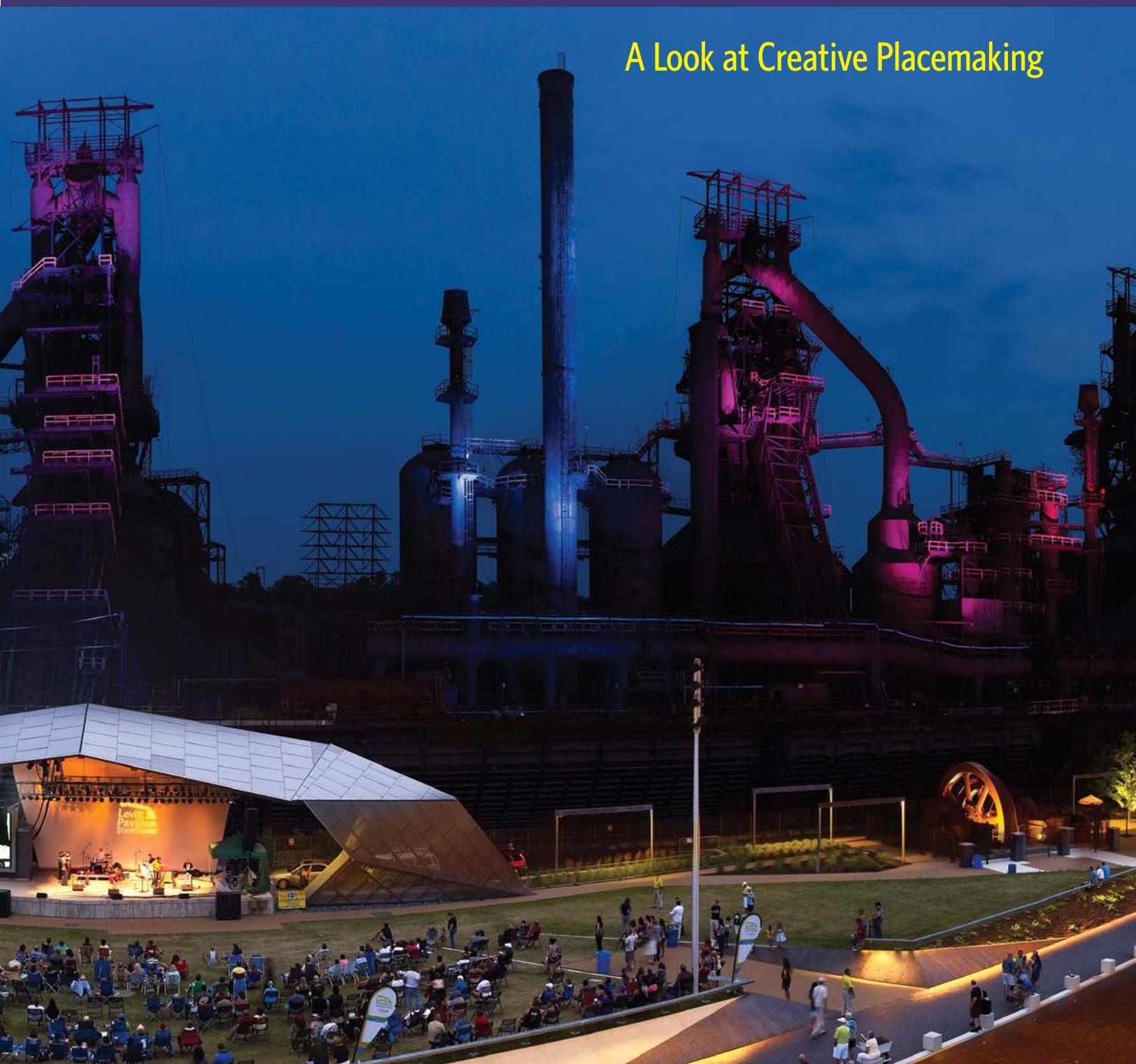


NEA ARTS

NUMBER 3 2012

Arts and Culture at the Core

A Look at Creative Placemaking



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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

At the NEA, we have been focusing on creative placemaking for the past few years. Chairman Rocco Landesman has traveled the country, seeing how the arts improve communities in many different social, physical, and economic ways. In 2011, the NEA made creative placemaking one of its flagship initiatives with the Our Town grant program, funding partnerships led by arts organizations and local governments to increase the livability of communities through the use of art. Over the past two years, the NEA has invested \$11.58 million in Our Town projects in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

In this issue, we take a look at some of the exciting transformations taking place across the country, in big cities and rural areas alike, in places like Baltimore, Maryland; Driggs, Idaho; and San Jose, California. In addition, we look at how other organizations—foundations, local government agencies, and consortiums such as ArtPlace—are also looking to the arts for community improvement.

We also have online-only stories that you can find by scanning the QR code to the left, such as how arts organizations in Jackson, Mississippi, are creating projects to revitalize the city; a slideshow on the Tribal Canoe Journey of the Squaxin Island Tribe and its impact on the community of Olympia, Washington; a multimedia piece on how the city of Wilson, North Carolina, embraced local artist Vollis Simpson and is creating a park for his art; and more.

The best place to start, though, is with a strong understanding of what exactly creative placemaking is. So we had our Design Director Jason Schupbach talk with cultural and economic development experts Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus about the philosophy of creative placemaking and how it can be applied successfully in communities throughout the country.

Don't forget to visit our Art Works blog at arts.gov to comment on this issue or to share information on arts in your community, and join us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/NationalEndowmentfortheArts) and Twitter (@NEAarts).

ABOUT THE COVER

An evening view of the SteelStacks campus in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where ArtsQuest and the city repurposed the Bethlehem Steel industrial site into an arts and cultural facility with a movie theater, arts gallery, and numerous outdoor performing arts spaces. Photo by Jeffrey Totaro

