



YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

Update

Design Program - National Endowment for the Arts

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From the Editor

As 2006 has drawn to a close, so has another successful round of Your Town workshops. Workshops were held in Bogalusa, Louisiana; Eureka Springs, Arkansas; Blairsville, Pennsylvania; and Spartanburg, South Carolina. Each had its own focus and flavor. Our last newsletter described the Bogalusa workshop, and this newsletter features the other three.

Additionally, the National Endowment for the Arts Design Program funded three special post-Katrina workshops in Mississippi in October 2006. These workshops are also described here.

Please take note: this is the LAST newsletter that is being sent via regular U.S. mail. From now on, Your Town newsletters will be sent only electronically and will be posted on our Website: www.yourtowndesign.org. To receive the newsletter via e-mail, please send your e-mail address to: shellmast@comcast.net. We hope that you will take advantage of this service by contacting us today.

Shelley Mastran, Editor

■ Your Town: Eureka Springs

Eureka Springs, Arkansas, nestled in the Ozarks near the Missouri border, where rolling hills, small farms, rivers, streams, and limestone cliffs characterize the landscape, was founded in 1879 as a health resort. The town's many natural springs and healthy mountain air attracted visitors from across the Midwest and South, and Eureka Springs became a well-known spa with lodgings scattered over its hills and hollows.

Although Eureka Springs is a successful tourist destination, many townspeople would like to enhance the arts and cultural strengths of the community. The town is a haven for painters, potters, sculptors, jewelers, writers, and musicians, and there are opportunities both to expand living and working space for artists and to offer tourists more venues to experience and share in the arts.

The Your Town: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design workshop of August 13-15, 2006, coordinated by Glenna Booth, the town's Economic Development Coordinator, focused on designing an Arts and Culture District for Eureka Springs on North Main Street. The aim was to develop concepts for a pedestrian-friendly area with galleries, artists' living quarters, restaurants, parks, and other street amenities. The challenges involved re-designing parking areas, rehabilitating historic abandoned buildings, designing suitable infill development, designing a pedestrian walkway, and enhancing existing green space.

Ed McMahon, Senior Fellow at the Urban Land Institute, was the workshop's keynote speaker. He spoke about the economic benefits of preserving community character to an open audience in the town's auditorium.

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Downtown Eureka Springs has a wealth of historic limestone buildings.

Your Town: Spartanburg

The focus of the Spartanburg, S.C., Your Town, held September 13-15, was the design and re-use of abandoned big-box retailers and the development of design guidelines on commercial construction. Spartanburg County in northwestern South Carolina has an unusually high number of abandoned big-box stores and chain retailers including Publix grocery stores and Wal-Mart. How to convert these huge structures surrounded by asphalt into new uses and how to make the commercial corridors of Spartanburg County more attractive were the issues tackled by the workshop.

Coordinated by Emily Neely with Upstate Forever, a nonprofit organization that promotes sensible growth and works to protect the upstate region of South Carolina, the workshop brought together a formidable group of presenters and over 40 committed local citizens. Pratt Cassity from the University of Georgia delivered the keynote address on the importance of good design. Steve Luoni, with the Arkansas Community Design Center, provided new designs for Wal-Mart stores and parking lots. Bill Steiner described the components of good places, emphasizing the importance of physical health and social interaction as an antidote to sprawl. And Jeff Speck, Director of Design at the National Endowment for the Arts, presented the New Urbanist alternative to the throwaway landscape of sprawl.

Each of the small groups worked to redesign a specific abandoned big-box site at four different locations in Spartanburg County. Their proposals include mixed-use development, residential clusters, a children's museum, and numerous beautification schemes. The participants agreed to continue to meet on a regular basis and work toward the development of commercial design the development of commercial design standards for the country.

(con't from page 1: Eureka Springs)

The Your Town workshop resulted in conceptual designs for the Arts and Culture district, specific drawings and ideas about design details along the street (sidewalk, parking lots, parks), and a very specific process for bringing the former ice house, a "white elephant" building at one of the entrances into town, back to life as a focal point of the community.

For more information on the Eureka Springs workshop with an array of pictures, see our website, www.yourtowndesign.org.

YourTown: Blairsville

The Blairsville, PA Your Town workshop was a joint effort, benefiting from a terrific group of contributing organizations, including the Blairsville Improvement Group (BIG), National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program, Indiana County Office of Planning and Development, and the PA/Delaware Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Ed McMahon, of the Urban Land Institute, and Tom Horsch, Adventure Damascus, Inc., and Sun Dog Outfitters, gave the keynote addresses. Mr. Horsch gave an insightful talk on the economic impacts of recreational trails on local economics. The workshop focused on the design issues associated with community gateways and



An entire wall of the gymnasium was covered with the community's opinions on how to make Blairsville a better place to live.

wayfinding, rediscovering and reconnecting the community with the Conemaugh River, and establishing a trail system.



