

MONOGRAPHS

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ARTS PROGRAMS THAT REVITALIZED A DOWNTOWN: TUCSON, A CASE STUDY

by Dian Magie, Executive Director, Tucson/Pima Arts Council

"If one traveled downtown three years ago in search of entertainment — or any viable art scene — that misguided person would have found fewer moving bodies than at the city morgue. Yet, the Tucson Pima Arts Council, along with the Downtown Development Corporation, has completed what pessimists said could never happen: the restoration of downtown Tucson.

In just over a year, the sidewalks have been redone in red brick, artists have moved in, shops are springing up regularly and, on some Saturday nights, the once lonely fun seeker can find colorful dancers and all kinds of musicians on the street, and in the restaurants and art galleries."

April 27, 1989, Tucson newspaper article

After the first year of Tucson Arts District arts programming, the change in the downtown was evident. Five years later, it is difficult to find available retail space. The programs of the Tucson Arts District revitalized a retail-abandoned downtown, and brought residents and visitors back into the center of town. The arts were the catalyst for this successful rebirth involving City of Tucson support for two components: development and major support of arts facilities for both the large institutions and expansion arts, and support for Arts District programming that brought life back to the streets and buildings surrounding these facilities. This *Monograph* outlines three Arts District programs that provided the major ingredients for the rebirth of the downtown: Phantom Art Galleries, the Arts District Residences, and Downtown Saturday Night.

To place these programs in context, a short description of the Tucson downtown in 1988 is helpful. Like many cities, Tucson's historic city center, once the hub of the



city's social and economic life, by the mid-1970s was virtually abandoned by retail business. By 1988, many of these storefronts were boarded up, while trash and debris collected around doorways. The streets were dark at night, and weekends were especially desolate.

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The existing activity in the 1988 downtown related to two factors — weekday workers in government and banking (mostly in offices above the retail) and artists who had moved into many of the low-rent spaces once occupied by retail. City workers did not remain or return to the city center after work hours. Homeless were seen in all parts of the downtown, and litter was everywhere.

The City Council recognized that the arts were one of Tucson's strongest resources and decided to build on that. Tucson, with a population of 440,000, rivals most major U.S. cities in arts opportunities. It is home to professional companies in theater (Arizona Theatre Company), opera (Arizona Opera), and a symphony (Tucson Symphony Orchestra), and second home to the state ballet (Ballet Arizona). In addition to the Tucson Museum of Art, located in the Arts District, major museums and collections are found at the University of Arizona. The University of Arizona Museum of Art and the Center for Creative Photography are located on the 38,000-student campus. This was the icing on the cake, if cake can be an analogy for the multitude of expansion arts organizations and individual artists that call Tucson home.

There are major institutions and professional companies, mid-level arts organizations and small, ethnic and expansion arts organizations in every discipline area. Arts audiences have their choice of professional theatre in a 650-seat house, experimental theatre in a 65-seat house, and several options in between. Add to this mix the incredible cultural diversity and cultural history of the community.

In 1986 the Tucson City Council committed support for cultural facilities. The facility support involved the adaptive reuse of two historic buildings in the downtown, the 1920's Temple of Music and Art into a theatre complex (650-seat main house, 120-seat cabaret theatre, rehearsal space, restaurant, and small gallery), and a Catholic Church built before 1920 into a performing space for expansion arts organizations. In addition, major renovations were made to the Leo Rich Theater, which is

a 450-seat performing arts space, and the 2,200-seat Music Hall, both located in the Community Center. The funding for this major arts expansion was a part of a large sale/leaseback of the city's debt-free convention center that includes an 8,000-seat arena. The bulk of the funding was for an addition of an exhibition hall at the convention center. The arts facilities were \$4.2 million of the \$28 million sale/leaseback package. These facilities are all within four blocks of each other.

