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Hippies Come Home: The Future of Haynie's Corner

For at least thirty years, Evansville natives have been discussing how to revitalize Haynie's Corner, a historic region near the downtown area. An article appearing in the *Evansville Press* in 1976 spoke of a neighborhood on the rise where increased law enforcement had helped to eliminate the "Hippie Element" (Penn 13). A similar article appeared again ten years later. It likened Haynie's past to the "infamous Haight-Ashbury district" of San Francisco and said, "It attracted Hippies and Radicals: a generation of youthful, self-disenfranchised street-people" (Corrigam 8). Twenty years later, things have come full circle. Today, in the same spirit of revitalization, a small group of individuals has spearheaded an effort to establish an art colony centered in the historic corner, a colony capable of enhancing Evansville's culture and its economy.

Sound strange? It did to me. Until recently my own concept of art in the Evansville community consisted of the guy beside me at a stop light who had painted an Indianapolis Colts logo on the rear axle of his rusted-out S-10. Certainly I held a dim view. Then on July 9 the headlines began to appear: "Art colony in the making", "Artist colony dreams unleashed," "Arts district is born" (McBain A1, A1, B1). At least eight articles on or related to the developing art colony have appeared in the *Evansville Courier and Press* since early July, and the most recent of which, on October 24, made it official. On that day Evansville's city council unanimously approved a resolution creating the arts district (McBain B1). Not being an Evansville native, I wasn't entirely sure what the area in question looked like or why people

though it so suited to an artistic environment. So I went for a visit. What struck me most was the area's Victorian architecture. I was greeted by street after street of beautiful homes within walking distance of the Ohio River, the Pagoda, and Evansville's growing downtown nightlife, not to mention the historic Alhambra Theatre, the F. J. Reitz Home, and the Evansville Museum. Even in its present condition, the spot had a noticeable tourist appeal. Granted, some of the homes were in less than pristine condition, and some seemed to be low-rent apartments, but one thing was obvious: the potential existed for this area to be the most unique neighborhood in Evansville. Imagine some of the ideas proposed for the art colony in action: the Alhambra Theatre actually presenting plays, concerts, poetry readings, or showing foreign films; lighted bike paths to the Ohio or downtown; art galleries lining vintage brick streets; and café-style restaurants in old Victorian homes (McBain A1, B7, A12). It is an inspiring picture. Yet there have been 30 years of talk of revitalization without much progress. Moreover, establishing an art colony seems like such a strange, abstract idea as a means of economic regeneration. But, they work. There are several models for success, one of which is only a couple of hours away in Paducah, Kentucky.

In fact, Paducah has been so successful that it is a national model of small town revitalization and has even gained the attention of President Bush Sr. in his "Points of Light recognition program" ("Smith-Rogers"). Its own historic area, Lowertown, shared many problems with Haynie's Corner not long ago. Similar to Haynie's, Lowertown was known for run down buildings and illegal drug activity, and like Haynie's, a few people wanted to change its image (McBain D12). Local artist Mark Barone and his partner Tom Barnett began working on the eventual solution, the Paducah Arts Relocation Program. They convinced city officials that this program was a viable option for Paducah, and from there the necessary actions started to take place. City officials began to strictly enforce building codes preventing out-of-date, dangerous buildings from being rented. Many were condemned or soon available for purchase because slumlords could no longer rent them. Next, the city managed to allocate forty-six thousand dollars which included a salary for a program director and a national advertising campaign (McBain D12). Yes, Paducah,

Kentucky ran a national advertising campaign on a \$17,000 budget seeking artists of different backgrounds to renovate this small Midwestern community (“Marketing”). They sought out magazines like *Art Calendar* and *Craft Report* with hopes of attracting a variety of artists. Today, everyone from painters to jewelry makers has moved to Paducah from places as far away as California, Washington, and Hawaii (“About”). Many were surprised that they came. Julie Shaw, formerly of Colorado, said in an *Evansville Courier and Press* interview, “Paducah? What’s Paducah Kentucky? Why would anyone want to go to Kentucky?”(McBain D12).

Undoubtedly, the rich financial incentive package was hard to resist. It included a dual zoning ordinance that allowed artists and business owners to live and work from home, health insurance through the Kentucky Arts Council, preservation tax incentives, and 100% financing at 7% interest for up to 300% of the appraised value of existing homes (“Program”). The Paducah Artist Relocation Program has attracted at least 45 artists to the city (“Marketing”) and, in 2004 alone, generated a 12 million dollar boost to the local economy (Delaney 10). It has turned a city in crisis into a national model of success.

