

# Craft Artists Can "CreateHere" in Chattanooga

by Jim Weaver

**H**ow do you revitalize a depressed urban neighborhood and make it attractive to investors, new businesses and the public?

Chattanooga, Tennessee's Josh McManus and Helen Davis Johnson believed they could and, at the same time, help build a stronger arts community. They reasoned that artists, craftspeople and other entrepreneurial types would rise to the challenge of transforming a neighborhood fallen on hard times—and they were right. They took their plan to the local Lyndhurst Foundation, known for its commitment to community

renewal and support of the arts, and secured funding for a project called CreateHere (CH).

ArtsMove is a CH relocation program offering incentive mortgages to artists and entrepreneurs in a wide variety of creative enterprises (ranging from crafts and fine arts to performance and culinary arts). ArtsMove's full-time practicing artists make a commitment to live in the neighborhood for a minimum of five years and to help contribute to its cultural advancement and economic vitality. In exchange, they receive \$15,000 toward payment of a mortgage on a property in the renewal area. ArtsMove accepts applications from full-time, professional artists on a quarterly basis. In its first year, ArtsMove has attracted 25 individuals or couples to the city.

CH also operates an arts grant program called MakeWork that provides \$150,000 in annual grants to area artists and artisans. Helping to stimulate Chattanooga's creativity economy, MakeWork grants provide artists and artisans with the funds necessary to succeed and grow. Among the recipients is Janis Hashe, a California transplant with a passion for Shakespeare, who envisions an annual Shakespeare Festival as part of Chattanooga's cultural scene.

Her MakeWork grant of \$10,000 enabled Hashe to stage a critically praised professional cast production of scenes from three



**Above:** East Main Street headquarters of CreateHere in Chattanooga, Tenn. **Right:** Handmade stainless steel and glass sculpture by Kerrick Johnson of Kerrick Johnson Glass Studio





Shakespeare plays. Its success will hopefully enable her to secure additional grants to fund her nonprofit theater project in coming years. Ceramic sculptor Judith Condon received a MakeWork grant of \$3,400 to purchase necessary equipment to enable her to develop an image transfer process in her work.

In all, 23 artists and craftspeople living within a 50-mile radius of Chattanooga received grants ranging from \$500 to \$20,000 in three categories—studio assistance, career advancement and special projects. The only obligation was a commitment to exhibit their work in the city sometime in the next year. A list of the 2008 MakeWork grant recipients and their projects is available upon request.

CH also operates SpringBoard, a business resource program for artists, artisans and other creative entrepreneurs. It offers a variety of resources, including a business planning study course to help individuals achieve their artistic and economic goals. "Many artists have focused exclusively on developing their craft and given too little attention to find a way to make it financially viable," Johnson explains.

SpringBoard offers an eight-week course that includes personal finances, cost-per-unit pricing, break even and profit points, and marketing. MakeWork grant recipients attend a



**Above:** Bottle cap sculpture by John Petrey of John Petrey Fine Art Studios **Right:** Bottle cap and playing card sculpture by John Petrey ([www.johnpetrey.com](http://www.johnpetrey.com))



Selection of handmade handbags by Lisa Cutler of Lisa C. Purses

one-day class, although many elect to do the full course.

Another CH initiative is LeadHere, an internship program designed for recent college graduates who spend two to four months working on projects of their own choosing. LeadHere offers motivated individuals the opportunity to initiate



an enterprise, allowing their work, ideas and energy to potentially have a worthwhile impact on the community. Johnson tells of a LeadHere intern who initiated an international film festival (24 short films were presented in a single, four-hour presentation). Interns received \$10 an hour pay plus leadership training during their tenure. Both woodturner Ed Lewis and jeweler Mary Helen Robert are graduates of the LeadHere program and have made successful career moves based on their experiences. Lewis also received a \$3,900 Make-Work grant that has enabled him to purchase a new wood lathe. He now teaches other woodturning artists at his studio.

