

NEA ARTS

number 2 2011

Are You Ready for the Country?

*Creative Placemaking
in Rural America*



NEA ARTS

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

Rocco Landesman, *Chairman*
James Ballinger
Miguel Campaneria
Ben Donenberg
JoAnn Falletta
Lee Greenwood
Joan Israelite
Charlotte Kessler
Bret Lott
Irvin Mayfield, Jr.
Stephen Porter
Barbara Ernst Prey
Frank Price
Terry Teachout
Karen Wolff

EX-OFFICIO

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO)
Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)
Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN)
Rep. Patrick J. Tiberi (R-OH)
Appointment by Congressional leadership of the remaining ex-officio members to the council is pending.

NEA ARTS STAFF

Don Ball *Executive Editor*
Paulette Beete *Editor*
Joanna Gang
Rebecca Gross
Victoria Hutter
Adam Kampe
Josephine Reed
Liz Stark

Nancy Bratton Design



ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the United States has turned from a mostly agrarian, rural country into an urban, industrialized one. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, nowadays only about a fifth of the population live in rural areas, even though those lands comprise more than three-quarters of the country and are a major source of the nation's resources, culture, and traditions. Rural America may be more connected than ever before—through the Internet, better phone services, and improved transportation systems—but it still faces unique problems. As populations moved from rural to urban/suburban communities—and metropolitan areas expanded into areas that had been rural—serious problems have been left in their wake: aging and inefficient infrastructure, lack of employment, increased poverty.

This issue of *NEA Arts* looks at the creative approaches rural communities have been taking with the arts to help improve their communities socially, aesthetically, and economically. In Vermont, the Orton Family Foundation is bringing artists into the community planning process, while in the middle of Arizona's Sonoran Desert, the International Sonoran Desert Alliance has turned an abandoned school into artist housing, leading to new economic growth for the small town of Ajo. Two rural towns in Washington State take different approaches to utilizing the arts to revitalize their communities. On the Fond du Lac Reservation in Minnesota, art is used in a health clinic to promote the Native culture as well as for its healing properties. And in North Carolina, HandMade in America has shown that the traditional arts are a viable, important part of the local economy as well as the local culture.

Join us at arts.gov as well to find web-only features (see back cover), and don't forget to visit our Art Works blog to comment on this issue or to share information on the arts in your community.

ABOUT THE COVER

The neighbors of Starksboro, Vermont, work with visiting artist Matthew Perry on a community garden fence through the Orton Family Foundation's Art and Soul project that makes the arts part of community planning. PHOTO BY CAITLIN CUSACK

STORIES

3 THE ART AND SOUL OF THE COMMUNITY

How the Arts Transformed Starksboro, Vermont
By Paulette Beete

7 A CULTURAL BRIDGE ACROSS A DESERT

Arizona's International Sonoran Desert Alliance
By Rebecca Gross

11 OUT OF THE WEST

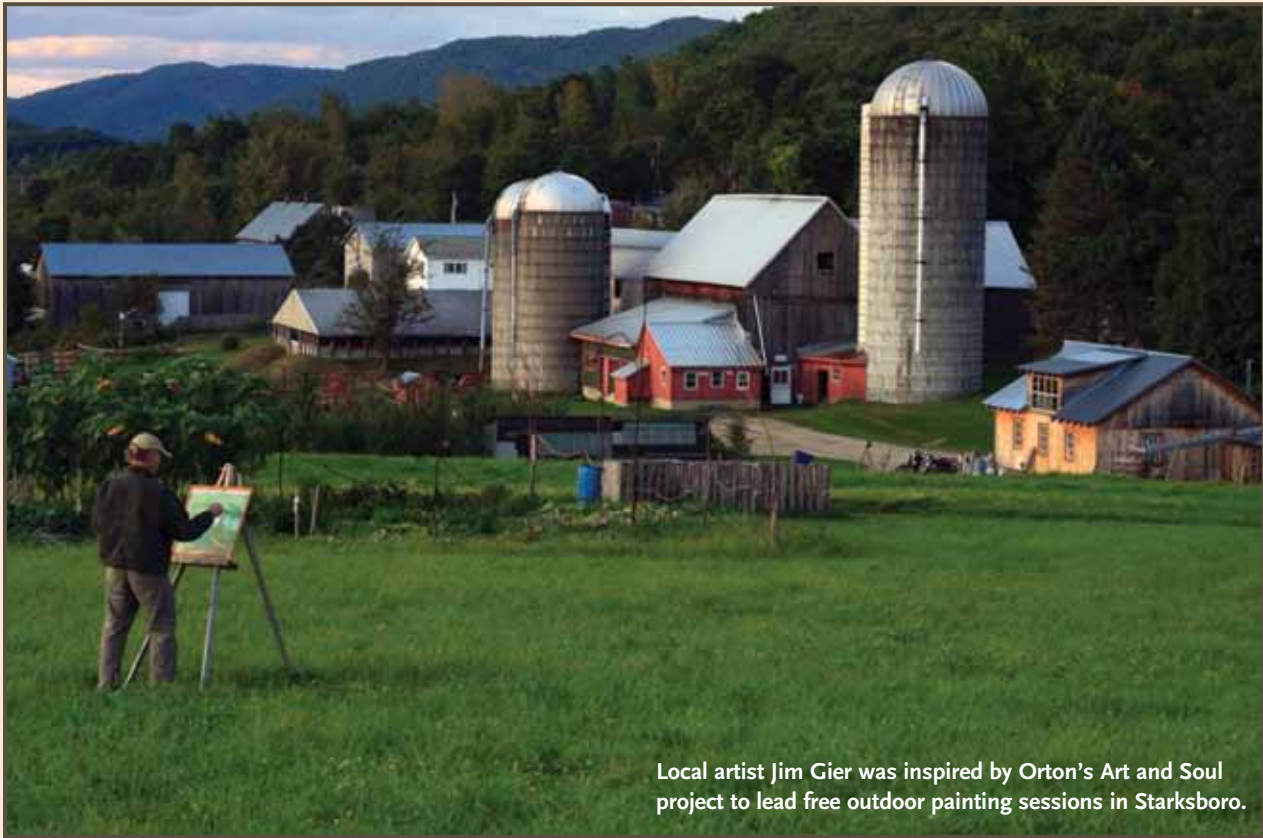
Creative Placemaking in Rural Washington
By Michael Gallant

16 A SENSE OF IDENTITY

Minnesota's Min No Aya Win Human Services Center
By Rebecca Gross

20 CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

North Carolina's HandMade in America
By Christy Crytzer Pierce



Local artist Jim Gier was inspired by Orton's Art and Soul project to lead free outdoor painting sessions in Starksboro.

