



Leveraging Public Investment in the Arts

The Role of Arts-based
Economic Development Strategies in
Georgia Communities



STATE OF GEORGIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
ATLANTA 30334-0900

Nathan Deal
GOVERNOR

GREETINGS:

It is an honor to introduce the publication of this stimulating case study which illuminates the positive impact the arts can have on communities in our state.

The arts are beneficial to our economy as they create jobs, attract businesses, enhance our quality of life, advance the excellence of education, and inspire creativity among our citizens. Collectively, Georgia's creative industries represent 200,000 jobs, \$8 billion in wages and earnings, and \$29 billion in revenue. The creative industries account for 5 percent of all employment and 6 percent of all business revenue in the state.

While these statewide figures are impressive, it is instructive for local communities to examine how our cities and towns use the arts as a tool for economic development. This series of case studies, created through a partnership between the Georgia Council for the Arts and the Georgia Municipal Association, demonstrates the power of the arts to improve our local economies through strategies to promote tourism, downtown development, entrepreneurship, community identity, and quality of life.

I have long been a supporter of the arts and the expression of creativity, and I encourage you to take a moment to consider these examples and contemplate how the arts might be used to improve your local economy – from the mountains, to the plains, to the coast, in communities large and small alike. I hope that you are inspired by the stories of Athens, Blue Ridge, Clarkston, Duluth, Hapeville, Springfield, and Thomasville. They are just a few of the many Georgia communities that successfully utilize the arts as an economic development tool. By following the example these cities have set, we can continue to move Georgia's economy forward and make this state an even greater place to call home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Deal".

Nathan Deal



The success of communities stands at the forefront of the mission-driven work that both Georgia Council for the Arts (GCA) and Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) undertake daily. Our organizations are committed to providing resources and services to support local governments and their citizens as they create vibrant places to live, work and visit. It is in this vein that we sought to collaboratively undertake this project; to tell the stories of Georgia cities committed to, and thoughtfully employing, the arts as a tool for economic and community development.

Each case study and project study on the following pages documents a Georgia city that has seen past the arts as mere entertainment. Each has defined, and is actively refining, a unique local strategy for engaging with artists, entrepreneurs and the creative community in a meaningful way. The results are seen through revitalizing downtowns, attracting entrepreneurs, activating community gathering spaces, changing education and forging a shared identity and a strong sense of place.

We share their stories here to document some of Georgia's best examples of arts-based economic development and cultural heritage tourism strategies. We hope that others in our state, region and country will find inspiration and take away best practices from these examples. However, we also share these stories to underscore that the arts are a tool that can reap great rewards, but must be employed with intent and strategy in the framework of an overall economic development portfolio. Each of the individuals interviewed in the seven communities spoke of the successes and the challenges faced along the way, and the changes to policy and practice that are being employed to keep working towards a vision for their city as a place with a robust economy and incomparable quality of life.

We have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to get to know the communities of Blue Ridge, Athens, Duluth, Springfield, Thomasville, Clarkston and Hapeville better. We are grateful to the civic leaders, community members and public servants that worked with GCA and GMA to study their efforts and to document their experiences. We hope that our readers are challenged, inspired and galvanized by the role of the arts in economic development as it plays out across these pages and throughout our incredibly creative state.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen L. Paty".

Karen L. Paty
Executive Director
Georgia Council for the Arts

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lamar Norton".

Lamar Norton
Executive Director
Georgia Municipal Association

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is home to countless vibrant communities – from mountain towns to coastal cities, from the urban and suburban piedmont to the rural plains. Part of what makes these communities energetic is the local economy. Another source for their liveliness and sense of cohesion is the arts and culture. Some of the most interesting work happening in localities around the state is where those forces intersect – where the arts and culture are employed as part of a local economic development strategy.

While there is data available about the impact of the creative industries on Georgia's economy, including 200,000 jobs and \$29 billion in industry revenues, data alone can only provide so much insight. Elected officials, civic and business leaders, and creative professionals need concrete illustrations of how creative industries and artists impact the economy in their communities. More importantly, providing these examples has the potential to inspire other elected and community leaders to explore options to incorporate the arts as part of the economic development strategies employed in their own cities.

CASE STUDIES AND PROJECT STUDIES

Toward these ends, Georgia Council for the Arts (GCA) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) entered into a partnership to develop a series of case studies and project studies to share the stories of Georgia communities that are successfully using the arts as part of their local economic development efforts. For the purposes of this report, case studies have a broader scope, examining multiple aspects of a community's approach to economic development through the arts and culture, while project studies focus on one specific venture implemented by a local entity.

GCA and GMA carefully considered the communities included in the case studies. We are aware that there are numerous examples of model arts and economic development efforts in local communities throughout the state. Due to the limited scope of this research, however, we are unable to include all of them here. Our selection process included searching for a variety of communities based on population, geography, demographics, resources, and specific strategies employed by each city. With those diverse criteria in mind, we chose to feature the following communities as case studies:

Athens

Best known as home to the state's largest university, the most fervent college football fans, and a groundbreaking music scene, Athens and its leaders have invested in local infrastructure, organizations, and public art to give their community a culturally rich atmosphere that attracts and supports the creative residents that are abundant in their city. Local citizens have signified their backing for the arts by voting to approve numerous SPLOST projects, by volunteering to promote and coordinate the arts, and through widespread participation in events, classes, and festivals.

Blue Ridge

Nestled in the north Georgia mountains, Blue Ridge beckons to those wishing to escape the congestion of urban areas for a weekend, or for the rest of their lives. Active cultural organizations, abundant arts festivals, and a picturesque downtown draw tourists, retirees, and artists to this quaint but thriving community. Their success is orchestrated through county support for the arts and culture, Chamber of Commerce coordination with arts organizations to attract tourists, and the vision of private developers to carefully curate their downtown storefronts with unique businesses operated by creative entrepreneurs.

Duluth

Located in a bustling Atlanta suburb in Gwinnett County, Duluth is using the arts to differentiate itself from dozens of other suburban communities. Whether it is Eddie Owen's Red Clay Music Foundry, summer concerts, seasonal festivals, regular art walks, or permanent public art, Duluth is investing in arts infrastructure and cultural programs to draw residents and visitors to its revitalized downtown. City leadership is the driving force behind their success, exemplified by increased visitors, additional restaurants and shops, and new residential projects.

Springfield

Located 25 miles northwest of Savannah, the seat of Effingham County was struggling to attract traffic and business to its city center. Then community leaders and elected officials developed a plan. Step one was to renovate the historic Mars Theatre. Step two was to develop programming to draw residents and visitors to the center of town. Step three was to hire a cultural affairs director to help make all of that happen. While the vision of city leaders has many more steps, if what they have accomplished so far is any sign, the rest will soon be history.

Thomasville

The city of Thomasville and the Thomasville Center for the Arts work hand-in-hand to help their city fulfill its potential. The arts and culture are deeply infused into the community – from bike racks to murals, from classes to performances, from coffee to dairy, from leather to yarn, from schools to downtown. Thomasville leaders and residents understand that creativity is the future. Their plan for a creative district will only add to the community's appeal for years to come.

GCA and GMA also selected two unique programs to highlight as specific project studies:

Entrepreneurship Training for Immigrant Artisans in Clarkston

Located in one of the most diverse cities in the country, the Clarkston Community Center has embarked on efforts to train immigrant artisans to become better artists and business people. This investment is paying off by developing creative entrepreneurs who are becoming self-sufficient using their unique talents and their cultural heritage.

