

New life for arts and culture

This article is the second part in a series highlighting the four committees of Rutland's Creative Economy initiative. The group will be hosting a community forum to identify new projects on March 31 from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Paramount Theatre in Rutland.

The Creative Economy Arts and Culture Committee focuses on promoting Rutland arts and culture activities for both residents and visitors. The Arts and Culture Committee started four years ago with an inventory of art and culture events happening in our region. Initial meetings

**Peter
MILLER**

**Mary
MITIGUY**

Commentary

identified a need to get the word out for arts events as well as coordination of efforts among arts groups. This discussion provided some impetus for the Rutland Herald's decision to establish the weekly "InViTe" section and invitevt.com.

The Arts and Culture Committee developed an event, "Arts Alive," to coordinate arts events and enliven the arts scene in the community. Arts Alive has evolved into what we now know as the Art Hop, which occurs on the second Friday of the month between 5 and 8 p.m. Through support from the Vermont Community Foundation and the Vermont Arts Council, with the National Endowment for the Arts, funding for visibility and publicity as well as financial support to provide music was provided.

Highlights of musical offerings included performances of classical music by The Boston Trio, world music

played by Luminescent Orchestrii, and a concert of jazz music by local ensemble Enerjazz. In addition, numerous local artists and students have been showcased. We are grateful to former Creative Economy coordinator Patricia Kreitzer for her vision, support and efforts in obtaining grant support and doing the legwork to establish these events.

The Art Hop is a monthly opportunity to see new work, talk with local artists, meet new friends, and generally socialize with others who love the arts. Rutland Art Hops have featured up to 29 venues, with each planning special events year-round to encourage people to get out and about. Art Hops are a multi-venue experience featuring gallery openings, music and other performances, art demonstrations and more. There is a need for volunteer support to assist with coordination. Please let us know if you are interested in helping to organize these rewarding and enjoyable events.

The Arts and Culture Committee has partnered with and supported arts organizations and other Creative Economy Committees for special events. We helped Sustainable Rutland develop the first Trash to Art exhibition in August 2009. We are looking forward to continuing to assist with this innovative project again this year. The Arts and Culture Committee also offered support and coordination for the Vermont Arts Council Puzzle and Palette projects, as well as for a number of events and openings sponsored by community galleries and arts organizations.

The Arts and Culture Committee initiated a future planning process in 2009. Meetings were held to brain-

storm ideas and map out "what's next" for the committee. A multitude of ideas were combined and categorized. What came out of these efforts is an overarching interest in encouraging collaboration between various arts endeavors and businesses well as other Creative Economy Committees. Through consideration of many possibilities, two projects were identified as next-step projects.

The design and construction of very creative, artistic bike racks has many individuals energized and excited. There has also been an interest expressed in creating theme-oriented seasonal coordinated events encompassing multiple activities and venues including local food products and cuisine.

We are still in the formative brainstorming stage for both of the above possibilities, as well as other possibilities, and invite you to attend the overall Creative Economy Forum to be held at the Paramount Theatre on March 31 at 6 p.m. Arts and Culture Committee follow-up meetings will be scheduled soon thereafter. Vibrant and successful arts and culture institutions, businesses and events are essential to our community. Join us to ensure that these offerings are exciting, relevant and widely accessible. We welcome your inspiration in continuing to develop a vibrant arts community in our creative community.

To get involved and learn more about the Creative Economy and its other committees, please visit www.rutlandcreativeeconomy.org.

Peter Miller and Mary Mitiguy are co-chairmen of the Arts and Culture Committee of the Rutland Creative Economy.

Community-building time

Let anyone think all is doom and gloom in Rutland – and between the economy and the state of affairs at the south end of Wales Street, there are plenty of those stories in the city these days – along come the good folks at the Creative Economy to remind us of the positive energy in and around the community.

Having gotten a long way down the paths originally embarked upon almost five years ago, the group is going to have another series of community meetings to refresh and recharge. You may have seen the various committees' continuing op-eds in the Herald or caught representatives on PEG-TV.