The Paducah model is a viable plan geared toward the growing trend of cultural-economic development, a plan that will help ensure the city’s success in an economy that is changing on a national level. It’s no secret that America is losing many of its manufacturing jobs. At the end of the 20th century “non-manufacturing jobs” comprised about 80% of the total market (Delaney 3). A recent report issued by the office of Michigan governor Jennifer Granholm identifies the best of these new jobs as the “creative class” and states that they make up about 30% of the total work force (Delaney 3). A *Courier and Press* article by Bill Medley echoes these sentiments. Although manufacturing jobs in Evansville have risen 7% since 2000, the statewide average has decreased by 16% (Medley A1). Mortan Marcus, an economist, and Mohammed Khayum, Dean of the University of Southern Indiana’s College of Business, both participated in the recent economic panel assembled to evaluate Evansville’s future stability and featured in the *Courier and Press* article. According to Medley, they have suggested that “Evansville’s future economic well-being will depend on how well the region fosters entrepreneurial success. You must have imaginative

people in Evansville and Southwest Indiana. . . . Today's world demands imagination" (Medley A12). In other words, the key to success for most cities in our country's changing economic environment will be their ability to adapt. Evansville's ability to attract this new "creative class" may prove vital to its continuing success. That is precisely what the Paducah project did in Kentucky, and it is precisely what Haynie's Corner could do in Evansville.

Cultural economic development is based on the premise that all aspects of a community are intertwined, that issues such as education, overall health, safety, social services, and culture directly affect an area's standards of living and therefore affect a city's economy (Delaney 3). Some point to the arts as a particularly promising area of emphasis. Neeta Delaney, author of "Cultural Economic Development: A Practical Guide for Communities" developed in 2004 for Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm writes, "interfaces between a community's arts and cultural interests and its economic development are particularly fertile ground for shaping the community's future" (Delaney 3). She suggests that in the future economy a city's "human capital" will be the most important aspect for ensuring economic success, and that cities such as Evansville must change their ideas behind economic development to attract and retain a more "creative and knowledgeable" workforce. Delaney says that

if developing the economy now includes the work of retaining and attracting people . . . then economic developers are going to need new partners who can help them create . . . culturally vibrant communities that will retain and attract the workers and entrepreneurs we need to fuel this new knowledge-based economy. (Delaney 4)

In other words, by bringing together the cultural and economic communities, everyone benefits. The Paducah bank took a risk by offering great loan packages, but none of the loans were at 0%, and it has yet to foreclose on a single one (McBain D12). They are making money on the loans and reaping the benefits of a much improved local economy. The artists who enjoy Paducah's unique environment have helped the bank as much as the bank has helped the artists.

There are several guidelines for success, and many recent occurrences in Evansville bode well for the art colony's future. Obviously artists are needed. Paducah's original goal was to attract 15 to 20 artisans to Lowertown (McBain D12). Haynie's corner already has somewhere around 36 living nearby (McBain A16); its architecture and history naturally attracts them. For example, Billy Hedel, who has been featured several times in the local paper, moved to Evansville from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. It was supposed to be temporary, but something about the Haynie's corner area prompted him to stay despite the fact that his home in New Orleans was not severely damaged. He and partner Tom Loesch are currently remodeling a house on southeast Sixth Street with plans to turn it into Hedel's studio (McBain A16). Haynie's is also home to a local art festival that has been taking place for the last four years. Alone, it featured more than 70 artists and attracted 3000 people this past September (Lesnick B1). This is certainly not a bad start, and if this type of appeal exists with no outside motivation, imagine its power when coupled with incentives comparable to those offered in Paducah.

