Describe in 2-3 sentences about the evolution of Belchertown’s ArtWeek involvement over two years.

Traditionally, grant-making had been the council’s key priority but a few years ago we decided to test the waters of doing some programming which was a major strategic shift. ArtWeek was a great opportunity to put that strategy into action with an afternoon of events centered around the town green. During the second year, our volunteer base grew exponentially - in fact, some of today’s key council volunteers came from being involved in the first year of ArtWeek. Our marketing budget also expanded in year two and we spent more time on branding the event that can be reused annually, as well as creating more substantial booklets.

“Ain the second year, we had expanded our partnerships to the local schools, library, recreation department, family center, art association, museum/historic commission, and a number of local businesses. All of this outreach resulted in a key partnership with a local volunteer who coordinated our signature “recycled flowers,” bottle cap blooms made by local school children, that transform the town green into a virtual garden during ArtWeek which has become an overwhelming crowd favorite.”

How did you and the cultural council engage different community partners to work together on ArtWeek?

Our council mission is always to partner with other town departments and organizations so we identified and reached out directly to individuals and had an open kickoff meeting to brainstorm ideas. In the second year, we had expanded our partnerships to the local schools, library, recreation department, family center, art association, museum/historic commission, and a number of local businesses. All of this outreach resulted in a key partnership with a local volunteer who coordinated our signature “recycled flowers,” bottle cap blooms made by local school children, that transform the town green into a virtual garden during ArtWeek which has become an overwhelming crowd favorite.

What have been some of the most successful elements of ArtWeek over the past two years?

The community has been very supportive. Even businesses have been willing to participate as we build on highlighting how economic development and the creative economy can be successfully linked. We also spread out workshops over the course of the week that were well attended and free thanks to grant funding. Additionally, ArtWeek has increased our visibility which has been helpful in securing a line item in the town budget to support the ongoing and enhanced role of the Cultural Council throughout the year.
WHAT WERE SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES, CHANGES, AND SURPRISES BETWEEN THE TWO YEARS?

The weather was amazing for the first year and terrible the second year. Even with bad weather working against us, we still had good attendance. Our town is geographically widespread and the venues we utilized were as well; this works better in nicer weather when people don’t mind walking around. We also realized that our rain plan signage and communication around venue shifts, etc., could be improved.

CAN YOU SHARE SOME LESSONS LEARNED/IDEAS FOR SUCCESS THAT MORE RURAL COMMUNITIES CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF?

In 2020 we are going to condense the amount of locations and make better use of the larger common areas as a central hub, so attendees can participate in as many activities as possible. We have also learned that communication is key! Shout it from the roof tops in every form of media and signage you can, or people won’t know it’s happening. This year we will also have a newly minted website for the Belchertown Cultural Council and our ArtWeek festivities will have its own app. Lastly, don’t be afraid to take risks and think outside the box. We had several storage containers donated that we used as gallery space – people love to experience art, culture, and creativity in non-traditional spaces!

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• Plan for Mother Nature to be Unpredictable
• Consider Programming around a Hub
• Get Creative: Think Outside the Box
• Share the Leadership Role
• Leverage ArtWeek to showcase economic development potential