

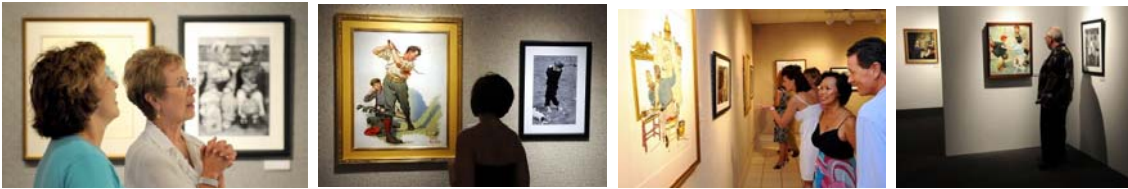
## Art lovers turn out for Rockwell gala at VAC

### The long-awaited exhibit will run for eight weeks

June 13, 2009 | By MATT DIXON / News Herald Writer

PANAMA CITY — A bona fide slice of Americana graced Panama City Friday night, as the Visual Art Center kicked off its eight-week summer exhibit "In Search of Norman Rockwell's America."

The exhibit features Rockwell originals alongside the black-and-white images of photojournalist Kevin Rivoli. The images, which Rivoli has taken during his career, bear a striking similarity to the Rockwell pieces with which they are paired.



"There are canvases in there that Norman Rockwell painted. It's the originals," explained Joe Silva, president of the VAC's board of directors.

The Visual Arts Center is hosting the premier opening event of the exhibit's two-year national tour. It is a distinction, Silva said, that could earn the VAC and Panama City national recognition.

"We are very pleased that we got it," he said. "It should bring us national notoriety, and the fact that our glass is half full and getting fuller is encouraging."

For the opening, Fourth street was closed to traffic as elegant tables draped with white tablecloths took the place of downtown traffic.

"It has been a long road, and a bumpy road at that. It's just so gratifying to see people on the streets enjoying themselves," said Rich Musgrave, the VAC's treasurer.

Musgrave, along with Silva and executive director Ellen Killough, have been busy in recent weeks working to keep the VAC's doors open.

"It's all worth it right now," said Musgrave as he looked out the dapperly dressed audiences enjoying cocktails and conversation before the exhibit's official opening.

Those in attendance said what sets the exhibit apart is that it showcases original pieces of artwork.

"It's not just another print, that's what makes it special," said Matty Jankowski.

Stylistically, he said, there are many things that set Rockwell apart.

"He was a figurative artist who could realize anything he could think about," he explained. "He was able to create vignettes of America he thought needed to be presented."

Describing one of his favorite pieces, Jankowski explained how he felt Rockwell's style was truly able to penetrate American culture.

"There is one where you are looking into a barber shop and there are a bunch of guys in the back room playing in a band... It just keeps going deeper and deeper into the culture."