

AcA among finalists in national placemaking grant

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(Photo: advertiser file photo)

Art Covers All.

“It’s the kind of a title that I think says what needs to be said,” said Gerd Wuestemann, executive director of Acadiana Center for the Arts.

If it sounds like an art project, you’d be correct; but it’s even more than that. It’s one of 90 projects that have been selected as finalists for consideration for ArtPlace America’s 2015 National Grants Program.

Local artist CeCe Cole’s idea is to give bus stops in Lafayette a serious artistic touch to cover commuters from the elements while exposing them to art and culture. Hence “Art Covers All.”

In total, ArtPlace received 1,283 letters of inquiry. The finalists’ projects are proposed for communities of all sizes across the country, with 25 percent of finalists proposing rural projects, 4 percent representing suburban communities, and 71 percent taking place in urban centers.

“We now have about a 50/450 chance to get the grant. That’s where we are,” Wuestemann said. “Just to be a finalist is already considered to be a great honor and a very special accomplishment for our community.”

It’s called creative place making.

“The definition of that is basically changing your community and social structures through art and culture,” said Wuestemann. And that comes down to quality of life, economic development and social change. “So that’s what we applied for.”

As it is, there are very few shelters for those who use public transportation here to get work or get to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, according to Wuestemann.

“By and large, in our community, public transportation is used by the working class,” he said. “And here, it’s hot or it’s wet and they have no shelter. It’s very uninspiring.”

Wuestemann said in the Lafayette Consolidated Government’s Comprehensive Plan there’s a solid public transportation system and building it up more is

“It’s there, but I think one of the things that has to happen in order to do that is to remove the stigma that comes with public transportation; that it is uncomfortable, that only people that can’t afford a car use it, etc.,” said Wuestemann.

And here’s where the project comes in.

“We’re trying to create here up to 20 bus stops that are artistic designs and that would span the entire Lafayette Metro Area along the major nodes of transportation,” Wuestemann said. “Those bus stops would be designed not only to give shelter from the elements, but also inspire people while they’re waiting for the transportation.”

Waiting for a bus in something other than a shell could have positive results.

“It could change their day, have a bit of impact on how they get to work,” he said. “Inspire them, engage them through art and culture and be somewhat interactive and reflective of their respective neighborhoods where they’re located.”

Community partners would include artists and designers who would work with UL architecture students, public works, transportation, city engineers and planners “to work and interface with them in order to make sure those shelters are safe and can withstand hurricanes or whatever else needs to be there,” said Wuestemann.

“We want to bring in Habitat for Humanity to help us with locating affordable and sustainable materials and resources,” he said. “This will be a very big civic project that engages the entire community as a whole.”

And once completed, Wuestemann said the bus stops would “bridge divide between north and south (Lafayette), between lower income neighborhoods and more affluent neighborhoods,” he said. “If you’re thinking of the nodes the buses travel on crisscrossing Lafayette Metro Area, those major nodes sort of actually create natural corridors of public art now.”

So with 20 or more bus stops that are “very unique and their very artistic, cool, colorful and engaging,” he said, “You’re creating a network of arteries of public art throughout the city. I think that would go a very long way in Lafayette.

“It’s kind of living, useable sculpture that feed the soul and give you shelter across the city,” he said.

Grant recipients will be announced in June.

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