

“FABULOUS ARTS-FABULOUS FUTURE”

**Report on a workshop organized by the
Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network**

Brockville, ON 16/04/2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The FAB Arts workshop, Saturday April 16, in Brockville was the final in a workshop series organized by the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network to explore new ways to build sustainable communities. Almost 120 people with a passion for the arts gathered to learn how the arts can contribute to the region’s sustainable economic development. Speakers from North Carolina’s “HandMade in America” program helped lead the workshop. Born out of a downturn in the regional economy, HandMade in America built from a strong regional craft tradition of potters, quilters, painters, and others, to create a new \$200 million annual economy. With videos and powerpoints, the speakers from HandMade demonstrated how crafts, trails and the volunteer-powered revitalization of small towns spurred tourism, put their region on the map, and led to sustainable community and economic development. See <http://www.handmadeinamerica.org/>

Participants—from tourism and economic development, municipal councillors and planners, and a broad cross-section of the creative community from Kingston to Kempville, Prescott to Parham—discussed whether the HandMade approach could apply to the Frontenac Arch Biosphere region. Looking beyond crafts to all creative endeavours (visual arts, theatre arts, music, writing, etc), they concluded that better coordination of artistic activity in our region would strengthen our economy and drive tourism by making us an arts destination. Suggested initiatives included:

- coordinating a one stop web-based calendar listing all regional artistic events
- establishing a regional arts council
- building the case for the arts through a study on the economic impact of the arts
- getting our cultural stories out using social media
- mapping our cultural assets for greater accessibility
- organizing an annual arts festival that would rotate among towns in the Biosphere
- promoting an arts trail.

All of the above require leadership, a willingness to work together, and some funding. Numerous participants were eager to volunteer and help make our region economically and culturally stronger through arts coordination and promotion.

Over the coming months, the FAB Arts working group will focus on following up on these recommendations. Stay tuned!

Learn more about this workshop and FAB Arts at the FABN website (www.fabn.ca).

NOTE: *This report contains the complete “as it was said” comments from workshop participants. We left them in to demonstrate how much attendees shared the same train of thought.*

1- INTRODUCTION

On April 16, 2011 over 100 participants assembled in Brockville to discuss making the greater Frontenac Arch Biosphere region an arts destination that would drive tourism and enhance cultural and economic development in the area.

Local officials welcomed the participants: Brockville’s Mayor Henderson, the MP Gord Brown, and the MPP Steven Clark. They each indicated their support for the work of the Biosphere Network and wished participants well in their discussions.

2- KEY NOTE SPEAKERS

The keynote speakers consisted of two representatives from NW North Carolina’s “HandMade in America” program, Gwynne Rukenbrod and Judi Jetson.

Gwynne described how their program was founded in order to create economic change and keep residents viable when industry flagged in the NW region. The HandMade in America program is a grassroots effort that is assets based. Since traditional crafts of woodworking, pottery, quilting, etc were a major local asset, the program banked on revitalizing them via grants from some NC Foundations. The first order of business in 1994 was to partner with a university to study the economic impact of crafts in the local economy. The results astounded decision-makers: crafts far outweighed the #1 tobacco industry by a factor of 4! The crafts sector accounted for \$122 M/year, and comprised 750 full time producers and 3,500 part time producers. The study showed that ceramics was the number one medium followed closely by fibre, wood and jewellery, and it asked questions about why people chose to live in the region. The existence of craft education opportunities at the Penland School and the John C. Campbell Folk Arts Centre constituted major attractions for both students and teachers.

With HandMade’s focused assistance, the NW North Carolina crafts industry has grown and brings in approximately \$200 million per year to the local economy. The area now boasts crafts schools, folk centres, and gift centres and HandMade published a few iterations of a book on their Heritage Craft Trails, a new version of which will soon be on-line. Craft consumers or “cultural tourists” spend on average \$750 per visit in accommodation and services, and purchase approximately \$2-300 worth of crafts. An industry of raw materials may be a niche for new business, as evidenced by Highwater Clay that supplies potters around the world with raw clay. A district of old factories is being made into arts colonies and the creative economy accounted for \$3.9B in wages in the NC economy in 2006. HandMade literally turns craft into cash and has become a key

component of the NC creative economy and vitally important to the well-being of the overall community.

A small town revitalization program is also part of the HandMade in America program. Judi Jetson described the work accomplished in 12 local towns where volunteers beautified their streetscapes, built river walks, arenas, etc., all in order to attract tourism and sell their crafts. She showed a video with testimonials from local citizens enthused about the improvements they have collectively brought to their community with guidance from teams of volunteer architects, engineers, horticulturalists, etc, assembled by the HandMade staff.

3- SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Participants met in small mixed groups over a working lunch and addressed three questions. Their comments are transcribed below:

- a) What would be the **BENEFITS** to our region of implementing the type of initiative that HandMade in America has fostered in North Carolina?
- b) What might be the **CHALLENGES** in trying to implement this model in our region?
- c) What **ACTIONS** need to happen next if we are to implement the HandMade model in our region?

a- BENEFITS of implementing a HandMade approach here :

- It would give artists a louder voice and artists would gain more exposure through group marketing.
- Other niche businesses would be helped eg. tea rooms & cafés, B&Bs, hotels, restaurants, service industry.
- It would respect the 4 pillars of sustainability (economy, environment, culture, social well-being), build a future that would benefit all of us and not destroy what makes us unique.
- It would help artists and consumers appreciate the link between art and nature. Nature provides the materials and the inspiration. Connection to the landscape enhances the quality of life and encourages us to sustain our natural environment.
- People coming here for the natural beauty will enjoy the arts.
- It would take advantage of our accessible location on Hwy 401.
- The cultural industry could replace other lost industry.
- We could pool money available in municipalities for economic development and tourism to do a proper job for arts and culture: bring visitors, attract investments and tourists who are likely to buy local.
- It would get tourists off the beaten track and into smaller villages, revitalize industrial sites, spur revitalization of historic sites, revitalise the downtowns and the closed industrial buildings.

- It would create interest in the unique qualities/talents/products of the region.
- The HandMade approach includes the respect of local sacred spaces so people understand and value them & they are not ruined by too much traffic.
- This approach would keep newcomers and residents here and create the potential for new small businesses.
- It would improve the quality of life for our region and contribute to long term sustainability.
- Acquainting artists with each other would lead to the cross fertilization of the arts disciplines and improvements in the quality of their work.
- It would teach artists how to market and be business-like in their accounting
- It would give our culture a longer reach by making this a destination area that brings more tourists to the region and enriches the identity of the locale.
- It would enhance co-op craft sales, the notions of cooperation vs competition and civic pride.
- It could provide an opportunity to mentor and produce excellence in the arts.
- It would combine scarce arts advertising dollars and achieve cross promotion.
- It would encourage volunteerism and grass roots efforts.
- Having one book or web site listing all artists & cultural events is a good idea.
- An arts trail would allow artists to stay in their studio and do more work.
- It would educate people about the value of our creative community.

b) CHALLENGES inherent in trying to implement a HandMade approach here:

- There is an economic imperative: where do we get the funding for studies, outreach and surveys?
- Doing this requires time and a sustained focus.
- It will be difficult to overcome the negative voices & apathy and not get sidetracked.
- We deal with a short tourist season that is a 3-4 month window.
- There is some apathy towards the arts: we need to generate enthusiasm.
- Sustainability requires a dedicated core and paid staff.
- At the political economic development level, there is some indifference.
- Agencies, economic development officials, councils and tourism don't always understand that the arts are a major resource: we need to educate them.
- We must find good leadership and overcome historic indifference to the arts.
- There is resistance to change, and a 'don't make waves' attitude that we must overcome.
- We need to conduct asset mapping of the region and include all cultural activity.
- We require leadership & must find core funding to do this initiative.
- Artists tend to eat their young- we need to "get that lovin' feeling" and urge everyone to realize that this isn't a competition but collaboration. We should aim for cross-fertilization, break down the silos between arts communities and stop criticizing one another so much.

- Some artists are too busy multi-tasking with day jobs, others just want to do their art.
- Getting people off of Hwy 401 into our region is a challenge. We need to convince tour operators to get people off the bus.
- We need to start by educating children and getting the arts back in to the schools.
- We need outlets and galleries for our art and lots of marketing.
- The mentality of art producers can be a downfall: they must take themselves seriously as a business
- The lack of public transportation and infrastructure means we lack both venues and a means of getting to them.
- Artists are not always good at telling their stories.
- We have a small population and geographic distances to overcome.
- We require cooperation from the media, and must learn to work with them in spite of our difficult geography.
- We need a long term plan that brings every municipality and community on board to become the best arts destination in Canada.
- Other businesses don't always see the arts as a business, and artists themselves require education in marketing and business administration.
- We need a community arts strategy for the region that speaks to a number of audiences.
- We must identify leadership and not only from the Biosphere: we need a champion to drive the project.
- We should coordinate within Region 9 who now control the tourism dollars.
- It will be a challenge to include all the arts and still brand ourselves clearly.
- How can we get more business groups to promote artists?
- How can we keep this project grassroots and sustainable?
- We must market to seasonal residents & help them feel a part of the area.
- Retail pricing of art works is always a challenge.