STORIES

3 DEFINING CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

A Talk with Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus

By Jason Schupbach

8 SMOKESTACK LIGHTNING

The Rebirth of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

By Rebecca Gross

12 NOT JUST ANOTHER POINT ON THE MAP

The Artful Reinvention of Driggs, Idaho

By Paulette Beete

16 SIGNS OF LIFE

The Station North Arts District in Baltimore, Maryland

By Rebecca Gross

20 A VIBRANT TRANSFORMATION

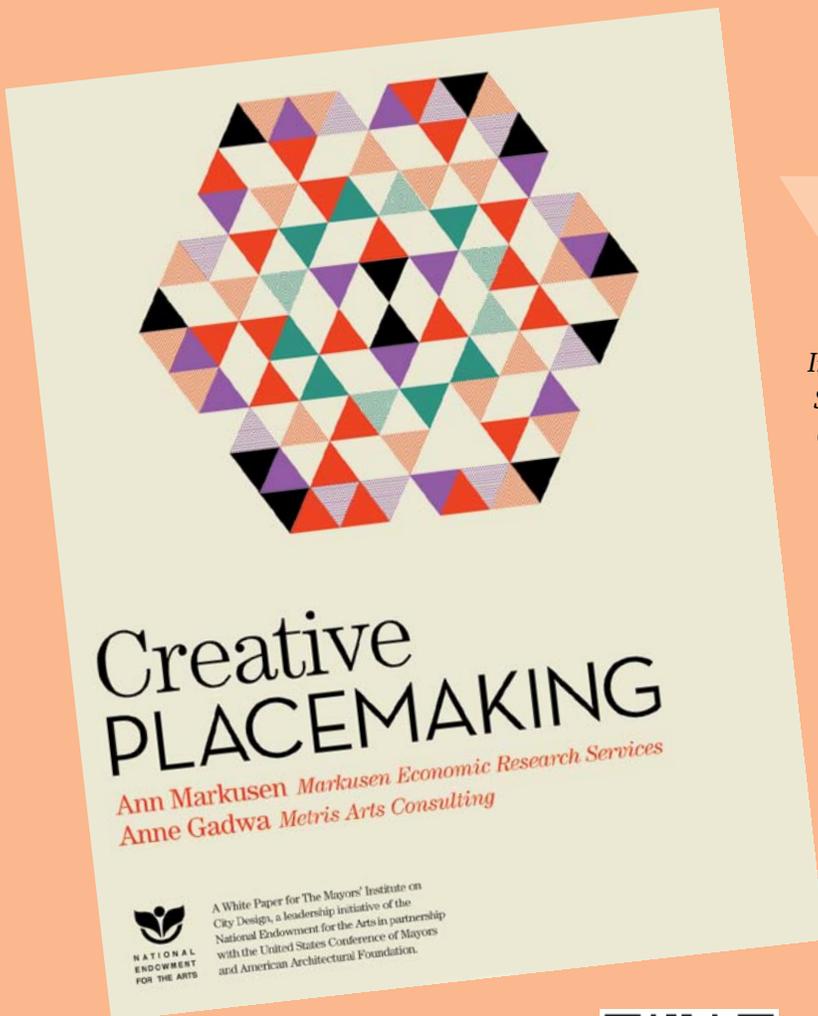
Cities and States Take Creative Placemaking to New Heights

By Michael Gallant

Defining Creative Placemaking

A Talk with Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus

BY JASON SCHUPBACH



In September 2012, NEA Design Director Jason Schupbach talked with Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, authors of Creative Placemaking, a white paper commissioned by the Mayors' Institute on City Design (scan QR code to left to view PDF of the report). Markusen is emerita professor and director of the Arts Economy Initiative at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota where she also directs the Project on Regional and Industrial Economics. Her research specializes in artists, arts organizations, and cultural activity as regional economic and quality-of-life stimulants. Gadwa Nicodemus is the principal of Metris Arts Consulting, which focuses on research analysis and planning support on how arts and culture strengthen communities and vice versa, and writes and speaks widely on creative placemaking and artist spaces. Below is an edited version of their conversation about creative placemaking (a longer version of the discussion is available online at arts.gov).



Mavis Fruge and Loretta Bourque working on a quilt as part of the Les Coudre Points events every Thursday at NUNU Arts and Culture Collective in Arnaudville, Louisiana, where people get together to work on quilts and speak French.

PHOTO BY JACQUELINE COCHRAN

JASON SCHUPBACH: I want to start by paraphrasing your definition of creative placemaking [from the report *Creative Placemaking*] because this is the definition that we use here at the NEA. In creative placemaking, public, private, not-for-profit, and community sectors partner to strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. So that's what we're going to be talking about today.

Let's start with a general question about where you two feel like the field stands at the moment. What are the missing links? What are the things that you think have been accomplished?

ANN MARKUSEN: Well before we researched and wrote *Creative Placemaking*, NEA Chairman Rocco

Landesman began traveling to cities large and small and asking arts and culture groups to come out of their doors and join him in meeting with mayors and other civic leaders, using his presence to give the arts and cultural sector considerable visibility. And the new Our Town and ArtPlace funding has electrified cities large and small, has seeded all kinds of initiatives. I have been traveling around giving talks and visiting our case-study communities and other creative placemaking efforts. Many leaders are saying, "Even if we don't get the funding, we're going forward." And I think that's very exciting.

ANNE GADWA NICODEMUS: Yeah, it's really exciting to see so much interest and momentum. The state public art funding in Connecticut has adopted a creative



placemaking focus. Kresge Foundation and William Penn Foundation and the Educational Foundation of America are all focusing on creative placemaking. It's also great to see an interest in other federal agencies in how arts and culture can invent placemaking. What I think is a missing link is that people are still really trying to understand how to actually go about this. They're interested in the idea, but they're not sure necessarily what it means or how to start or how to actually pull off the projects that they aspire to do.

SCHUPBACH: If someone's going to pursue this type of project in their community, what are the steps that they might need to take? Where are the places where you feel we don't have as much understanding at the moment?

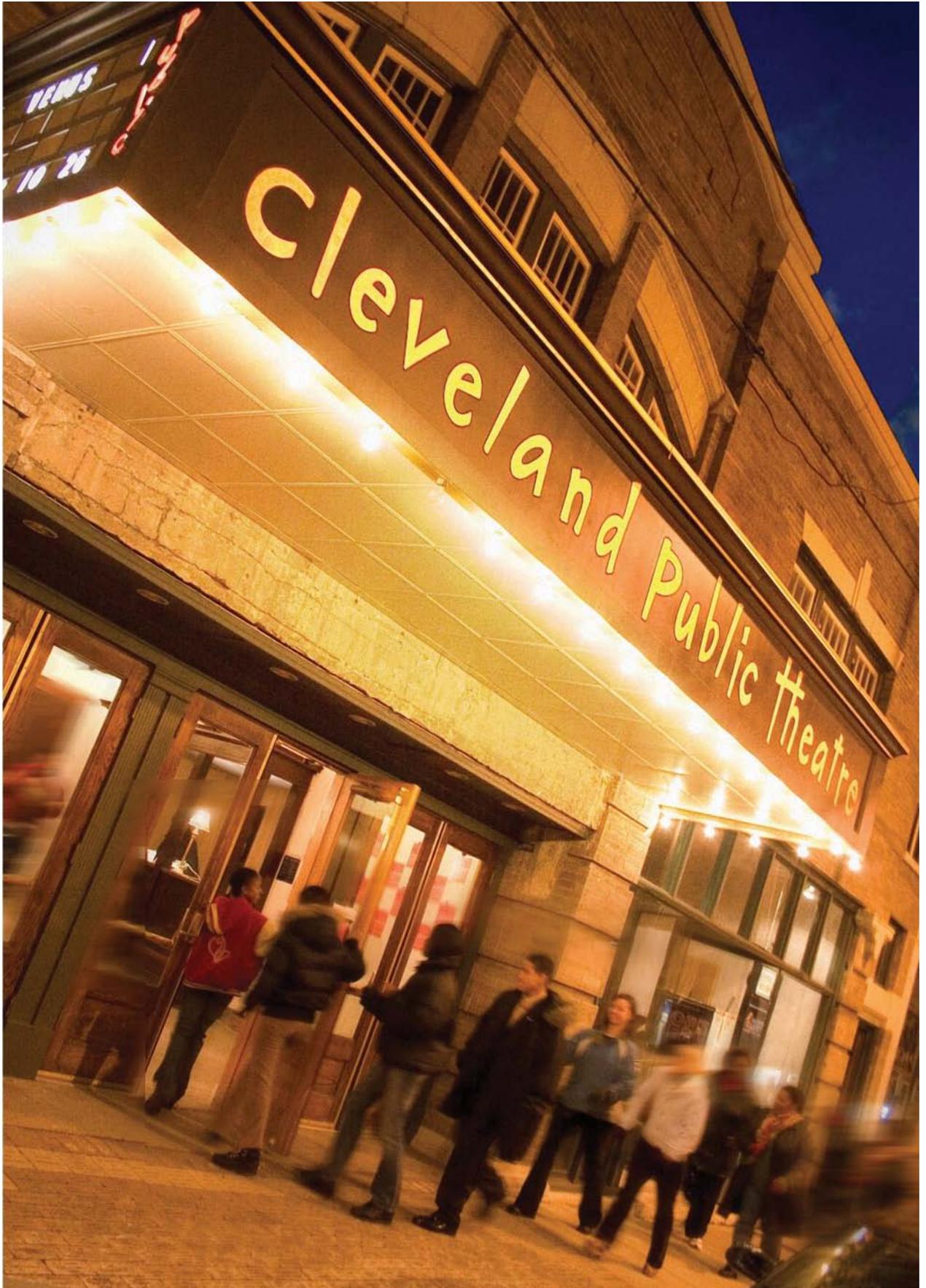
MARKUSEN: One thing that's baffling for many people is that they're really not sure what the outcomes are supposed to be or what partners and funders expect. For instance, some are wondering whether they're supposed to be about creating jobs or increasing property values or home ownership, or whether they are expected to attract tourists rather than focus on service to existing residents. In our study, we placed arts and culture at the core of creative placemaking, but arts and cultural outcomes are often underplayed in the rhetoric about expectations. Creative placemaking *is* about getting artists and designers, community culture groups, arts research groups, cultural affairs offices, and arts organizations out of their silos and into the neighborhoods and regions around them. Our study demonstrates how people in communities are mobilizing arts and culture to make the quality of life better where they live and to raise the visibility of arts and culture so that many more people are participating.

