

Building Community Through Craft

Annual Report 2002-2003

The seeds of HandMade in America were sown in the mountains of Western North Carolina where a group of community leaders were planning the revitalization of the Asheville community. This group realized that the answer to their revitalization plans didn't necessarily lie in recruiting "industry", but could possibly be found in the already established invisible industry of craftspeople working steadily and exceptionally in shops, classrooms, studios, and galleries tucked away on small town main streets and back roads throughout the Blue Ridge Mountains.

In December of 1993, HandMade in America received a three-year organizational development grant from the Pew Partnership for Civic Change. Over 360 citizens participated in a regional planning process to help determine how HandMade could establish Western North Carolina as the center of handmade objects in the nation.

Today HandMade in America has grown to include thousands of craftspeople throughout the southeast and the HandMade team is regularly recruited by other regions throughout the United States to help communities revitalize themselves... HandMade has initiated programs in education, community and economic development for thousands of citizens in our region.

We welcome the support and involvement of those who share our commitment to that inspired joining of art and function we call "handcraft."

Dear Friend,

If I had to put our entire year in a single basket--no doubt about it--that basket would be woven with partnership. This is a letter of thanks, really--great thanks--for so many countless organizations, groups and individuals who have taken possession of both the programs and the spirit of HandMade, turned the flame up and made a difference time and time and time again.

Because of these partnerships, as you will read in this report, our Small Town Revitalization programs are flourishing, so are our school system and craft workshops, our new Craft Registry, the forward-looking work of creating "handmade" tours for our visitors, and the building (in breakthrough style) of a National Creative Economies Institute.

As a staff member of HandMade, a stake-holder of any kind, a supporter or collaborator, you are a part of this rich story-making that is turning our mountain region into a vibrant, colorful, pulsing, cross-grained center of some of the most breakneck, beautiful, and, I

don't mind saying it--awesome--work in the United States. And, should there be any doubt about it whatsoever, I direct you to the pages of the third edition of The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina, the printing of which is another major HandMade event of this past year.

Truly, there's much to be thankful for and, with this kind of energy, passion and partnership, I don't believe there is anything that will stop this great and imaginative outpouring of the heart. Welcome to HandMade in America.

David Newell
Chairman

Small Towns

One of the most creative endeavors in Western North Carolina is very likely what happens when a handful of townspeople gather up in the back of a restaurant, community center or town hall and start thinking about how to make things better "downtown."

According to David Quinn, who joined the HandMade team this year to nurture HandMade's Small Town Revitalization initiatives, these meetings are just as likely to follow "Bob's Rules of Order" as they are to follow "Robert's Rules." The results, nonetheless, are largely the same: the sharing, the trading of opinions, the spirit of divide-and-conquer teamwork--all leading to incremental change and growth.

This shirtsleeve, grassroots partnering moved forward more than 40 projects this year, with 11 participating communities actively involved. In Hayesville, the town completed the first phase of the renovation of the Clay County Courthouse. Todd finished a very successful music series (this year with Doc Watson performing), folding in a new blues festival. Crossnore completed the bog walk section of its walking trail between school and town park. Bryson City planned out its riverfront walk. Hot Springs mapped a small loop trail along Spring Creek. West Jefferson participated in a streetscape design charette with the NC State School of Design. Chimney Rock, down by the Rocky Broad, continued to develop its festivals and events, and along with other communities, its conversations and initiatives to make downtown even more welcoming.

As part of the program, participating communities get together in cluster gatherings, share ideas and offer up stories. This year HandMade held a gathering in June at the Grove Arcade in Asheville. More than 55 representatives attended and heard an informative and encouraging presentation from Rodney Swink, director of the North Carolina Main Street Program.

Also during the year, HandMade, in partnership with Jeff Fischbach of the NC Division of Community Assistance, worked with five Small Town participants to develop work plans that identify and schedule priority projects in their communities.

“It’s a process,” says David. “And every project and every town is very individual in what it wants to do and how it goes about doing it.”

In Andrews, Bakersville, Bryson City, Chimney Rock, Crossnore, Hayesville, Hot Springs, Mars Hill, Marshall, Todd and West Jefferson, the Small Town Revitalization Program continues to cultivate public-private partnerships, continues to spur economic growth, continues to be the soul of creativity.

Up Through the Sidewalk: A National Creative Economies Institute.

Based on outcomes of last year’s enthusiastic conference in Asheville on building creative economies, HandMade has made considerable progress over the past 12 months in the design and establishment of a HandMade Institute to provide “solutions for creative economies.”

