

New England Foundation *for the Arts*

BUILDING  
COMMUNITIES  
*through*  
CULTURE



# BUILDING COMMUNITIES *through* CULTURE

*A report on  
New England  
Foundation  
for the Arts’  
program  
**Building  
Communities  
through  
Culture***

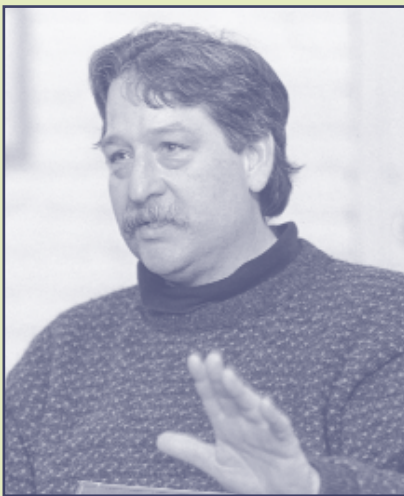
A longtime leader in fostering the arts and their presentation, New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) has a particular commitment to art-making that draws inspiration from the community, nourishes the community, and develops connections within it.

During the 1990s, NEFA and the state arts agencies (SAAs) gathered together remarkable cultural leaders working in New England—initially, to talk to them and to put them in touch with each other. Later, grants were made to individuals, identified as fellows, and to their projects.

These fellows were creating more than “finite” works of art. They were engaged in community building through their work, which, by its nature, relied on interaction with civic leaders and administrators, and involved ongoing activity. This approach gave rise to NEFA’s program, **Building Communities through Culture (BCC)**.

## “Cultural Heritage Chronicles,” Lewiston, Maine

When NEFA first began gathering information about the phenomenon of art and civic partnerships, Richard Willing, executive director of L/A Arts, and Jim Lysen, a city planner in Lewiston, had already been working together for several years. What’s more, they didn’t even regard their partnership as a phenomenon.



Lysen, 53, a Chicago native, had lived in Lewiston since the mid-1980s, when he moved there

with his wife, a writer and poet, and a native of the area. “I became the *de facto* cultural liaison between the arts agency and the city,” says Lysen.

L/A Arts, which serves Lewiston and Auburn, is the oldest local arts agency in the state. Richard Willing is just the third director in the group’s 25-year-long history. He is big on employing the arts in education—involving young people in artistic process instead of limiting them to sitting at desks.

In 1998, using a NEFA grant as partial seed money, Willing and Lysen created “Cultural Heritage Chronicles” to fire-up local kids with a pride in the history of their town—and to teach them audio and video recording skills, interviewing techniques, and the value of learning about their neighbors. The project involved 100 middle school students, six teachers, and two artists-in-residence who created

a video that showcased the history and heritage of people in five diverse Lewiston neighborhoods.

Lewiston is an old mill town of about 35,000 people. Over half its population is of French Canadian extraction; the balance are descendants of Irish, English, Greek, Eastern European and African American ancestors.

According to Lysen, the blue collar town, home of Bates College and two regional hospitals, has an amazing industrial history that few of its young people knew. They were familiar with the Bates Mill, the largest employer in town, and its pending closing, and the shameful condition of Hispanic “migrant workers” who come to work in the sprawling local egg factories. “But they didn’t know how the [1840s] Irish immigrants escaped a famine, and worked all day long digging a canal out of granite, and how that led to industrialization,” he says.

Community-generating art projects took many forms. The most effective generally involved strong leadership; collaboration with local individuals, agencies, and officials; and long-term benefits to a geographic or demographic community.

Working with the SAAs to identify notable examples, NEFA found projects ranging from an urban music center for teens, to a theater to preserve cultural heritage, to a rural art center created from an old mill building.

The fellows drew on their neighborhoods—its people and places—for inspiration, and gathered-in local artists and non-artists as participants. They asked for (and received) assistance from civic leaders, and often attained their long term involvement and collaboration. Their community-based art projects sparked connections among disparate individuals, sectors of neighborhoods, and institutions. **BCC**

### ...six stories of BCC fellows and their work

They learned about the distant past and also how during the mid-1960s, Cassius Clay knocked-out Sonny Liston in Lewiston; and how Clay (Muhammad Ali) came up for the city's bi-centennial. When they took their video cams into Lewiston's neighborhoods, they learned how in their own time, people they'd never met were living quietly and heroically. The eighth graders interviewed these men and women, and learned how to structure narratives to tell stories, and to produce video documentaries.

In addition to serving the kids and helping to knit together a community of residents, volunteers, artists,



teachers, and parents, the project salvaged local history. “There was a sense that we were losing our past,” says Lysen. “Our village elders were dying. With the ‘Cultural Heritage Chronicles,’ we were able to hold onto the community’s heritage through the stories the

kids found, and their recording and documentation.