PHOTO BY MERLIN THOMPSON

The Art and Soul of the Community

HOW THE ARTS TRANSFORMED STARKSBORO, VERMONT

BY PAULETTE BEETE

A bucolic town of nearly 2,000 people, Starksboro, Vermont, is home to eight working farms and a cohort of maple sugar producers. It's also home to several mobile home parks, and has only recently exceeded the population peak it saw back in 1860. Like many rural towns, Starksboro struggles with planning for future growth, while at the same time maintaining the pastoral characteristics that make it an attractive community in the first place.

According to the Orton Family Foundation, founded by Vermont Country Store chief Lyman Orton, the inimitable characteristics of communities like Starksboro are their "heart and soul assets." As Orton's Betsy Rosenbluth explained, these are "what really matters to people about where they live, both in terms of the place and in terms of their



Artist-in-residence Matthew Perry (center) with children from Starksboro's Hillside Manor Mobile Home Park in front of Perry's Art Bus, which he used to travel around the rural community. PHOTO BY CAITLIN CUSACK

connection to each other.” The foundation started its Heart and Soul initiative to help communities identify these defining aspects—such as landscape, cultural heritage, and volunteerism—which then serve as a basis for planning decisions, including zoning laws, development of public spaces, and even municipal signage.

The arts, in the form of storytelling, are a critical part of the Heart and Soul Community Planning process. Participating communities use activities such as story circles and intergenerational interviews to ferret out their shared values. According to Rosenbluth, “the point is that neighbors are listening to each other and that the community is listening to the stories as a whole.”

Having seen success with the program, Orton expanded the role of the arts in a new project called Art and Soul. “We were interested in seeing whether [other art forms] could serve, in the way that storytelling did, as a different entry point for people to be involved in these discussions, in a way that could cut to what is the heart and soul because that is a much more emotional question than the right height of a building or the setback of a street,” said Rosenbluth.

With a municipal planning process already underway and an elementary school nationally lauded for its arts education program, Starksboro was a perfect fit for the Art and Soul experiment. According to Robert Turner, Starksboro’s elected auditor and long-time member of the conservation commission, the town had two main issues: geographic dispersal of the neighborhoods and the integration of its mobile home parks into the rest of the community. He added, “We don’t have a central core village that a lot of New England villages have where you have the church and the school and the town store and those kinds of things. Instead we have these neighborhoods...and two of those neighborhoods are mobile home parks.”

In the opening months of the year-long project, Orton engaged students from Middlebury College to conduct community interviews for the storytelling phase. The next step, however, was up to Starksboro: hire an artist in residence.

North Bennington visual artist Matthew Perry describes himself as a social and community artist. Perry said, “When I heard about the vision that Lyman Orton had about this project, it just resonated with me...because what he was saying was that he

felt that artists should have a seat at the table in town government and school boards, and people in decision making should be listening to the artist’s opinion because we approach problem-solving and challenges creatively.”

Turner noted that Perry “really had the right personality and the right attitude, and that [attitude] was hands-on, let’s get out into these communities, let’s talk to these people, let’s find creative ways to do things with these people that draw them out.”

In fact, Perry’s first priority was getting to know the townspeople. “I went around and [met] all of the groups, from firemen to the artists in town to the school to the teenagers. I went to the mobile home parks. I went to all of the different groups to find out who was in the town.”

Perry had an unlikely ally in this quest: a converted school bus. “My art bus really played a big key part in this whole project, a lot more than I had thought.... It just brings the arts to the people because people don’t really get out to art that much.”

Residents of Brookside Mobile Home Park in Starksboro look at the signs created by the park’s children during Matthew Perry’s residency. PHOTO COURTESY OF ORTON FAMILY FOUNDATION



Rosenbluth agreed. “He was almost like the Pied Piper throughout Starksboro getting people excited about both doing art and just talking.”

Surprisingly, two words went unspoken during Perry’s residency: “art” and “artist.” “I teach a lot of classes and whenever I work with adult populations with art...they’re kind of intimidated by it, and it freaks them out,” he explained. “So I stopped [saying] that I’m an artist or that we’re going to make art. I kept saying, ‘Well, we’re going to find some creative approaches to this.’”

While there were many visual arts efforts—new signage for the mobile home parks, a youth photography project, the painting of sap buckets for the annual sugaring festival—Perry’s signature activity was the “roadside conversation.” Visiting each of Starksboro’s enclaves, he invited residents for a neigh-



Matthew Perry’s final artwork from his residency in Starksboro. PHOTO BY MATTHEW PERRY

borhood-wide potluck. Neighbors met each other, swapped stories, and were encouraged to reflect on what made Starksboro Starksboro. At each gathering a local artist was charged with making a piece of artwork in response to the conversation. One musician, for example, wrote a song inspired by “This Land is Your Land” about Big Hollow Road, a local thoroughfare. Perry claims an ulterior motive in recruiting the town’s artists: “[I]t was important that the artists in the community carry on the work. Part of my job was to show them some different ways to work with people and particularly people in their own community.”

