

CREATIVITY IN THE NATURAL STATE

Ducks, Documentaries, & Design

Tales from Arkansas' Creative Economy



REGIONAL
TECHNOLOGY
STRATEGIES, INC.

CREATIVITY IN THE NATURAL STATE

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Tales from Arkansas' Creative Economy

Regional Technology Strategies, Inc.
Dan Broun, Editor

With Mt. Auburn Associates, Arkansas Arts Council, Arkansas Science &
Technology Authority, Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges

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We would be delighted if you quote this book in your publications or make copies of portions of this book to give others. However, we do ask that you send us a copy of any publication in which this book is quoted.

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We are also grateful to the authors who contributed pieces: Dan Broun, Sarah Butzen and Stuart Rosenfeld of RTS, Peter Kwass of Mt. Auburn and Robert Donnan, a consultant to the project. John Simon served ably as the editor of all the pieces; making sure the story of these creative efforts was told in the clearest possible way. We are also grateful to Maxine Mills and Abby Brown of Maxine Mills Graphic Design for putting together such an attractive publication.

Of course, the stories that are told depend most heavily on those whom we are featuring. We want to thank all these people and organizations whose efforts make Arkansas such a creative place to live and do business. The individuals interviewed for these profiles contributed pictures and materials and most importantly their time to help us learn more about their work.

Finally, a grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation makes this publication and our work in Arkansas possible. We continue to be grateful for their support.

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March 2008

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Introduction

In 2010, Crystal Bridges will open in Bentonville, showcasing what is already being called one of the finest collections of American art in the country. But with all the justified hoopla that the opening is creating, the grand opening will not signal the start of cultural activity in the state of Arkansas. In the Natural State, creativity is flourishing not just in paintings that can hang on a wall, but in ways that contribute millions of dollars to the state's economy, train young Arkansans for careers in science, and generally improve the quality of life for all residents.

In our other reports on Arkansas, we have talked about the impressive numbers generated by the state's creative economy. *Ducks, Documentaries and Design* is our attempt to tell the stories of the individuals and organizations who make the state such a vibrant place in which to live and work. Inside you will read about:

Stuttgart, where hand crafted duck calls further the town's reputation as the duck calling capital of the world.

The Hot Springs Documentary Festival, which not only shows innovative films but also teaches the art of filmmaking to the next generation of artists.

Fayetteville's New Design Center's efforts to provide graphic design students with hands on experience in working with clients.

The town of Mountain View, where families gather on the courthouse square to play and listen to traditional music.

Eureka Springs' journey to become one of the nation's most celebrated centers of art.

The College of Aspiring Artists' innovative curriculum aimed at helping students become professional musicians.

A bookstore in Blytheville that brings some of the nation's best authors to Northeast Arkansas.

The EAST Program, which uses technology to help young people develop their critical thinking skills.

The University of Central Arkansas, which is working with the city of Conway to make sure the arts play a prominent part in the community's rapid growth.

The Communication Arts Institute, a haven for writers around the nation that makes the state a center of the literary arts.

The craft of bladesmithing, rooted in Historic Washington, which continues to be taught through an innovative multi-state partnership.

Texarkana's ArtsSmart program, which helps public school teachers integrate the arts into their everyday lesson plans.

Arkansans are fortunate to live in a state where the arts and cultural activities can be found not just in museums but also in businesses, schools, and even in public squares. Hopefully, these pieces will give you a better sense of the stories behind the numbers.

Dan Broun,
Director of Special Projects, Regional Technology Strategies
March 2008

Foreword

As a member of the project advisory panel, formed by Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. in 2006, I have been very pleased to learn more about model educational and artistic programs, as well as creative industries, that are thriving throughout Arkansas. A few of these outstanding programs and businesses are featured in this publication.

We began this three-year project to assess our state's creative economy and find ways to nurture and expand it by asking two basic questions: "What comprises Arkansas's creative economy?" and "How large is it?" First, the Arkansas creative-industry cluster was defined as including creative workers, businesses whose "raw material" is imagination, invention, or art, and industries and/or people who support creative enterprises. Our next step was to determine how many Arkansans are currently employed in those occupations. We found through census and employment data that approximately 35,000 of our citizens are employed or self-employed in creative fields, earning almost one-billion dollars annually. This creative-employment cluster is one of the three-largest industry clusters in our state, contributing significantly to our economic well-being and quality of life. The details of this research are provided in "Creativity in the Natural State", which was released in April of 2007 and may be accessed on the Web site of the Arkansas Arts Council at www.arkansasarts.org.

In the second year of the creative-economy project, we surveyed Arkansas manufacturers to determine the importance of creative workers and original design to their products and marketing, and whether they plan to increase investments in design. Three-fourths of the respondents indicated that creativity was a positive influence in hiring new employees, and more than 40 percent indicated that they expect to invest more funding in design over the next three years. We also evaluated cultural and other creative assets in Arkansas.

The vignettes contained on the following pages demonstrate the quality and range of the creative endeavors of Arkansans. From an arts-education program in Texarkana that serves as a national model to a company in Stuttgart that designs and creatively markets hand-turned duck calls, there is much to enjoy in reading about these Arkansas success stories. I hope that you will learn as much as I have.

Ginger Beebe, First Lady of Arkansas



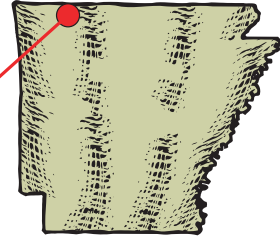
Ducks, Documen- taries, & Design

Tales from Arkansas' Creative Economy



Community of artists' studios and galleries.

EUREKA SPRINGS



Eureka Springs Morphs Creative Strengths into Economic Assets

Scale and Synergy Achieved through Preservation, Orchestration, and Planning

It's like some weird cross of Asheville, NC and Oak Bluffs, MA, all perched on the side of a hill that would make San Francisco proud and topped with a grand old hotel. In short, it's fun.

The New York Times, April 20, 2007

In 2006, Eureka Springs was certified by the governor as an “Arkansas Community of Excellence,” included in the book *100 Best Art Towns in North America*, and named by *American Style Magazine* one of the nation’s top 25 arts destinations. It’s in Robert Ripley’s “Believe It or Not” as one of the ten most unusual cities in America, and in 2001 was named one of twelve “Distinctive Destinations” by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The town has won this recognition by turning its unique architecture, cultural heritage and charm, plus its openness to diversity and fresh ideas, into a magnet for innovative people. It’s history aside, however, (many other “historic” towns have withered away), Eureka Springs’ town leaders, who understand their community’s economy, have carefully planned and orchestrated development that preserves and builds on its creative strengths.

Situated in the Ozarks, in Carroll County, Eureka Springs has 2,278 residents. The approximately 300 artists in the community are among some 1,500 represented by its more than 20 galleries. In 2007, Carroll County earned the “rural artistic haven” designation bestowed by the US Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service upon non-metro counties that rank above the 95th percentile nationally in the concentration of artists, writers, and performers.¹ The nearly 38 percent of the town’s work force employed in the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodations, and food services is more than six times the average for the state. The town claims to have “more writers per capita than anywhere else in the country.” About 15 percent are self-employed, double the state’s average, and very likely well below the true number of residents who combine creative entrepreneurial businesses with more conventional sources of income.

The town's diverse, offbeat character accommodates almost any lifestyle and interest, and its reputation for being open to people with innovative and non-conformist ideas and careers has for decades attracted creative people abandoning cities in a quest for simpler, less expensive places to live and work, and seeking communities of interest. It's the town "where the misfits fit!" according to one web site.

Rarely does Eureka Springs lack something interesting to do. Events scheduled during October-November 2006 included an Arts Eye View festival, music festivals with Dr. John and Little Feat, Arlo Guthrie, and the Smothers Brothers, weekly Sunday Markets, the Ozark Creative Writers Conference and Fall War Eagle Mill Arts & Craft Fair, the Eureka Springs Digital Film Festival and Eureka Springs Food & Wine Weekend, and their 8th Annual Fall Antique Show & Sale. The town is also home to Christ of the Ozarks, a biblical theme park, and an annual Passion Play that appeals to religious audiences. The town-led renovation of the historic City Auditorium retained the seats and mission style furnishings that were in place when it opened in 1928 with a concert by John Phillip Sousa. Concerts in recent years at the main auditorium upstairs, now fitted with state of the art sound systems, have featured Ray Charles, Judy Collins, Bill Cosby, Iris Dement, Bela Fleck, Arlo Guthrie, Emmy Lou Harris, Alison Krause, Lyle Lovett, Randy Newman, and Doc Watson, among others

Arts and tourism go hand in hand. The dozens of inns and B&Bs, spas, galleries, gift shops, event planners, and non-profits support and benefit from the creative core. The city reportedly hosts some 6,000 weddings each year, and many inns and hotels advertise themselves as wedding sites. The famous (and reportedly "haunted") 1886 Crescent Hotel keeps two full time wedding planners busy with 300-350 weddings each year, and hundreds more wedding ceremonies are performed every year at the architecturally renowned 48-foot high glass Thorncrown Chapel.

Some of Eureka Springs recent success is ascribed to a working relationship that has developed between the Mayor's Office and Charlotte Buchanan, who moved there from Seattle and immediately started, as she says, "meddling," looking for ways to build a stronger sense of community among residents and beautify the parts of the downtown that had begun to decay. She formed Glamorama, an event planning and community development company that has become a catalyst for innovative ideas. Charlotte worked with the Mayor's Office to "bring history to the streets" and transform the downtown from primarily a venue for tourist shopping into a "place where neighbors meet." She organized moonlight street dances, a Sunday market, and outdoor movies, and converted an ugly back wall of a downtown parking lot into the ARTery, a gallery of four by eight foot panels representing changing themes. "Just when we thought we couldn't have any more fun in a parking lot," she said, "we encouraged people to bring beds to the movies and organized bed races and pillow fights."

Drivers of Eureka Springs' Creative Economy

The creative strengths of Eureka Springs translate into economic assets upon each of which a community could build, but that together provide a scale and synergy that sets the town apart from most other creative communities. All enjoy the support of the town's government.

Main Stage Creative Community Center, begun modestly as an after schools program for teens in the community's public schools that later added programs for younger children, is in the process



Stuart Rosenfeld

Musicians busking on the street are a common sight in Eureka Springs.

of becoming a venue for participatory arts, having absorbed the earlier Eureka Theatre Company that produced local and other plays. The non-profit center, which has branched out into the digital arts and expanded its still active programs for youth is in the process of converting a recently purchased 100-year old, 9,600 square foot, three-story building in the historic district into a 130 seat theatre, 900 seat auditorium, dance and recording studios, and digital video editing and literacy labs with rentable space for workshops and seminars.

Communications Arts Institute earlier called the Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow, is a writers' colony that was established to "foster, promote, and preserve the creative and essential business of words," profiled on page 46.

Eureka Springs School of the Arts, begun in 1998 as a "school without walls," offers classes, lectures, and workshops in clay, wood, glass, ceramic, drawing, paper, quilting, and metal arts. Although local artists offered workshops out of individual studios since the 1940s; with the advent of the school, activities were able to be scheduled, coordinated, and promoted, and a place has been provided for students and teachers to interact with and inspire one another. In 2004,

the school acquired a house, hired an executive director, and became a campus offering summer and fall week-long classes.

Inspiration Point for the Arts, another of Eureka Springs' local creative assets, puts on Opera in the Ozarks each summer, *PaperMoon* organizes Celtic events that feature traditional music, literature, crafts, food, and other cultural attractions, and *Gallery Mint Museum* mints replicas of antique coins.

Looking for New Opportunities: Arts Is On the Political Agenda

It's obvious from its topography and infrastructure that Eureka Springs is not going to land a large branch plant even if local developers wanted one, which they do not. The town recognizes that its economic future is tied instead to its cultural and creative economy, and to the cultural and creative environment that can attract the small, mobile, technology-based companies as well as other creative people and enterprises it does want.

A "Mayor's Task Force to Develop and Promote the Arts and Cultural Heritage" was commissioned in 2006 "to take advantage of the surge of interest in arts and culture and combine it with our historic and natural beauty."² The citizen group, led by Economic Development Coordinator Glenna Booth, articulated a vision of Eureka Springs as *the* arts and cultural heritage destination for the State of Arkansas, the mid-America destination of choice for travelers seeking an open environment in which individuals can freely express their personal passions. and a place in which arts and cultural heritage experiences enrich local, regional, and short-term residents through diverse discovery and life-long learning opportunities. In its first year, the Task Force was charged with:

- inventorying Eureka Springs' arts, culture, and heritage assets;
- surveying ACH customers;
- creating a registry of area artists in all media (accomplished);
- clarifying "branding";
- incorporating art into daily life and the streets (well underway);
- developing regional partnerships in regional media;
- strengthening ties with Elderhostel;
- improving communication with realtors;
- providing more opportunities for youth-artist interactions.