Shipping Containers as Pop-up Galleries in Hapeville

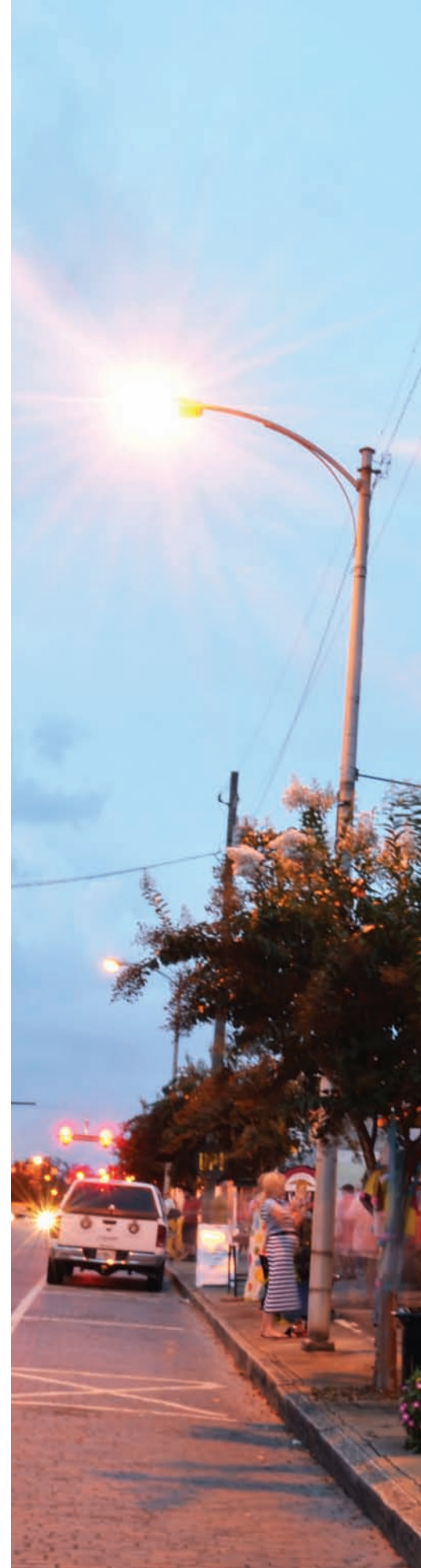
What does a community do when they have a plan to expand the availability of the arts, but there is a lack of physical space? In Hapeville, they turned to shipping containers. Building on their plan to establish a more creative community, the Hapeville Arts Alliance has taken a unique approach to create new visual art galleries in their historic downtown.

CONCLUSION

The case studies and project studies featured in this report illustrate that the arts are far from mere decoration or light entertainment. Rather, they are a serious component of economic development strategies in communities throughout the state. These Georgia cities have employed the arts as a lever to increase visitors, attract residents and businesses, create jobs, improve quality of life, and increase local tax revenues.

Notably, these communities did not use carbon copies of economic development plans employed by their neighbors. Instead, they found what was unique about their communities, their local cultures, their resident artists, their resources, and their leadership, and developed a strategy tailored to their strengths.

As readers contemplate these case studies, we encourage you to consider your own community—its assets and eccentricities, the unique talents of its residents, underutilized resources, and the vision of local leadership—and apply these lessons to incorporate the arts in your community's economic development strategy.





THOMASVILLE



Location:
Southwest Georgia, near
the Florida state line, 35
miles north of Tallahassee

18,413

Population

\$29,924

Median Household
Income

16.2%

Unemployment Rate

Partnerships Fostered Between City and Arts Organizations
Arts Festivals Produced by Arts Organizations
Public Art Developed by City and Arts Organizations
Creative District Planned by City and Arts Organizations
Arts Education Provided by Partnership Between School
System and Arts Organizations

Key Strategies

Thomas

County

83.5%

% of Population with
at least a High School
Diploma

23.2%

% of Population with at
least a Bachelor's
Degree

10.8%

% Employed in Arts,
Entertainment, Recreation,
Accommodation and Food
Services



Thomasville: All in for the Arts

When cities roll out new way-finding signs, leaders don't usually consult with local arts organizations about how the signs should look. Then again, many cities don't have the kind of relationship that Thomasville has with its largest creative enterprise, the nonprofit Thomasville Center for the Arts (TCA).



“Signs are not art,” acknowledges city Mayor Max Beverly, “but the Center for the Arts is a great resource for us. We know that what we do with the sign ordinance will have a visual impact on the entire community. So bringing in people with artistic talent is logical.”

Effective sign design is just a small way Thomasville has leveraged the arts in recent years. The southwest Georgia municipality, famous as a quail hunting

“It’s a wonderful partnership. It allows us to offer quality art instruction that these children may not otherwise get without duplicating efforts or breaking the bank.”

– Dr. Daniel Oldham, Director of Finance,
Thomasville City Schools

destination, has been working to develop a vibrant, creative community.

“When you look at economic development, you’ve really got to differentiate yourself as a community to attract outside businesses,” Mayor Beverly says. “The arts is one of the things that we use to distinguish ourselves from the cities we’re up against when a company is looking to move to a certain area.” It’s an effort that’s propelled by a close working partnership among government, schools, business owners and arts organizations – most notably, TCA.

Connecting With Community And Schools

The TCA dates back to 1986, when a group of artists sought to create a place that would enrich the quality of life for all ages through the arts. The Thomasville community came together and raised money to renovate the old East Side Elementary School into the Thomasville Cultural Center. For 25 years, the center operated as a place that offered art, theatre, dance and education. But while popular, it seemed to be missing a deeper connection to the community.

So in 2010, the Cultural Center’s board brought in consultant Michele Arwood to lead a strategic planning effort. The first thing she did was to talk with the community. She met with donors, city officials and other stakeholders, asking them what they thought about the center and its future potential.

“Early on, the city was one of the stakeholders,” Arwood says. “Consulting with them fostered the spirit of collaboration, as well as trust and mutual respect.”

In 2011, the center rebranded and shifted its mission to make the arts more “community based” and changed its name to Thomasville Center for the Arts, reinforcing the idea of Thomasville being a physical nucleus for the arts.

“We basically started over and changed our focus externally in order to connect the community through the arts,” says Arwood, who was hired as the new executive director that same year.

In the years since, TCA has added literary and applied arts programs, restructured youth education, and focused on connecting the community through festivals, which also generated revenue. Before the rebranding, TCA was a \$750,000 organization with a handful of programs.

“Seven young entrepreneurs have opened businesses here within the last several years. When these people see a thriving, bustling downtown, they say, ‘this is where I want to be.’”

- Karen Smith, Main Street Director, Thomasville

Today, it brings in close to \$1.3 million through 28 programs, according to Arwood. TCA also has “resident partners” such as the Thomasville Entertainment Foundation, South Georgia Ballet, the Thomasville Music Academy, and the Red Hills Players, an acting company. These groups and others lease space from the center, and offer lessons and classes to the public.

Forging stronger relationships with schools was another key aspect of TCA’s evolution. The center provides arts instruction to Scott Elementary School, located next door. Under a pilot program started two years ago, students come to the center throughout the day to learn visual arts, theatre, dance and music.

“It’s a wonderful partnership,” says Dr. Daniel Oldham, director of finance for Thomasville City Schools. “It allows us to offer quality arts instruction that these children may not otherwise get without duplicating efforts or breaking the bank.” He adds that the pilot program was so successful that talks are underway to expand and grow into other schools.

Growing The Economy Through The Arts

The festivals TCA stages throughout the year not only bring residents into downtown but also attract people



from outside of Thomasville to visit. A good example is Flaunt!, an annual event that was originally called Summer Showcase.

The center changed the name to Flaunt!, moved the festival to September, took it outside and expanded it to include public art, music and other activities, all around a different theme every year. The 2014 festival celebrated “pop-up” art, and the event was much more than a theme. Unused storefronts along Jackson Street served as temporary homes to nearly two dozen creative businesses.

“It was astounding,” Arwood says. “Two or three of the buildings were sold with new businesses going in just by having the pop-up businesses, which is pretty remarkable for one block.”

One of those new endeavors was “Sturdy Brothers,” launched by local brothers Ben and Spencer Young. The pop-up shop, which featured handmade leather goods, was so successful, it took up permanent residence downtown in December 2013.

The Young brothers represent a changing demographic in Thomasville: a younger generation who either grew up in Thomasville and are coming back to raise families, or are settling here for what the small town has to offer. In 2009, Spencer Young and his wife Megan wanted to open a coffee shop, so they settled in Megan’s hometown of Thomasville. They were joined by partner Ed Millere, also a native. The trio opened Grassroots Coffee, an eclectic java shop on Broad Street. In 2013, they were able to buy a building and move across the street. That same year, he opened the other business with his brother.



“Seven young entrepreneurs have opened businesses here within the last several years,” says Karen Smith, Thomasville’s Main Street director. “When these people see a thriving, bustling downtown, they say, ‘this is where I want to be.’ The community embraces new ideas and supports new businesses.”

Creative Redevelopment

While making plans to redevelop an underutilized area of historic downtown, the city, along with input from TCA, decided to designate a “creative district,” an area devoted to public art, galleries, and creative entrepreneurs such as Sturdy Brothers.

