



The Art of Community: Rural SC

An initiative of the
South Carolina Arts Commission
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USDA Rural Development



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As part of its mission to help create a thriving arts and culture environment for South Carolina, the South Carolina Arts Commission launched a new initiative, *The Art of Community: Rural SC* in 2016.

This pilot project advances the Commission's commitment to rural development through arts, culture and creative placemaking. It has been supported by funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development. A milestone in the early development of this initiative was becoming an official partner with the S.C. Promise Zone in 2015. This designation applies to six rural South Carolina counties: Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Colleton, Hampton and Jasper.



Purpose: A community process to create a new framework for engagement, learning and action in rural communities resulting in new relationships between people and place.

Questions: What makes rural places unique? What characteristics define each place? And how can those positive characteristics serve as the basis for new ideas and ways to celebrate these six small communities in South Carolina's Promise Zone? Who leads change in each rural community and how can "the table" be enlarged for more voices to be heard?

The Art of Community: Rural SC creates a way to support new leadership, generate energy and motivate action in one of South Carolina's rural regions. Its primary objectives:

1. To create pride of place and learn together
2. To build new relationships with South Carolinians living in rural communities
3. To inspire new community building using arts and culture
4. To fuel local action with new resources
5. To identify people and businesses that make up the 'creative economy'
6. To provide new opportunities for engagement with Young Voices, the Next Generation of leaders, entrepreneurs and makers

Through a guided exploration of each county's natural, built and human assets, the program hosts gatherings to consider what's possible within each community's cultural context and physical landscape. While the discussion may include what "has been," the central focus in *The Art of Community* is on what "can be."

Framework:

1. An advisory council of national, state and local leaders support this initiative providing insight and connections. They participate in conference calls, provide guidance and new networks within the state and beyond. An annual advisors' gathering within the six-county region showcases new learning and opportunities; it also offers the chance for all participants to know one another better.
2. Six community members serve as 'mavens' (they make change happen through ideas; they are also well connected in their local communities). Each invites local residents to join them for community-based brainstorming and activities and to become part of their local team.
3. A series of community-based, context-setting local meetings provide time and space for working together; for understanding the variety of assets and cultural richness of each community; and for practicing telling the stories of place within the context of what's beautiful, what's working and what's not. Each team has identified a community development challenge and a plan to use arts and culture to address that challenge. This process provides a practical application of how arts and culture can be used within this context. Each project becomes a local example through which further learning occurs. As part of the process, the South Carolina Arts Commission funds grant requests for design and early implementation of the projects.
4. Rural Cultural Exchange: Traveling to other sites, including Kentucky, Mavens, Young Voices and team members have explored how other communities have addressed challenges through the use of arts and culture.

Mavens



Matt Mardell (Colleton County representative), is a native of the United Kingdom, a graduate of the University of Portsmouth School of Architecture and the executive director of the Colleton County Museum, Farmers Market and Commercial Kitchen. He began there as program coordinator under the direction of former executive director and **Maven Emeritus Gary Brightwell** (who continues as an advisor to the local demonstration project). He serves on regional boards and advisory committees for health and economic development. When he is not busy renovating his 1923 Craftsman Bungalow in Walterboro, Mardell enjoys technical drawing, woodworking, reading about British history and playing soccer. He is married to Holly and has two children, Maddie and Towns.



Evelyn Coker (Barnwell County representative) has served as executive director with Blackville Community Development Corporation for 11 years. She earned a B.S. from Voorhees College and an M.B.A. from Nova Southeastern University. Coker currently serves on the boards of the S.C. Association of Community Economic Development and Low Country Health Care System, and is clerk/financial secretary of Sunshine Baptist Church. For 12 years she served as trustee for Barnwell 19 School District. She earned the Certificate of Achievement from the Non-Profit Leadership Institute and attended leadership and community development training through Neighborworks' Community Development Institute. She is a native and lifelong resident of Blackville.



Johnny Davis (Jasper County representative) graduated from Winthrop University in 1992 with a B.S. in physical education with an emphasis in recreation and leisure services. He currently serves as the director of Jasper County Parks and Recreation and has more than 24 years in this field. He is a former chairman of S.C. Athletic Programs and *Eat Smart, Move More* of the Lowcountry. Davis served as an elder for a local church and currently heads up the Men's Ministry. He has been married to Macon Davis for 21 years and is the father of twin daughters Adia and Claire (14). Davis lives in Beaufort, S.C., and loves spending time outdoors with his family, fishing, camping and golfing.