A particularly high priority, based on a 2004 study, was to create an "Arts and Cultural District." Although the town itself is, in effect, an arts and cultural district, the recommendation accommodated a focus on rebuilding an under-developed part of downtown by encouraging artists, galleries, and shops to locate in newly vacated space.

Prospects

Its creative assets notwithstanding, Eureka Springs' residents, albeit able to survive economically, could not be said to be prospering. Median income still is about 66 percent of the state aver-



Stuart Rosenfeld

The Lucky 13 Starlight outdoor cinema is a seasonal weekly event in Eureka Springs.

age, reported unemployment above the state average, and many in the creative sectors lack health insurance. Yet, the percentage of families living below the poverty line is less than half state or county averages. It is thus the case that most residents have livable incomes, but few have financial security. Moreover, the average age of residents is ten years above the state average owing to a loss of youth exacerbated by the absence of a two- or four-year college within commuting distance.

Led by the mayor and economic development director, Eureka Springs is attempting to meet these challenges head on by pursuing a set of goals that includes generating steadier, higher levels of income (and compensating for the likelihood that prosperity will make housing less affordable for those who work in the creative sector), reducing dependence on tourism by developing exportable forms of creative goods and services, expanding creative activities for residents, making the community more attractive to young people, and managing growth in a way that maintains its character. A requirement, for example, that any new construction in the historic district fit the rhythm and harmony of its neighborhood in order to be approved represents an opportunity for new programs in architectural preservation at a community college.

The Mayor's Office also aspires to continue to move beyond the traditional Ozark culture to which the area owes its origins into newer, riskier art forms including the digital arts. With many local artists having already branched out into more varied art forms, the town must find a balance between the niche responsible for its recognition as an artists' colony and the avant-garde arts that will attract young people, new customers, and high-tech entrepreneurs.

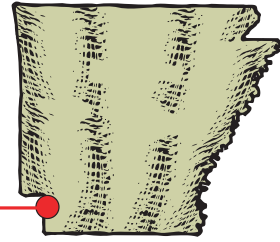
Eureka Springs also stands to benefit from the Wal-Mart-related rapid rise in the population of and visitors to the Bentonville-Springdale area, and the music industry of Branson, Missouri, which is within easy driving distance for festivals, events, theatre, or just sightseeing and shopping.

This nationally recognized center of creativity faces two overarching challenges. One is to ensure that its historic advantages are not only preserved, but leveraged to diversify into related small scale industries dependent on or attracted by the arts including information technology and the emerging field of digital arts. Eureka Springs' other major challenge is to connect its assets and markets to those of the larger region.

Stuart Rosenfeld, Regional Technology Strategies

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1. T. R. Wojan, D. M. Lambert, and D. A. McGranahan, "The Emergence of Rural Artistic Havens: A First Look," Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2006.
 2. Mayor's Task Force to Develop and Promote the Arts and Cultural Heritage Assets of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, Arts & Cultural Heritage Vision of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, Spring, 2006.

TEXARKANA



A Smarter Approach to Education

Texarkana's ArtsSmart Program Lays the Groundwork for a Region's Future

We busted out of class, had to get away from those fools. We learned more from a three-minute record than we ever learned in school.

—Bruce Springsteen from “No Surrender”

With all due respect, perhaps The Boss wouldn't have “busted out of class” had his teachers complemented their instruction with a little rock music. Texarkana teachers might not be playing the latest hits for their students, but they are using the arts in a way that makes learning relevant and is helping to invigorate the creative economy of southwest Arkansas. ArtsSmart, a program developed by the Texarkana Regional Arts and Humanities Council (TRAHC) that works with individual schools and school systems throughout the region, promotes the integration of the arts into the classroom in such a way that creativity becomes more than something students exercise once a week in art class.

Established in 1991, the program encourages teachers to use the arts to more effectively impart the subject matter they are trying to teach their students. Visiting artists typically spend several weeks helping individual teachers discover how best to integrate the arts into regular instruction with the idea that the teachers will subsequently use the skills they've learned on a regular basis.

ArtsSmart is presently working with 33 schools in five school districts in Texas and three in Arkansas; Texarkana, Ashdown, and Foreman. In terms of individuals, the program is reaching more than 18,000 students and more than 2,000 teachers.

Teach the Children Well

Studies long having shown regions' economic fortunes to be tied to the health of their public school systems, K-12 education cannot usefully be thought of independently of economic development. Outstanding schools attract businesses that require skilled work forces, and can be expected by those companies to boost employee satisfaction among those who have school age children.

Schools in the border city of Texarkana, Arkansas were not regarded as outstanding. Indeed, some—Principal Robin Stover arrived at College Hills Middle School to find only nine percent of its students passing the statewide assessment—were negatively perceived throughout the community.

Enter ArtsSmart. “ArtsSmart helped us tremendously,” Stover insists, citing dramatic increases in test scores. “It was not the only factor, but a huge part of what we have now. Campus has become a place where students and teachers want to be.”

To take the example of a specific school is all the more appropriate because ArtsSmart’s is not a cookie cutter approach; the program tailors what it delivers to each school based on perceived needs and input from its principal and classroom teachers. A typical engagement begins with program staff meeting with the principal to get an idea of what is needed and wanted, and give an idea of how ArtsSmart is implemented. “We explain to the principals what is possible and give them some ownership so they feel comfortable,” explained Charlotte Smelser, who directs the program for TRAHC.

Dancing to Numbers

The meeting with the principal and subsequent discussions with faculty and staff inform the design of the program ArtsSmart will offer a school. Teachers, who obviously are central to the program, as a group are responding positively to what ArtSmart has been offering.

Lekia Jones, a sixth grade math teacher at College Hills, maintains that ArtsSmart has become an invaluable part of her curriculum. One visiting artist, a choreographer, she enthuses, even succeeded in making fractions fun! “We visited together and talked about what we were working on,” she recalled. “We were talking about fractions and percentages, so she showed them a few dance steps using the counts. If we were talking about 25%, she showed them dance moves that would move them that amount.”

The artists who participate in the program are recruited from around the country. TRAHC puts them up for weeks at a time in the regions in which they’re working. The artists make it clear at the outset that they are there not to replace but to help teachers, specifically, to introduce the concept of and provide guidance in using the arts in public school curricula.

“Our artists don’t pretend to know the teacher’s ‘art form’,” explained Smelser. “We tell them, ‘Your art is math or science.’ What we try to do is match talents between the artists and teachers.



Students use art to learn about circuitry.

TRAHC



In Texarkana, teachers are taught how to incorporate magic into their classroom activities.

TRAHC

We frown on teachers sitting in the back grading papers. The goal is to allow the teacher to learn to do this the next week.”

A Different Kind of Superhero

According to Richard Jenkins, a visiting artist who has worked as an instructor in programs throughout the country, cultivating teacher commitment to the program is one of the things that makes ArtsSmart unique. “In other states, teachers would just watch, but in ArtsSmart they get to practice and model with the artist present. I have had more teachers continue this work in Texarkana than in other states.”

That Jenkins is a comic book artist speaks to the willingness of ArtsSmart to expand the definition of the arts to new media. One lesson plan has Jenkins starting by helping students understand the function of comics, then moving on to help them create their own comic strip in which a superhero, instead of fighting crime, helps a homeowner learn how to use the proper angles to construct a house.

The Geometric Stylings of Miss Lekia Jones, Math Teacher Extraordinaire

Although such lesson plans are undoubtedly fun, how do they fly in the new world of “high stakes testing,” in which arts and physical education programs are being sacrificed to the quest for high test scores? TRAHC works diligently to ensure that ArtsSmart not only doesn’t distract schools from, but contributes to their efforts. “We make sure everything we do is tied to the curriculum so the teacher can see the immediate connection,” explained Smelser. “If it doesn’t connect to the curriculum, then we don’t do it.”

The program’s success can be measured in part by the enthusiasm exhibited by the principals of the participating schools. “Very good news on our second grade IOWA test scores,” volunteered a clearly very pleased principal of a local elementary school. “The classes with the top scores were the ones that actively embraced the arts in their classroom.... [T]he arts and the work of TRAHC had a huge impact on the increase.”

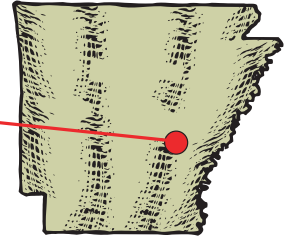
The program has been fortunate with respect to commitment of resources. Area schools annually contribute more than \$100,000 to TRAHC, which in 2003 was awarded a \$723,000 US Department of Education grant to further develop the ArtSmart program. TRAHC is currently in the midst of additional fundraising to keep the program alive and vital.

Jones hopes the program will continue long into the future, if for no other reason than to make geometry a whole lot more fun. She cheerfully sings a version of “I Wish I Had an Oscar Mayer Weiner,” its lyrics changed to extol the virtues (and properties) of an isosceles triangle. “When the students took a test, I could see many of them mouthing the words to that song to help them figure out the answer,” she says.

The song might not make Bruce Springsteen’s next album, but it’s much more than just music to the ears of Texarkana students and teachers.

Dan Broun, Regional Technology Strategies

STUTT GART



The Call of the Wild

Rich-N-Tone Calls Makes Sweet Music *(Well at Least the Ducks Think So)*

It's like Mecca. If you are into duck hunting, once in your life you have to come to Stuttgart, Arkansas.

Stephen Bell, Vice President, Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce

Every Thanksgiving weekend, when most Americans are thinking about the “gobble, gobble” of the sacrificial turkey, more than 40,000 hearty souls are jammed into the small downtown of Stuttgart, Arkansas to hear a bird call of a different sort. “The World Championship Duck Calling Contest and Wings Over The Prairie Festival” not only crowns the world’s best duck caller, but cements Stuttgart’s station as the Duck Hunting Capital of the world. It also helps to showcase the state’s creative economy in the form of custom duck calls.

Most people don’t associate the arts and creativity with outdoor sports. Camouflage wasn’t exactly a color on Picasso’s palette, after all. But creativity in the form of design is at the core of the business model that drives Rich-N-Tone Calls (RNT) of Stuttgart. “Custom design is really our competitive advantage,” says RNT owner and operator John Stephens. RNT designs a full range of custom duck and goose calls for sale by catalog, direct order, or in outdoor retailers around the nation.



Dan Broun

John Stephens, the owner and operator of Rich-N-Tone Calls.

The calls are made from wood or, increasingly, acrylic, a form of plexiglass. Prices range from \$25 to well over \$100.

The waterfowl call industry in general, and RNT in particular, have changed dramatically in the 30 years since the company's founding in 1976. "It used to be that you would just pick out a block of wood and then we'd go and make the calls," Stephens said. Although many of the calls are still made of wood, computer numerically controlled (CNC) machines do much of the final work. The custom element still remains, but the efficiency with which the product is crafted has improved dramatically.

Sweet Talking the Ducks

Still, Stephens and his 15 employees take care that each call meets rigorous design standards. Much like a musical instrument, each must be tuned to ensure that it attracts ducks. The shop floor consequently sounds more like the flooded timberlands outside Stuttgart than an assembly line.

The description on RNT's website of one of its signature lines, the Timbre, illustrates just how unique and highly designed these products are; indeed, the description might have been written for a musical instrument.

Its unique sound has quietly stunned, hypnotized, and awestruck the duck calling world. And there is good reason for that. It is still the only call to have captured two back-to-back World Hunting Style Duck Calling Championships. Ultra-realistic, throaty, but softly spoken, it's unique tone board design along with it's 1/4 inch drill hole and bore, produces a deep, nasally, quiet call, that is easy for the average caller to use and replicates realistic duck sounds. Whether your situation calls for pleading, sweet-talking, sassing, or just plain shaking your little hips, with minimal effort, we are confident that this low volume call will continue to find a place on your lanyard.

The craftsman element is apparent in Stephens' background. A landscape architect by education, Stephens, who grew up in Stuttgart, has long been interested in duck calling, qualifying for the world championship at the age of 13. As he was learning to call ducks, he was also learning how to make the calls from an old pro, RNT founder Butch Rickenback. Stephens worked closely with Rickenback from the age of 12.

