

PRESENTING A SPECIAL FIRST THURSDAY ARTWALK IN THE UNIVERSITY ART
COMMUNITY AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE DOWNTOWN
COMMUNITY ART SCENE

by

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A PROPOSAL

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Abstract

As a member of the First Friday ARTWalk (FFAW) planning committee, the focus is to promote the arts in our community, specifically in the downtown core of Eugene, as a way to revitalize the area. Sponsored by the Lane Arts Council, this monthly event brings together the community through an appreciation of the arts and local artists. Working with local galleries and arts organizations, the First Friday ARTWalk has re-emerged over the last five years as a popular venue. As with many organizations, the planning team comprises of committed volunteers, who work in various art worlds within our community and have succeeded in maintaining a level of consistency in showcasing quality experiences.

During the planning process, it was disclosed that many community members felt disconnected between downtown and the University of Oregon community. What are the barriers that prevent art patrons from visiting the university arts community? What can be done for the community to feel part of the university arts community? Through research, these and other questions could be answered in order to establish a connection between these two sites.

One idea that emerged is to present a special ARTWalk in the University Community as a bridge between the University and the downtown community art scene. Presenting the opportunity to the University community will require organization, diplomacy, and an understanding of the needs of the arts community in the university environment as well as the community at large. If successful, this special ARTWalk would take place in 2006.

Promoting the Arts in the Community of Eugene, OR

The promotion and implementation of an arts experience in the community of Eugene and outlying areas requires passion, flexibility and perseverance to see a project through to a successful completion, the ability to be clear on a vision and communicate effectively with all stakeholders involved in an arts project so that it remains meaningful, and knowing the importance of building and sustaining community. A network of artists, art patrons and supporters values the relevance of art in our culture and participates in events that honor our cultural heritage and local talent. Community leaders, city government, and organizations have provided support in promoting the arts and the outdoors. In 2005, the Eugene City Council approved the Jacobs Gallery's funding request of \$30,000 to help offset the operational expenses of promoting their exhibits and continuing collaborations with other arts organization. The City Council and Mayor also proclaimed Eugene to be the "Greatest City of the Arts and Outdoors." (Neevel, 2005) The climate for building community through the arts was further illustrated in an article about the arts thriving despite constraints. (Jordan)

The beauty of building community through the arts allows ongoing collaborations among various art worlds to



Art Walk Stop at the Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts (DIVA), 2005
UO Arts & Administration Program – STPA Photo Gallery

produce meaningful art programs and exhibits. In an "arts town" such as Eugene/Springfield, there are many examples of establishing a culture of the arts. (*Arts Towns*) A large number of citizens are involved in the arts and participate in events such as the year-round First Friday ARTWalk, the summer art festivals, the Art and the Vineyard, the Country Fair, the Lane County Fair, and other festivals that celebrate local artists and craftspeople, are sponsored by arts

organizations and individual donors. Local cafés regularly exhibit art for sale, which adds aesthetic value to the establishments and cultural pride.

Cultural pride is also reflected in the abundant public art displayed throughout the City. Every piece of public art tells a story about our history and what the community values, and helps the observer feel a sense of belonging and community spirit.

The ARTWalk Experience

The First Friday ARTWalk (FFAW) has been a program of the Lane Arts Council (LAC) for over 25 years. A committee of artists and arts advocates meet monthly to plan the ARTWalks, and LAC staff implements the program. The First Friday ARTWalk takes place on the first Friday of every month, year-round, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Approximately five galleries or art venues are highlighted each month. The walks vary and are mapped in an orderly fashion. This first Friday event gives the community an opportunity to appreciate the visual arts as part of their pre-weekend activities, and the start time allows the community to arrive directly from their workplace and recreate in the downtown Eugene area, adding vitality to an otherwise inactive downtown. The walk officially ends at 7:30 p.m. so that participants may remain in the downtown area to enjoy fine dining and performing arts venues.



Art Walk to Eugene Galleries, 2005
UO Arts & Administration Program – STPA Photo Gallery

The First Friday ARTWalk is a venue that provides education and family fun to seeing the art in local galleries and public spaces, while maintaining the vitality of downtown Eugene. The art venues are generally located within a five-block radius of downtown Eugene. The ARTWalk host(s) and participants walk en masse to the various art venues (that are usually located inside). Many local businesses stay open for this

event. Presenters and gallery hosts provide appetizers and refreshments, insights and information on specific exhibits.

Enhancing the ARTWalk Experience

Periodically, a survey is given to patrons to determine the relevance of the First Friday ARTWalk and other art programs. Among the data that is reflected in surveys and informal discussions are comments by community members of a desire to experience a walk through the University of Oregon community during the spring or summer months, to become familiar with what is being offered in the University galleries and museums.

