



*In the past 6 years, the Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission has spurred Mass Ave and the other five cultural districts, proving itself to be*

**Downtown's biggest weapon in the war against Carmel**

◀ Christopher West, curator of the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, takes advantage of one of the three "wi-fi hot zones" available along the Avenue. The three antennae allowing for the wireless internet connections are on the Luna Music building owned by Chatterbox Jazz Club owner David Andrichik in the 400 block; the Dean Johnson Design building in the 600 block, and the Mass Ave Video building owned by Tom Battista on the East End.

**S**OHOO IN INDY? MAYBE WE'RE SHY A FEW hippies and street performers, but Mass Ave is indeed becoming a Mecca for people looking for a unique experience, be it shopping or dining or live entertainment. The proof lies in the crowded stores, the heavy pedestrian traffic, the frequently non-existent parking spaces.

Which is exactly what the people behind the Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission envisioned in 2001, when they began to put together a multifaceted program to help make Indy a destination, a happening place. One of those facets – the cultural districts – sought to create “a place that’s fun to be, a place that, over time, would be as identifiable as SoHo or Greenwich Village.”

Those words were from Ted Boehm, who has chaired the Cultural Development Commission since its creation by the Capital Improvement Board and the Lilly Endowment. In those seven years, the commission has spent almost \$12 million to enhance Indianapolis as a cultural destination, to not only convince people of central Indiana to visit, but to convince people in Chicago and Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio, as well.

Today, at this writing, it is possible the Cultural Development Commission has come to its end. It is also possible that it has not. Boehm, who by day is a member of the Indiana Supreme Court, believes the latter. But the



## **BABBLIN' BROOKS**

*Musings from the editor about life downtown (or just about anything else he wants to write about.)*

**By Bill Brooks**

decision lies with the Capital Improvement Board, which has the thorny problem of funding Lucas Oil Stadium, a temple to sports in general and the Indianapolis Colts in particular. The thorny problem is this: a projected \$20 million operating deficit for 2009. That deficit may choke off money for cultural development.

Which will be more than too bad. Regular readers of this column know that our 2008 theme has been our “war with Carmel,” a reaction to Carmel’s efforts to establish itself as a cultural destination – often by attempting to lure Downtown amenities to the would-be Disneyland that is Carmel’s own city center. It is a war of dollars, a war of imagination. These are the same weapons the Cultural Development Commission has used over the past seven years to convince the world that Indy is worth visiting.

In the Mass Ave Art & Theater District, the evidence of that effort is ubiquitous. The murals, which mark both ends and the middle of the six-block commercial district, were financed by part of a \$50,000 initial district outlay in 2003. The way-finding pedestal maps. The public art installations. The art display cases at such venues as the Murat Theatre, the Athenaeum and the City Market, which not only promote local artists, but feature displays of upcoming Mass Ave events.

And then there’s the Mass Ave logo itself, one of the first creations of the cultural tourism effort, and one which came about

◀ Street kiosks such as this one help visitors navigate their way along Mass Ave. Like everything else pictured on these pages, the maps were funded by the Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission.

Cultural district guides give visitors information and directories of each of the six cultural districts. The guides are available in numerous shops along the Avenue. ▼





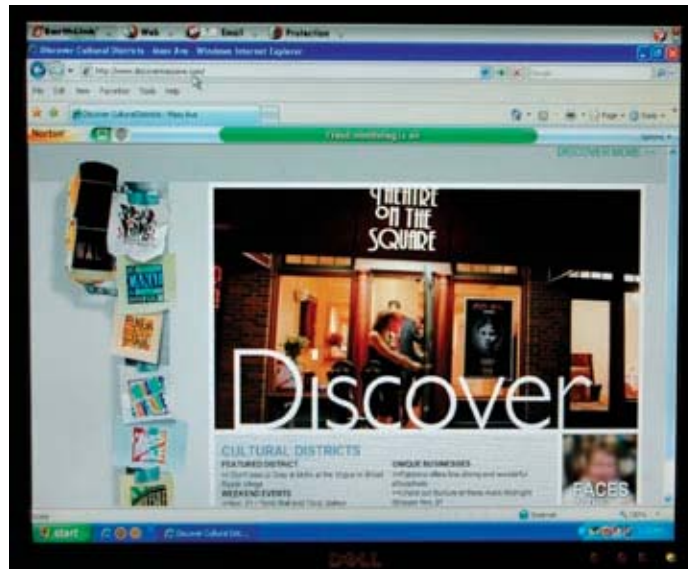
▲ Mass Ave is marked by three murals underwritten by the Cultural Development Commission. This one is viewable by passing interstate traffic. Another sits at the opposite end of Mass Ave at Delaware and New York streets, while the third, on the side of the Chatterbox Jazz Club, is viewable by Michigan Avenue traffic.

through a grassroots effort in which stakeholders in Mass Ave came together to determine how their community should be defined. For Mass Ave, the effort produced not only the logo but two marketing lines: “45 degrees from ordinary” and “new-fangled angle.”

