

Artisan Project Progress Report

18 months (June 2006 to December 2007)

The following is a brief summary of the extensive work that has been accomplished by the artisan workgroup through a completely voluntary grass roots effort. It is important to note that the following accomplishments have been achieved without any funding to support this initiative and relying almost totally on professionals in the fields of arts, education, economic development, tourism and state agencies volunteering their time to this project.

Market and Economic Research

A significant amount of research was conducted analyzing the regions' economy and its capacity and/or need to expand opportunities for artisan related business and industry. This research also looked at other industry sectors that can be impacted by art-centric business development. In addition, a more in-depth Location Quotient Analysis was conducted to calculate the estimated multiplier for the region, and a Shift Share Analysis was conducted to analyze current trends in related industries. In addition to this analysis, research was also conducted on other artisan related programs throughout the US to identify some best practices to be used.

Surveying Artisan Needs

A survey was conducted to identify the needs of local artisans. Of the 300 plus artisans contacted, approximately 1/3 responded. Their interest in the project was strong, and we gathered good data regarding educational needs and needs for support services. A summary of the responses was included in the report.

Report Submitted to DCNR & Recommendations

A report detailing the findings of the above research and the recommendations to support the industry were delivered to DCNR in March 2008. In this section, I have also included a report on the status of each recommendation.

Identification and Certification of Artisans – currently, there are 354 artisans included on the data base. This does include artisans from Center County as there seems to be some confusion regarding whether or not any or none of Center County is located in the PA Wilds Region. The Artisan workgroup felt it was appropriate to gather this information just in case.

- By consensus of the organizations involved, the certification process will start in the Spring 2008 with a series of workshops planned to provide opportunities for local artisans to work with photographers and writers to develop their portfolios (core marketing materials) for review. These portfolios will be based on the PA Artisan Guild guidelines as much as possible. The guidelines are currently not finalized, however the workgroup feels it cannot hold off on the process any longer. If alterations need to be made after the state guidelines are finalized, they will be. Artisans who already have a well developed existing portfolios will be able to submit it for review at this time as well. Two members of the workgroup (Jennifer Swain – Northern Tier

Cultural Alliance, and Andi Willis – Elk County Council on the Arts) have been involved with the drafting and review of the state guidelines. Certification / Jurying is the first step in ensuring the quality of those involved in this project.

Develop a Network of Existing Retail Partners – One key component of this project is to try to increase the likelihood of finding locally made artisan projects in shops and galleries throughout the region. The key to this is identifying retail partners who are interested in these locally made products and helping develop relationships between them and the artisans. This retail network will also be the backbone for the proposed artisan trail and web retail site.

- Currently, 43 Galleries have been identified throughout the region as strong potentials to be part of this retail network. The Physical Retail committee is in the process of contacting them to share additional information about the project and gather their interest in participating in upcoming grant applications. We anticipate that we will have approximately 30 willing to participate in our first round of projects which will hopefully be funded by ARC in the Spring 2008, and will revolve around the artisan trail, and web retail.

PA Wilds Artisan Trail – We are proposing the creation of an artisan trail that would connect the existing Route 6 Artisan Trail with new trails to be developed throughout the PA Wilds Region. This will create new partnerships and build upon relationships that already exist.

- As this trail will link our retail partners together and provide the inventory for the Web Retail Site, a big component is inventory management to keep duplicate sales from happening (web and in-store), and to provide a way to track sales relating to the project. Funding will be requested from DCED to support the trail initiative. The inventory management component is further explained in the Web Retail Recommendation.

PA Wilds Web Site – The development of a Web Retail Site to provide sales for locally made artisan products has also been recommended. Initially, the galleries will provide the inventory for the web site, with artisans being able to directly list products starting in year two of the web site. A stand alone URL will be established with links developed as portals with all of the marketing entities within the region including: visitpa.com, pawilds.com, parout6.com and all of the local TPAs. The primary entry point to this retail site will hopefully be PAWilds.com.

