

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Shreveport, LA Cultural District Profile: Shreveport Common

OVERVIEW:

Shreveport Common is an arts-led, multi-partner initiative to revitalize a historic but long-blighted nine-block area within the much larger, state-designated downtown cultural district, (est. 2009). Shreveport Regional Arts Council (SRAC) and City of Shreveport have led the project from the beginning, through the precepts of creative placemaking, with community-based “oversight” that supports each phase.

BACKGROUND:

When a random act of arson destroyed the Shreveport Regional Arts Council’s (SRAC) headquarters, Shreveport Mayor Cedric B. Glover, proclaimed “a new day” for the arts—one that would put the arts at the center of revitalizing a small but significant area within a larger downtown cultural district. This area had deteriorated for more than two decades, beyond the probability for grassroots revitalization. Neither tax incentives nor artist sales tax exemptions would be enough to spur redevelopment.

Of the few large historic buildings that remained—other than those owned by the city/venue management and those occupied by social service organizations serving the otherwise homeless—all would require major restoration for occupancy without an impetus for change. The prohibitive costs to bring neglected historic buildings to code was compounded by grand but unrealized plans that led speculators to hold properties without making improvements, creating blocks of broken slabs and adjudicated weed-filled lots, many with multiple tax sale “owners.” Because blight begets blight, the deterioration had spread into the downtown business district; long-neglected historic buildings had become dangerous “shelters” for vagrants, an under-managed section 8 apartment high rise was noted for a high-crime rate, and the Ledbetter Heights neighborhood, Shreveport’s oldest and now a HUD Choice Neighborhood, lost 75 percent of its population (average income now \$13,000/year).

THE PROCESS:

Engaging the principles of creative placemaking, SRAC and the City started a year-long community vision planning process that put the arts and artists at the helm of every initiative—community, cultural, and economic development—from vision plan to strategy to implementation. The Shreveport Common Vision Plan is predicated on the authenticity of the people, architecture, and history of the area.

During the first year, the arts-led, grassroots community vision planning process, (supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, an M.I.C.D. grant, and Educational Foundation of America), was led by SRAC Executive Director Pam Atchison and the City of Shreveport Public Assembly and Recreation Director Shelly Ragle with oversight by a 50-member, mayor-selected

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Advisory Committee. Rounding out the team were a “staff” of two consultants, a lead designer, and a project manager.

In year two, with a Metropolitan Planning Commission and City Council approved plan, the focus shifted to infrastructure, strategies, and action plans. SRAC and the City lead nine community-expert task forces through researching, recommending strategies, and developing policies to best advance the Vision Plan to a Creative Cultural Community. Those nine task forces focused their expertise on redevelopment initiatives through the arts in: Parks and Green Spaces; Transportation; Development; Vendor Opportunities; Public Art; Art Programming; Artist Residences and Responsibilities; Integrating Social Service Organizations; and Communicating with Neighbors. This phase was guided by a 15-member Management Team of representative stakeholders and city department heads.

In year three, as **Shreveport Common** moved toward implementation of the Vision Plan—with 30 major partners and 36 major projects—the Shreveport Common Management Team voted to become a 501(c)(3) organization, and a Board of Directors was formed—made up of ex officio positions, mayor, Northwest Louisiana artists designated positions, and neighbor/stakeholder seats. A Shreveport Common Administrator was added to the staff this year. The success of Shreveport Common to date is reflective of the arts bringing together public and private partners to make big changes in the nine-block area, with the arts and artists involved every step of the way.

FROM THE FIRE TO THE FIRE STATION:



The first step was for SRAC to move from the fire to the 1922 unused Central Fire Station—at the “epicenter” of Shreveport Common—while overseeing the door-to-door, grassroots community engagement and arts-led planning effort to produce the Shreveport Common Vision Plan. The Central ARTSTATION opened in February 2013 thanks to a \$6.5 million renovation, funded mostly by private funds. Central ARTSTATION was the first major capital improvement of a historic building in the area, and included an Arts Business Center, artist training center, emerging artist gallery, and programming space—the Engine Room. Adding the new, vibrant

Central ARTSTATION in a previously unused building meant hundreds of artists and volunteers coming and going daily.

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



At that time, the City passed a \$4.5 million bond issue for needed improvements of the 1929 Municipal Auditorium, where Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, and many others started their careers, and the historic Oakland Cemetery. At the same time, private owners of surrounding national historic registry buildings, including churches and social service organizations, began to make historic restoration improvements. The momentum and emphasis on revitalizing the neighborhood began to impact even the out-of-town owner of the long-neglected section 8 apartment high rise.

CREATING VIBRANCY THROUGH PUBLIC ART AND ARTS PROGRAMMING:

In fall 2013, SRAC brought arts programming to a whole new level in animating and creating vibrancy in the formerly desolate area. UNSCENE! (supported with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and Artplace America) brings nationally renowned artists to work along-side professional, local artists in month-long residencies that culminate in new works of art that leave an indelible mark on Shreveport Common.

The program is a huge success and has jump-started the investment in artists in this area, attracted new and widely diverse audiences, engaged artists and the community in the creation of the works, introduced and engaged the clients/residents of the neighboring social service organizations to the artists, attracted private-sector development, and generated new earned income for artists. Twelve months of groundbreaking arts programming generated \$342,500 in commissioned artists' fees for 100 national, regional, and local artists, and attracted thousands of widely diverse, new audiences to the area.