So when he decided to head back to Arkansas, Stephens approached Rickenback about buying RNT and trying his hand at the business. Stephens took control in 1999, but Rickenback still helps out. Although retired from competitive duck calling, Stephens is involved in all aspects of the business including design, manufacture, and extensive creative elements involved in marketing the product.

Although Stephens was an experienced call manufacturer and designer when he bought the business, not everyone who comes to work at RNT shares his background. "When you get started at Rich-N-Tone, you really get thrown in there," Stephens said of new employees. "We start them off with baby steps like polishing wood, and then move them on to planning, and then finally to the CNC machines."

Creative Marketing

The creative elements of the company are apparent not only in the design of the calls, but in the marketing of the product. RNT employs a full time creative specialist to assist in marketing and



Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce

Duck callers from around the world make an annual pilgrimage to Stuttgart.

there are inconveniences associated with being in such a small town—difficulty getting computer hardware fixed is just one example—but adds that the association with a center of duck hunting is a definite plus. People come to Stuttgart not only for the festival, but to shop at places like RNT and Mack’s Prairie Winds, one of the largest outdoor retailers in the country.

Located across a parking lot from RNT’s facilities, Mack’s was a relatively sleepy store until it began selling from a mail order catalog. The company sent a catalog to every person who bought a federal duck stamp, and now individuals from all across the nation purchase Mack’s products, which include RNT calls. Mack’s Prairie Wings advertises its Stuttgart, Arkansas location proudly on its web page, which makes sense for a company that bills itself “America’s Premier Waterfowl Outfitter.”

RNT and Mack’s hold joint marketing events and heavily promote the annual festival. That the town bills itself “The Rice and Ducks Capital of the World” is evidence of the festival’s importance to the regional economy. “Thanksgiving weekend you see 40,000 people in town all dressed in camouflage,” says Stephen Bell, vice president of the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce, which sponsors the event. “Most people think of tourism season as warm; we think of it as cold and rainy.”

Stuttgart is home to many duck camps where hunters can hole up in preparation for hunting the land around the town. Many area farmers open up their properties to hunters during the non-growing season to bring in extra income. The Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce lists 42 such camps that advertise easy access to the flooded timberlands which are a natural gathering place for waterfowl.

Many of the hunters staying at the duck camps will be using their recently purchased calls from RNT. Although we doubt that eastern Arkansas’ ducks have much fondness for John Stephens’ and his company’s creativity, we’re quite sure its amply appreciated by the townspeople and duck callers of Stuttgart.

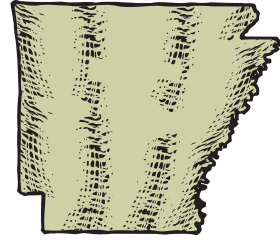
packaging the calls, and employs a video producer to create a half-hour duck hunting show broadcast on cable channels that showcases RNT’s products.

RNT is a national brand, its products sold in stores throughout the country, and is expanding its market. Its “QuackHead” line targets young hunters, appealing to those just getting started in the sport with inexpensive calls and marketing text that appeals to their tastes. The company is also branching out into other hunting products such as masking scents used in deer hunting.

Selling Stuttgart

One thing that continues to be emphasized in all elements of its marketing is the company’s location in Stuttgart. Stephens concedes that

Dan Broun, Regional Technology Strategies



The EAST Initiative

Inspiring Young People, Educators, and Entire Communities

I think the big mistake in schools is trying to teach children anything by using fear as the basic motivation. Fear of getting failing grades, fear of not staying with your class. Interest can produce learning on a scale compared to fear as a nuclear explosion to a firecracker.

—Filmmaker Stanley Kubrick

One day last spring, Emma and Sarah Bailin, twin sisters from Little Rock, Arkansas, had reason to be both pleased and more than a little excited. Their short video, *Watching the Waters Rise*, a compelling narrative about the great 1927 flood that engulfed small towns all along the lower Mississippi River and its tributaries, had just won first prize for a documentary at the 2007 Hot Springs Film Festival.

Their achievement seems even more remarkable in light of the fact that at the time the two young women were 13-year-old students at Horace Mann Arts and Science Magnet Middle School, a public school in Little Rock. Their sophisticated presentation, which combines archival flood footage with contemporary video interviews of older adults who lived through the devastation, hardly seems the work of teens.

When one learns, however, that Emma and Sarah developed their award-winning project as part of their school's EAST program, an innovative educational initiative in which digital storytelling technologies are simply one of many powerful, creative tools and processes made available to facilitate self-paced, student-directed learning opportunities, surprise gives way to the realization that something revolutionary might be going on here.

The Environmental and Spatial Technology (EAST) program—a homegrown Arkansas educational initiative that today is reaching beyond the state's borders to establish itself nationwide—to some degree builds on a natural adeptness to new technologies shared by many young people who have grown up with laptop computers, the Internet, interactive multimedia, digital camcorders, and portable audio devices. Its genius, however, goes well beyond its ability to provide middle-

and high-school students ready access to the latest, professional-grade technologies. In fact, EAST uses technology as an alluring catalyst to stimulate young learners to develop their critical thinking skills and acquire other creative capabilities that will empower them as adults to more fully participate in the information-based creative economy of the 21st century. By way of example, Emma and Sarah Bailin's coach, Rick Washam, facilitates collaborative learning opportunities in which students can become social entrepreneurs, identifying real-world opportunities for developing service learning projects that utilize advanced technologies to benefit their local communities.

Last year, in addition to working on the documentary about the 1927 flood, Sarah participated in Horace Mann's efforts to monitor and help control pollution in Fourche Creek, an urban waterway in Little Rock fouled with litter and run-off contaminants. She has taken water samples and observed firsthand the adverse effects of pollution on the watershed. And along the way, together with twin sister Emma, Sarah has been developing the creative and technical skills to communicate to a much broader audience what she and her classmates have been observing and learning about the local environment, their community, and their respective histories.

"In class, I write a report. In EAST, I write a movie," Emma recently told filmmaker Ken Ellis, who produced a series of short documentaries on EAST for the George Lucas Educational Foundation's Edutopia.org website. Emma recently told documentary filmmaker Ken Ellis. "I can't remember history. I know who some of these people are, but I can't remember what they did. In EAST, I know what I did, because I did it. I made it real. I love my history teacher. My history teacher is wonderful. But she can't give me the things that EAST can give me. She can't give me hands-on experiences."

Many of the self-directed, hands-on experiences EAST students devise for themselves are breathtaking in ambition and scope. Horace Mann students have, for example, used architectural design software to create a model of a proposed new school football stadium, and GPS (global positioning system) equipment to map the location of World War II-era Japanese-American internment camps in southwest Arkansas. The mapping project sparked further self-directed student research about the camp that ultimately led the students to make a documentary film on the topic. One group figured out a way to go to California to interview Japanese-Americans who had experienced life in the camps. The project also inspired students to design and construct a memorial garden on the school grounds.

EAST students devise their own self-directed, service learning projects

"I don't select the projects for them," explains Washam, the former EAST facilitator at Horace Mann, who also spoke last year to filmmaker Ken Ellis. "They buy into those projects because they believe in them. They want to make a difference. They've been told for the past 10 or 12 years, 'You're too little. You're too young. You can't do it.' And then all of a sudden you say, 'Yes, you can do it. Give me a plan. Find the money.'"

Indeed, the EAST Initiative pedagogy dramatically reinvents the role of teachers in the classroom in calling for them to cede to their students significant control over the focus and flow of their learning experiences. The teacher's task becomes to provide encouragement and guidance to help youngsters define their interests, investigate opportunities to initiate service learning projects, identify and master the skill sets needed to accomplish their goals, and communicate effec-



Sarah and Emma Bailin, award-winning East Initiative participants at Horace Mann Arts and Science Magnet Middle School.

EAST Initiative

tively to broader audiences the facts and conclusions they draw from their work.

Students themselves direct their learning paths. A group of students collaborating on a computer animation project, for example, will likely come to realize that they need a much more thorough understanding of geometry, which prompts them to pay closer attention and ask more probing questions in math class. In the EAST classroom, there are no lectures and, no tests, no grades. Students enthusiastically embrace learning, acquiring and applying new skills primarily because they passionately care about the outcomes of their work.

Yet another outstanding EAST project produced last year was *The Middle Fork of the Saline River, A Commemoration*, produced by students at the Cobra EAST program at Fountain Lake High School in Garland County, Arkansas. The short documentary won top honors at the

2007 My Community student filmmaking competition, a statewide initiative that encourages young people to learn about digital filmmaking and their own communities by undertaking documentary projects.

Not surprisingly, the four-person team that produced the award-winning documentary is not content to rest on its laurels. “We were not as impressed with it as they were,” confessed Lauren Gross at a subsequent showing of their film in Hot Springs. “We were very surprised to see how much they liked it.” Even so, several months after winning the My Community award, two of the four student filmmakers were already immersed in their next project, flying to Japan to film a new documentary about the sister-city relationship between Hot Springs and Hanamaki.

“There’s a trigger, I think, that clicks in, where the students realize the opportunity they have,” observed Dick Warrington, the EAST facilitator at Fountain Lake High School, in an interview in the Edutopia documentary. “Once they get into a project, and they see the results of a project, there’s usually no holding them back. They finish one, they’re ready to go on another.”

EAST students work collaboratively, share their results, and compete for top honors

The students also relish public opportunities to talk about and share their work, especially with peers in other EAST programs. The premiere opportunity for that sort of fellowship is an EAST Partnership conference held annually in Little Rock. The most recent one drew 2,000 participants from the more than 200 EAST programs at schools across Arkansas and in a steadily

increasing number of other states including California, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania. Showing considerable poise as they present their work and answer questions posed by judges and other visitors, the students compete at the conference for coveted awards and recognition. As Ellis observes in the Edutopia documentary, “It’s a rock concert atmosphere, where hard work, imagination, and community service are celebrated.”

From its modest beginnings in 1994 at Greenbrier High School in Greenbrier, Arkansas where an environmental science teacher, Tim Stephenson, partnered with local information technology firms to launch the very first EAST program, through to the present day, the EAST Initiative has thrived because of its ability to forge working partnerships with public and private sector organizations. The popular My Community statewide filmmaking competition, for example, though open to all Arkansas students, involves a close partnership among the EAST Initiative, the Arkansas Departments of Economic Development, Parks and Tourism, Education, Higher Education, and Workforce Education, the Arkansas Arts Council, 4-H of Arkansas, Skills USA, the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, the Arkansas Literacy Council, and the Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute, among many other entities including a network of post-secondary educational institutions.

Students at individual EAST programs typically forge working partnerships with community-based organizations. Students at Horace Mann Middle School, for example, who investigated, helped remediate, and documented the effects of pollution on Fourche Creek collaborated with Audubon Arkansas, which sponsors ongoing projects to protect and clean up the watershed.

Launching and sustaining a successful EAST program

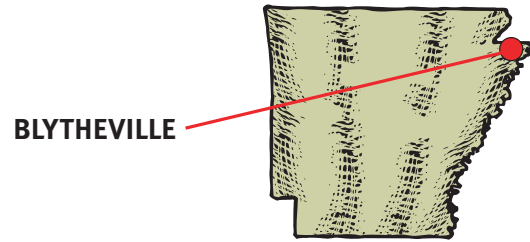
Moreover, when a community expresses interest in the EAST Initiative, according to Matt Dozier, the national program director, he and his staff in Little Rock are ready and willing to work towards building the coalition of partnerships needed to launch and sustain a successful program. “It takes a lot of support to get it going, and I’m not just talking money. It takes community will, because if [the students] are going to do a project, then they are going to be working out in the community. That means the community has to agree that this is something they are going to do.”

Dozier estimates that a community needs to invest about \$150,000 over the first two years to successfully launch a new program. Most of this expenditure is related to teacher training and equipment, much of which can be procured by EAST at a substantial discount. After the first two years, he adds, the program is “incredibly less expensive” to maintain.

“We tend to get the most dramatic results [with the EAST programs] in small rural areas,” Dozier reports. “I think that’s because they tend not to have a lot of access, and they tend not to have a lot of expectations. So when you give them—especially kids in smaller, poor, more isolated rural areas—more actual access to the equipment and the methodology, they begin to believe, and mom and dad begin to believe, ‘Hey, we can compete with anybody.’ Because they can!”

