



Some may see smokestacks & abandonment.

We see creativity, innovation & new life.

**Something's
happening just below
the proverbial rust.**

From Syracuse to Buffalo to Pittsburgh to Cleveland, communities are tapping into the magic that artists offer. Inside you'll read about why artists are playing the role they are in formerly industrial cities and hear from people that are creating a new vision for industrial America.

Welcome to the Artist Belt



Industrial America After Industry

At the peak of the United States' industrial dominance, its industrial cities witnessed explosive growth and prosperity. From 1900 - 1950, Detroit's population increased six-fold, Cleveland's almost tripled and Buffalo grew almost twice as large. During this period, each city saw explosive growth in infrastructure - from warehouses to private residences to roads - and the world looked to America's prosperous industrial cities for their unprecedented innovation and technological advancement. Each city experienced an artistic explosion as well, as philanthropists encouraged the establishment of world-renowned cultural institutions.

But since 1950, industrial cities have experienced an equally fast decline. From St. Louis to Chicago to Pittsburgh, centers of industry saw thousands of jobs dissolve and thousands of citizens flee. Many industrial cities are now home to half the residents for which they were built. Today, industrial cities are more likely to be labeled "Rust Belt" or "Fly-Over Country" than to be recognized for their prominence in research and innovation. And while industrial cities still have incredibly strong artistic communities, the outside world is perhaps more likely to recognize these urban centers for their problems rather than their creative workforces.

Sprawl: Industrial cities not only suffer from low in-migration and relatively high levels of out-migration; they are also home to strong patterns of suburban sprawl. In the Cleveland metro area, for instance, 100,000 acres of rural land was developed between 1980 and 2000 - nearly a third of all land in the region.¹ This occurred at a time when the metropolitan population was stagnant, leading to severe population declines in the city proper and increasing segregation of impoverished populations. Such trends are challenging to all cities, but in cities already faced with declining population and substantial surplus property, the trends are all the more alarming.

Entrenched Poverty: Industrial cities are increasingly home to high concentrations of poverty. As of 2006, Detroit, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Philadelphia and Newark were all among the ten large cities (those with populations of 250,000 or more) with the highest percentages of residents living at or below the poverty level.

Vacant Properties: With declining population bases and aging housing stock, it is not unusual for industrial cities to face thousands of vacant properties. All too often, vacant properties serve as centers for crime, including drug use and prostitution. Studies have also suggested that each vacant property can reduce the value of surrounding houses by several thousands of dollars. Demolishing or renovating these properties is not inexpensive; despite high municipal investments in addressing such problem properties, many industrial cities are overwhelmed by the scope of this problem.²

Foreclosures: Nationwide, the foreclosure crisis has caused significant disruptions in the housing market. In industrial cities, already home to slow housing markets and large low-income populations targeted by subprime lenders, foreclosures are exacerbating already negative trends. Foreclosure legal processes also slow municipalities' and nonprofits' ability to address vacant properties strategically.



Welcome to the Artist Belt

The Opportunities

All too often, the story of industrial America stops there. But while the “Rust Belt” faces significant challenges, it also faces a unique opportunity to redefine itself. Much of the rest of the United States faces rapidly increasing population and strong market dynamics that overwhelmingly influence how development plays out. But in industrial cities, lower demand for development affords community development professionals with the ability to work slowly and strategically to revitalize their cities.

In short, these cities’ challenges are also creating an environment that is perhaps one of the most interesting urban laboratories in American history.

Low Cost of Living: Due to a number of different factors, including the high availability of property, cost of living in industrial cities tends to be relatively low. Most industrial cities have costs of living lower than or near the national average and considerably lower than comparably-sized non-industrial cities. Arguably, this low cost of living gives residents the opportunity to live a higher quality of life than they might otherwise be able to afford.

Abundant Space: While the vast surplus of buildings and undeveloped lots presents “Rust Belt” cities with a set of challenges, it also provides them with a unique opportunity. Residents are able to locate affordable space in virtually any neighborhood, allowing them to choose where they live based on amenities beyond price availability. A wide variety of property types are available at relatively low price points, including unusual spaces, such as industrial warehouses and churches. Moreover, availability of space gives community development professionals the opportunity to do large-scale revitalization projects and to invest in nontraditional uses for land, such as sculpture gardens, pocket parks and community gardens.