SCHUPBACH: I want to frame the next part of our conversation around the question that we get a lot here. Does this work everywhere? How is it different or the same in places that are maybe more rural, or urban, or suburban?

GADWA NICODEMUS: I think this is one of those areas that really needs more investigation. My next major project is trying to really dig deeper into the differences between types of places and types of projects, and trying to get us those lessons learned and initial impacts. One thing that I will say is that in smaller communities it may be easier to try to get some of these projects off the ground. We really emphasize partnerships, and in smaller communities you just have fewer players, but they also have an additional challenge [of maybe having] to reach outside of their immediate area to increase support. For instance, in Arnaudville, Louisiana, they reached out to their parish tourism offices and the French Consulate in New Orleans and tried to build bridges to get support and resources to do their project that just weren't coming from their immediate town.

MARKUSEN: One of the mistaken beliefs among many arts advocates is that you have to look outside of your community for participation, funding, and support. Yet in most of our case studies, initiators started by imagining that they would be serving local audiences. So even in Arnaudville, yes, they sought support and funding outside, but mainly they created a space, NuNu's Café, to host live music and visual arts and act as a gathering place. Only after local people got engaged and excited about it were they able to build their reputation and attract funding and people from farther afield.

Most good creative placemaking grounds itself on distinctive features and capabilities of the community, and service for the community. To form Cleveland's Gordon Square Arts District, three theater organizations joined forces with an established community development corporation to restore two old theaters, build a new one, and link them with a streetscape to create a vibrant arts and cultural area on the west side of Cleveland, far from the city's flagship arts institutions. In San Jose, California, the ZERO1 biennial festival marries art with technology, engaging local artists and arts organizations to share their work and





The Cleveland Public Theatre was one of the theaters renovated in the Gordon Square Arts District of Cleveland, Ohio. Photo courtesy of Cleveland Public Theatre

spaces in an event targeted at international as well as local participants. By design, it intends to help the people of Silicon Valley see themselves in a different way—not as just a techie, geeky place, but a place where rich, ethnically diverse, artistic traditions have much to offer.

SCHUPBACH: I'm sure that both of you get phone calls all the time that say, "How do I start doing this? And how do I know that the arts are the right solution for our neighborhood? If this is our community development project, how do we do the arts piece of it?"

GADWA NICODEMUS: I would encourage people to just take a step back: all creative placemaking projects start with an idea. So there's a creative initiator—sometimes that's an artist. Sometimes that's somebody from the public sector. It could be from the private sector. You can look at different examples of past projects, but what strategies might this be employing? Where would it take place? What are the desired outcomes? And so just kind of brainstorming, and then they have to consider, does this advance your organization's mission or is it employing your particular passion or skills? And you have to answer that for yourself. I think it's great to encourage arts organizations to get out of their silos, but if it's not your core expertise or if it's mission creep, then maybe it's not the right fit for you.

So then the next step that I would encourage is to think really strategically about coalition building. So who are the partners that might *really* champion this—not just to write a letter of endorsement for your grant application—and how would your idea advance their core interest and missions or those of their constituents? And if it doesn't, you need to go back to the drawing board, and either identify different partners or adjust your idea. It's a nice, iterative process that you can do in close collaboration with these partners to try to get something that really speaks to the needs and assets of your community, and then advance the work. It's a challenge to maintain that political will as the project is evolving—to make sure that it's still

rooted in what the original idea was and meeting the needs and the interests of your partners.

SCHUPBACH: So where should be the next phase of research in the creative placemaking field?

GADWA NICODEMUS: First, I think more peer-to-peer learning is one pressing opportunity. It might be convenings where people are presenting on their project about what worked and what didn't. It might be webinars. I know that the NEA sponsored a series of broadcast webinars from the [Our Town] panel. I thought that was a great start.

I'm also hearing that people want more in-depth case studies—pairing those in-depth resources with the people that want to know practical skills of how to go about this. There are so many interesting efforts that we could learn from. I'd love to see more of a longitudinal approach to research be supported; to track a few projects that either exemplify a particular place or a particular strategy and look at them over the long term. I think that might give us richer insights than the indicator efforts, or maybe they can be done in tandem. For the field to move forward, we have to keep sharing information about who else is out there—how they're approaching these projects and what we can start to see about impacts and outcomes.

MARKUSEN: I second everything Anne said. As somebody who's worked in urban and regional planning for 35 years, it's sad how many people reinvent the wheel all the time. We need lots of case studies, a daunting project, because there are things going on all around the United States, many unique but with important lessons. And we have to have studies of failure as well. How can we foster learning from others? One way would be to have a website where people are invited to write short things—900 words max—about their creative placemaking experience, success or failure. And have somebody organize it by topics for easy access. We need a lot more cross-fertilization. ▲

Smokestack

The Rebirth of
Bethlehem,
Pennsylvania

BY REBECCA GROSS

The SteelStacks campus with the Levitt Pavilion in the foreground in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. PHOTO BY MARK DEMKO



Lightning

When Bethlehem Steel shut operations in 1995, the plant that had once been Bethlehem, Pennsylvania's main architect of economy and identity suddenly became its greatest scourge. The city was left with a 1,800-acre brownfield, the remnants of an industrial dream gone sour. "It was a constant reminder of what we used to be," said Julie Benjamin, vice president community partnerships of ArtsQuest, a not-for-profit that uses the arts as an economic engine. The most inescapable reminders were the five 20-story blast furnaces that loomed over Bethlehem like a desolate version of the skylines they had once helped build.