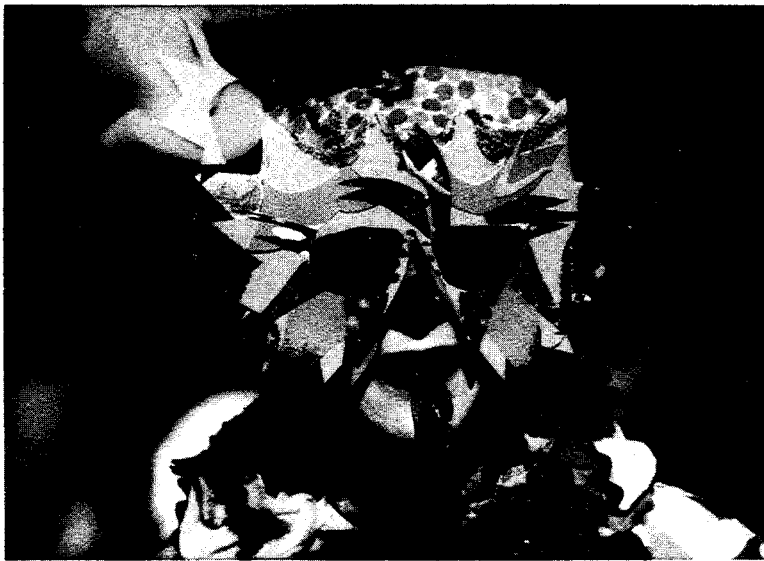
The support for the **programs** began with the June, 1988, Tucson City Council adoption of *Urban Design, Development and Management Strategies for the Tucson Arts District: Findings, Opportunities and Implementation* (Project for Public Spaces, New York/Seattle, June, 1988), a privately funded study for the creation of an Arts District. A transient occupancy (hotel-motel) surcharge of one dollar per room per night was passed in June, 1988, by the City Council to support the arts and arts district. In the first year, this surcharge provided \$1.4 million. The City Council passed a \$1 million budget for the arts, \$387,500 for the first year of the Arts District and \$612,500 (up from \$550,000 the previous fiscal year) for programs of the Tucson/Pima Arts Council. These Arts Council programs included grants to arts organizations (over half the funding), administration of the City's Percent for Art program, and operation of an arts channel included in the cable franchise agreement with the City.



The \$387,500 Arts District budget for the first fiscal year beginning July 1, 1988, was divided between the Downtown Development Corporation (DDC), an economic development not-for-profit organization, and the not-for-profit Tucson/Pima Arts Council. DDC developed Arts District programs that related to retail recruitment, economic development, and major property purchases. The Arts Council administered programs relating to the arts and reported back to the City Council on the full program. Both organizations provided existing administrative support so that initial funding could go directly into programs rather than the duplicating existing office operations and administration.

Arts programs developed in the first year by the Tucson/Pima Arts Council included the Phantom Arts Gallery, the Arts District Artist Residency Program, Downtown

Saturday Night, and the development of a visioning image (more than a logo) for the Arts District. A staff person, Patty White, joined the Arts Council in August, 1988, to develop these programs, along with many additional "in-kind" hours of administra-



Patty White, now Director of McCall Arts and Humanities Council, McCall, Idaho, leading first Arts District Children's parade, 1989.

tive support from the Arts Council by the Executive Director and other Arts Council program directors and secretarial staff. After an initial 18-month incubation period, the Tucson Arts District Partnership, a new not-for-profit spun off in January, 1990, for the purpose of providing oversight for all Arts District programs, both arts and economic development. Representatives of the Arts Council and Downtown Development Corporation have appointed seats on the board of the new organization, thus providing continuity and ongoing collaborations.

This *Monograph* looks at the start-up of the three arts programs in the initial 18 months of the Arts District

development. The challenges associated with the success and expansion of these programs (such as traffic and crowd control, escalating property values, etc.) can be provided by the Tucson Arts District Partnership, which administered the maturation of these programs and developed new programs for the Arts District.

THE PHANTOM ART GALLERY

The concept of the Phantom Art Gallery is simple. It is to place temporary art exhibitions in vacant storefronts. Phantoms act as a bridge between inactivity and a viable tenant. In addition to creating visual interest for those passing by, both on foot and in cars, the spaces provide artists with a valuable opportunity to display their work. Perhaps the most appreciated feature of the program, however, is cleaning and lighting these spaces. A block once dark with boarded-up or graffiti-filled windows is transformed by Phantom Galleries into a luminous attractive space, changing the perception of the street from vacant and dangerous to active and interesting.

In November 1991, three years after the first Downtown Saturday Night and the first opening of a Phantom Gallery, the City of Tucson Economic Development office completed a survey of 112 pedestrian-level downtown businesses, representing 1,105 full-time and 393 part-time employees. The survey found:

- 26 businesses had opened in the location in last 3 years
- 54% said they had increased sales volume within past 3 years
- 53% said they had made renovations within the last 3 years with a total average cost of renovations, \$105,272

The Phantom takes its name from an earlier artist space in Tucson and the fact that the gallery is temporary, moving to another location if retail rents the space. The concept was inspired by the “guerilla” spaces in abandoned filling stations and other spaces developed by Richard Kashalek of the Museum of Contemporary Art in downtown Los Angeles in the mid-1980s.

