

# Poetry of Place:

## Fostering the Arts and Supporting Creativity in Rural/Small Communities

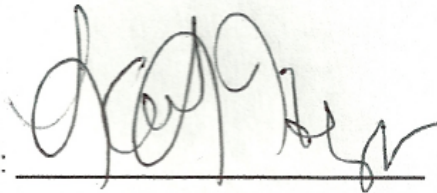
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University of Oregon  
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the University of Oregon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Arts Management

**Poetry of Place: Fostering the Arts and Supporting  
Creativity in Rural/Small Communities**

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Hager", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Lori Hager  
Arts and Administration Program  
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12/09/2010

## **Acknowledgements**

It is with sincere gratitude that I acknowledge the Arts and Administration faculty for both their dedication to the field and to their students. And to my research advisor, Dr. Lori Hager, it has been a pleasure to work with you.

I would also like to thank my parents for always encouraging my brother and I to pursue our passions. And to my loving husband, Jon, for cheering me on, keeping me focused, and for making me dinner when my research went well into the evening.

And to all the small towns I have called home.

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## EDUCATION

**M.A., Arts and Administration: Museum Studies**, University of Oregon anticipated in 2010. GPA 3.95

**M.A., Humanities**, Florida State University, 2004. GPA 3.6

**B.A., Humanities with a French Minor**, Florida State University, 2002, *Cum Laude*. GPA 3.72

## EMPLOYMENT

**Museum Education and Outreach Assistant, Museum of Natural and Cultural History**, Eugene, OR 2008-present

- Actively participated in strategic planning, program evaluation, and interpretive exhibit planning meetings
- Aligned and/or modified programs to meet the department's strategic plans
- Evaluated educational programs and presented data to the education committee when assessing program effectiveness
- Implemented theories of informal learning, interpretation, meaning making, and multiple intelligences
- Developed cultural and science curricula, outreach material, and programs for youth and family, K-12, museum members, university students, and the community
- Excellent project management skills with an ability to multi-task, prioritize demands, problem solve, work collaboratively, and meet fixed deadlines
- Excellent event management skills
- Created interpretive exhibits and programs for *World Harmony: Musical Instruments from around the Globe* and the *Scientific at the Core* education gallery
- Composed press releases and promotional materials for museum programs
- Marketed upcoming museum events through traditional strategies and social media technologies
- Created a policy manual and SWOT for the museum's volunteer program

**Museum Education Intern, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art**, Eugene, OR Summer 2009

- Updated the museum's Japanese Outreach Kit which conformed to National Standards
- Created interdisciplinary lesson plans promoting multiple learning styles and Visual Thinking Strategies
- Created a tool kit and led a training session enabling volunteer docents to teach controversial subjects in the museum

- Taught art classes on site, in the community, and in schools
- Created a new system of data analysis for program evaluation
- Aided in archiving museum collections

**Behavioral Assistant, Lane Education Service District, Eugene, OR 2006-2008**

- Teacher's assistant for a diverse population of students with emotional and behavioral disturbances, At-Risk Youth, and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in grades 4-8
- Created art, theatre, and photography classes for student enrichment
- Taught language arts, science, reading, social skills, and social sciences
- Implemented positive behavioral support while demonstrating excellent classroom management skills
- Modified educational approaches based on individual student needs

**Venue Coordinator, The Shedd Institute for the Arts, Eugene, OR 2005-2006**

- Oversaw multiple aspects of event planning and daily operations in a non-profit performing arts institute and educational center
- Managed a staff of 10 paid employees and 30 volunteers
- Coordinated event specifics such as staffing, artist services, concessions, hospitality, set-up and tear down
- Contracted and successfully managed numerous and varied venue rentals

**Gallery Associate, Kneeland Gallery, Sun Valley, ID 2004-2005**

- Responsible for all aspects of gallery operations including exhibition design, install, artist-client relations, marketing, and daily operations
- Consistent top seller
- Demonstrated knowledge of for-profit business practices in fine arts markets

**Teaching Assistant, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 2003-2004**

- Assisted in teaching undergraduate classes: *Humanities Senior Seminar: The Critical Tradition* and *Multi-Cultural Film and Twentieth Century American Culture*
- Implemented critical theory as a means to analyze socio-political contexts of the arts and culture
- Emphasis on the historical and cultural influences of visual and literary theory

**TECHNOLOGY SKILLS**

- Mac and PC operating systems
- Adobe Creative Suite
- Microsoft Office

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*"If we are seeking in America, let it be a seeking for the reality of democracy in art. Let art begin at home, and let it spread through the children and their parents, and through the schools, the institutions, and through government. And let us start by acceptance, not negation--acceptance that the arts are important everywhere, and that they can exist and flourish in small places as well as in large; with money, or without, according to the will of the people. Let us put firmly and permanently aside as a cliché of an expired moment in time that art is a frill. Let us accept the goodness of art where we are now, and expand its worth in the places where people live."*

*Robert Gard, 1969*

## **Introduction and Problem Statement**

Prominent arts organizations and initiatives are not relegated to the bright lights of urban and metropolitan areas. The National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (1992) eloquently asserts, "big dreams are not confined to large cities. Art is as much at home in rural communities as in the glittering concert halls or imposing museums of the big city" (p.6). Rural and small town America is home to a large population of influential cultural endeavors encompassing arts organizations, guilds and associations, community development, and educational programs, which are often supported by local and state arts councils. Duxbury and Campbell (2009) argue, "the extent of cultural and creative work occurring in rural communities tends to be undercounted and under recognized, in part due to the traditional research focus on artists and cultural workers in urban locations" (p.3). Echoing this argument, Overton (2009) finds, "most work in the area of creative economies and cultural development focuses on large metropolitan areas. Yet, in the United States, thousands of rural/small communities face many of these same issues without having the human and financial capital resources these large population centers have more readily available" (p.126). In addressing the tradition and impact of the arts in rural/small communities, Overton (1997) concludes:

The history of community arts development movement in rural and small communities is a long, rich heritage of innovative individuals, philosophical traditions, and creative community efforts, whose existence continues to change the landscape of America's rural/small communities. Each region has its own unique history and heroes that need to be identified and celebrated. Each community has its own cultural roots that need to be remembered, restored, and honored (p.62).

Many small and underserved communities face the challenges of a lack in financial assets, production means, visibility, and retention of human capital. Small towns often differ from metropolitan areas which is influenced in part by the changing face of industries specific to rural areas. This includes timber, manufacturing, food production, agriculture, mining, and other rural based operations which traditionally brought economic assets and human capital to rural locales. As industries change, so does a region's economy, rural areas are shifting from an agrarian or production economy to a knowledge economy. Overton argues, "overall, the single largest challenge facing rural/small communities is their ability to continue to exist, to meet the changing needs of their citizens without giving up the essential part of who they are and why they came into existence" (Overton, 2009, p.127). Robert Gard (1969) similarly echoes:

As small communities undergo the depletion of cultural resources that results from their role as providers for American manufacturing and commerce; as they educate their young people only to see them located in cities; as older people remain or reside in these communities in their late years because of the lower cost of living and the more intimate social acceptance and recognition they receive as industry decentralizes; then the small community finds in arts development an important part of the answer to its new needs (as cited in Ewell and Warlum, 2006, p.20).