The city, in partnership with TCA, first pulled together a design charrette, a collaborative brainstorm session commonly used by architects and designers when planning a project. In March 2014, experts in economic development, landscape architecture and master planning, as well as community members, came together for a three-day meeting funded by the city, TCA and the Main Street program. From that meeting came a written plan that detailed everything the creative district could be.

“We first thought of it as an ‘arts district,’” Arwood says, “but due to input from the community during the charrette, we decided to target a more ‘creative’ group, including businesses like sign makers, landscape architects, illustrators and interior designers.”

The plan also calls for a 14-mile trail system that connects the city through all of its parks. A multi-use park will anchor the trail downtown, with a stage and lawn seating for outdoor performances — providing yet another reason for people to come downtown.

Another new development – independent of the creative district – is the old Rose’s department store, a run down building on the edge of downtown that the city now owns. Beverly says the city plans to make it

into a new events center and will work with TCA on the concept to maximize the potential of the project. With the collaboration of TCA, the creative district, the multi-use park and new businesses continuing to open up shop in Thomasville, Mayor Max Beverly is confident Thomasville is becoming a more attractive place to live, as well as a place where businesses want to come.

To demonstrate the strength of the arts in Thomasville, a copy of “Thom,” a magazine that TCA started publishing last year, is included in information packets to prospective companies and potential residents. Supported by corporate partners, the book-like publication features stories about the people and ideas shaping the creative life of the Thomasville community. “That magazine tells more of what Thomasville is than most brochures,” Beverly says.



“When you look at economic development, you’ve really got to differentiate yourself as a community to attract outside businesses. The arts is one of the things that we use to distinguish ourselves from the cities we’re up against when a company is looking to move to a certain area.”

– Max Beverly, Mayor, Thomasville

BLUE RIDGE



Location:
North Georgia, near the
Tennessee and North
Carolina state lines

1,290

Population

\$26,944

Median Household
Income

19.2%

Unemployment Rate

Arts Facility Granted to Arts Organization by County
Arts Organization Staff Funded by County
Spring and Fall Arts Festivals Produced by Arts Association
Creative Entrepreneurs Recruited by Local Developers
Cultural Tourism Promoted by Chamber of Commerce

Key Strategies

Fannin

County

62.9%

% of Population with
at least a High School
Diploma

12.0%

% of Population with at
least a Bachelor's
Degree

13.6%

% Employed in Arts,
Entertainment, Recreation,
Accommodation and Food
Services



The Artistic Rise of Blue Ridge

For as long as anyone can remember, the outdoor majesty of Blue Ridge has beckoned people to escape from hectic everyday life. Vacationers and weekenders alike have been drawn to its picturesque mountains, National Forest and lakes and streams.

Downtown was another story. Twenty years ago, only a handful of businesses occupied buildings; the rest of the town was a mix of empty shops and plywood storefronts. While Blue Ridge offered breathtaking views, downtown didn't have much for visitors to see or do.

Bo Chance exemplifies how all of that changed. He'd been coming to Blue Ridge for several years after his parents had retired in the area. Tired of the frenetic pace of traveling with his job as a software developer and the congestion of Atlanta, he and his wife decided to pull up stakes and move to Blue Ridge in 1995. They also bought and renovated a building downtown, opening it as High Country Art and Antiques.

When Bo Chance looked at the city's core, he saw opportunity. "And I wasn't alone," Chance says. "There were about five of us who took a leap of faith at that point. It was really a collective, unorganized effort."

Around the time Bo Chance and others decided to open a few businesses downtown, other efforts were being made to draw more people to the area. In 1996, Fannin County approved a hotel/lodging tax to support and promote tourism.

A separate grassroots effort proved just as important. In 1998, a group of citizens from Blue Ridge and McCaysville approached the Georgia Northeastern Railroad about running a train between the two cities, starting and ending from a depot in downtown Blue Ridge. The railroad agreed, and that train became a reality.

“It never ceases to amaze me what we accomplish and the people we impact. The Arts Association provides an arts identity for Blue Ridge and Fannin County that helps attract artists and tourists.”

– Nichole Potzauf, Executive Director,
Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association

“The Blue Ridge Scenic Railway was the catalyst for development of downtown Blue Ridge,” says Jan Hackett, president of the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce, “along with the increase in destination tourism stimulated by the Chamber’s promotional efforts.” Hackett estimates the train now brings in about 40,000 tourists a year.

To demonstrate how much the area has grown, in 2002, the county collected \$91,000 from the hotel/motel tax. In 2013, the number skyrocketed to \$1 million. The Chamber now receives 5 percent of the tax collected for marketing efforts, which includes promoting all of the arts venues.

Allure of The Arts

The attraction of new visitors to Blue Ridge sparked new enterprise in the arts. In 1998, a local writer worked with the well-established Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association (BRMAA) to bring a regional writers' workshop to town, a now-annual weekend of guest speakers, work sessions and networking events. The Blue Ridge Community Theatre, which began as an entity of BRMAA before growing into its own nonprofit, put on plays in public school cafeterias, open air parks or anywhere else they could find a space.

In 2004, BRMAA found its first permanent home when the county suggested it take over the historic Fannin County Courthouse, which had been vacant for years. Not only was it a beneficial way to make use of a dormant building, but it also allowed The Art Center to expand its programs and have a presence downtown. Fannin County paid for a new roof on the building, and through the years has provided matching funds for renovations and structural improvements. The county also supports the BRMAA by leasing the organization the building in exchange for maintenance and upkeep, and paying the salary of the executive director and another staff person.





From these efforts sprung the creative community that Blue Ridge is today, and its success is nothing short of remarkable. BRMAA now has more than 1,000 members. The Art Center houses studios, a pottery and kiln studio, five artistic guilds, five galleries and an artist-in-residence program. It also sells art supplies. Classes in visual arts, music and dance - for all ages and skill levels - draw people from Tennessee and North Carolina, and all over Georgia.

BRMAA also co-sponsors the Fall Plein Air Festival, part of the International Plein Air Painters Artists Organization. Each year, 40 or more artists venture to Blue Ridge to render its outdoor beauty on canvas. "Nature is our biggest asset," says Nichole Potzauf, executive director of the Art Center, "and nature is also the defining factor of Plein Air."

“ It’s a different retail customer here every day of the week. We have some locals and lots of tourists. Blue Ridge is one of a kind. I couldn’t have this business in Atlanta. ”

- Lynn Kemp, Owner, Gawdy Bobbles and Canoe Bags

As with BRMAA, the acquisition of its own building in 2009 spurred the Blue Ridge Community Theatre to new attendance and acclaim. "The permanent location gave us credibility," says Mike Lacy, who has been involved with the theatre since 2001 and now serves as a vice president of its board. "We're proud of what we've created; it's been a group accomplishment." He says the theatre performs a major production almost every month, along with providing acting classes and summer camps for children. The theatre has also expanded into live music performances. "We were looking for a way to fill those 'dark weekends' between productions," says Lacy. "We've invested in new sound and video equipment to draw bigger talent as well as a more regional audience."

Other developments have added fuel to the growth of the arts in Blue Ridge. Artists from around the country participate in a national juried art show staged by the Southern Appalachian Artist Guild, which is housed at The Art Center. Their works draw crowds to the gallery housed in the former courtroom in the Center during the fall. Arts in the Park, a small festival started back in 1976, and now supported by the Center, has grown into two events, one in the spring and one in fall, attracting hundreds of artists and vendors and thousands of visitors.

"It never ceases to amaze me what we accomplish and the people we impact," Potzauf says. "The Arts Association provides an arts identity for Blue Ridge and Fannin County that helps attract artists and tourists."

Downtown: Home To Creative Businesses

The entrepreneurship of business owners - led by the efforts of Bo Chance - has played an equally pivotal role in Blue Ridge's development. Chance sold his High Country Arts and Antiques business several years after he opened it, but kept the building. Over the years, he acquired 19 other buildings downtown, forging a new career in property management.

He has always had a clear idea of what he wanted Blue Ridge to be and that philosophy and practice set him apart from typical landlords. He carefully curates tenants, making sure each is a good fit for the area – and has the potential to succeed.

“If a business owner requires a lot of foot traffic, I’m not going to rent them a building that is off the beaten path,” he says as an example. “I also won’t locate a competitor near an existing business if I can help it. My philosophy is ‘your success is my success.’ I want each business to thrive.”

