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TOP STORY

## New effort aims to connect Charleston area artists and funds

By Maria Young Features Editor

Aug 26, 2020



Bryan Cooper speaks during the Charleston Creative Placemaking Council's official launch of its new Charleston Creativity Connections at the Carpet Lounge Wednesday.

CHRIS DORST | Gazette-Mail photos

The Charleston Creative Placemaking Council, organized by the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, on Wednesday launched Charleston Creativity Connections, a new effort to help a diverse cross-section of visual and performing artists in the area secure paying opportunities the council believes will help drive the Charleston economy.

“Statistically, it’s been proven that a thriving art scene drives people to want to live here. It improves real estate pricing, it improves wages for people. The effects of a rich arts community has been proven over and over again to enrich all facets of a community,” said Bryan Cooper, recently hired as the “connector” charged with overseeing the effort.

Addressing a small crowd on the patio of the Red Carpet Lounge, beneath a colorful, two-story mural by Ian Bode, Charleston Mayor Amy Shuler Goodwin said, “This is what we know art does for our community – it makes our city vibrant, and that’s exactly what we need right now in the city of Charleston right now.”

Charleston Creativity Connections includes visual art; music; performing arts such as dance, film, theater and street performers; literary art including authors, poets and storytellers; and culinary artists like chefs, bakers and mixologists.

The immediate projects include:

- A new website, GetCreativeWV.com, which aims to connect potential customers to artists;
- A grant program to provide up to \$5,000 for new, art-focused projects in Charleston;
- “The Common Thread,” a YouTube series that features two local artists from different genres; and
- Scholarships for Arts Education, offered to Charleston area artists for a training program through the Tamarack Foundation for the Arts.

The initiative is the result of a years-long effort by the council, comprised of artists, funders, The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, the city of Charleston and other community organizers, to secure the funds and the platform needed to move the vision forward.

“Charleston has an amazing, rich and diverse artistic community already and the goal of the CCC is to really expand on that, creating new paying opportunities for artists, making the connection between businesses and artists and organizations to really make a new project and enrich our community for all of us,” Cooper said.

More information on Charleston Creativity Connections is available on the website.

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