

ARTISTIC AVENUE

ARTS ORGANIZATIONS COMBINE ENERGY TO BRING DOWNTOWN TO LIFE. BY ARIA SELIGMANN



Drawing by Charlie Jackpot

Sketch by Oscar Moss



Leave it to art to bring people together. On Friday, June 4, downtown will come alive with artists, musicians and patrons, lovingly tended to by businesses, restaurants and a consortium of arts organizations that have banded together for one purpose: to let art revitalize downtown.

Artists will display and sell their work at booths along Broadway and Willamette, carefully perched near business awnings in case of rain. At one end of Broadway, the annual FOOD for Lane County fundraiser, the Empty Bowls Project, will have folks lined up around the corner of Broadway and Pearl, accompanied by a wine-tasting at Ambrosia and the percussive rhythms of Samba Já. At the other end, wine-tastings at Broadway Market will bring people in who are gathered for this first-ever ArtFest.

The event runs concurrently with the monthly First Friday ArtWalk, and will kick off an entire weekend dedicated to art, artists, and an artistically expressive community.

ArtFest is the first event to come out of the March 2004 Arts Summit, which brought together for the first time in a collaborative sense the Lane Arts Council, Hult Center, Downtown Events, Inc. and DIVA (Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts.) Long a dream of the city to have art bring downtown alive, the reality now exists because of new leadership and new directions of major arts groups in Eugene.

Those new leaders include Andrew Toney, who took over as head of Lane Arts Council in January, and Rob Hankins, the city's new cultural services director, who oversees Hult operations.

The new direction is actually about 10 years old. Considering expanding the arts as a source of economic development was first put forward in 1994 as ArtsPlan, followed by the Eugene Downtown Plan, drafted in December 2003.

Among the implementation strategies proposed in the new city plan is to "Encourage and support a stable arts community downtown" and "research market potential and available incentives for major new cultural or recreational venues, such as a new art museum downtown."

One of the key players in realizing that agenda is the Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts (DIVA). Recognizing DIVA's key role in cultural visioning, the plan describes this possible project: "Work with

Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts to find a suitable location for an art museum downtown." DIVA's congruence with downtown goals resulted in a significant startup donation from Downtown Eugene, Inc. (DEI), which works to support local businesses in achieving economic viability and to provide economic stability to the downtown core.

At the Arts Summit, the groups brainstormed on what activities could foster a thriving climate of art and commerce in what DEI's Michelle Emmons calls "the arts and entertainment center of Lane County."

A downtown artistic oasis is what the city will focus on in a current push to market Eugene to tourists. Emmons says with new leadership at the Hult and Lane Arts Council, there is a "new focus on a collaborate effort and it's very exciting to all entities involved."

By joining forces, she adds, all of the groups can "make our resources go the furthest and we can create more excitement."

While continuing to work with existing businesses downtown and luring new ones, Emmons says DEI is committed to supporting the arts and the role they play in building the business economy downtown.

One great example of an arts/business initiative, she says, is the dinner and a show concept that includes discounts at participating restaurants on the night of a major production at the Hult.

"Carol Phillips took that on and made it happen," says Emmons. "Kudos to the Hult for that. Everything starts as a small idea and getting information from there and coordinating efforts to make it happen is what creates change."

Other simple yet sublime ideas include the DEI collaboration with Impact! Arts to bring the Summer Film Festival — three Friday nights of movies under the stars — to life, and to coordinate efforts of smaller theaters to work together.

A big project in the talking stages is to combine the energies of DEI, DIVA, the city and Lane Arts Council, as well as the UO to bring a new art museum downtown. (See accompanying story for time/location of City Club talk on that topic.)

That downtown/UO connection is what has many quite excited. For too long, the mile stretch between campus and downtown has

seemed like a vast desert, when in fact, it could be a well-planned, meandering riverfront stroll with galleries, shops and restaurants. Connecting the two is in the interest



Print by Angus Macaulay