One of those thriving businesses is owned by Lynn Kemp, another Atlanta transplant and former Macy’s buyer who moved to Blue Ridge with her husband and started making her own jewelry. In 2011, Kemp rented a building from Chance and opened Gawdy Bobbles, a design studio and shop that sells handcrafted jewelry with an artistic flair, made on the premises. “It’s a different retail customer here every day of the week,” she says. “We have some locals and lots of tourists. Blue Ridge is one of a kind. I couldn’t have this business in Atlanta.”



Kemp’s success led her to buy her own building and open a second business, Canoe Bags, last year. The handbags are designed by Kemp and hand-sewn locally.

“We have an environment that’s conducive to someone who is successful at selling a form of art,” says Chance. Indeed, downtown Blue Ridge is now home to an array of crafted and creative enterprises. Bill and Shannen Oyster own Oyster Fly Rods, in which they not only custom make and sell hand-crafted bamboo rods with shotgun-steel engraving, but teach others how to do it in their six-day classes. Fly fishing enthusiasts come in from all over the country to create their own custom made rods in these classes, which usually fill up six months in advance.

Mike Lacy of the Blue Ridge Community Theatre also owns Multitudes Gallery, which features hand-blown glass and other fine art.

A stroll along the streets of downtown Blue Ridge turns up many other examples – artistic businesses and shops that reflect a love for the aesthetic as well as a second life for their proprietors. And visitors would be hard-pressed to find an empty storefront. Chance says occupancy is near 100 percent.

“A lot of people come up here to Blue Ridge to reinvent themselves,” says Lacy. “It’s been exciting to see that over and over again. The creative energy just draws people to this town.”

“A lot of people come up here to Blue Ridge to reinvent themselves. It’s been exciting to see that over and over again. The creative energy just draws people to this town.”

– Mike Lacy, Owner, Multitudes Gallery

HAPEVILLE



Location:
Metro Atlanta, 8 miles
south of downtown
Atlanta

6,373

Population

\$36,435

Median Household
Income

15.2%

Unemployment Rate

Arts Facilities Developed by City and Arts Organizations
Arts and Culture Included in Municipal Planning
Arts Programming Produced by City and Arts Organizations

Key Strategies

Fulton

County

75.4%

% of Population with
at least a High School
Diploma

17.8%

% of Population with at
least a Bachelor's
Degree

11.1%

% Employed in Arts,
Entertainment, Recreation,
Accommodation and Food
Services



Hapeville: “Pop Up” Art Adds to Revitalization Efforts

What do you do when you want to make the arts a cornerstone of your plan to revitalize the city — but you don’t have any gallery space? If you’re Hapeville, Ga., you buy shipping containers.

Earlier this year, the nonprofit Hapeville Arts Alliance purchased a pair of used shipping containers to convert into “pop-up” art galleries. The 8-by-40-foot containers were painted and fitted with windows and doors, and placed on a concrete slab. By late spring, the galleries would be open to the public, with artists displaying their works in a rotating series of exhibits.



“We don’t have a lot of buildings,” explains David Burt, executive director of the Arts Alliance, “so this seemed like a creative and cost-effective way to get space and get art into Hapeville.”

Burt started doing research and found a company – ConGlobal – that sold both new and used containers. The group went with used containers since they were less than half of the \$5,500 cost for new ones. The company made modifications so windows

and doors could be added. Once the containers were delivered, local vendors installed windows and doors, interior framing, drywall, insulation, heating and cooling, and landscaping.

Burt estimates that the total cost for each container was about \$16,000, which was paid for out of a combination of a Georgia Council for the Arts Tourism Product Development (TDP) grant, a grant from the Community Foundation Neighborhood Fund, and community fundraisers. The city is offering in-kind help by providing the land, pouring the concrete, and doing the electrical work.

“You absolutely have to have buy-in from the government. And you get that buy-in by having a cohesive vision and implementing it step by step. Without it, you won’t have the collaboration you need.”

– Ann Ray, Vice Mayor, Hapeville

“We don’t have a lot of buildings, so this seemed like a creative and cost-effective way to get space and get art into Hapeville.”

– David Burt, Executive Director, Hapeville Arts Alliance

“The cost is a bit more than we originally anticipated,” Burt admits, “but we will be able to cover it. We could have shaved several thousand dollars off each one by making them simpler, but we want these to really be interesting architecturally.”

A juried committee from the Arts Alliance will choose the artists who will display work, and the art will be for show and in some cases, for sale, with the Alliance getting a commission.

The pop-up galleries are permanent fixtures on cement slabs, and more can be added at any time. Burt says no zoning changes were necessary because the containers are on city property and exempt from zoning requirements. But the city is thinking ahead in case others would like to try this idea.

“We are looking to have the zoning changed in the downtown arts district to allow private property owners to have the opportunity to also install these containers,” Burt says.

Using Arts As A Destination

The pop-up galleries are just part of the arts equation calculated to bring new economic life to Hapeville. It’s been a tricky equation to solve. Since the closing of a Ford Motor Co. plant in 2006, the city has battled an image problem – perceived as unsafe, too close to the airport, with nothing to do.



“Several years ago, downtown Hapeville was in decline and in pretty bad shape,” Burt says. “Some buildings were empty, but the majority were underutilized with tenants that tended not to stay very long. And most were the color of battleship gray.”

But he and others saw the situation as a canvas on which to paint a new Hapeville. In 2010, Burt was serving as president of the Hapeville Main Street board. He and fellow board members Ann Ray and Charlotte Rentz “put their heads together” to come up with a plan to revitalize the city.

“Every community needs to find its niche,” Burt says. “We believed Hapeville was well-positioned to become an arts community because of its safe environment, close proximity to downtown Atlanta and an atmosphere that is diverse, tolerant and welcoming.”

The trio formed the Hapeville Arts Alliance, leased an old house downtown and renovated it with volunteer labor to create the Norton Arts Center. The new enterprise provided an incubator space for local artists as well as a gallery and classrooms.

While the vision was clear – make Hapeville an arts village, a place where people want to spend time – a plan was needed. Burt’s professional background and education in city planning proved to be useful; already a consultant to other cities, he contracted with Hapeville to develop “Blueprint 2020,” an economic development plan.

A key goal was positioning Hapeville as an arts destination, and the strategy was a collaborative initiative involving the Arts Alliance, the Hapeville Historical Society – headed by Charlotte Rentz – and the newly relocated Academy Theatre. A key fourth partner in the initiative was the City of Hapeville.

“You absolutely have to have buy-in from the government,” says Ray, who as vice mayor has a dual interest in Hapeville’s success. “And you get that buy-in by having a cohesive vision and implementing it step

“**The bar has to be set pretty high from the beginning. We can’t just do substandard work to fill the space and expect it to last. If you do that, people might come here once, but they won’t come back. If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well.**”

– Ann Ray, Vice Mayor, Hapeville



by step. Without it, you won’t have the collaboration you need.”

Next Step: Getting Businesses On Board

While the Arts Alliance was gaining momentum, Burt went about trying to recruit new businesses to the city. In the last year, Drip Coffee has opened its second location in Hapeville, and Volare Wine & Bistro and Beer Girl, Growlers & Bottle Shop, have also come to downtown.

His recruitment efforts weren’t limited to for-profit enterprises, however. When the Avondale Estates-based Academy Theatre, a nationally recognized professional theatre company, was looking for a new home, Burt persuaded its leadership to move to Hapeville. The theatre relocated in 2013, providing a performing arts component to the scene.

“The theatre allowed us to create some nighttime traffic,” Burt says, “and that traffic is conducive to bringing in restaurants.” Now he’s hoping the pop-up galleries will attract more businesses, and more people will come into downtown, especially on weekends.

“The galleries will be open two Saturdays a month – maybe more in the future – and the art will rotate out,” explains Burt. “People can come back and not see the same art twice.” To generate more foot traffic, Burt says they are planning to pair the gallery openings with shows at the Academy Theatre.

While it seems that things have been coming together pretty quickly in Hapeville, Burt and Ray say it’s all been calculated with the intention of getting it right. “The bar has to be set pretty high from the beginning,” Ray says. “We can’t just do substandard work to fill the space and expect it to last. If you do that, people might come here once, but they won’t come back. If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well.”