- Fortress Studios, a web design firm located in the PA Wilds Region has started to develop a product aimed at providing web-based sales and marketing for individual artisans. They met with the artisan workgroup to discuss tailoring this project to meet the needs of the workgroup, and the artisan workgroup agreed to work with them on this project. This web portal will provide opportunities for galleries and artisans to post products to the web site, for artisans to each have their individual web pages, and to allow the customer to sort and search for products in a number of ways. The other feature that they offer is the ability to have artisans belong to different groups (PA Wilds, Route 6 Artisan Trail, and Lumber Heritage Region) that will customize the way their page looks and which artisans are represented based on how the customer enters the web retail site. The default design will feature the PA Wilds branding. If

someone enters through the visitPA site, PA Wilds.com, any individual TPA sites, or some other PA Wilds related site, the templates and artisans will only be those from the 12 counties of the PA Wilds and will feature the PA Wilds look and feel.

If someone enters through the Route 6 Artisan Trail Site, or the Lumber Heritage Site, the site will feature artisans from each of their regions respectively, and take on the look and feel of their sites. Fortress Studios will process the credit card sales (in store & on line), transfer payment to the appropriate party via electronic funds transfer, schedule and pay for shipping, and provide the retail partners with an inventory management tool that links the in-store inventory with the web inventory.

This tool will also provide tracking possibilities to provide input on the success of the web sales and the artisan trail. The web retail site will also provide a tool for artisans to submit their portfolio for certification / jurying to become involved in the initiative. The use of Fortress Studios was suggested by Linda Devlin, the Chair of our Web Design Committee, and a member of the PA Wilds Marketing Corporation.

Fortress Studios is a business that was started by a few of the Web Developers who worked for Adelpia Communications, and have decades of experience developing Enterprise Level systems. Fortress Studios has indicated that they see the need to hire an additional employee(s) once the system is active for maintenance, training, support, and further development. A price quote for this service has been obtained for inclusion in the ARC grant that is submitted for FY 2008 funding.

PA Wilds Artisan Display – The workgroup suggests the development and purchase of a traveling display that features PA Wilds specific artisans, the wide range of available products, and the quality of our artisans. This will be used at events both within the PA Wilds Region, and outside the region. Potential uses include arts and heritage related festivals, as well as artisan and sales related trade shows.

- A price estimate has been obtained for the development and production of this display and has been included in the ARC Grant for FY 2008 funding. The design cannot happen until after artisans have been juried and selected to be featured in the display. WE anticipate feature at least one and potentially multiple artisans from various artistic media. Once funding is received, additional price quotes can be obtained for this project.

Marketing and Branding Guidelines – The Artisan workgroup asked the PA Wilds Marketing Corporation to develop a series of guidelines relating to artisan and galleries use of the PA Wilds Brand to market their products. The Marketing Corporation indicated that they would defer the guidelines to the Artisan Workgroup.

- The artisan workgroup's guidelines will be based on the jurying guidelines from PA Artisan Guild, and artisans being from the PA Wilds Region. This only applies to the PA Wilds Artisans. Artisans from LHR and Route 6 will have to meet guidelines set by each of those organizations in

order to use their branding, allowing flexibility in each organization being able to meet its brand promise.

Marketing and Branding Materials – It is recommended that marketing materials be developed to further establish the PA Wilds Brand as it relates to artisan products. Recommended marketing materials include: artisan trail brochures, links to web retail through appropriate web sites, hang tags, PA Wilds Packaging, etc. The Marketing Corporation is the obvious choice for the development and distribution of these materials.

- The development of these materials will need to occur shortly. There is currently an artisan component to the PAWilds.com website, however getting artisans listed is problematic until the jurying process has been completed. Each TPA indicated that they will be uploading some artisans ASAP to provide some data in this section. Ideally, this can be expanded when funding is received, avoiding duplication, but still promoting local artisans while the structure is developed for the long term sustainability for this project.

Education and Workforce Development – Basically, offering educational workshops related to art and small business development for artisans. This will be overseen by the education council partners as they are vendor neutral and can work with any educational provider in the country (obviously using local and state resources when possible). Other educational partners include the Northern Tier Cultural Alliance who offers educational programming and expanding their delivery from their service region to the entire PA Wilds Region, and Route 6 who also offers programming and expanding it from their service region to the entire PA Wilds Region.

