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Maxwell L. Anderson, Indianapolis Museum of Art

THE CULTURE CONNECTION



When Paul Baumgarten assumed duties as manager of the Fountain Square Main Street program four years ago, he recognized two challenges. First, people unfamiliar with the area’s revitalization efforts clung to the outdated notion that Fountain Square was “a blighted shell of its former self, ripped apart by

suburban flight,” says Baumgarten. Second, enthusiastic residents might have been too zealous in “over-selling and under-delivering” the changes that had occurred as part of their work to reinvent the neighborhood. In truth, the retail district was still in transition, and many storefronts were still vacant.

“Today you hear the terms ‘edgy,’ ‘gritty,’ ‘artsy’ and ‘up-and-coming’ used to describe Fountain Square,” says Baumgarten, noting the eclectic mix of galleries, restaurants and shops within the district. “Ours is definitely a neighborhood where a significant number of artists, musicians and other creative professionals live and work. Of course, we still have much room for improvement, but there is a noticeable increase in momentum.”

Fountain Square’s resurgence is the result of a complex strategy initiated and supported by a number of partners including SEND (Southeast Neighborhood Development); the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Making Connections initiative; the citywide FOCUS (Fostering Commercial Urban Strategies) program; and the Great Indy Neighborhoods Initiative. When the Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission selected the area as one of six cultural districts in 2002, the designation “coalesced many of the efforts already in place and gave us a clear direction of how to market Fountain Square,” says Baumgarten.

BEYOND BUZZ WORDS

Identifying the city’s cultural districts was just one part of a \$10 million comprehensive, cultural development and tourism initiative begun in 2001 with equal funding from Lilly Endowment and the city through the Capital Improvement Board of Managers of Marion County (CIB). The Cultural Development Commission, a nine-member panel working under the auspices of the CIB, governs the initiative.

The goal of the initiative, for which the Endowment provided a second grant of \$2.5 million for 2007 and 2008, is to capitalize on the rising interest in cultural tourism, one of the fastest-growing segments of the hospitality industry. More than buzz words, cultural tourism is real, and its benefits go beyond attracting well-educated travelers to the city’s arts and entertainment venues. Such an initiative also can strengthen the local arts community, enhance the quality of life for residents and generate interest among businesses that are considering sites for expansion or relocation.

“Our research showed that this was something we wanted to pursue,” explains Jenny Guimont, director of the commission, which works with and

funds three partner organizations—the Arts Council of Indianapolis, the Indiana Convention and Visitors Association and Indianapolis Downtown Inc. (IDI)—to develop and manage key elements of the program. When they began their work, Guimont and the team were well aware of the cultural assets already in place throughout the city. The challenge was twofold: to identify and fill any gaps that existed and to design a campaign that would communicate an accurate image of Indianapolis to a broad audience. They knew that the city did not have a reputation for cultural vibrancy,

so their initiative needed to raise the profile of the arts and cultural organizations through collaborative marketing and lively programming. The

stakes were high: Over time, this coordinated effort could potentially encourage economic development in Indianapolis and beyond.

“It begins with the perception of a place being progressive, innovative and ambitious,” says Maxwell Anderson, the Melvin and Bren Simon director and CEO of the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA), whose prior experience as director of the Whitney Museum in New York and as an international arts consultant gives him a global perspective. “Culture, when fostered by local institutions with excitement and brio, sends the message that this is a place that matters.”

IN SEARCH OF THE UNIQUE

IDI took on the task of overseeing the development of six cultural districts. Neighborhoods that applied for the designation had to show that they were pedestrian-friendly, offered unique cultural experiences, were

“The districts are helpful when it comes to recruiting talent to Indianapolis.”



