

## AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS CONFERENCE June 2003

### IMAGINATION

Collaboration within and across and outside the arts.  
Experiences, strategies, and lessons.

I am the Civic Art Coordinator for the City of Austin, Texas. As of mid-March we are going through a major restructuring of the Arts within the City organization. Two parallel activities have initiated this:

- 1) August-December 2002 – championed by one Council member, consultants evaluated and made recommendations concerning our Cultural Contracts Program (contracts program to fund artists and arts organizations using City's bed tax funds).
- 2) November 2002 – March 2003 with final work still ongoing – A Council-initiated Task Force works toward developing an Economic Development Plan for the City. Of three committees, one, the Cultural Vitality and Creative Economy subcommittee is dedicated to making recommendations regarding arts, creative industries, and cultural amenities. This work has really raised the level of awareness of the arts as a major contributor to Austin's draw for the "creative class" and made us question what the City can do to support and sustain the arts and creative industries here!

In December '02 the Cultural Contracts consultants recommended moving the arts into Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office, incubate the group, and launch it as an independent arts council in 2 years. It is this department that is charged with developing and managing the City's economic development policies. I was already in this department doing arts and economic development, and revitalization projects with arts in the downtown area. As of this March, the City moved the re-visioning of the Cultural Contracts Program, our Art in Public Places Program and staff, and an individual from another department facilitating economic development of the creative industries of music, film, and technology. Other positions are being created. (We're looking for our main leader; please pick up a job description & contact info at the resource table!) Our goal with this endeavor is to create a new cultural arts *animal*, one that can include the non-profit, commercial, and community arts worlds. A tall order!

That sets the scene. Here are 4 key thoughts for you to take away and then I'll site some examples of real things we are working on:

*Follow your inner compass*

The Joseph Campbell "follow your bliss" is apropos. Arts leaders often have a finely developed intuition about what will occur, what is needed, and how their organizations should proceed. Pay attention to it, act on it.

*Real places unfold organically from the inherent nature and potential of that particular place*

Study and understand your community's sense of place and cultural identity; preserve it, nurture it, maintain it, and promote it. Every place is unique with

special qualities like no others. When you think of Austin, music usually comes first to mind. I believe it is the heartbeat of Austin. Like the first recommendation, once you tap into this resource, phenomenal things will happen.

*Network inside and outside the arts*

I think we understand the value of networking within the arts community. I had a professor once who constantly challenged me about the validity of Public Art in comparison to cultures where there was no word for art but lives that had art and creativity so integrated that you couldn't think of one without the other. Contemplate this concept. Explore it. How can we, as arts administrators, make art integral within our cities? Make art an everyday practice and occurrence. Find those places outside the normal world of the arts that art can become a part of.

*Be entrepreneurial, create strategic alliances*

Get out there, talk to people, and be risky. Alliances, associations, partnerships within and outside the arts – develop them. It takes time, it's messy, but it's well worth the effort. Look for partners that are seeking something that is similar to what you're looking for. Look for win-win situations. You've heard this all before. Just get out and do it!

So what is Austin doing? My colleague working with the creative industries and I spend much of our time in the larger world of the City, certainly within our individual creative communities, but a lot outside trying to weave these arts into the overall fabric of the City. We have created numerous working associations and partnerships, and have or are facilitating numerous projects. Individually, together, or in various combinations we work with committees of the Downtown Austin Alliance (a downtown management group), various Chambers of Commerce, the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau, the University of Texas at Austin and other colleges, numerous individuals, arts organizations and creative industries (specifically commercial music, film, and interactive media).

While the City takes 15% of the Bed Tax funds to contract with the non-profit arts organizations and artists, it also contributes either money or in-kind services to such major events as the SXSW Music, Film, & Technology Festivals, as well as the recent Austin City Limits Festival now in its 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Within the music community, my colleague, Jim, works closely with the Music Commission, as well as the Music Foundation, Sims Foundation (emergency health care for musicians), and others. He manages our Austin Music Network, a channel dedicated to Austin music. He and a group of people, together with our Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, initiated "Hire an Austin Musician" campaign that has been very successful in creating extra work for musicians through contracts with conventions and other events. Working closely with the Music and Film Offices of the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau Jim is helping facilitate smoother load-in & out for bands at clubs as well as creating a new, more film-friendly permitting process. We have a major film community in Austin. Jim works with many of the film organizations including UT, ACC (our local

community college), and the Chamber's film and digital entertainment committee. Jim comes at this field, not from the arts but rather from economic development. What I share with you here about music and film, Jim also does with technology with specific concentration on the "gaming" industry.

My work has concentrated on the downtown environment. I work closely with the Downtown Austin Alliance and Austin Parks Foundation on the revitalization of a downtown historic park. Part of this work is in partnering with Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) in facilitating a major work by Jesus Moroles, a world-renown stone sculptor. TCA and our department also partnered to facilitate a successful community-wide civic dialogue on the built environment downtown. I am also currently working closely with the Downtown Austin Alliance to identify cultural amenities in the downtown area. This has lead to a major marketing endeavor for the downtown area that will have some concentration on marketing the arts. I've pulled Jim in on this now, as well as the Austin Convention and Visitor's Bureau. We all understand how public art can occur through private development. I also do that. But it is never solely about the object, but often about the process. One of my colleagues in the environmental education field who puts numerous partnerships together has a mantra. "If it doesn't build community then it isn't worth doing." My job description doesn't have much "arts" language in it; it is rather keyed to the activity of facilitating "Austin sense of place and cultural identity."

As part of our work on the Cultural Vitality and Creative Economy subcommittee of the Economic Development Task Force we did an artist/art organization survey, began to inventory Austin's cultural amenities, created a chart that identified how the City contributes funds to these cultural amenities, among others. There are more studies and activities in the works. With the small business development center coming under our department we will be developing a whole "toolbox" of technical assistance for arts and artists. A major recommendation that will be adopted by our City Council while I'm here in Portland is a policy that will incorporate cultural considerations into policy and regulatory decisions. For instance, corporations moving into Austin under review for an economic development grant or tax development financing program will be evaluated in part on their support of the arts in the communities they currently reside in as well as encouraged to support the arts as a resident corporation here. Among other things, Jim and I are talking with various people at UT to help us with other studies we think should occur. Times are tough for Austin like everywhere else. We're looking for partners that can share our tasks but that benefit all partners at the same time.

So, some final words: You all are incredibly creative people. Use the gift of imagination you were given and look for ways to connect the dots. Follow your inner compass, be a life-long student, protector, promoter of your City's particular sense of place and cultural identity, remember to network and partner outside the arts, and get out there and make strategic alliances!