Consequently, rural/small communities are reinventing themselves to foster economic diversification and growth in myriad ways and "are a wellspring for much



of the country's history, culture, recreation and tourism activities" (Bayard, 2005, p.2). Many rural/small community initiatives are models for community cultural development with recommendations transferable to other sectors such as urban planning and development.

This research examines how the arts can promote economic development, celebrate regional heritage, foster cultural participation, and encourage civic engagement. Sub-questions include: How can rural/small communities ensure that grand ideas and visions for the future are successful? What are the lessons in the field? And how can arts managers and community organizers in small towns utilize these findings to foster arts vitality? In the influential book, *Arts in the Small Community*, 1969, Robert Gard articulated the need for a revitalization or renaissance of the arts in small communities. He states:

And as the small community discovers its role, as the small community generates freshness of aesthetic response across the changing American scene, American art and life are enhanced. Can the United States rediscover, cherish, and strengthen its small communities? Can we assign to small communities the important role deserved in the forthcoming renaissance in the arts? (as cited in Ewell and Warlum, 2006, p.20)

His questions are just as pressing and relevant today as they were over forty years ago.

## **Research Questions**

Research questions stem from seeking to understand rural/small town arts initiatives and how small communities might adopt successful models for their own community development efforts. The primary questions are:

- What makes a small town an art town?

- How can good ideas be transformed into innovative programs and high impact initiatives?
- What is the public value of arts in a small community?
- And how can rural/small town community organizers promote and sustain the arts?

This investigation prompted secondary questions pertaining to the definition and structure of a successful arts town.

- What causes some communities, like Sisters, Oregon to be considered a flourishing arts town, while towns like Oakridge, Oregon struggle?
- What makes a successful model? What are some common pitfalls?
- Who are the major actors in rural arts initiatives?
- How are rural arts organizations embracing innovation while addressing the needs specific to small communities?
- What are some of the challenges and advantages indicative of rural arts initiatives?
- What is the impact of successful initiatives?
- And what enables a small town creative economy to flourish?

Both Sisters, OR and Oakridge, OR enjoy many similar features, access to world-class outdoor recreation, comparable size, and high number of visitors in the summer and winter months. Yet these two towns could not be any different. Sisters boasts several popular festivals and arts events which foster cultural tourism, has its own arts council, and touts a popular and bustling main street. Oakridge on the other hand could be no more disparate. Empty storefronts are the norm, cultural

centers are scant, and there is nothing to retain a visitor. What makes these two comparable towns so divergent? Demographics? Does affluence and proximity to bustling Bend enable Sisters' artistic and cultural success? Is there a prominent creative class promoting Sisters' livability? And how can small towns, like Oakridge, become 'art towns'? What lessons and recommendations can be found from successful small towns nation-wide and how can community organizers utilize this information in fostering a creative economy? This capstone shall seek to answer these questions through additional coursework in Community Cultural Planning and Public Folklore and Cultural Programming, vignettes of successful programs and initiatives, coupled with an extensive literature review.

A presentation at the 2009 Americans for the Arts conference, *Beyond rural: Arts and community development in very small towns*, by Robert McBride from Vermont's Rockingham Art and Museum Project, sparked my interest in rural arts initiatives. The presentation on how Bellows Falls, Vermont was revitalized from a run down mill town to a thriving arts community inspired me to think of ways other rural and small communities could become positively impacted by embracing and fostering the arts and culture. Living in a small community made this presentation and research topic meaningful and personal. Having lived in a small town for most of my life, I could relate to the challenges of promoting arts and culture. I have witnessed numerous well-intentioned ideas dissolve due to a lack of resources, leadership, and community organizing. Consequently, I sought to gain an understanding of how rural arts initiatives benefit small communities and what measures could be taken to ensure their success.

In accordance with the Capstone requirement for the Arts and Administration Master's program, this study investigates rural arts initiatives through independent research and additional course requirements. In Community Cultural Planning, I further investigated the field of community planning, specifically community planning in small towns. As my budding interest in forging a career as a cultural worker in a rural setting came to light, this class allowed me to explore rural community planning in greater depth and is where I began to articulate my research questions that would inform this investigation. Issues regarding community organizing through the arts, asset mapping, cultural democracy, and an introduction to the methods and vocabulary of cultural development comprised the core of academic discussions, while an independent investigation focused on asset mapping. A key concept from this research was the belief that community organizers must acknowledge existing assets, both organizationally and throughout the community. The process of community building is rarely to start from the ground up, but instead to survey the landscape and build upon and celebrate successes. This course provided a "how to" for community organizers and provided the tools and resources for cultural planning.

A departure from the practical methods of Community Cultural Planning, Public Folklore and Cultural Programming examined theoretical concepts of authority, context, and representation. These recurrent themes are continuous and significant issues in community cultural organizing as they provide both a framework and purposeful intent for cultural programming endeavors, whether at the rural or urban level. These theoretical concepts form the backbone of cultural

programming, and gave me pause to contemplate how cultural workers are best able to foster the arts and support creativity in an honest and respectful manner.

This course provided the theory for the practice.

Takeaways from both classes prompted me to think about how community organizers and cultural planners can be innovative leaders while accurately representing and contextualizing rural/small town identities and history. What is the role of a cultural broker and how do they portray a community's story with conviction and integrity? What are the tools of community planners and how do theoretical concepts influence their role as a cultural animator?

### **Researcher's Role**

It is important to first acknowledge my personal interest in this research. Having grown up (and desire to remain) in a small town, I have witnessed successful arts programs that brought the community together, fostered tourism, and were events that became a part of local identity and pride. Conversely, I am all too familiar with well-intentioned ideas which lose momentum due to weak leadership, a lack of resources, community awareness, or knowledge of responsible practices. This, coupled with my desire to live in and work in a small town, prompted me to think of ways rural arts initiatives could be successful and how I could be an integral part of rural/small town community revitalization through the arts. What lessons exist that I could use in this capacity? How can we learn from other initiatives? And how can I use my training as an Arts Administrator to benefit my own community? This research is personal and shall inform future professional endeavors.

### **Organization of Study**

Several common themes emerge throughout much of the scholarship regarding rural/small community development. These themes are:

- Celebrating heritage
  - Articulating community identity and local voice
  - Engaging and retaining human capital, specifically youth, professionals, and the creative class
  - Economic development
  - Cultural tourism
  - Innovative leadership
- (Dunphy, 2009; Duxbury & Campbell, 2009; Overton, 2009).

This paper is organized in accordance with these overarching themes with the concepts, Poetry of Place: Celebrating Local Identity and Heritage, Leadership and Arts Integration, and Arts-Based Rural Regeneration.

## **Defining Rural**

In order to fully delve into rural/small community cultural development, it is necessary to first define rural. Based on the 2000 census data, the Agriculture Economic Research Service records, “rural America comprises 2,052 counties, contains 75 percent of the nation’s land, and is home to 17 percent of the U.S. population (49 million people)” (Bayard, 2005, p.2). This population contributes significantly to the regional character, identity, and local history of rural America.

There are innumerable definitions of rural with indicators ranging from geographical, socioeconomic, population, density, and proximity to urban centers. This study shall adopt Philip Overton’s (2005) definition of rural. Overton limits rural areas to populations under 25,000. A more important distinction to this research that shall be adopted in this study is the expression, rural/small communities. “The way in which people understand (the term) rural or small is

varied. For these purposes, whenever the term *rural* is used in this paper, it will be accompanied by the term *small (rural/small)*, providing a wider definition that is not limited just to population density or geographical location, but also the nature of the community as well” (Overton, 2009, p.115). This distinction allows for a broader definition of rural ranging from remote to frontier, and from villages to townships, while addressing the changing face of the rural landscape as ‘isolated’ areas become connected through technology and modernity.

