A CONVERSATION WITH MEMBERS OF THE AMHERST DOWNTOWN BID AND AMHERST CENTER CULTURAL DISTRICT
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PROVIDE A SUMMARY OF THE FIRST ARTWEEK IN AMHERST, A TOWN IN THE FIVE-COLLEGE AREA OF THE STATE.

The first ArtWeek was a dynamic collaboration of cultural institutions and organizations including the Jones Library, Mead Art Museum (Amherst College), the Emily Dickinson Museum Homestead, Amherst History Museum, Amherst BID, Amherst Public Art Commission, Amherst Arts Night Plus and businesses like Laughing Dog Bicycles, Of Note Stationers, and the Monkey Bar/Bistro 63. The Amherst BID collaborated with the UMass Amherst Donahue Institute for an international cultural exchange of Pakistani music and dance with the Phool Patti Trolley as a rolling exhibition of artwork. The majority of new activities - mural painting, Phool Patti Trolley event, first Thursday Craft/Farmers Market on the lawn of the Amherst History Museum on our regular monthly Arts Night Plus (the first Thursday of the month) - were particularly successful.

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WHO WERE SOME OF THE PLAYERS WHO LED THE ARTWEEK CHARGE? DID YOU INVOLVE ANY OF THE COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES IN THE AREA?

The Amherst Downtown BID, the managing entity of the Amherst Center Cultural District, and tand Steering Committee members of the Amherst Center Cultural District organized outreach initiatives to the community. Arts Night Plus committee members and members of the Public Art Commission as well as the Emily Dickinson Museum also helped create programming unique to ArtWeek.

HOW DID THE AMHERST CENTER CULTURAL DISTRICT RECRUIT, INVOLVE, MOTIVATE, AND RECOGNIZE THE DIVERSE RANGE OF VOLUNTEERS WHO MADE ARTWEEK A REALITY?

They were excited by the possibility of greater exposure through the state-wide initiative and believed in the potential to grow this annual event as a complement to our other annual activities.
WHAT WERE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THAT WERE ENCOUNTERED?

The rain! Also, the fact that there was no direct funding to help with the events, so many of our cultural institutions such as the Mead Art Museum and the Jones Library used their already planned events around May the 4th (Be With You, etc.) as part of ArtWeek. Restaurants and cafes couldn’t really take the plunge into being creative and joining in because they were focusing on preparing for upcoming college graduation events. Despite the timing, a wonderful food truck ‘Santo Taco,’ did make a great impact at the Saturday Farmers Market with Frida Kahlo-inspired tacos.

WHAT WERE SOME OF EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED IMPACTS THAT ARTWEEK HAD?

An unexpected impact was the remarkable popularity of some first-time events such as the Phool Patti Trolley Cultural Immersion event, the Thursday Night Farmers/Crafters market, and the Architecture Tour of Downtown. People really responded well and want to see more. An expected impact was a boost in revenue to our downtown food establishments on Thursday evening.

CAN YOU SHARE SOME INSIDER SUCCESS SECRETS FOR OTHER FIRST-TIME COMMUNITIES?

The ArtWeek team did a great job of getting everyone excited and sharing examples from other communities with an onsite presentation. It was really helpful to bring those ideas and examples to the cultural institutions and businesses so they had a point of reference. Early outreach is also so important - having multiple meetings to discuss, share and collaborate before the holiday season hits and (in our area) graduation is upon us. We hope to grow this week with the same success as our annual September Block Party - a great town and gown mixer that has evolved into a community event beyond the downtown area.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• Leverage existing events
• Add an ArtWeek twist to Farmer’s Markets, Food Trucks, etc.
• Pre-holiday outreach can be effective
• Multiple meetings foster collaboration
• Be inspired by what other communities are doing