



NEIGHBORWORKS WORKS

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Arts as economic development

Murals are often recognized for their value in showing the creativity of residents, but community art is more than just colors and paint. Along with brightening up the city, community art engages residents of all ages and it can have serious economic impact as well.

In this issue, we explore how art and artists can change the perception of place and signal a new future for communities.



Investing in live/work spaces for artists

NeighborWorks chartered member LaCasa is using art as the foundation to both create new affordable housing and support downtown revitalization efforts in Goshen, Ind. LaCasa acquired a furniture factory built in the 1870s along the historic Mill Race canal and converted it into The Hawks, 35 bright and sunny one-and two-bedroom loft apartments for artists and entrepreneurs.



The Hawks is a unique development designed to accomplish multiple outcomes. Renovation of the building preserves an example of Goshen's history, the last example of the factory buildings that once lined the hydraulic canal. It is the first significant investment in the Goshen Redevelopment Commission's ambitious master plan to bring new life to an under-utilized brownfield. The project is also the first in Indiana to use affordable housing funds to create a residential community for artists and entrepreneurs.

Photo credit: Stuart Meade Photography

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Arts-based economy revives Georgia town

In 1990, Colquitt, Georgia was located in the ninth-poorest Congressional district in the U.S. Town leadership decided to invest in cultural tourism while also engaging their residents with storytelling and the arts.

The project, called Swamp Gravy, now helps Colquitt attracts 55,000 visitors annually. Swamp Gravy material has been performed at the Kennedy Center and the Olympics, a youth theater has developed and Colquitt secured funding from the National Foundation for the Arts to install 16 murals downtown. The Georgia state legislature named Colquitt as "First Mural City."



Photo credit: [Judy Baxter](#)

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Revitalizing community, engaging youth with art

Community Housing of Wyandotte County (CHWC) in Kansas City, Kansas, uses art as an engagement tool to get youth involved in making the neighborhoods better places to live. During the past five years CHWC has developed a wide range of art-related programs, including after-school classes, an art club, and art in community gardens and parks.

From those efforts, a group of teens took ownership and created the ART SQUAD. They have painted murals to abate gang scripting from alleys and removed trash to make a safe and inviting place for kids to play. They have also been involved in all of CHWC's neighborhood engagement projects, working with residents, volunteers and younger kids to make them part of redeveloping their own neighborhood.



[Watch the video](#)