The effort produced a more important by-product, said Jenny Guimont, who has directed the cultural district effort these past years. “We don’t do anything by ourselves,” said Guimont, who said the Cultural Development Commission worked from the beginning to create partnerships to leverage dollars, resources and human capital. “That’s the underlying principle of everything we’ve done.”

The effort that came together along Mass Ave was mirrored in five other districts – Fountain Square, the Wholesale District, the Canal/White River State Park, Indiana Avenue, and Broad Ripple. In each district, partnerships were created that were unique to that particular district, resulting in finished products which were equally unique. “We understood early on that you couldn’t do it in a cookie-cutter way,” Guimont said. “The districts are not all the same; they don’t offer the same things.” Added Boehm, “We wanted to be a catalyst” by providing support, “but let the locals do it.”

Prospective visitors can learn how those districts are



◀ Each cultural district received a website of its own, courtesy of the Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission. The websites are also closely linked to each other, allowing prospective visitors to gain information for the best possible stay in Indy.

different by visiting websites such as [www.DiscoverMassAve.com](http://www.DiscoverMassAve.com) – websites which are the most important contribution the Cultural Development Commission has made to the districts. The highly visible art is wonderful for those visiting

Mass Ave, but to be seen the art must first be known. The websites provide that portal to the uninitiated.

But the cultural districts are hardly the commission’s only byproduct. Other elements of the commission’s multi-faceted agenda include:

- Out-of-market advertising, which Boehm called “an enormously successful program.” Research by the Indiana Convention and Visitors Association indicates that each dollar of advertising in such cities as Cincinnati and St. Louis has generated almost \$100 in local spending by tourists. Proof of the pudding, Boehm said, is that local organizations are ponying up their own money for that marketing effort – tripling the Cultural Development Commission’s contribution, since those dollars are also matched by the ICVA. “And it’s invisible from the point of view of people in Central Indiana,” Boehm said.

- Public art, such as the current “Mass Transit” installations throughout Downtown. That effort began in 2005 with the well-received Tom Otterness exhibit, followed by the Julian Opie exhibit which included an installation at St. Clair Street and



▲ The Cultural Development Commission has funded several rotations of temporary art in the Mass Ave Urban Art Gallery.

Mass Ave. The strategy, Boehm said, “was aimed at a third audience – our own citizens – that Indianapolis is a place where exciting things happen.” The same message, though, went out to the rest of the world: Indianapolis cares about art.

□ Fast-track grants, providing direct benefit to local artists. The commission has awarded over \$675,000 in such grants over the past six years, a fair share of that going to Mass Ave artists and stakeholders. One such grant helped get the Indianapolis Downtown Artists and Dealers Association, IDADA, off the ground.

“I know it sounds a little Pollyanna, but I think the program has been remarkably successful,” said Boehm, himself no stranger to Mass Ave. “As a customer, every time I walk up and down the Avenue, I find new and interesting shops.”

If indeed the Cultural Development Commission is winding down, it continues to take active steps to boost the cultural districts. The latest improvement to the districts has been the creation of e-wireless hot zones, including three along Mass Ave. The latest edition of the cultural district guides have been distributed to shops and newsboxes throughout Downtown, and radio advertising is airing this month promoting events in Mass Ave

## The commission’s ledger

Year-to-year funding for the Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission:

<b>2001-02</b>	Marketing: \$776,370. Grants awarded: \$40,020 Cultural districts: 0 Public art: \$100,000 Administration: \$83,610 <b>Total outlays: \$1 million</b>
<b>2003</b>	Marketing: \$540,449 Grants awarded: \$226,852 Cultural districts: \$200,000 Public art: \$89,073 Administration: \$156,816 <b>Total outlays: \$1,193,192</b>
<b>2004</b>	Marketing: \$243,002 Grants awarded: \$402,790 Cultural districts: \$138,791 Public art: \$196,477 Administration: \$107,997 Indianapolis 2005*: \$289,410 <b>Total outlays: \$1,378,469</b>
<b>2005</b>	Marketing: \$231,547 Grants awarded: \$181,433 Cultural districts: \$571,941 Public art: \$564,785 Administration: \$89,869 Indianapolis 2005*: \$1,755,983 <b>Total outlays: \$1,755,983</b>
<b>2006</b>	Marketing: \$501,156 Grants awarded: \$214,055 Cultural districts: \$395,687 Public art: \$482,070 Administration: \$95,561 Indianapolis 2005*: \$250,310 <b>Total outlays: \$1,938,842</b>
<b>2007</b>	Marketing: \$589,060 Grants awarded: \$170,638 Cultural districts: \$434,772 Public art: \$332,545 Administration: \$114,849 Indianapolis 2005: \$10,639 <b>Total outlays: \$1,652,505</b>
<b>2008**</b>	Marketing: \$438,189 Grants awarded: \$98,211 Cultural districts: \$265,990 Public art: \$459,575 Administration: \$66,058 <b>Total outlays: \$1,328,024</b>
<b>2001-8**</b>	Marketing: \$3,299,776 Grants awarded: \$1,334,001 Cultural districts: \$2,007,183 Public art: \$2,224,526 Administration: \$714,763 Indianapolis 2005: \$2,306,344 <b>Seven-year total: \$12,280,081</b>