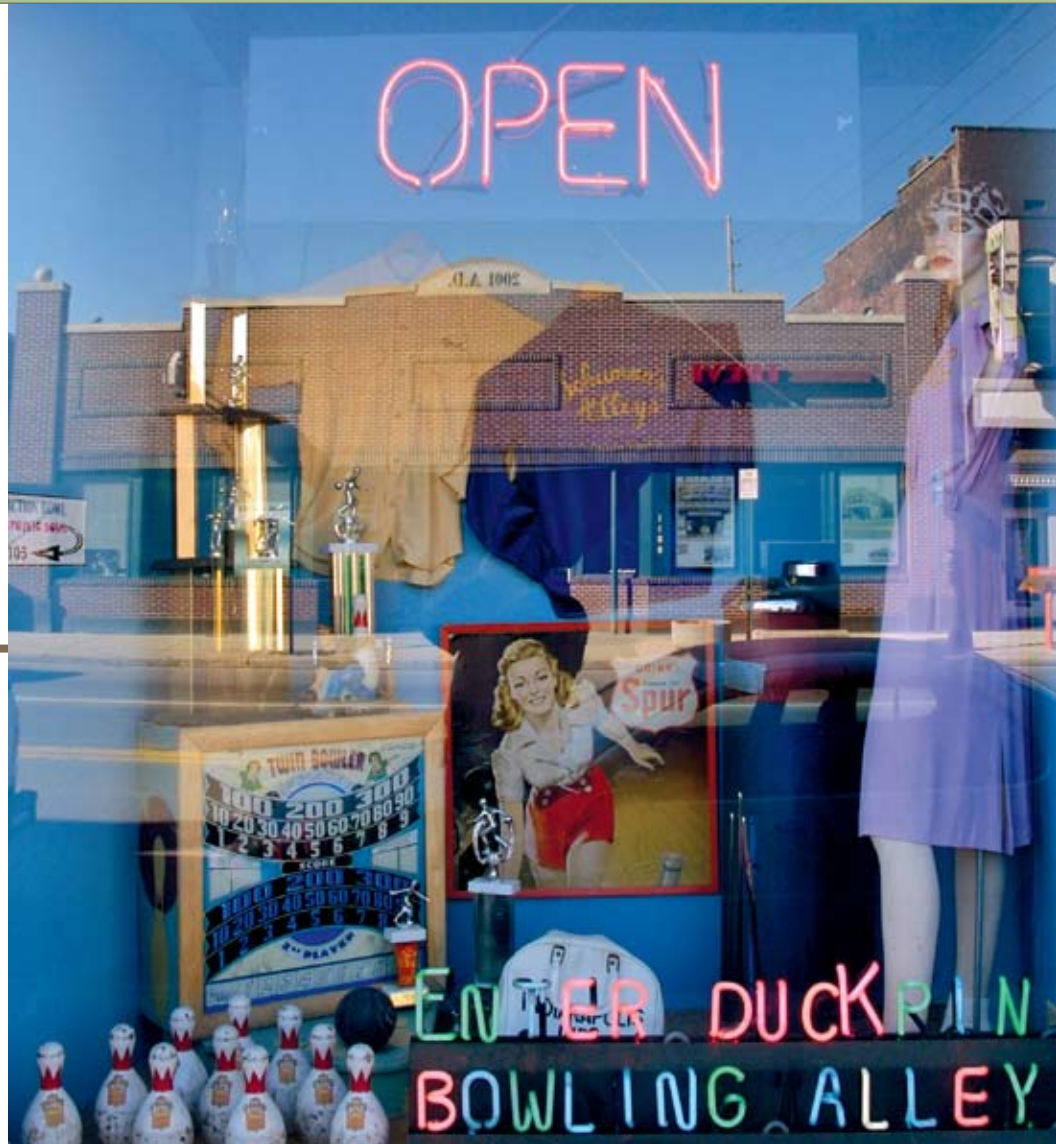
P 19 The Smokehouse on Shelby in Fountain Square seems like a good place to take a break for (left to right) Jenny Guimont, director of the Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission; Tamara Zahn, president of Indianapolis Downtown Inc., and Paul Baumgarten, manager of the Fountain Square Main Street program. **OPPOSITE** The bright, evocative paintings of Brazilian artist Christine Drummond (pictured) are displayed in the Kuaba Gallery on Massachusetts Ave. Jammed with galleries, eateries, theaters and shops, the district's "cultural tag" is "45 degrees from ordinary." **RIGHT** An integrated, intentional strategic plan has focused on six area "destinations within a destination" in Indianapolis. Duckpin bowling is only one attraction in Fountain Square, where the slogan is "close in and far out." The area is full of restaurants, galleries and studios.