Well into the planning phase of this venture, Cheryl Hargrove, The HTC Group, working in partnership with HandMade to model the mission, principles and goals of the Institute, says the purpose is to nurture the inter-dependency of tourism, the crafts community and the amazing fabric of our natural heritage, to include farms and gardens.

A contract from the Appalachian Regional Commission provides for the creation of a craft advisory committee to help set the course of the Institute.

“We want to sustain living traditions,” she says, “but it’s also about appropriate growth driven by community. It’s about long-term residual benefits, healthy revenues, quality visitor experiences and low impact on resources.”

The Institute focuses on providing a consistent process for HandMade to deliver distinctive products and services based on lessons learned in Western North Carolina. An on-site learning lab, speaker’s bureau, consultation and training materials are proposed as deliverables, all of which will carry fees that would sustain the Institute and HandMade itself. In the realm of training, as an example, the Institute might very well train guides to help travelers embark on “handmade holidays,” whether in Buncombe County or County Cork.

“What we’re doing is setting standards,” Cheryl says, “We’re raising the bar on what visitors can expect--and how they appreciate--a region where all of the partners are interlaced in both the process and the outcome.”

“In the end, it’s the experience--both for visitor and resident--that counts.”

New Arrivals in 2003: The Third Edition of Heritage Trails and the Craft Registry.

It was a winter (and spring) to be remembered. The long, sinewy, two-lane roads to out-of-the-way studios, the conversations with hundreds of “trail” folks, lunch and dinner in the car, re-mapping routes, laying out “String of Pearls,” the many months of writing and editing and shaping what finally evolved into the most comprehensive trails book so far--close to a hundred pages longer than the second edition. (Thanks, especially, to Betty Hurst, Jay Fields and Scott Smith.) On bookstore shelves in June, the latest edition has sold very well--more than 5,000 copies over the summer--with profits fueling other HandMade initiatives. We are grateful to our readers who send notes like: “I loved the way it laid out, the listings of suggested music and recommended reading. I love the book. Fantastic.”

Also new in 2003--the Craft Registry, HandMade’s on-line listing of artists, galleries and events throughout the North Carolina mountains. Artfully arranged at handmadeinamericacraftregistry.org, the site references crafts people by name, studio and type of work; one click on an artist’s name brings up a more detailed profile and, in most cases, photography showing representative pieces. “We had the extreme good fortune of working with some of our board members on this project--like Jon Ellenbogen and Catherine Ellis--who are also artists,” Betty Hurst reports. “This site is extremely easy to use for persons looking for a particular piece in a particular medium.”

Community Workshops and Other Energetic Partnerships

Over 75 folks arrived at A-B Tech’s Madison Campus in November to learn how to merchandise and sell art and/or home-grown products, create a flexible marketing plan, and develop profits through internet usage--among other helpful subjects. Mainly designed for Madison County residents, the workshop with marketing consultant Bruce Baker, exemplifies partnership, both with HandMade and through sponsorship of the Madison County Partnership with funding from the Duke Endowment’s Program for the Rural Carolinas.

These sorts of gatherings fall within HandMade initiatives and encouragements. In partnership with the Arts Business Institute of Sante Fe, for example, HandMade helped organize “A Business Boot Camp for Artists and Craftspeople” at Haywood Community College in April. And, with session topics like “More time in the Studio, Less Time on the Road” and “Profitable Partnerships with Galleries,” how can one resist?

Crafting a New Curriculum

Funding from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina and the Wingate Foundation allowed HandMade to expand its workshop programs over the year to include more schools and, in particular, to present a student/teacher workshop entitled "Magic of African Rhythms" in order to bring more cultural integrity to the learning experience. The weaving of craft into the world of young students continues to leverage discovery and curiosity among the children, their teachers and the administration of their schools. Teachers in this year's workshops were enthusiastically engaged with: creating handmade journals of drawings and photographs, creating an African Adinkra cloth (which now hangs at Vance Elementary in Asheville), learning the rhythmic connections between drumming and math; building, tuning and playing cardboard dulcimers; and weaving from hand-assembled looms.

The enthusiasm created in these workshops with gifted instructors spills over into the minds and hearts and hands of elementary students in the dozen schools involved and builds interest almost exponentially. Requests for 2004 workshops include: book arts, block printing, story quilts, surface design on gourds, tiles in clay, and weaving with natural materials.