### **Poetry of Place: Celebrating Local Identity and Heritage**

*Wherever people live, there is community  
Wherever people live, there is art*

Cynthia Cote, 2005

Contrary to perceptions of rural/small communities lacking in culture, stories, or the arts, rural communities boast rich and proud histories. Celebrating heritage and local identity is an important means of portraying a community’s spirit and character. There are numerous artistic disciplines which celebrates and represents local identity. The arts can articulate a community’s history, culture, geography, and way of life while further reflecting a community’s character both intrinsically and extrinsically. This is what Overton (2009) refers to as a region’s *poetry of place*. In addition to cultural representations, communities are defined through social and geographical identities. Place and character are important in holistically and accurately capturing a community’s essence. Poetry of place articulates place both intrinsically and extrinsically.

In capturing a region’s spirit, Robert Gard (1969) suggests that communities

articulate local lore as a means of cultivating pride, branding the region, creating a regional awareness of local identity and community, and ultimately capturing and promoting public value. Gard further suggests:

People in small towns have a well-developed sense of their legends and lore, but frequently they do not fully appreciate the dramatic value of their fascinating stories. Development of the arts may well be based on a careful exploration and use of local history. Not only can this generate a sense of local pride, but an awareness of the past and past values can also give impetus to contemporary viewpoints and programs (as cited in Ewell and Warlum, 2006, p.57).

This chapter will expand upon the notion of poetry of place and how celebrating local history, culture, community, and identity is a cornerstone of successful rural arts programs. Additional investigations will explore the theoretical concepts of authenticity, representation, interpretation, community ownership, and local brand with respects to rural/small communities. “The nature of arts activity in rural communities – the underlying cultural assets, dynamics, and foundations – inform and shape the nature of community and economic initiatives that interact with the arts” (Duxbury and Campbell, 2009, p.6).

Two prominent rural programs, Appalshop and Swamp Gravy are model programs due to their articulation and celebration of community identity, promotion of local participation, while ultimately securing public value for the arts in a small community. These vignettes are illustrative of these theoretical concepts and will be presented at the chapter’s conclusion.

People in rural areas are generally proud of where they live and have either chosen to live in a small community or have family ties to the region going back for generations, “there is a charm to small-town living. Even more, there is an



ingenuity... an attitude and an approach to problem solving, a vision and a work ethic that all work together to pump a new life into a place that's barely a speck on a map- but astoundingly vibrant and healthy within its borders" (Schultz, 2006, p.1). Creative economies often flourish in small towns due to the overall quality of life, access to the outdoors and scenic landscapes, reduced cost of living, proximity to larger metropolitan areas, and size (Duxbury & Campbell, 2009).

A further allure of the small town rests in its community cohesiveness: "In rural communities, people come together to present art for people they know and to support artists they know. ... The arts are intrinsic to small towns because they are part of the tradition of the community"(Janet Brown, 2002, as cited in Duxbury and Campbell, p.5). Brown posits:

In rural communities, people come together to present art for people they know and to support artists they know. It is not uncommon for communities of 5,000 people or less to sponsor arts activities where the entire town is involved, either as performer or audience member. Activities like festivals, talent shows and community celebrations of all kinds feature artists from the community

Robert Gard (1969) similarly argues:

People are social creatures. They seek one another. They're generally proud of the place they live. We know that a sense of place is meaningful to residents and visitors alike. Town master plans commonly talk about local character or community uniqueness. People, wherever they live, are hungry for meaning. They are hungry for something to belong to, for community (as cited in Ewell and Warlum, 2006, p.22).

Communities are built upon a multitude of histories indicative of the social and geographical landscapes and of specific cultures and traditions spanning generations. It is therefore important for the cultural worker to cultivate and

provide a forum for resident's stories in an effort to represent and interpret both the history of the area and of its people. Encouraging participation by the greater community by directly involving them is important. It is not for a cultural worker to enter a community and decide what should or should not be represented, but instead to encourage the community to be the authors and presenters of this identity. This promotes civic engagement, ownership, supports individual and group creativity, and creates community excitement.

A challenge is including and capturing the folklore of residents who may not readily identify themselves as artists or who do not associate with a specific cultural group. These might be people who sing in a church choir, paint with their children, belong to a quilting guild, work as carpenters, welders, tailors, builders, chefs, or writers who are residents of the local or surrounding area. In articulating the importance of capturing the essence of small town cultural life, Janet Brown (2002) concludes:

In reality, the arts flourish in rural and small towns in every form because of committed artists and arts activists who live there. Many of these people don't think of themselves as artists nor do they think of the arts as some special thing that we should all be talking about. They are motivated by a love for an art form whether it's music, theater, visual arts or dance that, often times, defies the repressive stigma that modern-day America has put on the arts in more sophisticated institutionalized settings ([www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/03/authentic\\_pssi.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/03/authentic_pssi.php)).

There is a tremendous value in fostering participation by those who freely associate with the arts and those who do not; it adds a complexity to the artistic character of a community.

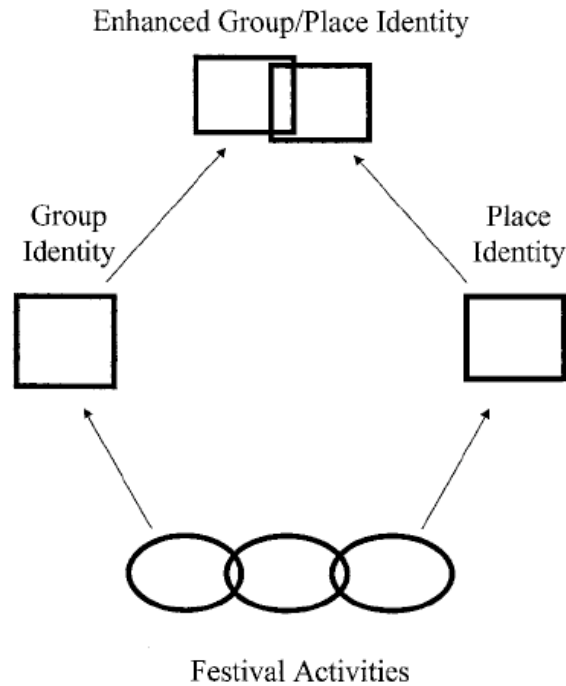
Robert Gard asserts, "as America emerges into a different understanding of her

strength, it becomes clear that her strength is in the people and in the places where the people live” (as cited in Ewell and Warlum, 2006, p.17). The liveliness of arts-centric small towns is fuelled by an authentic passion of artists and art enthusiasts (Brown, 2002, as cited in Duxbury and Campbell, 2009, p.18). In articulating the strength of people and place, Gard (1969) asks the cultural animator to define and articulate the character of community.

- What is the character of our community?
- What is it like to live here?
- Are there symbols that identify the community?
- Is there a community attitude, concern, philosophy, or sense of pride that people recognize or share?
- If there were a slogan or logo for our community, what would it be?
- Are there sacred places in the community?
- Are there places that the locals all know about?  
(as cited in Ewell and Warlum, 2006, p.42)

Gathering responses to these questions is an initial step in identifying a region’s poetry of place and branding a small community.

