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Berea

finding high-tech ways to highlight its old-time tradition

Berea is known far and wide for its excellence in arts and crafts, a tradition that dates back to the 1800s when Berea College President **Thomas Frost** implemented a crafts production program to help students pay for their education.

It is from this heritage that the Madison County city came to be known as the “Folk Arts and Crafts Capital of Kentucky.” Now, its leaders are finding new ways to merge this legacy of the past with the technology of the present.

The community recently debuted a project that uses modern tools to connect tourists with art and the people who create it. Studio Artists at Berea is

a series of videos designed to introduce the city and its artists.

The initiative lets visitors see artists at work and become more familiar with the processes they use. In addition, it gives them a deeper insight into

what life is like as a working artist.

The videos play at kiosks in locations throughout the community, including the Kentucky Artisan Center

and the Berea Welcome Center, as well as the city's major hotels and motels.

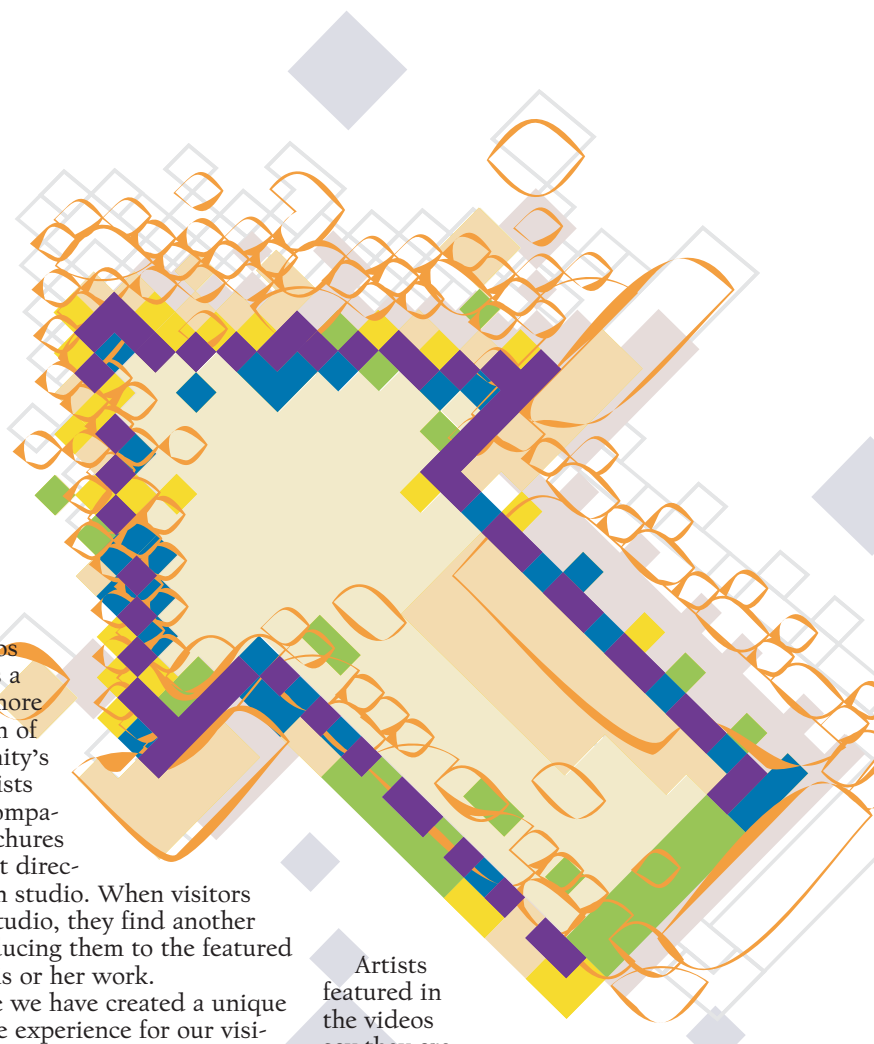
The videos give viewers a glimpse of more than a dozen of the community's working artists and are accompanied by brochures that map out directions to each studio. When visitors arrive at a studio, they find another video introducing them to the featured artist and his or her work.