“When kids learn that the place they live in has history and culture, they gain some pride, and are less prone to bad social influences.” **BCC**

## Why HERE? Why NOW? Is this NEW?

*It may be useful to consider these partnerships along a continuum.*

For centuries, artists and artisans have operated as part and parcel of the community, fashioning frescoes and stained glass windows for cathedrals that attracted the faithful; creating fountains, sculpture and monuments for public squares; composing everything from ditties to processions. Artisans forged lanterns, vessels and flatware. Plays, parables, and pamphlets were created and passed on verbally, in handwritten texts, and in larger distribution in the age of the printing press. The language and rituals of drum and dance were unions of art and community, as were stories handed down through oral traditions. Textile artists, who made everyday and ceremonial garments, were valued members of the community.

In the industrialized era, when social patterns were interrupted, the role of the artist-in-community changed. Art-making became a more separate and separated activity. In the U. S., during the period of westward expansion, frontier societies eventually gave rise to community concert series,

### Blackstone River Theatre, Cumberland, Rhode Island

To many, the idea of a spiffy theater devoted to live performance in the gritty region of northern Rhode Island seemed like blowin' in the wind.

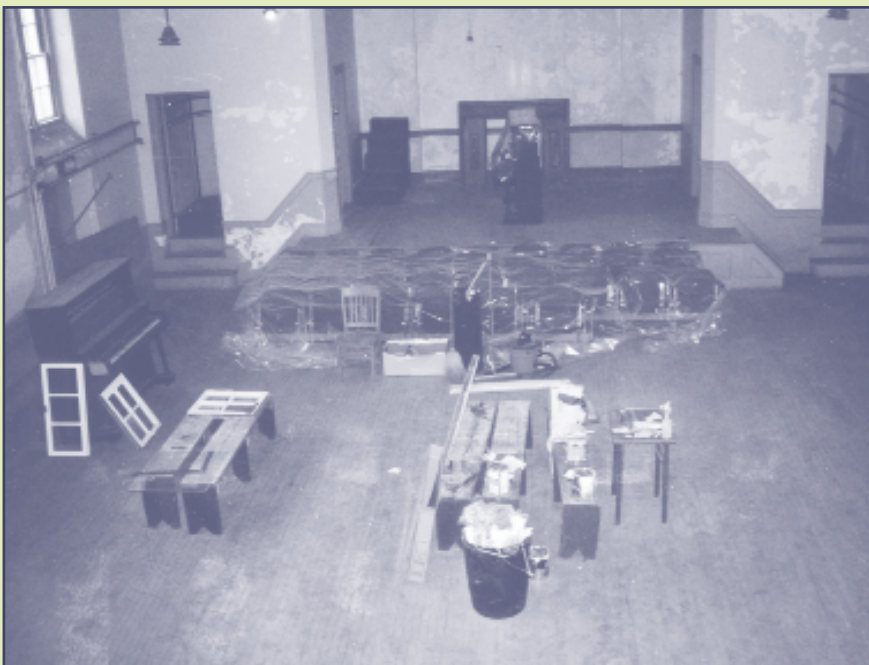
But in Cumberland, where a dilapidated old mason's hall once stood, the handsome Blackstone Valley

Theatre now occupies a restored section of the city. Its renovation was the dream of musician Russell Gusetti, a hometown boy. For four years Gusetti and local people struggled to turn the vandalized, pigeon-filled old hall into a regional theater to showcase the artistic

heritage of the Blackstone River Valley—the music, dance, and stories of the 19th century Irish, Scots, and French Canadian immigrants to northern Rhode Island.

Gusetti, 35, a member of the musical troupe, Pendragon, and his band of volunteers transformed the city-owned eyesore into a hall that today offers Celtic music, French Canadian dance, blues, jazz, troupes from Spain and Ecuador, and monthly children's programs. Everything is affordably priced.

To transform the three story 1920s-era mason's hall into a theater, Gusetti worked with the local mayor and regional tourism council to negotiate a deal. The city wiped-out the building's back taxes, provided a 15-year-lease, and did exterior work on the building. They got rid of an abandoned gas station that abutted the property and turned it into an attractive city park, and created a parking lot to serve the theater.



vaudeville touring programs, and seasonal performing arts productions that traveled throughout the territories and new states. In New England, towns tended to be more autonomous in their programming.

During the 1960s and 1970s, as grass roots activism became a more prevalent part of American culture, art—its process and product—reemerged as an agent and a tool for social change.

At the same time, the demand for equity and equality in marginalized urban and rural communities led to the emergence of community development organizations. These indigenous groups learned how to effectively organize, politicize, publicize, and petition to win economic support for their neighborhoods.