Slow Market: While a slow real estate market presents community development professionals challenges, it also gives them ample time to strategically plan for neighborhood change. Among other trends, community development professionals are afforded the time to address potential gentrification, such as by creating permanently affordable units of housing or preparing existing residents for homeownership. In “strong market” cities, where patterns of gentrification may occur more rapidly, community development professionals may not have the same latitude to develop strategies over time.

Active Redevelopment Efforts: Perhaps because the community development environment has been so challenging in industrial cities for several decades, these cities tend to have well-developed networks of community development professionals.

A Strong Arts & Culture Sector: As previously noted, industrial cities have historically built strong arts and culture sectors. As quality of life is increasingly playing a role in where workers choose to reside, this group of amenities may play a key role in improving industrial cities’ competitive positions.

Welcome to the Artist Belt



Enter the Artists

Given their unique set of amenities and opportunities, today's industrial cities are faced with a unique opportunity to recruit and retain artists. Research suggests that artists' locational decisions are influenced significantly by affordability of space.³ Moreover, industrial cities provide artists with a quality of life, access to existing, robust arts and culture sectors and a unique urban backdrop that may not be found in comparable non-industrial cities.

But why artists? While artists cannot serve as a cure-all for the challenges facing industrial cities and their neighborhoods, they can play a significant role in revitalization efforts.

Economic Impact: Artists often work across numerous sectors, and often work as entrepreneurs themselves. This results in products and services being exported outside of the regional economy, and for well-established artists, the possibility of employment opportunities for support staff.⁴

Drawing Force: Numerous studies have indicated that artists can have a drawing effect for additional residents. Because artists often are willing to be "early adopters", they may signal to other potential residents that a neighborhood is poised for revitalization.⁵ And just as artists can play a key role in changing perceptions about particular neighborhoods, they can also change viewpoints regarding cities and entire regions. Cities from Paducah, Ky., to the Ruhrgebiet region of Germany have received considerable national and international attention following the creation of programs that engaged artists directly in community revitalization.⁶

Impact on the Neighborhood: Artists can play a central role in neighborhood affairs, from education projects with neighborhood children to public art projects to bringing unique perspectives to block clubs and neighborhood associations. Research indicates that, in exchange for access to low-cost space, artists have a high willingness to participate in a variety of neighborhood-based activities.⁷

Willingness to Relocate: Research suggests artists are willing to relocate, assuming that new locations offer them a package of amenities that they desire, particularly low-cost space.⁸ This willingness to locate based on amenities offered, particularly in areas with low cost of living, could signify that industrial cities' efforts around artist space will garner a high degree of interest from both local artists and artists outside of their metropolitan region.

As the following stories illustrate, artists are already playing a significant role in the revitalization of industrial cities.

1 Katz, Bruce. "The Goal for Ohio Metros: 43,000 residents." The Brookings Institution. 29 June 2007.

2 Mallach, Allan, Lisa Mueller Levy and Joseph Schilling. *Cleveland at the Crossroads: Turning Abandonment Into Opportunity*. Neighborhood Progress, Inc. June 2005.

3 *Survey of Artist Regarding Their Living/Work Space Needs*. Cypress Research Group. Prepared for the Community Partnership for Arts & Culture. July 2007.

4 Markusen, Ann, Sam Gilmore, et al. *Crossover: How Artists Build Careers across Commercial, Nonprofit and Community Work*. Prepared for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation et al. October 2006.

5 See, for instance, Jones, Ken, Tony Lea et al. *Beyond Anecdotal Evidence: The Spillover Effects of Investments in Cultural Facilities*. Ryerson University. July 2004.

6 See www.paducaharts.com and <http://en.kulturhauptstadt-europas.de/start.php>.

7,8 *Survey of Artists Regarding Their Living/Work Space Needs*.

Stories from the Artist Belt

Mark Barone's Creative Crusade

Syracuse. NY
Paducah. KY

Town and gown.

It's an age-old phrase. But in Syracuse, N.Y., the traditional relationship between city and university is taking on a whole new character -- one that's changing Syracuse physically, culturally, economically and educationally through effective political alliances and an increased array of resources.

Because Syracuse and Syracuse University (S.U.) work as partners, a revitalization project such as the city's Near West Side initiative can aim not only to save buildings, foster arts activity and attract business, but also to provide students and policy-center staff with hands-on experience in redevelopment work.

