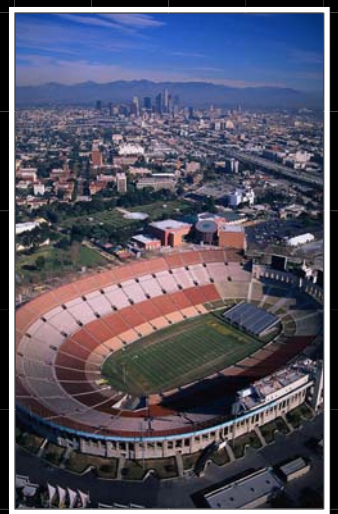
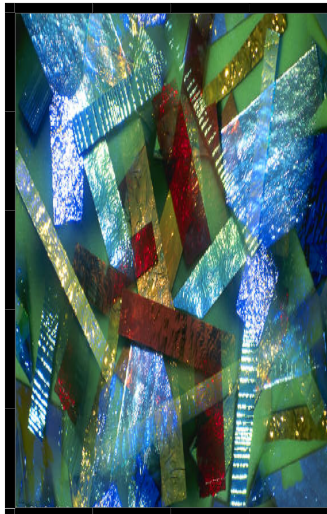


# JOINT Urban Studies CENTER



## THE IMPACT OF ARTS & CULTURE ON COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

JOINT URBAN STUDIES CENTER

JUNE 2005

# JOINT **UrbanStudies** CENTER

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The Joint Urban Studies Center was established to provide essential research, analysis, and consultation to small and mid-size cities aiming for full participation in the new economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Center mobilizes the resources of regional institutions of higher education to engage communities in planning that is informed by research, energized by broad participation from stakeholders in the community, and validated by successful implementation. As the managing partner in the Center, Wilkes University is joined by King's College, College Misericordia, Luzerne County Community College, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, and the University of Scranton.

## **Note**

The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the educational partners, their offices, trustees or board members, or private businesses that fund the Joint Urban Studies Center (JUSC) or the staff of the JUSC.

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## Executive Summary

The city of Wilkes-Barre has much to offer in the form of arts and culture, recreation, and venues. However, due in part to the lack of regional marketing and coordinated scheduling in this segment of our communities and especially our region, many who live in our region and those looking to relocate here don't have a clear picture of our regional attributes.

The following study highlights some of the arts and cultural activities that occur in the city, as well as a few festivals and performing arts centers in the region. This study is not meant to be a comprehensive regional synopsis of all events and venues. As research for this study progressed, it was once again brought to our attention that we need to think regionally. Many of the problems that occur in the city of Wilkes-Barre occur in Scranton, Hazleton, Pittston, and other municipalities in our region. By thinking regionally we mean, forming collaborative partnerships across political jurisdictions to operate more effectively, to market specific assets, and coordinate scheduling of events for maximum impact.

The study also provides the reader with success stories that have taken place in communities across the country and as close as Bethlehem, Pa. These success stories provide valuable insight into communities which realize the impact of the arts in their community or region. As our study shows, these communities have reaped not only financial rewards through increased revenues, the communities have prospered by providing new and exciting experiences for their residents. Each community has benefited both culturally and economically. They have also formed partnerships that have given their projects a larger focus than just one entity struggling on its own.

An arts, culture, recreation, and venue strategy for revitalization will only be successful when it is preceded by a planning process. Careful consideration must be given to the vision of the community, an objective look at whether the attributes of the community could support the various projects, whether daily or overnight tourists are a viable market, and long-term financial viability. Given all the components needed for a comprehensive feasibility study, stakeholders from government, non-profits, businesses, and residents should be involved. An arts related strategy is only one segment of an overall community revitalization program. Its success hinges on complimentary businesses, ease of movement through the community (by vehicle or as a pedestrian), aesthetics, image, and crime.

Here in northeastern Pennsylvania, we have the foundation for successful revitalization using arts, culture, recreation, and venue as one tool. Because of the proximity between Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, there is much to capitalize on between the communities. By incorporating the smaller, surrounding communities, this area has a solid start with a wide variety of activities. Coordination between activities would lead to larger impact from local residents and allow travelers to plan overnight stays. Thus, a regional marketing effort should follow the regional planning and coordination.



## Financial Impact

To determine the financial impact of arts and culture in a community, there must be a measurement of success. Indicators of positive financial impact are significant production of jobs and revenue. These attractions are desirable because they draw people to a community. Nonprofit arts are an industry that generates 134 billion dollars in total economic activity and supports 4.9 million jobs. Arts and culture related jobs, in fact, make up a higher percentage of the U.S. workforce than any group of either doctors, lawyers, or accountants. Such forms of employment indicate that the arts industry is an important part of keeping people employed on a local, state, and national level.<sup>i</sup>

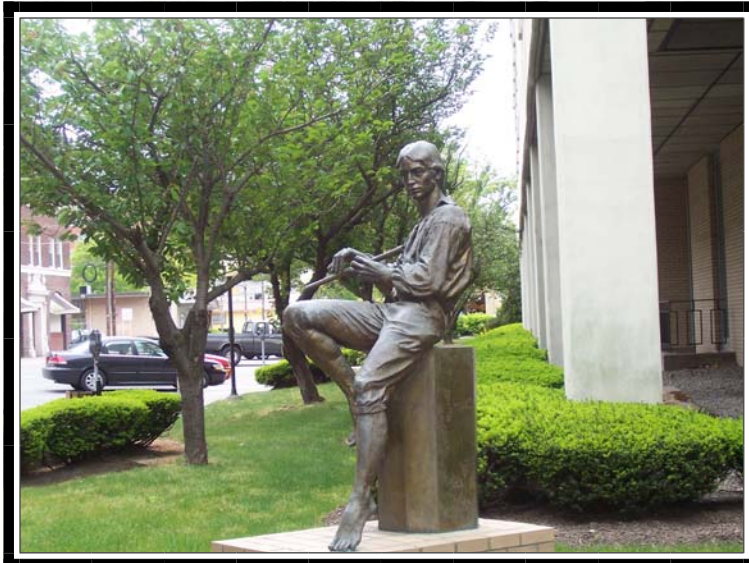
The positive influence of arts and culture on the economy holds true in other economic sectors. In the area of resident household income, the presence of an arts and culture industry has proven to be advantageous. For example, the total impact of the nonprofit arts industry on resident household income in the nation is 89.4 billion dollars. Government revenues (comprised of taxes such as income tax or sales tax and fees for utilities and licenses) are another aspect that are favorably impacted by the presence of an arts and culture industry. The revenues generated by arts and culture can be invested back into the community, making items such as clean streets and community parks more affordable. The total impact of the arts and culture industry delivered 10.5 billion dollars in federal income tax revenue, 7.3 billion dollars in state revenue, and 6.6 billion dollars in local government revenue in the year 2002 alone. These figures are a significant sum of money proving that the arts and culture industry is a major contributor to government revenue.<sup>ii</sup>



Despite this excellent rate of return on government funding of arts and culture, the least support for arts and culture comes from governments. Evidence shows that arts and culture can improve the economic prosperity of major metropolitan areas and small towns, yet federal, state, and local governments collectively spend less than three billion dollars on support for the arts each year. From 2002 and 2004, aggregate local government funding of the arts and culture industry has dropped nearly eight percent. State funding has also decreased by 39 percent from 2001 to 2004.<sup>iii</sup>

Even though funding has decreased, there is still money available for the arts in Pennsylvania. For Fiscal Year 2004-05 the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA), a state agency, has a state appropriation of \$14.5 million. PCA has also received a \$759,770 State Partnership Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The PCA distributes more than 2,400 grants a year to arts organizations; non-arts organizations with arts programs or art projects; schools, school districts, intermediate units, and other educational settings; other entities through nonprofit conduit organizations; and local governments. The PCA also supports individual artists. Application guidelines are available online at <http://www.pacouncilonthearts.org>.<sup>iv</sup> The National Endowment for the Arts also has several grant programs. Information for these may be found at <http://www.arts.gov/grants>.

