

The Art Community in Binghamton

Background Research on the Creative Economy

Richard Florida, an American urban studies theorist, believes that "human creativity has replaced natural resources and physical capital as the predominant driver of economic growth."¹ The creative sector includes science, technology, the arts, culture and entertainment, and information based professions like law, finance, health care, and education.

Understanding how technology, talent, and tolerance are related can identify the role of a university in a community. University technology can be associated with patent applications, disclosures of inventions, licensing income, and business start-ups. These concepts begin in the university, but they do not always get introduced to the community. The area needs to be receptive to these concepts by being attractive to talented individuals and providing an environment where creative thinking can be nourished. Richard Florida says it this way: "The relationship between the university and the regional economy can be thought of in terms of a simple transmitter-receiver system, with the university transmitting a signal that the regional economy must be able to absorb."¹ For the technology to be applied to an area, that area needs to attract talent.

A problem in Binghamton, NY is the "brain drain," or the movement of talented university graduates away from the region. A primary goal of Catalysts for Intellectual Capital is to reverse this, keeping more Binghamton University students in the Greater Binghamton area after they graduate. Great universities can have a very positive effect on attracting talent. Companies and research institutes might want to locate near a university to take advantage of the creative student population. Richard Florida believes that "the availability of a strong pool of local talent can trump both good physical resources and low costs in attracting corporations to a region and growing the local economy."¹

Recent studies show that creative people enjoy areas that are diverse and have interesting, engaging cultural and social activities. It is a common correlation that the same areas that have large numbers of high-tech engineers and entrepreneurs also have large numbers of musicians and artists.

Richard Florida presents universities as the core institutions of The Creative Age. His creativity rankings evaluate locations that are innovative, have high technology industries, and are demonstrating tolerance. The top five U.S. cities in the creative rankings all have at least one world-class research university. The "University-Creativity Index," created by Florida, compares a community's university size and strength to the percentage of its work force in the creative class. Binghamton University would score high on this index, as the University is one of the major employers in Greater Binghamton. Florida's study identified Albany and Syracuse as "older industrial regions that have experienced the decline of manufacturing industries but have strong universities on which to build."¹ Binghamton could be included in this classification, suggesting that Binghamton University has the potential to create growth and development for the Binghamton area. With more cultural amenities present, Binghamton is more likely to draw

and retain talent. This would make it more likely that university technology would be introduced to the area.

Graham Spaniter, the President of Penn State, made a presentation in 2002 describing ways that his university can engage the community. Some of the areas he includes are community redevelopment, urban revitalization, and issues related to the environment and natural resources.

The Mayor of Providence, David N. Cicilline, is working on a model where local universities support neighborhood redevelopment. An example is Rhode Island School of Design developing studio space and student housing in old industrial buildings. These types of models would work very well in Binghamton.

Binghamton Application

A vibrant artistic community is a vital ingredient in attracting young professionals to an area. There is a fear that Binghamton University Students are unaware of the art galleries in Downtown Binghamton. My research has focused on marketing these galleries to University students, in hopes that they will visit them and become more involved in the community.

The most prominent efforts to draw people into Downtown Binghamton have been made by The Gorgeous Washington Street Association. This partnership began in 2000 with thoughts about Binghamton's tremendous potential. The mission of this association is "the beautification and enhancement of the quality and character of our city, as well as the promotion of the urban environment as a unique, electric, alternative destination." Now including over eighty-one local businesses, the association has been a driving force for the revitalization of Downtown Binghamton through programs such as First Friday Art Walks.

First Fridays began four years ago. It is an event that is held on the first Friday of every month from 6-9pm. On First Friday, one can roam through the city's many art galleries, shops, restaurants, banks, and churches. The First Friday in April 2008 included forty-six different venues, mostly in downtown Binghamton, but also in different locations on the Westside and Southside. There are usually many special sales and promotions at these venues – some even offer complementary food and wine. It is not uncommon for an art gallery to see over 1,000 people on any given First Friday. There are free BC Transit Trolley rides so that people can easily see many different parts of the City. Since the beginning of First Fridays, many galleries have reported seeing many more visitors and much more business. This program has been an excellent way to increase the popularity and awareness of the artistic community in Binghamton.

