



THE ARTS PART OF THE SOLUTION

REBUILDING COMMUNITY IDENTITY *From Plant Closings to Performance Openings*

For more than a century, Lancaster was known world-wide as the center of glass tableware manufacturing. Then, in the early 1980s, the Anchor Hocking Corporation was sold. Many civic-minded people were transferred, one plant closed, jobs and significant tax revenue were lost. With the economic downturn and the loss of identity, community spirit was severely dampened.

Late in 1984 a proposal was made, which some considered preposterous, that Lancaster present a major arts festival. In July of that year, volunteers, civic groups and businesses joined forces

to present an outdoor picnic and pops concert by the Columbus Symphony Orchestra at Ohio University's Lancaster campus. The community responded with contributions of money and services and the number of volunteers topped 600. In 1985, the Lancaster Festival began with eight days of music, dance, theater and the visual arts in the streets, churches, parks and public buildings of Lancaster.



At the end of the 1987 season, the Columbus Symphony withdrew and a new music director was engaged who formed the festival's own resident orchestra—at a time many orchestras nationally were struggling to survive. With orchestra musicians staying with local families, the community developed a sense of ownership of the festival. Linda Morton Fisher, principal bassoonist with the Festival Orchestra since 1988, describes this effect: "The people and the camaraderie are so great in this little town! It's rare to find a smaller city with so much love for the arts."

Each year, with support from the Ohio Arts Council, the festival draws tens of thousands of people to Fairfield County for performances by renowned classical and

popular musicians and its own fully professional chorale, as well as exhibitions by internationally acclaimed artists. This success has helped create an environment where other arts organizations and programs can flourish. Three new museums have opened, and the city supports two additional museums. And local businesses also reap the benefits, which all see increases in business during the festival. "This wonderful event brings out not only the people of Lancaster but many from around the state and the country who fill hotel and motel rooms," comments Pam Berry, manager of the Lancaster Hampton Inn.

In 2009, with the festival in its 25th year, community spirits are high, and the city of Lancaster now has a new cultural identity. As Ruth Drinkle, a local community historian and author, notes, "This one activity has pulled the community together in a most exciting way."

Bringing
Unity to
Communities

Cultural
Participation
and Building
Audiences

FAIRFIELD COUNTY
Lancaster Festival
Lancaster, Ohio



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