While the important economic indicators such as jobs, household income, and government revenues are important

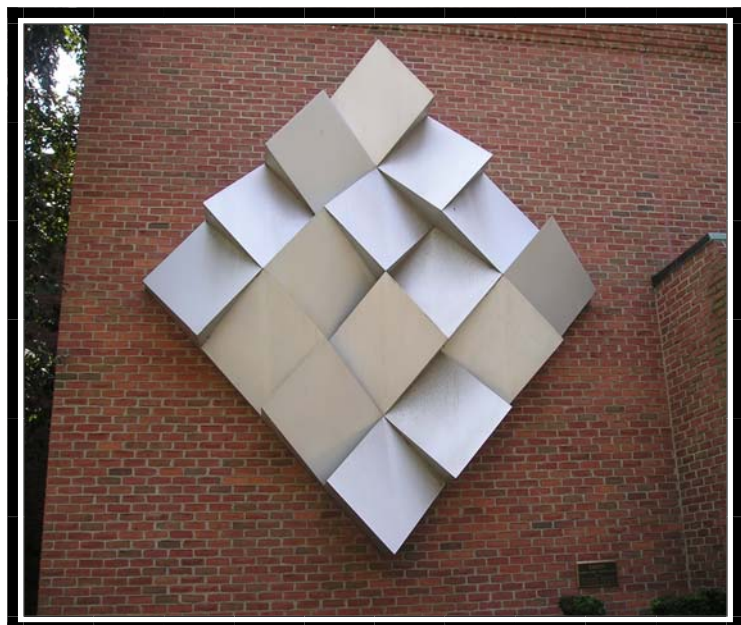
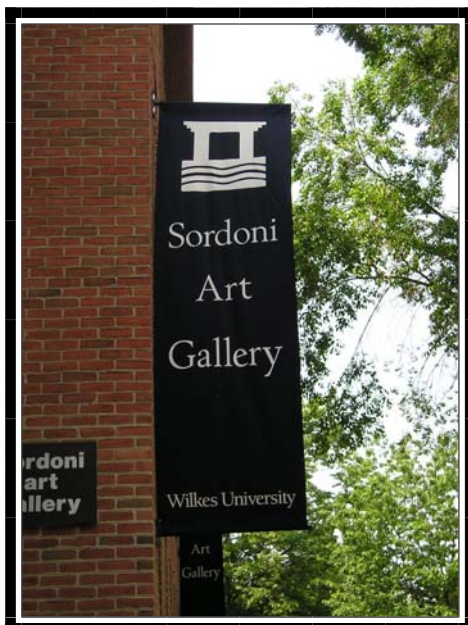


when examining the importance of the arts and culture, other factors must be considered. For instance, those attending an arts-related event spend money on the art event, as well as other amenities such as parking, public transit, food, and souvenirs. This spending is valuable revenue for local merchants and restaurants. On average, a person attending an arts-related event will spend nearly \$23 in addition to the cost of admission.<sup>v</sup>

Tourism is another dynamic greatly influenced by the arts and culture industry. Tourist spending is very desirable to a community. These additional dollars bring more revenues to both businesses and also to the government. Most tourists will

typically spend more money at an arts-related event than a local resident. On average, tourists spend 75 percent more than a local resident at an art event. Tourists who are attending arts events will typically spend more, shop more, and are more likely to stay at hotels and other lodging options. When a community attracts people through an arts event, restaurants stay open later to accommodate hungry attendees, parking garages stay open later, buses run more routes, and local shops are more likely to make sales.<sup>vi</sup> In 2001, consumers spent 1.9 billion dollars more on performing arts events than movie tickets and 500 million more than spectator sporting events.<sup>vii</sup>

The evidence clearly indicates that from a financial perspective, arts and culture are almost always a boon for a community. The arts increase spending, promote businesses, create jobs, and produce tax revenues that can be reinvested in a community. In 2001, a study showed that nonprofit arts have a \$134 billion economic impact in the United States.<sup>viii</sup>



## Image

Arts and culture also impact a community's image. Part of a community's image is linked to finance. For example, attractive window displays in prosperous shops, and clean streets are all desirable. A visually pleasing environment will bring people into a neighborhood. Taxes collected from business owners and tourists provide additional revenue to a community. Although the finances of a community help to play a major role in defining a community's image, sometimes arts and culture can have an even more direct affect on image. A community's image can be influenced and beautified through community gardening, city murals, public art, and redevelopment of abandoned or dilapidated buildings into centers for the arts.

Community gardens and plant life in cities and towns can cover unsightly places, such as abandoned lots, and give community members an aesthetically beautiful place to relax and play. This tool, called community greening, is helpful in community revitalization. Greening can encompass anything from a downtown square or waterfront that has been landscaped to shop windows with window boxes or plants outside. Plants and trees can help soften a city, make it look more lush and prosperous, and contribute to a sense of overall health and vitality. Greening also brings community members together who might not otherwise



encounter each other. When neighbors feel they know each other and share a common investment (such as a garden) the area is strengthened and unified.

One example of successful community greening is in Philadelphia's New Kensington neighborhood. Philadelphia Green worked with the New Kensington Community Development Corporation to get rid of vacant lots. The purpose of the project was to give the neighborhood "curb appeal," which is an important part of real estate value and community attraction. Executive Director of the New Kensington Community Development Corporation Sue Salzman, explained, "With the increasing amount of clean and green spaces, replacing what were once trashed and vacant lots, people no longer feel threatened by their surroundings."<sup>ix</sup>

Community greening provides more benefits than just social and aesthetic. Community greening also has an effect on crime and blight. Abandoned land is a red flag that a community is in trouble and is deteriorating. Abandoned buildings and lots are breeding ground for criminal activities. Simply stated, by picking up the trash, an abandoned lot is more appealing to developers and residents. From an economic development standpoint, a potential developer would be more interested in a property that displays a sense of a community. For example, if a neighborhood vacant lot has grass growing on it or is graded with stone and litter free, a developer would have less expense in turning the property into a business. Costs for ripping down or cleaning up the property would be minimal. This simple act shows a commitment to the community from the property owner and tells potential

developers that the community cares about aesthetics. Developers would see signals that the community cares about its appearance and wants to promote pride.

Murals and public art have also proven to be an important part of community image as well. Murals bring art to a city's landscape and provide community members a medium of expression. Most murals contain elements that hold meaning about a community. Often murals are created by neighbors' combined contributions, much like community parks.<sup>x</sup> Murals could depict an historical event in the community or display a glimpse of a future event.