There is growing research in the cultural sector which articulates the importance of festivals and how this art and cultural form is paramount in portraying rural identities, fostering cultural tourism, communicating a sense of place, while representing various groups, traditions, foodways, and culture, while additionally portraying the spirit of people and place. (Duxbury and Campbell, 2006; De Bres and Davis, 2001). De Bres and Davis (2001) offer a schematic illustrating how group identity and place identity are illustrated through festivals.



However, one might also argue that Festival Activities, as represented here, could instead present a holistic view of the arts; this portrayal could take many forms, from the festival to lecture, literary to visual, performance to spoken, and the myriad craft permutations any culture may call its own. If done with the intention of reflecting group and place identity, multiple genres and artistic styles are able to convey regional heritage, identity, and pride.

Critical here is the delineation of group (social) identity and place (geographical) identity which merge via artistic mediums. Overton (2009) describes the intersection of group and place identity and how this identity is formed through a relationship between a region's material resources and social development. He states:

The geographic landscape that surrounds people influences how a community develops by defining its economy and its role in the larger commerce of the region, based on the geographical resources available to

that community. One way to understand *sense of place* is to define it as the way the geography of a place impacts the people who live in that place... Another critical aspect of place is the intersection between the individual and the larger community in which he/she lives. This aspect of life in rural/small communities can be... defined as the impact people have on a place as a result of the way they interact with each other in the community setting. It is the give and take, the dialectic, the balance between these two aspects of place that have the greatest influence in the development of a particular community (Overton, 2009, p.7).

### **Authenticity, Representation, and Interpretation: Swamp Gravy and Appalshop**

Dreezen (2003) rightly cautions, “authenticity and quality matter. Community cultural development requires artistic quality and authenticity. Mediocre art does not inspire community development and phony tourist attractions can not sustain interest” (p.11). Community organizers must be mindful of over-commodifying and misrepresenting a community’s identity. The goal is not to sacrifice quality and authenticity in lieu of ‘success’. The following vignettes of Swamp Gravy and Appalshop are illustrations of how a small community can successfully navigate the danger of over-commodification, defined here as exaggerating or overtly misrepresenting any given culture. These organizations positively celebrate their individual character and spirit honestly.

#### **Swamp Gravy: Colquitt, Georgia**

With a population of 2,000, Colquitt, Georgia established a name for itself in the community based arts field with the creation of Swamp Gravy, a small town folk life theatrical event. In connecting theory to practice in respect to context, authority, and representation, one need look no further than this rural southern community. Swamp Gravy, a culinary reference to a stock made from fish drippings, is a

community theatre project relying on local citizens to gather regional stories and act in and portray the myriad accounts of its community. Its mission reads, “to involve as many people in a theatrical experience that empowers individuals and bonds the community while strengthening the economy” ([www.swampgravy.com](http://www.swampgravy.com)). *In making exact change: How U.S. arts-based programs have made a significant and sustained impact on their communities*, William Cleveland (2005) describes the production as a musical performance which:

Celebrates rural southwestern Georgia folk life. Original songs and choreography are combined with traditional music and dance in a grand-scale stage production with a cast and crew of 100. Professionally written...directed and designed, the play draws on folklore, tall tales and family stories for its content, and culled from oral histories ([www.communityarts.net](http://www.communityarts.net)).

The theatre’s director, Richard Owen Geer, and Joy Jinks of the Colquitt Miller Arts Council act in what Spitzer (2008) refers to as a culture broker or a liaison role between the community and artistic production. To promote organizational success, longevity, and faithful cultural representation, Geer and Jinks mediated between the community and its socio-cultural context, its artists, the Colquitt Miller Arts Council, and the organization’s stakeholders. They consequently empowered the local community, charging them with methods of self-representation such as storytelling, interviewing, documenting, and cultivating oral history for inclusion into the play. By encouraging community members to take an active role in productions, Swamp Gravy promotes community ownership and participation. Gard (1969) aptly articulates this desire for ownership:

Community arts development is not only about providing arts *for* people. As we encompass a broad spectrum of activity, we, of course, embrace professional arts being presented *for* people in small communities. But arts

development also includes the arts *by* people who live in a place. It includes the creative expression *of* the people who live in the community. It also showcases the traditional arts *of* various groups. It features creative expression dealing with local issues (as cited in Ewell and Warlum, 2006, p.22).

The intent is to promote Colquitt's poetry of place: both its surroundings and its people. William Cleveland (2005) affirms:

These elements reflect the play's authority and express its local knowledge. At times... The intimate process of community members who do not usually interact with each other rehearsing and performing together in the safe environment created by the arts council contributed to dialogue in this small town. As a cumulative effect, Miller County's pride has deepened. The project has now been replicated in other communities

Cleveland (2005) further affirms, "the Swamp Gravy esprit de corps carries over into all facets of life and work in the community. Swamp Gravy is a way in which the arts create common ground on which diverse people can work and play together"(Cleveland, 2005). Presenting Colquitt's heritage through the lens of local actors, singers, stagehands, production crew, and event staff gives the small town authorship in its own representation. This local authorship signifies authority. Linda Frye Burnham (1994) echoes:

Swamp Gravy is a good example of a work that blurs the definition of ownership. Overall the performance is the product of the direct efforts of 400 people, and captured the indirect involvement and attention of everybody in Colquitt. "We're all in Swamp Gravy," said a local merchant. In talking with cast members, it is clear that the play belongs to them, not to Geer or the playwright, Jo Carson. They are in control of the social and artistic life of the drama. They will tour it and they will answer requests to assist nearby towns in developing their own plays ([www.communityarts.net](http://www.communityarts.net)).

An integral part of Colquitt's community identity, Swamp Gravy is a model organization for promoting local voice, giving the people authority in their own representation and interpretation, and honoring rural southwestern Georgia. It has

both succeeded in maintaining and presenting its history and culture and is integral to the community fabric and local identity. Under the guidance of the Colquitt Miller Arts Council, Swamp Gravy has expanded its programming to include a learning center, mural project, May-Haw variety show, education and learning programs, the Storytelling Museum and Swamp Gravy Institute, while additionally hosting the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Global Mural and Cultural Tourism Conference.

### **Appalshop: Whitesburg, Kentucky**

Kentucky's Appalshop is a non-profit interdisciplinary community arts center in the heart of rural Appalachia and is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Kentucky Arts Council. Founded by Bill Richardson in 1969 as a component of the United States War on Poverty program, Appalshop was charged with localized and individualized storytelling with the goal of accurately portraying the character of Eastern Kentucky's mountainous region. In *Appalachia: A history* (2002), John Williams writes:

By 1969 Appalachian poverty had become a fixture of network television... Fathoming the resentment that these images engendered among the ordinary citizens of places like Whitesburg, Richardson helped young people start the Appalachian film workshop, whose declared purpose was to give mountaineers power to determine how the region's image was projected to the larger society (p.360).