To view Edutopia documentaries on EAST cited in this article, please go to: www.edutopia.org/east

Robert Donnan, Consultant



The Divine Secrets of That Bookstore in Blytheville

How an Independent Bookstore Survives in the 21st Century Marketplace

A bookstore is one of the only pieces of evidence we have that people are still thinking.

Jerry Seinfeld

When most authors announce their book tours, you can usually guess the stops: the big cities, of course, like New York, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and perhaps some college towns with literary bents like Charlottesville, Ann Arbor, or Berkeley. So you might be surprised to find your favorite author scheduling a stop in little Blytheville, Arkansas. And if your favorite author is John Grisham, the aptly named “That Bookstore in Blytheville” might be one of the only places you’ll catch him reading from his latest thriller. But That Bookstore in Blytheville is more than just a stop for famous authors; in the hands of owner and operator Mary Gay Shipley, it’s helping the community restore the downtown to its former glory and enriching the cultural life of the entire region in the bargain.

A Changing Landscape

When Shipley opened the bookstore in 1976, there was little competition for those who wanted to buy a book. Neither Mississippi County nor the nearest larger city, Jonesboro, had a bookstore. Shipley opened for business on a side street before moving her store to its present location three years later.

In the intervening years, the marketplace for books changed dramatically. With the advent of Internet booksellers like Amazon.com, readers could order almost any book without leaving the comfort of their homes, and locally, books could be had in traditional venues like grocery stores and big box stores. Additionally, a number of chain bookstores including Books a Million and Borders opened near Blytheville.

So how does May Gay Shipley compete? “We are still in business because of John Grisham,” Shipley admits. Grisham faithfully returns the support they offered early in his career by traveling to only a select few independently owned bookstores each time he releases a book. The sign-

ings attract visitors to Shipley's establishment from throughout the southeast, and the autographed copies the author leaves behind are shipped all over the country.

Grisham isn't the only author who gives readings and signings at the store. Both Clintons held signings at the store, and readings by authors such as Rebecca Wells helped create momentum for these books. The author of the mega-best-seller *Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood* told Malcolm Gladwell of *The New Yorker* that she owes her success in large part to That Bookstore in Blytheville, which championed her first book, *Little Altars Everywhere*. "Mary Gay is a legend," Wells said. "She just kept putting my books in people's hands."¹



Dan Broun

Mary Gay Shipley, the owner of That Bookstore, has made previously unknown authors household names.

Spreading the Gospel

It's not only authors who appreciate Shipley. The residents of Blytheville, many of whom had Shipley as a teacher when she taught in the local schools, appreciate all she brings to the community. "The bookstore adds a lot to the quality of life; every community needs a bookstore," says Blytheville mayor Barret Harrison. "But she's also a tourist attraction. When Grisham is here, you'll see lines out the door. People know of Blytheville just because of Mary Gay and her bookstore. We're very proud of her, and fortunate to have her in community."

Because signings are key to the success of her business, Shipley has devised a mechanism for getting the word out to people both locally and nationally. Her 20,000-copy printed newsletter has given way to an Internet mailing list that announces the posting of an electronic newsletter that alerts subscribers to upcoming readings and favorite new books of Shipley and her staff. Still, Shipley believes nothing can beat word-of-mouth. "We try to make it easy for people to come to readings," she says. "We put things in local area press, but you have to tell people. It may be in the newspaper, but if you don't tell people, it ain't gonna happen."

Readings aren't the only events that keep people coming to That Bookstore. It's also the venue for a number of book clubs that meet periodically. Perhaps more important, people come into the store specifically to seek the advice of Shipley and her staff. "We have a regular customer," she says, "who lives in Monroe, Louisiana. He always makes an appointment to see me when he is in town."

The faith people have in the recommendations of Shipley and her staff is evident in one of the bookstore's premier services. Customers can register for a bookstore-sponsored book club that mails them a new book every month. Customers can refuse the book, but few, if any, do.

Community Commitment

Increasingly, people in Blytheville and the surrounding area are turning to Mary Gay Shipley not only for advice about what to read, but as an anchor for the ongoing revival of downtown Blytheville. "It really helps to have Mary Gay's store downtown," says Mayor Harrison. "All over the country, downtowns have struggled, but when you see a store like That Bookstore in Blytheville succeed, you know it can be done. I have to give Mary Gay credit for hanging in there"



Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

People from across the state count on That Bookstore in Blytheville for suggestions on what to read next.

One of the most historic of the buildings in Blytheville that attract buyers interested in renovation to be offered for sale formerly housed John Grisham's grandfather's piano store, and residents recently voted to establish in the old Kress building in downtown Blytheville a Mississippi County heritage museum. The town has benefited from an active Main Street program that tries to improve downtowns as an economic development strategy. Shipley is active in both the Main Street program and the local Chamber of Commerce. Indeed, a recent visit to That Bookstore found her being asked for help in negotiating the purchase of another downtown property.

Shipley knows that rebuilding a downtown is a challenge. "People aren't married to their downtowns anymore," she reflects. "Some people remember when every Saturday they would come downtown." Recognizing that "it's never going to be like that anymore," she explains that her store is taking steps to shape the downtown to people's new attitudes. "Now," she observes, "people are more errand runners. We do curb service even. People open their car door and there we are with their favorite books."

Shipley's commitment to contributing to the region's economic development extends beyond downtown. The new Arkansas Delta Made program of the Rural Heritage Delta Initiative is discussing with her having the store display local crafts and products, and she also sponsors on the area radio station a local music series as well as a program on books.

Among the challenges posed by being situated in Blytheville is that, unlike many independent

bookstores, That Bookstore is not surrounded by an active community of published writers. “That would be nice,” Shipley acknowledges, “because they tend to be loyal and show up for each other’s events”

Shipley would like to see Blytheville and the surrounding region do more to promote tourism, pointing out that the town’s proximity to I-55 offers the potential of a large visitors’ market. That Bookstore already gets significant traffic from individuals who stop by to pick up reading materials on their way to warmer climes for the winter.

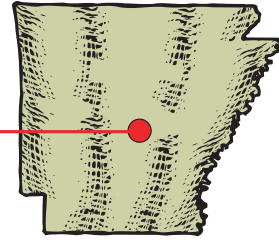
“Blytheville doesn’t have much in the way of tourist trade,” Shipley acknowledges. “But if we did, the bookstore would benefit from it. If people who come to the bookstore to breathe the molecules that John Grisham breathed had another place or two to visit or stay, that would be nice.”

Regardless of the sparse tourist traffic, Shipley is not going anywhere soon. “I don’t have an ‘exit strategy’ for when I retire,” she says. “I feel a little more responsibility. I don’t want to shut the door and walk away.”

Dan Broun, Regional Technology Strategies

1. Malcolm Gladwell, “The Science of the Sleeper,” *The New Yorker*, October 4, 1999.

LITTLE ROCK



Awakening the Muse

The College of Aspiring Artists

O, how wonderful is the human voice! It is indeed the organ of the soul!
– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The muse was sitting down.” That’s how Debora Chapman had been feeling for a long time before she heard of The College of Aspiring Artists (TCAA). She had always wanted to write songs and felt that she had something to express through music, but couldn’t seem to get many written, and what she did write she never sang. “My self-esteem wouldn’t allow me to believe I could perform,” she says. That changed in the fall of 2006, when Chapman enrolled at TCAA and found herself surrounded by other musically gifted people who wanted to spend their lives, and find their livelihood, in the world of music. She found herself pushed and challenged by instructors who would not allow her to plead low self-esteem as a reason not to produce. Within a few months, Chapman had written the words and music to “I’ll Try,” and try she did, performing the song for the first time in the spring of 2007 to great acclaim. She now plans to be a singer/songwriter, and says she will never again allow her fears to keep her from pursuing her dream.

TCAA hopes to set all of its students on a clearer path to fulfilling their dreams of a music career. Based on an idea founder Arthur Hunt had eleven years earlier, TCAA was founded in 2001 and admitted its first cohort of students in the fall of 2006, with a current enrollment of 28 full-time students. It has created a two-year postsecondary educational program aimed at preparing students for careers as performers, composers, producers, managers, agents, technicians, promoters, and a host of other niche occupations in the world of music. Through a combination of classroom instruction, rehearsal and live performance, and apprenticeship practicums, TCAA teaches students how to navigate the inner world of music: how to create a professional demo, get it played on radio stations, get record label representatives to listen to it, negotiate a contract, find venues for performing, and perform professionally. In short, TCAA’s goal is to turn raw musical talent into something on which students can build a career.

Giving the Muse an Education: Coursework at TCAA

Although TCAA’s offerings are structured as a two-year educational program, it is not an independent educational institution. Rather, it is situated within North Little Rock’s two-year Shorter

College. TCAA students are enrolled at Shorter College, and can earn a two-year associate's degree (MBE: Music Business Education) while completing the TCAA requirements.

The backbone of TCAA's educational program is its classroom instruction. Course offerings provide both a broad overview of the business side of the music world and a sharp focus on navigating specific elements from the performer's perspective. Significant attention, as might be expected, is paid to how performers, songwriters, and other independent musical "creatives" should approach financial management. Courses in this area cover not only fee setting and negotiation, but also the tax implications of performer payment structures, the profit potential in composition and copyrighting, and even personal budgeting and accounting.

Another important area, self-marketing, is the subject of three courses. One on image and presentation, taught by a professional in imaging and style consulting, is intended to teach students not only how to develop a professional look, but how, according to the instructor, to integrate "their inner person and their outer person." Many students have developed a performing style on their own prior to coming to TCAA, she explains, and might not be aware of the image they present. The course aims to help students articulate a desired self-image and then develop the constituent elements of that image: dress, hairstyle, body language, and singing style. The ultimate goal, according to the instructor, is to "make sure that what you're marketing is what you want to sell." Another course, on the specifics of marketing and promotions, teaches students how to get their work played on radio stations and heard by the right people, and how to identify and reach their target audience. The third course offers instruction in methods of getting booked for live performances and ways to establish and maintain the networks of connections needed to get desired bookings.

Other courses deal with the relationship between the performer or songwriter and music label: how to make the initial connection, handle contract negotiations, and establish and maintain the best possible relationship with the label. Still more courses teach graphic design and studio recording and production skills. The first two semesters of TCAA's program involve coursework intended to expose students, who up to that point might have experienced only the performing side of the music world, to the skills and techniques needed to transform a performer into a successful, financially viable music professional.

Getting the Muse into the Spotlight: Performing at TCAA

If its courses are its backbone, the heart of TCAA's program is the opportunity to perform. Performances in TCAA facilities earn peer and instructor feedback, and for students ready to move beyond the studio, TCAA arranges public venues that match the students' levels of readiness. TCAA students who performed at the halftime break of UA Pine Bluff's basketball game in November 2007 were warmly received. One of the higher-profile of TCAA's performances was that of Sounds of OEM, six sisters ranging in age from 14 to 20 who performed at the Sabine County Lights Festival in December 2007. Though most of the sisters are still in high school, they have been able to get instruction at TCAA in part because their father is studying there, and in part because they have already met with considerable success, having won the annual Arkansas Gospel Heritage Award and been scheduled to begin a 40-city tour in January 2008.

Performing for one another and for their instructors is the primary way TCAA students hone and refine their musical skills, both during and after the coursework period. Once the course-



LX, one of TCAA's best-known artists, performs in Little Rock.

work is completed, peer and instructor feedback becomes the primary mode of instruction, with students receiving both group and one-on-one consultation on the music they write, the studio skills they put into arranging and producing their songs, and the performances they give.

Several of TCAA's students credit this process with helping them uncover a performing talent they didn't know they had. Devon Mitchell, like many TCAA students, has a successful career in a field unrelated to music, but has always been actively involved in singing, pri-

marily in religious choral settings and in a female quartet. But spending time around people at TCAA who share her goals and her love of music has revealed solo abilities she didn't know she possessed. She is now doing some producing and songwriting for other artists as well as developing her performance abilities in the hope of embarking on a full-time career in contemporary gospel music. Mitchell finds TCAA's training so valuable in bringing her closer to this goal that she makes a four-hour round trip twice a week to attend the program.

Other students have come to TCAA from the other direction. Charles Sampson has already had a long and successful career in music, having written his first song in 1957 and played guitar and sung professionally ever since, both in his own group and in others'. He has also been a producer, songwriter, and music publisher. Yet he realized, after hearing about TCAA on a radio program last year, that he knew little about the business side of music. Two semesters of coursework not only brought Sampson considerable knowledge of the business end of music, but revitalized his performing career. Although he had enrolled in the TCAA program with the idea of leaving performing behind in order to devote himself to the business of music, a collaboration with Sounds of OEM is producing exciting new music that has made him want to sing again.

