

1.) Find out what you have

John - Many of the towns we work with have incredible artistic and cultural resources that are less known by many of the residents: the local painter or potter that has a regional recognizable name, sometimes even a national recognizable such as the photographer William Eggleston who did much of his best known work in Sumner, Mississippi.

Joy - The Canton Flea market started years ago as a way to celebrate local artist and to bring people into Canton. A basket weaver came every year but refused to play by the rules, he would not buy a space. He would not stay from 7 - 4. He came in his pickup loaded with his wonderful woven baskets, parked on the corner, sold to a waiting line of customers, and then left, usually within two hours. The line of customers grew each year. Finally, the Flea Market Committee realized that he was as much an asset to the Flea Market as the Flea Market was to him. That is the artist we want you to find in your towns. The ones that are outstanding. Artist by nature will not seek you out, they enjoy using their talent and generally just market and sell out of necessity. Some real talent work in our universities and community colleges, so if you live close by these places search for these creative people to help with making your community unique.

2.) What appear to be liabilities are also usually assets

John - In many towns, the abandoned historic building is also the opportunity for historic tax credits and housing new institutions, artists, or businesses. An elderly population is the opportunity to offer more services geared to their needs and thus improving economic opportunity. In DeKalb, MS, we suggested that revitalization efforts cater to the needs of their large elderly community, making the downtown accessible by providing housing, activities, and retail oriented toward senior in the downtown area.

Joy - Empty store fronts in the downtown can be a real liability and give the town a feeling of doom, but those same storefronts can readily become an asset if you display local art, or utilize as an art studio, or open the buildings for after 5:00 events so that people actually get to go inside and look at the features of the building. It greatly increases the chances for filling the building and it works well for bigger groups. Canton has utilized a vacant building as a location to host a wine and cheese tasting by inviting all the restaurants in town to set up inside the vacant building to get citizens downtown. Two buildings have sold since being opened to the public.

Juke Joints aren't always the neatest cleanest establishments in a community, but if you recognize them as an asset, a little grass cutting and sprucing up can greatly enhance outward appearance and international visitors are coming seeking out this authentic experience. Make sure you add your local juke joints to your web site and offer to help link the local juke joints with others for the purpose of recruiting big-name acts and marketing opportunities.

3) **Do it Yourself**

John - York, Alabama, a town of 2500 persons, started the Coleman Center for the Arts from the meetings of an afternoon tea club. Since then, the Coleman Center has become a nationally recognized arts organization, funded by both the Andy Warhol Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Center supports an artist in residence every year that works with the community to create a permanent public work for the town.

Joy - Rolling Fork has a photo contest and asks local photographers to take photos of the natural wildlife of that area. The winning photo receives a cash prize, and all the photos remain property of the town. These photos are then used as displays and utilized for brochure covers. It is an inexpensive way to get the locals involved and create art for the community.

Winona has put together an act using local talent to tell the story of their ancestors and key community leaders called Hill Fire. Many people come for their once a year performance and now days they get invited to go to other towns and present plays that tell that town's local story.

The pride that comes with letting the locals have some ownership of the local talent can be a starting place to make your town have that special feeling. In Columbia there are several wonderful painters and potters, but most of them have a day job. A young sculptor, that is doing well for himself selling his wares all across the USA agreed to allow the front of his studio to become the new "Art Studio" and he "mans" the shop while the others work their day jobs. For every piece of art sold, parts of the proceeds go toward rent. This gives the unknown artists exposure for their work. They are also considering rotating the art from the museum to the economic development office and other office buildings around town. The opportunity to be seen greatly enhances the potential to sell.

4.) **It is all about leadership**

John - it is easier to be an art critic than to be an artist. In other words it is easier to kill a good idea than to make it happen. We have to educate the community to realize the potential of these talented people located within their communities.

Joy - Star has a birdhouse company named "Heartwood" - this business started as a hobby with the wares being sold at flea markets on the week end - today they make \$3,000 bird houses and are creating jobs for 4 -5 others at peak season.

Blues Markers are more about dead people than living artist. Let's lead the charge to celebrate our up and coming artist - like Grady Champion of Canton. He is touring Canada, California and points beyond. Have a focused agenda to honor and celebrate talent at the local level. Let these talents know that you recognize and appreciate their gift by enjoying their talent and sharing it in open venues, when that person is back in town.

5.) Go and visit other communities

John - seeing what others are doing is inspiring. We encourage you to go and see success! Spend time looking at how the success started and is sustained.

Joy - Examples of success in Mississippi where we have been invited include:

Civil war re-enactment in Quitman, Raymond, Vicksburg, Farmington

Downtown housing - Columbus, Meridian, Yazoo City, Hazlehurst, Brookhaven

Historic pictures as art - Bay Springs

Public art - Rolling Fork, Tunica, Batesville, Ellisville

Art studios - Water Valley, Oxford, Columbia, Ocean Springs

Bike trails - Hernando, Tunica, Ridgeland, Hattiesburg, Purvis, New Albany

Festival - there are many and depending on what you are considering, Woodville, Belzoni, Canton, Aberdeen

Regional restaurants - Como, Flora, Senatobia, Magee, Pass Christian

Downtown revitalization - Pelahatchie, Hernando, Philadelphia, Brookhaven, Carthage, D'Iberville

City Parks - Puckett, Philadelphia, Pelahatchie