

Neighborhoods team for the arts

Festival touts initiative aimed at fueling development

By Lisa Bernard-Kuhn • lbernard@enquirer.com • October 12, 2008

An alliance between two Cincinnati neighborhoods, Pleasant Ridge and Kennedy Heights, was officially launched Saturday with the unveiling of District A - a grassroots effort to build community partnerships and fuel economic development through the arts.

To mark the occasion, more than 50 local artists, musicians and businesses came together to host a street festival that stretched along Montgomery Road from Ridge Avenue in Pleasant Ridge to Kennedy Avenue in Kennedy Heights.

Throughout the day, more than a dozen venues in each neighborhood hosted live music and showcased local artists' work, including pieces by internationally renowned 20th-century modernists Noel and Colletta Martin of Kennedy Heights.

Over the last two years a citizens' group of business and community leaders from both neighborhoods have formed the Montgomery Corridor Arts Collaborative and worked on a plan to engage local artists and connect them with the area's business district, said Kennedy Heights resident and District A board member Jim Zarnowiecki. "This is just the beginning of pointing out to people that the arts can be a real economic driver in a community," he said.

Last year the group landed a \$25,000 grant from downtown-based marketing firm LPK to help create a "brand" for the alliance, said Maria Kreppel, chairwoman of the Montgomery Corridor Arts Collaborative. The "A" in District A stands for "arts."

"We had to find a way to build a new concept that went beyond the names of the two communities," she said. "These communities have to get stronger together, and using arts as the catalyst has kept everyone at the table."

Among the local artists who took part in the day's festivities was Elliott Jordan, a gallery owner and art teacher at Rockdale Academy. Thirteen years ago Jordan opened his studio and gallery at 6113 Ridge Ave. where he sells his own paintings, work by other local artists and imported African art. Although he lives downtown, he said the strong base of local artists and the diverse neighborhood led him to his Pleasant Ridge storefront. "We have such a great mix of different people that live and work here," he said. "It seems like all the right people come here."

Kreppel said that the goal of District A will be to continue to create opportunities for local businesses and artists to take part in community development initiatives along Montgomery Road.

"This is not your typical arts community," she said. "This is where artists choose to raise their families. We're not about building new arts venues. Our ultimate goal is fostering community development through the arts."