Looking Forward: Revitalizing and Sustaining the Muse

TCAA hopes that its program will eventually be equivalent to a brand or franchise that can be placed in a variety of higher educational settings, similar to the model of the Cisco Academies

situated in two-year technical and community colleges across the country. Cisco owns the intellectual property associated with its programs, but none of the physical or institutional infrastructure in which those programs are placed. TCAA hopes eventually to be a recognized and proprietary approach to music business education, situated, like Cisco Academies and other proprietary approaches to technical education, in two-year colleges throughout the country. Unlike these technical programs, however, TCAA envisions expanding the model to selected four-year colleges, beginning with historically black colleges and universities. Because the TCAA model has only just begun what could be considered its pilot test, its first cohort completing the program no sooner than spring 2008, it will have to find ways to show potential partners that its model will lead to its students' achieving greater success in the world of music.

Another important goal as TCAA moves forward is securing the buy-in and support of the music industry. Meaningful connections to record labels and high-end performance venues will be needed if TCAA is to be able to provide its students with access to real opportunities. TCAA will also need to be able to call on industry representatives to provide input and feedback on its curriculum and instruction methods to ensure their ongoing relevance to industry needs. It has taken some important steps in this direction, including establishing a strong relationship with a local radio station. Further developing these relationships will be key to the program's long-term success. Because the ultimate goal is to situate the program around the country in a variety of institutions, the model may need to receive a "stamp of approval" of some sort, whether explicit or informal, from the industry, and ways for the individual programs to establish the necessary industry relationships in local markets will have to be codified.

For now, TCAA has launched a program that might be able to put at least some of its students within reach of their dreams, or at least get them closer than they might ever have thought they would be.

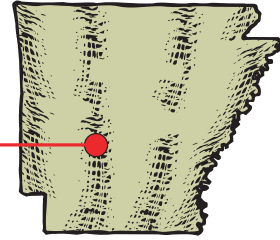
Sarah Butzen, Regional Technology Strategies

Acts such as the Sounds of OEM perform at TCAA sponsored concerts.



TCAA

HOT SPRINGS



Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute

Locus of Learning, Venue for Viewing, and Catalyst for Collaboration

When you ask filmmakers where they want to play, they say Hot Springs.
Ben Avila, documentarian

For 10 days each October, thousands of filmgoers stream through the doors of Hot Springs' historic Malco Theatre to attend the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival. For 16 years, the non-profit Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute, presenter of the festival, has screened a diverse collection of films produced by some of the world's most recognized documentary filmmakers along with a new generation of emerging talent. Launched in 1992 by a small group of local arts activists, the festival in its first year screened, free of charge to a primarily local audience, 10 Academy Award nominated documentary films. In 2007, it screened nearly 100 films including a number of world premieres to an audience of nearly 25,000 from across the country and beyond. This, first in the United States, all-documentary film festival is now recognized as one of the largest and most prestigious in the world.

Tourism Beyond the Springs

Tourism has long been the pillar of Hot Springs' economy. Generations of visitors have bathed in its therapeutic waters fed by 47 hot springs on the western slope of Hot Springs Mountain. In 1832, to protect the springs, Congress designated the area the first Federal Reservation and in 1921 established a national park on the site. Horseracing, casinos, and other forms of entertainment drew more visitors. But the waning popularity of thermal springs resorts post World War II, and closing of the casinos in the 1960s, prompted the community to reposition its tourism industry. Historic bathhouses and other architecturally significant structures were renovated to showcase the city's colorful history, new spas were established to supplement the hot springs with contemporary relaxation therapies and skin treatments, and convention facilities were built.

In the midst of these developments, cultural tourism has emerged as an increasingly prominent part of Hot Springs' tourism mix. The city has a lively music scene and hosts three annual music festivals. The most important, the Hot Springs Music Festival, which pairs some of the nation's

most talented young musicians with established professionals for a series of 20 classical concerts and 250 open rehearsals during a 10-day period in June, attracts audiences of more than 20,000. The city's cultural appeal is further abetted by the art galleries and antique shops that have sprung up in restored buildings on the once seedy edge of the city's historic downtown. These venues for the visual arts in what is now known as the gallery district have been joined by new restaurants and entertainment spots. Gallery owners began sponsoring in 1989 a monthly gallery walk during which new exhibits are unveiled and artists are on hand to discuss their works with the public.

Throwing out the Red Carpet

The Documentary Film Festival, Hot Springs' highest profile cultural event, has played a lead role in cementing the city's image as a cultural tourism destination. The festival has received considerable national and international media attention in recent years, making the pages of both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. "It helps us keep Hot Springs out there in markets we can't advertise in because of our limited budget," notes Steve Arrison, executive director of the city's Advertising and Promotion Commission. "It's a great way to get information out about what a great place Hot Springs is to visit."

Hot Springs' position as a center of documentary film exhibition was further enhanced in 2004 when it was designated by the International Documentary Association one of the first four communities in the United States to screen potential academy award nominees. In terms of direct economic impact, festival audiences are estimated to pump \$4-\$5 million into the local economy through spending in local hotels, restaurants, and shops, giving a particular boost to businesses in the gallery district in which the Malco Theatre is located.

The Hot Springs' community has adopted the festival as its own. The audience includes a devout local following, but community involvement goes far beyond attendance. In 2007, more than 500 volunteers pitched in to do everything from chauffeuring filmmakers to taking tickets and selling popcorn. City Manager Kent Myers is one of those volunteers. "I volunteer because it's fun, but also because the festival needs us to succeed," he says. "It's obvious my hours are well spent on something so beneficial to Hot Springs." Why do so many others volunteer? "First,"



Joe Correian

Festival volunteers prepare for Opening Night Popcorn and Champagne Reception.

says Myers, “the quality of the films. Second, Hot Springs is a tourism-based community, so people want to make sure visitors are well treated and have a good experience. By volunteering, they can throw out the red carpet.”

“The Filmmakers Festival”

In 2007, Myers took his involvement to a new level. A long-time runner, he read a favorable review of a new documentary, *Runners High*, in a runner’s magazine. He submitted the film to the institute for consideration and it was accepted for screening. Myers went a step further by lining up a sponsor for the film, who paid to bring producer and director Oren and Justine Jacob to the festival. Myers then organized with the Arkansas School of Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts, a statewide magnet high school located in Hot Springs, a 5k “Runners High” to be run with 500 participants, all of whom were to receive free tickets to the film. The Jacobs kicked off the race and gave lectures about filmmaking at the magnet school and another local high school.



Peter Carlson, producer of the documentary film *Born In the Honey: The Pinetop Perkins Story*, with Pinetop Perkins during a Q & A Session at the 2007 Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival.

It’s this kind of community support and engagement that has documentary filmmakers calling the Hot Springs Festival “the filmmakers festival.” According to noted documentary filmmaker Chris Gore, it’s “one of the best in the world,” and “fast becoming *the* destination for filmmakers to premiere their work,” for which he credits appreciative audiences, a supportive staff, and Hot Springs’ laid back atmosphere. Adds Ben Meade, another well known documentarian and associate professor of communication at Avila University in Kansas City, “When you ask filmmakers where they want to play, they say Hot Springs. I’ve been to 137 festivals in six years and this is the best for documentary film. You have an audience that truly loves documentary films.” After showing one of his films at the 2006 festival, Meade was so impressed with the institute and charmed by Hot Springs that he and his wife decided to buy a second home in the area. Soon after, he was offered, and accepted, the chairmanship of the institute’s board of directors.

Building a Homegrown Film Industry

The institute has not only made the festival a premier venue for today's documentary films, but is working to cultivate a new generation of documentary filmmakers and viewers. A collaborator in the Arkansas School of Math, Sciences and the Arts' recent inauguration of a documentary filmmaking program, the institute has taken a leading role by assisting with curriculum development, obtaining equipment donations, and bringing in guest speakers. Meade plans to teach two film production courses in 2008 while on sabbatical from Avila.

Putting Hot Springs on the Radar Screen

The institute is also planning to produce, in collaboration with the film programs at the School of Math, Sciences and the Arts and three Arkansas higher education institutions, its first feature documentary film, which will deal with the life of Owney Madden, Hot Springs' legendary organized crime boss from the 1930s through the early 1960s. Each collaborating institution will select five or six of its best students to participate in the project, which the institute will coordinate.

The Madden documentary will not only support the institute's educational agenda, but also promote its vision of Hot Springs as a hub of documentary production and distribution. The institute is currently assessing the potential to add to its existing facilities or acquire adjacent property for post-production facilities, and planning a capital campaign to fund construction and equipment purchases. It is also developing an archiving system for the 17,000 documentary films in its library, and exploring the development of a distribution system that will include on-line capabilities. Although these additional resources and the festival's reputation will help to attract documentary film production to the state, the institute and others are also lobbying state officials to offer film production tax incentives that will make Arkansas more competitive with Louisiana, Mississippi, and other states as a venue for film production.

Local economic development officials support these efforts, and fully understand their economic potential. Says Arrison, "While nothing has happened yet, we've seen increasing interest in Hot Springs among film production companies. Digital production techniques give the industry much more flexibility in locating facilities, but the institute is the reason we are even on their radar screen. That is priceless for Hot Springs and priceless for the State of Arkansas."



Joe Correian

Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute's Historic Malco Theater.

As one of Hot Springs' leading cultural assets, the institute has enriched the city's cultural life, which has itself generated economic benefits. A community's quality of life attracts talented workers and



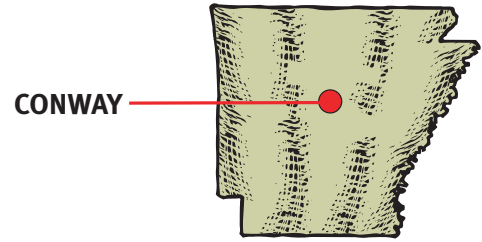
Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

The beautiful setting of Hot Springs attracts visitors year round.

others who can choose where to live. In recent years, the Hot Springs area has benefited, in particular, from an influx of well-to-do retirees and second home owners. Local political and business leaders acknowledge that the cultural environment has been an important factor in this trend, and that the institute has made a key contribution. “What a great quality of life addition it is to Hot Springs,” enthuses Arrison. “Retirees can have the amenities of a big city without the big city.” City Manager Kent Myers sees the festival as having a certain edginess that helps Hot Springs stand out. “It fits into the framework of being a culturally active community, and it gives us a certain notoriety because of the films shown, the filmmakers it attracts, and the media coverage. We take pride in that fact.”

Beyond its impact on Hot Springs, the institute is beginning to expand its activities to other parts of the state. Two banks are sponsoring its “docmobile,” which will travel to small communities elsewhere in the state to screen documentaries and deliver educational programs for K-12 students. Beginning in 2008, the institute will hold a second documentary film festival in Fayetteville. “We want to make Arkansas the documentary film state,” says the institute’s executive director, Malinda Herr-Chambliss, “the state most identified with making, showing, and celebrating documentary film and filmmakers.”

Peter Kwass, Mt. Auburn Associates



Symbol and Stimulus

Collaboration between Town and Campus is Making the Arts Central to an Enlightened Future for Conway, Arkansas

UCA is not a small, sleepy college anymore, just like Conway is not the same small, sleepy town it was a few years ago.

Conway Mayor Tab Townsell

If you drive up one side of Front Street in Conway, Arkansas, you'll see a city hall much like the city halls in a hundred other Conways, a municipal building designed in that great architectural wasteland of the mid-20th century when zoning ordinances seem to have been drawn up without much thought to creativity. But if you drive down Front Street in the opposite direction, you'll see something quite different. A huge mural covering the side of the structure juxtaposes images of the city's past with the large image of a young girl looking forward. The mural symbolizes the growing city's commitment not only to the arts, but to exploiting one of its most important assets, the University of Central Arkansas, to assure an enlightened future for its creative economy.

Making the Ivory Tower a Little More Artistic

About 30 minutes north of Little Rock, in Faulkner County, Conway is home to three institutions of higher education, two private, Hendrix College and Central Baptist College, the other the state-supported University of Central Arkansas (UCA), the second largest campus in the state. With more than 1,000 students enrolled in degree programs in its College of Fine Arts and Communication, UCA is having a profound impact on the city's life and creative economy.