Perry counts the roadside conversations as a major success of his residency. “Just the fact that we brought people together that hadn’t talked to each other in a long time, people that didn’t know each other...and everybody was just talking and having a great time... that alone was a key part of the goal.”

Nearly two years later, Starksboro’s Art and Soul project is still bearing fruit. For example, walkability emerged as a priority for the town’s citizens. Turner reported, “We’ve built a small pathway that leads from the school to the main street and that is a visible, tangible example of how we’ve taken kids off the road and put them on a safer path to get from one destination to another. We’ve also moved the efforts to increase recreational trail access in our town’s recreation fields, which happen to be a couple of miles distant from the village.... As part of Art and Soul, we’re extending a trail to make it a longer loop trail, and we’re creating a bridge so that the utility of this trail brings people out.” The project includes funds for commissioned art works by local artists to be installed along the trail. Starksboro has also allocated additional funds for public spaces.

Ultimately, however, Turner believes the benefits of Art and Soul are more than civic improvements. “[W]hen you recognize that there’s a lot of good in this community, and you’re proud of the people, your neighbors, the volunteers, the people in the fire department, your elected officials, when you feel pride, I think that goes a long way toward increasing your social capital. And when the inevitable challenges come up that divide communities, I’m a great believer that this sort of capital banking will go a long way toward making those difficult challenges a lot easier.” ▲

A Cultural Bridge

Across a Desert



Arizona's International Sonoran Desert Alliance

BY REBECCA GROSS

When the New Cornelia copper mine shut in 1985, the tiny town of Ajo, Arizona, became even tinier. Located 40 miles north of Mexico in the heart of the Sonoran Desert, Ajo's population registered a scant 2,919 people in the 1990 census, a drop of roughly 40 percent from a decade prior. Employment options were scarce, poverty was rampant, and the town plaza's beautiful Spanish revival architecture had largely fallen into disrepair. The Curley School, once a glittering jewel of

The Curley School in Ajo, Arizona, after being renovated by the International Sonoran Desert Alliance. PHOTO BY RON MCCOY

public education, was headed for the wrecking ball. It was a sad case of boom to bust, but one that the International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA) saw as ripe with possibility.

Formed in 1993, ISDA represents the Anglo-American, Mexican, and indigenous O'odham communities living in the Sonoran Desert. Born out of concerns that environmental preservation efforts disregarded the people they affected, the organization



One of the wings of artist apartments that ISDA created when renovating the Curley School. PHOTO BY JEWEL CLEARWATER

operates under the belief that economy, environment, and the arts are all interconnected and critical to community well-being. Ajo seemed like the ideal place to headquarter the organization's efforts.

"I suppose some people would look at [Ajo] and see a decaying town," said Tracy Taft, executive director of ISDA. "We saw tremendous opportunity to restore a beautiful cultural history."

The historic town plaza, a product of the City Beautiful movement, was constructed from 1917 through 1947. A remarkable architectural outpost amid a vast expanse of desert, the plaza captured ISDA's imagination, and ultimately provided the framework for Ajo's reinvention.

The grand experiment was to see if the organization could lead, in a rural area, the type of artist-led revitalizations that has occurred in so many urban centers. New York's SoHo neighborhood is perhaps the best-known example, where artists, attracted by cheap loft spaces, stimulated the neighborhood's gentrification in the 1980s and '90s.

"The arts offer so many opportunities to develop your own little businesses, especially with the Internet and Internet sales," Taft said. "It helps that because we're in the heart of this incredible Sonoran Desert, we also have nearly one million cars a year coming through town.... They're on their way to the seacoast in Mexico and they're on their way to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. We reasoned [that] if you could build arts opportunities here and then work on stopping the tourists that are already traveling through, all of that could fit together into a revitalized economy in town. That was the big idea."

ISDA ended up purchasing the Curley School, converting the main building into 30 affordable artist residences and live-work spaces. It was a major real estate undertaking that Taft acknowledges was much bigger than anyone had anticipated. "Had I known how hard it would be," she said, "we probably wouldn't have done it." ISDA staff had little experience with managing an architect. The builder had to pull out months before construction. Initially there were also

problems with community support.

“This is a place where if you’ve only been here ten years, you just got here,” said Taft. “It felt to some people like newcomers were coming in and taking over their building and their tradition. Some people were afraid that dope-smoking hippies were going to move into the school and paint it purple. That was one of the rumors.”

Community tensions eased after a public meeting was held and specific plans—none of which involved purple paint—were laid out. Eventually, the right architect was found, a new builder was hired, and the Curley School was born anew in 2007 as a haven of culture and creation. The restoration retained the school’s original high ceilings and eight-foot windows, creating spacious, light-filled spaces for the artists who moved in.

“When we completed [the school], the whole town was now in support of this kind of work,” said Taft, noting the dissolution of initial skepticism. “Their treasure, the place where everybody had all these memories, was saved and saved beautifully.”

With this initial project completed, ISDA had the track record needed to move on to the remaining seven buildings of the Curley School campus. The cafeteria was converted into a gallery and community business and printing center. Another building was transformed into a clay studio and woodworking shop. Construction is currently underway on a commercial kitchen, which will be used by Ajo Cooks, an ISDA-sponsored program that encourages culinary micro-enterprise among Hispanic and Native-American women. As the final piece of the Curley campus, the former elementary school courtyard will eventually house a conference center and international artist-in-residency program, a project that Taft estimates will be completed in two years.

For those who live on the Curley campus, the complex is an artist’s dream of quietude, creative community, and scenic inspiration. Mari Kaestle, a former puppet and doll designer, moved to the Curley School

four years ago to forge a new path as a multimedia artist. “Here I am with a very affordable rent, built-in friends, a community which is diverse and welcoming and has a great deal to offer, and an art gallery with new shows every month,” she said. “It’s just fabulous.” Although Curley apartments come with no formal obligations regarding community engagement, both Taft and Kaestle said that most of the artists volunteer within the community and have fully integrated into Ajo life.