In some communities, artists and activists were the same individuals, or moved in overlapping circles. In others, artists took up community causes

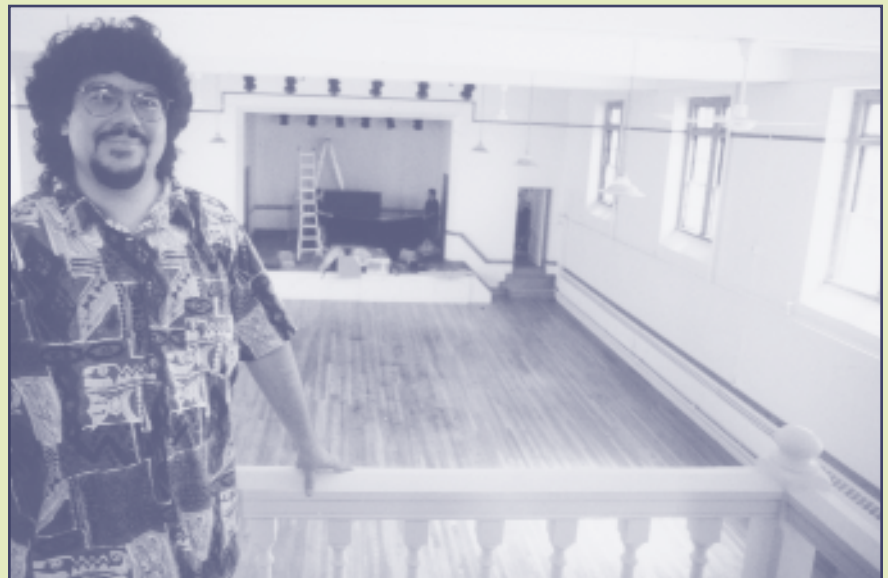


### ...six stories of BCC fellows and their work

Since July, 1996, when Gusetti and his volunteers formed a nonprofit group, they have “fundraised like crazy,” and worked every weekend on the building. Much of the restoration and conversion was done with donated labor, but the code work required professional attention—about \$250,000 for the electrical system, plumbing, and fire doors.

Gusetti—a BCC fellow along with Robert Billington, President of Blackstone Valley Tourism Council—parlayed community and NEFA support into successful applications for federal support. For the last three fiscal years, the group—with its mandate to preserve local culture—has received funding from the John Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Commission, over \$250,000 in aid.

Though the theater just opened in September, 2000, almost 2,500 people are already on the mailing



list, and attend events without even knowing the performer. “We have built up some trust,” says Gusetti. The grandchildren of Irish and Scots immigrants, and more recent Latino immigrants, show up for Celtic and Latino music, as well as jazz and blues. Everybody seems to turn out for the participatory dancing—Cajun, Irish step, contra. Quadrille, a traditional French

Canadian dance form—played by musicians in their sixties and seventies—seems particularly apt on the hall’s gleaming wooden dance floor.

The Blackstone River Theatre is preserving cultural heritage and generating community alliances. It is also providing answers for other post-industrial New England communities about the forms that development can take. **BCC**



in their work, creating partnerships in the process. Or, community activists would approach artists to develop programs beneficial to young people.

In every community where these alliances were forming, the meetings among individuals, and the meshing of concerns, were different. But confederations of artists, community activists, and civic leaders were taking shape.

During the early 1990s, with the help of the SAAs, NEFA was “on the case,” gathering information about these partnerships, though not yet making programmatic moves.

“We recognized the vitality in the nature of this work,” says Rebecca

## “Who Are My Heroes,” Waterbury, Connecticut

Once a major manufacturing center, Waterbury is another New England city struggling to make an economic transition. Conditions in the Walnut-Orange-Walsh (WOW)

Hispanic, and 20% white. At the local Walsh School that WOW children attend, reading and writing skills are substantially below those of students in the rest of the state.

American, is treasurer of the WOW Neighborhood Revitalization Zone, a neighborhood group. She has been director of the junior choir at Grace Baptist Church for 50 years. Chosen as BCC art and civic fellows in 1995, the women became allies and friends and created a series of projects—including “Who Are My Heroes”—that fused reading and writing with community based art programs.

“The idea came out of Millie’s clear goals for her neighborhood association,” says Galbraith. “I remember her saying, ‘I want to create a community cultural center in my neighborhood where kids are engaged in the arts.’ ”

Paris attributes the program’s creation to Galbraith. “We loved each other, and enjoyed each other,” she says simply. “We worked harmoniously. We seemed to have the same kind of mind.”



community are particularly bleak. Over a third of its 6,500 residents live below the poverty line, 3,500 are under the age of 19, and 50% are single parents. The community is 60% African American, 20%

Marie Galbraith and Mildred Paris are longtime local residents. Galbraith, 54, who is white, is director of the Mattatuck Museum, which specializes in regional history and art. Paris, 77, who is African

Blunk, Deputy Director of NEFA. “Art efforts in combination with civic activity were powerful. The question was, could we help these people—artists and cultural leaders working in their communities—become more visible?”