“I believe we have created a unique museum-like experience for our visitors by connecting our artists to the visitor with similar presentations, explanation of art and working artists, and making available the video of the artist process if the actual artist is not available,” says **Belle Jackson**, executive director of Berea Tourism. “I believe that this project is unique to Berea and is utilizing modern technology to connect the tourist with art and artists.”

Artists featured in the videos say they are excited to be able to tell their stories in their own words and to share their work and lives as artists with a wider audience. It is this excitement, says Jackson, that enriches the art experience for visitors.

City officials hope the Studio Artists at Berea initiative will help the community become synonymous with traditional arts and crafts.

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Berea at a Glance

"I believe this project with other ongoing marketing will continue to increase Berea's visibility as an art and craft center," says Jackson.

Local officials and artists alike have also realized the importance of utilizing the Internet. Information about the many galleries and artists in Berea is available online through Kentucky Artisan Heritage Trails at www.kaht.com, which spotlights arts and crafts such as woodwork, pottery, ironwork, fabric and antiques.

Some of the town's artists have taken technology into their own hands by marketing and selling their work through their own Web sites, allowing them to reach a much wider audience and increase their consumer base at a faster rate than they would through more traditional means of displaying and selling their work.

Many of these Web sites also allow users to contact the artists, giving patrons another avenue to feel connected to the art they buy and those who create it.

"Our planet is shrinking, and we in Berea must now compete on a world market," explains Jackson. "We can use the World Wide Web to tell our story, connect the artist and the consumer, and continue to celebrate our culture and heritage."

Helping to promote and preserve the city's identity and uniqueness by employing 21st century technology is one of the key New Cities Institute principles for ongoing success in an increasingly global market.

Jackson stresses that while the way people view and receive the traditional arts and crafts that have made Berea famous may change, the connection they feel to the art and artists will not.

"I believe today's consumers need to feel the hands of the potter left on that handmade mug. They want to know the jeweler and the inspiration for the necklace they will purchase," she says. "In this highly technical world where a click of a mouse moves us into space, I believe it is the hand-thrown mug, the hand-woven throw, the hand-touched art that grounds us and connects us as humans."

—NEWCITIES INSTITUTE STAFF

Mayor: Steve Connelly
Population: 13,230
Location: Berea is

in southern Madison County, near the edge of the Bluegrass region in central Kentucky. The city is located approximately 40 miles south of Lexington, just off Interstate 75. Berea, known as "The Folk Arts and Crafts Capital of Kentucky," is home to Berea College, Boone Tavern Hotel and Restaurant, Churchill Weavers and more than 40 craftsmen and gallery owners. Berea has a small-town atmosphere that is rich in cultural and historic roots, giving it a unique blend of Southern hospitality and Appalachian tradition. The city was recently recognized by *Southern Living* as one of the magazine's "favorite small towns."

History: In 1850 the area surrounding Berea, known as the Glade, was a small community with scattered farms and citizens who were sympathetic to the cause of emancipation. In 1853 a rich and politically ambitious man named Cassius M. Clay gave the Rev. John G. Fee a tract of land in the Glade free of cost. It was here that Fee established a church, which he called Berea College, and a small village. Fee named the village Berea, after a town in the Bible where people

"received the Word with all readiness of mind." Two years later, Berea



Berea College was recently ranked number one among comprehensive universities in the South by U.S. News & World Report.

College became the only Southern institute of higher learning to be integrated, and remained so for nearly 40 years. Berea's integration, along with

Fee's efforts to educate thousands of male slaves who became Union Army volunteers, contributed to the beginning of a rich history of tolerance. Decades later, in the 1890s, writers, missionaries, academics and teachers nationwide began to develop an interest in the traditions and culture of the Appalachian region. At once enthralled by its abundant culture and bothered by its poverty and isolation, Berea College donors were extremely interested in the coverlets many students brought to school with them in exchange for their tuition. Sensing that there was a national market for such traditional crafts, college president William Frost began the first Berea College Fireside

Industries. The school later built a loom house and hired a supervisor, whose job was to train the students

12 Principles for NewCities

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2. Encourage youth, diversity and inclusiveness
3. Feed the mind, nurture the soul
4. Embrace healthy living
5. Remain true to the city's uniqueness
6. Don't merely grow; plan and develop over time
7. Build beautifully and steward the environment
8. Cultivate leadership and citizen involvement
9. Recruit, retain and generate wealth
10. Mimic bigness, but think small
11. Rethink boundaries
12. Buy locally, sell globally

www.newcities.org

and maintain the quality of their work. Today Berea College is known as a premier producer of traditional arts and crafts and continually ranks as one of the foremost liberal arts schools in America.