Sketches of Possible Conemaugh Riverfront Structures

■ Gulf Coast Your Towns

On three consecutive weekends in October, three special Your Town post-Katrina workshops were held in Mississippi: in Picayune, Biloxi, and Laurel.

The Picayune workshop responded to the need for the community to use available land to accommodate the post-Katrina population surge and to create a tighter urban fabric. The workshop was coordinated with the Carl Small Town Center, Mississippi State University and Mississippi Main Street. The first activity in the workshop was a walk through downtown guided by Norman Mintz.

One design problem addressed creative ways to revisit a downtown that is divided by railroad tracks. Another design issue concerned accommodating the new population that is likely to permanently locate in Picayune. Currently, there is virtually no housing available in the city. Finally the workshop focused on the role public spaces can play, walkability, enhancement of natural and cultural resources, and creating a safe, family-friendly environment.

The Biloxi workshop, for the small communities along the Gulf Coast that had been damaged by Katrina, focused on the pressure for new development north of I-10. In a largely unzoned region, new

housing subdivisions are appearing, threatening the natural resources and rural character of this previously largely undeveloped area. The workshop's design problems concentrated on protecting existing natural and cultural assets and on making Smart Growth decisions. Harriet Tregoning, Executive Director of The Governors' Institute on Community Design and the Smart Growth Leadership Institute, was the keynote speaker. One of the workshop highlights was a dinner held at the Walter Anderson Museum in Ocean Springs, with evening entertainment from NPR celebrities Felder Rushing and Dr. Dirt, who talked about native plants and horticulture issues.

The Laurel workshop, held for communities in Mississippi's Piney Woods, was built around downtown revitalization issues—how to use Main Street buildings for artists' living and work space and how to improve entrance corridors into town. Among the featured speakers were David Preziosi, Executive Director of the Mississippi Heritage Trust, and Malcolm White, Executive Director of the Mississippi Arts Commission. The workshop resulted in detailed drawings for facade renovation in downtown Laurel and design concepts for highway entranceways into town.



Norm Mintz discusses how Main Street facades can be improved

■ News from the Carl Small Town Center

During the 2006-2007 school year, Kimberly Brown has taken a leave of absence from her position as the Director of the Carl Small Town Center to delve back into professional practice. During the months of September and October, she worked with Welborn Henson Modern Furniture in Atlanta on the design of their studio space. Currently she is working with the office of Leslie Gill Architect in New York City. Kimberly will return to the College of Architecture, Art and Design at Mississippi State University in July 2007. In the meantime, she can be contacted at kbrown@caad.msstate.edu.

While Kimberly is on leave, Jane Britt Greenwood is serving as Interim Director of the Carl Small Town Center. Associate Dean in the College of Architecture, Art and Design at Mississippi State, Jane acts as an advocate for faculty and students in their quest for scholarly and design excellence.

Jane was an art major at East Carolina University before earning an undergraduate degree in Interior Design from the University of Tennessee. After working for a number of years as an interior designer in an architectural firm, she earned a graduate degree in Architecture from Virginia Tech. She practiced architecture in Boston, Mass., before serving as University Architect for the newly founded American University in Armenia.

Over the past ten years, Ms. Greenwood's teaching and research interests have focused on design studio pedagogy, vernacular housing, cultural determinants, design build, and sustainability. Currently, she is engaged in several long-term research projects involving the identification and preservation of historic houses of Armenia.

Profile Update: Pratt Cassity

In addition to serving as a Your Town lecturer this past year in Bogalusa, Picayune, Eureka Springs and Spartanburg, Pratt Cassity is spreading the message that quality design and wise growth are economic development tools in places other than his own backyard.

The University of Georgia Ghana Summer Service-Learning Program, which he initiated in 2000 in Cape Coast, Ghana, West Africa, has become a model for other programs.

The six-week Studio will again be held in Ghana in 2007, but there will also be a six-week option for students and professionals to work in Thailand. The program in Thailand will be split between a neighborhood revitalization project in Bangkok and a rural cultural tourism project near Chiang Mai. For more information about the programs, visit this Web site: www.sed.uga.edu/psd/programs/international



Pratt Cassity (right) meets with a group from Ghana.

Reminder

This is the last newsletter to be delivered via regular mail. In order to receive the Your Town Newsletter electronically, please send your e-mail address to: shellmast@comcast.net.

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