Could they be identified, encouraged, and given strategic assistance? Could they be connected with each other, empowered by the knowledge that others were engaged in similar work? Could a regional movement of artists working in collaboration with community leaders emerge? Could the artists and civic leaders, working together, encourage involvement, nurture emerging local leaders, and create cohesion and economic growth? **BCC**

*“Art efforts in combination with civic activity [are] powerful.”*

**Rebecca Blunk,  
Deputy Director  
of NEFA**

### ...six stories of BCC fellows and their work

The two minds designed a language and visual arts project that met in “the annex,” a bare-bones community building in the WOW neighborhood. Children ages six to ten were introduced to heroes in their own culture—mainly African

American and Latino—whom they had not heard of at home or in school.

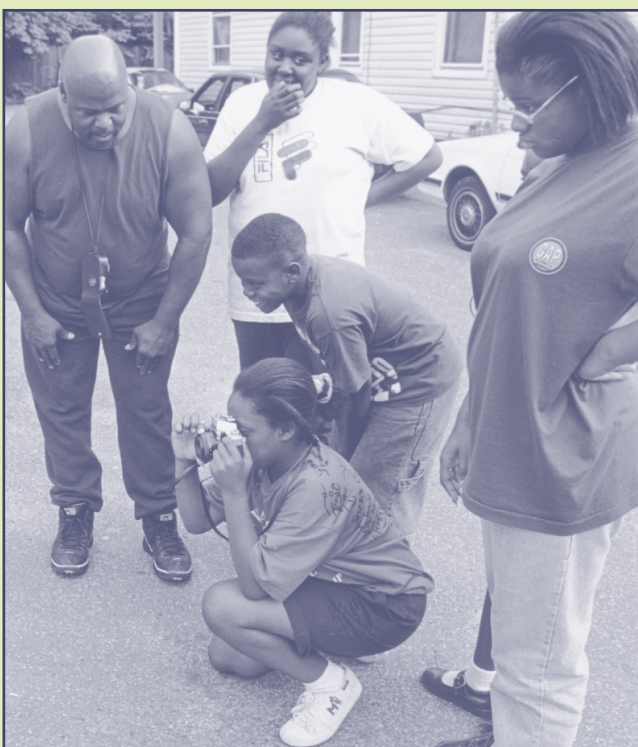
All the while—through sessions enriched by mask making, story telling, musical performance, painting and dance—artists, teachers, and volunteer tutors in the program pushed the books, immersing the children in their heritage. “We would talk about people like Cab Calloway, and what made him a hero,” says Paris. Frederick Douglas, Harriet Tubman, Venture Smith, Cinque, Sojourner Truth, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Jaime Escalante, William

Carlos Williams, and Roberto Clemente were also on the list.

During the school year, the program met two or three times a week, with field trips to museums, theaters, and the library; always focused on the study of African American and Hispanic heroes, and looping art activities with reading and writing.

The project, which was continually assessed by educators, not only raised children’s expectations and improved their language skills, but forged a relationship among the WOW community, the Mattatuck Museum, and other institutions.

Recently, the Mattatuck Museum curated “At Home in Waterbury,” a community-based exhibition drawing on five local ethnic neighborhoods. There is also discussion of re-opening a long closed branch of the city library that would serve the WOW community. It has more readers now. **BCC**



## BRIEF HISTORY *of an* IDEA

### *Broadening our Vision: Connecting the Arts and Community Development*

In **1993**, NEFA initiated a two-day retreat, “Broadening our Vision: Connecting the Arts and Community Development,” held in Madison, CT, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (CDCs). The retreat, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Rockefeller Foundation, included cultural leaders and representatives from community development corporations. Proceedings of the precedential event were published in a resource-intensive, 65-page-booklet, which included essays by participants such as Mitchell Sviridoff, former President of Local Initiatives Support Corporation “*What Do We Mean by Community Development?*”; A. B. Spellman, Acting Deputy Chair National Endowment for the Arts “*What Do We Mean by the Arts?*”; Liz Lerman, Founder and Artistic Director, The Dance Exchange “*Arts and the Survival of Community*”; and Malcolm Walls, Director of Community and Cultural Affairs, Mississippi Action for Community Education “*Bridging Community Development and the Arts: The Delta Blues Festival*”. An outcome of this conference was the development of

### ▼ *The Vermont Arts Exchange, North Bennington, Vermont*

It didn’t happen quickly, neatly, or in a straight line, but in essence, Patricia Pedreira and her husband Matthew Perry created a regional art center from an old ball bearing factory. Ten years ago, the couple was renting a single studio in a crumbling North Bennington

own work and offering classes, including those for special needs students and survivors of trauma. After a few years, in 1993, the building’s owner declared bankruptcy. Though in terrible condition, the factory, known as Sage Street Mill, and its site, were of historic

constructed. Over the years, it had been everything from a manufacturer of furniture to a toy factory.