"You literally had this old Bethlehem steel mill right there lurking above you," said NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman, who visited the site in 2010. "So what do you do with it? Do you take it down? Do you ignore it and make the best of it? Or do you actually try and engage it as part of the history of that place, part of its culture, and try to make it into a positive?"

Today, the furnaces form the awe-inspiring backdrop of SteelStacks, a 9.5-acre arts and cultural campus located on the Bethlehem Steel site. Developed by ArtsQuest in partnership with the Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority, SteelStacks has welcomed one million visitors since opening in May 2011. The campus is home to year-round programming, a first-run independent movie theater, the stunning Levitt Pavilion, a visual arts gallery, and numerous outdoor spaces for festivals, concerts, and craft and farmer's markets. Although the Lehigh Valley has long been

home to prestigious art institutions such as the Allentown Symphony, SteelStacks was designed to showcase contemporary art forms that weren't readily available in the area.

Mayor John Callahan, who is a Bethlehem native, credited the Mayors' Institute on City Design (MICD) with providing guidance during the early stages of the site's redevelopment. MICD is an initiative of the NEA in partnership with the American Architectural Foundation and the United States Conference of Mayors. Since 1986, the Mayors' Institute has helped transform communities through design by preparing mayors to be the chief urban designers of their cities. In February 2004, a month after taking office, Callahan presented Bethlehem's design challenge at an MICD conference in Charleston, South Carolina. Among the most memorable—and prescient—feedback he received was to leave the blast furnaces as they were. Once a symbol of the city's industrial strength, the furnaces now signify Bethlehem's transformation into a regional arts capital.

"It's one thing to feel that sentimental connection if you live in the community," said Callahan. "But to have national and international experts see how important they are, it really makes you say, 'Hey, we're going to stick to our guns and make sure that these things don't go anywhere.'" Of the \$2.2 billion worth of development projects that have taken place during Callahan's tenure, he says "every one" has benefitted from what he learned at the Mayors' Institute.

In 2010, Bethlehem intersected with MICD once again when ArtsQuest received a \$200,000 MICD25 grant from the NEA. These grants, designed in honor of MICD's 25th anniversary, were the precursor to the agency's current Our Town program. They signaled a renewed focus by the Arts Endowment to bring art into everyday community spaces, and into the daily lives of every citizen, even those "who never would think of buying a ticket to a ballet, opera, a play, a museum," said Chairman Landesman, who announced



The Bridge, designed by Elena Colombo, was funded by an NEA MICD25 grant. PHOTO BY PAUL WARCHO

the MICD25 grant recipients at SteelStacks. ArtsQuest used its MICD25 funding to commission and build *The Bridge*, the signature sculpture of the SteelStacks campus. Featuring a natural gas flame snaking along a curved piece of steel, *The Bridge*—much like the rest of SteelStacks—is at once an historical reference and a stunning piece of contemporary art. Benjamin said the sculpture has become a part of the campus’s daily ritual as people wait for it to ignite come evening.

In the case of Bethlehem, the aesthetic benefits of adaptive reuse are hard to ignore, but the city’s current economic profile has become just as eye-catching. In May 2012, the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia published a report called *In Philadelphia’s Shadow: Small Cities in the Third Federal Reserve*. Among the 13 cities studied in the report, Bethlehem was reported to earn the highest median household income, and boasted the lowest poverty rate, the lowest violent crime rate, and the second lowest unemployment rate.

“There weren’t many people a decade ago imagining that with the demise of Bethlehem Steel that we’d be on those kinds of lists,” said Callahan.

Benjamin believes that at least part of the reason that Bethlehem is where it is today has to do with the city’s emphasis on arts and culture—a belief echoed in *In Philadelphia’s Shadow*. In 1984, ArtsQuest launched the annual ten-day MusikFest, which was designed to “provide that economic shot in the arm.” In 1996, it converted a former banana distribution center into the Banana Factory, which offers art classes and affordable studio space. And of course, there is SteelStacks, which Benjamin estimates has generated \$29 million since opening.

Both the Banana Factory and SteelStacks are located in the city’s South Side, which has become fertile ground for galleries, theaters, and boutiques. Tony Hanna, executive director of the Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority, cited the Banana Factory in particu-



Artwork peers out from the ArtsQuest Center with the Bethlehem Steel furnaces in the background.

PHOTO BY RYAN HULVAT, COURTESY OF ARTSQUEST

lar as “a seminal project for the city.” “It took us to the next level, one where we weren’t just engaged in showing art,” he said. “It was a place where artists could come and do their thing, do their work, and create art.”

“Things began to grow from there,” he continued. “A whole community grew up around it in terms of our second downtown,” which Hanna described as an artier, funkier version of Bethlehem’s historic district.

With the addition of SteelStacks, Benjamin said that the South Side has grown not only as a community destination, but as a means of recruiting and retaining skilled employees for Bethlehem-based companies such as Air Products and Synchronoss. “[SteelStacks] is something that neighboring communities don’t have that we do have to offer: programming that’s year-round, programming for children and families, ten different music festivals,” said Benjamin. “It allows [companies] to say, ‘Here’s what we have for you when you relocate to the Lehigh Valley.’”

And there is still more to come. Forty-six units of affordable artist housing are planned for the former St. Stanislaus Church and a second site at East Fifth and Atlantic Streets. In August, a study was launched to determine the feasibility of turning the Hoover-Mason Trestle, which connects SteelStacks with the nearby Sands Resort & Casino, into an elevated walkway similar to the High Line in Manhattan.

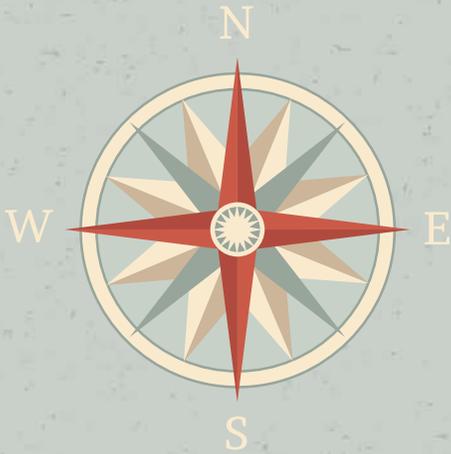
As Callahan reflected on all the changes that have transpired since he was elected, and all those in the works, he noted how incredible it has been to oversee the transformation of his own hometown. “I always had this dream, when I first made the decision to run for mayor, that there was going to be a time in my life when I could load up the grandkids into the car and drive around Bethlehem 30, 40 years later and point to a few things that happened while I was mayor,” he said. His grandchildren should plan for a long car ride; there might be a lot to point out. ▲

Not Just Another Point on the Map

The Artful Reinvention of Driggs, Idaho

BY PAULETTE BEETE





Idaho's Teton Scenic Byway winds its way

from the Snake River toward Ashton through miles of spectacular scenery, including the western ridges of the Teton Mountains. Along the way, travelers pass by Driggs, a growing city of roughly 1,660 residents where the highway does double-duty as Main Street. Like many other small communities in the early 2000s, Driggs was in need of an economic boost, one it hoped could be accomplished by enticing motorists to enjoy the local scenery by pulling over to spend some time—and dollars—in town.

