

AQCA Monthly Membership Meeting Notes

Thursday, April 16, 2009, 7:00pm (Kimball Towers)

Guest speaker:

Ann Black, *Creative Capital Springfield* <www.creativecapitalspringfield.com>

Robert Louder called the meeting to order with several announcements:

- A new business has opened on the corner of Dwight and Worthington called Savannah's - serving breakfast and lunch.
- The annual *Keep Springfield Beautiful* event is coming up on May 2nd. Volunteers from the neighborhood are invited to gather at 8:30 that morning, next to the Hispanic Baptist Church at Mattoon/Salem/Elliott Streets.
- May 17th Pancake Breakfast - AQCA will have a table again, in front of the TD Banknorth Building. Volunteers needed to help pour juice and coffee.
- A series of informational meetings regarding ward representation are coming up (for dates and times, visit springfieldcityhall.com and click on "News.")
- Guest speaker for the May 21st AQCA meeting will be Al Chwalek of the Springfield Department of Public Works.
- There will be no formal membership meetings during the months of June, July, and August.
- Fall AQCA meetings will include a Ward 1 City Council Candidate debate and a visit from Springfield Schools Superintendent Dr. Ingram.

Robert introduced Ann Black, Mattoon Street resident and the Marketing and Development arm of *Creative Capital Springfield*.

Ann told us the story of how she fell in love with Springfield while participating in a Zen Peacemakers "street retreat." Although she worked in Downtown Springfield years ago, she had never really noticed the city at that time. She has now made it her mission to help Springfield reinvent itself, and has been living Downtown since this past November. Ann's main partner in Creative Capital Springfield is Downtown property owner Evan Plotkin, but she has also been working closely with an Italian artist/urban planner friend, Alberto Mancini. They hope that by attracting artists to Springfield, the city can eventually be positioned as the creative capital of the region. Ann mentioned NYC neighborhoods DUMBO and SOHO as examples of neglected areas that have been successfully reclaimed and transformed into meccas of the arts. She outlined the organic process by which artists move into cheap lofts, leading to Open Houses and galleries, leading to small sustainable businesses which spring up to take advantage of the growing foot traffic. Eventually, the area becomes attractive to middle-class residents.

After studying maps and touring Springfield, Alberto identified Apremont Triangle as the HEART of the city. Ann described how it can be seen as a missing link which could help “knit together” various neighborhoods. As such, they have been working with Leon Charkoudian, owner of the Birnie Building to bring a grocery and some artist space to the Triangle. They have also been eyeing other buildings in the area for artist lofts. Another nearby property that they are considering purchasing is the Hippodrome. In addition to developing space for artists and encouraging small business, Ann feels strongly about the need for more green space. She would like to help dispel the myth that there is a lack of parking in Downtown Springfield - she countered that Springfield is actually in danger of becoming ONE BIG parking lot and she had a color coded map to prove her point. (Discussion followed this, with some folks at the meeting stressing that there is a need for more “secure” parking. The point was also raised that there are city ordinances that require a certain amount of greenery be incorporated into parking lots, but that the rules are often ignored and not enforced by the City).

Ann and her team have already met with many key players in town, trying to get them on board with the “Creative Capital” vision. She appreciates that there are many individuals and groups in town already, who share the vision, and she would like to help all of these people work more effectively together toward common goals. She plans to hold regular gatherings for those interested in helping grow a creative economy (first event was held April 21 at Theodores), and is also working on a more formal “creative summit” to be held early this summer. Public “Creative Springfield Events” are also in the works - the first one to be held April 25th, 5:30 - 8:00 at the Sovereign Bank Building (an art opening featuring paintings by Alberto). She encourages us all to stop by!

Two other people who are working to revitalize the city introduced themselves: Karoun Charkoudian, who is opening a yoga studio in the Birnie Building, and Shiloh Dean of Nehemiah Ministries <www.nehemiah-ministries.com>. One of Nehemiah Ministries projects is Phoenix Arts, which brings a variety of art classes to Springfield’s homeless population.

Notes submitted by Anna Brandenburg, AQCA member