- We have been planning a core marketing materials workshop for Spring 2008 which will provide artisans with the template, writing assistance, and photographers to develop their portfolio. At this time, portfolios will also be review for certification and jurying. The workshops for 2008 will be offered using local resources, as they do not match up with the timelines of most grant applications. A request for funding to support the core marketing materials workshop and 3 other workshops for the 2009 program year has been submitted to the Route 6 Heritage Corporation. Trainingpa.com has volunteered their website as a free marketing tool to get word out about educational opportunities, and other marketing and recruitment tools will be used as well.

Special Events – Creating and/or Supporting artisan related events in the PA Wilds Region.

- Discussion has been held regarding the hosting of a buyers day for Elicotville, NY shop owners that will feature PA Wilds Wood Artisan Products. In addition, the workgroup would like to support existing events in the region. This support can come in the form of providing them with access to our artisan data base, to eventually providing the PA Wilds Artisan Display at their event.

Managing RFPs for Large Projects – This is a long range goal that would involve working with artisans to work collaboratively to bid and fill orders that are too large for them to fill individually.

- Limited progress has been made on this initiative, with the exception of working with DCNR on the Bald Eagle Facility (see below).

Furnishing DCNR and other State Buildings with Local Products – The Artisan Workgroup would like to encourage state and other public buildings/areas to use locally made artisan products in their design and décor when possible.

- Bob Veilleux has been attending Design Team meetings for the Bald Eagle Nature Inn project and has shared examples of various artisan related products that can be incorporated into the facility. A electronic copy of the document will be shared with the PA Wilds Marketing Team, DCNR and DCED.

Develop an Artisan Retail or Display Space at a High Profile State Facility in the PA Wilds Region – Originally, this was recommended for SB Elliot, but another high visibility, high traffic facility would also work. The purpose of this space would be to expose visitors to the available products and encourage them to travel into the rest of the PA Wilds Region to experience them firsthand.

- Other than being included in the recommendations, no action has occurred with this yet.

As mentioned in the beginning of this document, the advancement towards implementing the recommendations has been completed without funding of any kind to support this initiative. It has been a grassroots efforts of local artisans, non-profit agencies, civic groups, and others who have been volunteering their time to this project and away from other projects because of their dedication in adding value to local artisan creations and products to improve the regional economy. Many others have simply volunteered their time to be involved. The workgroup has requested funding to support this project through the Appalachian Regional Commission, has a grant through DCNR (LHR Heritage Grant) to support the initiative, has requested funding through DCNR (Route 6 Heritage Grant for Year 2 of the project). The workgroup also hopes to receive some level of support from DCED to move this project forward.

The planning is pretty much done, now we need the funding resources to move forward. Partners have expressed their commitment to continue donating their time to the project so that grant funding can be used to implement initiatives rather than hiring staff.

Despite challenges, the core group is still motivated, and is really looking forward to receiving the funding needed to take the project to the next step. Organizing any project that includes 12 or more counties, and 3 distinct but similar groups such as PA Wilds, Route 6, and the LHR has challenges. These partnerships and the private sector base of artisans and volunteers will lead to long term sustainability. More private sector businesses and artisans that can benefit from this effort, will result in a better opportunity for long-term benefits for the region. There have been concerns presented that things are moving slowly, but as with any major new project, the end result is only as good as the plan and the ability to build in long term partner involvement.

The workgroup views this project as an Economic Development Project that should benefit the artisans and our regional economy, plus provide a new product to promote to visitors. It takes time to research, plan, identify key partners, and put together requests for funding. In 18 months, by utilizing research, and reviewing best practices from other established artisan regions, this volunteer workgroup has accomplished what had taken other areas including North Carolina, Kentucky, and West Virginia, several years to pull together. Each and every member of the Workgroup who has been active in this project should be proud of what they have accomplished, and look forward to great things to come!