Public art displays are another way to affect community image. Open-air art and exhibits give local residents and tourists something attractive to look at and, in some cases, buy. Most cities have some form of temporary or permanent art. Permanent art can become a landmark and an attraction for tourists or beautify a public place, such as a park, square, or garden. Temporary theme art is a popular trend in cities, such as New York and Chicago, and has also become popular throughout northeastern and southeastern Pennsylvania with the “Miles of Mules Project.”

“Miles of Mules” is a public arts project born from a similar project several years ago in Zurich, Switzerland which was done to promote tourism. Zurich used life-size cows as their animal of choice. This project has been duplicated in many communities around the world. Here in northeastern and southeastern Pennsylvania, 150 life-size fiberglass mules have been decorated by renowned and emerging local artists, schools, and nonprofit organizations and put on display in an area stretching 165 miles long in the Delaware and Lehigh Canal Corridor. Mules were chosen because of their historical significance, as they were used to pull boats through the canals of our region.<sup>xi</sup> All the mules have been purchased through an auction process, with profits benefiting nonprofit organizations in the Delaware and Lehigh Canal Corridor.

Many things affect a community's image; arts and culture are an important part of image. The arts provide revenues for a community; however, the impact on image can be more direct, with public art providing tangible beauty and creativity in a community's landscape with gardens, murals, and public art.

## Sustainability

An important effect that arts and culture have on a community is its sustainability. A community's sustainability is its ability to meet the needs of the present, as well as plan for the future. Arts and culture can be an important part of this process since they are timeless. While economy and image play an important role in making a community vibrant and keeping it alive for the future, a key element of a community's sustainability relies on connections and community building.



Such connections are social, religious, and cultural. Through these connections, community members identify with their community. When this sense of belonging or ownership exists, community members invest themselves in keeping their community alive for the present and the future. Arts and culture are often a catalyst for reinforcing these connections. A 2002 study on the link between arts and culture and community connections from the Urban Institute found that the main reasons people reported attending an arts-related event was to socialize with friends or family, support a friend or family member, celebrate their heritage, or join in a religious ceremony.<sup>xii</sup>

Places such as schools, churches, and local gathering spots (ie, community centers or restaurants) are environments where people feel comfortable, and for many, make up part of their identity. Interestingly, these places also comprise a significant portion of arts and culture venues. There is much more to arts and culture than the symphony and ballet. While those are important and enjoyable, they are not a part of everyday life. Local establishments, schools, and places of worship are typically places where families feel comfortable coming, especially to bring their children. The next generation is an important part of community stability, in the arts and culture and community connections study. People who support and participate in community arts and culture programs were profiled. One characteristic that appeared in participants was that they had been taken to arts and cultural events as a child.<sup>xiii</sup>

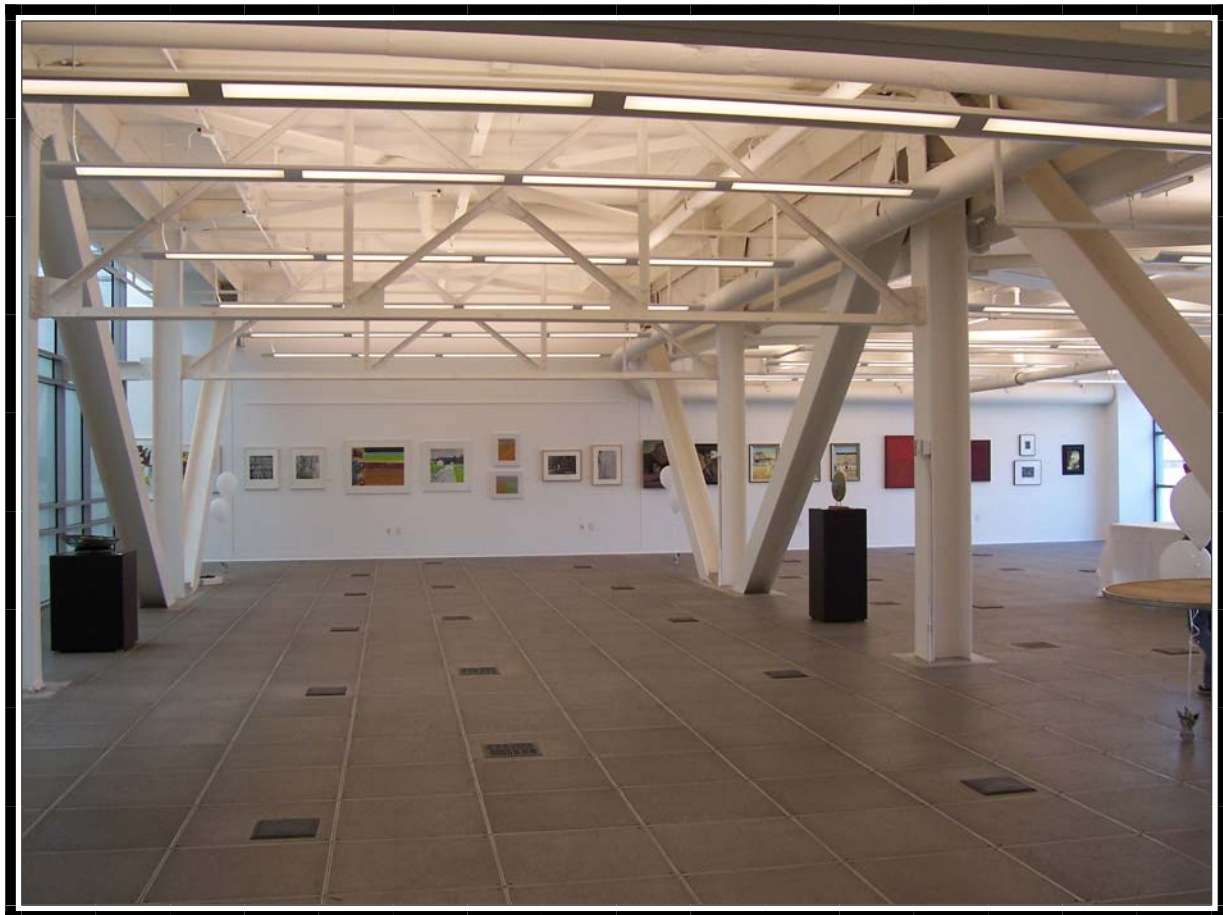
Community connectedness is a big part of keeping a community alive and sustainable. When people identify with their community and neighbors, they want to invest in the well-being of where they live. Arts and culture participation is a big part of this connection. The community connections study shows that people who participate in arts and culture activities are more likely to vote, volunteer, and be involved with community organizations.<sup>xiv</sup> Community involvement and participation are paramount to creating bonding in a community.

Each of the cities in our region has festivals that generally take place during the spring and summer months. Downtown



Wilkes-Barre hosts the Cherry Blossom Festival and the Fine Arts Festival. This spring, Wilkes-Barre will be home to the Medieval Festival staged at Coal Street Park. Along with unique shows there will also be an outdoor marketplace and an indoor merchant square with more than 40 merchants selling an assortment of items.<sup>xv</sup> Hazleton is known for FunFest, Pittston for the Tomato Festival, and Scranton for the LaFesta Italiano. While these events attract large numbers of people, they only last a few days. Imagine if there was a festival once a month in the city of Wilkes-Barre? Imagine festivals that would be held indoors in colder weather at an arts center utilized specifically for arts events?

