“Forty years ago, if an American man or woman meant to have an artistic career, you got on the train to New York. Today, you can be a violinist in North Carolina, a writer in Iowa, a painter in Utah.” – Garrison Keillor, March 29, 1990 Like many businesses here, the Reader is participating in an exciting mission to help position our Quad Cities community as a top-tier Midwestern destination for people to live, work, and play. We believe very strongly that one vertical segment of that effort is the vitality of the region’s arts and culture. Six months ago, in our Fall Arts Guide, I wrote, “We have the makings of a Midwest Arts Mecca here in the Quad Cities.” The vastness of our region’s cultural equity is documented weekly in these pages. Culturally, there’s more to do than ever in the Quad Cities. The arts are good business for all kinds of reasons. The arts are assisting community leaders in areas of urban renewal, cultural tourism, and workforce development, as well as population retention and attraction. While many have acknowledged that we have a huge wealth of reasons to work, live, or play in the Quad Cities related to the arts, what are we actually doing about it?

One of the suggestions from our arts guide six months ago was to establish a joint marketing agreement between the dozens of arts presenters, business and development organizations, and government leaders in the Quad Cities area. A portal web site would be the initial effort to begin the co-branding concept that would place our community in the nation’s general consciousness for reasons other than flooding. We suggested a three- to five-year agreement for all parties to co-promote themselves when and where appropriate as part of the Midwest Arts Mecca. Since last fall, a number of exciting things have been lining up to ensure that this joint marketing or regional branding effort comes to fruition this year.

Arts Mecca Identity Created

For a co-branding or joint marketing effort to work, those participating needed a symbol or icon that would help create the dialogue regarding a regional destination for the arts. This branding tool, as seen on this cover, was the result of collaboration between artist members of MidCoast Fine Arts’ Executive Committee. Larry Devilbiss, area arts educator and satire artist, drafted the original concept. The typography and digital-design touches were provided by Terry Rathje, another area arts educator and multimedia artist. The concentric circles are not only meant to target the viewer’s eye to our location but refer to the fact that, except for New York City, more people reside within a 300-mile radius of the Quad Cities than any other place in America. The logo is “freeware”— free to anyone who wishes to use it in furthering the cause of positioning the Quad Cities as a “Mecca” for the arts.

QCCVB Signs On

In February of this year, the Quad Cities Convention and Visitor Bureau convened its annual marketing retreat. Out of this session the Bureau established its marketing goals and priorities for the following fiscal year. Area professionals in the hospitality, restaurant, transit, casino, festival, media, and retail industries were presented an overview of the Arts Mecca vision. Subsequently, the CVB has made “Market Quad Cities as Midwest Arts Mecca” one of its top 10 marketing goals for the year 2001-02. This effort will include placing the Arts Mecca logo/link on the Bureau’s web site, working with local arts organizations to create an all-inclusive arts brochure, and targeting national and regional media that cover the arts.

Portal Web Site Construction Begins

With a logo created and area tourism professionals signing on, the need for a portal web site that would tie all of the advocates together, as well as provide end users one-stop shopping for links to all things cultural in the Quad Cities, became a priority. The concept for a portal site is simple in that area arts organizations, small and large, will be encouraged to use the freeware Arts Mecca logo in their collateral materials, such as brochures, print ads, letterhead, reports, websites, etc. In return their organization's hyperlinked logo will be made available at the Arts Mecca portal Web site. In tandem with this effort, non-arts organizations, such as area chambers and development groups, as well as city and county governments, would also be encouraged to participate in this reciprocating joint marketing effort. Ideally, critical mass will be reached through mutual promotion, creating an increase both locally and regionally for the cultural profile of the Quad Cities. Such increased awareness and unified access to information relating to arts activities, events, and organizations will help accelerate our region's ability to compete as a top-tier Midwestern destination.

