

Downtown Promotion Reporter

Targeting Demographic Groups

Marketing to artists as gentrifying homebuyers

We all know that artists have long been at the vanguard of urban gentrification, and that homeownership is a win-win for residents and municipalities. So why not market directly to artists as homeowners? That's the idea behind an Artist Relocation Program that only in the last few years has put Paducah, KY (pop. 26,310), on the map of arts-driven revitalization, and completely turned around a blighted neighborhood adjacent to downtown.

The program is a partnership between the city — with new zoning in its Lower Town neighborhood enabling artists to maintain gallery, studio, and living space under one roof, and the local Paducah Bank, which is offering 100 percent financing, 7 percent interest, and 30-year-fixed loans for the purchase and rehabilitation of structures above appraised value.

Come see, and qualify for a loan

Artists considering buying a home through the program must visit to make sure it's a place they wish to live, and qualify for a loan with Paducah Bank.

The bank was persuaded by the city that an exceptional incentive offer would be necessary to make Lower Town Paducah marketable as a relocation destination.

After the program's relocating artists spent one million of the bank's money in the program's first

eight months and then another million in the next four months, the bank removed its wait-and-see lending limits.

National promotion on a low budget

Since 2000, Paducah has had 45 artists of various disciplines, genders, and races relocate to Lower Town as homeowners, "from New York to San Francisco and everywhere in between," Barone says.

Once the program was adopted by the city, Barone and program partner Tom Barnett, director of planning, decided against advertising it locally or regionally, as they needed a critical mass of artist-homeowners, 30 to 40 they figured, to turn the neighborhood around.

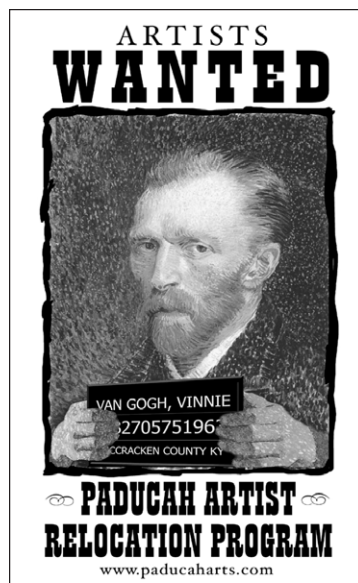
"It was going to be [promoted] nationally," Barone says. "To go from the whole pool of artists that this country had, to get 30 or 40, we thought that was feasible."

But with an annual advertising budget of only \$17,000 for the first three years of the program, "it was

important to get articles written about the program," he says.

Talk up a good story with media

When Barone talked to publishers about running ads in their publications, he also pitched "what we



"Vinnie" Van Gogh has been a favorite poster boy for the Paducah Artist Relocation Program.

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were doing here, and told them that I thought it was something their artist-subscribers needed to know about. Here was a city that was giving incentives to artists to relocate to their town. The part that intrigued them was that it was a city-run program, and the incentives were substantial.”

The first national publications Bar-one approached were *Art Calendar*, a business opportunities magazine for artists, and *Craft Report*, a business magazine for ceramic, glass, and other craft artists.

“We wanted a diverse group of artists so I wanted to approach a lot of different magazines as they all had different audiences,” Barone says.

As for the ads created for the program, which appear on the Paducah Arts website and T-shirts the

city sells, “we wanted to make them unique and stand out,” Barone says. “We had to get the biggest bang for our buck, as we didn’t have a lot of money to burn, so we went with humor that bordered on absurdity. We always equated ourselves with major metropolitan areas with great art scenes. The idea of the name Paducah alongside New York and Paris got artists’ attention, and they responded.” Barone, an artist and Paducah homeowner, created the ads himself, and shows artists interested in the program around when they come to town.

Barone also applied for all the awards he could to get attention and recognition for the program.

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