\*Indianapolis 2005 was a year-long public arts celebration.

and Broad Ripple. Print ads continue as well in The Indianapolis Star, NUVO Newsweekly and The Indianapolis Recorder.

Those elements of the campaign are managed by Indianapolis Downtown, Inc., which shares such duties with the Arts Council of Indianapolis and the ICVA.

Quantifying the commission's fiscal impact on Mass Ave, or any of the other five districts, is a tricky proposition. Through Oct. 31 of this year, the seven-year total money allocated to the six districts is \$2,007,183. The pie has not been divided equally, because expenditures were project-based – but it's safe to assume that Mass Ave's cut is in the well above \$300,000. That number does not include the benefit received from the overall marketing effort, which in most cases promoted the six districts as a whole. Regardless of how the numbers are shaken and stirred, the best is a very, very pricey martini.

But what is next? If the Cultural Development Commission fades into financial oblivion, what will happen to the framework that the commission has established? Who will fund the next round of temporary public art? Who will maintain the website? Who will update the maps on the way-finding pedestals? Have we seen our last edition of the cultural district guide?

The good news is that, thanks to the Cultural Development Commission and the street-level work by IDI – and thanks to the Mass Ave stakeholders who have come together as a result of this program, the network is in place. MAMA, the Mass Ave Merchants Association, is functioning at a level of sophistication it had never before approached. Perhaps it is time for the stakeholders to carry their own water.

The praise that is appropriately heaped upon the Cultural Development Commission does not mean that Mass Ave is flourishing solely because of the cultural districts program. No, there is much more sweat and fiscal equity which has already been invested here. The credit can be spread around, to the entrepreneurs such as David Andrichik of the Chatterbox Jazz Club and Bryan Fonseca of the Phoenix Theatre and Ron Spencer of Theatre on the Square, to restaurateurs such as Jeff Berman of Bazbeaux and Kathy Sarris of Aesop's Tables and Regina Mehallick of R Bistro, to gallery owners such as Don Elliott of Franklin Barry Gallery and Mark Ruschman of Ruschman Gallery, to merchants such as Kristin Kohn of Silver in the City/At Home in the City, Jessica Hamm of Sage and Natalie Canull of Mass Ave Toys.

These are the people who are the colonels and majors and generals in the war on Carmel. Still, it would be wonderful if those people with the very plump purse strings could find a way to continue to boost Indianapolis as a city which values the arts. Chances are not very good that Carmel will suddenly decide to stop spending money, or stop trying to recruit our galleries and theaters and shops. Heat and cool "The Luke," for sure, but save some coal for culture. ■

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### Fast-Track Grants

Here is a sampling of grants which have been awarded by the Indianapolis Cultural District Commission to fund organizations related to Mass Ave:

#### 2003

- ☐ \$3,000 to businesses in the 400 block of Mass Ave.
- ☐ \$20,000 to the City Market.\*\*
- ☐ \$30,000 to IDADA.\*\*
- ☐ \$5,000 to the Phoenix Theatre.\*

#### 2004

- ☐ \$3,750 to Ruschman Gallery
- ☐ \$1,500 to Kuaba Gallery
- ☐ \$3,000 to Riley Area Development Corp. (to support a gallery walk)
- ☐ \$3,000 to Riley Area Development Corp. (women in arts program)
- ☐ \$4,000 to Theatre on the Square.

#### 2005

- ☐ \$3,125 to IDADA.
- ☐ \$3,000 to Indy Pride, Inc.
- ☐ \$5,000 to the Indianapolis Theatre Fringe Festival.
- ☐ \$3,000 to the LAMP Gallery.

#### 2006

- ☐ \$1,400 to Jason Ammerman for a poetry event.
- ☐ \$5,000 to the League of Indianapolis Theatres.

#### 2007

- ☐ \$5,100 to IDADA.

#### 2008

- ☐ \$9,000 to the City Market.
- ☐ \$6,800 to the Indianapolis Theatre Fringe Festival.

\*\*From a one-year program called Special Initiatives Funding.

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▲ This icon developed for Mass Ave was one of the first products of the cultural district effort. It was a result of a series of brainstorming sessions by local stakeholders, resulting in an image which has been used in marketing and promotional efforts involving the Mass Ave Art & Theater District.