The space was huge—20,000 square feet, and the community didn’t want the building destroyed. Pedreira and her husband knew that artists were desperate for space. A series of remarkable events followed, a combination New England barn raising, prolonged and complex church supper, and leveraging deals that would do Wall Street proud. The town came up with a tax stabilization plan and loaned funds. Pedreira and Perry pieced together a “patchwork quilt” of funding—local, state, and federal; public and private—to create the Vermont Arts Exchange (VAE). Completed in 1997, this hive of artistic and community activity combines studio space for working artists and an array of exhibitions, courses, and workshops for a student population that ranges in age from three to ninety-seven. Local artists



building, the property of “a slum landlord,” as Pedreira puts it. She was an art therapist, her husband a visual artist. They were doing their

significance to the town. During the 19th century a wooden textile mill had occupied the site. It burned down, and a brick mill building was

NEFA's **BCC** program, which supported regional arts and community building efforts from 1995–2000.

By **1994**, culturally-based programs in arts and community development were taking hold. Two strong examples were based in New England: The Connecticut Commission on the Arts' Urban Artists Initiative started in 1992 as the Inner City Cultural Development Program; and the Massachusetts Cultural Council's YouthReach program, launched in 1994. As a regional arts organization—operating across geographic lines, and among all six states—NEFA was well-situated for facilitating and encouraging the integration of arts and community development.

In **1995**, working with the SAAs, NEFA identified a series of “arts/non-arts” community projects. Sites were evaluated for evidence of leadership, collaboration, and long-term benefits. In fourteen communities, cultural and civic leaders were nominated as **BCC** fellows—one cultural fellow



...six stories of BCC fellows and their work

lead workshops in everything from boat building to papermaking, rug hooking, ceramics, and sculpture. After-school and youth programs are offered, including opportunities for children of low income, a hallmark of VAE projects from the start.

In 1995, when Pedreira was invited to join the BCC program as a cultural fellow, VAE was at a critical

juncture. The organization had just received a Community Block Grant, the first such federal grant to be awarded to an arts organization in Vermont. The connections made through NEFA proved helpful, particularly the counsel provided by Rob Woolmington, Pedreira's first civic partner, who became VAE's attorney. Nate Williams of the Bennington County Regional Commission—whose children took classes at VAE—became Pedreira's second civic partner, and also provided substantial guidance and support.

Pedreira, 41, says she “isn't sure” why she and Perry have been willing to put ten years of their lives into regional cultural

deal-making. “We were possessed,” she speculates.

Fortunate for the community, the “possession” led to a second ambitious community arts partnership completed in 1999. The Vermont Arts Housing and Preservation Partnership Project is another mixed use, art making and housing combination, in this case “satellite” art centers in Bennington and North Bennington. Pedreira and Perry, whose first project had been so successful, were able to leverage various grants to raise 1.7 million. Five buildings, including two decommissioned fire stations, hold residential artist's studios, gallery and performance spaces, and low to moderate income housing.

“It's been a lot of hard work,” says Pedreira. “But it's wonderful to be part of a transformation, to leave things better. And it's clear now —art is a catalyst for economic development.” **BCC**





and one civic fellow from each site. They were chosen for their accomplishments and leadership, and also for their potential for strategic pairing and collaboration. NEFA's objective was to support and advance existing or emerging collaborations.

The **BCC** fellows represented a wide range of occupations and potential collaborations: visual artists, musicians, and arts producers; social activists, city planners, a chamber of commerce chair. Sometimes the "pairs" had worked together or knew of each other. Sometimes they were brought together through the program.

**BCC** was designed as a multi-year program to nurture civic and art partnerships, and funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the SAAs.

From **1996–1998**, the selection of fellows, awarding of planning grants, and several convenings took place. Following the awards to fellows, addi-

## Zumix, East Boston, Massachusetts

In East Boston, where 30% of the population receives public assistance, Zumix, an urban music center, works with teens and adolescents to forge familial and community ties. The center was founded in 1991 by two local residents—Madeleine Steczynski, who worked in an architecture firm, and Bob Grove, a musician who worked in computers.

"We saw that kids got into trouble

when they had nothing to do, or nothing to look forward to," says Steczynski, 37. "We thought we'd do something with music for a year, and started with a really low overhead, offering musical programs out of our living room."

The living room morphed into a vibrant art center—rented space in a one-story building with a 40' X 40' space for classes, performance and

exhibitions, and a beehive-of-an-office with computer stations. Zumix now has three full-time employees, one part-time employee who works full time, seven music teachers, one sound engineer (nominated for a Grammy award), two youth staff, one volunteer, and two interns. The agency uses music training and the fellowship of musicians to empower young people.

East Boston, a gateway city for new Bostonians—now predominantly Latino and Southeast Asian residents—is in the shadow of Logan Airport. Many of the local teenagers are at loose ends. They want to attend college but have limited skills, poor grades, and little sense of how to proceed. Music and friendship draw them to Zumix.

"Music, which they love and which I don't have to sell, brings structure and form to language, which they need in their schoolwork," notes Steczynski. The center provides



tional grants were made for planning and implementing projects. The regional convenings, held three times a year at various sites of cultural/civic activity, turned out to be a highpoint of the **BCC** program.