Forty years later, Appalshop's vision and purpose remain the same. Its goals are:

- to document, disseminate, and revitalize the lasting traditions and contemporary creativity of Appalachia
- to tell stories the commercial cultural industries don't tell, challenging stereotypes with Appalachian voices and visions
- to support communities' efforts to achieve justice and equity and solve their own problems in their own ways



- to celebrate cultural diversity as a positive social value; and
- to participate in regional, national, and global dialogue toward these ends ([www.appalshop.org](http://www.appalshop.org))

Martin Nagy, in a publication by the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (1996), echoes, “this wealth of historical, cultural, and social information has given the people some of the resources they need to create local solutions to critical issues” (p.1). Currently, Appalshop has created over a hundred locally produced, individual films with topics ranging from poverty to mountain traditions, from coal mining to carpentry, and from the environment to social justice in Appalachia. This articulation of local identity and representation of local assets became the cornerstone of Appalshop’s public purpose and has resulted in the organization expanding to include its Roadside Theatre, community radio, educational institute, Front Porch Program, and state of the art archival facility.

Giving young people cameras and media equipment with the charge of documenting their community, and adding a much-needed local voice to Appalachian identity proved to be powerful. The original intent of the program was to train youth in multimedia as a professional skill. Through the preservation and celebration of local heritage, Appalshop not only sparked national interest in Appalachia, but positively affected the local economy. The goal was youth empowerment, conveyance of local identity, and professional training. Appalshop did not anticipate that its program was, in fact, retaining youth and the creative class. However “by the mid 1990s [Appalshop] had become one of the largest employers in Lecher County and a magnet that offered training and practice to

young film makers from all over the community in what came to be called, community-based media” (Williams, 2002, p.360).

Swamp Gravy and Appalshop are thus illustrative of Robert Gard’s (1969) sentiments:

The people, if shown the way, can create art in and of themselves. The springs of the American spirit are at the grassroots. Opportunities must exist in places where they never have existed before. A consciousness of the people, a knowledge of their power to generate and nourish art, and a provision of ways in which they may do so are essential for our time (Gard, as cited in Ewell and Warlum, 2006 p.17).

Spitzer (2008) defines the methodology of public folklore as “using ethnographic research bases to negotiate and create public representations of expressive culture that the core community and broader audiences find useful, edifying, and engaging” (p.79). This balance of external and internal authority is certainly a key factor in both Swamp Gravy’s and Appalshop’s longevity and prestige in the community arts field. Participants of these organizations represent a diversity of race, culture, gender, age, and ethnicity. Establishing the arts and celebrating local identity in these small communities proved to be powerful. Accurate representation and interpretation validate and reinforce cultural and folk traditions in a delicate balance between objective portrayal and commodification.

## **Leadership**

*A citizenry engaged with the arts can create opportunities that foster a community-wide vision, attract a skilled workforce, and energize new business activity.*

Cuesta, Gillespie, & Lillis, 2005

The second emergent theme in this study is the importance of leadership. Across the sectors, effective leadership is key to organizational success and vitality.

Good ideas do not necessarily lead to effective initiatives without strong and innovative leadership. I argue, in both rural and urban locales, it is necessary for arts leaders to:

- Gather data to assess project feasibility and community readiness
- Determine what type of facility is available
- Determine scope: large or small scale project, initiative, organization, or program
- Assess and leverage resources
- Plan strategically
- Evaluate programs
- Identify stakeholders
- Motivate the community and maintain its excitement
- Build meaningful and lasting connections and collaborations
- Build a case to secure public value
- Communicate results

Rural cultural workers must additionally:

- Acknowledge and act upon the changing rural society and economy
- Utilize the arts as a vital tool in keeping the community relevant
- Engage the community
- Integrate the arts
- Motivate and involve people who may not see themselves as artists
- Gather stories and facilitate conversations
- Act as a cultural broker

The aim of this section, however, is not to articulate the value of effective leadership as this is beyond the scope of this investigation; instead it aims to provide an overview of some of the challenges rural cultural workers face and recurring themes of managing a vibrant arts program in a rural/small community.

The 2005 Michigan-based Bright Stars report indicates:

The responsibilities of arts leaders in rural communities encompass more than attracting followers for their institutions. Part of their task is also to broaden support for the arts in their communities by helping to develop citizens into civic leaders, a process that in turn creates and preserves a much-needed level of engagement and interest in the community. Those leaders...share a common goal: to keep their rural regions, cities, and towns healthy. They use a variety of techniques, combining the creative instincts of

inspired artists with the consensus-building approach of seasoned community advocates (Cuesta, Gillespie, & Lillis. p.35).

Whether at the urban or rural level, knowing, engaging, and receiving support from the community is vital to organizational success (Avery, 2002; Philips, 2004). In order to properly engage the community, Gard (1969) suggests that cultural animators pose the following questions:

- Who are the creative people in our community? How can we include them?
- What arts related groups already exist in our community?
- Do we know what the creative people and arts groups need and want in order to thrive? How can we find out?
- In what ways can we help meet the needs of creative people and artists groups or help them meet their own needs?
- How can we make creative groups a vital part of our program? How can we be a vital part of their program?
- Can we expect to encounter resistance from any groups? What are their concerns and how can we address them?
- What information exists about the economic impact of arts and culture in our community? Working with local decision-makers, how can we use this information as part of an effective community development strategy?
- What are the creative industries in our community? Who are the creative entrepreneurs? What are the arts-related businesses?
- Who are the key business leaders in our community? What is it about them that makes them leaders? Why does our community respond to their leadership? What can we learn from this and from them?  
(as cited in Ewel and Warlum, 2006, p.66 &91).

Shifferd's 2005 study articulated the following trends regarding successful cultural development initiatives and qualities of arts leaders. The report finds:

- Leaders must be able to attract a group, a critical mass, of supporters to share the work of programming and advocacy.
- Leaders need to be connected into the larger structures of community influence. In this study, the most effective leaders were long-time and respected residents of their towns. But it is certainly possible for people to learn how to establish the connections needed for effective leadership. And it is just as certainly not necessary for effective arts leaders to be "life-long" community residents.

- The leadership group needs to establish coalitions or collaborations with other civic entities to assure that the arts sector is well integrated into larger community development plans and projects (as cited in Duxbury & Campbell, p.18).

### **Leadership: Support, Collaborations, and Resources**

In addition to engaging the community, the literature speaks to a great need for arts leaders to emphasize collaborations and share resources. Gard (1969) asks the cultural worker to identify arts and business leaders, decision makers, and key organizations. Dunphy & Campbell (2009) suggest tapping into social networks, K-12 and university programming, municipal entities, and foundations. While Burns & Kirkpatrick (2008) call for the “development of stronger networks for creative sectors” and “better coordination of public sector agencies in support of rural creative industries” (as cited in Dunphy and Campbell, 2009, p. 33). In a McKnight Foundation report highlighting Michigan’s success in fostering arts and creativity in rural/small communities, Cuesta, Gillespie, and Lillis, (2005) recommend building “broad community partnerships around arts activities to ensure that a diverse cross section of citizens will come together... to play a major role in the revitalization of downtown as a community-wide gathering place (p.74). A key finding from this report suggests that arts leaders should promote collaborations and “create community solutions through diverse leadership.” This establishes “artistic collaborations that encourage citizens to reach beyond traditional roles to share resources” (Cuesta, Gillespie, & Lillis, 2005, p.74).

The report additionally recognizes the importance of building relationships with business and civic leaders. Leaders throughout the community are integral to

increasing the impact the arts can have in small communities by recognizing and utilizing the arts in leveraging community assets.