A total of \$12,061 was spent during the first fiscal year of the program (eight months of actual operation, after a four-month start-up), excluding the staff salary and any administrative expense such as telephone, office, bookkeeping, duplicating, etc., provided by the Arts Council as in-kind support for the program. The expense for cities beginning this program will depend on support for the administration, the size and condition of buildings, real estate market conditions, and cooperation of city officials and building owners — and of course, inflation.

The quality of the work of community artists may also play a role in the success or acceptance of the program. Artistic quality may be measured differently from city to city. The fact that Tucson has more than 800 visual artists living within the county with no community gallery and very little exhibition space was an advantage for the Phantom program. The quality of the work in the early Phantoms rivaled that of gallery exhibits and provided an opportunity to display contemporary works in video and installation art.

From November 1, 1988, until November 1, 1989, the Phantom Art Gallery program had cleaned up and occupied 13 retail spaces and exhibited the work of 39 artists. Three of the spaces were replaced by retail during that period. Four years later, all but one of these spaces are occupied by retail. Between five and seven spaces were open at any given time, with the exception of July and August, when cooling costs in Tucson were prohibitive.

Building conditions, as well as artist requirements, resulted in two types of exhibition spaces: window display spaces and regular walk-in gallery spaces. Both were set up with electrical timers which lit the space until midnight.

Essential to the success of the program is a staff person having a background in visual arts and a knowledge of professional installation of work and willingness to

Asked which of the services/programs listed had been valuable in assisting their business, respondents replied:

- 51% Arts District Programs
- 29% Ronstadt Transit Center
- 13% Trolley
- 10% Downtown Loan Programs
- 9% Assistance with City Permits, Regulations, Codes
- 8% Relocation Information
- 6% Small Business Development Workshops
- 2% Other

expend extraordinary time and energy to assure success. This the Arts Council found in Patty White. Other professional qualities that go with the job are exceptional people skills in order to work with artists, to convince property owners to participate, and to work with city inspectors who must approve the building for occupancy.

Other steps necessary for launching the Phantom Program included identifying an insurance carrier for the artwork to be displayed (Huntington T. Block Insurance was used by the Arts Council), developing a process for selecting artists, recruiting buildings for the program, and developing the necessary forms for all aspects of the program.

Recruiting and preparing the initial spaces for the Phantom Program was very labor-intensive. Owners had to be convinced that providing the space rent-free, with a 30-day notice to vacate, would be in their best interest. Next, city building inspectors had to approve the building for electrical service and for occupancy, which most often determined whether the Phantom would be open to the public or a window-only display. Patty White worked with an electrician to install needed lighting fixtures in order to provide professional gallery lighting for work, and which also could be transferred to a new space when the building rented. Negotiations with the local utility resulted in waived hookup fees and arranged for electrical billing for the spaces.

Artists provided sweat-labor including cleaning, painting and/or patching of inside walls (the Phantom Program paid for paint and supplies), the installation of the exhibit, and responsibility for staffing any walk-in galleries through regular posted hours. Considering the graffiti and accumulation of trash in some of the spaces, this was no small project. The Phantom Gallery budget paid for the necessary content and liability insurance and provided promotion for the program through flyers. Arts Council staff prepared press releases and provided the personal contact with media representatives.

A combination of a modest budget, supportive artists, and an experienced staff person, combined with arts council in-kind administrative support, can transform the vacant retail of any downtown through a Phantom Gallery Program. Combined with other programs such as the Downtown Saturday Night, and artist residency program,

Asked to list the top three advantages with doing business in the downtown:

- 39% listed downtown revitalization and low rent

- 35% listed Arts District Programs

- 34% listed proximity to government/business center

the downtown will spring back to life, with the result that Phantom Galleries will disappear altogether as retail moves back into the downtown.