The Creative Economy group has had a hand in a number of successes large and small, from Friday Night Live to the monthly Art Hops to the almost-ready-for-prime-time Rutland Creek Path, the downtown shopping bags and many more. Some, like the path, are works not yet completed. Others that are in progress include an online database for locals and visitors alike of recreation facilities, from swimming pools to biking and hiking trails in Rutland County; a fenced, off-leash dog park and the work on a revitalized downtown public space. Proposals for that include Center Street Alley and/or a permanent farmers' market along Evelyn Street.

One reason these projects have moved forward where others languish is that they are grassroots efforts, dreamed up by residents at open community meetings and moved forward not by government but almost exclusively by volunteers. There is some outside assistance: A grant paid for a one-person staff for a couple of years, the nonprofit Vermont Council on

Rural Development facilitates the community meetings and the committees rely occasionally on local nonprofit groups for their expertise, but the movement is getting back to its volunteer roots at the end of the month, and looking to get a couple of new initiatives under way.

The next meeting, at the Paramount on March 31, is to once again get people together to discover what the majority feels is the best project or couple of projects for the community ... not just the city, but including surrounding towns as well.

The four areas of interest from the first consensus were arts, outdoor recreation, public space and sustainability. This year's goals may follow up on those or may move in different directions entirely. What will come out of the meeting is anyone's guess, but it's certainly not too early to have your thinking caps on about what one or two things would be the biggest improvements to our community that private citizens can create.

The first lesson Rutland has learned from the Creative Economy group is that when we work together, we can achieve a great deal. The second is that there are incredibly motivated, energetic and talented people among us who want to improve where we live, not for personal gain but because it is good for the community as a whole.

The final lesson Rutland has learned is that while these projects are worthwhile, none of them come without a great deal of time and energy. But good things are worth working toward, and the journey is its own reward. The next step is in a couple of weeks and it's well worth taking, together.

Residents brainstorm for a new economy

By **CRISTINA KUMKA**
STAFF WRITER

The public has spoken on the future of the city's creative economy.

It will include a clearly-defined identity for Rutland and a railroad or children's museum, the result of a vote by about 100 locals Wednesday night after a three-hour public forum held at Rutland's Paramount Theatre.

The Rutland Creative Economy's first large-scale forum since 2006 was meant to recruit new volunteers for community projects, ranging from creating artistic bike racks to reconstructing Center Street Alley.

It was also a call for direction.

"This is about what's next for our community and how



CASSANDRA HOTALING / RUTLAND HERALD

The crowd attending Rutland Creative Economy's forum gathers on stage at the Paramount Theatre on Wednesday evening.

we proceed," said Tara Kelly, executive director of the Rutland Area Farm & Food Link and the head of the Creative Economy's project steering committee.

A flurry of ideas emerged

from the crowd of elected city leaders, state representatives and avid volunteers, who began brainstorming by watching a trailer of a movie being made about what can happen when Rut-

land-area residents come together.

The documentary, "The Blood in this Town," about the annual Gift-of-Life Marathon blood drive tells the story of the city's signature feat of donating more pints of blood than New England cities with populations up to 35 times its size.

In December, Rutland broke its own record by donating more than 1,000 pints of blood in one day.

"Not any city can do it," Mayor Christopher Louras said in the film, likened to a testament of how the people of one rural city, plagued by a lagging economy and an embattled working class, care for one another through the hardest of times.

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The film, meant to capture the community's spirit, was followed by presentations from each of the Creative Economy's four committees on recreation, sustainability, open air and arts and culture.

There's the Rutland Creek multi-use path, a dog park, a second edition of Downtown Life magazine and a zero-waste campaign for Friday Night Live in the works.

But what wasn't mentioned by a committee was what the

public said they wanted the most – a new place to go and a meaning of what Rutland is all about.

Flanked by the magenta walls and vibrant gold trim of the theater, the public's ideas were just as lively – some suggested forming new committees to organize neighborhood potluck dinners and townwide yard sales while others said the city should be a hub for good food and opportunities for young people.

"Like 1,000 pints of blood, maybe we can plant 1,000 trees in this city," said Chris Siliski of his idea to green the city.

Steve Costello of Central Vermont Public Service said a committee is needed to figure out to fill all the empty spaces with small businesses.