"To me, it's a laboratory for these institutions to come down and be part of it ... creating bridges and partnerships with the assets in your city," says Mark Barone, senior director, Office of Engagement Initiatives at Syracuse University.

Barone understands the value of partnerships. Once an artist living in a rundown part of Paducah, Ky., he had the brainstorm of inviting other artists from around the nation to buy into the neighborhood and fix it up. He teamed with the city planner and city government to create a low-cost home-ownership program for artists that has turned his old section of Paducah into a thriving attraction and a national model of creative urban renewal.

In Syracuse, Barone has both a more complex scenario and more abundant tools with which to work.

But the problems there closely resemble those of Paducah and many struggling Rust Belt cities: a vicious

cycle of disappearing manufacturers, job loss, resulting loss of population, growing numbers of vacant, neglected buildings, increasing crime, plummeting tax base, impoverished schools and even more population loss.

Other industrial cities would recognize the desired outcomes, too: economically flourishing, self-sustaining neighborhoods full of creative businesses and diverse homeowners, where handsomely restored architecture, restaurants, unique shops and outdoor events promote bustling street activity and reflect a stable, emotionally invested resident community.

"I've always looked at the Rust Belt cities as tons of opportunity," says Barone.

So how will Barone help Syracuse get from here to there on the Near West Side, a project that's really just beginning?

First task on the list, Barone says, is "to really engage this community in a profound way" and get all the components in place to make it easy for people to move in, fix up homes and start up businesses. "A seamless process is what we're trying to create."

In that, Syracuse has an advantage over other communities because of the active role S.U. has committed to playing in the city's comeback. For the \$55 million Near West Side initiative, for instance, S.U. is providing \$13 million in funds created by state loan forgiveness; green housing there will be developed with input from the university's Syracuse Center of Excellence and with the financial aid of state tax exemptions and brownfield grants.

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Mark Barone's Creative Crusade

Syracuse, NY
Paducah, KY

The students of S.U.'s S.I. Newhouse School of Communications are even developing a marketing plan for an entrepreneurial company - a maker of all-natural soaps that Barone hopes to lure to the neighborhood – helping themselves learn while helping a business succeed.

The university offers its home city a great resource. Still, like everywhere else, Syracuse won't be able to effectively reimagine itself unless its elected officials buy into the idea. Politicians, money, marketing and

“You have to go all out, and as part of that, the city's got to be committed to it.” the workability of the project are the keys to success, Barone says.

Luckily, he and Syracuse already have City Councilor Pat Hogan, who represents the Near West Side. He has embraced both redevelopment and the arts as the way to go.

“The arts community is becoming almost a magnet” in that neighborhood, Hogan says.

The redevelopment plan includes creating an arts hub there. The initiative organization has bought warehouses intended for artist apartments and teaching spaces,

Hogan says; he hopes to locate the local Public Broadcasting System station nearby. A children's museum is in the works and he wants to try a Paducah-style tactic to lure nonprofit organizations, offering to sell them houses for \$1 to use for headquarters on the condition that they fix up the places at their own expense.

“One of the problems I have as a council member is the lack of political will on the part of other elected officials,” he notes. “You have to go all out, and as part of that, the city's got to be committed to it.”

Together, Hogan as part of city government and Barone as a leader of the university provide complementary types of support to the Near West Side project.

Barone “is brilliant and an urban visionary,” the councilor says. “What Mark brings is the wherewithal and the knowledge of how to do this.”

What Hogan brings is access to government channels and a personal vigilance about the state of his ward.

“We've been very, very aggressive” about cracking down on negligent landlords, he says, even getting rules changed to allow code-violating property owners to be brought up on charges.

“We're, like, nuts,” Hogan says with a grin detectable even over the phone. “We're sick of it. It's amazing how a couple of arrests straighten out the housing situation.”

For more information, visit www.syr.edu and www.paducaharts.com.

Stories from the Artist Belt

Buffalo, NY

Building the New Economy of Upstate New York

It won't work without the politicians.

That's ArtSpace vice president Wendy Holmes's best piece of advice to anyone trying to revive neighborhoods by making them affordable and appealing to artists.

Bringing about new or renovated buildings for artists depends so heavily on public perception, government policy, private-sector involvement and personal commitment that such projects require leadership from someone with influence in all four areas.

"It boils down to the elected officials," says Holmes, who specializes in consulting and resource development for ArtSpace, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit serving artists and communities.