In **1999** the **BCC** program was evaluated by external consultants Barbara Schaffer Bacon and Pam Korza. Their report, "Future Directions for the Culture in Community Fund," was issued. Its recommendations included the holding of periodic, regional conferences to allow "an aggregate look at community building work in the region, [and to] highlight model activity, and bring in ideas from outside the region."

In **2000**, informed by the evaluation report, planning began for a major national convening in the fall of 2001, to focus on current arts and community building in New England. The convening is to include representatives from foundations, private industry, the New England state arts agencies, and key practitioners. **BCC**

*NEFA's objective was to support and advance existing or emerging collaborations.*

### ...six stories of BCC fellows and their work



musical instruction, but also encouragement, friendship, and continuity. Teachers track students' development and guide them into focused planning of their own lives.

For their part, the students produce public concerts, do municipal clean-ups, and organize mural painting projects. Zumix orchestrated Cultural Connections, a pivotal

project described as "community-wide arts engagement and empowerment" by a local social service agency. The four-year long project aimed to break through the community's isolation; to knit together some of its ethnic factions, with Zumix students as emissaries.

The school's alumni have gone on to the University of Massachusetts,

Lesley College, Bunker Hill Community College, Clark University, and the Berklee College of Music. A blighted urban neighborhood has begun to turn around, attracting city services and plans for renovation of the ancient public transit station. Real estate values have gone up. A multi-ethnic team of civic supporters has emerged, including a retired probation officer, a real estate broker, local parents, and artists. Zumix and its supporters have helped to move a community from apathy to involvement, and to generate a charged and optimistic atmosphere.

"The intersection between Zumix, civic, and community involvements has been powerful and great," says Steczynski. "There has been a shift in where the arts stand. In the beginning we were speaking different languages. Now we speak together. The arts are on the table. Business groups, health agencies, ethnic communities in East Boston—they all get it." **BCC**

## CONVENINGS: *an intensive exchange of ideas*

*“These events were where it all started to happen. Everything goes back to that initial alliance.”*

*Marie Galbraith of the Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, Connecticut*

From 1996 to 1999, ten **BCC** convenings were called. These events—each a combination retreat, focus group, workshop, seminar, think tank, culture-lab, and field trip to cultural site—were two-day events. Fellows, most of whom had not previously met, dined together, roomed together, and settled into an intensive exchange of ideas. Activities ranged from focused discussions and presentations; to strategizing toward better communication among civic, business, and arts communities; to participants’ reports on local challenges and opportunities.

The intent of these gatherings was to create a setting where individuals invested in collaborative social change could come together to share problems and solutions, good and bad experiences, and to brainstorm. The programs did not set out to find answers, but to afford dialogue among practitioners.

### ▼ The Mill Tapestry Project, Newport, New Hampshire



In another era, Patryc Wiggins and Kathy Hubert might have set forth in a covered wagon, crossed the country, and founded a new state. In a way they did that in 1997.

Wiggins, 47, grew up in Newport, N.H., and became a third generation worker at the Dorr Mill, the textile factory that has dominated the town for 130-years. During the

1980s, she left N.H., settled in San Francisco, and studied the ancient textile art used to create French tapestry. An avid reader, self-schooled in cultural anthropology, industrial history, and the arts, Wiggins returned to her town six years later; an accomplished weaver seeking a way to combine art, community work, and social change. In 1988, she began the Mill Tapestry project, a monumental work, still in progress. Woven by hand in the French tapestry manner, the 6' by 13' mural-tapestry depicts her life in the context of Newport's heritage, especially the Dorr Mill.

“I was using traditional French tapestry as a vehicle to engage the community—as a tool to accelerate understanding the root causes of our contemporary issues,” says Wiggins, looking through her windows, surrounded by the red brick mill buildings she grew up in. “Newport has all the deficits of post industrial communities, but also

certain strengths—our ethnic heritage, our work ethic.”

One night in 1995, she gave a talk about her work at a Chamber of Commerce meeting where she met Kathy Hubert, a businesswoman who grew up in Manchester, also an old mill city. Hubert was head of the Chamber of Commerce. They clicked.

In its search for fellows, NEFA found Wiggins, who suggested Hubert as a civic partner. Together the two women created a monumental event that changed the economic infrastructure of Newport, N.H., and has managed to shake up the whole state.

From 1995–1996, they developed a series of initiatives in community building through the arts that culminated in the choice of Newport as the site of the fourth New England Artist Trust Congress. They produced a sprawling,

Working in isolation, often approaching burnout, the fellows were invigorated by the time spent with peers—touring dramatically different sites that were nevertheless comparable to their own, and learning from each other. Sites in each New England state were visited.

