

Spotlight: Arlington Community Comes Together Through Art

Despite the isolation that the current public health emergency requires of all of us, the concept of community has never felt so important. Every day, we're seeing the ways people are reaching out to one another, to connect, to comfort, to offer resources or support or gratitude. For those of us involved in arts & culture here in the Commonwealth, this emphasis on community is not new, but rather baked into the very nature of our work. And in some very special places, these strong community networks are long in the making.



This week, we can see the power of art and community shining its brightest in Arlington through the work of the **Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture**. Earlier this month, two large, colorful, mask-shaped banners and lines of mask-shaped prayer flags were hung over the Arlington Service Station to express gratitude to our caregivers and essential workers. The display was the brainchild of Arlington Service Station's owner **Abe Salhi**, whose business sits squarely within the town's cultural district and fosters a deep relationship with the artistic hub around it. After he approached artist **Johnny Lapham**, who painted the station's signature design, and ACAC co-chair **Stewart Ikeda**, the project came to life through a series of partnerships that tied together town and public health officials, Arlington Public Art Curator Cecily Miller, Heritage Flag Company, and a team of local volunteers. The idea of one soon became the proud work of many, and the day of the display's hanging brought joy to its creators and onlookers alike.

The pace and ease at which Arlington's community sprung into action may feel spontaneous, but in reality, it is the result of years of effort and dedication to build strong networks within the town's many sectors. ACAC co-chair **Cristin Canterbury Bagnall** describes an ecosystem in Arlington that fosters relationships and works hard to integrate arts & culture beyond the boundaries of the cultural district. ACAC itself is formed with a "cross-pollination" design that emphasizes the voices of not only local artists and nonprofits, but also schools, libraries, and the Chamber of Commerce. By creating a structure in which coalition and partnership is embedded into its ideals, the community is able to create a culture where everyone is already "leaning forward", ready to offer support and collaboration whenever and wherever it is needed.

At MASSCreative, we are proud to highlight Arlington and ACAC's work not only as an example of the power of partnership in one specific instance, but also as a demonstration of how long-term relationship-building creates a context and culture that allow these inspiring moments to happen. The arts matter to us all, and there's no better way to celebrate that than through the power of community.