OUTCOMES:

Shreveport Common's 30 partners and 36 major projects have completed \$38 million of \$100 million public/private initiatives including major restoration and preservation of historic buildings and places. Seventy percent of those improvements have been privately funded or supported, and 30 percent is public support. UNSCENE! has animated the area with more than 100 local and nationally acclaimed artists, 16 major arts programming events, 31 smaller grassroots events; this means that more than 64 days in one year, an area that has seen little foot traffic in the last 20 years was a bustling, creative place.

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Since 2010, 19 buildings have been purchased: 17 by private developers, including the City acquisition of the Arlington Hotel. A total of 38 buildings are now occupied, (up 27 percent). Of those unoccupied, five are currently undergoing major renovation and 13 more have committed plans for major redevelopment. There are six new start-up businesses in Shreveport Common, located in formerly retail/commercial empty spaces.

Visitor traffic in Central ARTSTATION now averages 100 visitors a week including artists, neighbors, community members, and volunteers. Performances by local artists in the Engine



Room spill onto the streets which, when closed off, create a venue for performances and arts markets. SRAC is dedicated to equipping artists and arts organizations to fully engage in all of the new opportunities of Shreveport Common with a staffed Arts Resource Center and intensive Arts Entrepreneurial Training and Practicum. Fall 2014 started the fifth class of an intensive, a four-week Art-as-Business program. Ninety percent of the 75 graduates report increases in earned income and 40 percent report at least doubling income earned from their art. Additionally, SRAC's Pay It Forward program trades artist space rental and training fees for

comparable professional artist fees, which enables artists to work with social service organizations who serve the otherwise homeless, building relationships between the artists and the existing neighbors that stems gentrification and furthers a creating a neighborhood community.

Street traffic is up with visitors, bicyclists, pedestrians, and neighbors exploring the area. People are visiting and engaging public art structures in new ways as artists and the neighbors begin to animate the area on their own. The City has acquired adjudicated properties for packaging and redevelopment. A historic Preservation Ordinance and local board now oversees preservation goals and policies. The City has simplified Temporary Permits for events in Shreveport Common including new programming in abandoned, but now clean and usable spaces. Downtown Development Authority and the City have partnered with SRAC to establish semi-permanent food truck spaces with amenities such as needed electrical ports, tables, and chairs.

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Promenade before & after

PARTNERSHIPS:

Shreveport Common's 30 public/private partners include existing neighbors and property owners; City, Parish (county), nonprofit organizations; private partners; and 1,100 Northwest Louisiana artists.

\$6.5 million in private support made the renovation of the Central Fire Station to Central ARTSTATION possible. Further revitalization, including from neighbors and property owners, totals \$20.5 million completed with another \$2.25 million funded and/or started. Six partners contributed to fund local developers' requests for a Residential/Retail Market Study.

To date, City support in Shreveport Common revitalization totals \$7 million; the Parish (county) has supplied \$375,000 for the design, plus \$3 million in construction planned for the artist designed Caddo Common Park.

The State of Louisiana has invested \$1.2 million in street improvements and \$75,000 in the City's first Bike Pedestrian Path, and new, much needed zoning is now in place that creates an A.C.E. (arts, cultural, and entertainment) district.

VENUES:

Many cultural districts are centered around venues for public art and arts programming. Central ARTSTATION is the newest venue. At the center of Shreveport Common, the repurposed historic 1922 fire station now serves the arts community with a fully stocked Arts Resource Center, a gallery, black box theater, and meeting/conference/training rooms. At night, the building is up-lit to an enchanted effect with the 19.5 foot tall fiberglass dog, ART the Dalmatian, a "housewarming" gift from the National



NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Endowment of the Arts and local Academy Award-winning artists Bill Joyce and Brandon Oldenburg, with fabrication by Junoworks in Colorado.



With the help of a bond issue, the City made significant restoration and improvements to the under-used 1929 Municipal Auditorium and Oakland Cemetery. A new Grand Promenade green space, formerly a broken concrete esplanade, is complete and located across from the anticipated James Burton Guitar and Car Museum. The Calanthean Temple, the first African-American professional high-rise in Shreveport, with a rooftop venue that hosted Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, is being renovated by a private owner who donated use of an adjacent niche for UNSCENE! AIRLIFT (New Orleans) to create the new Calanthean Canyon—a series of music houses, built from

abandoned structures, that continues to host performances. The six year old ASEANA Gardens, formerly a concrete desert, is now an Asian botanical garden thanks to a handful of volunteers who host Asian festivals twice a year.

Planned are Caddo Common Park and CommonLINK, both designed by artist teams. Caddo Common Park, an urban gathering green space for community and artists, will replace 1.3 acres of unused concrete slabs. Across the street, CommonLINK, a transformational, block-long, lit transportation center, will serve as an information center as well as a venue. Both are shovel ready, awaiting funding for fabrication. Most importantly, UNSCENE! has shown artists and the community that any space, including streets, parking lots, abandoned parking garages, outdoor niches, and forgotten spaces can be venues for art and arts programming.



NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



UNIQUENESS/DISTINCTIONS:

Shreveport Common is dedicated to more than creating a space or place. Shreveport Common is committed to being a community built on creativity, authenticity, and sustainability built on economic development through the arts AND most importantly on community and cultural development that keeps existing neighbors as integral to the neighborhood while giving artists a place to live, work, and play.

For more information:

www.shreveportcommon.com

www.shrevearts.com

www.facebook.com/shreveportcommon

www.facebook.com/unscenesb