There are instances where Binghamton University students are involved directly with art galleries in Downtown Binghamton. There are shows at the Jungle Science Gallery that regularly display student art, and student art was displayed in the University Union as a part of First Friday May 2008. One way to expand Binghamton University students' involvement in art galleries is for them to become members. Two galleries that offer membership to students are the Cooperative Gallery and the Art Mission.

For thirty dollars, a student could get a supporting membership at the Cooperative Gallery, which would entitle him/her to member only shows, such as the Holiday Member Show, and other invitational shows. Members can display art work at the annual member art show, and

also online at the gallery website. There is no rule against a student selling art for a profit, even art work that has been made for a class. Members also enjoy discounts from the Garland Gallery and receive other special promotions.

The Art Mission offers an individual/artist membership for thirty-five dollars. Members receive a discount on admission to movies and events, mailings of the print newsletter and postcards, and invitations to special events. Art work created by the member can be displayed at the member art show every spring.

Both these galleries offer membership at very low cost. When compared to the price of tuition, these costs become negligible. Figuring that tuition is around \$4,350 for New York residents, each academic credit hour costs approximately \$272 for the usual schedule of sixteen credits. A student can make a profit selling their artwork and get the invaluable experience of being involved in an art gallery. Imagine the pride a young artist would feel telling his or her peers to view their artwork displayed at a gallery in Downtown Binghamton!

Working with Beginnings, the orientation department at Binghamton University, I have created a poster board that will be displayed at Orientation this summer. This poster includes pictures of many art galleries downtown, as well as information about what type of art is displayed and what makes each gallery unique. The contents of this poster are included at the end of this paper. This display will help mold a positive first impression of the area for incoming students and their families, and will lead to more students coming downtown. Hopefully this will spur a series of chain-reactions, which will increase the popularity and image of the Greater Binghamton Area. In accordance with Richard Florida's theories, this will make the area more attractive to creative and talented people, which will lead to economic development.

Observations and Recommendations

First Fridays did a lot to increase the popularity of art in Binghamton, but there is much more work that needs to be done. Whereas some galleries report constantly seeing more business on First Fridays, such as the Garland Gallery and Anthony Brunelli's, others, such as Connelly's, have not seen much more business. Orazio Salati feels that the restaurants have benefited the most from First Fridays. He says that since First Fridays began he has seen many more people visit his gallery, but there has not been a noticeable increase in sales. Furthermore, while there could be 1,000 people that come and visit his gallery on First Friday, hardly anyone will come on Saturday. There needs to be programs that will attempt to bring people to the downtown area on days other than the first Friday of every month.

A popular gallery for Binghamton University art students is Spool MFG in Johnson City. Besides the contemporary art space, there are events that involve film, dance, and music. This variety is attractive for students, and is a good example for Binghamton to follow. Involving other types of media would draw more people to come to Downtown Binghamton.

Bibliography

¹ Florida, Robert. "Regions and Universities Together Can Foster a Creative Economy." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Sept. 2006.