DULUTH



Location:
Metro Atlanta, 30 miles
north of Atlanta

26,600

Population

\$60,161

Median Household
Income

7.4%

Unemployment Rate

Arts Facilities Funded by City and Organizations
Public Art Funded by City and Companies
Arts Programming Funded by City
Arts Festivals and Special Events Produced by Organizations
Public Arts Commission and Fine Arts League Established
through City Leadership

Key Strategies

Gwinnett

County

92.0%

% of Population with
at least a High School
Diploma

42.7%

% of Population with at
least a Bachelor's
Degree

9.5%

% Employed in Arts,
Entertainment, Recreation,
Accommodation and Food
Services

Duluth: Music as a Magnet, Arts as an Attraction

When Eddie Owen first stepped inside the Red Clay Theatre in downtown Duluth, he had a sense he was in the right place at the right time.

“A friend told me I needed to go up there and look at this theatre, but I wasn’t even sure how to get to Duluth,” Owen recalls. “I was blown away by the set up, by the incredible sound and lighting equipment and by the theatre itself. I saw its potential, and my mind started clicking.”



It was the fall of 2011. Owen, the former proprietor of the famed Eddie’s Attic music club in Decatur – and a man who has been credited with helping to launch the careers of musicians John Mayer, the Indigo Girls and others – was looking to launch a new enterprise.

But the Red Clay Theatre represented more than a next act in Owen’s career. The 260-seat venue was the centerpiece of a new vision and strategy for bringing people to the city, one built around the concept of “arts infrastructure.” Today, the final pieces of that strategy are being put in place, and there’s good reason to believe that downtown Duluth soon will be teeming with visitor activity, day and night.

“We knew that making Duluth an attractive place to live, work and visit was key. And that starts with the arts.”

– Nancy Harris, Mayor, Duluth

It’s been a long comeback for a city that began losing downtown businesses 30 years ago, after the 1984 opening of Gwinnett Place Mall a few miles away.

“The leadership is the most critical component of this whole formula. If you don’t have leadership with a vision, you won’t get anywhere.”

– Chris McGahee, Economic Development Manager, Duluth

Since then, Duluth has taken a series of steps to revitalize its core. In 1999, Taylor Park, was built on a small plot of land next to City Hall. The next year, the city rolled out Duluth Town Green, an expanse of community lawn that has since added an amphitheater. Both brought more people downtown, but the district still lacked the regular foot traffic that sustains businesses and restaurants, especially in the evenings.

After Nancy Harris became mayor in 2007, the city embarked on a new effort to create an infrastructure that would attract businesses and people to downtown Duluth. “We knew that making Duluth an attractive place to live, work and visit was key,” says Harris. “And that starts with the arts.”

“It became clear that the city needed to take an active role in creating an infrastructure in the arts just as it does with water, sewer and roads,” says Chris McGahee, the city’s economic development manager. “It’s the government’s responsibility to make that infrastructure attractive so we can attract chef-driven restaurants and more shops and art galleries.”

With the local government taking that lead, and persevering through the criticism and doubts, the city



embarked on a plan to turn the downtown around using the arts.

Bringing Live Music Downtown

The lynchpin in those efforts was the Red Clay Theatre. Once a bank and later a church, the theatre was acquired as city property in 2004 and leased to various theatrical outfits that staged Broadway-style performances. The last of the troupes left town in 2011, and city leaders had to figure out a new plan for the theatre. Their solution: live music.

Eddie Owen's interest happened to be a stroke of good fortune. In October 2011, Owen signed a lease agreement with the city of Duluth and put on the first show that December. Despite featuring national acts and emerging artists alike, the theatre had uneven attendance, a reflection of what Owen terms as the "feast or famine" nature of concert going.

But the city wouldn't give up on Red Clay – far from it. The model was changed from a lease agreement to a venue operation contract to support Eddie Owen's vision. In fall 2013, city leaders brought in an outside consultant to study the theatre's business model and potential impact on the economy.

“We want to be the city in Gwinnett where people come for performances and to be entertained. Red Clay and the Town Green are part of that.”

– Nancy Harris, Mayor, Duluth

The findings were encouraging. The study showed that the venue had brought in 50,000 nighttime visitors after 7 p.m., most of whom would not have otherwise

visited Duluth. It also found that downtown stores had an increase in sales on the nights the Red Clay featured a concert.

“The local pizza place made an extra \$400 in cash when people came to the theatre,” says McGahee. “The [study] determined there was a direct correlation with the city's investment in this space and economic return. It also made us appealing to potential business owners looking to invest in Duluth.”

“Red Clay creates the ambience we were looking for,” agrees Mayor Harris. “The study really changed our thinking. It was independent validation of our plan, and it was a fabulous resource that convinced the council to step up to the table and support the venue.”

As a sign of that support, the city signed a five-year contract with Owen in August 2014. Two months later, Owen extended the brand, changing the name to Red Clay Music Foundry after he formed a partnership with the Gwinnett School of Music. The basement of the Foundry has been converted into a music school, offering private instruction in an array of instruments as well as voice lessons, songwriting workshops and training on how to use the sound and lighting boards.

Downtown as a Destination

The city has worked to give people other reasons to come downtown. On “Thirsty Thursdays,” shops and restaurants offer specials and discounts to patrons. In conjunction with the Summer Concert Series held on the Duluth Town Green, “Food Truck Fridays” offer lots of food choices from local Atlanta vendors from June through October. Art walks – with artists and live music – take place during the summer. During special events, the alcohol ordinances are relaxed to allow open containers in the downtown area.



“We want to be the city in Gwinnett where people come for performances and to be entertained,” says Harris. “Red Clay and the Town Green are part of that.”

But the arts infrastructure doesn't end with music. Other arts experiences factor prominently into the city's plans to strengthen community and make downtown a destination point.

One example is the Duluth Public Arts Commission (PAC), formed by the city council in 2013 with the purpose to support performing arts, promote public art projects and encourage developers to install public art in the city. The commission's first significant task is to create a public art master plan. The Commission is collecting input from the community to shape short- and long-term goals for public art. “We are looking to you to help fill Duluth's canvas with art that tells our one-of-a-kind story to the region and the world,” invites a special website set up for the effort.

“We want to create an identity that's in line with the mayor's goal of Duluth being a destination,” says G.G. Getz, director of the PAC. “One of the things we are committed to is functional art – such as bike racks and crosswalks – so you feel you are in a unique, wonderful place.”

In 2014, the city unveiled “Ascension,” a three-ton sculpture that was commissioned and donated to the city by AGCO Corporation, a global manufacturer of agricultural equipment headquartered in Duluth. It's located at a roundabout on McClure Bridge Road and faces the heart of the city.

The Duluth Fine Arts League, a nonprofit organization established in 2008, sponsors Art Walks, fundraisers and other events and activities that support all forms of art.

Every September, the Duluth Fall Festival takes over the Town Green with vendors selling arts, crafts and food, as well as entertainment and carnival type activities. The Festival, started in 1983, now brings in hundreds of vendors and thousands of visitors to Duluth. “Everything we earn goes back into improving downtown Duluth,” says Kathryn Willis, Festival chairman and one of the founding members.

She adds that \$2 million has been raised since the event's first days, which helped build Taylor Park, the festival center and a courtyard on Town Green, and supported landscaping all around the city.

“It became clear that the city needed to take an active role in creating an infrastructure in the arts just as it does with water, sewer and roads. It's the government's responsibility to make that infrastructure attractive so we can attract chef-driven restaurants and more shops and art galleries.”

– Chris McGahee, Economic Development Manager, Duluth

Adding to Duluth's arts infrastructure is the Hudgens Arts Center, located near Gwinnett Arena. The Center offers exhibits and art classes for all ages and can be rented for private events. While the city does not have a direct relationship with the Center, Mayor Harris sits on the Hudgens board, and the two entities are currently working on a joint art installation in downtown Duluth.

In addition, Duluth's first fine arts gallery, 2 Smith Gallery, opened last year in downtown, and features original artwork from regional and national artists. The owners also offer art classes.

Arts Brings Results

While a steady flow of day-and-night downtown traffic is still a bit more pending than present, Duluth is clearly seeing the results of its efforts. Case in point: In January, two investors purchased a pair of buildings downtown solely because Eddie Owen was there. The plan is to convert the spaces into chef-concept restaurants.