The goal of arts leaders is to foster a community rich with knowledge, growth, vitality, civic engagement, inclusion, diversity, preservation, health and quality of life, and a more active and prosperous economy. Thus, there is a strong connection between the arts and community vitality: “An increase in arts activity can draw new residents and businesses, boost civic participation, develop new social gathering places, and build bridges across ethnic and class divides—all of which strengthens communities. The arts can profoundly affect the ability of a town not only to survive over time, but to thrive” (Cuesta, Gillespie, & Lillis, 2005, p.15).

John Davis, a cultural worker who established a Michigan-based artist residency program, stresses communication as integral to fostering rural arts initiatives, “leadership is key, he says, but back-and-forth communication is critical. You can’t try to move too fast, or try to be too smart, or try to tell other people how to do something. It’s important to listen, to talk to people who have been there, to look for the town historians—people who know the town intimately because they have lived here” (as cited in Cuesta, Gillespie, & Lillis, 2005, p.39). This harkens back to the notion of inspiring community members to articulate and gather their own cultural stories, which fosters local authorship and expertise in expressing the region’s artistic and cultural history. The rural/small community cultural worker must find this local knowledge from town historians and community members, from people who identify themselves as artists, historians, and experts, to individuals who would not classify themselves in this manner, yet are able to speak to a region’s

culture, traditions, identity, folkways, and poetry of place. In rural/small communities, arts and creativity exist already; the challenge is that artists or the creative community may not be represented or the focus of civic and community organizers. Leaders should facilitate a gathering space, center, or common area where the arts and the people can come together in creating a cultural community.

Consequently, community organizers and arts managers in small communities often become cultural brokers, or liaisons between the organization, the community, and various cultural groups. Avery (2002) notes that cultural workers in rural/small communities are “uniquely positioned to provide exposure to and understanding of local traditional artists” (p.107) and as such must ensure that these artists or cultural groups are able to participate in their representation. Nicholas Spitzer (2008) defines the mission of cultural programmers and public folklorists as:

Primary public practitioners [who] must develop a creative repertoire of ideas and actions to extend the reach of traditional cultures through collaborative re-contextualization into varied appropriate forms of representation—from film and festival to text and museum exhibit. Such representations should assist traditional communities in creating their *own* metaphors (p.82)

### **Leadership: Integrating the Arts in Rural/Small Communities**

*From the largest to the smallest communities, the research clearly demonstrates that the arts attract audiences, spur businesses, create local jobs, and generate government revenue. When we say that the arts mean business- that's not just a slogan, it's the truth.*

Robert L. Lynch, 2003

Appropriately integrating the arts into the fabric of a rural/small community is key to successful community cultural planning endeavors. Appropriate arts

integration refers to weaving the arts into the community with respect to a community's nuances and individuality. Given that no two communities are the same it is thereby true that no two methods of integration will be the same, it is up to arts leaders to evaluate and determine the best method of integrating the arts into the community.

It is also important to note that arts integration is only one of a number of initiatives that small communities should undertake to promote a more viable, healthy, and livable community. The arts become part of community development processes that incorporates a host of other initiatives striving for rural regeneration or an increased quality of life. It is thus beneficial for the arts leader to build the arts in tandem with other policies or programs to truly integrate them in a holistic community development plan. The arts are a component of many initiatives striving to better rural/small communities. Philips (2004) posits:

The underlying conviction for the community-wide revitalization effort is that the arts are a key to revitalizing the community. While arts events alone are not enough, it is the integration of the arts into overall community development strategy and planning, including encouraging wide-spread citizen participation, that seems to be an effective community development approach (p.118).

This speaks to an integration of the arts in concert with a multitude of community development projects, whether directly linked with the arts or not. This accordingly provides a rich foundation where community revitalization policies have a greater impact and an increased opportunity to thrive.

In order to establish policies specific to integrating the arts into a community, Philips (2004) offers the following recommendations:



- *General support for the Arts.* Citizens and local government officials need to recognize that a healthy arts presence is a vital part of community infrastructure and is important in terms of community development. Participation approaches in community decision making should be used to further build support.
- *Seek out untapped resources.* Local governments may have more resources than direct funding that can be used to support arts-based businesses and other activities. Examples include rent-free facilities from a variety of sources such as school classrooms and auditoriums, commercial warehouses, conference centers or vacant retail spaces.
- *Integrate the support of arts with community development benefits.* Whenever possible, the community should strive to link benefits with arts-based activities. For example, artisans could participate in programs such as bringing art to public schools or placement of art in public venues.
- *Maximize resources through community sharing.* The centralization of facilities and resources is a significant factor in the success of arts based programs. Centralized facility such as a production studio, gallery, office or retail space can be used by numerous groups to provide cost savings. This is one of the underlying premises of arts business incubator programs – by sharing, costs are reduced for everyone involved.
- *Adopt a flexible approach to arts support.* All artists are different and need different kinds of support and assistance. Business management assistance to arts entrepreneurs is usually a critical need in communities, yet the type of assistance may vary. Successful arts-based programs will respond to artists on an individual basis (p.119-120).

## **Economic Growth: Arts-Based Rural Regeneration**

*We are on the threshold of a way of life that combines the traditional appeal of the small community with the economic and cultural advantages of the city.*

Robert Gard

The aim of this section is not to convince the reader of the multiple benefits of the arts in community development as this is a widely documented topic and is beyond the scope of this investigation. However making a case for the arts is often most successful through economic benefit. This section explores the impact of fostering the arts in a small community by looking at economic growth and rural regeneration as methods for advocating and making a case for fostering the arts in small/rural communities.

With the change from an agrarian economy to a knowledge or creative economy, small communities are reinventing themselves and looking to alternative funding streams and economic drivers. If rural areas are changing in this direction, can the arts be a part of rural regeneration and boost the local economy, promote livability, and foster revitalization? Can the arts keep a small town relevant?

Markusen (2006) believes they can:

In American small towns, arts-centered activities are serving as an important growth stimulus for both declining downtowns and the surrounding countryside. By refurbishing older educational, cultural and industrial buildings to host artists and art participants, these towns have increased export base activities, prompted import substitution and helped to attract and retain artists as residents. Arts and cultural centers often act as anchor tenants in main street revitalization (p.1)

The arts are playing a “crucial and valuable role in their local community economic development efforts. The resulting effects are both indirect and direct” (Williams *et al.*, 1995, as cited in Phillips, 2004, p.112). Williams (1995) posits that indirect efforts include community aesthetics and amenities such as historic preservation and architectural creative reuse while direct efforts incorporates a strengthened economy through job creation, growth, and spending (as cited in Phillips, 2004, p.112).

Cultural workers in rural/small communities are becoming innovative in their approach to community cultural development by making an economic case for the arts, pushing for an increase in cultural tourism, restoring and renovating vacant buildings for creative use, encouraging new business and residents, while bringing the community together in support of cultural revitalization. In addressing the economic impact of the arts in favor of an arts centric rural regeneration, Markusen

(2006) adds:

The creation of an arts-dedicated space—cultural centers, artists’ retreats, multi media theaters, artists’ live/work or studio buildings—can magnify the economic impact of artists’ presence in an area, the number of tourists brought to the center, the quality of arts development and the draw for retirees. In many small towns, local governments have helped to raise funds for arts centers through bonding, giving vacant city-owned buildings to organizers, providing infrastructure, combining city economic development or tourism staffing with arts center management, helping to develop artists’ live/work spaces or even by deciding to own and run arts centers themselves (p.4).