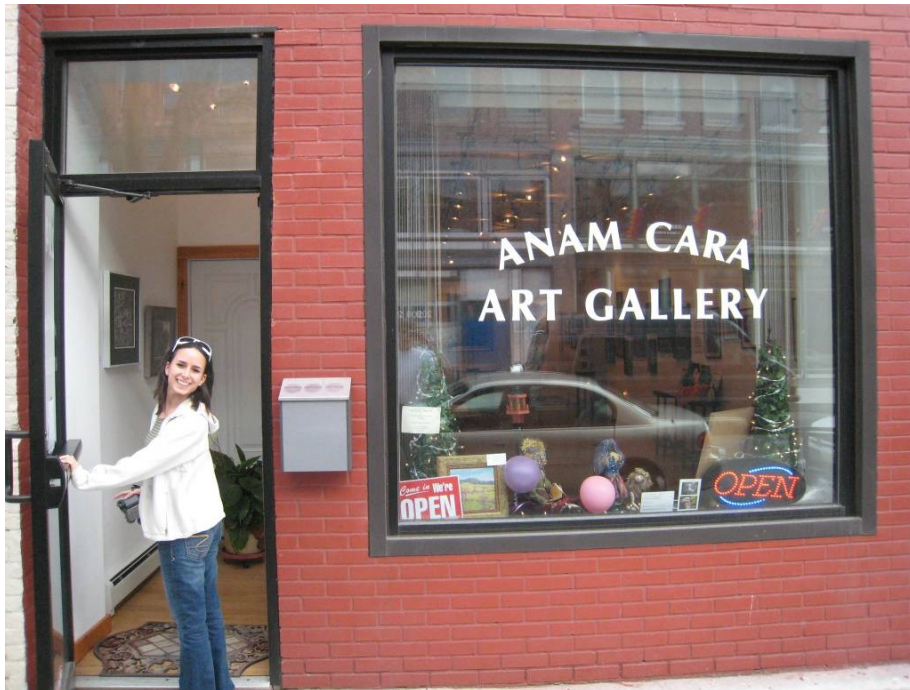
² Spanier, Graham. "Connecting: Why Universities Must Foster Engagement. *All-Extension Conference-Washington State University*. Oct. 2002.

³ Toye, Sue. "Tolerance Supports Economic Growth. Jan. 2003.

Anam Cara

Anam Cara is an art gallery featuring painting, sculpture photography, and pottery. New artists are featured every month. The gallery has beautiful lighting and a very nice setup.

<http://www.anamcaraartgallery.com/>



Art Mission

“The ART Mission is a not-for-profit downtown community art space supporting contemporary artists working in the visual arts. Our mission is to foster creativity and art excellence; provide exhibition space to new and established artists; provide programs and activities that encourage public awareness, participation, and appreciation of the visual arts and to serve as a catalyst for small city revitalization via the arts.”

The Art Theater is the only place showing independent films in Binghamton, and is open every day. All different kinds of films are shown, including documentaries, experimental, and foreign language films. The Art gallery has different types of art each month, ranging from conceptual to mixed media and more. <http://www.artmission.org/>



Cooperative Gallery

The Cooperative Gallery has studio art from local artists. This gallery was the first gallery opened on State St., and is run completely by the artists. This gallery runs a high school show every December and has affordable art all year round. <http://www.cooperativegallery.com/>



Bob & Sallie Connolly

Connolly's has an expansive collection of all sorts of antique art. Bob Connolly appraises everything from American furniture, ceramics & pottery, toys, and much more. There are many interesting events that are held at this gallery, including a Baseball & Sports Memorabilia Auction and a Guns and German & U.S. Military Memorabilia Auction which were held in Spring 2008. <http://www.bobconnelly.com/>



Orazio Salati Studio & Gallery

Salati's consists of two different galleries. Gallery I features a new solo exhibition every First Friday. These artists are sometimes internationally known, and sometimes more local. Gallery II features the work of ten different artists from the Northeast. There are all kinds of art ranging from realism to non-objective.

Orazio Salati has a personal love for abstract expressionism, and says painting is the language of his heart. He claims that his gallery has unparalleled energy, and has more diverse art than any other place in Binghamton. Other events at this gallery include book signings, wedding showers, retirement parties, and fundraisers. There is going to be a student thesis show next year from an artist from SUNY Purchase. <http://www.oraziosalati.com/>



Anthony Brunelli Fine Arts

The Brunelli Gallery is owned and managed by Anthony Brunelli, Binghamton University alumni. The opening of the gallery in 2003 was described by Anthony Brunelli as “a natural extension of my passion for the revitalization of Downtown Binghamton.” The gallery has an emphasis on contemporary realism. This includes photo realism and classical realism. Also displayed is well-disciplined abstract art. Brunelli’s has excellent connections in the art world, with art from nationally and internationally renowned artists. <http://www.anthonybrunelli.com/>



Garland Gallery

The Garland Gallery has been in business over twenty years, ten at its current location. The gallery offers custom framing, plaque mounting, and other design services. There is art work on sale, as well as unique gifts, cards, books, and posters. www.garlandgallery.com



“Zaniest place in town. We’re very weird and funny”
-Sherry Eaten, owner

