LYNN: A CITY REIMAGINED AS A CULTURAL HUB

A CONVERSATION WITH CAROLYN COLE OF DOWNTOWN LYNN CULTURAL DISTRICT
LYNNCULTURALDISTRICT.ORG

DESCRIBE IN 2-3 SENTENCES HOW LYNN USED ARTWEEK TO HELP BUILD ITS REPUTATION AS A CREATIVE HUB.

Lynn is not unlike many other towns and cities where we have a number of groups and organizations doing passionate and impactful work within - and for the betterment of - our community, but they sometimes produce this work in silos. ArtWeek proved to be the quintessential vehicle to bring together these artists and organizations in ways that allowed us to bridge our efforts and offer a well-rounded, unique and place-specific experience for our visitors.

WHAT ROLE DID THE CULTURAL DISTRICT PLAY AND HOW DID IT RECRUIT PARTNERS TO JOIN IN ARTWEEK?

The Downtown Lynn Cultural District took on the role of Community Catalyst in order to bring together participants on an initiative much larger than any one of us. I presented this as an opportunity to maximize our ongoing efforts to change our city’s narrative, and to reflect our artistic and cultural assets in the positive way that we see them every day. No amount of phone calls, in-person visits, emails or webinars were too many when it came to getting the word and invitation out to our community partners.

HOW DID YOU USE ARTWEEK TO CHANGE PEOPLE’S PERCEPTION ABOUT LYNN?

We are a different Lynn than we were 20 years ago, or the hundreds of years before that, but we are the same strong, creative and industrious people. We have long dealt with perception issues in various forms. ArtWeek gave us an elevated visibility platform to show our presence on the North Shore as a beautifully vibrant, history-rich arts and cultural destination, and to convey its message to guests who might not have previously considered Lynn worthy of their visitorship.

“ArtWeek paved a way for visitors to take notice of Lynn on so many creative levels. Now we invite you all to see for yourselves that the old adage holds true: ‘you won’t go out the way you came in’.”
WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST ARTWEEK SUCCESSES OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS? CHALLENGES?

I think this depends on how we define ‘successes.’ In my eyes one of our biggest successes is the expanding local involvement and interest in ArtWeek participation. I find that groups who may never have previously worked together made the effort to collaborate with their neighboring organizations recognizing that community collaboration is key to their overall success.

If you’re looking for our most successful events, I’d have to say tours, tours, tours, specifically centered on art and history. Our tours included outdoor public art, historic trolley rides and even churches. Another guaranteed success is hosting a Lynn Public Schools event, for example our ‘All-City Art Exhibit’ and ‘All-City Band Performance.’ Their programs automatically engage diverse multi-generational families, staff and supporters. And finally, this year’s Downtown Lynn Cultural District sponsored ‘ArtPeek’ was a way to expand our bandwidth capabilities, maximize coverage and make every participant feel important and supported, reaching those who may have been unable to physically experience the programs for themselves. Working with an up-and-coming local photographer, we were able to share events in real time on social media to a wider audience while also creating valuable marketing resources for the future.

Of course, challenges exist when facilitating expansive efforts like these. Knowledge is power, and the thought of something new can be challenging to people. Educating them to realize the power of collaborative effort sometimes must be experienced to be believed. It is also an ongoing challenge to entice people to come to downtown Lynn even though we’ve made ongoing strides in revising our narrative and perception. But if we can continue to build on, and celebrate, our strengths, we know people will start to see us in a new light.

WHAT WORDS OF WISDOM WOULD YOU SHARE WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES WHO ARE THINKING ABOUT ARTWEEK?

When communities and organizations reach out for ideas on shaping community engagement efforts or changing the perception of their city, honest and truly, ArtWeek is the first thing I recommend. I think the beauty of it lies in the fact that there is no barrier for entry or participation; it makes art and culture accessible to all. I stress that even their regularly-scheduled programming can be registered as an ArtWeek event, revealing their organization to a whole new audience and a new level of exposure and appreciation.

And don’t be afraid to take risks and get bravely creative. You might find that ArtWeek is the spark you need to ignite your creative community flame.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• Community Collaboration is Key
• Art and History Tours are Popular
• Involve Your Schools
• Work with a Local Photographer
• Take Risks and Get Bravely Creative

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