But the two ideas proposed that beat out the rest were a combination of some

of the public's suggestions – develop a railroad or children's museum and "zeroing in on Rutland's identity with a brand campaign," said Paul Costello of the Vermont Council on Rural Development and the forum's moderator.

The Creative Economy will meet April 20 to form action plans around the two new ideas, Kelly said. For more information, call 775-0871, ext. 211, or e-mail rutlandcreative@gmail.com.

cristina.kumka@rutlandherald.com

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Work to begin on creative initiatives

The Creative Economy is set to get to work next week on the two new initiatives selected by the public at last month's community forum.

All are invited to participate in an organizational workshop for those initiatives – promoting Rutland's brand and developing a children's or railway museum – at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Dana Recreation Center on East Center Street.

The Creative Economy is particularly seeking anyone who is interested in, has information pertaining to or can aid in either of the two initiatives.

For more information, call the Creative Economy at 775-0871, ext. 211 or e-mail rutlandcreative@gmail.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The next step
for Rutland

We would like to thank the over 150 community members who participated in the Creative Economy Public Forum held March 31 at the Paramount Theatre.

Rutland Creative Economy has brought a large and diverse group of volunteers together to build social and economic growth for the Rutland region. It was great to share the progress of the past four years – and to brainstorm with so many additional people about “what’s next.”

The four initiatives to date have been Rutland as a recreation destination, arts and culture, sustainable Rutland and downtown open air. The Creative Economy has been active on the funding trail, raising over \$1.5 million to date by way of grant opportunities and pledges on specific projects.

The active projects are numerous – from Friday Night Live summer series to the Rutland Creek Bike and Pedestrian Path to the monthly Art Hops to the Trash to Art contest to refurbishing of Center Street Alley and much more. But this only scratches the surface of what can be done with additional volunteers and energy.

Based on the great input and energy on March 31, we are now moving forward with two new initiatives. These items rose to the top as priorities among the community members in attendance. There is a lot of energy and enthusiasm for getting these done.

The two topics are promoting Rutland’s brand, including the development of green space downtown and a children’s/railway museum, developing new and existing visitor attractions.

The next step is for interested community members to come together on these two topics and in a spirit of collaboration and commitment to our community, strategically create action plans to carry the ideas forward. We hope everyone with energy, enthusiasm and a desire to work on these projects will come to the Dana Recreation Center on Tuesday, April 20, at 6:30 p.m.

The Creative Economy movement in this community has brought together many new friendships, and the volunteer work has been very rewarding in making Rutland a better place. We look forward to working together to make this community an even better place to live, work and play.

*TARA KELLY
(Chairman),
PAUL GALLO
(Vice chairman,
Creative Economy)
Rutland*

Volunteer groups get creative

By STEPHANIE M. PETERS
STAFF WRITER

Creative Economy volunteers wrestled with weighty questions this week as they tried to get a handle on their two newest tasks.

On the philosophical level, they asked whether promoting Rutland's brand was the final product or a means to another end. On a more tangible front, the group working on developing a children's or rail museum pondered interim steps to demonstrate its progress to the community.

"People were kind of just feeling each other out and talking," said Tara Kelly, chairwoman of the Creative Economy. She helped facilitate discussion in the committee working on fleshing out the region's brand.

"It's similar in any kind of community building or planning exercise," she said. "You have to start with relationship building first so everyone knows where everyone else is coming from."

The meeting, the first since a public forum held in the Paramount Theatre last month with a purpose of selecting two new projects for the Creative Economy initiative, attracted about 50 volunteers to the Dana Recreation Center. After a

"We had a little bit of a struggle in the sense that we have two ideas that have kind of gotten melded together ... and what our initial first steps should be."

Michael Coppinger, Downtown Rutland Partnership

brief introduction from Kelly and other members of the group's steering committee, the volunteers split up based on their interests in the two individual projects.

About 27 people sat in on the museum discussion, which saw several parents, elementary school teachers and even a couple of people who've made their career in museum development and curating engage in an impassioned debate about their individual visions for a museum in the city's center.