Five departments, each representing a different creative endeavor, comprise the college. These departments—Art, Mass Communication and Theater, Writing, Music, and Speech and Public Relations—offer both bachelor's and master's degrees in a variety of disciplines, some unique to the state. For example, the college's Masters of Fine Arts degree in Digital Filmmaking, a three-year, terminal master's program that combines technical expertise in film creation with lessons in storytelling to ensure that students' work finds audiences, is the only such degree offered in Arkansas.

Embracing the new technology of digital media is consistent with UCA's longstanding emphasis on practical approaches to arts instruction, a major component of which is encouraging students to



UCA

Productions like the UCA's Theatre performance of the Three Penny Opera draw spectators from around the region.

pursue internships with local or national artists. "We always try to get our students as good an internship as we can," says former UCA ceramics professor Helen Phillips. "That's a really good aspect of the program as it gives them a hands on experience of what it is like to be an artist."

Classes also emphasize some of the commercial aspects of producing art. Students are taught, for example, not only brush stroke technique, but also how to prepare a portfolio and work with galleries to get their work into shows.

Bringing the Arts, and Artists, to Campus

One means of imparting practical knowledge is the college's unique Artists in Residence Program. A student fee used to promote the arts funds the program, which brings nationally recognized artists to campus for three-day stays during which they lecture and meet with students to give them a sense of what it takes to produce art beyond the campus's ivory tower.

Our Artists in Residence program is particularly important for our students coming from small communities," says Rollin Potter, dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication. "They've never really had face to face contact with a distinguished artist, so in many ways it's an inspirational contact. It may only be a three-day contact, but it puts them in touch with what they can be expected to experience in the wider world."

The fee also supports many of the cultural programs that bring artists' works to campus. Two galleries, Baum Gallery of Fine Art and the Black Box Gallery, exhibit traveling shows as well as student art with the goal of providing students with a wide range of artistic experiences. "By the time they leave campus, they will have seen a variety of media and a variety of subject matter," says Jeff Young, chair of UCA's Art Department.

Collaborating with the Community

The galleries also, in line with a recent emphasis on increasing outreach, hope to attract visitors from the broader community. Other elements of this outreach include the university's participa-

tion in helping to found the Conway Symphony Orchestra, the conductor of which holds a faculty position. The orchestra performs at the college's new 1,200 seat Reynolds Performance Hall. UCA is also a major funder of the new Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre, a summer festival of performances held at Reynolds Performance Hall.

An initiative the university has undertaken with Hendrix College and Central Baptist College involves the creation of the Conway Alliance for the Arts responsible for coordinating arts programming and outreach in the community. "The original goal of the alliance was to develop collaboration among UCA, Hendrix, and Central Baptist," explains Dean Potter. "Conway was beginning to have a thriving arts life, but it wasn't organized. For instance, we all market things on our own instead of combining information." Consistent with its expansion beyond academia into a one-stop source of information about creative activities that helps to advertise events in town as well as at the colleges, the city of Conway was encouraged to appoint members of the public art commission and parks and recreation department to the council.

Conway Embraces the Arts

Recognizing that the arts are critical to its future, Conway is embracing the university's outreach plan. "Art has really been something we've decided to emphasize in the past few years and moving forward," says Mayor Tab Townsell. "We believe the city we are trying to become requires high quality of life style, and arts and culture contribute to that in a big way." The mayor sees the arts as a way to ensure that the city's residents, which recently exceeded 50,000, don't have to drive to Little Rock for entertainment.

Even the natives, the mayor avers, realize that their town has come a long way. "Although we are still in many ways a conservative town, we are a little more savvy and a little more worldly now," he says. "People who were raised here, they are almost a little giddy when they see opportunities such as art in Conway. The other night we had a wonderful concert featuring Brazilian guitarists at UCA. That's the kind of exposure a lot of towns would love to have."

The city has begun to invest more in public art as well. It sponsored a unique art project with the Chamber of Commerce, and commissioned an artist to create "Travel Art" depictions of Conway in the style of the 1920s and 1930s, for which both Hendrix and UCA financed depictions of their campuses.

Paint the Town Red . . . and Pink

With the city increasingly embracing art as key to its growth, it was time for a native son to return to lead another public art initiative. Morton Brown, who earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from UCA in 1996, came home to paint a mural with input of the entire Conway community. After earning a Masters degree at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Brown went to Pittsburgh where he established the Sprout Public Arts Program, which over a five-year period painted 32 murals around the Steel City. Working with young artists, he never forgot what he had learned at UCA. "I totally loved my time at UCA," Brown says. "I teach artists many of the same lessons I learned there."

Brown approached UCA about spending a semester on its faculty, during which time he would create a mural in the city. UCA, with the support of city leaders, jumped at the chance to bring



UCA

The city and UCA worked with noted artist Morton Brown to create a mural highlighting Conway's past and future.

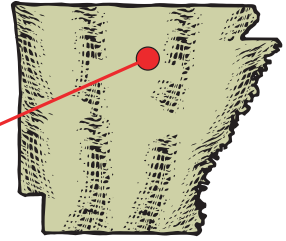
town and gown together in such an innovative way. The process of creating the mural was rooted in both. Brown facilitated a town meeting at which more than 70 residents offered their thoughts on what the mural should represent. Brown took their ideas and proffered a design, to which the community was invited to have further input. Community input was key to getting the project off the ground. "Creating the mural was really a well done process," says the mayor of Brown's approach. "He really reached out to the community as a whole."

The work itself was done by UCA students. Brown supervised an independent study class, ten students from which experienced the full range of activities involved in bringing a mural to life, from ordering supplies, to building scaffolding, to finally painting. "These students really lived the life of a professional artist," Brown says. "They worked from sun-up to sundown and got class credit for it."

The town unveiled the mural in the fall of 2007 as part of ArtsFest, a joint effort of the town, Hendrix, and UCA. Like many artworks, the mural is not without controversy. Scenes from Conway's past are depicted, but the largest image is a girl wearing large pink glasses and a cape, looking as if she's preparing to fly. Although the prominence of that image caused consternation among some residents, for the mayor it's the key to the whole work. "The girl was objected to the most, but for me that is what makes the piece," he says. "That is one portion of the mural that speaks to the future. Everything else speaks to the past. That moment just before takeoff, that speaks to the hope of a child, and that is perfectly fitting for Conway right now. To me, it captures how we see ourselves."

Dan Broun, Regional Technology Strategies

MOUNTAIN VIEW



From Street Corners and Front Porches to Festivals and Performances Its Diet of Homegrown Music Feeds Mountain View's Economy

Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn.

Charlie Parker

Viewed on an Arkansas highway map, the town of Mountain View appears to be just one of scores of tiny black dots peppered across the state. But although it is, indeed, one of Arkansas' smaller towns, with fewer than 3,000 residents and a 6.8 square mile footprint, Mountain View looms large on both the state and national folk music scenes. Its reputation as the Folk Music Capital of the World stems from a folk music tradition that has endured for decades in the living rooms, schoolhouses, general stores, and street corners of a town in which music has been an integral part of daily life. Families built and played instruments, wrote and played music “just for pleasure...to be doing something...for fun.”¹

The same motivations hold today. Several nights a week, summer and winter, the town's parlors, restaurants, and public squares—even disused and closed-down retail and industrial spaces—fill with foresters, retail managers, schoolteachers, truckers, and hotel owners, in other words, with Mountain View's musicians. They gather to harmonize and share techniques, but mainly to play and hear “soul-satisfying homemade music.... Some events are scheduled, and others start with a phone call: ‘Hey, I was thinking about pickin’ a little.’ As often as not, it's a matter of dropping by a certain porch or likely gathering place just to see who is there and ready to play.”²

Owing to its “organic” nature, its authenticity and groundedness in the life of the community, Mountain View's folk music has always been one of its most valuable cultural and quality-of-life assets. Over the past four decades, however, it has also become one of the town's most significant economic assets. How this has come about sheds light on the role authenticity plays in determining the value of a creative asset. It also dramatizes the tensions and questions that can arise when a traditional or folk-art is brought to prominence in ways that require present-day interpre-

tations and creativity to maintain and develop it. How, for example, is authenticity to be proved, and is it more authentic to preserve or refresh the art form? The story of folk music in Mountain View is the story of the creation and re-creation of an authentic, traditional, living creative asset.

Give Me That Old-Timey Music

When Mountain View was founded in 1890, its economy was based on small-acreage cash crops such as grain, cotton, timber, and livestock.³ Due to its isolation and poor accessibility, the town developed a largely self-sustaining lifestyle that helped its residents endure decades of poverty and scarcity, particularly during the Great Depression. But in the years following World War II, this lifestyle became increasingly difficult to sustain as jobs and economic opportunities became scarce for Mountain View residents.

In the early 1960s, a group of state Cooperative Extension staffers looking for ways to ameliorate the area's depressed economy came up with the idea of a craft and artisan fair to provide a larger market for local craftspeople's products. Somewhat incidentally, it was decided to include a music component, and Mountain View progeny country singer-songwriter Jimmy Driftwood was asked to organize it. Instead of bringing in his Nashville connections to perform, Driftwood surprised everyone by calling on the town's amateur musicians to play and sing their "old-timey" music in the local high school gymnasium. To everyone's further surprise, the "amateur" music show was by far the draw of the April 1963 Arkansas Folk Festival, attracting more than 4,000 people to the first show and more than 10,000 over the course of the weekend, and establishing the festival as an annual event.

The festival was the catalyst that precipitated Mountain View's transformation, that turned the musical traditions of a small, music-loving town fallen on hard times into a valuable economic asset. The creation of a folk center that would celebrate, preserve, and teach the folk traditions of the Ozark region was first floated by a director of the federal Area Redevelopment Administration as a way to get federal funds into the region to help build the sewer and water system the town so badly needed. It took ten years and political influence peddling, lobbying, and logrolling by a large cast of characters to get the funding approved and released, but in 1973 the Ozark Folk Center opened its doors. The center, like the festival, embraces the gamut of folk arts and crafts, but music is central to both. Together, the Arkansas Folk Festival and the Ozark Folk Center have institutionalized the living musical traditions that have become Mountain View's greatest economic asset.



Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

In Mountain View, music is often passed down from generation to generation.



Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

Gathering to listen to music in front of the Stone County Courthouse is a Mountain View tradition.

The Soundtrack of Daily Life

Were its population assessed according to occupational codes, Mountain View might be judged to be nearly devoid of musicians. Yet not only is much of that population connected in some way to the world of folk music, but music is central to the community's way of life. Mountain View residents make their own instruments, play, and teach music; children learn to play and sing at almost the same time they learn to walk and talk; and teens recall the excitement they felt when, at one of the town's impromptu jam sessions, they were first beckoned from the sidelines where the children sit to make music with the adults, when they were tested and allowed to prove themselves as adults in what might almost be thought of as a rite of passage.

Some long-time residents assert that the institutionalization of Mountain View's musical heritage has not only transformed it into a public economic asset, but also breathed new life into the private expression and enjoyment of the music the town has known so long. "There had been living room gatherings and front porch gatherings, you know, all those years, but that was dying out," says Charley Sandage, who helped to establish the Ozark Folk Center and Arkansas Folk Festival.⁴

When he planned the "old-timey" performance for the first Folk Festival, Jimmy Driftwood secured permission for the musicians to practice in the old county courthouse every Friday night. Friday music in the courthouse subsequently became a tradition that persisted for decades, and still persists in the sense that preparing for the festival, in getting the music out of the living rooms and into the public spaces, revived and re-energized the living room playing that had begun to die out. The relationship between public and private playing constitutes one of the most important elements of folk music's role as an economic asset.

People come to Mountain View not only for festivals and performances, but simply to be where people are playing music, where during a weekend stay in a hotel they will more than likely stumble upon a jam session, or hear the hotel owner's prodigy son play banjo over breakfast (on an instrument the father made himself), or pass a few old-timers picking in the square, or, falling into conversation with a local, learn that the individual's grandparents were the best harmonica players in Stone County.

Those who visit Mountain View know they will encounter music simply because music is part of the life of the community, because the people who live there would be playing music whether there were visitors or not. It would appear that economic benefit is most likely to be reaped from the playing of music when that music is treated as a valuable activity and tradition in its own right, apart from whatever performance value it might have.