Arts and culture is an important part of community planning, building, and sustainability. These experiences open the doors for members of a community to come together. For example, an event such as an arts festival can reinforce bonds that already exist with events that celebrate heritage and culture. The community connection that arts and culture offers is a major element in keeping a community sustainable.



## **Case Studies: Successful Use of Arts and Culture in Community Revitalization**

Arts and culture play an important role in community revitalization. In general, the incorporation of arts and culture in community revitalization results in success, and when it doesn't, it is usually because of faulty implementation. Highlighted are a few glimpses of cities that have had success with community revitalization by enhancing arts and culture in their communities.

### **San Diego, California**

One success story is the city of San Diego. In the 1970s, social blight and physical and economic conditions negatively affected the city. There was an especially blighted downtown district where businesses could not stay open and the empty buildings were a breeding ground for illegal activities. In 1972, the mayor at the time, Pete Wilson, developed an outline for a revitalization program that included a strong job base, retail commercial businesses, and residential opportunities. A significant part of Wilson's plan was to encourage local artists to come and set up shop. Wilson's plan offered the artists incentives, such as tax breaks and services, to encourage them to live and work in the community.

It took more than two decades and 410 million dollars, but Wilson's plan came to fruition. San Diego is now a "mecca" for art studios, antique shops, and dining. The city is considered a trendy place for artists to live and work, and tourism money is coming in. The area is now referred to as San Diego's "gas light district," named for the old-fashioned lamps that illuminate the shop-lined streets. The gas light district has become a premier tourist spot in San Diego. Mayor Wilson's plan for change worked so effectively because the city's characteristics and needs were carefully examined and arts and culture was brought to the community in a way that would be interesting and acceptable to locals and tourists.

### **Paducah, Kentucky**

Another great success story is Paducah's artist relocation program. Paducah was slowly losing its vitality and sustainability, residents were leaving the area, not many good jobs were available, and more and more buildings were being left empty as businesses closed or moved. Many of these empty buildings were beautiful historic buildings in the downtown area. City officials realized that community revitalization was necessary to the area. In 2001, city officials decided they would focus on rehabilitating neglected but beautiful and historic structures and, at the same time, add cultural diversity to the city by recruiting artists to live and work in the area.

The plan to persuade artists to relocate was to offer them as many incentives and benefits as possible. In exchange for living and working in the downtown area, artists were given lower than market interest rates, loan-to-value ratios up to 100 percent, discounted closing costs, and products and services at no charge. The artists were offered free web page space and Internet services, free promotional and marketing services, and tax incentives.<sup>xvi</sup> This setup was an opportunity that many artists couldn't refuse. In return, Paducah would get the benefit of already established artists who could quickly set up business in town. Paducah's artist relocation program met with success.

Today Paducah is referred to as the "Soho of the South," and the downtown area has been restored to its original beauty. The city has become a major art and tourist attraction. Paducah's incubator program was successful because the city had resources the artists were interested in, such as vacant spaces and incentives. This exchange of

desirable goods for services is key when implementing an incubator program as a means of city revitalization and rehabilitation.

### **New Haven, Connecticut**

Known as the Elm city, New Haven was one of the first New World settlements to begin with a town plan that consisted of nine blocks or squares, with the town green at its center.<sup>xvii</sup> New Haven is rich in history, arts, culture and higher education. The city is a college town with five colleges and universities, among them Yale.

In the early 1950s the rush was on to move to the suburbs. As the middle class left the city New Haven's economic condition became progressively worse. Mayor Richard Lee began his first of eight terms as Mayor of the city. More than \$300 million dollars was spent in public and private construction in renewal areas during his administration. The most dramatic development project was the rebuilding of downtown New Haven with an office tower, shopping mall, and a 300-room hotel. Two major department stores, Macy's and Edward Malley's opened in the city. Despite this effort, population continued to decline. Both department stores closed as did the hotel and many other long-time businesses. By the 1980s the city like many in the country had succumbed to urban blight. In the late 1990s, the city rejected the idea of stimulating its economy by building a new one-million-square foot mall on its scenic riverfront. According to New Haven's mayor, John DeStefano Jr., "it became clear to us that you ought to compete in areas where you can win, so we wrapped our arms around the arts, biosciences, and downtown residential redevelopment. It was from taking stock of our inventory that we figured out what we could do to succeed."<sup>xviii</sup>

Yale University invested in upgrading blighted streets and supported fledgling bioscience companies. The university was also home to a repertory theater, art gallery, center for British art, and concert series.

New Haven is also home to Long Wharf Theater, New Haven Symphony, Creative Arts Center, Educational Center for the Arts, Schubert Performing Arts Center, Palace Theater, several national historic districts and three local ones—with architecturally significant restored Victorian homes.<sup>xix</sup> The city's economic development administrator had a five-year plan that would see the rehabilitation of a 50-square-block area of downtown New Haven with almost all private money. With the recognition of the commercial value of science and research labs developers came to the city to develop space for these entities, lawyers came to service them and retailers took notice of the fact that the city had the largest population of 20-34-year-olds in the state.<sup>xx</sup>

The transformation of the city began with the historic Ninth Square District. This section of the city is thriving with new restaurants, smart shops, nightclubs, galleries and a sidewalk market several blocks long that is jammed with residents, suburbanites, and some of Yale's 11,000 students. Crime which was a major concern in the city has dropped from 21,000 incidents in 1990 to 10,000 in the year 2002.<sup>xxi</sup>

Today, the arts continue to thrive in the Elm city. New Haven has earned the title of the "*Creative Capital of Connecticut*" due to the number of cultural attractions. Not only is the city rich in the arts, but there are also museums and festivals. A few of the highly attended festivals are the New Haven Jazz Festival, and the International Festival of Arts and Ideas. These festivals engage the entire city in performances, hands-on arts experiences and symposiums. Museum goers can visit the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Yale-Peabody Museum of Natural History, the Connecticut Children's Museum and a replica of the Freedom Schooner-Armistad. New Haven is also home to a professional hockey team, and a Class AA baseball team.<sup>xxii</sup>

To add to the cultural scene, the Commonwealth of Connecticut awarded a grant of \$30 million dollars to the Long Wharf Theater to help build a new theater complex in the Ninth District of downtown. The new theater will be built on the site of a long-closed sports and entertainment arena. The theater had leased its current facility since 1965. The Long Wharf is one of America's leading regional theaters.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Additional redevelopment in New Haven can be seen with the relocation of the Gateway Community College to the former Macy's and Malley's department stores.