During 1997 and 1998, six convenings were held. The gathering in East Boston in February, 1998, was typical in range and design:

*At this meeting Bruce Rossley, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of Boston, addressed the role of artist housing on revitalizing neighborhoods, an ongoing process in East Boston (Zumix site, see page 10), as well as Boston's South End, Fort Point Channel area, and Jamaica Plain neighborhoods. Choreographer Peter DiMuro led a participatory workshop on translating community stories, legends, and concerns into movement. Mark Smith of the Massachusetts Cultural Council provided intensive, down-to-earth information on MCC's evaluation process for its YouthReach Program—not only to explain that particular process but to demonstrate the need for measuring program effectiveness. The significance of qualitative and quantitative measurement was an important subtext of this meeting, as artists, administrators, and activists probed what was needed to speak a common language. **BCC***

## Fellows

*The BCC program recognized exemplary leadership, innovative collaboration, and long term benefits in community based art projects throughout New England.*

### ...six stories of BCC fellows and their work

multi-faceted four-day event, where the entire downtown served as a campus. The town common, the opera, library, banks, businesses, and social service agencies were all employed—and curated! The town-wide extravaganza was created to host the 350 conferees, but also to demonstrate the economic viability of cultural tourism.

As a result of this effort, Newport was selected by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and the New Hampshire Charitable Trust for a four-year national effort. Local philanthropists created the Economic Corporation of Newport (ECON). The group's concerns are in recognition of Wiggins' approach; in support of investment in Newport's cultural and civic institutions; with attention to heritage, environmental, economic, and educational affairs. Wiggins is director, Hubert is president. Their current major project, the renovation of Eagle Block in downtown Newport, involves the

conversion of a three-story 7,500 square foot building into a cultural activity center that integrates restaurants, retail space, a community center, and offices for start-up enterprises. "It's gone from community art to driving the economic engine," notes Wiggins.

Supported by a humanities-based grant, she continues to weave the Mill Tapestry in an open studio in Newport's public library. As it comes together, so does the town, in multiple layers and strands. **BCC**



# BCC HOST COMMUNITIES *and* FELLOWS



## **New Haven, Connecticut**

**Frances Clark**, *Arts Council of Greater New Haven*

**Mike Morand**, *Office of New Haven Affairs, Yale University*

The city of New Haven recently became actively involved in cultural planning and developed a plan to institute a program of loaned or purchased public art sculptures. The BCC fellows decided that this could be part of an ongoing community building project entitled the "Gateways Project." Well underway, the program is seeking to place public art installations in ten New Haven gateways and to conserve existing public art works.

## **Waterbury, Connecticut**

**Mildred Paris**, *Walnut-Orange-Walsh (WOW) Improvement Assoc.*

**Marie Galbraith**, *Mattatuck Museum*

The Mattatuck Museum and the WOW Neighborhood Association conducted a successful program in cultural history and dance at the PRIDE Youth Center. Fifty African American youngsters benefited from the project, which included writing workshops, lessons in art history, African American history, and African dance classes. The Mattatuck Museum, WOW, and the Silas Bronson Library also began an arts and literature program for youngsters ages 6 to 10. The project entitled, "Who are My Heroes" was a new partnership among the participating groups that the BCC fellows initiated.

## **Lowell, Massachusetts**

**Paul Marion**, *Poet*

**Clementine Alexis**, *Community Organizer*

The Flowering City Forum (FCF), a community computer network for exchange of information and ideas, was designed to advance the implementation of Lowell's 25-year-plan to improve its natural environment. The goal of FCF was to provide a tool for everyone, especially persons working in the arts. Design arts issues, landscape architecture, and other aesthetic aspects in the "Flowering City" plan offered many opportunities for participation by people in the cultural community.

## **Dorchester, Massachusetts**

**Eva Thorne**, *Boston Freedom Summer*

**Teny Gross**, *Photographer Streetworker-Ella J. Baker House*

The project featured youth bringing economic and cultural revitalization to a low income section of Boston. Teny Gross coordinated Camp Oasis, a program for 50 court-involved at-risk youth. The job readiness program focused on the development of discipline, self-esteem, life skills, and community service. Part of a three part program, community service engaged youth in designing new uses for vacant lots and then cleaning them up. They worked with an architect learning the basics of urban design. The group researched the neighborhood's history and learned basic quantitative and demographic analysis. They photographed their community while learning photography.

## **Holyoke, Massachusetts**

**Jim Morrissey**, *Greater Holyoke, Inc.*

**Carlos Vega**, *Nueva Esperanza*

Holyoke is home to a number of vibrant, community-based arts, agricultural, and small business development organizations that are working together to revitalize the blighted canal and downtown business district. Holyoke's newest project includes the Talleres Initiative that seeks to utilize the inherent skills and talents of the largely Puerto Rican population in creating cultural activities and products that will lead to economic empowerment. The Talleres organization promotes working through cooperatives and training groups to facilitate community-building.

### East Boston, Massachusetts

Madeleine Steczynski, ZUMIX

Phil Giffie, *Neighborhood of Affordable Housing*

ZUMIX, an arts and cultural organization for youth, and other collaborating organizations from the East Boston community, offers a wide range of participatory cultural programming for a geographically isolated, working class community; music classes, creating works of public art, and producing summer concerts.