Although the school is ISDA’s centerpiece, it is only one part of the organization’s programming. ISDA purchased the entire town plaza when it came on the market in 2008, and its buildings, like the school, are now



Local businesses and organizations sponsored peace-themed murals—designed by local artists and painted by the community—which were installed in Ajo’s town plaza for the annual International Peace Day celebration.

PHOTO BY JEWEL CLEARWATER

“Here I am with a very affordable rent, built-in friends, a community which is diverse and welcoming and has a great deal to offer, and an art gallery with new shows every month.” – Mari Kaestle

on the National Historic Register. With 90,000 square feet of commercial space, the plaza offers enormous potential for new businesses and economic growth: a restaurant, café, and gift shop have already opened on its premises. Taft hopes that at least some of the space will house businesses spun off from the work of local artists, such as pottery shops or handcrafted jewelry stores. To this end, ISDA recently was awarded an NEA Our Town grant of \$100,000 for the adaptive reuse of multiple buildings and outdoor spaces in the plaza.

Beyond real estate projects, there are festivals, after-school art initiatives, environmental preservation projects, and the Las Artes GED program, which develops art skills in conjunction with academic training. Prior to Las Artes, locals had to go to Phoenix or Tucson to enroll in a GED program; both cities are more than two hours away.

Though these projects are diverse, the common thread in nearly all of them is art. Taft considers the arts to be “the perfect driver” for creating economic activity and sparking enthusiasm within the community. “They inspire, they create energy, they open minds and they bring people together across cultures and generations so powerfully.” Later, she elaborated, saying, “What we’ve been doing since about 2000 is intentionally using the arts as a cultural bridge. We see the arts as having an incredible disarming power.... Defenses go away, people connect, people bond.”

Because ISDA operates in Arizona, Mexico’s northern Sonora state, and the Tohono O’odham reservation,

the need to bridge cultures is more than just lip service. “Our board of directors is comprised of those three cultures and nations and has been from the very beginning,” said Taft. “If you zero in, Ajo itself was originally three separate, segregated towns: Indian Village, Mexican Town, and the Ajo-Anglo town site.”

ISDA has come up with a slew of creative ways to showcase these three nations. International Peace Day, the organization’s largest festival, takes place every September 21st in Ajo’s town plaza. Contingents from the Tohono O’odham Nation and Sonoyta, Mexico, join with locals as giant dove puppets are flown in a parade. Then there is the Organ Pipe Cactus Fruit Harvest Tour, led by a Hia C-ed O’odham elder within the national monument. A 50-foot mural depicting harvest traditions graces the Curley School offices, painted by Tohono O’odham artist Michael Chiago.

As the town begins its new lease on life, residents are hopeful that things are changing. “I think in ten years, Ajo will be the place to be instead of the place you drive through,” said Kaestle, who has no plans to move from the Curley School anytime soon. “There’s something about the quality of this place, the quality of Ajo, the incredible environment of the Sonoran Desert. I hate to use the word magical, but in a sense, I think there is almost a magic about the way so many positive things have come together here.” ▲

A gallery opening on the Curley School campus.

PHOTO BY JEWEL CLEARWATER



Two of the five metal cutout dancers—a Yakama fancy dancer and a Mexican dancer—displayed in a Wapato park. PHOTOS BY MARTHA GOUDEY

Creative Placemaking in Rural Washington

Out of the West

BY MICHAEL GALLANT

“There are oceans of children in this town, and this is their home,” said arts entrepreneur Barbara Peterson, speaking from her office in the farm community of Wapato, Washington, roughly 150 miles southwest of Seattle. “Even though this is a tiny, hard-scrabble town, there’s no reason they shouldn’t have beauty here.”

This is precisely why Peterson, who serves as executive director of the educational not-for-profit Northwest Learning and Achievement Group, has spent years creating innovative art projects in her adopted hometown, sparking a striking rural renaissance in the process.

Just about 30 miles northwest of Wapato, a similar transformation has been underway in the town of Tieton, another small, rural community. “Years ago, people in the area had the mindset of, ‘What if we could get a golf course or high-security prison to move here? Wouldn’t that be a shot in the arm for the economy?’” said Seattle art book publisher Ed Marquand, who

While Wapato’s rebirth started with the engagement of youth, as well as active promotion of the town’s unique ethnic heritage, Tieton’s renaissance took a different route—specifically, reinventing the town’s forlorn, abandoned buildings as furnaces for artistic enterprise. And though the paths of the two towns may differ broadly, the introductions of the arts into Wapato and Tieton strike a clear pattern—even in the tiniest of rural communities, artistic engagement can change everything.

FIVE ETHNICITIES, ONE COMMUNITY

Peterson’s relationship with Wapato began in 1993 when, as an employee of the Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board, she was asked to write a grant to support college outreach for high-poverty communities. “I needed to find some place where my grant would not be competing with pre-existing public services,” said Peterson. “I was told, ‘Go to Wapato; they don’t have anything.’”

Wapato sits on the Yakama Indian Reservation in southern Washington. “When people were homesteading, this was one of the least expensive places because it was so far from settled areas,” described Peterson. “So people who were quite poor made their homes here.” While visiting, Peterson was struck by the unique diversity encapsulated in the tiny community. “It’s a confluence of five ethnicities,” she said. “You have the Yakama tribe of Native Americans, as well as Hispanics who moved in because of agricultural opportunities. In the 1920s and ’30s, there was an influx of Philippine and Japanese farmers. And then you have white farmers as well, who are largely of Dutch and Irish descent.”