Cuesto, Carlo, and associates (2005) stress the connection of the arts and community dynamism in regeneration efforts by concluding that boosting arts and creativity invites:

New residents and businesses, boosts civic participation, develops new social gathering places, and builds bridges across ethnic and class divides—all of which strengthens communities. The arts can profoundly affect the ability of a town not only to survive over time, but to thrive. ... [However,] to make any progress, revitalization ideas can’t just originate with or benefit artists (Cuesta, Carlo, & Associates, 2005, as cited in Duxbury & Campbell, 2009, p.13).

Davis (2005) concurs with the notion that rural revitalization must benefit the entire community as opposed to individuals or those who are involved with or receive a direct benefit from the arts.

To make any progress, revitalization ideas can’t just originate with or benefit artists... You need a cross section of the community committed to efforts like this. Nothing causes residents to see the value of arts to their communities as clearly as economic results. They recognize that artistic activity equals money and visitors saying good things about our town to other potential visitors. That means jobs. They get behind it (Cuesta, Gillespie, & Lillis, 2005, p.70).

Little makes a case for promoting the arts in a small community like visible and measurable economic impacts. Although there are a host of benefits to incorporating the arts, which includes social and mental wellbeing, education,

beautification, civic engagement, and leisure, economic opportunities make a strong case for fostering the arts. A stronger economy through the arts often results in an enhanced public value.

### **Bellows Falls, Vermont and The Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation**

The Rockingham Arts and Museum Project is a prime example of utilizing the arts to revitalize, diversify, and improve the economy of a small community.

Director Robert McBride exemplifies innovative leadership through integrating the arts in rural/small town community cultural development. He took Bellows Falls, Vermont from a run-down mill town to a thriving arts town. Situated in Southeast Vermont along the Connecticut River, Bellows Falls (population 3,500) was once a dilapidated mill town with over half its storefronts and residences empty. “By the late 1980s, the village was in serious economic decline, with the once vibrant brick factories vacant and crumbling, the Victorian houses subdivided into apartments, and the majority of storefronts empty” (Phillips, 2004, p.118). Today, this village has become a model program of economic revitalization through the arts and culture appearing in the New York Times, the Boston Globe, and highlighted in a presentation at the 2009 Americans for the Arts Conference entitled, *Beyond rural: Arts and community development in very small towns*. Bellows Falls has been so successful in integrating the arts “that the Vermont Community Development Association held a day-long conference in 2000 to showcase the village as a “prime example” of a community using creative ideas, the arts, cooperative local citizen efforts and a wide variety of funding sources to revitalize itself” (Smith, 2000, as cited in Phillips, R, 2004, p.118).

The Rockingham Arts and Museum Project (RAMP) is spearheading cultural revitalization initiatives in Bellows Falls. Its mission is:

- to develop awareness of the arts
- to create vitality in the community through the arts
- to demonstrate that the arts can favorably impact the local economy (<http://www.ramp-vt.org/ramp/about.html>)

Bellows Falls is “a nationwide model of lightning-fast downtown revitalization through music, painting, sculpture, outdoor installations, murals, and literary events and is a frequent stop for out-of-towners seeking cultural stimulation” ([www.rutlandherald.com](http://www.rutlandherald.com)).

RAMP was one of five community organizations to receive multi-year funding through the Vermont Arts Council. Ranging from \$7,000-\$10,000, the local Arts Partnership Grants for Community Development are currently the largest grants awarded by the council. RAMP intends to use this funding to continue its collaborations with the “town of Rockingham, Housing Vermont, the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance, Flying Under Radar series, and the Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce, as well as two local social service agencies, Our Place and Park Place, and the Bellows Falls Middle School” ([www.ramp-vt.org](http://www.ramp-vt.org)).

A major initiative of RAMP was to create affordable artist live-work spaces in the once derelict Exner block building. Funding was diversified from private and public sources, in addition local tax credits and a combination of state and federal funding to complete the renovations (Phillips, 2004). The 1905 building underwent a \$1.2 million renovation resulting in a combination of artist residences and commercial spaces. The commercial space houses retail spaces, RAMP’s office, and

Gallery 17, a non-profit regional artists gallery. Artists in the Exner residence are encouraged to exhibit in the building's Gallery 17. The gallery provides an income for participating artists while additionally acting as a revenue source for RAMP.

A second initiative bolstering arts participation through RAMP is a major public art program consisting of murals and sculpture and an innovative program Music for Trains. Music for Trains modifies the original structure of musical performances and participation by bringing music to non-traditional audiences outside conventional venues or concert halls. The impetus for this was to reach different audiences and to redefine the perception of concert going (McBride, 2009). Along with initiatives to bolster arts participation and vibrancy, RAMP offers professional development opportunities by encouraging artists to participate on boards and through hosting quarterly artist town hall meetings. Both avenues allow for artists to assume leadership roles, authorship, and have a voice in issues concerning Bellows Falls and the village's cultural revitalization.

Robert McBride, founding director of RAMP says of the community development initiative:

As RAMP enters its eleventh year, it continues to stay mission-focused, promoting the arts as an essential component in the development of our community socially, culturally and economically. RAMP prides itself on creating effective partnerships and devotes a great deal of time to these partnerships... RAMP has focused on developing significant community-inclusive projects. These projects have been key to the cultural and economic revitalization of downtown Bellows Falls and gained positive visibility, regionally and statewide. The improved social and economic climate also is a direct reflection of significant community involvement ([www.ramp-vt.org](http://www.ramp-vt.org)).

The mission and initiatives of RAMP and Bellows Falls illustrate the balance of economic revitalization though encouraging a community-wide creative presence,

retaining human capital, while cultivating participation through the arts, and fostering opportunities for a greater quality of life. “When arts and creativity are considered within the economic and social dimensions, the contribution is instrumental, a way of achieving some other valued goal. Within the cultural dimension, however, arts participation can be considered in terms of its intrinsic value, with the experience being worthwhile in its own right for individuals and the community” (Duxbury & Campbell, 2009, p.81).

Providing validity to rural/small community arts initiatives, the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) highlighted the work of RAMP and Bellows Falls, citing it as a model program for community and economic revitalization through the arts. The council’s goal is to encourage creative communities, cultural initiatives, and diversity statewide. For Vermont, Bellows Falls has become influential not only for rural initiatives, but in providing recommendations and lessons reaching into the sphere of urban planning.

In parts of Vermont, the creative economy is plainly visible. You can see it in a village like Bellows Falls, where a dying downtown has been resurrected with artist residences, gallery spaces, new restaurants, and shops in abundance. Starting with one building and a handful of volunteers, creative leaders in Bellows Falls have taken historic preservation step by step around the square and along the river, and have built music and cultural programs to turn the village into a regional attraction. The town’s revitalized life has attracted entrepreneurs who have launched successful, sustainable, and growing businesses... Many Vermonters are now asking, “If it can work in Bellows Falls, how can we make it work in my town?” (Advancing Vermont’s Creative Economy, 2004, p. 6 & 7).

Using successful cultural revitalization initiatives, like Bellows Falls, VCCI is charged with promoting Vermont’s individual brand, distinctive identity, and sense of place.