Housing development is also taking place. Many former office buildings and factory spaces are being converted into studio, one and two bedroom apartments and luxury apartments. Most of these complexes are fully occupied with tenants. An interesting aspect of many of these rehabilitated former office buildings and factories is that there is mixed-use space for commercial tenants on the first floor. Houses to purchase and apartments to rent are at a premium in New Haven. People want to live in New Haven because of all the city has to offer, professionally, culturally and residentially. Available rentals vary and are not only high end housing but moderate and low income housing as well. This mixed range of housing choices helps to make the city more diverse and affordable to every income bracket.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Artspace Center for Contemporary Art is also located in the Ninth District. It is an artist-and volunteer run contemporary arts nonprofit whose mission is: to catalyze artistic efforts, to connect artist, audiences and resources, and to redefine "art spaces".<sup>xxv</sup> This center features rotating exhibitions of contemporary art in all media and a permanent collection of affordable works on paper by local and regional artists. Each year Artspace sponsors City-Wide Open Studios. It is a grass-roots celebration of visual arts that connects artists to the public and to each other. City-Wide Open Studios is held in vacant historic properties throughout New Haven. These properties serve as unique exhibition spaces, leading to their revitalization for new uses.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### **Asheville, North Carolina**

Asheville's use of public art also met with success. The downtown area had long been neglected and the city had experienced almost no development in between the Great Depression and the 1970s. Realizing the need for revitalization, city officials formed a committee that included landscape architects and artists. This committee envisioned an "Urban Trail." The "Urban Trail" would be composed of many pieces of public art and already established city landmarks. The goal of Asheville's trail was to form a narrative of the city that residents and tourists alike would be interested in and understand. The idea was for tourists and locals to travel through the historic area and learn about the city's history through public art. The art that appears along the trail is part of a coordinating scheme to educate visitors about the history of Asheville. The trail features pieces of art that are relevant to Asheville. The art contains references to famous historical figures from Asheville, including author Thomas Wolfe, and also focuses on Asheville's musical history.

The "Urban Trail" proved to be a great success, making downtown Asheville a popular tourist attraction. Downtown Asheville is now a flourishing cultural center with more than 50 art galleries and many craft-related businesses. The trail has become so popular that every year more than 100,000 maps of the "Urban Trail" are distributed. In 2002, Asheville hosted the Urban Trail Arts Festival, which embellishes the trail with reenactments, demonstrations, and theater. The "Urban Trail" idea was successful because it was a collaborative effort between city officials and arts organizations that worked with and capitalized on what Asheville already possessed: a rich and interesting history.<sup>xxvii</sup>

## **Bethlehem, Pennsylvania**

Bethlehem is not only very similar in size to Wilkes-Barre, but also shares some of the same history as Wilkes-Barre. Wilkes-Barre saw a decline in the garment and manufacturing business, while Bethlehem lost the once predominant steel industry. Both cities saw declines in the manufacturing business, jobs were lost, and the economy of each city was in a downturn. Bethlehem has done a turnaround by promoting business in its downtown and promoting the arts. The city is home to colleges and universities just like Wilkes-Barre. Bethlehem is a city that has blended culture and commerce, progress, and preservation.

Among its cultural highlights are Musikfest, a festival that draws a million visitors each August, the Bach Festival in May, the Spirit of Community Festival in June, the Blueberry Festival in July, the Celtic Classic in September, and the Christkindlmarkt during the holiday season.<sup>xxviii</sup> Of these major events, Musikfest and Christkindlmarkt were started in 1984 by the former Bethlehem Musikfest Association (now ArtsQuest).

Musikfest is a 10-day music festival that provides nearly 1,000 live performances by more than 300 performers, all in the downtown area. This unique festival provides musical experiences, ranging from rock, jazz, pop, blues, country, native American blues, Celtic rock, surf music, contemporary rock, and funk. More than 15 staged locations throughout the city are used, including blocked off streets surrounding the downtown. Musicians can also be seen performing along the streets. Visitors enjoy being outdoors, moving to the music, shopping in both stores and from street vendors, and also sampling the wide array of ethnic delicacies that food vendors provide.<sup>xxix</sup>

Christkindlmarkt is a holiday marketplace for the entire family, styled in the traditional European heritage. It runs four consecutive weekends in November and December, between Thanksgiving and Christmas. This open-air festival has over 75+ visual artists and craftspeople, more than 10 food vendors specializing in everything from apple strudel to pork barbecue to bratwurst, knockwurst, and turkey legs. The festival also features music and performances from groups as varied as brass ensembles, choirs, handbell choirs, and individual singers.<sup>xxx</sup>

In the early 1990s, the board of directors of ArtsQuest held discussions on how it could branch out in the area of visual arts. The board commissioned several studies to assess community needs to best determine a location for a community arts center that could educate, present gallery shows, and house studio space for established and emerging regional artists. Inspired by the Torpedo Factory Art Center (an art center created through the joint effort of a group of local artists in Alexandria, Va.) the board was led to a vacant banana warehouse on Bethlehem's Southside. Redevelopment activity in this section of the city was beginning due to affordable real estate. ArtsQuest decided that this factory would be a perfect location for the center. ArtsQuest was fortunate to have many generous donors committed to making the center a reality. It took 14 months to adapt the building for reuse, and it officially opened in January 1998.

The Banana Factory quickly outgrew its space and, in 2003, an auto parts store that was adjacent to the factory was purchased and connected to the Banana Factory. Visitors to the arts center total nearly 20,000 per year. Those both young and old are offered a wealth of visual arts opportunities. The center hosts exhibitions, special events, and hands-on classes for all ages. The Banana Factory provides a place for individuals looking to explore their creative spirit.<sup>xxxi</sup> Both Musikfest and Christkindlmarkt help to generate revenue to support the Banana Factory.

These three specific venues in the city of Bethlehem have an economic impact of more than \$30 million annually.<sup>xxxii</sup>

### **North Adams, Massachusetts**

North Adams is a small city at the northwest corner of Massachusetts that has seen a dramatic turnaround from 18,000 inhabitants that lost 4,000+ jobs in the 1980s, to a city that created more than 850 jobs within two years of opening the MASS MoCA arts center. Along with community partners, Williamstown College, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and those in the private sector, the largest center for contemporary arts in the United States opened in May 1999. The center is housed on a 13-acre campus of a renovated 19<sup>th</sup> century factory complex. Facilities include:

- 19 light-filled galleries with more than 100,000 square feet of exhibition space including a single gallery as long as a football field
- 10,000 square-foot black box theater
- 3,500 square foot lab theater
- Outdoor cinema
- Two performance courtyards
- Workshop and art fabrication facilities
- 5,000 square feet of rehearsal and production support space
- 60,000 square feet of office and retail space for commercial tenants in the communications, high tech, and new media industries

The total project cost was \$34 million (including \$3 million in contributed real estate and \$4 million in environmental engineering and feasibility studies). The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provided a construction grant of \$22 million, with the remaining \$9.4 million coming from private funds.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

MASS MoCA has created an unusual event to help bring the community together in a fun atmosphere. Called Eagle Street Beach, this event takes place on a closed off city street. Truckloads of sand are dumped, and anyone in the community can come for a “play day” in the sand. This event attracts the young and old, artist, bankers, parents, and executives. This “play day” brings together the community and the region. In addition, MASS MoCA has many special events for the community year-round.

North Adams is located in Berkshire County. Information for every community in Berkshire County may be accessed at <http://www.berkshires.com>. This comprehensive website includes the arts, a calendar of events, places of worship, accommodations, and maps and directions. By focusing on the entire county and region, North Adams is able to promote itself in the regional market.