While the committee went back and forth on what the focus of the attraction should be – either trains or children's education, or both – they did agree that there is a lack of attractions in the area for children. They talked about some small first steps that could curb that problem in the interim, including promoting tours of what businesses and facilities the city does currently have, such as Westminster Crackers.

Another first step, they agreed,

might be aiding in the Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce effort to bring a 1913 Rutland Railroad passenger car to the city. Tom Donahue, the Chamber's executive director, said during the meeting that the process is snagged on fundraising – the city must build a cover for the railcar before it can take delivery.

The group also heard a pitch from Pat Carbonell of the Vermont Farmers' Market, who, along with Greg Cox of the market and Boardman Hill Farm, is promoting the creation of a rail-centric Rutland Community Events Center in the Evelyn Street area. Cox gave the same presentation to the branding group, as they believe the project could dovetail with both efforts, according to Carbonell.

"We had a little bit of a struggle in the sense that we have two ideas that have kind of gotten melded together ... and what our initial first

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steps should be," said Michael Coppinger of the Downtown Rutland Partnership and the Creative Economy steering committee. Coppinger and Matt Soroka, who co-chairs the Creative Economy's Recreation Committee, served as facilitators for the museum group.

On the other end of the Dana Recreation Center, 23 people exchanged ideas about how they would characterize the greater Rutland region, and which elements of that description could be used to bring to life the city's "Connected, Naturally" brand.

At first, the discussion took a narrow focus on the city's downtown before the group realized they needed to pull back and contemplate Rutland as a region instead. The group decided it likes the

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Tara Kelly, Creative Economy chairwoman

idea of a central theme for the region and tossed around ideas about what they consider to be Rutland's strong suit: recreation, food, the presence of a rather large hospital and a rich history. Ultimately, however, the volunteers agreed that before settling on a theme, they need to research what is happening in surrounding communities.

"We know that Killington has a branding going on, Brandon doesn't have a brand but is active and a lot is happening out in Castleton and Poultney," Kelly said. "I think the sense was that we

need to do a ground sweeping and come back to the table in a couple of weeks to see where we're heading philosophically."

Both groups have set the next meeting dates for the first week of May. The branding group is tentatively set to meet at 6:30 p.m. May 4, while the museum group has also tentatively set their next meeting for 7 to 8:30 p.m. May 6. Both groups are hoping to meet in the Dana Recreation Center. New participants are welcome to attend.

stephanie.peters@rutlandherald.com

Building on past success



VYTO STARINSKAS / RUTLAND HERALD

Aubrey Goad dances with the Drum Journeys of the Earth band, which encouraged audience participation during a large crowd turnout in downtown Rutland for Friday Night Live this past summer.

Creative Economy seeking new flow of ideas

By STEPHANIE M. PETERS
STAFF WRITER

The Creative Economy's Wednesday evening public forum at the Paramount Theatre will mark four years since the concept first took hold in Rutland, attracting volunteers with ambitious ideas and an equally matched determination to see them to fruition.

At the time, it was an opportunity to participate in a statewide initiative called the Creative Communities Program and receive targeted aid for community-led economic

"It's sort of one of the best events happening in the state, in terms of bringing things to the downtown that really weren't happening."

Paul Costello, VCRD executive director, speaking about Friday Night Live

development planning from the Vermont Council on Rural Development. The city was hungry to be chosen and it was one of five pilot communities of the 12 total that were eventually brought into the project.

The program officially ended

in 2008, with local efforts still up and running, working on projects like creating a business incubator and arts space in Hardwick, improving communications technology in Manchester, starting a public relations campaign in Windsor and, in Middlebury, trying to figure

out how to make better use of the river.

But of the 12 communities the VCRD assisted, Rutland has become the success story the organization points to as it continues to extol the benefits of promoting creative economies, according to executive director Paul Costello.

"Rutland's not the poster child, but it's an example of work that's happening right now that is really helping to transform a community," he said in

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a phone interview Friday. "Rutland is one of the greatest successes (out of the program)."

Others examples in Vermont might be more obvious; Burlington is widely considered to be one of the best examples in the country for a city of its size, while Vergennes and Bellows Falls were two communities, each having brought about their own Renaissance through significant redevelopment projects like Vergennes Opera House, that the VCRD pointed to when developing and explaining the Creative Communities Program in 2005.