Evansville could be on its way to that very thing, if the right types of people take an interest. To date, the local involvement along these lines is promising. Certainly local artists are involved. Billy Hedel, Tom Loesch Jr, and William Sovern, a painter and poet, all own homes in the vicinity and have been featured in the local paper (McBain A16). Dustin Barrows, the former owner of Synchronicity Art Gallery, is attempting to develop a complex of artist studios in the neighborhood (McBain A16). His former partner, and now sole owner of the gallery, is renovating the space with plans to make it available for art shows and live performances (McBain A16). It has been renamed Art Colony Studio. The artists, however, are not alone in their efforts. Betsy Hopkins of the Alhambra Theatre Group and Lynn Miller of Leadership Evansville have been involved since the project's beginnings. On July 11, Hopkins hosted a brainstorming session outside of the Leadership Evansville office. Participants' ideas, appearing in an *Evansville Courier* article by Roger McBain, included:

. . . bike paths from the Ohio River and Downtown, collaborations with Evansville's universities, museums, orchestra, and

other arts organizations . . . art studios, galleries, art walks, ghost walks, ice cream shops, restaurants, public murals, public fountains, full moon parties, and an open lighted Alhambra theatre playing host to concerts, stage shows, dance performances, and poetry readings. (McBain A1)

Shortly after, a second session was held by Miller at Patchwork central. City councilman Keith Jarobe, the project's primary player in civic government, was highly impressed. He said of the meeting, "There really seems to be momentum here. It's coordinated, connected, and led by individuals who want action. It really seems like an opportunity to make a difference" (McBain B7). Jarobe's recent proposal to officially designate the district's borders was unanimously approved by the city council, and his hope is to have zoning ordinances, allowing artists to have galleries within their homes, in place before the end of the year (McBain B10). Even officials from the Mayor's office are showing an interest in the artistic community. Jack Schriber, of the Evansville Public Art commission, and Gregg Lamar, director of Evansville's Department of Metropolitan Development, have both attended early Leadership Evansville meetings on the subject (McBain B7). The hope of many involved in the project is that the interest shown by Mayor Weinzapfel's office will lead to a connection with his popular Front Door Pride program. A major focus of this campaign partners with federal funds to improve incomes and appearances of downtown neighborhoods. It seems to be a natural fit for providing at least some of the economic incentives that helped make the Paducah project so successful (McBain A10).

Certainly, these early stages of the colony seem promising. Many of the recommendations of Neeta Delaney are being met. The local government has taken an interest, and financial programs already in existence appear to have goals coinciding with the colony's creation. If it becomes half as successful as Paducah, it will be worth the effort. The reality is, however, that Evansville may have the ability to equal or even surpass Paducah.

The Evansville project has the distinct advantage of hindsight. Paducah's example is there to take the very best from and tailor it to this city's needs. It has similar historic and architectural appeal, yet

may not face one of Paducah's major problems, obscurity. Evansville is an above average city in terms of population. In its early stages Paducah's biggest challenge was convincing artists to move to a relatively remote location, and still today they must remain content to stay there (Marketing 8). My younger sister Melissa Phegley, assistant to the President for the Boston Center of the Arts, recently met an artist who had been living and working in the Paducah community, but was now seeking similar opportunities in the Boston area. According to Melissa, the woman spoke highly of her time in Paducah and thought it a very worthwhile project. One of the main reasons she cited for leaving, however was it was such a small isolated community (Phegley).

Evansville may not have this difficulty. Its population exceeds Paducah's by roughly 90,000. There are three small museums, two universities, a symphony, and active theatre groups. By properly developing the artist colony, the city will reap economic benefits, like the 12 to 15 million dollars seen by the Paducah economy, but it will also add a significant addition to Evansville's cultural identity. This alone makes the art colony a worthwhile enterprise.

The arts have long been known to promote positive social developments. The Creative City Network of Canada credits a city's artistic and cultural communities with "facilitating social cohesion . . . branding a community and setting it apart from others" ("Making"). This same organization also points out many of the benefits of a thriving artistic community. For example, students involved in the arts, especially those in lower-income families, normally score higher on academic tests, and participation in the arts fosters "creative problem-solving skills" ("Making"). According to the President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities "Young people who participate in band, orchestra, chorus, or a school play . . . are significantly less likely than non-participants to drop out of school, be arrested, use drugs or engage in binge drinking" ("Making").

Again, alone these reasons make the Haynie's Corner Artist Colony worth developing. But they are paired with convincing economic evidence that Evansville could benefit financially from a successful Art Colony and, if current economic trends continue, it may even suffer from the lack of strong cultural environment. The Haynie's Corner Artist Colony obviously benefits Haynie's Corner, but it also benefits

Evansville's downtown area. It benefits Evansville's cultural community and young people. In short, The Haynie's Corner Artist Colony will benefit all of Evansville, and should be considered a promising step toward ensuring the future of the entire community.

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