

Team Punta Gorda's artisans village concept moving ahead

The arts — it's an economic generator for communities. The arts — it's an industry that supports jobs, generates government revenue, is a cornerstone of tourism and economic development, and drives a creativity-based economy. Americans for the Arts conducted a study in 2005, Arts & Economic Prosperity III. The findings of this study revealed that nationally 30 percent of arts events attendees come from outside the county in which the event is held. The study also documented that non-local attendees spend more than local attendees. The arts also mean business. The non-profit arts and culture organizations in the U.S. drive a \$186 billion industry — a growth industry that supports 5.7 million full-time jobs and generates nearly \$30 billion in government revenue annually.

The arts also build healthy, engaged communities. Charlotte County is no exception. The Arts & Humanities

Nancy Prafke

Nancy Prafke is CEO of Team Punta Gorda. Readers may reach her at team@teampuntagorda.org.



Council of Charlotte County sets the stage by promoting artists and arts organizations. They hosted Art Sensation on Nov. 1 in Lashley Park in Punta Gorda where hundreds of artists were featured. In Punta Gorda a thriving Visual Arts Center and many other arts festivals throughout the year provide our citizens with much enrichment.

And yet there is more opportunity for our arts community to come together to further promote local artists and connect them with visitors. One way other communities around the country have achieved this is through the artisans

village concept. Think of this in business terms as an "arts incubator." It evolved from redeveloping unused factories or housing enclaves into a collection of studios where artists work and visitors come to watch, experience, and shop. Cafes often provide refreshment and areas for visitors to take a break and enjoy their newly acquired art.

Team Punta Gorda's Artisans Village Committee — comprised of representatives of the Arts & Humanities Council, Visual Arts Center, many galleries, local artists, and interested citizens — has been exploring this concept. The first approach is a "virtual" artisans village where techniques are used to promote a virtual arts district without "bricks and mortar." This concept bridges existing galleries, studios, and related shops to help make the connection with visitors, both local and non-local.

The second approach involves creating actual locations in the traditional sense

of an artisans village. The Artisans Village Committee surveyed local artists to determine if there is a demand for studio space. With a high 10 percent response rate, a significant number of artists indicated such an interest. Armed with this data, the committee is currently working on a strategy to make this happen in Punta Gorda. Artisans have been alerted to emerging projects that will soon be open to the public. An example is the soon-to-open Darkwood Center at King Street and East Charlotte Avenue which will house musical and visual arts.

If you are passionate about the arts, why not join our Artisans Village Committee in this pursuit. To join Team Punta Gorda as a member and/or volunteer, call us at 941-637-8326 or visit our Web site at www.teampuntagorda.org. This is your chance to personally have an impact on our community. Your contributions are also welcome.