The following is the 1988 budget for the initial opening with notations:

\$ 88	city occupancy permits on four buildings
\$ 308	cleaning supplies
\$ 369	electrician to bring electricity up to code and install lighting timers and gallery light fixtures where needed (these light fixtures were moved to another space if the building rented to retail)
\$ 84	utilities for electricity to light spaces until midnight each night the first month; monthly electrical bills varied with size of space, and with whether the space was walk-in or window only, from \$19.09 to \$64.58
\$ 75	services of professional window cleaner one time
\$ 535	banners (this was a one time cost as these were moved when ability to use space ended)
\$ 125	liability insurance, rider on existing \$1 million policy
\$ 350	contents insurance (monthly payment for annual policy); Huntington T. Block Insurance provided coverage in the amount of \$28,850 for "fine arts on exhibit" at the various locations per the itinerary on file, with a \$250 deductible per loss (and not per item)
\$ 14	postage

\$1,948	total expense for initial opening of four Phantom Galleries

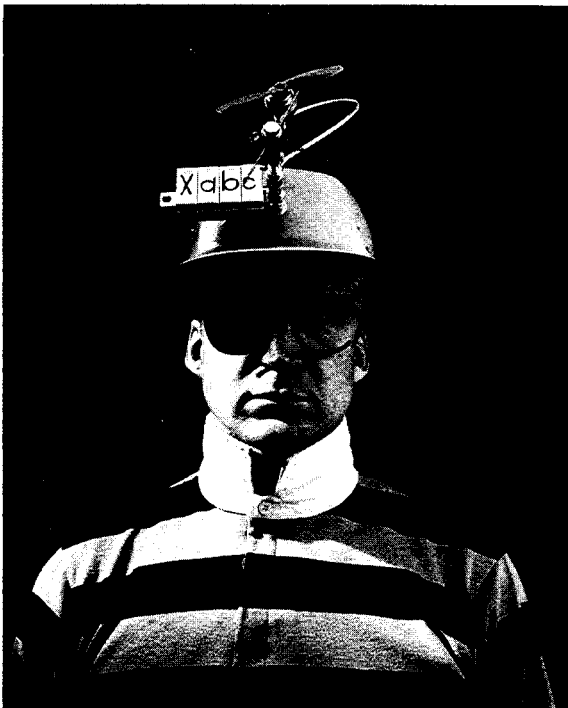
Examples of several forms used in the initial program are available by calling NALAA at 202.371.2830, including:

- Exhibiting artist agreement forms
- Sample of information needed on buildings and artwork for insurance purposes
- Sample of flyers placed in windows of Phantom Galleries

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Arts councils across the country offer arts education programs that involve artist residencies in schools. Arts District residencies were developed to define new ways

to add to the vitality of the Arts District. A Request for Proposals was distributed to visual, literary and performing artists soliciting proposals outlining how artists would interact with the community in the Arts District over a three-month period in a \$5,000 residency program.



Ned Shaper, Kinetic & Performance Artist.
1989, Tucson Arts District Artist Residency.

A two-step selection process included a review of all proposals by a panel of artists and arts professionals to select finalists. The panel then interviewed the finalists before awarding the first Arts District Residencies. A total of 36 proposals were received for the first residency offered in 1988-89.

The first two residencies demonstrate the contemporary Tucson arts community and unique additions to the Arts District programming. Kinetic sculptor and performance artist Ned Schaper gave his first residency performance from a dumpster in the alley connecting with the main street. Schaper's work, which he describes as a demonstration about functional value of the things we throw away, consists of moving contraptions choreographed to music, poetry, and light — contraptions which become characters, costumes, and instruments of the philosophy of the artist.

A collaborative of multicultural dancers — featuring black, white, Latino, and Asian dancers — received a residency for its proposal to create a series of jazz, tap, and percussion “explosions” in high-traffic public areas of the downtown Arts District. A culminating performance downtown, entitled “Variety Is the Spice of Life,” included Oriental dances, samba, a character jazz piece, some lyrical dancing, and funky jazz.

The Arts District received extensive media coverage through these two residencies, justifying the Arts District philosophy that funding the artists rather than a large marketing budget would result in more media coverage than the same dollar amount spent in advertising.

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DOWNTOWN SATURDAY NIGHT

Downtown Saturday Night was developed to provide a mini-festival atmosphere focusing on the arts to attract people from throughout the community to the downtown on the first Saturday of each month. Today, it is held the first and third Saturday nights. Prior to development of the Tucson Arts District, the downtown was deserted on weekends, and many residents feared the area. Galleries had tried to coordinate openings but were frustrated in reaching more than the "500 faithful," as regulars were defined.

The recipe for the initial Downtown Saturday Nights was to coordinate gallery openings on the first Saturday night, encourage restaurants and existing retail to remain open, and season generously with Arts District sponsored openings in Phantom Galleries, performances by artist residency, and musical performances strategically placed to draw people from one block to the next. Then promote the package.

