
ArtsBuild

UW-Platteville Office of Continuing Education

Arts ♦ Community Development ♦ Economic Development ♦ Education ♦ Historic Preservation ♦

In March 2004, the Office of Continuing Education at the University of Wisconsin - Platteville undertook a bold and innovative venture in support of rural artists in southwest Wisconsin. Using grant funding from UW-Extension Outreach and E-Learning, along with resources from the University System and numerous project partners, the OCE launched ArtsBuild, an initiative completely new to the multi-county region served by the university..

ArtsBuild is an economic development program - a "New Economy" effort. It offers a wide range of assistance to local artists interested in beginning or expanding their arts-related businesses. ArtsBuild increases the professional and business capacity of arts people through educational offerings, mentoring, counseling and networking.

ArtsBuild has accomplished the following in its first year and a half:

- Worked directly with over 200 southwest Wisconsin artists
- Surveyed artists regarding their needs/desires
- Matched 11 mentors with 19 program participants
- Sponsored over 45 classes unique to arts businesses
- Conducted community meetings in 8 southwest Wisconsin counties
- Established an Internet marketing mechanism through Wisconsin Common Market
- Developed a strong, helping network of communities, agencies and organizations
- Established a region-wide Arts Council
- Published the first directory of artists in this region

Intended from its inception to be a collaborative effort, ArtsBuild was planned and is being operated in conjunction with: the Platteville Small Business Development Center, Wisconsin Common Market, Platteville Business Incubator, the Wisconsin Arts Board, and Arts Wisconsin. Since then two technical colleges, the Spring Green Center for Innovation and Creativity, and the Shake Rag Center for the Arts have joined the partnership, as have county and municipal governments through a new component called SmART Communities. By building the capacity of various organizations and municipalities to help the arts market cluster, ArtsBuild is building the entrepreneurial capacity of the region.

A critical aspect of ArtsBuild success has been the creation of a new network of artists and craftspeople. Better yet, the hundreds of artists involved have begun to establish their own "mini-networks," related to a community or to respective medium (e.g. visual arts). An "entrepreneurial spirit" is developing - in individuals, groups and communities. It's electric and growing rapidly as word spreads from artist to artist, community to community.

ArtsBuild has fostered an entrepreneurial climate that recognizes and nurtures creativity and innovation. One artist wrote:

"Many people are blaming you
for all this excitement. This ArtsBuild program has been bringing people together from various art
venues and it has become very exciting. Thank you."

The three counties that comprise the core of ArtsBuild activities are quite rural - with a core population of fewer than 100,000. ArtsBuild is particularly replicable in smaller, rural areas that have little in the way of "cultural infrastructure." It has proven to be an effective mix of business support and community organization. In a little over a year, ArtsBuild has made an extraordinary contribution to the growth and vitality of the arts in the small, rural communities of southwest Wisconsin. It isn't rocket science, it is entrepreneurship! Any community can do it. ArtsBuild can be a model for many types of new rural initiatives, not just those related to the arts.

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