However, Rutland's stock in this realm is rising. So much so, in fact, that the Creative Economy's Chairwoman Tara Kelly and Mark Foley Jr. have been invited to speak about the effort at next month's 2010 Northeast Rural Summit in Burlington. Rutland is one of two communities — the other in Maine — that are being featured, according to Costello. Kelly said she and Foley

were surprised by the invitation. While they knew the organization was making significant headway in the city, she said they were not aware to what extent the work might resonate outside of Rutland.

"It's flattering, encouraging and motivating," she said Friday. "I think it shows that we're on the right path and we're getting things done."

Visions come to life

The list of what the Creative Economy has done includes some of the more visible events currently happening in the city, including the summer Friday Night Live series, the monthly Art Hops, Trash-to-Art competition, Thanksgiving Localvore Challenge and "I Am Local" tote bag sale.

It also includes two substantial development projects, construction of the Rutland Creek Path and renovation of the Center Street Alley, known as the Center Street Marketplace Project. In the fall, the Center Street Alley received a \$974,000 federal appropriation that will fund the work, while the Creative Economy's Recreation Committee hopes to

receive word any day about its application for a transportation enhancement grant to fund the first phase of construction on the path.

Of those accomplishments, Costello said Friday Night Live is one that has garnered statewide attention for the city.

"It means a lot to have a celebration. It means a lot to have a way for people to come together and have fun," Costello. "It's sort of one of the best events happening in the state, in terms of bringing things to the downtown that really weren't happening."

Though the organization has much to point to in terms of accomplishments for the past four years, like any other effort it wasn't without its share of speed bumps and detours along the way.

The Recreation Committee has tried, unsuccessfully, several times to secure a transportation enhancement grant from the Agency of Transportation. Sustainable Rutland floundered for its first year and the Creative Economy even considered abandoning the idea before eventually deciding instead

to bring in new leadership, in the form of Carol Tashie and Jim Sabatano in the fall of 2008, to reinvent it. Around the same time, the membership found itself torn over whether to retain or fire its one paid staff member, Patricia Kreitzer, at the end of her first year's contract. While the executive committee initially decided to part ways with Kreitzer, who was also a co-chairwoman of the Arts Committee, it changed course after a strong showing of public support for Kreitzer. Ultimately, Kreitzer remained in the position until the end of last year, when grant funding for the position of the Jane's Trust came to an end, according to Kelly.

Still, given the group's successes, why put the organization's current focus on the arts, sustainability, open air projects and recreation back up to public discussion now? According to Kelly, "it just felt like it was the right time."

"We thought it has been long enough since we've done something flashy enough to attract the public," she said.

"We want to be inclusive, open and transparent and go out and recruit new energy," Kelly said, noting that they had begun to hear that there was some public perception that the group wasn't open and accepting of new members.

"What's cool about this group is that, at its core, it's a bunch of people who for one reason or another love this city and want to make it better," she said.

Tip of the iceberg

Costello said he agrees it is probably the right time for the organization to revisit the process that was at its impetus four years ago. Now, like then, he will serve as the facilitator for the "Open Ideas" portion of the forum that encourages those in attendance to suggest new groups and projects for the Creative Economy.

"This event is really exciting because they're saying, 'Hey, we're making it all happen. What's the next step?'" Costello said.

The group's executive committee already has committed itself to forming up new groups out of the process, according to Kelly, and has gone back to the

lengthy list of suggestions generated in 2006, as well as brainstormed amongst themselves, to come up with few ideas to get the conversation rolling.

The six projects Kelly said they'll float to the public include: Forming a group to spearhead a comprehensive implementation of Rutland marketing brand; increasing the green landscape of the city; creating a community development office in the city "to focus on community and creative economy projects and further town/city cooperation;" create a downtown gateway at the train station; beautifying the city gateways through landscaping and prominent signage and building Rutland's pride and highlighting its history.

