

Arts and Cultural Amenities



Portal to the Sculpture Garden located at Bethlehem's City Center complex



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■ Arts and Cultural Amenities Vision

Quality of life, tourism and recreation in Bethlehem each benefit from the City's arts and cultural amenities. In fact, Bethlehem is an arts and cultural hub for the region. Although most municipal comprehensive plans do not include a specific Arts and Cultural component, the City recognizes that an ongoing effort to continue to build our arts assets is important. Therefore, it is important to discuss how the City proposes to ensure ongoing arts and cultural partnerships Bethlehem.

Bethlehem's cultural arts scene is both an outlet for local creativity and an economic development asset. A local community of visual artists, craftspeople, musicians and others flourishes in Bethlehem fifty-two weeks a year. The for-profit and non-profit groups that channel this creative energy into organized events play a special role in promoting and enriching local quality of life.

The following goals help guide how the City of Bethlehem furthers the arts:

- Recognize the role that arts and the creative community play in making Bethlehem a first-class city attractive to prospective residents and employers.
- Facilitate local arts events by providing convenient venues, logistical support, and promotional assistance.
- Exert leadership in the arts community through the Bethlehem Fine Arts Commission.
- Help secure intergovernmental grants and other funding assistance for new arts-related facilities and other appropriate arts initiatives.

■ Arts and Cultural Amenities Overview

The artists themselves range from full-time professionals to serious part-timers and those who dabble only as time and energy permit. The people who help bring the work of local artists to the public eye include resident volunteers, students, donors, arts-related businesses, and non-profit partner organizations dedicated

A sculptured bust in Bethlehem's Sculpture Garden

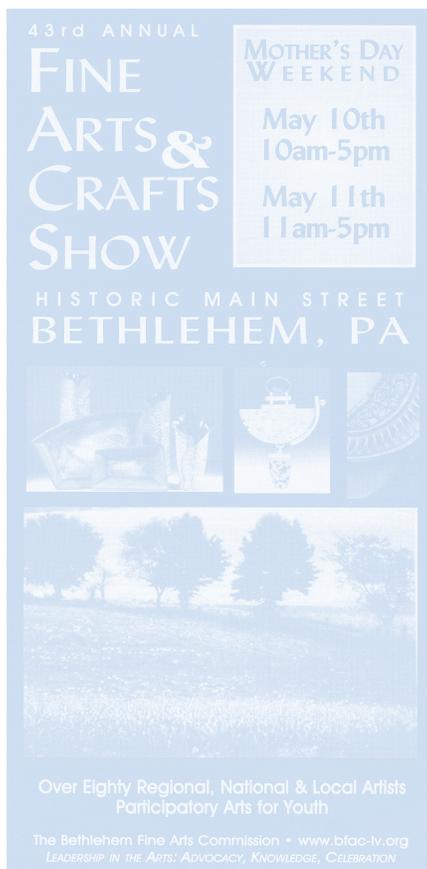




to cultivating creativity. Groups devoted to the arts are equally varied, including those that focus on a specific art form and those that have a more general mission. Lehigh University, Moravian College, and the Northampton Area Community College each offer academic majors related to fine arts. It is beyond the scope of this Comprehensive Plan to inventory and profile the myriad of large and small groups that make up Bethlehem's vibrant arts scene. A sampling of some of the community's established arts organizations, venues or events include the following:

The Bethlehem Fine Arts Commission

Bethlehem Fine Arts Commission display ad announcing an annual event



Bethlehem founded its Fine Arts Commission in 1963. It consists of twenty-five members who the Mayor appoints and Council approves. Fine Arts Commission responsibilities include advising City government on arts-related matters, furthering arts-related activities, and exerting local leadership in the fine arts field. The City provides the Fine Arts Commission with a moderate budget each year. In cooperation with many different partners, Fine Arts Commission volunteers plan and operate several recurring special events, including the following, among others:

- The Fine Arts Festival held on Main Street in downtown Bethlehem;
- A Summer Concert Series in the City's Sculpture Garden adjacent to City Hall;
- Juried Art Shows in the City Hall Rotunda;
- Tribute to the Arts Luncheons to publicly recognize local supporters of the arts;
- A Small Grant Program that offers funding assistance for specific fine arts activities undertaken by Bethlehem-based, non-profit arts organizations.

The Fine Arts Commission is working closely with City staff and others to determine how future City projects can more directly involve the local arts community to guide design elements. A current example of where the arts community can be specifically integrated into the design of a community project is the planned South Bethlehem Greenway. The Greenway is a long range project that will take many years to fully implement. The City anticipates that design and utilization of the Greenway will provide a variety of opportunities for local artists and public art.

Other Arts Partners

ArtsLehigh

ArtsLehigh is an all-university program designed to promote, integrate and facilitate the arts, creativity and an aesthetic sensibility throughout the curriculum, campus culture, and community. The program is premised on the conviction that the “arts” (including all aspects of the formal and informal visual, performing, literary and design arts) are directly related to everything we do with creativity, joy and style at the University and within our local community.

ArtsQuest and Banana Factory

ArtsQuest’s mission is “to celebrate arts and culture”. Through volunteers and paid staff, ArtsQuest provides quality cultural experiences for individuals and families. ArtsQuest may be best known for organizing Musikfest, Bethlehem’s summer mega-music festival. For a quarter-century, Bethlehem’s Musikfest has hosted local and world-famous musical talent in a 10-day long celebration every August. Musikfest has showcased the City to a wide audience and made Bethlehem an important stop on the cultural map. Beyond this signature event, ArtsQuest also hosts Christkindlmarkt, a holiday-celebration held every November and December.