John and Peggy Petrey moved to Chattanooga from Orlando, Fla., in June 2007 as part of CreateHere. John is a sculptor who works in metal and mixed media, while Peggy is a small-metals jeweler and graphic arts designer. "We were unhappy with the arts scene in Orlando," Peggy says. "We felt the quality level of the art there was pretty low and we wanted a situation where we could be part of a vital, more cutting-edge, artistic community. John had participated in the 2006 4 Bridges Arts Festival in Chattanooga and liked the city and its relaxed lifestyle, so we began investigating the possibilities of relocating here," she shares.

With help from CreateHere, the Ptreys purchased a 5,000-square-foot industrial building for \$400,000 and are slowly converting it to a living space with loft in front and studio space for both in the rear. "Actually, there will be room for us to rent studio space to other

**Below:** Wood-turned vessels by Ed Lewis of Chattanooga, Tenn.



**Above and Left:** Ceramic sculptures by Judith Condon of Tennessee

artists when its fully renovated," Peggy adds. "Also, we have several building lots at the rear of the property that can eventually be developed as residential housing. In all, we own a full acre of land and the city has rezoned it to allow us to do pretty much whatever we



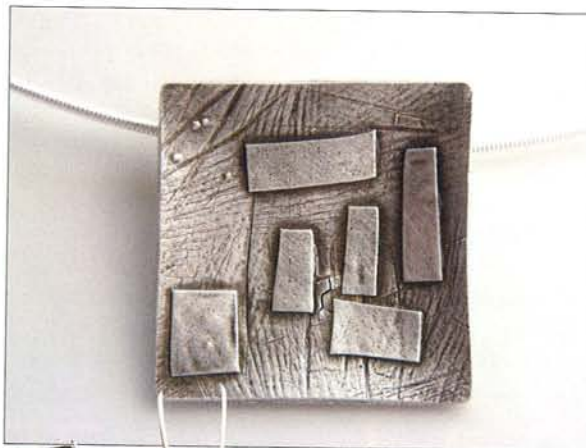


want."The Southside neighborhood is located only a few blocks from downtown Chattanooga, and free public transportation is easily available on nearby electric shuttle buses.

According to the Petreys, the best part of the move has been their association with other artists in the area."There was already a small arts community functioning when we arrived, and we were immediately made welcome,"Peggy notes."It's great to have close connections with other artists who are doing really interesting work. We support one another and want everyone to excel."



**Above:** Heart pine coffee hutch by Aaron Cabeen of Cabeen Originals (cabeenoriginals.com)



**Above, Left and Below:** One-of-a-kind wearable art jewelry by metalsmith Mary Helen Robert of Chattanooga, Tenn. (maryhelenrobert.wordpress.com)



Another Chattanooga transplant is handbag artist Lisa Cutler, who came to the city from Omaha, Neb., with the help of a \$15,000 grant. She has quickly established herself as a part of the local arts community, expanded her product line and helped establish a new collective for female artists. Glass artist Kerrick Johnson (www.kerrickjohnson.com) from Chattanooga also received a \$15,000 relocation grant for moving to the redevelopment district and building a new house and studio on an empty lot.

"Making the world a better place starts at home," says Johnson. "We love our city for what it can become, as well as for what it is. We believe that entrepreneurship, individual expression, interdependent partnerships and cooperative relationships are key economic and cultural drivers. We want Chattanooga to be the best city in the world in which to live, work and play."

Helen Davis Johnson and Josh McManus see CH as a concept for artist advancement, neighborhood renewal and community building. "CreateHere is not meant to be a permanent organization, but rather an instrument for positive change. It simply makes things happen," Johnson maintains. For more information, visit [www.createhere.org](http://www.createhere.org). If visiting the area, begin your trip at [www.chattanooga4fun.com](http://www.chattanooga4fun.com).<sup>TCR</sup>