Of course, those are on ideas and the group is looking for more. Ultimately, the two new projects will be chosen through a vote of the public present at the meeting. It will take place from 6-9 p.m. Wednesday in the Paramount Theatre on Center Street.

stephanie.peters@rutlandherald.com

Creative Economy pursues children's museum concept

By **GORDON DRITSCHILO**
STAFF WRITER

They still need a location, funding and exhibits, but as far as organizer Chuck Piotrowski is concerned, Rutland has a children's museum.

"A museum exists right now," Piotrowski said as he ran the Rutland Creative Economy meeting Thursday at which the idea was

slowly taking shape. "You guys are here. Whether it's a 20-story building with flashing lights or in somebody's living room."

Rather than a high-rise or a living room, the group decided to begin assembling exhibits to put on display at Friday Night Live while continuing to work on finding a proper location.

The Rutland Downtown

Partnership's executive director, Michael Coppinger, said that the organization started talking about some sort of children's and/or train museum in May and the two concepts branched off. Coppinger said he hears about people driving two hours to the Montshire Museum in New Hampshire

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because the local area lacks something similar.

"We came up with a concept of looking at energy, what powers things," said Karen Hill, the partnership's office coordinator.

Hill said CVPS showed interest in the concept and might provide some funding if shown a full plan.

"We're piecemealing it," she said. "We've done a lot of stuff, just not cohesively."

Sherri Durgin-Campbell said putting exhibits on display at Friday Night Live could be a way to build buzz and momentum for the project ahead of finding a physical space. Candace Lewis pointed at the Green Mountain Children's Museum, a Burlington-area group that lacks

its own location, as an example of such a strategy.

"It's an entity and people know it and people are buying into the project," Lewis said.

Coppinger said the partnership could kick in for that effort.

"We do budget for children's entertainment at Friday Night Live," he said. "I'm willing to look at restructuring that because this would fulfill our children's entertainment mission."

Coppinger also said he could think of at least one corporation that might contribute if presented with a coherent concept.

The group agreed that it made sense to split into two subgroups, one to brainstorm exhibit ideas for the summer and another to begin crafting a business plan to try to attract partners.

The group agreed to

meet for a brainstorming session at 5 p.m. Feb. 17 at the partnership office and again to finalize a mission statement at 5 p.m. Feb. 28 at Community College of Vermont.

gordon.dritschilo
@rutlandherald.com

Museum group to liven up Fridays

By **GORDON DRITSCHILO**
STAFF WRITER

Rutland families will get a taste of what could be this summer.

A group from within the Rutland Creative Economy working to create a children's museum in the city will offer a series of exhibits at the Farmers' Market and Friday Night Live.

"The idea is to have six or seven hands-on activities for kids to do," said Myra Peffer, one of the organizers. "I need a good engineer who's willing to donate some time."

Peffer said the group is working with a \$1,000 grant from Central Vermont Pub-

lic Service Corp. and wants to build a local buzz around the museum concept as members continue to raise funds and search for a permanent location.

Three exhibits will feature at the two events for two weeks each, running from 6 to 8 p.m. at Friday Night Live and from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. the next day at the Farmers' Market.

"We have themes and we have some of the exhibit components worked out," said Candace Lewis, another organizer. "The first exhibit is going to entail a lot of simple machines — gears, wheel and axles, levers, those kinds of things."

Titled "Energy in Motion," the first exhibit is planned for July 8, 9, 15 and 16.

The second, titled "Farm to Fit," is planned for July 22, 23, 29 and 30. Lewis said it will tie farming to good health and will include a feature on nutrition.

"We'll be putting together a mini-farmers' market for kids to role-play in," she said.

Lewis said the third, which looks at recycling and is slated for the first two weekends in August, was still taking shape.

"They should be highly

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interactive," she said. "Our age-frame is three to eight years old. They're not going to walk through and look at things. Learning through play is very important in all

these exhibits."

The exhibits will be run by volunteer staff members, and Lewis said the budget for each exhibit is still "up in the air."

"We're working on putting together what materials we'll need for the exhibits," she said. "We're

actively seeking community partners, people to sponsor exhibits."

Lewis said anyone interested in making such a contribution can contact her or Peffer through Community College of Vermont.

gordon.dritschilo
@rutlandherald.com