"customer-ready" and had a history of collaboration. Emerging from the process as "destinations within a destination" were Broad Ripple Village, Fountain Square, Indiana Avenue, Massachusetts Avenue, the Canal and White River State Park and the Wholesale District.

"These are areas that have a critical mass of cultural amenities," says Tamara Zahn, president of IDI. "Each has a unique personality that gives Indianapolis richness and diversity. Initially the commission's idea was merely to identify the districts and shine the spotlight on them. But that wasn't enough. From our work in community development we knew we had to continue to build the product. Our efforts over the past five years have been to do just that—build the product and showcase what the districts have to offer."

Each district now has a strategic plan that lists its strengths and opportunities for improvement, and each has a colorful logo and tagline that capture the flavor of the neighborhood. As examples, Fountain Square is "close in and far out," the Wholesale District is "front and center," and Massachusetts Avenue, with its sharply angled street, is "45 degrees from ordinary."

More important are the specialties of each neighborhood. If visitors want anchor museums, they



head for the Canal and White River State Park; if they want great jazz, Indiana Avenue is the place to go; if they want to rub elbows with the college crowd, Broad Ripple Village is just a few miles north of downtown.

"Our redevelopment blueprint clearly states what the district has to offer today and what we want to see it offer in the future," says Randy Jones, who lives and works downtown and is active in the Indiana Avenue Cultural District. "The blueprint has given our area a voice and allowed us to inform potential developers that we want to see projects adhere to the spirit of the plan."

As a way of keeping the districts in touch with each other, a district council meets three times a year. "We generate and share ideas," says Jeanne Scheets, vice president of marketing and public relations for the Indiana Historical Society and council representative from the Canal and White River State

Park District. She cites the value of getting together to “understand and appreciate the unique aspects of each district and what they offer collectively to the community.”

The designated neighborhoods appeal to all demographics, according to Zahn, and they are beginning to serve the corporate community in pragmatic ways. “The districts are helpful when it comes to recruiting talent to Indianapolis,” she explains. “It’s not uncommon for companies to arrange tours of the districts to show employees or potential employees what’s happening here.”

Mark Hill agrees. A successful information technology entrepreneur, Hill is the incoming chair of the board of Techpoint, an initiative (like the BioCrossroads life sciences initiative) focused on growing Indiana’s high-tech economy presently comprised of more than 3,000 tech-based firms. With firsthand experience in recruiting high-tech talent to the Indianapolis area, he clearly appreciates the importance of the community’s cultural image and opportunities it presents for technology businesses to attract and retain the employees they need to succeed.

“It’s clear to me that people who are innovative and entrepreneurial in high-tech business settings are drawn

to communities that exude and foster creativity in other contexts,” says Hill. “They want diverse opportunities to stretch their minds and connect with others who are similarly inclined. Communities that don’t offer these experiences are not likely to attract or retain them.”

BEYOND THE DISTRICTS: FOSTERING CREATIVITY

In keeping with Indianapolis’ reputation as a city of monuments, the Cultural Development Commission decided to take public art to a new level by asking the Arts Council of Indianapolis to oversee a program that would place sculpture and other creative works in very visible spaces. The first exhibition, the largest ever hosted in Indianapolis, featured 25 bronze works by New York sculptor Tom Otterness. The 2005 show was so popular that several donors, including the Endowment, funded the purchase of three of the pieces for installation outside the Indianapolis Convention Center.

“People were enamored by these sculptures, and families made it a point to visit all 25 and take pictures,” says Guimont. “It became an ‘event’ to experience the bronzes. The exhibition also was a great introduction to citizens who might not consider themselves ‘artsy.’ It opened the door for us to challenge people to look at pieces of art and discuss why they liked them or didn’t like them.”