In addition to re-energizing its economy, Driggs was also concerned with keeping a sense of community identity amidst high population growth. Once thought of as just a bedroom community to the Jackson Hole region in Wyoming, new residents had started flocking to Driggs once they realized it offered the same scenic attractions without the same crowds. As with any long-settled community, the population boom, while welcomed, also led to some tension between new arrivals and long-time residents. “I think being a rural community, there’s a deeper need to be more authentic and to maintain the ties to the land, to the history of the place, and respect the cultures that settled the community here,” said Douglas Self, the city’s planning administrator. He added that the challenge was to find the right balance of “conservative and crazy.” As a reminder of that balance, Self keeps in mind a local rancher, who had converted an abandoned building into a hot yoga studio, doing yoga in cowboy boots.

(opposite) A snow sculpture featured during the annual Snow Fest in Driggs, Idaho. PHOTO BY KEN LEVY

Thanks to the Teton Arts Council, Driggs already had some experience with meeting these challenges through arts events. “Any small rural community needs to offer as many opportunities as possible to experience art in its many disciplines,” said Teton Arts Council Chair Linda Lopez, explaining the organization’s commitment to promoting the local arts scene. The high-visibility Snow Fest and Plein Air Festival—which showcased local artists at work—had not only increased the city’s tourism base, but also provided occasions for recent arrivals and old hands to come together as a community. As Self emphasized, “Art for us and our involvement in the downtown is another way to enhance and highlight the high quality of life that is offered in Driggs, and that is one of the main engines for our growth and economic development in the community.”

But Driggs wanted to do more, and applying for an NEA Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design (CIRD) workshop was a logical next step.

Understanding the Importance of Design in Rural Communities

CIRD (formerly known as Your Town) debuted in 1991. As then-NEA Chair Jane Alexander wrote in *Your Town: Designing Its Future*, “[This] is our best effort to help small towns and rural communities understand the importance of design and identify resources to help them preserve their heritage and identity while expanding their economy.” Initially a partnership among the NEA, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the State University of New York (SUNY) at Syracuse, the program was managed by Richard Hawks at SUNY and Shelley Mastran at the National Trust.

Mastran noted that the rural communities that attended the workshop faced a host of challenges ranging from dying downtowns to transportation improvements that had isolated neighborhoods from each other to a disconnect from the natural resources that had defined the communities in the first place. As with the NEA’s urban design program, the Mayors’ Institute on City Design, the goal was to empower participants to become design leaders back at home. Mastran recalled, “One of the biggest challenges [was] to help them to realize that they do have

a special culture and they do have the ability to use it for economic development purposes....[They didn't] think of themselves as being able to do what a lot of communities across the United States are able to do.”

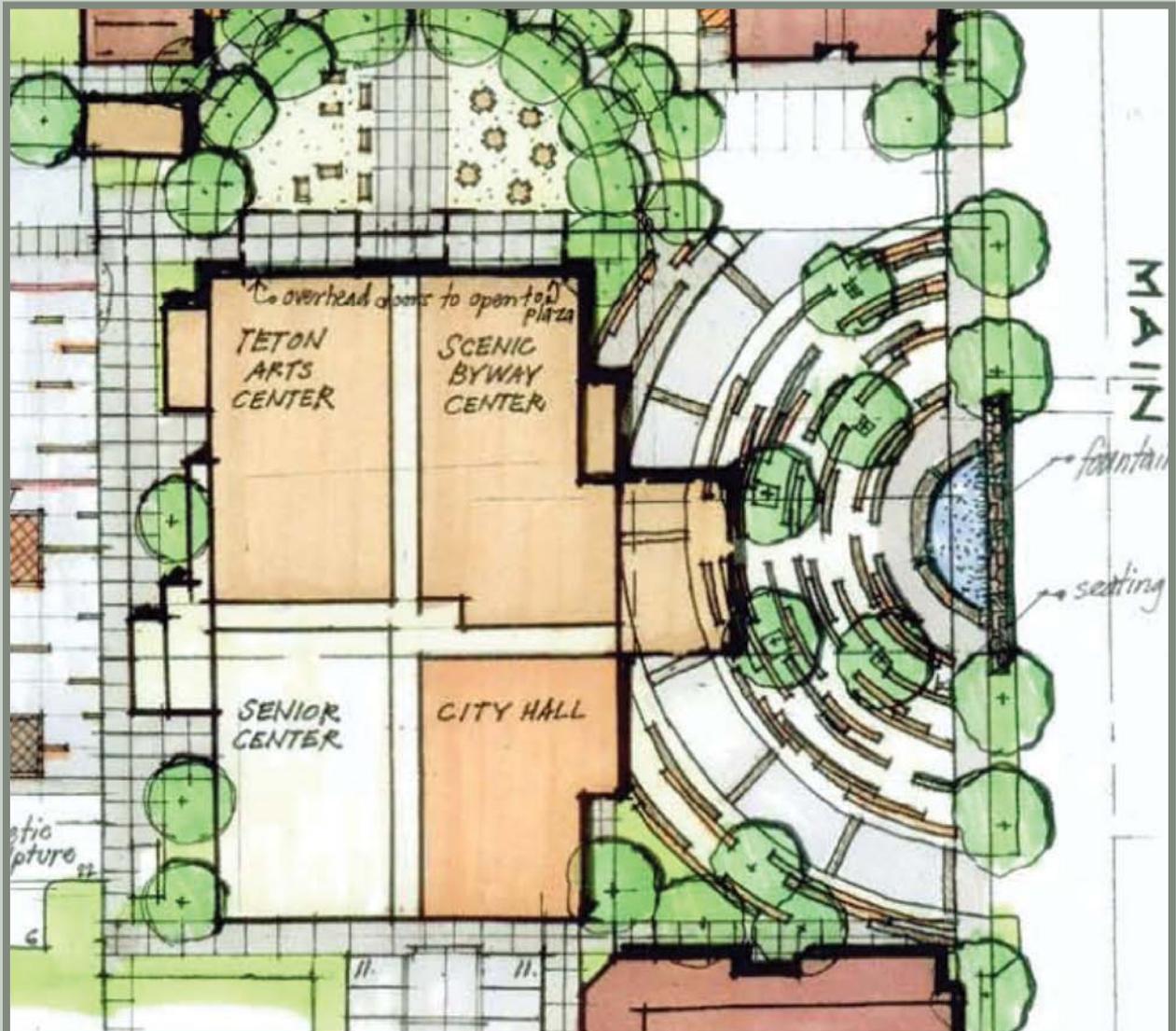
While CIRD originated as a one-time workshop for rural communities, the program is currently expanding into an ongoing resource. The in-person workshops are still core to the program, but a complementary online portfolio will soon include webinars and other resources on a range of subjects, such as agricultural preservation, heritage preservation, design, and art. Spearheading the revamp is the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) in partnership with the U.S.

Department of Agriculture, Orton Foundation, and Community Matters®. According to new project director Cynthia Nikitin, the goal is to take advantage of their combined expertise “to broaden out the dialogue. We’re looking at making [the program] more robust in terms of not just providing information for the communities of practice that are engaged but really being...about access to information to a much broader audience about rural design issues.”