If mayors or council members get behind artist-space efforts, those efforts tend to be successful.

And what persuades the political leaders? Impact studies.

"It helps to give elected officials something concrete to look at," Holmes says.

It was an impact study of sorts that convinced Eva Hassett, who was then chief of staff for the mayor of Buffalo, N.Y., that the arts could help revive her blighted and economically ailing Rust Belt city. What she read was "The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and

Everyday Life," Richard Florida's 2002 book about the coming of a new economy based on jobs requiring inventive brain skills rather than strong backs. The cities that could attract creative workers such as software designers, entrepreneurs, research-and-development types and artists, Florida wrote, would be the ones thriving in the near future.

Florida's book ranked Buffalo fairly high on attractions for creative workers. When Hassett also saw a magazine piece that gave the city good grades for arts, Hassett says, "something clicked in my head."

Soon, with help from N.Y. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and the full backing of then-Mayor Anthony Masiello, Hassett got in touch with ArtSpace to see if Buffalo qualified as a good candidate for an arts redevelopment project.

Approved by ArtSpace, the city eventually created Buffalo Artist Lofts, a mix of first-floor arts business space and 36 live/work units in the Midtown neighborhood's historic Breitweiser Printing Building. New construction behind the Breitweiser Building added another 24 units.

Since it opened in 2007, the waiting list for Buffalo Artist Lofts has grown to 300; people have begun to buy homes nearby and a performing-arts high school will soon go up in the area.

Stories from the Artist Belt

Buffalo, NY

Artspace's Venture into Upstate New York

"In the Rust Belt communities, there's a huge opportunity for artists to make a huge difference," says Holmes.

Though renovating buildings in these cities often does mean having to deal with site-selection problems and environmental complications such as brownfields, asbestos and lead paint, sites are "inconsequential" compared to the problem of mustering the political will needed for an artist-space project, Holmes adds.

"If there's not support from the local elected officials, then I think the timing is not going to be right" for the project, she adds.

In Buffalo, luckily, Hassett was already convinced of the arts' community value and "the mayor got it just like I got it," she recalls. "He made this his top priority."

"In terms of changing our self-concept, it was a significant accomplishment."

Furthermore, "Sen. Clinton said to the guys from ArtSpace, 'I will do whatever it takes, but you have to do this in Buffalo.' "

It also helped that the Artist Lofts had at least one person – herself – focused on the project at all times, Hassett says.

Political backing led to successful fund-raising for the \$16 million Artist Lofts from state historic tax credits, grants, banks and from Clinton, who gave \$250,000 in

Housing and Urban Development funds, says Hassett.

Elected leaders like to hear that arts-related spaces preserve and restore notable buildings, bring good kinds of activity to neighborhoods and reduce crime rates.

One key to success for project developers lies in figuring out how creating space for artists helps that city solve its problems.

These projects, say Holmes, offer a way to "marry the city's agenda with the arts' agenda."

Hassett agrees. The lofts project helped turn a building that was a barrier to development into a beacon for property buyers. But perhaps most important for Buffalo and other down-on-their-luck cities, she says, "In terms of changing our self-concept, it was a significant accomplishment."

For more information, visit www.artspacebuffalo.org.

Stories from the Artist Belt

Pittsburgh. PA

Artists Set Up House in an Urban Corridor

“Build it and they will come.” In “Field of Dreams,” the character played by James Earl Jones says that about a baseball diamond, not an arts district.

But lots of people in the arts-space movement base their projects on pretty much the same idea, hoping that by rehabbing old structures or putting up new ones, they’ll attract artists to areas in desperate need of desirable, productive residents.

Pittsburgh did it differently. In the city’s East End, community developers took a look at Penn Avenue and realized that the artists were already there. What they needed to do was build things so artists would stay.

“The initiative has helped me as an artist gain more recognition in the city.”

The resulting Penn Avenue Arts Initiative (PAAI) was designed to convert renters into homeowners, says PAAI district manager Matthew Galluzzo.

“I think ours started a little more organically,” than some space projects, he says. In 1994, “Penn Avenue was a place you went through to get someplace else.” Now, he says, artists who have bought their own spaces and take part in monthly arts events have turned the street into a destination.

“I do think the initiative is working,” writes ceramic artist Laura Jean McLaughlin in an e-mail. At the monthly events, people “walk up and down Penn Avenue to see what the galleries have going on. I do not even need to advertise and I have a gallery full of people and often sell work.