Two big residential developments are in the works, which will support downtown activities. Fuqua Development is planning a mixed-use complex close to downtown that will have 330 apartments. The city is assembling downtown properties to create the opportunity for a planned residential community. Developers believe the city's commitment and investment in providing an appealing cultural life is conducive to adding housing near downtown. As the plan all starts to come together, McGahee credits the mayor.

“The leadership is the most critical component of this whole formula,” says McGahee. “If you don't have leadership with a vision, you won't get anywhere. Nancy's drive to make art a part of the daily life in Duluth has been the key to making this work. She has had the perseverance and the courage to listen to naysayers and take criticism, but still stay true to the vision.”

CLARKSTON

Creative Entrepreneurs Developed by Community Center
Arts and Business Training Provided by Community Center
Arts Markets Produced by Community Center



Location:
Metro Atlanta, 12 miles
east of downtown
Atlanta

7,554

Population

\$32,392

Median Household
Income

23.4%

Unemployment Rate

Key Strategies

DeKalb

County

69.2%

% of Population with
at least a High School
Diploma

16.7%

% of Population with at
least a Bachelor's
Degree

13.2%

% Employed in Arts,
Entertainment, Recreation,
Accommodation and Food
Services

Clarkston: A City of Enterprising Entrepreneurs

The 2010 Census deemed Clarkston “the most diverse city in America,” and for good reason. Though the city’s population is less than 8,000, an estimated 55 different languages are spoken there. They are the dialects of refugees who began arriving in Clarkston in the 1990s from all corners of the world – Somalia and Sudan, Burma and Bhutan, Nepal and Nigeria.

Some settled; others moved on. All faced the challenge of beginning a new life in a new country. For those who continue to call Clarkston home, they have a friend in the Clarkston Community Center. Since opening in 1994, the center has been a focal point for the community to come together to socialize, connect and learn new languages and skills.



While the center leases the school from the DeKalb County Board of Education free of charge, and receives some financial support from the city of Clarkston, the center is an independent non-profit responsible for raising their own funds.

“The Community Center fills an important void that, because of limited resources, the city couldn’t provide,” says Clarkston City Manager Keith Barker. “This is a place where there’s recreation, education and cultural activities. It is needed in every community.”

Art has played a special role in these efforts. More than a few refugees are skilled in a craft, and the Community Center has worked to help them develop their talents — even take them to market.

“For some, art is a hobby,” says McKenzie Wren, the center’s executive director. “But others would really like to make a living out of their art, so we try to get them to that place. They may know art, but they don’t know business.”

Prior to joining the Center in 2010, Wren worked with a group of Bhutanese performers, also refugees, who formed the Bhutanese Artists of Georgia. A National Endowment for the Arts grant - procured by Wren and a colleague - offered support for costumes, rehearsal space and more and culminated in a cultural music performance at the Horizon Theatre. The troupe became so successful that it moved its performances to Center Stage, a performing arts space in midtown Atlanta.

“Helping artists make a living is something I brought with me to the center,” Wren explains, “but now we’re dedicated to making it a more formal effort as opposed to just being on the sidelines.”

“We teach them to fish,” adds Michael Molina, director of art and education for the center, “but we also give them access to the pond.”

The Clarkston Farmers Market, established by the center four years ago to strengthen a sense of community, is part of that “pond.” The market - formerly held Sundays from April until November and opening on Saturdays in 2015 - features locally grown produce, prepared international foods, handmade crafts and live music performances.

“We are now changing the model,” Wren says, “and not doing a traditional farmers market focused on food. This will allow us to expand into more wares and crafts, and create the energy of an international street market. It’s a chance to share and showcase multiple cultures of both refugees and the American-born population.” Artists can also sell their art during special events and activities in an 8-foot kiosk set up in the foyer of the Community Center. In exchange for shop space, the woodworker gave back to the center in the form of the kiosk.

“For some, art is a hobby. But others would really like to make a living out of their art, so we try to get them to that place. They may know art, but they don’t know business.”

- McKenzie Wren, Executive Director,
Clarkston Community Center

“We support artists in a couple of different ways,” Wren says. “From giving them a place to showcase and sell their work, to hiring them to teach classes and camps.”

Beyond providing a marketplace for artists, Wren says the center helps these budding entrepreneurs develop their business acumen. That includes connecting artists with outside resources designed specifically for them.

“**The Community Center fills an important void that because of limited resources, the city couldn’t provide. This is a place where there’s recreation, education and cultural activities. It is needed in every community.**”

– Keith Barker, City Manager, Clarkston

Two examples are C4 Atlanta, a nonprofit that offers classes in how to write a business plan, develop a marketing strategy and create a website, as well as mentor and peer support, and Start: ME, a business accelerator that offers a 13-week business training class. In addition to Bhutanese Artists of Georgia, other success stories abound.

One is Doris Mukangu, from Kenya, who started Johari Africa to market her African-themed clothing, jewelry and handmade crafts. All of her goods are made from recycled products, including necklaces made from used paper, bags sewn from scraps of cloth, and powdered glass beads used in the jewelry. She hires refugee women from Clarkston to help assemble her crafts.



Another is Sushma Barakoti, a native of Nepal, who owns Sunavworld. Her mission is to “promote sustainable, fairly traded local and global gifts for the socio-economic empowerment of artists and artisans, especially women.”

She imports handmade products from Nepal to sell here, and also employs refugee women in Clarkston to sew products such as traditional baby blankets. She also helps Bhutanese basket weavers sell their crafts at markets around the area.



While neither came through the refugee program, both women are providing employment opportunities for refugees who may otherwise struggle to find a job due to cultural and language barriers. In turn, the center helps both businesses in several ways.

“We provide vending opportunities for them to test drive their lines and get experience in the community before launching on a wider scale,” Wren says. “We have also connected them with other resources and used our network to promote them.”

Serving these artists, both refugee and American-born, benefits not only the Community Center but the city of Clarkston as well.

“Whenever you keep money in the local community, it not only helps strengthen the community, it also adds energy,” Wren says. “We also believe that the arts are a vehicle for learning about other cultures and providing the artists with an opportunity to share their heritage.”

“**Helping artists make a living is something I brought with me to the center, but now we’re dedicated to making it a more formal effort as opposed to just being on the sidelines.**”

– McKenzie Wren, Executive Director, Clarkston Community Center

SPRINGFIELD



Location:
South Georgia, 30 miles
northwest of Savannah

2,852

Population

\$46,921

Median Household
Income

4.0%

Unemployment Rate

Rehabilitation of Historic Theatre Funded by City
Cultural Facilities Planned by City
Arts Staff Hired and Funded by City
Arts Programming Sponsored by City
Arts and Culture Included in Municipal Planning

Key Strategies

Effingham

County

78.3%

% of Population with
at least a High School
Diploma

14.1%

% of Population with at
least a Bachelor's
Degree

7.8%

% Employed in Arts,
Entertainment, Recreation,
Accommodation and Food
Services

Life from Mars: Springfield Theatre Renovation Sparks Revitalization

Barton Alderman will never forget those Saturday afternoons of his youth in Springfield, Ga.

He and his friends would stop at a downtown gas station, where the owner would count out six bottle caps for each child. Then they headed next door, to the Mars Theatre, where the bottle caps gained them admission to the Saturday matinee. Young Barton watched westerns, newsreels, cartoons and such classics as “Gone With the Wind.”

Unfortunately, he would not enjoy that Saturday ritual for long. Like many small-town movie houses that lost patrons from declining populations, rising multiplexes and the advent of television, the Mars Theatre closed its doors in 1957. Shortly thereafter, a drive-in theatre three miles away also closed. Soon, the city of Springfield was on a downward economic spiral, culminating with the opening of discount retailers in surrounding cities in the mid-1990s.

“People got into the habit of leaving Springfield to get what they needed,” says Alderman, a lifelong Springfield resident and the city’s mayor on and off since 2003. “Businesses just couldn’t last and started shutting down. No one came downtown any more.” But all that is changing.

In April 2014, 57 years after the closing of the Mars Theatre, Barton Alderman once again attended an event there – the venue’s grand re-opening.



A Place “Where History Plays On”

It wasn’t the first time the Mars had seen life since its Eisenhower-era shuttering. In the 1970s, the lobby of the theatre was converted into office space; over the years, it served as home to an attorney’s office, florist, fabric store and bank. The main theatre, however, remained unused.

“I’m convinced that when business owners see the city taking the lead and running with it, they’ll jump on board. The people in the community are more open-minded and optimistic that we can make something happen. There is a sense of pride in the community.”

