

Blueprint for the Arts in New Castle County

I acted in the 1990 Delaware Theatre Company performance of “Files,” Sarah Schenck's award-winning Delaware school play. As a math teacher at Prestige Academy, I used music and visual and performance art to teach. As the creator of the globally-recognized Ecosandals in a Nairobi, Kenya shantytown, I learned that creating a global, high technology footwear business required a beautiful marriage of art and science. We must teach our children STEAM not just STEM.

Our government should create the canvas on which our artist citizens paint. In some cases, that means prioritizing arts funding. In other cases, that means finding space for artists to create. And other times that means providing leadership, bringing people together so that artists can thrive here and so that New Castle County is recognized as a leading East Coast arts destination.



The Arts as Facilitator of Neighborhood Transformations

The arts are transforming a section of West Center City that some have characterized as blighted and hopeless. The Chris White Gallery, Creative District, Wilmington Renaissance Corporation and numerous corporate partners are collaborating to turn a neighborhood with little formal economic activity into a vibrant center of creativity. My former boss, Chris White, had an idea for affordable housing and artists' lofts. Others carried that idea beyond one building. And today there is a new energy, a disruptive artistic energy, that is creating an economic vibrancy. The arts are a source of pride and strength for our cities and our county. Our county government must recognize that and be a catalyst for the arts, from Claymont to Smyrna.

Utilizing the Arts to Reach Those Outside the Mainstream

I am one of the only candidates who is an experienced public school teacher. Human beings have multiple intelligences, such as linguistic, logical, musical, and visual intelligence. Formal education systems today undervalue certain intelligences, particularly musical and visual. We need to create artistic spaces where kids can thrive. When I taught fraction division, few of my sixth grade students initially mastered the concept. After we performed the fraction division rap, every one of my sixth graders mastered the concept. Everyone's brain is wired a little differently. The arts are a critical tool to extend educational opportunity to more students.

Pushing Extraordinary Communities Even Further

According to daVinci, painting is poetry that we see and poetry is painting that we feel. There are vibrant arts communities across New Castle County, from the independent artistry at the Arden Fair to Thursday night spoken word at Levitea, from world class jazz at the Clifford Brown Festival to Music on Main by the Gibby in Middletown. We are thriving with our pens, our paintbrushes and our voices. The arts not only deliver economic value and create employment, they also speak to our diversity and inspire us to create a world beyond what we typically see and feel.

I have served as legal counsel to the founders of Artist Ave Station, a co-working space for artists that has already successfully launched two income-generating ventures. Artist Ave Station borders Wilmington's West Center City and is quickly becoming a critical building block of a safer neighborhood, of creative expression and of economic vibrancy. Where appropriate, the county government will provide incentives for artistic communities to coalesce in areas known for blight.

When I greeted voters at the Clifford Brown Jazz Festival this summer, I had a problem: about half of the attendees in Rodney Square were not from Delaware. That's bad for campaigning. But it is great for economic development and the vibrancy of our county. With coordination across state and local governments and private-public partnerships, our county will continue to thrive, with artists in the leading role.