Charmed and inspired, Peterson went forward with her planned college outreach program to a warm response from the community—but she wanted to do more. “The town didn’t have a good sense of self, so I felt it needed public art, student art,” she said. “It was a hardworking place and it didn’t have beautiful architecture or other lovely things to retreat to. But



Bronze pictures that Wapato children created, with the help of professional artists, and placed around the city as public art installations. PHOTO BY MARTHA GOUDEY

played a key role in catalyzing Tieton’s own artistic rejuvenation. “Our approach was, ‘What if we take designers, architects, and other creative people from Seattle, and plug them in here? Would that model work?’” By the looks of Tieton today—a busy artisanal outpost with locals and Seattleites working shoulder-to-shoulder—the answer is a resounding “yes.”



At the annual Tamale Festival in Wapato, children participate in traditional performances, such as Native-American fancy dancing and Mexican *folklorico* dancing. PHOTOS BY MARTHA GOUDEY



everything else was beautiful about it.”

With the help of guest concrete sculptors, bronze casters, and other artists—and funding from the Washington State Arts Commission—Peterson’s organization began to work with Wapato’s children. The young residents created locally themed pictures, images which the professional artists helped realize in sculptures of bronze and concrete. The artworks were placed around the city as public art installations. But the biggest project was yet to come.

“In Seattle, we had seen what the city did with metal cutouts, displayed on poles, in the middle of downtown,” said Peterson. “It seemed to be an affordable, visible art form that we could easily maintain, and keep free from graffiti. We thought we’d try something similar in Wapato.” Over the course of three years, Peterson and her colleagues brought children from the town’s different ethnicities together to create a defining public art installation for the city. “We asked them to find an image that we could make that would be distinctive for each of these cultures,” she said. “We would then cut the images into metal and display them together.”

For the wide variety of Hispanic heritages present in Wapato, the children stepped back in time to choose an image from the Aztec calendar; to represent Native-American heritage, they produced an image of a feather inside the shape of a fish. “The images were not complex, but they were beautiful,” said Peterson. The resulting metal cutouts were mounted on poles and placed in the center of town.

With such unique public art created and installed, Peterson saw outreach as the next step. “We started a Tamale Festival to bring people in, to have them look at these multicultural children’s images that were displayed everywhere,” she said. “One town nearby is known for its cowboys-and-Indians murals. Another one has dinosaurs, and another has fountains,” she said. “We were without something to define us, so we

moved in the direction of children's art."

Based on the vibrancy of the Tamale Festival and other community gatherings—each rich with traditional dances from the city's core ethnicities—street traffic in Wapato increased significantly, and local business owners started to notice. "Proprietors decided that this was a place with good circulation," said Peterson. "Some of them took a chance, and now we have a carniceria next door, a Philippine restaurant down the street, a new taqueria, a martial arts studio, and more. We've really started to recapture parts of this town."

Perhaps most compelling is how the cycle of innovation continued, using images from past Tamale Festivals to create even more public art. "We worked with a high school art teacher to try to capture images of the ethnic dancers, one for each of the five cultures," said Peterson. Again immortalized in metal, images of a Yakama fancy dancer, a Japanese dancer in a kimono, and even American cheerleaders are on display today in the parks of Wapato.

The city's renewal continues, with plans in the works to begin showing movies publicly in the park. "Years ago, there just wasn't enough reason to do something like that," she continued. "Many great things are happening in Wapato and it all started with art. That was the spark."

FROM ABANDONED BUILDINGS TO ARTIST COLONY

While Peterson's introduction to Wapato resulted from a careful search, Marquand's first rendezvous with Tieton was pure accident. "In 2005, I was taking a bike ride around the area and ended up in Tieton for the first time," he said. "I pulled into a parking lot and punctured both tires on a patch of goathead thorns, so I spent the afternoon doing repairs in the little main town square, surrounded by all of these storefronts."

While fixing his injured bicycle, Marquand noticed some intriguing things about Tieton—the overall space and structure of the town, as well as a great many "for sale" signs. An idea began to grow in his mind. "Seattle real estate is far too expensive for most artists to buy studio space, so I started asking around about this town and why it was no longer as prosperous as before," he said. "It had always been a workman community—no Carnegie library, no gingerbread—just a nice little orchard town."

Tieton's fortunes fell, Marquand soon learned,

A demonstration of letterpress printing in Mighty Tieton's book arts facility, which is used during the annual LiTFUSE: A Poets' Workshop to print a broadside of the participants' poems. PHOTO BY ED MARQUAND



when local, family-owned farms and orchards began to consolidate as a result of changes in regional agribusiness. "Right now, the fruit business is every bit as successful as it ever was, but the owners are a much smaller group of people," he said. "Many of them live in other cities and they don't need to come into Tieton, so there weren't as many people to support local retail business. The bigger farms built more efficient warehouses, too," he added. "That left lots of unused buildings in this sweet, beautifully situated town. My thought was, what could artists do with these spaces?"

During the summer of 2005, after his fateful accident, Marquand invited artist and designer friends to visit Tieton with him. After much discussion and collective dreaming, the group decided to buy nine buildings, including a large warehouse for which they had special plans.

"We were interested in adding to the town," he said.



Matt Sellars' *Barns* hanging from one of the five former fruit storage rooms in the Mighty Tieton Warehouse, a venue for art exhibitions, performing arts events, and community activities. PHOTO BY ED MARQUAND

“None of the buildings we bought had viable businesses in them, so it’s not like we were kicking anybody out. We converted some of the buildings into beautiful lofts to give people a place to invest in and stay while they did their work here.” For Marquand, ownership of property in Tieton was a key component to success. “If people invest in the real estate of an area, they’re also investing themselves emotionally,” he said.

While Marquand’s colleagues began plying such crafts as furniture making, sculpture, and architecture in their new Tieton spaces, Marquand himself expanded his art-book business with the help of local collaborators. “My main endeavor here is creating handmade art books,” he said. “We’ve even branched out into making sketchbooks, letterpress items, and funny posters for sale in my Seattle design shop.” All of their artisan businesses work under the banner of Mighty Tieton.