## Case Studies: Failed Attempts at Introducing Arts and Culture Venues

While there are many success stories of communities that have revitalized their area through arts and culture, there is the occasional story of failure. This is not because arts and culture was incorporated into community revitalization projects but rather because it was incorporated poorly. In these situations, the needs and assets of the community were not adequately considered, nor was the culture and history of the community.

One prime example of a community that didn't take the needs of the area into consideration, is the city of Baltimore, Md. Due to poor planning for the expansion of the Baltimore Convention Center in the 1990s, the convention center has not experienced huge financial gains. City officials had hoped that with the improvement and expansion of the convention center, increased revenues would come with scheduled events. Contrary to their hopes, the convention center has under performed. There were some attempts to improve attendance at events, but city officials eventually realized that a big part of the problem was that the area did not have enough hotels.

According to Irene Van Sant, who is managing the hotel project for the Baltimore Development Corp., "It has not lived up to its potential. There are many reasons, but we believe the major reason is the lack of a convention hotel in close proximity."<sup>xxxiv</sup> City officials did not consider the needs that would result from the building of the convention center. According to David Hunter of the Maryland- based urban development-consulting firm, Hunter Interests Inc., this is a common mistake. Of the convention center, he commented, "Why didn't city officials and convention center planners know that they were under-hoteled? The Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) didn't tell them. Why not? Because the CVB has special interests with local hotels who viewed a large convention center hotel as a threat."<sup>xxxv</sup> The dysfunction in the planning process has made the Baltimore Convention Center a relative failure, for now, unless city officials can get more attendees.

Another example of poor planning is the Tennessee Performing Arts Center in downtown Nashville built in the late 1980s. When a community implements arts and culture into its community revitalization plan those residing in the community and those visiting the community will benefit. For example, the dollars spent on hotels, restaurants, and souvenirs add value to the economy of a city. With the revenues gained the community can provide better services. Once again, planning is key. In the case of the Tennessee Performing Arts Center, it was built in a way that people would go directly from their parked car to the center without passing restaurants and shops. As a result, the additional profits didn't come in.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Communities are realizing that large art centers that stand alone are not a wise investment.

While failure stories of community revitalization centered around the arts are rare compared with success stories, they do occur if a community doesn't plan carefully and community organizations do not work together. Hence a regional approach, and the ability to objectively study the community; and accept what the community can support are crucial.



## What Northeastern Pennsylvania Can Learn

There is no question that the presence of arts and culture is key in community revitalization. At a summit examining the role of arts in urban revitalization held at the Peabody Institute of John Hopkins University, Mayor of New York Michael Bloomberg spoke. On the role of the arts, Mayor Bloomberg commented: “Arts and arts organizations are a vital component to a city’s cultural life...the arts take us to the next level and make you think and that’s what civilization is all about...Arts are about economics as well; art brings in million of dollars to any city and can transform whole neighborhoods.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

While most city officials are eager to have arts and culture in their revitalization plans, the important focus should be to follow what applies to a community. There are many examples of cities that have had success. While it is a good idea to follow what works, the needs and characteristics of Wilkes-Barre need to be examined. Planning is the first and most important step needed prior to any revitalization process. The city of Wilkes-Barre has citizens from all different cultures and heritages. This diversity of backgrounds needs to be considered when planning community revitalization. Residents have a desire for arts and culture in their community. It is imperative to see that these needs are met and that members of the community are invited to participate in the planning phase. The F.M. Kirby Center has been keeping the arts alive on Public Square, providing a venue for live theater, concerts, film series, and productions that are of a caliber seen in major metropolitan areas. Wachovia Arena has brought concerts, sporting events, and conventions to the area as well. With successes at these two centers, it is obvious that there is a market for the arts, culture, and entertainment in the area. However, a regional strategic plan for arts, culture, recreation, and venue needs to be developed that encompasses the types and location of projects, and evaluation of supporting amenities and necessities to ensure success. Finally, the analysis should include analysis of arts, culture, recreation, and venue throughout Luzerne and Lackawanna counties to plan for complementary not competitive uses.



The Cultural Council of Luzerne County has engaged a nationally recognized nonprofit arts firm, Artspace, to complete a market-based feasibility study on Luzerne County. The Cultural Council has gained support and participation from the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Luzerne Foundation, the Luzerne County Higher Education Council of Presidents, officials of the city of Wilkes-Barre, county and state governments, and local nonprofit organizations, businesses, and art patrons.



Artspace is America's leading nonprofit real estate developer for the arts and has been in business for 25 years. Their mission is to create, foster, and preserve affordable space for artists and arts organizations by development projects, asset management activities, consulting services, and community-building activities that serve artists and arts organizations. Artspace conducts forums that help to assess the needs of a community, the leadership and levels of support, and ultimately the possibilities for a community arts center. After completion of the feasibility study, Artspace will determine if the city could support an arts center.

Artspace works with organizations in the community to purchase and rehabilitate dilapidated or abandoned buildings. In turn, they rent the space (at much lower rental rates than the market demands) to artists and performers. These spaces are used for residences and also as studios. Some have spaces that can be used for performances and are outfitted with dance floors and stages. Many of these spaces have space for families to live as well. Some of Artspace's projects have included rehabilitation of:

- abandoned factory complexes
- a casino
- a bank building
- a hotel
- a Masonic Temple
- an historic telephone switching station
- a brewery<sup>xxxviii</sup>

According to Chris Velasco, vice president of planning for Artspace, he liked what he heard and saw about the interest in creating a nonprofit arts center in the downtown. Velasco stated, "I think there are a number of assets and a number of challenges that you have going for you."<sup>xxxix</sup>

Artspace is familiar with this region. They just completed a feasibility study for Scranton. Perhaps the entities in Scranton and Wilkes-Barre should partner and market both of their projects together to create greater impact for both projects.

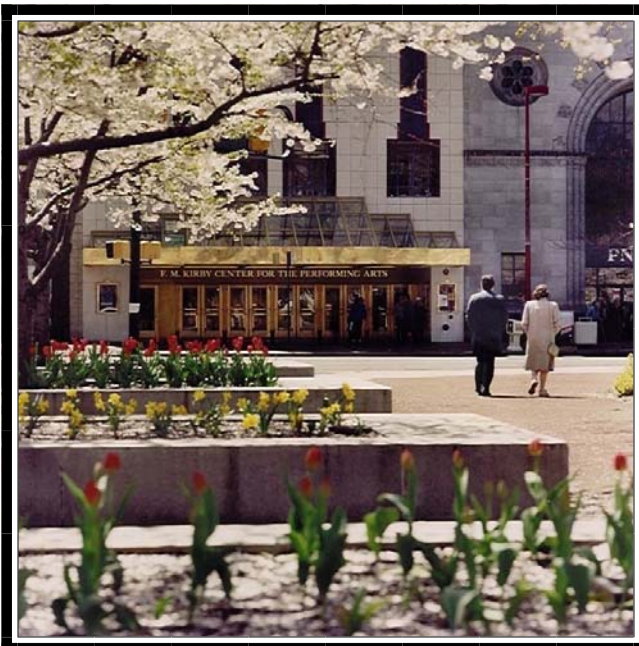
The long-term goal of the Cultural Council is to advocate for and participate with local partners in establishing a community arts and cultural center in downtown Wilkes-Barre. The Council envisions a space that will include educational space and galleries to exhibit visual arts, as well as provide a venue for performing artists and musical ensembles. Additionally, the Council envisions the center as a place that will support and promote artists and performers from our area. The Council hopes that the center will become a focal point and gathering spot for the cultural scene in northeast Pennsylvania.<sup>x1</sup>

City officials, nonprofit arts organizations, and residents need to examine the results of this feasibility study, and then determine what forms of art and culture would best attract people to the city, and what forms of art and culture people would be willing to spend money on.