– Brett Bennett, City Manager, Springfield



In the late 1990s, a group of residents formed the Springfield Revitalization Corporation (SRC) and leased the dilapidated theatre to prevent it from being torn down. In 2007, SRC bought the building and started raising funds to restore it. While the group was able to make some minor improvements to the facade, SRC struggled financially over the years, especially during the recession.

The city bought the building from SRC in 2010 thinking they could renovate it enough to be rented out. After the leaky roof was repaired, the city decided to move forward with a full renovation, hoping to create a chain reaction that would revitalize the city.

“A thriving downtown is all about getting people out there at night,” says Alderman. “The success of

the theatre would necessitate the addition of new restaurants and businesses downtown.”

For the theatre to be successful, though, it had to be done right. At a weekend retreat in 2012, the city council – some of whom were not entirely on board with the project at that point – made a commitment not just to restore the Mars Theatre but to do it “first class.” That meant investing in quality construction and state-of-the-art sound, lighting and projection equipment. “Going to the theatre had to be a pleasing experience right off the bat, from the sound to the temperature and right down to the popcorn,” Alderman says. “As the saying goes, you only get one chance to make a first impression.”

The project cost just under \$1 million, with most of it coming from city funds. Alderman says that had the city not stepped in and rebuilt the theatre, there would just be an empty lot sitting in downtown Springfield. While city officials could oversee the renovations, they didn’t know anything about running a theatre. At the advice of City Manager Brett Bennett, they hired an expert.

“Taking this job was a tremendous opportunity. It was a chance to make an impact on a community that was dedicated to bringing back local theatre and using arts, culture and heritage to revitalize the city.”

– Tommy Deadwyler, Cultural Affairs Director, Springfield

“I told the City Council that if we expect the theatre to have an impact in economic development, we can’t just renovate the building in hopes that people will use it,” Bennett says. “If it’s going to have that impact, it must have regular programming and a director who will be responsible for promoting as well.”

Enter Tommy Deadwyler, an event producer who visited Springfield in May 2013 when he ran the Georgia Presenters Network for the Fox Theatre Institute.

He was hired and oversaw everything from the lighting to the sound to the seating.

“Tommy came on board during construction and played an integral role in developing the finished product,” Bennett says. “Had we not had his insight, it would not have the economic viability that it has.”

Beyond overseeing the theatre renovation, Deadwyler was named director of cultural affairs, a somewhat rare position for such a small city, and another sign of Springfield’s commitment to use the arts to put itself on an upward trajectory.

“Taking this job was a tremendous opportunity,” Deadwyler recalls. “It was a chance to make an impact on a community that was dedicated to bringing back local theatre and using arts, culture and heritage to revitalize the city.”

Beyond creating what he calls “an extraordinary experience” for patrons, Deadwyler sets up programming that appeals to a broad audience and brings people into the theatre not just on weekends, but also for live performances throughout the week. Beer and wine are sold at the live performances when adult audiences are in attendance.

“You need to not only offer something for everyone, but you also need to be in tune with what the community will support,” he says. To generate ticket sales, he hired a marketing company to spread the word outside of Springfield.

Within months after the theatre’s reopening, the strategies appeared to be working. The 250-seat theatre brings in as many as 500 patrons for first-run and classic movies on weekends and hundreds more for live performances throughout the week.

In an act of foresight, renovations included creating outdoor access to the bathroom facilities, with a wall separating the space from the theatre. This facilitates large crowds such as the 9,000 people who come to the annual Springfield Fall Festival in October, as well as future events. The city also hopes to revisit its alcohol



“A thriving downtown is all about getting people out there at night. The success of the theatre would necessitate the addition of new restaurants and businesses downtown.”

- Barton Alderman, Mayor, Springfield

ordinances, such as allowing beer and wine sales outside like they do at the festival, as well as selling locally made beer and wine.

And Springfield is seeing signs of new life and progress. By the end of 2014, four new businesses had opened in downtown Springfield, while existing businesses began extending operating hours to accommodate evening shoppers.

Creating a Downtown Where People Want to Be

As the cornerstone of Springfield's revitalization, the Mars Theatre ties into a broader plan to get both residents and visitors into downtown Springfield. But city officials realize that they can't depend solely on the Mars Theatre to turn downtown around.

Before the renovation project, the city spent \$1 million on a streetscape project. "Updating the sidewalks and lamp posts is not going to bring people to downtown," Bennett acknowledges, "But once we have a way to bring people here, it's important that it looks nice."

In addition, Bennett contacted the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) and had interior design, graphic design and historic preservation students design a master plan for downtown, create plans to revitalize City Hall, conduct historic property surveys and work on other projects. The SCAD students provided their services and skill for little or no cost.

The city would eventually like to turn the current City Hall building, once home to a Ford dealership, into a multi-use event space. Plans created by SCAD students include transforming the parking lot into a garden, and adding a gallery.

In December 2014, the city acquired 275 acres at historic Ebenezer Creek, which includes two miles of rivers and streams where the creek meets the Savannah River. It's become a popular destination for kayaking and canoeing, and the city is hoping the outdoor lovers will stay awhile after their adventures.



"Right now they paddle the creek and go home," says Bennett. "We're working to give them more reasons to visit downtown."

While Springfield still has a ways to go in its revitalization, the city has created forward momentum that it hopes will lead others to take the initiative.

"I'm convinced that when business owners see the city taking the lead and running with it, they'll jump on board," Bennett says. "The people in the community are more open-minded and optimistic that we can make something happen. There is a sense of pride in the community."

No one felt that sense of pride and optimism more than Barton Alderman on the night the Mars Theatre reopened.

"I was absolutely speechless," he says. "Being in the theatre brought back so many memories. It's worth every penny we've spent."

ATHENS



Location:
North Georgia, 60 miles
east of Atlanta

115,452

Population

\$32,853

Median Household
Income

9.3%

Unemployment Rate

Arts Facilities Construction Funded by SPLOST
Percent for Art Ordinance Passed by Mayor and Commission
Cultural Arts Commission Established by Local Government
Public Art Investments Funded by Local Government
Arts Staff and Programming Funded by Local Government

Key Strategies

Clarke

County

85.1%

% of Population with
at least a High School
Diploma

39.5%

% of Population with at
least a Bachelor's
Degree

15.3%

% Employed in Arts,
Entertainment, Recreation,
Accommodation and Food
Services



Athens: A City Committed to Art

The “Nest” is a vibrant sculpture of red-metal bars and stainless steel mesh, dramatically suspended inside the new atrium of the Athens Classic Center, a convention center and performing arts arena. And it’s one of the first pieces of public art in Athens paid for with taxpayer money.

“You don’t have to be involved in the arts to appreciate what it does for the community and economic development.”

– Doc Eldridge, President and CEO,
Athens Area Chamber of Commerce

“There is a deliberate dedication to the arts in Athens,” says Mayor Nancy Denson. “The attitude isn’t ‘if it happens, it happens.’ There’s a conscious effort by the government to make it work.”

In 2010, the Athens-Clarke County Commission strengthened that commitment by passing an ordinance requiring that 1 percent of the construction budget for all special purpose local option sales tax (SPLOST) projects be dedicated to public art connected to the project.



So when the Classic Center underwent a \$24 million expansion in 2012 that added exhibit space and increased seating capacity, some of the budget helped fund the “Nest.”

The public art initiative is just one element contributing to Athens’ vibrant arts scene. The Classic Center is home to concerts and performing arts. Lyndon House Arts Center offers classes for all ages and provides a venue for artists to showcase their work. The Georgia Museum of Art, housed on the University of Georgia campus, showcases art from around the world, while the university itself offers concerts, plays and other performing arts events.

Denson and city officials also view the arts as a magnet to attract new business to Athens. She points to the 2012 decision by Caterpillar, a top manufacturer of tractors and industrial equipment, to build a facility in Athens, noting that the city’s artistic attributes contribute to a higher quality of life.

“Arts are not the deciding factor,” Denson says, “but companies look at the total environment. Sometimes it comes down to the one small thing that pushes one community over another. In Athens, we’re hoping it’s the arts.”

City leaders are not alone in their commitment to the arts. The business community is behind the efforts as well.