“I own the building as well as a house. Penn Ave Arts sold the building to me for \$15,000 and helped with every aspect of financing, etc. They have also provided many grants to help refurbish the building. The initiative has helped me as an artist gain more recognition in the city.”

Fourteen years ago, a local nonprofit development company called Artists and Cities identified the section of Penn Avenue between Negley and Mathilda avenues as home to 400 artists like McLaughlin, trying to live and create in an area blighted by the vacant buildings left behind as industries died and people fled.

To encourage the artists to invest in, and remain on, Penn Avenue, two neighboring community-development groups started a commercial-development strategy that would help turn bad rental spaces into artist-owned and –renovated live/work spaces, Galluzzo explains. With foundation and city support, the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation and Friendship Development Associates worked together to create the PAAI.

The initiative acquired buildings from the city or from landlords, then sold them inexpensively to artists and others or developed them itself. It also established the Artist Loan and Grant Fund to help artists purchase property and make improvements. Loans offered through the fund count as equity with local banks – in fact, the fund’s \$83,000 in grants and \$128,000 in loans have leveraged \$6 million in private investment in Penn Avenue properties.

But PAAI didn’t just make the buildings affordable: It also provided artists with guidance from a staff real-estate specialist, created neighborhood programming

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to showcase the artists' work and then supported its own efforts with marketing that has drawn visitors as well as even more resident artists to the area.

Street events called Unblurred: First Fridays on Penn attract 500-750 people every month, Galluzzo says, and the PAAI has worked to further capture the public's attention by organizing festivals and tours and commissioning public art. Collaborations have developed – Pittsburgh's Society for Contemporary Craft called recently to see if it could dovetail with the Unblurred events.

"That must mean we're doing something right," says Galluzzo.

Despite the initiative's comprehensive efforts to make artists' home-buying and entrepreneurial processes as smooth as possible, participants have hit occasional snags.

"The one thing that failed with me is that I had problems with my contractor and someone should have told me to get a no-lien agreement," writes McLaughlin. "The lawyer that I hired to help with the sale should have told me as well, but it would have been good if [PAAI] would have helped with figuring out the ins and outs of rehabbing the building. I think they may help out with that more now, because I was an early artist and have expressed this to them."

The initiative continues to face bigger, more endemic challenges, such as how to secure property from speculating landlords and what to do about vacant lots, Galluzzo notes. With the latter concern, PAAI has undertaken a "green and screen" program that turns such lots into tiny parks, plazas, private courtyards and the like with plantings and decorative fencing that

improve appearance, attract pedestrians and add to the sense of neighborhood density.

"We don't need to build everywhere," he says. "We can't afford to build everywhere."

But Penn Avenue's biggest dilemma may come in the guise of its biggest blessing: A \$700 million children's hospital will soon move to a location on the street along with a Whole Foods store and other amenities, undoubtedly increasing the area's desirability and its property values. What if artists start selling their buildings to cash in on the price rises?

Gentrification "is a real concern," Galluzzo says, "one that we are willing to live with, because we are creating equity for these folks."

Some galleries are already converting their buildings to medical-use space. "There's not much that we can do to control that. We know speculation is an issue," he says, but in the long term, the neighborhood "may not be sustainable as it is."

The initiative currently owns several buildings whose tenants will continue to bring artists to the district, Galluzzo observes. But the fact remains that the PAAI has a commercial-development mission and its efforts to support the arts have been in service to that mission, he says – adding hopefully that a lifestyle center proposed for the edge of the district, near the Shadyside neighborhood, may draw the medical development over there, leaving Penn Avenue for the artists.

For more information, visit www.pennavenuearts.org.

Stories from the Artist Belt

Cleveland, OH

Theatre Breathes New Life Into Old Square

If the Gordon Square Arts District were a person, it would be the richest one in town – not in money, but in the many elements needed to revive its neighborhood economically, socially and creatively.

Anchored by three significant arts organizations, endowed with a trove of historic buildings and a growing amount of diversified new housing and business, assisted by the local community-development corporation, championed by both the local councilman and the mayor and supported by city, state, federal and private funds, Gordon Square may prove to be the successful model of self-reinvention for which Cleveland, Ohio, has long searched.