Keeping the Tradition Alive

Bringing folk music to life in the present day—at the Ozark Folk Center, the Arkansas Folk Festival, or in the day-to-day lives of Mountain View's residents—gives rise to a dilemma observed whenever a folk tradition is preserved or revived. What makes folk music “real”? Adhering as closely as possible to the performance of an earlier day? Or does that only reinforce the sense that folk is a “dead” tradition? These questions arose when the festival and center were founded, and have by no means been answered. If anything, they have become more urgent as more “old-timey” folk practitioners die. In Mountain View, the question of how to be “authentic” attends the daily practice and interpretation of the town's musical culture.

How do you put something on the stage without killing it?... How it used to be is not going to exist in Stone County unless you have some way to nurture how it used to be, and by nurturing it in an environment that is orderly...you're not going to keep it quite the way it was, but you're going to keep enough of it so that it is reminiscent of how things were, and that's a good thing.⁵

Mountain View has, through its Folk Center and the many festivals it hosts, devoted a significant part of its community and economic life to keeping folk music alive and vital. In so doing, it has generated as well as a new source of economic vitality old questions and fresh ideas about how the creative and cultural authenticity of folk traditions come into play, questions and ideas to be considered with all the attention given the concerns of every day, because that is what they are.

Sarah Butzen, *Regional Technology Strategies*

1. Charley Sandage, “Mountain View, Arkansas: Where It's All About the Music,” *Ozarks Magazine*, <http://www.ozarksmagazine.com/index.html?p=85>

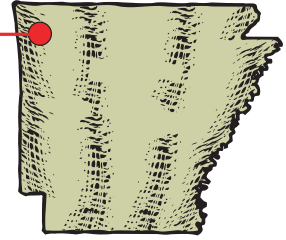
2 Charley Sandage, “Mountain View, Arkansas: Where It's All About the Music,” *Ozarks Magazine*.

3 “The Story of Mountain View,” Stephanie Lawrence Labert, http://www.cityofmountainview.net/mv_history

4 Lyons College Oral History Project, “Creation and Development of the Arkansas Folk Festival and the Ozark Folk Center,” interview with Charley Sandage.

5 Lyons College Oral History Project, “Creation and Development of the Arkansas Folk Festival and the Ozark Folk Center,” interview with David Newbern.

FAYETTEVILLE



A Grand Design for Arkansas

Students of a New School and Center in Fayetteville Learn about the World of Digital Design

Design, in its broadest sense, is the enabler of the digital era—it's a process that creates order out of chaos, that renders technology usable to business. Design means being good, not just looking good.

Clement Mok

According to young entrepreneur Sonia Davis Gutiérrez, the Mill District of Fayetteville represents a different side of northwest Arkansas. “It doesn’t feel like the kind of place where you get your tie on and stay in your box,” she says. “It’s more of a get your work boots on and grab your paint brush, or in our case grab your Wacom Tablet and your Mac, and get to work kind of place,” Davis Gutiérrez and her compatriot digital designers at New Design School and New Design Center come to work armed with their tools of the trade in hopes of passing their knowledge on to a new group of Arkansans in the process. Community members can avail themselves of workshops offered by the New Design Center, or earn a certificate in digital design by attending seminars conducted by the New Design School. An on-site design firm and student gallery help to provide a sense of total immersion in the world of digital design.

Beginning a Career in Design

In the fall of 2007, the New Design School, the first design school in the state began to offer a two-year certificate program for individuals looking to pursue a career in digital design. The 68-credit program includes graphic design, multimedia, games, and video and web design as well as the business skills needed to generate income from creative endeavors.

With the classes held at night, students are able to hold full time day jobs. Davis Gutiérrez knew from her work with area designers that the night classes were a draw for the faculty as well. “Having a network of graphic designers in the area showed me it was the right time to do this,” she said. “I knew people were burned out from being in the studio all day. It’s refreshing for them to get out and teach.”

“Makeshops” for the Masses

Recognizing that not everyone in northwest Arkansas is looking to embark on a career in digital design, Davis Gutiérrez and her partners offer through the New Design Center a series of short courses that include introductions to programs such as InDesign and Photoshop that equip participants to apply digital design to their businesses. “We don’t want people to think of a dry learning atmosphere,” Davis Gutiérrez explains. “We want people to engage in project based learning. The classes, called “Makeshops” to reflect the different approach the center is taking, are also offered in traditional media such as drawing. Last year, fifteen students participated in Makeshops, many opting to take more than one class.

Of the Salvador Gutiérrez Gallery for Emerging Artists, Davis Gutiérrez says, “We want new artists to have the opportunity to have us listed first on their resume, because most galleries ask, ‘So where else have you shown?’ We help the artists by promoting them on our web site and in our digital newsletter that goes out once a month. The artists are responsible for the remainder of the promotion and the opening reception if they choose to have one. This helps them understand budgeting, connecting with community, and planning promotion events. One hundred percent of the sale of the work goes to directly to the artists.”

Making a Home in the Mill

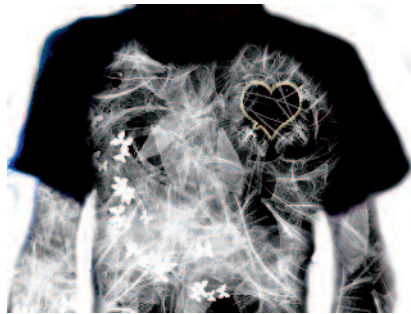
Reflecting Davis Gutiérrez’s desire that it be an anchor for the emerging Mill District of Fayetteville, the New Design Center and gallery recently moved into the Mill Building, a centerpiece of the neighborhood. Like most artists’ neighborhoods around the country, the district offers lower rents and an industrial feel, an attraction for designers like Davis Gutiérrez and her faculty.

Davis Gutiérrez is happy to be back where she grew up and first attended college. She earned a Masters degree ((choosing design over her other major, microbiology) and taught at the Parson School of Design in New York, then studied design for a year in Spain before returning home to northwest Arkansas. Like many entrepreneurs, she relied on family support, including a loan from her father, to launch the school and center in 2005.

Davis Gutiérrez’s goals are ambitious. She’d like to “put Arkansas on the map in design” by providing an interconnected environment in which, for example, her full time students in the New Design School lead makeshops for community members and collaborate with staff of the 3c21 Design Studio on the development of new design products for local businesses.

“We just moved into the basement of the Mill Building,” she says. “In five years, I’d like to slowly move up and take over the building. And she’s ready to grab her Wacom Tablet and MacBook and get to work to make it happen.

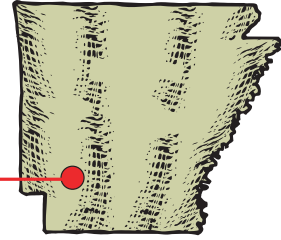
Sonia Davis Gutiérrez



Students at the New Design School learn a wide range of graphic design skills.

Dan Brown, Regional Technology Strategies

HISTORIC WASHINGTON



A Cut Above

A Two-State Partnership Creates the Preeminent School of Bladesmithing

[Crocodile Dundee is threatened by a mugger with a switchblade]

Sue Charlton: Mick, give him your wallet.

Michael J. “Crocodile” Dundee: What for?

Sue Charlton: He’s got a knife.

Michael J. “Crocodile” Dundee [chuckling]: That’s not a knife.

*{Dundee draws a large Bowie knife} **That’s** a knife.*

Defender of the Alamo, slayer of Count Dracula, and protector of Crocodile Dundee, the world’s most famous knife, the Bowie, was first forged in Washington, Arkansas. Today, the tradition of bladesmithing thrives in southwest Arkansas, anchored by the nation’s first school devoted to the craft of knife making, the Bill Moran School of Bladesmithing. The school thrives as a unique cross-state partnership between a Texas community college, a national association, and the state of Arkansas. It also has helped make Arkansas home to more master bladesmiths than any state in the nation.

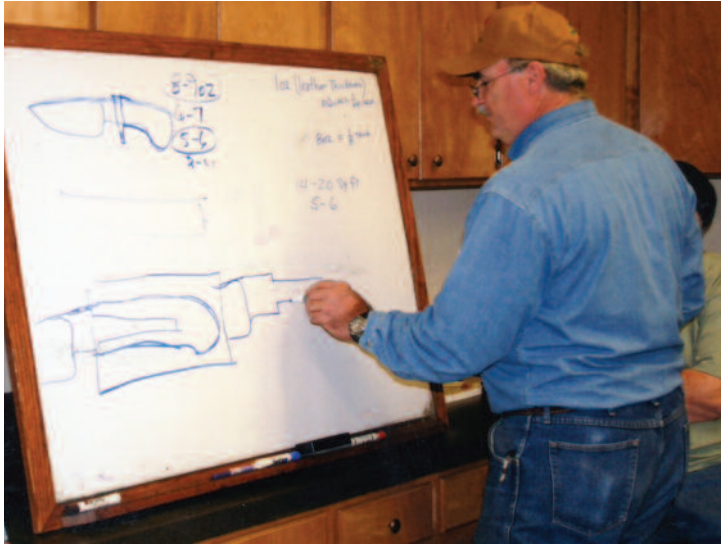
Teaching a Tradition

Historic Washington State Park is sometimes referred to as Arkansas’ Historic Williamsburg. The park’s more than 30



Texarkana College

Potential buyers examine a wide range of handcrafted blades for sale during an event at Historic Washington State Park.



Texarkana College

Teaching the art of bladesmithing.

painstakingly restored historical buildings give visitors a taste of 19th century life in Arkansas. After touring the grounds, visitors can eat at the renowned Williams Tavern restaurant or participate in any of the many workshops offered on site that teach, among other things, the art of quilting, cooking with a dutch oven, and even dances once popular on the frontier.

Visitors to the Bladesmith House can observe blacksmiths and bladesmiths displaying their skills, often working in the same man-

ner as the craftsmen of previous centuries, including noted blacksmith James Black who, in 1831, created the first Bowie Knife for Colonel James Bowie. Colonel Bowie brought the knife fame, since immortalized in song and on film, when he wielded the weapon in the famous Battle of the Alamo.

Historic Washington State Park was thus the natural choice when the American Bladesmith Society began to look, in 1987, to open the world's first bladesmithing school. ABS co-founder B. R. Hughes, dean of students at Texarkana College just over border in Texas, together with other interested parties, approached the community college as well as the State of Arkansas with a proposal to start a school that would teach the local craft of bladesmithing.

The Bill Moran School of Bladesmithing is named for one of the school's founders, who is also one of the most innovative knife makers in the country. The most popular of the various classes offered eight months out of the year is the intensive, two-week "Introduction to Bladesmithing," which attracts knife enthusiasts not only from around the country, but from all over the world. Students can bunk in a house at the state park in Washington, or stay in Hope, a short distance away. Several of the master bladesmiths who teach at the school are from the state of Arkansas. One of these, Jerry Fisk, a full-time bladesmith from Nashville, Arkansas, says the program is especially attractive to students from Europe, where the tradition of knife making is held much more closely and the "secrets of the craft" are not widely shared. "If they want to learn," Fisk says, "they come here."

Other classes offered by the Bill Moran School of Bladesmithing include crafting knife handles and guards and making silver wire inlay and Damascus Steel, a particular form of bladesmithing. The range of classes is testament to the intricacy of the craft. According to Fisk, a quality knife is a product of a blend of many artistic disciplines including metallurgy, woodworking,



Roger Massey

Knives such as this one designed by Roger Massey of Texarkana are sold around the world.

carving, and jewelry work, not to mention marketing. “And when you’re all done, you have to sweep the floor,” Fisk jokes.

Graduates of the Bill Moran School are well positioned to earn one of the American Bladesmithing Society’s two levels of bladesmith accreditation: the journeyman certificate, and the Master Smith. To sit for the Journeyman Smith test, an individual must be a member of ABS for two years, but this requirement is reduced to one year for those who successfully complete the Bill Moran School’s Introduction to Bladesmithing class. Journeymen can sit for a masters test after one year, and can present their work for evaluation at an annual trade show after two years. These rigorous requirements account for the fact that there only 126 ABS sanctioned Master Smiths worldwide.

Blades without Borders

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the Bill Moran School of Bladesmithing is the partnership that supports it, which transcends state borders. The organizer is the Continuing Education Division of Texarkana College, a publicly supported Texas community college. The American Bladesmith Society, a private association that promotes the craft of bladesmithing, helps the school find instructors and markets the program to its membership. The state of Arkansas’ Department of Parks owns the park facilities that host the classes.

Scotty Hayes, Texarkana College's director of community services, says the partnership has been extremely successful. "We have great relationship with the state parks. The communication lines are always open. There is a real give and take relationship."