From Your Town to Our Town

While the Driggs workshop took place long before the CIRD reboot, the city’s experience still had a measurable

The master plan for developing Driggs’s downtown community plaza. IMAGE COURTESY OF CITY OF DRIGGS



impact on its future plans. During the three-day workshop, Self and two dozen community leaders engaged with several expert consultants, including sustainable development and land conservation specialist Ed McMahon and then-NEA Design Director Jeff Speck.

According to Mastran, an important marker of success for CIRD participants is community-wide involvement. “If there’s a perception that the workshop is being run for and by one particular segment, the long-term sustainability is in question.” Accordingly, the working group from Driggs included stakeholders from the corporate and not-for-profit sectors, private citizens and city residents, and, as Self put it, “old-timers and newcomers.”

Driggs used the workshop to explore three specific issues. Self explained, “The year before we had a fire in downtown that destroyed four historic buildings right in the core...so we wanted to develop a redevelopment and infill plan for that space. We had also just purchased a 20,000-square-foot grocery store and an acre of property on Main Street that will become the city center plaza. So we wanted to develop concept plans for a community center. And...we wanted to find some solutions to maintaining the small-town look and feel under that growth pressure.”

Before addressing specific challenges, the group first discussed what *not* to do and generated a working definition of “good” design. Next, recalled Self, “We developed a common language to use that enriched our conversations on the local level, and then were given tools and ideas about how to solve these design and growth problems.”

Post-workshop, action plan in hand, Driggs set to work. First they invited a studio class from the University of Idaho Department of Architecture to generate initial conceptual plans for the development work. Over the next several years these ideas were refined into a master downtown plan, which included the rehabilitation of the former grocery store into a multipurpose community space as well as new elements such as the Teton Geotourism Center and a pedestrian-oriented Main Street.

In addition, Driggs figured out how to pay for it all. “The Driggs Urban Renewal Agency put a tax increment financing district in place so that all the taxes from [our] new grocery store and retail center went into the Urban Renewal Agency,” explained Self.



A new visual arts gallery, managed by the Teton Arts Council, is opening in a rehabilitated grocery store in the city center. PHOTO COURTESY OF TETON ARTS COUNCIL

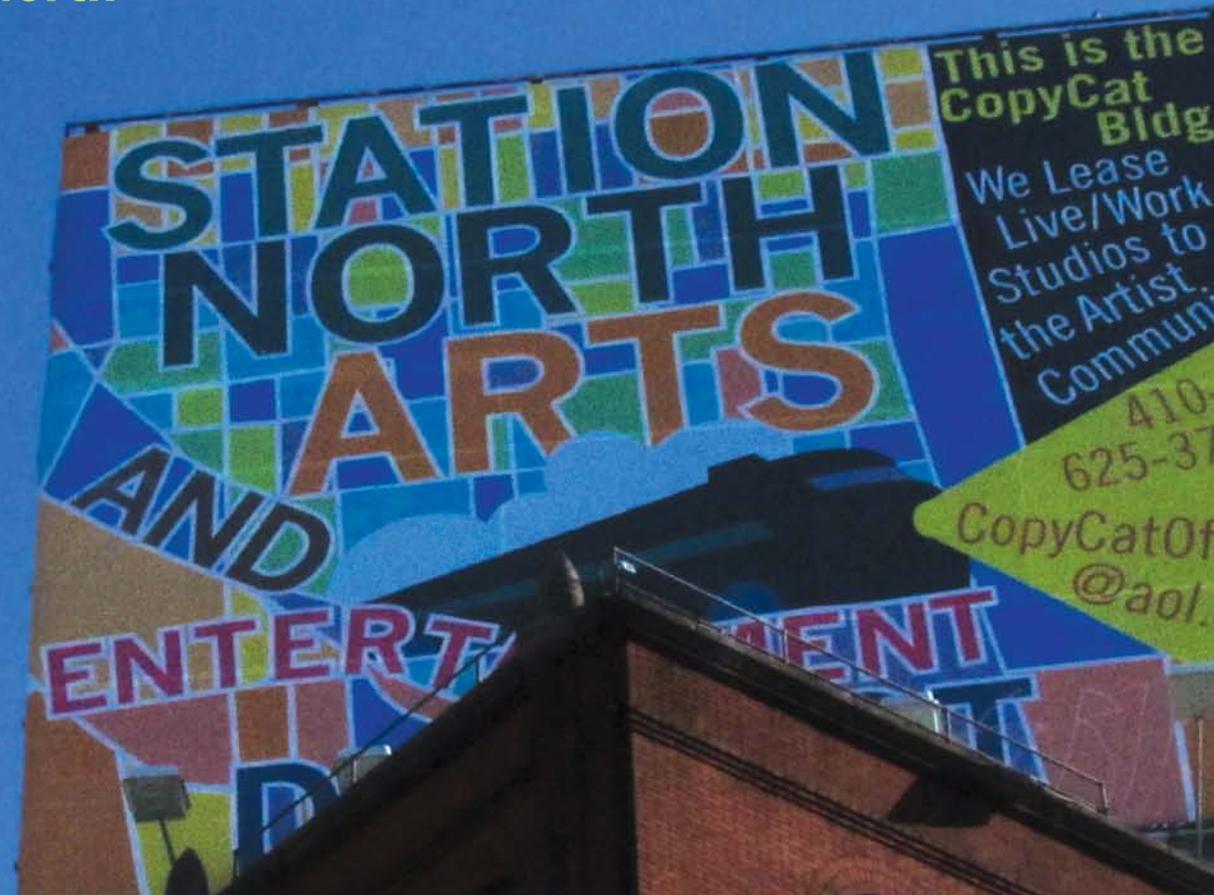
In 2012, the city came back to the NEA, this time to apply for an Our Town grant to support the final stage of its design plan—the development of the community plaza and the acquisition and permanent installation at the plaza of several pieces of public art. With the support of \$50,000 from the NEA, this next phase of redevelopment—expected to last through 2014—will include a three-day public charrette to allow residents to give their input on what they’d like to see for the plaza. The city and the arts council also plan to create a Public Arts Advisory Committee to oversee the public artwork selection and installation process, which is a significant part of the revitalization strategy.

While the process will ultimately take more than a decade from start to finish, Self maintained that embracing creative placemaking was the right choice for Driggs. “Creative placemaking for us—a small town on a state highway that’s the main street—is really about economic development and about triggering a response in those traveling through the city of, ‘Hey, there’s something going on here and we should stop to explore it,’” he said. In other words, thanks to its artful reinvention, Driggs will no longer be just another point on the map. ▲

SIGNS OF LIFE

The Station North
Arts District
in Baltimore,
Maryland

BY REBECCA GROSS



The top of the Copy Cat Building in Baltimore, Maryland, announces the Station North Arts and Entertainment District. PHOTO BY REBECCA GROSS

Baltimore's Copy Cat Building is arguably the city's most famous artist residence. A former cork-sealing factory, it has informally—and sometimes illegally—housed artist live/work space since the 1980s. It hosts gallery shows and music events and artist parties. Still it is easy to mistake the neglected, slightly desolate building for abandoned.

