

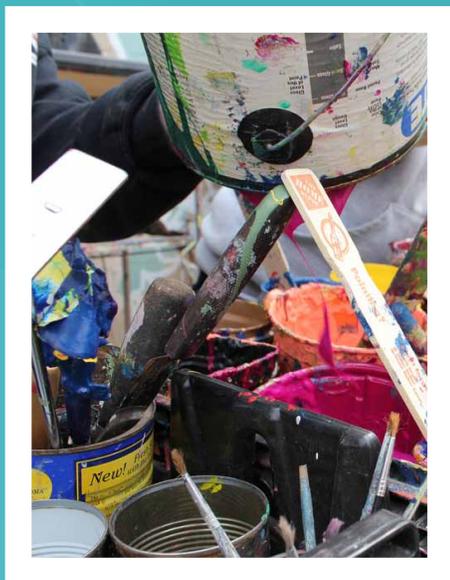
Michigan Municipal League

Artist Village Detroit



michigan municipal league

Better Communities. Better Michigan.



PROJECT DETAILS:

NAME:

Artist Village Detroit

DATE:

2003–Present

CATEGORIES:

Public Art
Creative
Enterprise
Built
Environment

THE GIST:

Artist Village Detroit is a creative enclave in the Old Redford neighborhood in northwest Detroit.

Artist Village Detroit

PROJECT SCOPE:

Challenge:

How can we bring people together using art and culture to stabilize and beautify a neighborhood?

Overview:

The Artist Village serves as a creative hub for artists, students, business owners, and neighbors living and working in the heart of Old Redford. A once abandoned commercial strip serves as the center of the village and houses the historic Redford Theatre, a small coffee shop, vintage clothing store, and an art education program. It hosts live music, poetry jams, church service, summer art camps, and additional community events throughout the year. The spirit and history of the neighborhood is shared through illustrative murals painted on each building and via colorful stories swapped between neighbors over cups of coffee at the village Java House.

Accomplishments:

- Enabled over 10,000 volunteers to build the Artist Village and clean up properties sited on Old Redford's main commercial strip.
- Dismantled 300 abandoned, condemned houses and repurposed their materials for these new construction projects.



michigan municipal league



- Provided over 100 prisoners construction and landscaping experience by partnering with the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative; at least ten of these participants went on to start their own home-improvement businesses.
- Partnered TechTown and local entrepreneurs to bring distinctive retail to the commercial district including Sweet Potato Sensations, Tire & Wheel, Ray-Ann's Wardrobe, and four additional businesses.
- Spearheaded \$20 million of investment in the Old Redford community by buying 80 percent of the available commercial and residential properties.
- Encouraged 400 new homeowners to move into the neighborhood.

Organization:

The Artist Village is a program of Motor City Blight Busters, a nonprofit seeking to stabilize and revitalize Detroit communities. Blight Busters invested in talented community members to build this multifaceted creative hub: Motor City Java House serves as a cozy gathering space where the community can enjoy food and friendship; muralist Chaz Miller involves young artists in his widespread community mural initiative, Public Art Workz, in the back lot; Ray-Anne's Wardrobe recently opened next door selling unique vintage clothing; and on the weekend, Creative Juices serves as a hot spot for live Saturday night performances of jazz and open-mic poetry.

Budget/Equipment:

Blight Busters initially invested \$250,000 in the Artist Village. The budget was primarily supported through corporate and state funding. A significant partnership was formed with the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative which provided labor and financial support. Additional supplies, furniture, and labor has been donated by over 10,000 volunteers and a local contractor.

Funding:

Blight Busters has cultivated a strong partnership with TechTown, an entrepreneurial resource center that supports distinctive retail in the district. While businesses in



the Artist Village are self-sustained, there is little room for growth. Small business loans, additional funding resources, and mentorships have been secured through this partnership.

Participants:

Old Redford is a primarily African-American neighborhood, but the Artist Village promotes multicultural and intergenerational interaction and discussion. Suburbanites come in to see a production at the historic theatre, and a young urban crowd will check out open-mic night. This cross-cultural pollination makes the space feel authentic and welcoming.

Inspiration:

Creative enterprise and new businesses generate buzz, and can take a blighted area and make it vibrant and healthy again. The Artist Village served as a catalyst for investment and redevelopment of the entire Old Redford district.

Actions Taken:

1) LOOK OUTSIDE THE BOX.

Blight Busters' volunteer cleanups quickly grew, and they actively thought about next steps for the organization and new ways to benefit the community. The team became inspired by work in other cities and began to think about redefining the Old Redford neighborhood by engaging artists and promoting creative endeavors.

2) FIND PASSION AND TALENT.

An unexpected collaboration between an artist, an entrepreneur, and a nonprofit founder catalyzed the Artist Village. Passion and drive connected with financial support and physical resources can expedite the process. Give the artists the tools, time to plan, and get out of their way.

3) CHOOSE YOUR HOME.

Armed with passion and a clear vision, the Blight Busters' team selected the main commercial corridor for the Artist Village's home base. Buying property can be tricky, and each building will have a unique series of hurdles to jump through. Do research and budget for unexpected expenses.

4) ADDRESS FUNDING.

Property can be quite expensive, especially when it needs a lot of work. Consider a variety of funding sources. Blight Busters found corporate sponsorship and state grants for the project. Grant writing can be tedious and time-consuming, so consider asking other organizations for their resources, or, if you can, hire a grant writer.

5) BUILD A COALITION OF VOLUNTEERS.

Blight Busters relied heavily on its base of volunteers to clean up the street and gather repurposed materials for the village build-out. Ten thousand people volunteered over several months to build the Artist Village. Students, former prisoners, small business owners, and neighbors worked together, and community members who rolled up their sleeves for the build-out gained a stronger sense of ownership and took more pride in their neighborhood.

6) PROVIDE A SAFETY NET.

Blight Busters partnered with TechTown to provide entre-preneurial resources to the Artist Village tenants. Without this extra support, the owners might struggle to land on their feet. Being a new small business owner can be intimidating, and it is important to find mentors that can help navigate the process.

7) ANIMATE THE SPACE.

The Artist Village hosts a variety of programs and activities, and the space is active 24/7. Students come to paint in the afternoon. Poets slam late into the night, and early risers grab a cup of coffee in the morning. Thinking about various users and experiences will build a sustained audience and create more viable businesses.

Lessons Learned:

- Partner Nonprofits and For-Profits. "If you partner nonprofits and for-profits, this will allow you to leverage your resources and volunteers. This is how you can help small businesses and the community at large."
- Invest in People. "Find people that have a passion and a talent. Give them the things that they need and get the hell out of the way."
- Find Partner Tenants. "You have to be a partner before we will lease to you. The synergy between your tenants is key. Most people will buy the largest building, renovate it, and lease it to whoever shows up. Well, that is fine, but it's not enough. We need partner tenants. By the very nature of what you do, you have to support Blight Busters and the Artist Village. This builds a network or coalition that can stand alone, but they are more powerful when they live and work together."
- Break Through the Property Nightmare. "Every address is its own nightmare. It's like peeling an onion. First you have to find who owns the property, then you have to check back taxes, is there a mortgage, what is the condition. But ownership is key, and there is a lot to look at before you decide to take it."

Experts:

John George, Motor City Blight Busters Founder, johngeorge@mcbb.org

The Center for 21st Century Communities

Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place*. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at mml.org.

Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place*, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a “one-stop-shop” for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.



michigan municipal league

Better Communities. Better Michigan.