Rationale

When the ARTWalk first began many years ago, the focus was specifically on promoting galleries and arts activities in downtown Eugene. As a policy matter, the Lane Arts Council will continue and focus the First Friday ARTWalk as a program that was designed for downtown Eugene and expand by instituting this program into other areas, not change and re-locate the original program, but move forward and grow with the success. Culturally, Eugene is striving to live up to the newfound reputation of being the greatest city of the arts and outdoors.(Jordan) Its patrons understand that immediate and ongoing investment in the arts (and outdoors) would ensure a healthy community worthy of its proclamation, and economic strength to reinvest in projects that enhance quality of life. In spite of financial constraints, community members support the arts by attending cultural events, and help in providing quality visual arts experiences.

Therefore, the FFAW Planning Committee is enthusiastic to the idea of having a "prelude" ARTWalk on the First Thursday of the month, tentatively scheduled for April (6) for the University Community. According to executive director Andrew Toney, it was felt that this approach would meet their dual need of keeping the First Friday ARTWalk as a downtown

Eugene event and serving as a bridge to the larger Lane County community by providing unique and unusual (non-First Friday) ARTWalks. “The goal is to grow and diversify our audience.”

(Toney, 2006)

As in many arts programming, decisions are made between broadening and deepening the audience base. According to Derrick Chong’s research, four major marketing challenges affect promotion of the arts – attendance stimulation, audience development, membership development, and fund-raising. (Chong, 2002) It would seem that an arts organization would need to broaden and deepen the audience base simultaneously in order to provide a satisfying arts experience. Attendance participation should progress to audience and membership development, with the hope of forming a stronger bond, and then to receive annual giving.

During the planning process, it was disclosed that some community members felt a disconnect between downtown and the University of Oregon community. What are the barriers that prevent art patrons from visiting the University area? Many say there is too much traffic on the streets toward the University community (i.e., 13th and 18th Streets, Franklin Blvd.) Walking down 13th Street is noisy, uncomfortable, with too few interesting things to see. Many have also expressed anxiety in finding parking.

These and other perceived barriers would need to be addressed when inviting the community to an unfamiliar neighborhood. What can be done for the community to feel part of the university arts community?



13th Avenue Shops near the University of Oregon

One idea that emerged is to present a special ARTWalk in the University Community, as a bridge between the University and the downtown community art scene. Presenting the opportunity to the University community will require

organization, diplomacy, and an understanding of the needs of the arts community in the university environment as well as the community at large.

“By hosting a First Thursday ARTWalk for example, allows us to share the ARTWalk Program with a new audience and help promote the ART that is in the area,” noted Toney, “It is true some (art patrons) may be slightly surprised by the announcement of an additional ARTWalk and have to choose one or the other, but we are opening up this program to a whole new audience in the campus area and hope to captivate a more diverse crowd.” (Toney, 2006) The Lane Arts Council believes that the University community ARTWalk is a wonderful idea that should take place and is partnering with the author to create a successful event. However, this is not a new idea. The University community has hosted art walks over the years. On Saturday, October 11, 1997, Eugene arts critic Fred Crafts and Arts Walk crew led the first Campus arts walk. On this particular walk, they visited eight art groups in the visual and performing arts on the University of Oregon campus. Crafts had commented on the opportunity to “discover some of the many cultural treasures to be found at the museums, in the galleries and on the stages of the university campus.” (Crosiar, 1997)

Research Question

Will the community at large support and participate in a special First Thursday ARTWalk in the University community on April 6, 2006? And will the University galleries be receptive to hosting and presenting the art displayed? If yes, how should this ARTWalk be organized to ensure success?

Method

A successful event requires active participation of all stakeholders, beginning with an introduction of an arts walk concept with members of the art worlds in the University community, and a formal invitation to arts enthusiasts to participate in the planning and/or

implementation of this fun program. There may be members who have previously participated in a University arts walk, who can share the history and provide insights in producing a successful event.

After initial written communications, face-to-face meetings of stakeholders would need to take place to continue the dialogue and become familiar with this concept and assigned roles. This would also be a time to become acquainted with the managers of galleries in the University community, learn about each member's goals and objectives within their art worlds, begin to plan the routes for each gallery visit, and identify key points of interest. It is during this stage where the level of interest is gauged. If there is positive energy around this concept, clear objectives that are mutually beneficial would be presented and resources would be available to satisfactorily support it – the main ingredients of a successful production.

An evaluation of the program would be needed to determine the best course of action in coordinating an art walk that is inclusive and accessible, that complements the mission of the sponsoring organization(s), and provides a welcoming introduction of the university community and the benefits of utilizing reliable public transportation, which ties nicely with the event's co-sponsor.

The Lane Transit District (LTD) has graciously offered bus shuttles at a substantial discount in support of the concept of being the bridge that links Downtown to the heart of the University community. Their participation would complement their mission to promote the virtues of utilizing public transportation and highlight its convenient transit stations. At designated times, art patrons would be bused from the Hult Center to certain stops in the University community. Afterwards, art patrons will be given a free bus coupon to ride on any LTD bus to other destinations after the special First Thursday ARTWalk. A local artist and

business owner is considering sponsoring the transportation piece of this special ARTWalk program.