"You wouldn't know, passing on Guilford [Street], that the Copy Cat was a crazy ill, amazing building with all this amazing stuff happening inside," said Gaia, a local artist who lives in a similarly run-down, "crazy ill" artist building called the Annex. And yet, "[The Copy Cat] is the reason why Station North is Station North."

This problem of existing but easily overlooked potential has long plagued the area just north of Baltimore's Penn Station. Comprised of sections of the Greenmount West, Barclay, and North Charles communities, Station North was until recently a poster child for Baltimore's many woes. Devastated by the 1968 riots, it was further isolated from the city by the construction of the Jones Falls Expressway. The neighborhood's bright spots, which included the Copy Cat, the Annex, and proximity to the Maryland Institute College of Arts (MICA), were overshadowed by drugs, streetwalkers, poverty, and crime.

But ten years ago, the neighborhood used its artistic assets to obtain distinction as an Arts and Entertainment District, a designation administered by the Maryland State Arts Council to stimulate economy and improve livability. At first, change was slow. But within a few years, tax incentives helped lure investors and artists, and the area gained momentum. Today, banners announcing the Station North Arts and Entertainment District (SNAED) hang from lampposts throughout the neighborhood. Vacant buildings have been rehabbed into housing, restaurants, and cultural venues such as the Windup Space, Metro Gallery, and Area 405. MICA has added a number of new buildings to its campus, including the 120,000-square-foot Graduate Student Center, which opened recently. The



The artist Gaia (center) talks with onlookers in front of his mural on W. North Avenue, part of the Open Walls mural project. PHOTO BY MARTHA COOPER

area's once unassuming artistic presence is moving—and moving quickly—into the light.

"Nothing was moving forward for several decades," said Ben Stone, executive director of Station North Arts & Entertainment District, Inc., the not-for-profit that promotes and supports the neighborhood's cultural community. "These new artistic projects were kind of a sign of life."

In the past year, some of the area's healthiest vital signs have been supported by a 2011 NEA Our Town grant. Managed by MICA in partnership with Station North, Inc., the \$150,000 award helped fund a range of neighborhood activities. D center Baltimore, a cross-disciplinary design space, was able to open a permanent home on North Avenue. MICA held a national symposium on arts, cultural, and entertainment districts last April, and a new cultural programming series called Final Fridays was launched. One of the most visible components of the grant—the Open Walls mural project—brought local, national, and international artists into Station North to erect some 23 murals over a two-month period.

Gaia, a 2011 graduate of MICA, was invited by grant organizers to curate Open Walls. As a 23-year-old white male in a largely African-American neighborhood, he was initially wary that he would be seen as an agent of gentrification. Section 8 housing is a necessity for many Station North residents, some of

whom have lived in the neighborhood for generations; changes that might attract cost-of-living increases can be a delicate matter. Although he said the project was at times “an interesting balancing act,” in the end he was surprised by the overall positive reaction.

“A lot of people in this neighborhood were very grateful that we’d given a gift,” said Gaia. “It was such a beautiful coming together of so many incredible things.” Ben Stone agreed that reaction among residents was “shockingly positive.” Citing post-project surveys conducted by Station North, Inc., Stone said that across the board, residents responded that they were happier with their neighborhood after Open Walls.

Not only has Open Walls helped put Station North on the map—it has prompted mentions in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and even on Voice of America—but it also has helped delineate the neighborhood as an arts destination for its own residents.

“When you have buildings like [the Copy Cat] that are full of artists working in their studios, and no one really can tell if it’s an occupied building or a vacant building...[locals] don’t really know what’s going on,” said Stone, noting that some long-term residents might not even be aware of the area’s Arts and Entertainment District designation. “But when you bring artists outside, and they’re working for two weeks at a time on a wall...it’s hard to ignore that there’s artistic activity happening around you.”

A similar community visibility effort is made with Final Fridays, cultural events held on the last Friday of every month to bring performance art, music, food, and dancing to public spaces throughout the neighborhood. For many of these events, Stone and his colleagues go door-to-door, informing people of the upcoming program and encouraging them to attend. Many of the programs are held in free, outdoor spaces to avoid the intimidation sometimes caused by theater or gallery settings.

Mike Molla, vice president of operations at MICA, remembers one Final Friday in particular that exemplified the grant’s goal of engaging residents and bridging communities. “To see [video artist] Dan Deacon at 8:30 on a Friday night, with 700 to 800 people in this mesmerizing performance of music, video, dancing—young Caucasian students and older African-American folks and neighbors who have lived in the same houses for the past 40 years all having this experience through the arts—was quite remarkable.”

As the neighborhood blossoms, the problem has shifted from attracting new residents, organizations, and investors to finding space for all those who want to move in. Although the cost of bringing abandoned buildings up to code has hampered some development efforts, there is at least one advantage of working in a neighborhood where a significant portion of buildings are still vacant. “We can rebuild an awful lot of buildings and build on a lot of vacant lots without displacing anybody,” said Charlie Duff, president of the not-for-profit developer Jubilee Baltimore, and a lifelong Baltimorean.

In 2011, Jubilee, in partnership with Homes for America and TRF Development Partners, opened the 69-unit City Arts building, which offers affordable artist live/work space using the low-income housing tax credit. Duff said that City Arts—which was filled in ten weeks—was built on a lot that had been vacant



Chopin “Tony” Divers in front the mural painted in his honor by the artist Jetsonorama on Barclay Street, in the neighborhood where Divers raises and trains pigeons. PHOTO BY MARTHA COOPER



The crowd enjoys a performance at a Final Friday event in Station North. PHOTO BY THERESA KEIL

for 25 years, and marks the first residential building built in Greenmount West since the 19th century. Eight for-sale townhomes were also renovated as part of the project; all were filled within a week.

City Arts was almost entirely federally funded, said Duff, and only survived the country's economic collapse thanks to the Recovery Act's Tax Credit Assistance Program (TCAP). NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Shaun Donovan arranged a joint visit to the site in March 2010, signifying the collective effort that federal agencies have made to revitalize Station North, each using the tools particular to their area of authority.

According to Duff, these federal efforts have amplified the influence of the local artist community, which he cites as one of the major factors in spurring Greenmount West's turnaround. He hopes that affordable housing like City Arts will convince artists to come to Baltimore, or in cases of MICA graduates like Gaia, to stay. Not only is this for economic reasons, but be-

cause of the contagious creativity that can reinvigorate dormant districts. As Ben Stone noted, "People in this neighborhood don't want to lose the artistic energy that really only is brought by the artists themselves."

So far, there seems to be no worry of energy loss; only gain. Jubilee recently purchased the largest vacant building in Station North, which will be converted into a mixed-use artist space. Next autumn, the year-old Baltimore Design School, a public middle and high school, will move to its new campus in the renovated Lebow Clothing Company building, which has stood vacant in Station North since 1984. A new row of market-rate townhomes is currently under construction just next to City Arts, and there is talk of a second iteration of Open Walls.

"All my life I've been trying to do things that the result of which would be that people would say, 'I want to live in the center of Baltimore,'" Duff said. "And it's happening. I didn't think I'd live long enough. I wasn't sure anybody would live long enough. But it's happening." ▲



A *Vibrant* Transformation

CITIES AND STATES TAKE CREATIVE
PLACEMAKING TO NEW HEIGHTS

take off your shoes and become an ac

A child enjoys the outdoor exhibit *iLounge Instant/Interim/Interactive* by Marcella Del Signore and Mona El Khaffif in the SoFA district of San Jose, California, as part of the 2012 ZERO1 Biennial. PHOTO BY PATRICK LYDON.