Marquand likens the successful model of Tieton’s

arts businesses to that of the Tieton Farm and Creamery, a nearby, locally owned dairy that distributes cheese to restaurants and markets in Seattle. “That economy, like ours, relies on the urban creative component, combined with the advantages of being in a rural area,” he said. “Tieton Cider Works does the same thing. Property here is inexpensive, there’s a strong workforce, and it’s just a nice place to be.

“This isn’t just a situation where we have expensive studio spaces for painters and sculptors and such,” he continued. “For this model to work, we really needed people who had broader business connections and reputations in order to sell the products that we are producing here. If you just plunked studios in rural Washington and opened a little pottery showroom, it wouldn’t work. There’s just not enough traffic going through. But if you can distribute the

Continued on page 19

A Sense of Identity



Minnesota's Min No Aya Win Human Services Center

BY REBECCA GROSS

Pie Social, 1997, by Carl Gawboy, a member of the Boise Forte Band of Chippewa, is displayed at the Min No Aya Win Human Services Center on the Fond du Lac Reservation in Minnesota.

IMAGE COURTESY OF MIN NO AYA WIN HUMAN SERVICES CENTER

IN MOST HEALTHCARE FACILITIES, ARTWORK IS generally limited to framed posters outlining the proper way to wash one’s hands. If you’re lucky, you’ll find inspiring phrases splashed across Photoshopped images of sand dunes or ocean waves, as if cancer can be cured by *Dreams* and *Motivation*.

On the Fond du Lac Reservation, however, the Min No Aya Win Human Services Center has replaced the sterile medical atmosphere with an expansive collection of Ojibwe art. Comprised of beadwork, paintings, bronzes, and historical photographs, the 350-piece collection is at once a cultural statement and spiritual healer.

Located in northeastern Minnesota near Cloquet, Fond du Lac is home to roughly 4,000 members of the Ojibwe Nation. The Fond du Lac Ojibwe operate a school, two casinos, and a cultural museum, yet it’s the Human Services Center that has become the artistic centerpiece of the reservation. The collection is almost single-handedly the work of Human Services Director Phil Norrgard, who came to Fond du Lac 32 years ago as a volunteer grant writer and never left. When he arrived, he worked in a basement with four other individuals; today he oversees a staff of 280. As employee numbers grew, so too did the center itself.

“We wanted to develop a sense of community ownership and identity,” said Norrgard. “As we built facilities or expanded facilities over the last 30 years, we always set aside money to acquire art when construction was completed.”

Although it isn’t unusual for a reservation to showcase tribal art, few—if any—house their collections in healthcare centers. This rarity isn’t unique to reservations of course: aside from a few university hospitals, medical facilities in general aren’t known as vibrant centers of fine art. And yet, the healing properties of art have been a focus of medical research for years. Numerous reports have shown that both art creation and art in the environment offer positive effects for patients, a correlation that the Arts Endowment actively supports. At Min No Aya Win, which primarily provides medical and dental services, the art collection works double duty, fostering community spirit while helping ease physical ailments. Because of this, Norrgard terms the clinic’s pieces “working art.”

“[The artwork] becomes sort of like part of the staff, it becomes part of the building,” Norrgard said. “It can distract [patients] from their own pain or feelings

of illness into giving them memories that might be pleasant and reassuring.” He continued, saying, “Most people come in because they don’t feel well. I want to believe that the artwork has the opposite effect. They feel better once they get here.”

It improves the spirit of staff members too: clinic personnel often request pieces for their offices or hallways, which benefits both themselves and their patients. Norrgard forwarded an e-mail he had recently received from a staff member who had just moved into a new, bare-walled office. She asked for three pieces to place over an interview desk—“something nice for patients to look at,” she wrote. Norrgard commented that “this is an example of how staff working here have come to appreciate what art can do for people (and expect that it should be part of the environment).”

It was not always this way. Resources are scarce at Fond du Lac, and with each new building, Norrgard has had to convince board members to allocate funds for art acquisition. All of his campaigns have ultimately proven successful. Today, the medical complex includes the main center, a clinic in Duluth, and a recently opened pharmacy in Minneapolis, each of which is awash in art. “You sort of can’t turn around

Sharing Meat, 1999, is another painting by Carl Gawboy on display at the Min No Aya Win Human Services Center. IMAGE COURTESY OF MIN NO AYA WIN HUMAN SERVICES CENTER





Two historical photographs of boarding schools brought in by members of the community to be displayed at the Min No Aya Win Human Services Center.

IMAGES COURTESY OF MIN NO AYA WIN HUMAN SERVICES CENTER

without seeing a piece somewhere.”

Although the Ojibwe Nation spreads across northern Wisconsin, Michigan, and southern Canada, Norrgard almost exclusively buys art from local and regional artists, many of them young and not yet established. Not only does this offer financial support to struggling up-and-comers, but it can serve to validate nascent talent while signifying that Ojibwe artistic traditions offer a viable, valued professional path. As is the case with many minority groups, Ojibwe art has largely been overlooked by mainstream art institutions, making it difficult for artists to have their voices heard.

“The artists were delighted,” said Norrgard as he described reaction to the collection’s early beginnings. “They finally got some recognition for the work that they did.”

The facility also houses pieces from more prominent Ojibwe artists such as Carl Gawboy, Rabbett Before Horses, and Joe Geshick, making the collection a comprehensive survey of young and old, historic and modern. Beadwork and sweetgrass baskets share space with contemporary paintings and blown glass, providing residents with “a greater understanding of their own cultural and historical past and present.”

Many of the more narrative works depict local scenes and traditions, and serve in a way to visually convey Ojibwe heritage. On the other hand, modern works speak to attempts to reshape a diaspora that has been blighted by poverty, disease, and political

marginalization. A number of contemporary pieces are done in the Woodlands style of Ojibwe artist Norval Morrisseau, who was called “Picasso of the North” and was known for his use of vivid colors and more abstract forms. Norrgard finds these pieces in particular “very inspiring. I think culturally [they] fit in very well with the American-Indian aspirations for redeveloping and emerging cultural awareness.”