There were eight Downtown Saturday Nights in the first fiscal year of Arts District programming. Of the \$6,500 spent on this program, all but \$325 (for photo documentation) went directly to local performing artists. The 33 individual performers and groups performed from 7:00 - 9:00 pm and received from \$150 to \$300. The cultural diversity of the arts community provided folklorico dance groups, Norteno and Mariachi music, Native American Wailla music, and even a Scottish bagpiper. Poetry readings and performance art sprang up in hotel lobbies and restaurants.

By April, 1989 after the sixth Downtown Saturday Night, the events were covered regularly by all media. A local newspaper reported ". . . *this event draws hundreds of people to wander into galleries along Congress Street . . . People from across the city immerse themselves in this mix of old and new — this renaissance of a place once abandoned when sleazy, rough bars made the area risky to hang around. But . . . Congress Street has changed. Street musicians play classical guitar and bagpipes, and an occasional flamenco dancer graces the street. . . . You might even see some performance art — maybe a man ambling around with a tangled array of junk metal strapped to his body. You might catch a poetry reading adding to the ambiance in a gallery of local art.*"

Today . . .

November, 1992 marked four years since the first Downtown Saturday Night and first opening of a Phantom Gallery.

■ **The 1993 Tucson Arts District Partnership Downtown Shopping and Dining Guide lists 60 cafes/restaurants, 125 shops and 40 galleries.**

■ **In the last 4 years, the retail vacancy rate in the downtown has declined by nearly 50%.**

■ **City sales tax revenues for the downtown area have increased 11.7% in the last 4 years, compared to a city-wide sales tax revenue increase of 7.4%.**

The \$20,000 marketing budget during the first year was stretched with press releases. Newsletters were printed and distributed to encourage the continued collaboration of the many organizations and individuals who were involved in the study that recommended the Arts District. More than half the budget was for the development and printing of an Arts District brochure. The Arts Council wrestled with the timing of the brochure, fearing that it would create expectations that would not meet with reality if released too early. The brochure also depended on the development of an imaging package with an Arts District logo, stationery, and banners for both the Arts District and the Phantom program. Twenty-eight professional design firms responded to a Request For Qualifications for the \$5,000 contract to develop the design elements for a unique Tucson Arts District image.

The critical philosophy of the Arts Council in early Downtown Saturday Nights was that artists, both visual and performing, should benefit from city funding used to revitalize the downtown as a "City of the Arts." Artists should be paid and treated as professionals. Free performances in exchange for "recognition" would be building the Arts District on the back of the artists.

The conviction that the media would respond with feature articles and prime-time feature stories proved true. Marketing dollars were stretched in the first year by using public service announcements and press releases followed by personal contact by Arts District staff.

The concept behind Downtown Saturday Night — the use of coordinated gallery openings to draw people back to the downtown — is used in many cities under a variety of names. In Scottsdale, Arizona, the upscale "Thursday Night Art Walk" attracts patrons to champagne openings of galleries representing nationally recognized artists.

There is a warning label on this program. As crowds increase, problems not encountered in early stages surface. Some of these problems can be prevented.

When proposing this program, be sure your city has a peddlers ordinance in place — with teeth. As crowds increase, individuals will appear who are usually seen at swap meets and flea markets selling everything from t-shirts to drug paraphernalia. Trying

to pass an ordinance after the fact is difficult. The expendable income of the audience for a flea market is different from that attracted to gallery openings, specialty restaurants, and performances. At the beginning of the program, work with the city attorney to draft any ordinances needed to deal with the problems identified with a predicted success.

Restaurants are often still caught off-guard by the number of people attracted to Tucson Downtown Saturday Night and can lose their appeal when crowds are turned away because of lack of seating or when the restaurant runs out of food on a regular basis. This requires careful communication between the staff organizing the programs to alert restaurants of anticipated crowd size.

Problems encountered with any program that attracts large crowds should be anticipated and contingency and emergency plans developed for potential trouble areas such as gang activity, shoplifting, crowd control, and traffic. If Arts District funding shifts from arts programming to security measures such as off-duty police and barricades the program loses its heart and the downtown will again begin the downward cycle. ▼

Author's Notes

Patty White, the Tucson/Pima Arts Council staff person for the critical initial development of the programs outlined in this Monograph, is now the Director of the McCall Arts Council in McCall, Idaho.

Sarah Clements has been Executive Director of the Tucson Arts District Partnership since January, 1990, and continues to coordinate each of the programs outlined.

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