



ROCKINGHAM ARTS AND MUSEUM PROJECT "Art Makes A Difference"

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www.ramp-vt.org

Robert McBride, panelist

Beyond Rural: Arts and Community Development in Very Small Towns

Thursday, June 18, 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.

A native of California, Robert McBride received his B.A. in Painting from the University of California at Berkeley and then moved to New York City where he received his M.F.A in painting. from Hunter College. He was a founding member of PS 122 on Manhattan's lower east side.

In 1995, he moved to Bellows Falls, VT (pop. 3600). As a newly arrived full-time resident, he wanted to participate in the revitalization of my community. Bellows Falls was a down and out; the mills had all closed and most of the retail and second floor spaces in the downtown were vacant.:

<http://www.smartgrowthvermont.org/toolbox/casestudies/downtowndesignationbellowsfalls/>

He founded the Rockingham Arts and Museum Project (RAMP) with a mission: *integrate artists and the arts in the community's development efforts*. RAMP's evolution over the last fourteen years includes initiatives re:

- affordable housing for artists
- hosting Artists Town Meetings four times a years
- public art projects
- involvement on a variety of boards
- sharing the case study of Bellows Falls, it successes and challenges with other rural communities.

The story he tells is through the arts. "The arts provide a wonderful resource to vision, engage and encourage collaboration, but whether the arts are the primary resource or not, what underlies success are vision, creative ideas, organization, engagement, and understanding the resources of the community: culturally, socially and economically ." RMcB

Degrees and Honors

University of California, Berkeley BA Painting

Hunter College, M.F.A. Painting

Founding Member PS 122, NYC

Snelling Leadership Institute

Vermont Arts Council Achievement Award

VT Community Leadership Award given by the VT Council on Rural Development 2008

Rockingham Arts and Museum Project: *Art Makes a Difference!*

“What I have learned first hand about building community is that it is common sense.”

Robert McBride

Identifying the resources in your community

Understanding the values of your community

Telling your authentic story, “being what you are not what you are not”

Choosing appropriate models

Communicating effectively and developing creative partnerships

History of the Rockingham Arts and Museum Project

The Rockingham Arts and Museum project (RAMP) www.ramp-vt.org, is involved in integrating artists and the arts in the revitalization of Bellows Falls (pop 3600) an undeserved mill town in southeastern Vermont, along the Connecticut River.

By the mid-1990s, the outlook in Bellows Falls – as in many downtowns in Vermont and across the country – was relatively bleak. Local events and national and regional economic and cultural trends had taken their toll on the community and its spirit. RAMP was founded and quickly developed partnerships with a broad range organizations, locally, regionally, statewide and nationally to carry out programs and events that engaged people of all ages in the arts.

RAMP's mission is to demonstrate that artists and the arts provide both cultural enrichment and positively impact the economy. It is important to continue emphasize this two-thrust approach of how the arts sustain vital communities and need to be included on all levels of community planning. **As RAMP matures it sees more clearly the active role it needs to continue to play as an arts-advocacy coordinator.** This participation on the variety of boards on which RAMP is currently involved offers a wide range of venues to bring the arts to the table and help shape policy.

Community Theater (1999), a ten-day residency with **Bread and Puppet Theater** Group invited by RAMP to Bellows Falls for a memorable event that brought hundreds of people to a performance in the downtown Square.

Mural Project (2000), creating a 30' x 40' historically accurate mural of the downtown circa 1910 which greets residents and visitors to the downtown.

The Exner Block (October 1998-present), working in partnership with Housing Vermont and the Rockingham Area Community Land Trust renovating a derelict building in downtown into ten, affordable live-work spaces for artists and six retail spaces with a focus on the arts.

Artists Create Community Millennium Project (2000) hosted in 2000 an art's organization from each state was invited to participate. The project was sponsored by National Endowment for the Arts and The Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation. RAMP selected Seattle based artist Beliz Brothers to participate in the project. Ms. Brothers lived in the Exner Block and collaborated with the other resident-artists.

Public Art Moving Site (2003-2006), a collaborative project between the Cambridge Arts Council, MA, ArtSpace, New Haven, CT and RAMP recently was selected in the Americans for the Arts Public Art Network (PAN) Year in Review. The project was selected as one of the Top 20 projects completed in the public art field by curator, Robert Rindler, Dean of the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

Music for Trains (2007-2008) stretched the concept of art and community by presenting a musical performance outside the walls of a traditional concert hall so it could reach beyond the typical music audience and redefine the notion of concert-going. The performance took in the two train depots in Brattleboro and Bellows Falls and audiences had the opportunity to travel to both sites via the railways that connect these two communities. So Percussion was commissioned to work with local student musicians, conduct instrument making workshops, visit the railroad sites and delve into the rich pictorial imagery of present and past and from this engagement create the musical performance.

Main Street Program

In 1999 RAMP served on a committee that successfully put together an application for Bellows Falls to participate in the Vermont Designated Downtown Program. The Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance (BFDDA) was founded. Vermont worked closely with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program in developing a main street program model that would work for Vermont. I subsequently sat on the board for three years.

Creative Economy Initiative

"The creative economy in a nutshell is: you bring creative people around the table and you develop creative solutions. You bring whiners around the table and you come up with whiny solutions."

RAMP participated in a year-long focus-group on developing a paper to present to the governor and the legislatures on the Creative Community, Subsequently, the Vermont Council on Rural Development coordinated a two-year grant funded by the Jane Trust to engage fourteen communities around Vermont in addressing issues around the creative economy. Over the year's Bellows Falls has developed a reputation as the poster child for the creative economy. Bellows Falls actively participated in this two-year initiative.

Historic Preservation/Conservation

Over the years, effective partnerships initiated with local historical societies, statewide organizations such as Preservation Trust of VT and the Division for Historic Preservation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation have brought successful results not only with the renovation of buildings but also supporting broader community revitalization and green initiatives.

Board Involvement

Preservation Trust of Vermont

Advisor to the National Trust for Historic Preservation

State of Vermont Advisory Board for Cultural Heritage Tourism

Steering Committee for the Connecticut River National Byway

Great Falls Region Chamber of Commerce

Participant in Vermont Council on Rural Development: Creative Communities Initiative

Southern Vermont Regional Marketing Program

Great River Arts Institute

Main Street Arts

Rockingham Free Public Library

Windham Regional Planning Commission