In part, the school's success can be attributed to a tradition of reciprocity between Texarkana College and Arkansas. Arkansas residents pay in-state tuition to attend the college; in the last academic year, 24 percent of the more than 3,500 full-time students were from Arkansas. Although the bladesmithing school is run through the Continuing Education program, the spirit of serving Arkansans extends from the core curriculum to working with the Parks Department.

Dinner at Uncle Al's

The Bill Moran School's location is testament not only to Arkansas' important place in the history of knife making, but also to the number of bladesmiths in the state. Arkansas is home to 14 master smiths, the most in the nation. Texas is second, with nine ABS-certified master smiths.

Texarkana bladesmith Roger Massey recalls saving up enough vacation time to finally take the Introduction to Bladesmithing class in the early 1990s. A few years later he passed the master smith class, and now teaches courses at the Bill Moran School. Massey is looking forward to retirement, when he will be able to work full time in his home bladesmith shop filling orders for customers the world over who order his award winning knives.

Massey and Fisk are both members of the Arkansas Knifemaker Association, which works to keep the tradition of bladesmithing alive in the state by sponsoring, among other events, the Arkansas Custom Knife Show in Little Rock, which draws participants and buyers from all over the country. Members drive hours to attend the association's monthly meetings, held in DeQueen at Uncle Al's, actually Riverside Machine Shop, Al Lawrence's business, for dinner and a chance to share techniques and bladesmithing experiences with fellow craftsmen.

Bladesmithing on the Cutting Edge

Fisk regularly makes the trip to Uncle Al's to learn from fellow craftsmen like James Cook of Nashville, who was named an Arkansas Living Treasure by the Arkansas Arts Council. Learning from peers is one way that Fisk has been able to make a career of bladesmithing. He makes everything from hunting knives to Bowie knives to elaborate swords. "I can make anything with an edge to it," he says. "If a guy wanted me to, I'd make him a shovel."

Fisk has himself been declared a National Living Treasure by the University of North Carolina at Wilmington's Museum of World Cultures. Although orders for garden tools aren't pouring in, his knives have found a global market. "I can measure the economy of a country by how my knives are selling," he claims, pointing to recent sales in China as an indicator of that nation's rising economic strength. Sales generally have been strong enough to enable Fisk to pursue bladesmithing full time.

A key to Fisk's success is his understanding that marketing is a critical part of the craftsmen's trade. Fisk maintains a comprehensive website, but his most successful marketing technique is a personal show he holds at his shop in Nashville each year, to which he invites only two other bladesmiths and only 20 collectors. The collectors are entered in a raffle for the right to buy the knives.

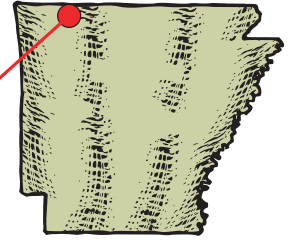
The show also includes talks by bladesmithing experts, information on how to attain journeyman and master smith status, and a tour of the bladesmithing school at Historic Washington State Park. Collectors have traveled from all over the world to Nashville for the opportunity to purchase some of the craft's most highly regarded blades.

When the show is over, Fisk goes back work on his back order list extending many years. He also serves as liaison for the school, in which capacity he helps to manage the partnership between the college, the park, and the state of Arkansas.

Texarkana College credits the success of the partnership and the school to people like Fisk and Massey, the instructors and the attendees they attract that keep the school going. "The bladesmiths are the easiest group we work with," Scotty Hayes says. "They are just the salt of the earth."

Dan Broun, Regional Technology Strategies

EUREKA SPRINGS



Celebrating Words and Expression

Eureka Springs' Communication Arts Institute Nurtures Arkansas' Emergent Creative Economy

Writing is the healthiest thing you can do.

Charlotte Buchanan

From its arboreal outpost in Eureka Springs, tucked within a glen surrounded by the town's Victorian-style historic district, the *Communications Arts Institute* (CAI), which includes among its programs the celebrated *Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow*, is quietly managing an ambitious set of residency and outreach programs that foster the creativity needed to kindle the expansion of Arkansas' emerging creative economy.



Robert Donnan

The Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow is a program of the Communication Arts Institute.

The scope of the CAI's work is implicit in its mission statement: *To explore the impact of words on human experience and develop creative opportunities for human expression.* Specifically, it seeks to unleash and leverage human creativity as a tool for healing and self-empowerment at the personal, community, and corporate levels, and, through its targeted incubation of skills essential to Arkansas' emergent creative economy, address the state's overall economic development. The Institute (www.ca-institute.com) focuses this coordinated effort through four core programs: The Writers' Colony, Arkansas Writes, Cool Cow Productions, and the Thinkubator.



Robert Donnan

Nora Maynard was the American Egg Board Fellow in culinary writing at the Writers' Colony during April and May 2007. Until January 2008, Nora wrote a weekly column called *The Celluloid Pantry* for the online website, *Apartment Therapy: The Kitchen*. She also used her retreat to work on her novel-in-progress, *Burnt Hill Road*.

The Writer's Colony (www.writerscolony.org), the CAI's oldest and best-known program, first opened its doors in 2000 thanks to the vision and hard work of its founders: writer Crescent Dragonwagon, best known for her imaginative cookbooks and books for children, and husband Ned Shank, historic preservationist, artist, and also author of a children's book. Today the Writer's Colony offers residencies ranging from two weeks to three months for professional writers to find their voice, sharpen their syntax, and weave together the strands of a compelling story. Some pay their own way; others' attendance is underwritten by sponsored fellowships. Direct support from individuals and corporations has enabled the CAI to expand its program to include more genre-specific fellowships awarded to individual authors focused upon, for example, children's literature, short stories, nature and the outdoors, and culinary interests. The Writers' Colony also awards fellowships to composers and songwriters.

Visiting professionals often take time during their rural retreats to work with less experienced writers and share their work with local communities. Many such outreach opportunities are provided through *Arkansas Writes*, which affords writers-in-residence and other creative mentors the opportunity to give readings, conduct seminars and workshops, and offer one-on-one consultation in a host of settings including Arkansas schools, women's prisons and shelters, and senior groups. Popular topics include writing, reading, literacy, and creativity and wellness skills. "We just held a fiction workshop for home-school kids in Clear Springs and Clear Spring School in Eureka Springs," reports Writers' Colony coordinator Jane Tucker. "These were young kids in middle school. A writer from California taught them about finding character and voice. Later, the mother of a student who participated told me that her daughter got up early on a following Saturday and wrote all morning long."

Cool Cow Productions taps the expertise of Writers' Colony resident writers and others, including the CAI's advisory board and a global network of professional educators, to develop interactive learning tools for schools, businesses, and other audiences. Although many of these tools are produced and distributed in DVD format, *Cool Cow Productions* also develops websites and stages workshops. The organization's inaugural project, a culinary and nutrition-based program that emphasizes healthy eating and fitness in the context of helping young people develop their

cooking skills, includes an interactive, entertaining website for young people (www.chewycafe.com) complemented by innovative learning tools for classroom use such as a DVD coordinated with related curricula in language arts, math, science, reading, and health.

CAI's latest, most free-form outreach program is its *Thinkubator*, a loosely structured program that helps individuals, businesses, and nonprofit organizations achieve breakthrough thinking and effectively communicate the results. The CAI leverages the creativity of resident writers and staff, its advisory board, and other networks to provide innovative services both at client sites and at the institute's Eureka Springs headquarters. Working in partnership with the nonprofit Heifer International and Women's Foundation of Arkansas, for example, the Thinkubator team recently began to facilitate a conversation on "civic discourse for civic engagement" among women leaders across Arkansas.

Nurturing local talent in a wide variety of settings

The CAI works its creative magic across widely diverse constituencies. It nurtures seasoned professional writers, develops the skills of aspiring authors, supports the natural creativity of young people in Arkansas schools, inspires community leaders, and is a catalyst of innovation in both private companies and nonprofit organizations. Over time, moreover, its geographic reach has been extended well beyond the state of Arkansas.



Robert Doman

According to Eureka Springs writer Charlotte Buchanan, "Writing is one of the greatest exercises in telling the truth."

Eureka Springs City Council member Charlotte Buchanan first became involved with the Writer's Colony shortly after finishing the first draft of her unpublished book, *The Road Trip of Love: Confessions of a Texas Jew Girl*. She participated in a workshop led by Rosemary Daniell, author of *Secrets of the Zona Rosa: How Writing (and Sisterhood) Can Change Women's Lives*. The visiting author, who lives in Savannah, Georgia, also met individually with Buchanan to discuss her novel. Later, Buchanan had the opportunity to guide Daniell along a short road trip through the back roads of northwest Arkansas. "Luckily, she took time to read a little bit of my manuscript," Buchanan recalls. "It was a grammatical nightmare, and not anywhere near where it is today. You know, Rosemary has become a dear friend, and a mentor. So the Writer's Colony gives locals a chance to meet writers from all over the world. It's a valuable resource."

Today Buchanan continues actively to participate in an ongoing women's writing group. "Writing is the healthiest thing that a person can do," she asserts. "That's what we say about Zona Rosa and Rosemary Daniell. It's like, put down your Zoloft and write your story. There's no way out but through. And so, I just think writing is one of the most healing things a person can do, especially in a beautiful environment of trust and sharing."

From Writer's Colony to Communication Arts Institute

Deciding in the late 1990s that they no longer wanted to be innkeepers, Dragonwagon and Shank decided to close their award-winning country inn and restaurant and, inspired both by their own creative needs, and the long-standing artists colony in Eureka Springs, began to transform their former bed-and-breakfast into the Writers' Colony that opened its doors in June 2000. Shortly after, Shank, who served as the project's inaugural executive director, died in a biking accident.

The Writers' Colony operated for about five years, according to Sandy Wright, a published author and former economic development specialist in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who took the reins as the organization's executive director following Shank's death. Then, in 2005, a confluence of fortuitous events—the donation to the Writers' Colony of a neighboring Usonian-style building and the subsequent emergence of a partnership with *Traditional Home* magazine and its editor-in-chief, Ann Maine, who currently serves on the CAI's board of directors, to renovate the structure—prompted a reconsideration of the organization's mission and goals.

"They [*Traditional Home*] took on the renovation and developing partnerships with the Writers' Colony," explains Wright, who as a consultant today directs special projects for the CAI. "They also challenged us to look at how this organization could become national. I had been talking about self-sustaining programs with the board for quite a while, but we had no place to go with them. So we combined efforts and developed the Communication Arts Institute, a much larger overall organization."

Many of the themes—creativity, cooking and good food, storytelling, and even entrepreneurial vigor—that were hallmarks of the founders' original vision for their bed-and-breakfast persist today in the richly diverse core programs offered by the institute. Both Cool Cow Productions and the Thinkubator are entrepreneurial ventures, Ms. Wright explains, that strive to provide a sustainable income stream that can help support the overall work of the parent nonprofit. Rather than pursue grants from corporate philanthropies, the Thinkubator team promotes its services to the marketing departments of potential clients, and the income generated by Cool Cow Productions—of late, more than \$500,000, thanks to a recent two-phased production contract/foundation grant—helps to shore up the local economy, in part because the enterprise mostly employs local people.

Some of CAI's recent alumni also are striving to become more entrepreneurial. Charlotte Buchanan is developing a literary enterprise called Runway Books, a cooperative publishing venture with the uplifting slogan, "Taking flight in the second half of life." "It's kind of a double entendre with the name," Buchanan explains. "You finally, as an elder, have a story to tell. There's also the idea that you're strutting your stuff in the second part of life. But the other double entendre of Runway Books, being from a Jewish retail family and in the rag trade for 21 years, is the idea that when I do a fashion show, you launch eight models at a time down the runway." Accordingly, Runway Books' several partners are working together to groom their books for a multiple launch and to raise investment capital for a shared marketing effort that will include a collective book tour.

The CAI's long-term contributions to the creative economies of northwest Arkansas and the state as a whole promise to be even more far-reaching. Students who enter the workforce with

enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and who are better-prepared to communicate their ideas effectively, are a coveted asset in a global economy in which creativity has become a powerful competitive advantage. Firms and nonprofits that understand how to integrate creativity into all phases of their operations are more likely to flourish. Local places like Eureka Springs that recognize and learn how to market their creative assets—artists, writers, musicians, craftspeople, and others—will be recognized by tourists as preferred destinations. Moreover, the networks of ongoing conversation established both within and beyond Arkansas through the continuous interaction of writers-in-residence with all of these constituencies are a significant catalyst for sustainable innovation.

Robert Donnan, Consultant



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