Some of the ethnic attributes of the citizens of the city are displayed at bazaars and festivals that are held at churches and schools. Local residents are proud of their cultural backgrounds, and they express their pride with arts and crafts and food at these festivals. While these festivals last only a few days, something similar but permanent could be utilized, such as a pavilion with casual and accessible shops featuring the crafts and creations of local artists, or shops and restaurants featuring culturally-rich food. Look at any of the vacant buildings in the downtown. Wouldn't one of these be perfect to set up a small indoor venue?

Perhaps the city could implement neighborhood block parties and close off sections in neighborhoods to have performances by local musicians and performers. Not only would this give those in a specific neighborhood a sense of community, but it would also provide a pride of place among the residents. This option would also give neighbors a chance to get to know each other and would not create any parking problems as residents would already be parked at their residences.

Locally, residents have access to visit the galleries that are housed at both Wilkes University and King's College. The Wyoming Valley Art League also has exhibits throughout the year. Additional galleries may have potential here and should be considered after a feasibility study is completed.



The Kirby Center in Wilkes-Barre, the Cultural Center in Scranton, Wachovia Arena, and Lackawanna County Stadium all market themselves exclusively. All the cultural festivals, museums and theater groups do the same. Wouldn't collaborative marketing be more cost-effective and display **all** that the region has to offer? Wouldn't arts in our region benefit by a collaborative effort among the organizations in all the communities? With more offerings, perhaps a marketing approach that promotes our region (not just one specific community) would be better to attract new businesses to relocate into our region. A focus on the region would not only show a strong cohesive consortium, but also would display all of our attributes. By marketing the entire region, we have more to offer outsiders whether through tourism, business relocation, or immigration.

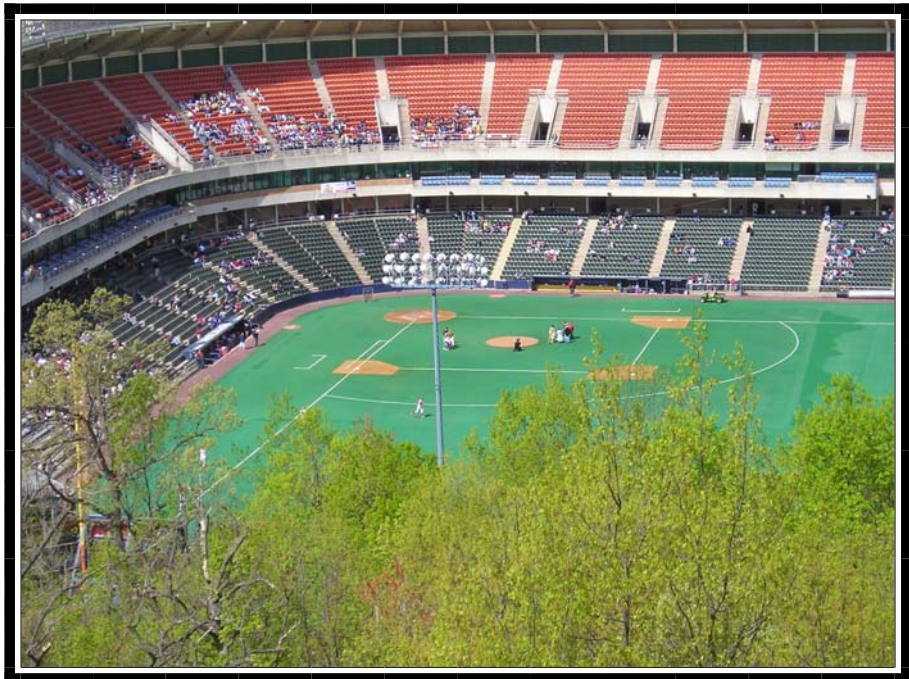
*Photo Courtesy of Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce*

## Arts & Culture, Recreation, and Venue

Within the city are small theaters and theater groups. The Little Theatre of Wilkes-Barre, a black box theater on North Main Street, stages productions several times annually. The Chicory House and Folklore Society of northeastern Pennsylvania is a nonprofit alternative entertainment venue for the Wyoming Valley. It is a place to hear both national and international touring performers, as well as local artists. From blues to bluegrass, Celtic to Cajun, Barrelhouse to Ragtime, French Canadian to African American . . . a stream of talented artists has been performing a variety of music to delighted audiences for the past eight years. Housed in the community center of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Wilkes-Barre, the Chicory House presents concerts from September through June once or twice a month.<sup>xii</sup>

Both King's College and Wilkes University have theater departments that stage productions and are open to the public. Additionally, Wilkes has a fine arts department that stages productions in dance, voice, and music ensembles.

Promotion of these superb events is a goal that needs to be addressed. All of these venues should be aggressively promoted to the community, especially to children in K-12. An appreciation for the arts should be instilled in children not only by their parents, but also by the schools and the community. While most school districts in the region have music and art programs, it seems as though athletics receive more funding and press from the districts. Local school districts stage productions and concerts too. Why are these events so poorly attended? Are they covered by the media?



In a recent opinion section of the *Times Leader*, columnist Mark Guydish focuses on these same issues. He questions if the cost of attending these events is too high, or that there is not ample media coverage. He mentions that residents in our region pay much higher prices to attend performances at larger venues. His solution to this dilemma seems best. He states, "Think outside the box. The next time you're planning a night out, check the paper, find the unknown, try the unexpected. If you stay away, art goes away."<sup>xliii</sup> Residents need to take an active stance for the arts by attending performances in a variety of spaces. Not all are professional performances. Many are done by volunteers.

Location and accessibility also need to be considered, or these venues will not thrive. Wilkes-Barre plans for additional parking in the downtown. Mayor Leighton has also stated publicly that the streets will be safer because

additional officers have been hired and will be monitoring the neighborhoods. However, there is never a miracle in terms of community revitalization; in the best case scenario, it still takes a few years to see results that are the benefits of careful planning and the cooperation of different governments, organizations, and citizens.

Wilkes-Barre is still in need of revitalization and steps are being taken. The area surrounding the Wachovia Arena has developed at a fast pace, with stores, restaurants, and hotels surrounding the area. The downtown area and Public Square have not been so fortunate.

Downtown Wilkes-Barre has recreational advantages. Not only does the downtown have sidewalks and walkways for pedestrians, but it also has green space to utilize for events. Coal Street Park is a prime example of the green space available within the city for public use. This park provides outdoor recreation facilities for basketball, soccer, baseball, and softball. The former ice arena located in the park should be renovated, perhaps adapted for a new use, reopened, and utilized by the community.

The levee system that runs along the Susquehanna River is perfect for outdoor recreation in the form of biking, walking, and running. Just across the river in Kingston is Kirby Park which has playground facilities, a walking track, covered pavilions, and plenty of open space. There is also a levee surrounding the park with miles of walkways free to the public. Kirby Park hosts fine arts events, including the spectacular 4<sup>th</sup> of July performance of the Northeast Philharmonic, prior to the awesome fireworks display at dusk.