Audrey Hopkins-Williams of Estill (Hampton County representative) has worked with several community programs, including reading and math camps. She was involved in the Bridging the Gap Resource Center's alliance with the Hampton County Arts Council to host an African-American art exhibition for Black History month called *The Arts of the Humanities*. It was viewed by nearly 5,000 students and community leaders. Hopkins-Williams is aware of her community's struggles with economic and educational opportunities. She attended Denmark Technical College and majored in human services. She has worked for her family's business, Gordon Logging Company, since 1999. She also owns and operates an event planning business, One Moment in Time Events. She is married to Wodwill Williams.



Lottie Lewis (Allendale representative), former chairman of the Allendale County Arts Council, heads up *Eat Smart, Move More*, and has initiated several neighborhood associations and the area Farmers Market. She has brought many grant dollars into the community, and she understands how the arts drive economic development. She is skilled in design, loves the arts and community beautification, and runs a thriving home-decorating business. She coordinates several yearly mission teams that come into the area to serve. Ms. Lewis knows the arts play a vital role in education, and she launched the "A is for Allendale" initiative, placing banners downtown to promote early childhood literacy. She and her husband Frank recently renovated a home in Allendale to become Emma's House, a safe place for children after school.



Yvette McDaniel of Orangeburg (Bamberg County representative), a soprano, has performed nationally and internationally. Serving as an arts educator, advocate and consultant, she is native of Orangeburg. As choir director at Denmark Technical College, she has led performances for former President Bill Clinton, Congressman James Clyburn and former Gov. Nikki Haley. An artist/entrepreneur, she founded Ultramacs Music Group to assist young professionals; organized the Vocalis Music Industry Conference to offer guidance with contracts, representation and promotion; and established the "Hood N-Da Woodz" Awards for local Orangeburg artists. Dr. McDaniel is a Louisiana State University Fellow and earned a Doctor of Music Arts degree in vocal performance.

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Co-Chairs



Dr. Ann C. Carmichael is the dean of the University of South Carolina Salkehatchie. Prior to her appointment in 2000, Dr. Carmichael served for nine years as director of the Salkehatchie Walterboro Campus and coordinator of development, overseeing the institution’s multimillion dollar capital campaign. She earned her Ph.D. in counseling from USC and a Master’s

in Student Personnel Services from Clemson University. Prior to joining USC Salkehatchie in 1991, she served as associate vice president for academic affairs and dean of students at Charleston Southern University and dean of students at Judson College in Marion, Alabama. Dr. Carmichael was instrumental in securing the Promise Zone designation for the six-county region. Dr. Carmichael is a graduate of the Diversity Leadership Institute at Furman University and currently serves as chair-elect of the Colleton Walterboro Chamber of Commerce, the Southern Carolina Regional Economic Development Alliance Board of Directors, and as chairman of the Savannah River Site Redevelopment Authority Board.



J. Robert ‘Bob’ Reeder serves as a program director and program field manager for Rural LISC (the rural component of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation). There he directs sustainable rural community development activities covering 84 local, community-based organizations working in 45 states, covering nearly 3,000 rural counties. His areas of expertise include

community engagement, board of director development and training, land retention strategies in rural areas and other issues impacting land tenure, project feasibility analysis, grant and loan assistance, and organizational capacity building. Reeder has built a 30-year career devoted to social and economic justice, housing and comprehensive community development, particularly in incorporating arts and cultural-based strategies (creative placemaking) in the revival of distressed rural communities, public policy, and legal and administrative advocacy. A native of Rock Hill, SC, he earned a BA in Government from Wofford College and a JD from Vanderbilt University School of Law.

The South Carolina Arts Commission

The South Carolina Arts Commission works to develop a thriving arts environment, which is essential to quality of life, education, and economic vitality for all South Carolinians. The agency focuses on three priority areas: community development, arts education and artist development.

Contact **Susan DuPlessis**, Program Director, *The Art of Community: Rural S.C.* at sduplessis@arts.sc.gov



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