The support given to Ojibwe artists is inextricably linked with the sense of community fostered among the clinic’s patients. Unlike a museum, a healthcare facility doesn’t cater to a specific arts-minded audience: it is a focal point for the community, and almost everyone will pass through its doors at one time or another. Given this, Min No Aya Win has a unique opportunity to strengthen social pride by presenting the community’s culture. While this is an obvious benefit for any group, Norrgard emphasized that it is particularly important for American Indians.

“Distrust in institutional care of any kind is so prevalent because of past cultural [and] historical experiences,” he said. “I think the artwork said that this is a tribal facility. It’s owned by a tribe, it’s operated by a tribe, it’s supported by tribal people, it’s governed by tribal people.... That was very critical. There was a much higher degree of acceptance and a pride in ownership.” Norrgard lamented that more medical facilities haven’t invested the same resources into art. “Healthcare facilities really have not understood that



A photo of Chief Wadena, circa 1902, that hangs in the Min No Aya Win Human Services Center.

IMAGE COURTESY OF MIN NO AYA WIN HUMAN SERVICES CENTER

the feeling of well-being or place and culture, especially in a minority community, can be very helpful to feelings of security and trust.”

In addition to the artwork, Min No Aya Win also showcases historical photographs. Any member of the community may bring in a historical photo or negative. For five dollars, the Human Services Center will scan the image and print two eight-by-ten copies: one for the image’s owner, and the other for the center’s walls. “People come in and see their own grandparents or great-grandparents in the photographs, or they see themselves as babies,” said Norrgard. Not only does this deepen the sense of familiarity and comfort, but it can add perspective by reminding patients “how it was in times that were tougher than these.”

Whether or not other minority and mainstream healthcare institutions take Norrgard’s advice to beautify their facilities, he has already set an example on Fond du Lac. Both the school and one of the casinos have reprinted some of the historic photos, while the casino has also purchased artwork from some of the clinic’s featured artists.

As for the Human Services Center, Norrgard said that as long as the facility keeps expanding, he’d keep collecting. “We’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback and a lot of heartfelt appreciation for having this here. I think it’s been really good for our patients and for our community. I just hope they keep valuing it. I’m awfully confident that they will.” ▲

Out of the West

Continued from page 15

goods made here into an urban area, it can work quite well.” The products that Mighty Tieton produces all carry the brand “Tieton-Made,” further expanding the community’s reputation as an artistic haven.

Rather than being tagged as carpetbaggers, Marquand and his colleagues received positive reactions from much of the Tieton community, thanks in no small part to the large Mexican population. “Many [Mexican] people here are familiar with artisan businesses,” said Marquand. “If you know someone who’s a potter, mosaic worker, or metal worker, then it’s easier to relate.” Also helpful in building community ties were the frequent art exhibits and other exquisitely executed community events staged in the large warehouse that Marquand and company had purchased.

Community reactions weren’t all positive, though. “A lot of the older residents were standoffish for the first few years, but they’ve all come to us since then and told us, in their own ways, that they could never figure out what to do with all of those buildings. They’re glad we didn’t tear them down,” he said. Indeed, while Tieton’s buildings were decidedly nondescript and utilitarian, Marquand noted that they were still important parts of the community’s collective identity, and deserved to be respected as such.

Marquand also described a distinct uptick in public mood during the six years since the Seattle artists first arrived. “Residents come to more community meetings and show up at farmers markets,” he noted. Marquand also pointed to the reaction of one 87-year-old resident as evidence of Tieton’s progress. “She runs a café and comes to work at 6 a.m. to pour coffee. She’s tough as nails,” he said. “Someone once asked her, ‘When are you going to sell this place?’ She said, ‘I’m not going to sell it! I’ve been waiting 40 years for something to happen here—and something’s finally happening!’” ▲

—*Michael Gallant is a composer, musician, and writer living in New York City. He is the founder and CEO of Gallant Music (gallantmusic.com).*

BY CHRISTY CRYTZER PIERCE



Potter William Baker shapes a new piece on the wheel in his studio; Baker is one of the local artists that North Carolina's HandMade in America has brought visibility to with its guidebooks and online resources.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ENERGYXCHANGE

Creative Solutions

North Carolina's HandMade in America

In an era of mass-manufactured products and outside corporate development, the Western North Carolina region, located in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains, has taken economic direction from a refreshingly unlikely source: its local craft artists. How much impact can pottery, jewelry, woven baskets, and the like make on the local economy? Try more than \$206 million each year, making the craft-arts industry a major economic player in the 25-county region, with a place at the table beside healthcare, hospitality, tobacco, and other major industries.

“Normally, discussions of economic development focus on things like housing, infrastructure, and manufacturing, so for many it is difficult to wrap their heads around arts and culture as an economic necessity. Then they see the numbers,” said Gwynne Rukenbrod, executive director of HandMade in America, an organization instrumental in bringing a new approach to stimulating the local economy.

Established in 1993, HandMade in America was the vision of founding Executive Director Becky Anderson, who sought to find creative solutions to the

region's economic problems. Focusing on the small, rural towns affected most by the loss of manufacturing, Anderson began analyzing cultural assets in the region and discovered a significant concentration of craft artists working anonymously in studios, classrooms, and galleries. With a grant from the Pew Partnership for Civic Change and input from more than 400 citizens, HandMade was soon established as a guiding force to promote these craft, cultural, and community assets with the purpose of stimulating economic growth.

"[Anderson] wanted to bring visibility to these invisible craft artists and cultural assets," said Rukenbrod. "That remains our mantra today."