ACTIONS recommended in order to implement a HandMade approach here:

- Do an economic impact of the arts study right away: ask the Queen's school of business for assistance and get the statistics to back up the arts.
- Develop a communications strategy that speaks of the many artistic disciplines to a variety of audiences.
- Recruit leadership outside FAB staff.
- Form a committee and develop a three year plan.
- Use advertising and organize an awareness campaign.
- Do asset mapping and map each community's assets including its trails.
- Use mentorship from schools & universities and local newspapers; continue communication which will help with the challenge of living in a rural area.
- Make it a grassroots approach: it's up to us to tell the people in power that we want change.
- Educate the public about FAB, and about the importance of arts & crafts.

- Provide cross-links to other artists, galleries & historic sites, and have this information available at all venues.
- Brand FAB as an arts region and develop terms of reference and a charter for inclusion of artists in the program.
- Leverage local colour without becoming a stereotype: refer to the HandMade video.
- Develop a green layered 3-dimensional map of the arts trail & create criteria for inclusion on the map.
- Conduct more public consultation with culture groups.
- Have a cooperative-based place to teach & learn- i.e. a sustainability centre.
- Take advantage of our fabulous location as a destination and reach out to seasonal residents.
- Take a larger regional approach and package the different regions.
- Create more authentic, cultural experiences.
- Locate funding for the program.
- Use new social media to get our stories out: e.g. book, internet, Facebook.
- Charge \$50 to be on the arts website, and use paid ads on web pages.
- Use green map approach and find the right software to make the arts & culture trail downloadable on phones, GPS, etc.
- Conduct small local sessions, but beforehand work with elected senior politicians to get economic development and municipal leaders as possible partners. Use assets such as college, printing, media, industries.
- FAB needs to make sure we know what is going on.
- Everyone in the Biosphere should get together for an annual festival of food & art and move it yearly to a different community (a rotating arts festival) to provide better exposure to the Biosphere.
- There are a lot of brochures being printed: the FAB website should have all the brochures on it with a complete calendar of all cultural events.
- Artists have to take responsibility to be linked to their community such as the B&Bs and events; the politicians will see the benefits.
- We need more research on demographic data.
- We should do culture mapping and link up with FAB website and cross-promote.
- Pool resources to print a more substantial brochure- perhaps the FAB website could help.
- Create a long term vision for culture and find a way to show it is working.
- Invest in niche community assets: e.g. trails.
- Make it easier for groups to talk to each other- select reps from each medium to form an arts group.
- An arts council would be a good idea. They could show leadership, know the demographic, know the benefits, and be more proactive
- Leverage our local culture: use humour and music, and our uniqueness to help people understand who we are.
- Seek funding for an economic impact study, make a website- use a job creation intern.
- Develop an authentic experience here- food tourism, trails, arts, courses.

- Advertise in our galleries the businesses in the community and vice versa.
- Define a regional aesthetic to achieve better architecture, and expect more from everything we do.
- Brand an image from the collectivity of the artistic experience in the area and make it available.
- On the local level, get into the discussions on uses for the gas tax money & the development of the Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSP); we want to promote the arts as a way of life and the ICSP needs to be used for more than roads.
- Promote more arts education in schools and summer programs.
- The name FAB Arts may be hard to understand; maybe we need a different brand that includes everyone.
- Protect the parkway so that the visual beauty does not change.
- Work with travel companies to promote rural economies; identify which people are already coming to this region and why.
- Develop a liaison with Region 9 as they have HST and Economic Development money.
- Promote a stronger relationship between arts and nature, and collect stories of how artists use nature as inspiration.
- We need to pay attention to asset mapping: check out maps developed by the union of BC Indian chiefs which map artists' favourite locations and great spots to stop.
- We are also on the Rideau Canal and we have a lot to market; the world will come and the best source is our email about art shows, initiatives, etc.
- Organize a craft fair like 'one of a kind' and/or rent a store front as a Christmas store or during the summer.
- Use empty store fronts as galleries.
- Educate tour operators and attract them.
- Create a long-term vision like the towns of Perth or Merrickville have done.
- Find ways to measure and evaluate how things are working.
- Keep studio tours fresh.
- Keep meeting and talking, even if not a lot gets accomplished.
- Get the municipalities on side.
- Include an environmental specialization for out-door classes.
- Harness enthusiasm into volunteerism.
- Create distinctive shopping: have a FAB store and educate people about our area.
- Provide central support to help artists be more business-like.
- Hold a local festival to showcase talent and rotate the festival through different communities.
- Develop better signage and a flag or windsock showing membership of FAB artisans in a coordinated arts program.
- We need to make people aware of the value of our region as a destination – we are more than the Thousand Islands in terms of advertising and education.