The council recognizes the impact in cultivating a creative economy calling it

“critical to the future competitiveness of Vermont in the global marketplace”

(Advancing Vermont’s Creative Economy, 2004, p. 3). A publication of the National Endowment of the Arts, *Arts in Rural America* (1991), articulates the importance of statewide efforts in promoting support for rural arts initiatives. The publication reads:

The state arts agencies play a major role in promoting access to the arts, expanding audiences, assisting artists, supporting cultural institutions, and promoting the arts in education. They support among other activities, touring and presenting of performances and exhibitions, arts education, and local arts agency development, all of which reach into many rural areas (as cited in Katz & North, 1991, p. 27).

For Vermont, cultural revitalization is identified as inciting innovation, promoting revenue and employment, while revitalizing downtowns. These measures engage the community and preserve the state’s heritage, creativity, and cultural identity while enticing the creative class.

### **Conclusion and implication of research**

“Big dreams are not confined to large cities. Art is as much at home in rural communities as in the glittering concert halls or imposing museums of the big city” (National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, 1992, p.6). Sharon Rodning Bash (2006) outlines trends and puts forth responsible practices of arts-centric communities.

Bash finds:

- Leaders/supporters are connected into larger community networks
- A critical mass of leadership/support exists, not just one or two individuals
- Leaders establish coalitions with other community groups
- An established group for arts advocacy and planning exists and gives voice
- The arts are seen by key non-arts leaders as essential to community well-being
- Arts activity and participation is intentionally inclusive of all ages and social groups
- Key community festivals include arts activities



- All forms of creative expression are honored, both formal and informal
- Participation is encouraged
- A minority of these communities sees the arts also as an amenity to attract visitors. (as cited in Duxbury & Campbell, 2009, p.16)

Echoing these findings, a 2006 Canadian Census speaks to qualities enabling rural/small communities in becoming arts towns. They conclude:

Factors include community recognition of the value of the arts and heritage, individual champions, catalytic events, leadership organization, media coverage, regular arts activity, a “critical mass of artists”, funding, organizational support, and many more. The literature review also outlines the variety of potential social, cultural, economic, health, psychological and interpersonal impacts of the arts (as cited in Duxbury & Campbell, 2009, p.6).

As rural/small communities reinvent themselves to promote economic growth and to encourage civic engagement, the arts are taking a prominent place in community development initiatives. Arts supporters and leaders of the community are integrating the arts and revitalizing the local economy. Arts have become an intrinsic component of community vitality and sustainability, particularly in rural/small communities.

Research indicates that cultural workers in rural/small communities must act as a liaison between the community and its artistic representation. Successful arts programs are often those which celebrate an local identity, both socially and geographically, and intrinsically and extrinsically. It is not for the cultural worker to come into a community and merely articulate its assumed identity, but to gather and involve the people in a portrayal of local identity. Celebrating local identity validates culture while allowing for ownership and authority. These are cornerstones of

securing public value and garnering support from the people, arts activists, and individuals committed to the furtherance of rural regeneration.

For the integration of the arts in a rural/small community to be successful, arts leaders must collaborate with the community and ensure that the arts are an integral part of other initiatives and that community development plans are happening holistically. Rarely will it be an arts organization coming in and single handedly revitalizing the community, but instead the arts act as a valuable component of community development initiatives. Leaders must be able to navigate and respond to the cultural climate to determine this opportunity. A cultural worker in a rural/small community must garner community ownership and encourage participation in an effort to foster an increased public value and worth. Articulating public value, creating revenue, fostering civic engagement, providing a means for expression, and encouraging a greater quality of life is vital to nurturing an artistic or cultural renaissance in rural/small communities.

Rural/small arts towns succeed in making their locale more prosperous, healthy, and inviting. Arts centric communities provide leisure activities for residents and tourists, bolster the economy, and retain its youth, professionals, and the creative class; demographic populations which often relocate to seek opportunity in more urban areas.

Residents of many communities have found creative ways to infuse new life in their towns. Rural/small “communities have become more appealing, interesting places to live and have invited a new kind of leader into their midst. Civic leaders from the arts have helped develop new community visions and traditions... They

have infused passion, hope, hard work, and new ideas that have led to astonishing stories of rural rebirth. They have opened the doors to new opportunities—and in small towns, opportunities mean everything” (Bright Stars, 2005, p.15).

Although Appalshop, Swamp Gravy, Bellows Falls, and The Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation are taking different approaches to rural/small community cultural development, each demonstrates the value of articulating and celebrating local culture, integrating the arts into the fabric of the community, and are supported by leaders and community members who see the significance of fostering the arts and supporting creativity in rural/small communities. In these vignettes local identity is articulated through arts and cultural programming, historic preservation, community planning, and statewide and national support. This has consequently fostered participation and public value, while providing economic assets such as cultural tourism, retaining human capital, and increasing employment and local spending. Overton (1997) articulates the value of promoting local arts in small communities. He states:

The history of community arts development movement in rural and small communities is a long, rich heritage of innovative individuals, philosophical traditions, and creative community efforts, whose existence continues to change the landscape of America’s rural/small communities. Each region has its own unique history and heroes that need to be identified and celebrated. Each community has its own cultural roots that need to be remembered, restored, and honored (Overton, 1997, p. 62).

Differing communities boast individual stories and an individual sense of place. Policies that may succeed in Vermont, Georgia, or Kentucky may not work for other communities or on a national or international scale. However the lessons from these cases are generalizable across the community cultural development field.

Common themes of identity, place, local resources, visionary leadership, increasing local community participation, and rural regeneration are essential tenets of developing successful community plans in rural/small communities.

My intention was to utilize this research to foster the arts in my small community and to utilize these findings to position myself as a leader in the field of rural/small community cultural development. I wanted to know how I could utilize my training as an Arts Administrator in addition to this terminal research paper to benefit my community.

I live in the small Oregon town of Cottage Grove with a population of 9,000 with deep roots in mining and timber. However its economy is changing, timber and mining, although still practiced, is no longer the community's economic engine. Consequently people are looking to alternate methods of reinvigorating the community.

Cottage Grove boasts a rich and proud history and is teeming with creative individuals yearning for representation and opportunity. There is an abundance of arts events which are intrinsic to community identity and range from festivals to art walks, theatre to public art, and concerts to parades. Arts events range from traditional to contemporary. Residents come together to support their neighbors and participate in local happenings. These events are quintessentially small town in character and have become a cornerstone of Cottage Grove's identity.

Despite these types of existing arts programs, there remains a great deal of work to be done to further embrace the arts and foster creativity. Arts education programs are sorely missing, there is poor communication between cultural

organizations, fragmented organizations, and little research to support arts-based rural regeneration efforts. As with many rural/small communities there are numerous challenges to overcome in fostering the arts, namely an absence of cultural workers or cultural policy advocates, poor communication, lack of collaboration, and an outward migration of professional and creative individuals who commute to larger cities for employment.

An additional concern is an unspoken generational shift. The majority of arts programs are volunteer-run and staffed by retirees. These leaders are doing an outstanding job of preserving local heritage, yet without new arts management practices and guidelines for transitions and leadership successions the futures of these organizations remain uncertain.

Despite these challenges, opportunities are surfacing. New businesses, organizations, economic developments, increased public support, and city-wide initiatives signal an ideal time for fostering the arts in Cottage Grove. A new generation of leaders is beginning to emerge. It appears that a cultural revitalization in Cottage Grove is imminent. This investigation supports cultural planning based on existing assets rather than solely from the ground up, capturing a region's poetry of place, and integrating the arts into the fabric of the community. This research will undoubtedly become influential to my work as a cultural worker in rural/small communities.

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