### Northampton, Massachusetts

Joseph Rich, *small business owner*

Amie Dowling, *Dancer, Community Organizer*

In collaboration with community organizations, the collaborative produced several children's series of performance and film at the Academy of Music, Northampton's art film house. The project introduced the children to live performances and film to create an appreciation for the arts that would continue through their lives. The project, in combination with other arts programming, secured capital improvement monies for the renovation of the Academy building.

### Lewiston, Maine

Jim Lysen, *Planning Dept., City of Lewiston*

Richard Willing, *L/A Arts*

Jim and Richard created a prototype for developing cultural heritage awareness. "The Cultural Heritage Chronicles" involved elementary, secondary, and college students in the processes of collection, preservation, and presentation of oral histories gathered from senior members of various ethnic groups. Their video, "Lewiston...The City We Call Home" contains the oral history interviews. Making it taught the students hands-on video production skills.

### Portland, Maine

Alex Jaegerman, *Planning & Urban Development, City of Portland*

Priscilla Dreyman, *Spiral Arts, Inc.*

"Celebrating Community: Portland's Arts and Cultural Plan," developed by fellows, included a cultural map that charted the flow of culture through the community—its people and organizations, events and calendars, rituals and traditions. The information was collected through personal interviews with leaders and performers in the neighborhoods, civic groups, and ethnic communities in the city. The Cultural Map publication was made available free to the community and was accessible on-line via computer terminals at the public library and in schools.

### Newport, New Hampshire

Patryc Wiggins, *Weaver*

Kathy Hubert, *Chamber of Commerce, small business owner*

Patryc and Kathy launched Newport's community revitalization plan by coordinating a major event for artists, the New England Artists Trust Congress IV. The Congress theme, "Culture Builds Community," was developed to unify and direct the complex program and support the purpose of the Congress; and to demonstrate how specific cultural programs empower the community and its artist. The distinguishing characteristics of this Congress included the implementation of eight year-long community-based arts projects, designed to provide substance, depth, and direction to Newport's ongoing revitalization efforts.

### Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Nancy Hill, *Portsmouth Middle School*

John Wheeler, *Portsmouth Naval Shipyard*

John and Nancy led a variety of projects that used poetry as a

bridge between segments of the community. The ongoing project entitled, "Portsmouth Poetry" built on existing structures and encouraged other groups to make poetry part of the public consciousness. In the "Three Generations Poetry Writing Project," community members of various ages wrote poetry and designed accompanying movement under the direction of a poet and a dance company. "Lullabies & Reveilles," a play, that uses oral history to create a civic dialogue.

### Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Russell Gusetti, *Musician*

Robert Billington, *Blackstone Valley Tourism Council*

Russell Gusetti coordinated three local performing groups in the development of a collaborative dance and music project celebrating the lives of the immigrants who lived and worked along the Blackstone River/Canal in the 1800s. As the Managing Director of the Blackstone River Theater, Gusetti renovated an abandoned Masonic Building in Cumberland, RI. A simultaneous project, The World Canals Conference, was coordinated by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, of which Robert Billington is Director. The conference enriched the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council's communities by building artistic ties with the Amber Valley (UK)/Blackstone Valley Compact.

### Westerly, Rhode Island

Sandi Gold, *painter*

Michael Rauh, *The Washington Trust Co.*

Westerly used cultural programming to encourage residents to visit their downtown and patronize local businesses. "Convergence: Westerly" is an annual festival of programs presented on Wednesday nights throughout the summer, featuring poetry readings, a sculpture park, and tours of historic buildings. The community has plans for installing downtown public artworks. The district is now alive with regularly scheduled events, galleries, and a heightened sense of the value of the visual, literary, and performing arts.

### Burlington, Vermont

Hannah Dennison, *Dancer/Choreographer*

The Waterfront Project was a collaboration of artists, civic partners, and community participants in site-specific performances on Burlington's post-industrial waterfront. The first five months were a pilot phase that included live performances with video and photographic documentation, providing a "visual tapestry" of the project as it evolved through the seasons. Work continued with site-specific public art performances that explored Burlington's historic downtown lost to urban renewal.

### North Bennington, Vermont

Patricia Pedreira, *Director, Vermont Arts Exchange*

Nate Williams, *Bennington County Regional Commission*

The Vermont Arts Exchange projects included "Celebrating Our Living and Working Community" where citizens and artists explored the heritage of North Bennington's historic mills, waterways and landscape through weekly visits to the studios at the Sage Street Mill, and through field trips to local mills and businesses along Paran Creek. Area businesses contributed leftover materials for participants to create art. The program culminated in exhibit and performance opportunities, and brought together local citizens, at-risk youth, area businesses, elders and artists at the historic Sage Street Mill site. "Vermont Arts, Housing and Preservation Partnership Project" created affordable housing for artists and low-income families, as well as program and gallery space in historic Bennington firehouses.



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