- Involve the education system to encourage young people to stay in the region; teach and promote arts and crafts at Agnes Etherington Art Gallery and at St. Lawrence College.
- Work with people who promote winter sports/activities/theatre.
- Identify assets: artists, villages, connections, volunteers and put all this into brochure/book/website for tourists.
- Work with local travel companies to create arts and village tours.
- Create a network and establish local focal points for arts.
- Use federal and provincial politicians to help engage municipal officials.
- Arrange meeting with CFDCs to discuss benefits.
- Raise funds to do an economic impact study and a hire full time coordinator housed at FAB.
- Formalize a regional body for arts/crafts.
- Come up with an effective branding (other than FABarts); maybe “Handmade in the Arch”?
- We need a separate session for politicians and the economic community to learn about “Handmade in America’s” small town development program.

4- INTEREST GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Participants met in groups of interest to discuss what their actions could be.

1) Publications, online and print

- We could do a bioregional focus publication to connect and promote local artists and tourist venues
- Create an online arts magazine with option of print publication every now and again, hopefully funded by advertizing

2) Potters, sculptors, ceramicists

- D. B. is willing to represent the potters group on FAB Arts
- Contact potters in the region for inclusion in the data base
- Prepare a potters guide to Eastern Ontario
- Share information from today’s workshop with:
 - Thousand Islands Artists
 - Seaway valley artists
 - On Common Ground artists
 - Leeds china painters in Crosby

3) Municipal councillors and staff

- Support practical projects for staff to implement
- Provide a venue for arts and arts display in municipal buildings
- Create a comprehensive arts package for Council rather than piece-meal

- Promote the arts on the municipal website either by directory or links to the common directory
- Implement CIP and other planning programs that are available
- Create a “cheat sheet” for arts businesses for planning requirements so they can start or expand in a municipality
- Speed up the planning process and have up-to date by-laws to address sustainable activities (e.g. tree cutting on lake front)
- Enlist economic developers to research funding sources and write proposals

4) Unidentified

- Have reps from each geographical area do an inventory
- Gather this data under the FAB to get help in funding for a coordinator to start the economic impact of the arts study and complete the data base of artists and artisans
- Be sure to demonstrate action from today’s workshop; be careful in how we move from a small working group to a broader group across the region.

5) Leatherwork, fibre artists, odds and ends

- Commit to being active within the local community of artists and artisans
- Be active with the public and with new artisans to learn about FAB Arts and become an ambassador about FAB Arts to the public; each of us will promote it with the public

6) Artists

- Create one flyer that links all arts events to one website for information on the event (submit one year or 6 months ahead); this flyer will not get outdated and can sit in tourism venues for the whole year.
- Improve signage on the 401, and have directional signage in town
- [create] a Brockville co-op gallery (retail, workshops, etc)
- Assist in finding funding for art in schools or communities to deliver educational program (Ontario Arts Council, Craft Council, Trillium)
- Volunteer our time for various programs and participate collectively

7) Fine craft, fine art

- While we were sitting here we got a verbal yes from Mr Wanless from the Thousand Island Playhouse to include a studio map element in their already existing theatre/dinner/hotel package advertising
- Approach multi-discipline areas to co-operate and promote one another

8) Performing Artists

- Help develop a performing artists inventory for cultural mapping
- Help develop a model for integrating performing and visual arts events
- Help create a performing arts trail of venues, programs and performances

9) Businesses that collaborate with artists (B&B's, etc)

- Provide an outlet for artworks (for business clients)
- Be part of the communication link
- Be open to artists who are interested. Need to find the right match so as to work with people who are interested in partnership
- Tell other businesses it is okay to work with artists (spread good press)
- Do thematic events and mini-vacations that work with multi-business and artists especially in slow times of the year (winter!)

10) Visual Artists

- Create a listing of artists and studio tours on the Biosphere website
- Organize an annual rotating festival that goes from one location to another throughout the Biosphere and celebrate the arts(visual and theatre)

11) Administrators and art educators

- Assist in compiling a directory including but not limited to arts, heritage, trails, accommodations, services (an inclusive document)
- Work on bringing arts education programming that focuses on the biodiversity here: summer arts programs, arts programs for high school students (can be integrated with science)
 - Utilize empty storefronts as temporary educational centres, galleries, classrooms
- Check out the Prince Edward County website for an example of a community website. There is a huge active retired group that is educated about the arts.