Throughout the city of Wilkes-Barre are several small parks. Most have facilities for baseball and softball. Several Little League and softball organizations utilize these fields throughout the spring and summer months.

Other recreational facilities within the city's boundaries are the YMCA, the Jewish Community Center, and the Catholic Youth Center. All three facilities offer recreational opportunities for all ages.

The Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership (WVWT) is a coalition of more than 25 organizations that was formed to link the numerous trail projects within the valley and utilize the resources and programs of the public health agencies, organizations, and health care systems. Formed in 1999 the partnership:

- promotes and supports health, fitness, and recreation;
- links communities up, down, and across the river;
- inspires interest in the river's history and culture ;
- boosts local economies and supports tourism; and
- helps build civic pride and community awareness.<sup>xliii</sup>

Throughout the year, WVWT hosts numerous activities open to the community. These include, trail and biking hikes, snowshoeing experiences, the annual RiverFest, trail cleanups, and seminars.

There is a self-guided walking tour of the historic area of Wilkes-Barre called "Walk Wilkes-Barre." It's an excellent tour, but needs additional enhancements. Most of the featured historic sites have nothing to offer tourists once they arrive (ie, historical markers or designations). Along Asheville's Urban Trail, there are displays of public

art to embellish the historic elements that were already there. Some of these are even interactive. The “Walk Wilkes-Barre” tour could be supplemented with interactive displays. In addition, the work of local Wilkes-Barre artists could be featured.

The Wilkes-Barre Riverfront Project along the Susquehanna is underway. This project will make the riverfront more accessible with walkways, gardens, and access to the river with a dock for fishing. Wouldn't this be a prime spot for some public art displays or festivals featuring Wilkes-Barre's heritage with crafts, artwork, and even food? Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry President Steve Barrouk said, “They're doing a project that is so beautiful and tasteful, it is going to have a dramatic effect on the whole Wyoming Valley.”<sup>xliv</sup>

Many outdoor running and walking events also take place. Most of these are sponsored by local nonprofit organizations as fundraisers.

The Luzerne County Historical Society has a museum at its headquarters on Franklin Street. The museum has a permanent exhibit on the Native American inhabitants of the area that includes artifacts ranging from stone implements of the Archaic period to the archeological evidence of European influence. There is also a permanent display on anthracite mining. The museum plays host to traveling exhibits.<sup>xlv</sup> Housed within its headquarters are the Bishop Library where the society's paper collection and genealogical resources reside. The Society also supports the Swetland Homestead in Forty Fort. The homestead is an original cabin built in 1803 that has numerous additions to it that reflect the changes of the Swetland family that span 70 years.<sup>xlvi</sup>

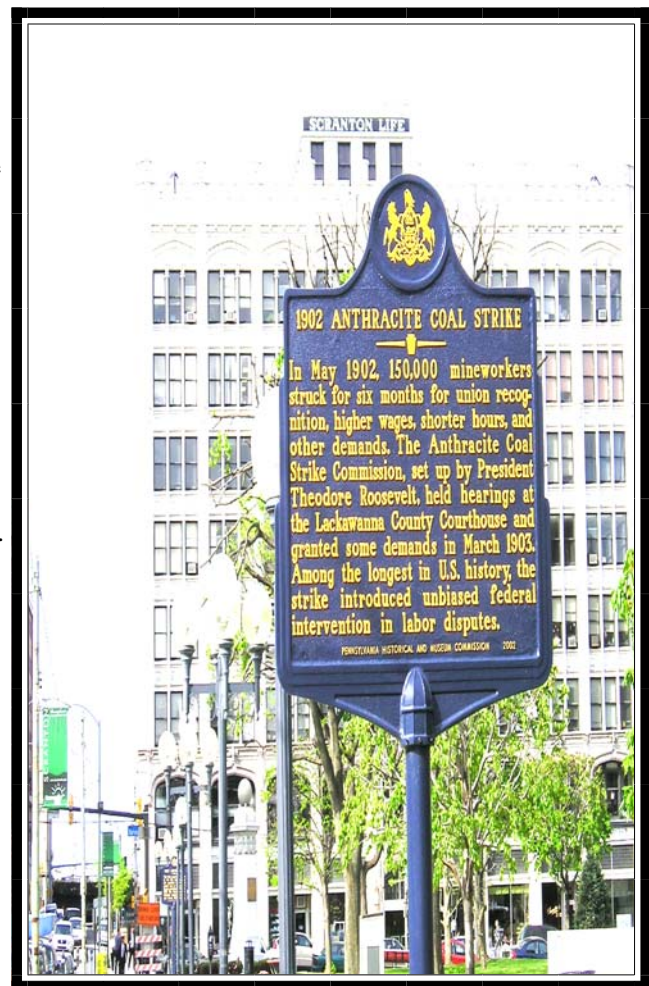


## Conclusion

The Kirby Center in Wilkes-Barre, the Cultural Center in Scranton, Wachovia Arena, and Lackawanna County Stadium all market themselves exclusively. All the cultural festivals, museums, and theater groups do the same. Wouldn't collaborative marketing be more cost-effective and display **all** that the region has to offer? Wouldn't arts in our region benefit by a collaborative effort among the organizations in both cities? With more offerings, a marketing approach that promotes our region, and not just one specific community, we would be better positioned to be viewed as a tourist destination. A focus on the region would not only show a strong cohesive consortium, but also would display all of our attributes. By marketing the entire region, we have more to offer outsiders whether through tourism, business relocation, or immigration.

Wilkes-Barre has much to offer as a foundation for arts and culture industries, a rich cultural and historical heritage, and members of the population who are very interested in arts and culture. If the background of the city in terms of geography and population are carefully examined and arts and culture are introduced in a way that meets the interests of the people and the ability of the city, arts and culture can certainly thrive in Wilkes-Barre. The correct and careful blending of the city and arts and culture will allow for the maximum benefits to be obtained when bringing new venues to Wilkes-Barre and enhancing the ones we already have. Everything from walkways, parking, directional signs, lighting, hotels, restaurants, and shops support successful arts related programs in communities. Those items need to be developed and incorporated into the strategy as much the consideration of what the local market will sustain. These complimentary venues, and pedestrian and driver amenities are also critical as demonstrated by the failures in Maryland and Tennessee. That is another reason why a collaborative planning process with a variety of stakeholders is critical.

With a marketing approach that encompasses all communities in our region we will focus on our region's attributes that include specifics about individual communities and all they have to offer, not only to residents of the region but also to those from outside our region who come to live, work, and play.



Arts, culture, recreation, and venues have the potential to revitalize our region. It should not, however, be the sole strategy. Business development whether through expansion, retention, creation, or attraction are imperative to support the region. Cleaning and greening efforts set the tone for the proper image and community pride.

Funding is available to organizations in Pennsylvania through the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). One of DCED's programs is the First Industries Tourism Program. This program provides planning grants, loans, and loan guarantees to entities involved in promoting tourism in the Commonwealth.<sup>xlvii</sup> All details of this program can be found on DCED's website at, <http://www.inventpa.com>.

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