Special Events and Attractions:

Berea offers a blend of Southern hospitality and Appalachian tradition. While in the city, visitors can learn how to create a rocking chair, make their own jewelry, or listen to traditional dulcimer music. The city features more than 16 antique shops in addition to three antique malls. Its restaurants offer a variety of options, with choices that range from soups and sandwiches to more traditional Appalachian fare. At the Kentucky Artisan Center, visitors can wander through the exhibit area to learn more about works from Kentucky artisans and the stories behind them. The center's retail areas feature a wide range



Historic Boone Tavern

of Kentucky products. Craft enthusiasts can also attend the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen fall and spring fairs, which feature more than 120 juried artists and craftsmen from Kentucky and neighboring states, as well as artists from across the country and Japan. The event is held over three

days in both the fall and spring. Other attractions are within a short distance, including Fort Boonesborough State Park, White Hall Historic Site, Constitution Square, Fort Harrod, Shaker Village of

Pleasant Hill, and Renfro Valley.

Native Sons and Daughters: the Rev. John Gregg Fee, Kentucky's most notable abolitionist and the founder of the City of Berea and Berea College ... James McCreary, governor from 1875 to 1879 ... Louise Frances Gilman Hutchins, M.D., was Berea's only pediatrician between 1939 and 1967. She also worked with the Mountain Maternal Health League during a time

when few physicians in the U.S. were concerned with women's health issues ... **Frances Estill Beauchamp** was born in Madison County in 1857 and was an active member of the Lexington Women's Christian Temperance Union and served as its president in 1895 ... **Laura Clay**

(www.womeninkentucky.com/site/reform/l_clay.html) was born in 1849 in Madison County and supported herself and her activism by becoming a farm manager. She was a passionate suffragist who believed that the women's vote should be extended by each state rather than a federal amendment ... **Mary Barr Clay** was president of the American Women Suffrage Association, an organization that helped women fight for the right to vote ... **Jane Stephenson**, who opened the New Opportunity School for Women in 1986, was born in Madison County ... **John Fenn** was awarded the Noble Prize in chemistry in 2002. He grew up in Berea and received his B.A. in chemistry from Berea College in 1937.

Web sites for additional information:

- www.berea.com
- www.cityofbera.com
- www.kentuckyartisancenter.ky.gov


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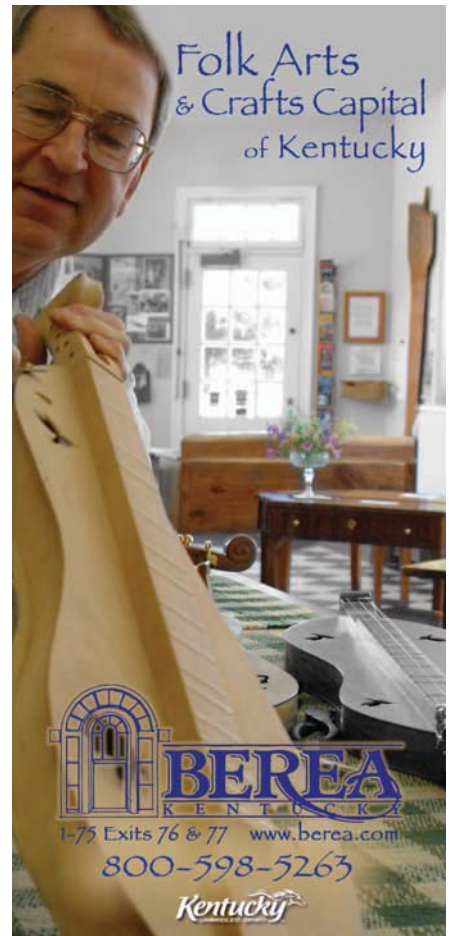
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