12) Painters

- Create a list of artists and their particular genre
- Incorporate this into the tourist trail

5- PERSONAL RESOLUTIONS FOR ACTION

Participants were asked to fill out an index card indicating what they personally were prepared to do to help implement in our region a Handmade in America-type model.

Over 30 individuals gave their coordinates and volunteered, either to be on committees, organize events, or write newsletters and articles. Another 28 people expressed their support and willingness to assist on an ad hoc basis or to provide moral support.

Since this information contained personal data such as addresses, telephone numbers, etc., it is not included in this report.

6- FAB Arts QUESTIONNAIRES

At the end of the session, participants filled out a questionnaire.

A/ Should there be a FAB region arts community network/council?

38 yes

variations:

- **yes- Regional arts**
- **network or council must be sustainable with funding \$**
- **is there something more appealing we can call this area? What the heck is an “Arch Biosphere” anyway?**
- **Check out Prince Edward County website- don’t forget the Heritage Societies**

B/ Who should be involved in developing this network or council?

- **Art group reps..... 35**
- **Ontario crafts council..... 29**
- **Ontario arts council..... 28**
- **Economic development..... 34**
- **Tourism..... 33**
- **Individual artists, artisans..... 34**
- **Other:**
 - **6 Elected politicians from representative townships/cities**
 - **Local business- anyone interested.**
 - **Joe public**
 - **Rep only from individual artists and arts groups but include liaisons with everyone else and reps from 4 pillars.**
 - **US- Jefferson County & St. Lawrence County**
 - **Avoid ‘top-level’ organizations as they are bound to their present style/format**
 - **Patrons & enthusiasts**
 - **Economic development should be aware but not come to every meeting**
 - **Heritage groups**
 - **2 tiers- arts groups, economic development & tourism on top tier and the rest 2nd tier**
 - **willing hands**

- o interested parties

C/ Would you like to see another workshop to continue development of an arts community network/council?

35 Yes 0 No

D/ Would you like to see:

- **Survey of interests of the arts community.....28**
- **Continue to add to arts community database.....28**
- **Regular communication to arts community through electronic newsletter.....32**

E/ Overall Comments on the workshop:

- excellent
- very informative
- the HandMade book and the inclusiveness is wonderful
- we need an umbrella organization to help write grants
- I think some of the most interesting comments were about creating a holistic aesthetic for the area- not just artists but raising the bar on beautifying the area and integrating art into our lifestyles and communities in unique ways (I'm on town council so I'm in the thick of it already)
- Very inspiring: we will need to see how our numbers and culture (e.g. our 1st study showed that the average FAB artist made \$5000 from their work) can be applied to make things work. Good turnout- let's follow through and collect new volunteers
- Need to define boundaries and limit to that region
- Kingston Arts Council should be invited to come talk about their organization, which does a very good job of publicizing and organizing area arts
- Model after successful precedents- start with case to case data and specific achievable high leverage objectives (actionable items)
- Well organized- would come to more meetings
- Excellent meeting and communications- please keep up the good work
- Great workshop
- I would like to be able to contact other artists and groups electronically so that I can network more efficiently. I am one of those artists who also has a 'regular' full time job as well so my time is limited.
- I really believe in working from the ground up. Exploit existing community assets- local fairs for example. Show the local community the value of arts and vice versa.
- Is there a recent economic impact study re arts and crafts for FAB? Eastern Ont # that can be used to impress funders, corporate and public? A fleshing out of data as W.N.C. ie. impact of crafts, artists, consumers, retailers etc.
- Brainstorming once a month at a mutually agreed upon location
- Include both sides of the river
- Network, Network, Network
- I'm at a time in my fibre art that I need more. I need to connect more with locals. I do craft shows in Toronto. I want to have more of a presence in this area, I belong to TIA but I want more exposure

- We need to start soon to develop all the suggestions mentioned before apathy sets in- not only 'artists' should be involved in these groups. Others can sometimes give an unbiased view as a consumer in the arts world.
- Have more art work on display in this meeting room

F/ Would you like to help? How?

- I will support at the council level and the community level
- This was an excellent day- I am very excited about moving this idea forward
- I will work on survey & collating
- The FAB umbrella should coordinate & collect info and publicize events; it might be useful to list today's participants for networking
- I will help with short term activities (3 months) as needed by the Biosphere region community
- I am willing to serve on an arts council and to help make the community aware
- I would do advertising
- I am willing to work at the local level
- I will represent the local art groups to which I belong
- I will communicate and interface with the USA side & spread the word
- I will communicate
- I'm ready to help
- I will attend events (for now)
- Yes. Just give me some options.
- I will volunteer