The positive public response to the bronzes encouraged the Arts Council to mount a second, more contemporary exhibition—a series of 11 whimsical signs by London artist Julian Opie. “Again, people appreciated them and began asking, ‘What’s next?’” says Greg Charleston, president of the Arts Council. Months after the Opie exhibition left the city’s landscape, the artist created a permanent sign, a sashaying *Ann Dancing*, to welcome visitors to the Massachusetts Avenue Cultural District.

“We approach public art in two ways,” explains Guimont. “We recognize the need for large-scale exhibits by nationally and internationally known artists, but we also want to give opportunities to local artists.” The result has been to sponsor a biannual Great Ideas Competition; display works by Hoosier artists in street-level windows of vacant buildings; and promote “Be Independent,” a commission and Arts Council program that encourages residents and businesses to invest in the work of local artists.



Some 25 bronze figures sculpted by New York artist Tom Otterness beguiled downtown visitors during the public art exhibition. The Endowment helped fund the purchase of three figures, including *Free Money* (right), which now greet visitors to the Indianapolis Convention Center.



“Buying original art isn’t on the radar screen of a lot of people,” says Guimont. “We hope to demonstrate to them that a wide range of quality artwork is available in Indianapolis.”

In fact, original art can be purchased for as little as \$1 to \$5 from a rehabbed vending machine that proved so popular during its stay in the Artsgarden that its developers later accepted an invitation for it to reside permanently at the IMA. The funky machine, the brainchild of local artists Artur Silva and Matthew Eickhoff, is an example of the innovation encouraged by the commission’s Fast Track grants program. Individuals and arts organizations can apply for modest funds to experiment with “wish list stuff.”

The idea is not to ease the operating budgets of arts organizations but to encourage them to test new ideas for taking their projects or events to a higher level. “For instance, the Eiteljorg Museum used a Fast Track grant of \$5,000 to hire a Native American band to play for its annual festival,” recalls Guimont. “They had record-breaking attendance, and now the museum incorporates music in the festival every year.”

MAJOR EXHIBITIONS

If smaller projects have nudged Indianapolis into the spotlight as a cultural destination, a major exhibition mounted by the IMA ratcheted the spotlight’s wattage considerably. *The Roman Art from the Louvre*, featuring 184 works on loan from the famed Paris museum, exceeded all expectations for attendance, revenue and national media exposure. Supported in part by a \$1.5 million grant from the Endowment, it was the most successful special exhibition in the IMA’s history.

OPPOSITE *The Roman Art from the Louvre* exhibition at the Indianapolis Museum of Art drew the IMA’s largest audience ever. Nearly 200 objects made their first trip to the United States to fascinate and intrigue visitors at the exhibition which ran from late September till year’s end.

RIGHT Maxwell Anderson of the IMA—the museum’s initials and its new motto, “It’s My Art”—has expanded evening hours at the museum, added features to its interactive Web site and worked to make the museum an integral part of the art scene in Indianapolis. (The painting behind him is from the post-impressionist School of Pont-Aven, led by Paul Gauguin. The Endowment helped fund the acquisition of the collection.)

However, the museum’s CEO warns that such visibility can be short-lived if there is no follow-up.

“Exceptionally spectacular exhibitions are additive,” says the IMA’s Anderson. “If you do them more than once in a while, they create an attitude of engagement, excitement and commitment that can be remarkable and can change the image of

a place. But if they come just once in a blue moon, the effect doesn’t last very long. That’s why we are committed, season after season from here on out, to stage major national and international exhibitions.”

The IMA also is interested in strengthening relationships with local audiences who patronize the galleries between major exhibitions. To this end, it has expanded its evening hours to accommodate the schedules of working families and has upgraded its interactive Web site to invite patrons to have a say in programming. In an effort to make museum business more transparent, a “dashboard” in the upper right corner of the Web site gives browsers up-to-date statistics on attendance, membership, expenses, works on display and even the daily consumption of electricity.

Anderson, who joined the Indianapolis arts community in 2006, believes that all efforts to enhance the city’s cultural climate—from major exhibits to public art displays to activities within the cultural districts—are beginning to attract widespread attention. “There’s no question that the public perception of Indianapolis has changed nationally,” he says. “The talk of people in the art world about civic engagement with public art in this day and age is fairly rare, and to have it happen here truly is a great thing.”