HandMade is proud to "bring visibility" to the more than 4,000 individual craft artists in Western North Carolina. *The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina*, now in its third edition from HandMade, was the first guidebook to map potters, glassblowers, metal sculptors, wood workers, and other artisans in the region, giving rise to tourism in the area's small towns. Online resources—including a craft registry and trip planner—now augment the guidebook by making artists, studios, and galleries even easier to locate.

In tandem with these visibility efforts, HandMade also offers career development opportunities for individual artists. Monthly craft labs, for example, are offered for free and tackle practical topics such as "how to market yourself as an artist" or "how to engage a visitor in your studio."

"HandMade in America has made a tremendous impact for many traditional and emerging craft artists in our area," confirmed Carla Filippelli, HandMade board member and local fiber artist, basket maker, and sculptor.

In addition to supporting individual artists, HandMade also aids the rural Western North Carolina towns where many of these artists live. The Small Town Revitalization Program, its flagship initiative, currently works with 13 small towns, each with fewer than 2,000 residents, in ten counties. The program helps to rejuvenate infrastructure through an asset-based planning approach, which has become a replicated model

across the country. Cornerstones of the project include a commitment from town leaders and volunteers, community assessment, partnerships, and mentoring. Since the program's 1996 launch, \$53 million has been invested into these towns, creating more than 600 jobs and restoring more than 200 buildings.

Hayesville in Clay County is one of these small towns. Working closely with the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association (CCCRA), HandMade identified revitalization opportunities based on many existing assets, including Clay County's historic 1888 courthouse, which was in desperate need of repair. With HandMade's guidance, CCCRA gathered volunteers,

Quilter Bernie Rowell is another North Carolina artist included in HandMade in America's guidebooks and online resources; her work *Poppies and Dragonflies*, 2011, is shown.

PHOTO BY TIM BARNWELL



secured funding, and made key partnerships, resulting in a renewed downtown square and greenway with a beautiful, restored church as its focal point.

This renewal has encouraged an increased use of the space for festivals and concerts, said Rob Tiger, local business owner and president of CCCRA. “There is hardly a weekend that the square isn’t being used, and the events keep getting better and better. These renovation and cultural projects are crucial to the economic health of our county.”

The courthouse renovation was an early success for CCCRA, which allowed it to build momentum for other projects, including the 14.5 mile Jack Rabbit Biking and Hiking Trail outside of Hayesville. Partnering with the Southern Appalachian Bicycle Association, the trail opened in April and is already estimated to have more than 40,000 riders this year.

“HandMade really held our hands through the crucial beginning stages,” said Tiger. “If it wasn’t for their guidance and expertise, we wouldn’t have been able to

get off the ground with these projects.... [O]ur work with them is the single best thing that could have happened to a group of overachievers looking to make a difference in their community.”

Networking and mentoring are key components to HandMade’s philosophy; Small Town participants are encouraged to connect with other area towns for the exchange of ideas and stories. Similarly, HandMade’s Appalachian Women Entrepreneurs program is a network of business women in rural North Carolina, designed to mentor and foster the growth of women-led businesses in the area.

HandMade is taking its own regional strategies and stories outside of Western North Carolina as well. Representatives consult on everything from the regional small town revitalization philosophy and cultural tourism to craft development and marketing.

For Florida’s Eden, a not-for-profit uniting 30 North Florida counties for the purpose of economic growth and natural resource conservation, this guidance was

The historic Clay County courthouse, built in Hayesville in 1888, was renovated through HandMade in America’s partnership with the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association. PHOTO BY MICHAEL GORA



critical to its success. “I had identified a huge concentration of creative talent in the North Florida region and unspoiled natural resources to go along with it, but I didn’t know how to begin unifying the region using these assets,” said Annie Pais, executive director of Florida’s Eden. “[Anderson’s] guidance and HandMade’s principles enabled us to navigate devastating pitfalls at the beginning, which really saved us long-term.”

Stewart Thomas, creative director of Florida’s Eden, agreed and added, “HandMade’s region is similar to ours in that there is one urban area [Asheville/Gainesville] with surrounding impoverished communities housing tremendous talent and resources. Even with these similarities, HandMade was flexible and could see that their model was not exactly ours, because the assets were different. We identified that our greatest strength was our waterways and fresh water springs, and they concurred.”

Despite HandMade’s continued success in Western North Carolina and beyond, the organization still

faces daunting challenges, most notably the economy. “Some of our small towns are suffering from lost jobs, funding difficulties, the flight of young artists to cities and volunteer shortages,” acknowledged Rukenbrod. “Right now 94 percent of our budget comes from grants, and with the instability of funding at the moment, we’re trying to diversify the revenue stream.”

Rukenbrod, however, still seems optimistic. “HandMade in America has always been an incubator of ideas and at the forefront of finding creative solutions through existing assets and partnerships... besides, I have never experienced a region with more community spirit and pride and an unwavering drive to succeed than here in the Blue Ridge Mountains.” ▲

—Christy Crytzer Pierce is a writer and publicist in Forth Worth, Texas.

A bowl by artist Buzz Coren, a North Carolina artist promoted by HandMade in America. PHOTO BY TIM BARNWELL



National Endowment for the Arts

1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20506



ART WORKS.

arts.gov

Scan the QR code to your right to access our online material. Or you can visit arts.gov to **SEE** slideshows of the murals of Dave Loewenstein in small towns in the Midwest and on the artistic influence of Donald Judd on Marfa, Texas; **HEAR** Jay Salinas of Wormfarm Institute (an NEA Our Town grantee) talk about the artist residency program that brings artists to a working farm in rural Wisconsin; **READ** about NEA's initiative Your Town: The Citizen's Institute on Rural Design in which local leaders in rural areas team with designers and architects to address their community's unique needs and problems.



Dave Loewenstein's mural *The East Lawrence Waltz* in Lawrence, Kansas.

PHOTO BY DAVE LOEWENSTEIN