Once a consensus is reached and a date is secured, other stakeholders would need to be contacted to make a formal request for permission to utilize public space. Specifically, permission must be made to the Hult Center for the use of the parking inlet on 7th Street for the LTD buses that would be waiting to take the art patrons to the University community, and to the University Public Safety Department for permission for the LTD bus(s) to drive down 13th Street from Kincaid Street to Agate Street to 15th Street, to University Street, then exit.

The Lane Arts Council has agreed to assist in ensuring a successful event, including sending out press releases and noting the "special event" whenever appropriate on its website and publications, and working to coordinate any details with the coordinator. Sponsors of this event would be featured on all promotional materials and publications. Promotional materials would be designed, and publicity efforts coordinated to ensure a well-publicized event.

Findings

A written introduction of the ARTWalk concept was made on January 5, 2006 to the following managers and institutions, and other stakeholders:

- Robert Canaga, Opus6ix
- Deb Carver, Knight Library
- Heidi Durden, Lane Arts Council
- Adam Howard, Adell McMillan and Buzz Aperture Galleries
- Jocelyn MacAuley, Jacobs Gallery
- Judi Pruitt, Museum of Natural & Cultural History
- Angie Sifuentez, Lane Transit District
- Andrew Toney, Lane Arts Council
- Rebecca Tonkin, Jacobs Gallery
- David Turner, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art

- Dom Vetri, Knight Law School
- Casey Wanlass, LaVerne Krause Gallery

The majority expressed interest in pursuing the concept of a special university art walk and in a later communication, open to holding a first Thursday art walk on April 6. However, full participation was desired to move forward on the target date. Due to time constraints, a meeting was not yet scheduled to discuss the goals and objectives or whether there would be full participation on April 6. This endeavor requires more than just being open to receive visitors and there are many aspects to this planning that would require your valuable input. Therefore, it would be unrealistic to coordinate all this effort in time for a first Thursday in April ARTWalk.

The next step would be to schedule a meeting to discuss this program under consideration, share each other's goals and objectives within our art worlds and identify mutual key points of interest. This would also be an opportunity to become more acquainted with the galleries in the University community.

The Lane Arts Council and the Lane Transit District supports this project and are willing to help coordinate a special First Thursday ARTWalk in the University art community whenever the community is ready. Once a date has been identified, contact must be made to the following stakeholders to make a formal request for permission to utilize public space:

- Laura Niles, The Hult Center of the Performing Arts
- Lt. Herb Horner, University Public Safety

Conclusion

Producing a successful event such as a special First Thursday ARTWalk of the University Community requires participation of all stakeholders and a well-organized format that is appealing to art patrons and hosts. Foremost consideration should be in cultivating and

maintaining meaningful and cooperative relationships with all members of the arts community and continually initiate dialogue to what can be achieved as a community. Creating an environment of inclusiveness promotes open dialogue where ideas can emerge that would enhance a cultural experience. As noted in Doug Blandy’s book *Art in a Democracy*, “democracy will continue in a community only as long as the mature members act personally and through social and cultural institutions to prepare children and youth to be competent members of the community.” (Blandy, 1987)

Regardless of how good an idea, if key stakeholders do not embrace it, the idea may not come to fruition. Or, sometimes an idea is not yet ready to take shape. In either case, one must have faith to allow an idea to come about in its own time (if it is meant to be) with the intention that the outcome will benefit the community and strengthen our respective art worlds. Good planning is democracy in action.

The Eugene/Springfield community is blessed to have so many aspiring and established artists and art leaders - the “creative class” – who work in the community “in the spirit of collaboration, cooperation and a shared vision.” (Jordan, 2004) Based on Richard Florida’s research on the rise of the creative class, our community has many of the characteristics that distinguish a “creative class” including being a place open to differences and acceptance of diversity and alternative lifestyles. Creative-minded people enjoy a mix of influences, and stimulating, dynamic places with high levels of cultural interplay. They favor indigenous street-level culture – cafes, sideway musicians, galleries, and bistros – where it is hard to draw the line between performers and spectators. Creative class people value interesting music venues, neighborhood art galleries, performance spaces, and theaters, and they value active outdoor recreation. Above all, the creative class “craves real experiences in the real world.” (Florida, 2002)

It is expected that presenting a Special First Thursday ARTWalk in the University arts community as a bridge between the University and the Downtown community Art Scene will take place and be well received. Over the years, the University arts community has participated in arts walks and art openings that brought the community together. (Crosiar, 2001) It is simply a matter of who is willing to organize it and when. People have risen to the challenge of presenting meaningful arts experiences - all for the love of the arts and the outdoors.

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