But 25 years ago, the arts district essentially was a person: James Levin. Having returned home from New York City, where he had become an actor and director, the Cleveland-area native moved into a decayed cold-storage space at Detroit Avenue and West 65th Street notable only for its lack of electricity and the crime levels in the crumbling neighborhood outside. Levin was starting a theater company.

“I remember very clearly envisioning back in ’84-’85 that this was going to be the West Side’s Coventry” – the East Side’s once-thriving center of 1960s bohemian life – “with coffeehouses and bookshops,” he recalls.

Levin thought the neighborhood would turn around in five years, though it actually took 15 years longer than that. Change began after Levin and the still-operating Cleveland Public Theatre started presenting cutting-edge stage productions on a city block that few people had any other reason to visit.

CPT, a group dedicated to alternative arts and social

activism, is “one of the reasons people choose to live in this area,” says Jeff Ramsey, head of the Detroit-Shoreway Community Development Corporation.

As a rebel and artist, Levin says, it took him a while to realize that cooperating with establishment organizations such as Detroit-Shoreway might help, rather than hurt, his efforts to revitalize the area around his counterculture theater.

“It didn’t even occur to me that they’d be welcoming,” he says. But after he added young-people’s outreach programs to CPT’s offerings and needed help marketing them to the neighborhood, he and Detroit-Shoreway realized they could be useful to each other.

Since then, the theater, the district organization and their growing number of partners have made a visible difference in the Gordon Square area. Levin improved the CPT building early on and the theater began attracting artists who wanted to live nearby. He also began purchasing property with his own money, to turn over to the nonprofit CPT. In this way, the company acquired the old Gordon Square Theatre, a historic venue right next to CPT headquarters.

But the space badly needed renovation. To improve the effectiveness of his lobbying for government funds, Levin joined forces with other nearby arts groups and formed the West Side Arts Consortium, an interim association that eventually changed into the Gordon Square Arts District.

While the consortium conducted studies and sought money for capital projects including a hoped-for new venue for the Near West Theatre, a community stage group, Cleveland city and neighborhood officials explored the possibility of renovating old buildings -

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Cleveland, OH

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or putting up new ones – for affordable housing.

The result, says Cleveland City Councilman Matt Zone, has been 600 housing units, 60 percent of them owned rather than rented, with a number of them set up for artists, including eight units in the City Savings & Loan Condominiums.

Aided by the neighborhood's views of Lake Erie and proximity to beaches and downtown Cleveland, young professionals have been buying new Detroit-Shoreway housing before construction is even completed, says Ramsey.

The new residents have created enough population density to support 14 new businesses such the Gypsy Beans & Baking Co., a material version of the coffeehouse Levin envisioned for Gordon Square a quarter-century ago. Though the neighborhood doesn't have a supermarket yet, "what we do have is the arts and they are the economic engine," Ramsey says.

The Capitol Theatre will stoke that engine further. An old movie house diagonally across from CPT, the Capitol has been dark since 1981, but is on the verge of renovation as the West Side's only independent art-film venue. On April 29, 2008, Cleveland City Council approved a \$1.5 million loan for the \$6 million project; ground will be broken May 14.

“What we do have is the arts and they are the economic engine.”

The Capitol represents an important part of the Gordon Square Arts District's plan to revive the area as an arts-driven, walkable city-within-a-city. It has taken

all these years to get the pieces in place for that renaissance, says district director Joy Roller, but now Gordon Square and its member organizations have the structure and partnerships they need to raise \$30 million. That amount will pay for redoing the Capitol, adapting a furniture warehouse as New West Theatre's new home, finishing work on CPT's Gordon Square Theatre and completing a streetscape for the Detroit Avenue-West 65th intersection.

Roller, who succeeded Levin as executive director of the district, presided over the district's incorporating as an LLC, with Detroit-Shoreway as fiscal agent and project overseer. She's also been instrumental in attracting private-sector support and building a neighborhood constituency for the Gordon Square initiative, which has already raised about \$12 million.

Success depends on having the right point person and Roller's organizational style and energy were perfect for the district's next phase, says Levin. "I was too associated with just the one organization [CPT]. I couldn't get [major funders] there."

Gordon Square has faced other challenges than winning over influential Clevelanders, including typical Rust Belt difficulties over environmental cleanup and finding all the funds necessary for renovations in an economically troubled city and state. Ramsey says state historic tax credits have helped, as has Zone's political support. But he also thinks that keeping the area affordable has been key to the success Gordon Square has enjoyed so far.