ArtsQuest is headquartered in the Banana Factory Community Arts Center, a converted warehouse on 3rd Street in the heart of South Bethlehem. The Banana Factory is also a visual and performing arts incubator for local artists, providing studio space for local artists who create art in a variety of mediums.



The Banana Factory Community Arts Center located on W. 3rd Street on Bethlehem’s South Side



The Bach Choir

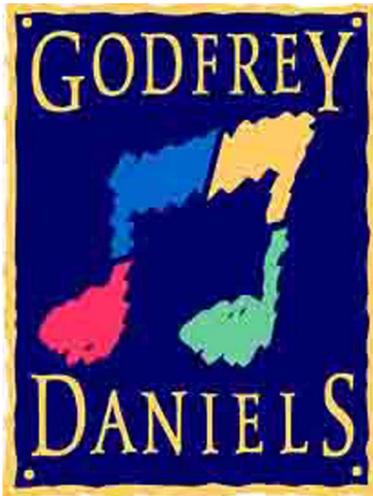


Bach Choir of Bethlehem

The Bach Choir of Bethlehem is the oldest American Bach Choir. Founded in 1898, the now-famous Choir has been attracting thousands of national and international visitors every May to its annual Bethlehem Bach Festival. The Choir is made up of 100 volunteer members with performances that include a fully professional orchestra and world-renowned soloists. During the past decade the Choir has received critical acclaim for several national and international performances.

Bethlehem Area Public Library

The Bethlehem Area Public Library provides books, music, periodicals and the use of personal computers free of charge to people in the Bethlehem region. The library's main branch is on Church Street adjacent to City Hall. There is a branch facility on Webster Street on the South Side. Special programs for young readers, a unique local history collection, the area's largest collection of Spanish materials and a bookmobile are among the other special services offered by the Bethlehem Area Public Library.



Godfrey Daniels

The mission of Godfrey Daniels is to create and nurture the appreciation of traditional and contemporary folk music and performing arts by providing an intimate environment where professional artists, amateur performers and audience members will be enriched by the unique experience of live performances. The coffee house first opened on East Third Street in 1976 and now boasts over 700 members and 250 volunteers. The venue remains a haven for lovers of live folk music and has grown in reputation as an internationally acclaimed club on the "folk circuit".

Lehigh Valley Charter High School of the Performing Arts

This charter school provides a rich and comprehensive educational program for students grades 9 through 12 with talents and potential in dance, music, visual arts, theatre and ice skating. Admission is based on audition. This regional model enables each student to maximize his or her special talents. The current student population is 435.

Pennsylvania Playhouse

Incorporated in 1946, the Pennsylvania Playhouse built its current home on Illick's Mill Road in 1965. Pennsylvania Playhouse is a nonprofit organization operated entirely by volunteers allowing attendees to experience regional theatre performances in an intimate setting.

The SouthSide Film Institute and Festival

The Institute is a volunteer-run non-profit organization that was incorporated in 2003. The first SouthSide Film Festival was held in 2004. The mission of the festival is to showcase great independent film of all flavors to widen audience appreciation of the varying styles of story telling through film.

SteelStax

ArtsQuest is deeply involved in planning and raising funds for a new high-tech broadcast and performing arts complex proposed at the western end of the BethWorks site on former Bethlehem Steel land in South Bethlehem. Cooperating partners include PBS Channel 39 and an assortment of cultural arts groups in the Lehigh Valley. Efforts to launch this project are currently organized under the name SteelStax. Sponsors hope the project will be a regional attraction and an economic generator with significant potential to stimulate investment in and around the South Side.

Touchstone Theatre

Located at 321 East 4th Street in South Bethlehem, Touchstone Theatre has been creating and producing theatre for 25 years. The theatre is a dedicated arts force on the South Side. The ensemble is committed to the creation of original work, touring selected works nationally and internationally, and offering educational programs to students of all ages.

WDIY Community Public Radio

WDIY is a commercial-free, membership-supported radio station that is an affiliate of National Public Radio. Its primary broadcast area is the Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton region. The mission of WDIY is to engage the people of the Lehigh Valley through a wide-ranging exchange of music, arts, news and other culturally diverse information. WDIY is overseen by the non-profit Lehigh Valley Community Broadcasters Association.



Musikfest, Bethlehem's summer mega-music festival



A mule of a different color on Bethlehem's South Side

Zoellner Arts Center

Lehigh University's Zoellner Arts Center provides a home for both the academic departments and a professional guest artist series. The Guest Artist series has presented a wide array of excellent multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural performers. Designed by Philadelphia Architects Dagit Saylor, the venue houses 3 theaters, the largest of which is a 1,000-seat proscenium theater.

■ Arts and Cultural Amenities Strategies

1. Continue promoting local efforts to tap the creative energies of Bethlehem residents, particularly our youth.
2. Ensure that the Bethlehem Fine Arts Commission continues to provide key input to City government on relevant arts-related matters.
3. Continue assisting ArtsQuest to seek intergovernmental grants and other funding for the proposed SteelStax performing arts complex.
4. Continue providing performance space and logistical support for MusikFest, Christkindlmarkt, and other major public festivals, such as the Celtic Classic, among others.
5. Undertake a survey and inventory of City-owned art in City Hall, outside City Hall and other City-owned locations.
6. Work with the City's Fine Arts Commission to formalize an "Art in Public Spaces" program where artists create art for permanent or temporary display at City parks and in other public areas.