

In Paducah, Creativity Is a Way of Life

Paducah is located at the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers, in the center of the United States. As early settlers traveled by river and over land through the mountains, the reuse of precious fabric cultivated a uniquely American art form: quilting. Fabric scraps of all kinds—clothing, flour sacks, feed sacks, and bandanas—were sewn into patchwork quilts that would warm families as they journeyed across America.

The National Quilt Museum of the United States (NQM) celebrates those quilters who draw inspiration from the world around them and manifest their creative thoughts and emotions with needle and thread. Through displays of diverse quilt and fiber art exhibits, the National Quilt Museum recognizes quilting as an important segment of American art. Recent exhibits spotlight social issues and the dedication taken to preserve the beauty and cultural value of textiles:

- “Say Your Piece—Black Women: Mothers, Martyrs, and Misunderstood” is a visual journey that includes a combination of symbolism and inspiration attached to the African diaspora, heightening the sense of cultural awareness.
- “Tribute to the Civil Rights Movement: Quilted Swing Coats.” African American women made major contributions to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. These story quilts created in African American traditional quilting design and construction technique, structured in the shape of swing coats, illustrate their stories.
- “Confessions of a Textile Conservator.” Harold Mailand, an American Institute of Conservation Fellow, shares 30 quilts from his personal

collection of textiles from India, Germany, England, and America.

The American Quilter's Society's annual Paducah QuiltWeek is the second-largest quilt show in the United States. QuiltWeek attracts quilters from around the world to view "technically perfect" quilts that compete in many categories, including traditional hand-stitched pieces and quilts made on sewing machines. Classes and workshops offer innovative quilting techniques and the latest quilting trends along with time-honored traditions and identifying fabric from the past. The American Quilter's Society recognizes quilting excellence by awarding prize money in Paducah that exceeds any other offered in the U.S.

Paducah's creative culture has evolved through educational and entrepreneurial partnerships to become an incubator for developing digital programs meant to carry creativity into the future. Sprocket, a nonprofit digital economic development organization, sponsors international competitions bringing entrepreneurs together to create new solutions, products, or services. Winning projects and year-long residencies have been awarded to creatives from India working on rural health care solutions and a



fashion designer looking to create digital design tools for the textile industry.

Paducah's Maiden Alley Cinema hosts the annual Cinema Systems, the only lesbian film festival in the United States. Lifting the visions and voices of lesbian filmmakers and providing a dedicated space to publicly showcase lesbian art attracts participants from many countries. Featured filmmakers in 2022 came from: United Kingdom, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, South Africa, and Canada.

Rivers' Edge International Film Festival has provided the opportunity to work outside of the sub-network of Crafts and Folk Art. Paducah participated in the Small World Film Festival, organized by Bradford, Creative City of Film (UK), in 2017. The festival theme was "My City" and entries were open to all members of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). Paducah entered a film produced by "The Mountain Workshops," a program of Western Kentucky University. The five winning films were screened at the 2017 UCCN Annual Meeting in Enghien-les-Bains, France. Films highlighted include: Santos (Brazil); Galway (Ireland); Nagoya (Japan); Bradford (UK); Montreal (Canada); and Rome (Italy).

Bradford, Creative City of Film, continued to partner with Paducah and provided a judge for River's Edge International Film Festival. David Wilson, director of Bradford UNESCO City of Film, visited Paducah and was an active participant in the festival.

This small city of 27,000 people is proudly the home of Paducah Symphony Orchestra, a symphony chorus, and a local chamber choir. The Symphony is currently partnering in an innovative approach to affordable housing and economic development, incorporating art and music to enrich Paducah's creative culture and economy. The Dunlap project will create a community for living, learning, and working inside the historic Jetton Schoolhouse.

Paducah works to embody UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals in each creative project. Paducah was the first city in west Kentucky to approve a Fairness Ordinance, which prohibits discrimination based on gender or sexuality. The two major hospital systems in the city provide accessible healthcare in their facilities and offsite for equitable treatment. With two high-performing school districts, two regional college campuses, and a

community and technical college, quality education is at the forefront of Paducah's goals. The partnership between the City of Paducah, McCracken County, and Paducah Rotary Club enables all high school graduates to complete an Associate Degree (two years) of college at no charge. Furthermore, "Life Under the Water" is paramount to Paducah's success as a thriving river town. Local conservationists and organizations continue to find new and creative ways to protect the native river species while sustaining the heritage of the river system.

Paducah is proud to be part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. The work continues to utilize creativity to build a sustainable city. In Paducah, creativity is not merely an attribute; it is a way of life.

Mary Hammond
(Focal Point of Paducah)