To this end, MidCoast Fine Arts, with support from the *River Cities' Reader*, contracted with the Augustana Web Author's Guild to build the portal web site. Organizations and individuals interested in participating are encouraged to visit www.artsmecca.org

Riverfront Arts Brochure

A unique collaboration between River Action, MidCoast Fine Arts, and Quad City Arts, with funding support from the QCCVB, the Rock Island District, DavenportOne, and the Riverboat Development Authority, a 10" x 36" multi-fold color guide to art and art attractions on our riverfronts will be published in June. Forty thousand four- color pieces will be produced and distributed via the CVB network, Familiarization Tours covering 10 states, the Illinois Weekend Getaway newspaper insert, local libraries, school districts, and chambers of commerce. The brochure covers four guided tours of over 50 art pieces and sites along 40 miles of the Mississippi waterfront, from a Sol Lewitt in downtown Davenport to the Hispanic heritage sculpture by the Family Museum in Moline. The piece is being designed by area artist and educator Bruce Walters and relies heavily on the hundreds of hours Walters has poured into a web site documenting public art in the Quad Cities at www.qc-art.com. While this piece will not cover all aspects of the arts in the QCs, it does share in the same vision of an Arts Mecca concept by branding our community as an arts destination worth visiting.

Mayoral Proclamations

Thanks to the initiative of Bettendorf Mayor Ann Hutchinson, and with the assistance of Dean Schroeder, Executive Director of MidCoast Fine Arts, official Mayoral Proclamations from Quad Cities' mayors are rolling in, demonstrating bi-state, multi-jurisdictional support for the Arts Mecca concept, and declaring our communities such a Mecca. A portion of the proclamation states, "Whereas it is time to bring recognition to the collective cultural wealth that is our community…."

Business Community Showcases the Concept

The Illinois Quad City Chamber of Commerce will be releasing its Business News Quarterly over the next two weeks. Its focus is the arts in the Quad Cities and its importance to our regional business climate. This glossy four-color magazine will showcase the strengths of our area's visual and performing arts, as well as an article regarding the Arts Mecca initiative and its goals. If you are not already receiving the Business News Quarterly, you may contact the Chamber at (309) 757-5416 to request your own copy.

MeccaTV @ The Airport

How about an Arts & Culture cable channel showcasing all the Quad Cities has to offer? The first steps of such an endeavor will establish a pilot series to be aired this fall at the Quad City International Airport. MidCoast Fine Arts, in collaboration with AdMospheres airport media and advertising, was successful in writing a grant to the Riverboat Development Authority (the grant recipients from the Scott County Regional Authority will be announced next week) to seed the creative and technical startup costs associated with creating a multi-media "cable ready" identity and format for broadcasting vignettes, documentaries, or short videos about our area's arts and cultural activities. A Quad City-wide "Call For Entries" will be issued for all non-profit arts, festival, and cultural presenters to submit their video documentaries for consideration in this untapped medium. In addition, a split-screen format will provide viewers a scrolling arts calendar and event information. The first series of these will be showcased on 42" high-definition plasma screens at the baggage-claim area of the newly expanded QCIA later this fall.

ArtStroll Bigger Than Ever

An event that epitomizes the joint marketing, or co-branding, efforts behind the Arts Mecca concept, is the annual ArtStroll hosted this August 3rd in downtown Davenport. Organized in part by MidCoast Fine Arts and Davenport One, this free four-block party for the arts will feature the unveiling of Davenport's first public giant kaleidoscope by artist Tom Chouteau; an auction of over three dozen 8' tall art banners; the public premiere of Art-O-Mobile—MidCoast's traveling art center; classic cars, exhibits and demonstrations by various arts organizations, jugglers, street vendors, and a myriad of open houses sponsored by businesses along the stroll providing music, food, and much more. The second gigantic group photo "Great Day in the Quad Cities Portrait II" will celebrate all regional musicians and music supporters. This street-level celebration of the performing and visual arts in the community combines an "Arts Mecca" of presenting partners blending creative energies on multiple stages and in the streets.

What Can You Do?

Attend, Invest, and Communicate. Attend area performances, exhibits, museums, galleries, etc. Invest by purchasing subscription series tickets or joining an arts organization's membership. But most of all, communicate to your neighbors, family, and friends that we are all living in a Midwest Arts Mecca.

Note: *To participate in the Arts Mecca joint marketing initiative, visit www.artsmecca.org and*

follow the links to join.