BY MICHAEL GALLANT

Communities throughout the United States have shown time and time again that art is far more than something pretty to listen to, look at, or experience in passing. Rather, when ignited through inspiration and strategy, art can be an explosive catalyst for positive change.

“Cities have long understood the opportunities to leverage cultural and artistic resources to shape the character of a neighborhood,” said Kerry Adams Hapner, director of cultural affairs for San Jose, California. “In the last couple years, though, the National Endowment for the Arts has identified placemaking as one of its priorities and has advocated for the strategy. It’s led to outstanding new opportunities to integrate arts into built environments on the city level. It’s also elevated the idea of placemaking into the national conversation.”

National Strategies, City Initiatives

Creative placemaking began to coalesce nationally two years ago, when the NEA and Chairman Rocco Landesman created Our Town, an initiative dedicated to funding arts-sourced rejuvenation of local communities.

“We saw Our Town as an outstanding opportunity,” said Adams Hapner, who applied for a grant with local partner foundation ZERO1: The Art and Technology Network. “San Jose is considered the capital of Silicon Valley and we are proud of our global position,” she said. “ZERO1 is a unique art organization with a mission of combining the technologies born in Silicon Valley with the artists who could utilize them and apply them in new ways—and conversely, embed artists with tech companies to promote and foster new innovations.” The specific goal? To partner with ZERO1 on Silicon Valley Inside/Out, a project that “weds public art with Silicon Valley technologies in exciting new ways,” said Adams Hapner.

The interdisciplinary studio Rebar’s project for the 2012 ZERO1 Biennial was *The Great Room*, a customized outdoor urban living room, complete with a massive outdoor viewing screen and food trucks. PHOTO BY PATRICK LYDON



San Jose and ZERO1 won a \$250,000 grant, enabling them to put on a thrilling festival with many positive ripples—not the least of which was an infusion of roughly \$20 million of festival-related revenue into the local economy, according to ZERO1’s estimates. Less tangible but equally important effects included boosts in public safety, cultural understanding, civic pride, and city reputation.

Beyond federally sourced grants such as Our Town, private arts advocates such as the ArtPlace consortium have helped San Jose’s local placemaking efforts as well. “ArtPlace is a group of private and national funders who have all co-invested in creative placemaking strategies throughout the United States,” described Adams Hapner. “Those creative placemaking strategies consist of various ways you can utilize the arts to change a neighborhood for the better and give it a sense of vibrancy.”

Though its creation was inspired in no small part by the NEA’s work on Our Town, ArtPlace works as an independent entity, made up of ten leading foundations and six of the nation’s largest banks. The NEA and seven other federal entities serve in advisory roles

but contribute no federal funding and have no say in who receives ArtPlace support.

San Jose has won multiple ArtPlace grants for projects like turning an abandoned park in the city’s SoFA district into an “urban living room for the arts, so the arts organizations surrounding it could bring the insides of their organizations to the outside,” said Adams Hapner. “We just had the ribbon-cutting at the park as part of the ZERO1 Festival,” she described. “SoFA is our chief cultural district, and we’re excited about these opportunities that help us continue to transform it.”

Statewide Success

Kip Bergstrom, deputy commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, has seen firsthand that creative placemaking can be a vibrant force statewide, as well as on the city level. “When I began working as deputy commissioner, I knew I wanted to do something similar to the NEA when it came to placemaking,” he said. “I knew that we were going to get air cover from the NEA throughout our efforts, and that has proven completely true.”

For the state of Connecticut, Bergstrom’s efforts to

In Hartford, Connecticut, Adam Niklewicz’s water-activated mural *The Charter Oak*—based on Charles DeWolf Brownell’s 1857 painting—depicts the massive tree when the wall is made wet, part of the statewide City Canvas program. PICTURE BY BOB GREGSON





The 30-by-30-foot mosaic *Cool Waters* in downtown Waterbury, Connecticut, by the artists Joanne and Bruce Hunter, which was created by more than 1,200 people on 30 3×5' panels. PHOTO BY NICOLE HUNTER

implement a new placemaking strategy have yielded dramatic changes. “We’ve shifted the focus of *all* of our arts funding to creative placemaking and put all of our grants under our Arts Catalyze Placemaking program,” continued Bergstrom. “Our pilot program, City Canvas, was a momentum-building initiative. It demonstrated the power of the arts in placemaking.”

City Canvas funds and facilitates the creation of large-scale public art projects in seven major cities around the state—and just like Our Town on the national level, City Canvas required each applying city to partner with a local arts organization. “There’s a relationship-building benefit just in that,” said Bergstrom. “It’s created in each of the cities a sense of momentum and a kind of affirmation, a declaration that ‘we’re back, we’re here, and we’re on the move.’ It’s been inspirational.”

Bergstrom described a mosaic project in the city of Waterbury that focused on the restoration of the Naugatuck River. “It had been an industrial sewer running through Waterbury, which was a brass city in the day,” he said. “The streams were full of contaminants, but it’s all been cleaned up. It’s a metaphor for the resurgence of Waterbury itself.”

More than 1,200 people collaborated on the 30-by-30-foot mural, which depicts brown trout in a stream with a line of brass running through it and is mounted on a blank wall by the city’s downtown. While staging

individual parts of the mural at Waterbury’s historic Palace Theater, none of the participants knew what the project would look like before its first public viewing. “Kids, seniors, and everyone in between came to the unveiling,” said Bergstrom. “There were 3,000 people there on one of those magical early summer nights. It triggered a sense of comeback momentum in Waterbury that goes far beyond the mural itself.”

Connecticut has received further placemaking support with an Our Town grant for Project Storefront, a program that sets up working artists in otherwise-vacant New Haven storefronts with immediate economic benefits. “Every single artist brings attention to the space he or she is working in, so it gets rented,” described Bergstrom. “We even had to work out a 90-day minimum into the free rental agreement with landlords. Otherwise, the space would be rented *too* quickly for the artist to get anything done. That’s how hot the program is.”

“Connecticut was at the head of the pack with Project Storefront,” continued Bergstrom. “And it was possible because of funding from the NEA.”

Bergstrom described the NEA as Connecticut’s strongest cheerleader in the state’s placemaking work, and further credits NEA funds with training project managers who have gone on to contribute to other impactful projects statewide. “The NEA has been incredibly supportive and enthusiastic,” he said. “We feel that we are totally aligned with the direction that Rocco Landesman has set for the NEA. It’s the same direction that I’m trying to set for our office here in Connecticut.”

Whether on a local, state, or national level, Bergstrom sees placemaking as a potent strategy for civic renewal, but also as a window into something deeper. “Starting with the first cave paintings 40,000 years ago, we’ve been using art to transform places that feel dark and scary into places that are safe and vibrant,” he said. “From primitive hand prints of blue and red pigment to the water-activated murals that were just unveiled in Hartford, Connecticut, the creative process that informs placemaking is an unbroken chain. What defines us, and the places where we live and work, is our art.” ▲

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