“You don’t have to be involved in the arts to appreciate what it does for the community and economic development,” says Doc Eldridge, head of the Athens-Clarke County Chamber of Commerce and former mayor of Athens. “The business community is supportive of the arts, and vice versa. Both sides know that the Arts are so critically important to the growth and uniqueness of the community. It’s why people like to come back to Athens.”

Using The Arts To Re-Invent Downtown

The story of how Athens came to embrace the arts so firmly begins in the early 1980s. The city's downtown hit a slump just after Georgia Square Mall opened in 1981 and flagship stores like Macy's, J.C. Penney and Belk left for the mall. Almost overnight, downtown went from being what Mayor Nancy Denson calls "the retail center" to one that was "dead" after 6 p.m.

But there was hope: The empty buildings and inexpensive rents proved conducive to attracting clubs and bars for live music, and soon the Athens music scene was born.

"Athens transformed from a 'Mayberry-like' city to a funky little downtown, completely re-inventing itself," Denson says. "This gave Athens a more creative vibe and laid the groundwork for the arts in general."

Indeed, the citizenry increasingly embraced a creative identity over the years. In the mid-1990s, voters approved SPLOST funding to build the Classic Center and expand the Lyndon House Arts Center. Other SPLOST referendums were later approved to expand the Classic Center and renovate the Morton Theatre, a historic performing arts space that was once an African-American vaudeville theatre.

"Art has probably received more money from SPLOST than any other single area," says Eldridge, "In Athens, we know [infrastructure] can't all be about roads and bridges."

“There is a deliberate dedication to the arts in Athens. The attitude isn't 'if it happens, it happens.' There's a conscious effort by the government to make it work.”

- Nancy Denson, Mayor, Athens

The Classic Center is a centerpiece, doubling as a convention center and a premier performing arts venue. It hosts travelling Broadway shows, concerts, dance performances and a range of other events that draw patrons from outside of Athens. Beyond bringing the community together, the Center has a profound impact on the economy: \$65 million a year, according to a 2013 study.

“We know that quality public art draws more businesses, young people and artists into a community. It makes Athens a more welcoming place.”

- Marilyn Wolf-Ragatz, Chair,
Athens Cultural Arts Commission

Another jewel in Athens' arts crown is the Lyndon House Arts Center, a building once home to a prominent Athens family. The city acquired the house in 1939 and used it primarily as a recreation hall. It became a visual arts center in 1974 and expanded 25 years later, though the original historic Ware-Lyndon House is still attached and serves as a house museum.

The Center hosts gallery exhibitions, festivals, workshops, art meetings, special events and classes for all ages and levels. It is also home to 22 art guilds.

"The vision is for Lyndon House to be a true community arts center," says Didi Dunphy, the executive director. "We want to provide a creative and productive environment for those who want to pursue the arts." She says what makes the Lyndon House successful is the fact that the community has embraced the arts as an element for an enriching life in Athens.

The city also financially supports the Center - since it is a division of Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services - which Dunphy calls "a partnership that works."

Dunphy is working on strengthening the membership program to help pay for special projects, such as juried



shows. She also wants to widen the scope of Lyndon House, hosting artists in residence and adding new kinds of programs. “My mission is to incorporate art into everyday life,” Dunphy says, “whether that’s functionally or aesthetically. It’s a form of cultural placemaking.”

‘Art For Everyone’

Another cultural component in Athens is the Georgia Museum of Art. The museum not only displays works from artists from all over the world, it also provides education to school-age children, film series and symposia for artists.

“Our motto is ‘art for everyone,’ and we are always trying to find new ways to accommodate different interests,” says Michael Lachowski, who is head of public relations at the museum.



The symposia hosted by the museum throughout the year bring artists from all over the country into Athens for several days. “These can draw up to 200 people at a time, which can have an impact on the economy, since they pay to stay, eat and shop.” Lachowski says. “It also gives us a chance to show visitors a part of the University that is not athletics.”



To engage audiences, the Georgia Museum offers “Family Days” to give parents and children a chance to view an exhibition and participate in an art project related to that exhibit, all free of charge. The Georgia Museum of Art (GMOA) also takes part in monthly “Third Thursdays,” in which seven art spaces—GMOA, ATHICA, Cine, the Classic Center, Hotel Indigo, the Lamar Dodd School of Art and Lyndon House— have extended hours for an “evening of art.” The Classic Center Cultural Foundation

sponsors a shuttle to provide free transportation to the different venues.

The arts scene extends way beyond visual arts – from film, dance, theatre, music, even learning the art of aerial dancing - proving there is something for everyone in Athens. “The arts scene in Athens is lively and we have a lot of it,” says Mayor Denson. “I am proud we are always doing something to promote the arts.”

The Art of Public Art

The public is now also engaged in public art, thanks to the creation of the Athens Cultural Arts Commission, established at the end of 2010 to help oversee the public art installation process of projects funded by SPLOST money. According to Marilyn Wolf-Ragatz, chair of the commission, the group helps keep the process “organized and consistent.”

“People often think it’s a group whose purpose is to select and install art,” says Wolf-Ragatz. “That’s not it at all.”

Instead, the process is much more involved, including getting input from the stakeholders, coming up with the criteria for the project, gathering proposals and pulling together a selection committee to choose the artist. At the end of the project, the Commission organizes an event to unveil the installation that has something for all ages.

Wolf-Ragatz says that for the most part, the community supports their efforts. But they did run into trouble when a SPLOST project involved the county jail. “That was our first big project,” says Wolf-Ragatz. “One percent of that construction budget was large, and many residents reacted against placing art in jail. Some worried it might be placed in jail cells, which wasn’t the case.” Since the Athens-Clarke County Commission must approve all public arts projects, public opinion was enough to make the measure fail. No public art was done at the jail, and the money went back into the main project budget.

That project notwithstanding, the city and the community know the importance of public art. “We know that quality public art draws more businesses, young people and artists into a community” says Wolf-Ragatz. “It makes Athens a more welcoming place. It also introduces citizens to new and exciting forms of arts.”

PHOTOS (Interior)

Pg 5 - FLAUNT Festival in Downtown Thomasville
Pg 7 - Downtown Thomasville
Pg 8 (top) - Sturdy Brothers in Thomasville
Pg 8 (bottom) - Thomasville Center for the Arts
Pg 9 (top) - Fuzzy Goat Yarn Shop in Thomasville
Pg 9 (bottom) - Sweet Grass Dairy in Thomasville
Pg 11 - Downtown Blue Ridge
Pg 12 - Gawdy Bobbles in Blue Ridge
Pg 13 (top) - Guitar Lesson at Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association
Pg 13 (bottom) - Working Artist at Multitudes Gallery in Blue Ridge
Pg 15 (center) - Downtown Hapeville
Pg 15 (bottom) - Shipping Container Gallery in Hapeville
Pg 16 - Mural in Downtown Hapeville
Pg 18 (left) - Eddie Owen at Red Clay Music Foundry in Duluth
Pg 18 (bottom) - Town Green in Duluth
Pg 19 (right) - Painter at 2 Smith Gallery in Duluth
Pg 22 - Artists at Winter Craft Fair, Clarkston Community Center
Pg 23 (top) - Shoppers at Winter Craft Fair, Clarkston Community Center
Pg 23 (bottom) - Refugee Beads at Winter Craft Fair, Clarkston Community Center
Pg 25 (left) - Downtown Springfield
Pg 25 (right) - Mars Theatre in Springfield
Pg 26 - Model of Springfield City Hall Renovation
Pg 27 - Ebenezer Creek near Springfield
Pg 29 (top) - Canopy Studio in Athens
Pg 29 (bottom) - Athens Institute for Contemporary Art (ATHICA)
Pg 30-31 (top) - Georgia Museum of Art on the University of Georgia Campus in Athens
Pg 30-31 (bottom) - The Nest at The Classic Center in Athens

FRONT COVER PHOTOS

(top to bottom, left to right)
Artspace Gallery in Hapeville
Multitudes Gallery Customers in Blue Ridge
Ascension in Duluth
Canopy Studio in Athens
Interior of Mars Theatre in Springfield
Waxing Fabric at Sturdy Bros. in Thomasville

BACK COVER PHOTOS

(top to bottom, left to right)
Artists and Shoppers at Winter Craft Fair, Clarkston Community Center
Historic Jerusalem Church at New Ebenezer near Springfield
Door Public Art Project in Duluth
40 Watt Club in Athens
Shop Window in Downtown Blue Ridge

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