Farms, Gardens, Inns and Handmade Experiences

As HandMade guidebooks fly from bookstore shelves to backpacks, handbags and glove compartments, more and more handmade adventures and experiences are developing underfoot, thanks to HandMade initiatives to bond visitors with both craft and place.

Once again this year, many of our book participants have received hands-on training in marketing, customer service, risk management and site interpretation, including a statewide video conference in February on liability and insurance and regional workshops on interpretation.

"It's been a year of developing packages of handmade holidays and tours," says HandMade's Carol Kline, "and we have dozens set for 2004 that will be available through our web site."

What's a handmade holiday? How about a "sparks and fire" weekend with a husband/wife team; one a metal worker, the other a potter? Or, how about learning how to grow a bonsai, weaving your way through the mountains, making a felt hat on an Angora Goat farm, fusing glass in Brevard or combining pot throwing with river running in Dillsboro?

All of this takes close partnering and learning, says Carol, but the result is something lustrous, fresh, exquisitely handmade, and extraordinarily marketable.

"The word is getting out," says Carol, who represented HandMade at the Governor's Conference on Travel and Tourism, participated in the National Tour Association's FAM tour of Western North Carolina, and worked with High Country Host, Blue Ridge Mountain Host and Smoky Mountain Host in cooperative marketing programs to attract visitors to our diverse offerings.

The Joys of Hot Air: Our Landfill Craft Studio Incubators

EnergyXChange hosted four potters and two glassblowers this year in its richly collaborative project involving the Blue Ridge Resource Conservation and Development Council, Mayland Community College, Mitchell and Yancey Counties, and HandMade in America.

The site provides free methane gas for kilns and ovens in one of the most fascinating (and talked about) interchanges in the nation: recycled landfill energy firing up newly imagined work and providing a steady income stream for the artists. In addition, solar power collected on the site now serves as an energy center for Appalachian State University.

Work progresses on a second Avery County site focused on wood. A 6,000 square foot micro propagation lab has been constructed for use by the National Forest Service and Mayland Community College. In the future, a solar/methane lumber kiln will energize incubator businesses for wood turners and furniture makers.

To understand the scope and promise of this project, over 600 people from around the country visited EnergyXChange during the year; and, in 2004, HandMade will introduce a tour of the facility as one of its place and craft packages.

Homeward Bound: The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative

The year 2003 marks a major milestone for our North Carolina mountain region with the Congressional passage of the heritage area bill for The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative.

The bill contains \$500,000 in funding in addition to \$250,000 that was held in reserve from the FY03 budget, for a total of \$750,000 in first year funding. This federally-assigned designation is intended to foster a close working relationship with all levels of government, the private sector, and local communities in managing, preserving, protecting, and interpreting the cultural, historical, and natural resources of The Heritage Area.

The management entity will be composed of representatives from HandMade in America, Advantage West, the Education and Research Consortium of WNC, The Eastern Band of The Cherokee, and appointees of the Governor.

Many people were involved in the passage—many over a long period of time. We would like to thank our partners whose time, energy and skills have made this designation possible. My special thanks to: Gary Everhart, former superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway; Wayne Martin and Beverly Patterson of The Folklife Division of The North Carolina Arts Council; Dan Brown, superintendent, Laura Rotegard, management assistant, and Gary Johnson, planning director of the Blue Ridge Parkway; Dale Carroll

and Betty Huskins of Advantage West; and approximately 200 other citizens, representing federal, state and local organizations throughout the region who provided information about their community assets resulting in the core research for the Feasibility Analysis required by Congress.

Becky Anderson **Executive Director**

A Worthy Mention: In Worth Magazine's January 2003 edition, HandMade was listed alongside 24 organizations that included the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art as representing "the best of our country's culture." In part, the inclusion of HandMade as an excellent philanthropic organization revealed that HandMade ". . . is helping 12 small towns revitalize their public spaces and, in another program, is harnessing methane from a landfill as a power source for glass and ceramics businesses."

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Everyone associated in any way with HandMade will miss the warmth and diligence of Pat Cabe, remarkable stalwart of the Small Towns Program, Energy Exchange, HandMade communications and much more, who said goodbye in August to take up a new position with the Golden Leaf Foundation.

David Quinn, who had worked with HandMade for the previous six years in his capacity as a planner with the NC Division of Community Assistance, stepped into Pat's Small Town role as she departed and has graciously taken on the task of following in her wonderful work.

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