"It's inclusive," he says. "We don't want to price people out."

For more information, visit www.gordonsquare.org.

Stories from the Artist Belt

Detroit, MI

Artists Set Up House in an Urban Corridor

You'd think an arts-presenting organization would have quite enough to take care of these days, what with programming, marketing, administrative chores, endless fund-raising and community outreach to do. What group would have the guts to add housing development to all that?

As it turns out, it took as much heart and brains as nerve for the Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit (CAID) to help in creating low-cost homes for local artists. Though not everyone in the organization thought the project was a wise move, the leaders who have seen it through remain enthusiastic about the results and about the partnership with Southwest Housing Solutions that made the whole thing possible.

"The success of this project really did [depend] on this collaboration," says CAID board chair Amy Green Deines. "We would absolutely consider it again."

Southwest Housing, a division of a nonprofit dedicated

"It was a great collaboration because they knew their business and we knew ours."

to improving lives and living conditions in Southwest Detroit, initially approached CAID for aesthetic advice on architectural and decorative elements in the two Hubbard Avenue buildings it

planned to turn into general low-income housing, says CAID executive director Aaron Timlin.

But Timlin, whose own home rent was about to go up, had been thinking about how to keep artists from

being priced out of improving neighborhoods. He wanted to make homeownership or perpetual low-income rents available to Detroit-area artists.

Southwest Housing liked the idea. The more real estate development director Steve Gabrys talked with CAID leaders about the arts, community space and affordable housing, the more it became apparent that a collaboration was "a natural fit," Gabrys explains.

The two groups decided to work together on the Hubbard Avenue buildings, with Southwest handling the construction and CAID taking care of the design, programming and publicity. Besides offering low-cost apartments to artists and others, The Whitdel Building would contain a gallery and a workshop space where children could get hands-on art instruction.

"It was a great collaboration because they knew their business and we knew ours," says Timlin. "I think each side learned a lot."

Still, it was a stretch for CAID, in philosophy as well as resources. An organization founded by artists and dedicated to promoting the connections between art and society through exhibitions, performances, public discourse and funding of art-related events, CAID had never envisioned itself as a developer and didn't have a lot of staff hours to spare for the task.

"We did lose some board members. I think they just thought that it was a little too much to take on," Timlin recalls.

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The project “wasn’t strategic in relation to a mission,” Deines confirms. But CAID is good at “using art as a catalyst to create a stronger urban fabric.”

The remaining members of CAID committed themselves to making the project work. Though the federally-funded low-income housing could not, by law, be reserved exclusively for artists, CAID and Southwest were able to target artists in their marketing of the two buildings. But first they had to learn something about each other’s business.

Trying to understand all the requirements for low-income housing proved a challenge, Timlin says, as did getting the Southwest staff to understand what artists need. They also faced the task of introducing the public to the idea of the project and its likely benefits.

But they helped one another and the neighborhood supported the plan, which included architectural preservation and green-housing elements for the two apartment buildings. In the mostly Hispanic Hubbard Avenue area, everyone was excited about the housing and the community arts programming that would come with it, says Deines. Moreover, political support lay close at hand: The local congressman lived in the neighborhood.

The whole project “really became a very efficient machine,” she says.

The advantages of a good partnership became clear when the first building opened in October 2007 – an unexpected crowd of 600 showed up for the event. The first tenant was in by November, and the building

was fully occupied by January 2008. Sixty percent of the new residents were artists – a rate that would have been even higher if the necessarily bureaucratic, low-income-housing application process hadn’t discouraged some artists from acting quickly, Timlin says.

Still, the collaborative effort paid off in artist-community gratitude. “People were just coming up and hugging me at the opening and thanking us for making this happen,” says Timlin, noting that property owners have begun asking him how to adapt their buildings for arts use.

Their positive experience has left Southwest’s and CAID’s leaders believing that they can do an even better job next time. Deines, an architect, would like to try creating more aesthetically distinctive housing. Gabrys would like to try a market-rate project with CAID, paid for by grants rather than federal funds so it would be open to a broader mix of residents.

Timlin says working with Southwest has taught him that many resources exist for such efforts and that, if you get good advice and come up with a good pitch, “you can pretty much make [the space] the way you want it.”

“Just make sure you have the right players around the table,” says Deines.

For more information, visit www.thecaid.org and www.swsol.org.



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