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## Arts & Entertainment

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### Arts group signs off after decade of success

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By Diana Nelson Jones, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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**Artists and Cities Inc.** has ended its 10-year run for a reason most nonprofit organizations would never imagine: It has completed its mission.

After building the first known database of 5,000 artists in the city, and before anyone was talking publicly about artists as community builders, Linda Metropulos and Becky Burdick helped create three artists studio-lofts, helped other enterprises get money to do similar projects, and helped filmmakers, dancers and other artists get grants to perform.

In recent years, independently, among many examples, the Sprout Fund sprouted, offering grants for public art; Pro Arts grew into a partnership with the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council, broadening its attention from cultural arts groups to individual artists; Lawrenceville and the Strip District collaborated on the 16:62 Design Zone to promote creative businesses between the 16th Street and 62nd Street bridges; and a group of young Mennonites on an urban mission established the Union Project in a former church in Highland Park, providing space for meetings and worship, artist workshops, classes and performances.

Individual artists are even helping one another. One, New York transplant Elizabeth Monoian, is renovating properties in Lawrenceville to accommodate visiting artists-in-residence.

"We would never take credit for everything that's going on now," said Ms. Metropulos, "but it does say to me that the message has gotten through."

Artists and Cities' big-three achievement was to renovate two old buildings, turning them into the Spinning Plate Artists Lofts in East Liberty and the Ice House Artists Studios in Lawrenceville, and build the Blackbird Lofts and Artists Studios, now under construction in Lawrenceville.

"Three was our goal," said Ms. Metropulos. "We did about \$13 million worth of real estate in 10 years, and most of the money was not foundation money."

The next step is to ensure artists of living and working space when the

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market jumps.

"Artists are priced out of the market on Carson Street" on the South Side, she said. "We don't want to see that happen anywhere else."

Lawrenceville Corp. will own and oversee the Ice House project, on 43rd Street near the Allegheny River, and will buy into the Blackbird, a condominium development at 36th and Butler streets; ACTION-Housing Inc. will look after the Spinning Plate, Pittsburgh's first loft-studio development for low-income artists and their families, on Friendship Avenue in East Liberty.

The Blackbird, which is expected to be completed in the spring, will house a dance studio and 7,000 square feet of studio space for artists on street level. Garage doors will open to prompt interaction between the pedestrian public and artists at work.

Artists and Cities and the Lawrenceville Corp. have been discussing a merger and hashing out legal details for a year, said Kate Trimble, executive director of the Lawrenceville Corp.

"We will do our best to manage it as well as Artists and Cities has," she said. "We take their mission very seriously. A lot of Lawrenceville's success, the resurgence of Butler Street, has come due to the concentration of artists and craftsmen."

In 1998, Artists and Cities put an early stamp on the Penn Avenue Arts Initiative, which took off with the support of its neighborhood organizations, Bloomfield-Garfield Corp. and Friendship Development Associates.

It began with 11 vacant, tax-delinquent buildings from Mathilda Street to Negley Avenue that it pitched to artists who would agree to work downstairs and live upstairs.

Jeffrey Dorsey, the arts district manager, said three buildings remain unsold of the original 11 and that 300 artists are living, working, or both on Penn Avenue. In recent years, the Dance Alloy, Attack Theater, Red Star Ironworks and the Pittsburgh Glass Center have relocated there.

The initiative has begun planning with Lawrenceville's community groups "to figure out how our dynamics and niches can work together," he said. "People are starting to notice an arts community is growing.

"Now it's about the art of building a community. It's organic, and things change," he said, wondering aloud: "What's the role of the arts initiative in the next two or three years? When will we be done?"

Not knowing, he said, "is why I work here."

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