



# Cleveland's Gordon Square Arts District: The Art of Economic Development

Theaters, Galleries Spark Real Estate Activity and a Retail Revival



The Gordon Square Arts District has been the driver for economic vitality in Cleveland's Detroit Shoreway neighborhood, as this festive scene along Detroit Avenue portrays.

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CLEVELAND, OH--(Marketwire - 04/08/10) - The [Gordon Square Arts District](#) in Cleveland's Detroit Shoreway neighborhood is rewriting the way the arts can rapidly shape neighborhood redevelopment. It's a unique economic dynamo, created by a team of innovative nonprofit organizations for this aging, historic working-class enclave on the bluff of Lake Erie.

Theaters and galleries help anchor the neighborhood, along with waves of new shops, restaurants and housing. Ultimately, \$30 million in seminal projects is predicted to cash in at more than \$400 million in commercial and residential real estate development, plus hundreds of permanent jobs and a projected \$317 million of economic output in Cleveland by 2013. Here is how this came about:

The executive directors and boards of three participating non-profits -- [Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization](#), [Cleveland Public Theatre](#) and [Near West Theatre](#) -- displayed courage and vision to

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break the mold and create the Gordon Square Arts District. In doing so, they agreed to limit independent fund raising and make fund raising for the arts district a priority, delegate considerable governance to a board with a majority of independent directors and promote the betterment of the whole through other collaborations.

Other cities have employed the arts as a tool for development. But the Gordon Square Arts District is believed to be the first instance where existing nonprofits, already owners of established theaters and programming, have coalesced to do planning, fund raising, renovation, new construction and infrastructure improvements. Nearly sixty percent of the \$30 million goal has already been raised from public and private donors.

The three participating nonprofits also have a common mission of social justice and working with underserved populations -- demonstrated in part by a \$1 million neighborhood responsibility fund. It will be used to give current residents and businesses advantages such as low- or no-interest loans, abated increases in property tax or business improvement district assessments, transportation and human services like day care and job placement.

Only three years old, the Gordon Square Arts District has attracted 33 new shops, restaurants, artists' studios and other new businesses, resulting in a commercial vacancy rate of just 3 to 4 percent. A [\\$3 million streetscape redesign](#) dresses up 15 blocks of the main thoroughfare, Detroit Avenue, with new sidewalks, lighting and buried utility wires. The central eight blocks also have public art, benches, trees, pavers and wider sidewalks to encourage pedestrian traffic and outdoor dining.

The Capitol Theatre, a one-time vaudeville and silent film theater at W. 65th and Detroit Avenue, has undergone a \$7 million renovation. It opened last fall as an independent and specialty film house, also showing quality Hollywood features.

Plans are already being finalized for a new \$5 million performance center for Near West Theatre, a community theater with an emphasis on youth, and the \$9.4 million renovation of Cleveland Public Theatre, the oldest standing theater in Cleveland and one of the nation's leading experimental & political performance venues, has begun. The sites of the Capitol, Near West and Cleveland Public theaters are within a two-minute walk of one another.

An analysis by Team NEO, an economic development clearinghouse for 16 Northeast Ohio counties, shows Gordon Square Arts District's dramatic economic impact. It is pumping hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services, personal income and tax revenues into Cleveland, across Northeast Ohio and even the rest of the state, while creating almost 800 jobs in Cleveland alone. The district will have created \$317 million of economic output in Cleveland by 2013, when construction on its five major projects is to be completed. When the direct and supply-chain effects across Ohio are factored in, the impact rises to \$436 million.

Despite its phenomenally quick redevelopment, the Gordon Square Arts District is a culmination of years of

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effort. The Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization, aided by enlightened public officials, including Councilman Matt Zone and Mayor Frank Jackson, has been working on reviving the aging neighborhood since 1973. The community group has helped generate significant redevelopment, including a [revived housing market](#) that includes Vintage Development Group's Battery Park, a \$100-million project of 328 condominiums.

Meanwhile, three of Cleveland's civic giants -- Richard W. Pogue (Jones Day), Albert B. Ratner (Forest City Enterprises) and Thomas C. Sullivan (RPM International Inc.) -- saw a novel, if unconventional, prospect for reinvestment in Cleveland. They started recruiting believers, including Larry Schultz (Calfee Halter & Griswold LLP), who chairs the arts district. Their vision was to extend an arts continuum, with its economic benefits, from Cleveland's eastern suburbs and the University Circle cultural center, through downtown to Cleveland's West Side. Without the clarity of their keen business sense, the Gordon Square Arts District may well have remained a great, but sadly missed opportunity.

Testimonials about progress in the neighborhood are easy to find. "It's the activity that draws people and investment," said Josh Kabat, who opened the Reddstone Neighborhood Eatery and Watering Hole on W. 76th Street, bought a house in the neighborhood and then bought two more he's renting out. "The theaters put people in the neighborhood." He added that it's also a safe neighborhood with a proactive police presence.

The ripple effect extends several blocks south, where parishioners at St. Colman's Church on W. 65th Street recently succeeded in persuading the Cleveland Catholic Diocese to remove their church from its list of churches to be closed. The Rev. Robert Begin, the pastor, has noted that the progress in Detroit Shoreway was a persuasive part of the neighborhood's reason to keep the church open. "Anything that makes a neighborhood a place to come to, rather than go through, is a big help," said Begin.

The Gordon Square Arts District is taking concrete steps, through its independent governance, the creation of a Business Improvement District and the \$1 million neighborhood responsibility fund, to ensure the long-term sustainability of neighborhood improvements and that residents and long-time stakeholders are not left behind. Rather, they will participate in the benefits of its success.

This isn't just an art studio in someone's garage trying to become an arts district. The Gordon Square Arts District is establishing the infrastructure for an empowered organization that will position Detroit Shoreway, a neighborhood with more than 17,000 residents, for sustainable, long-term impact and development. It is setting new standards for community development and neighborhood responsibility.

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## Contact:

Joy Roller  
Executive Director, Gordon Square Arts District  
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