

Paducah A Creative City

by Bobbie S. Bryant, KLC Community Development Advisor



Many Kentuckians are aware of Paducah because of the National Quilt Museum and the annual quilt festival, AQS QuiltWeek® – Paducah. What may not be known is that Paducah (population 25,000) is known around the world for spotlighting its arts and craft culture. Mary Hammond, executive director of the Paducah Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), describes how this happened for one of Kentucky’s beautiful river cities.

“Several years ago, we attended a conference about creative tourism. We heard about the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Creative City of Folk Art and Design designation. If you think

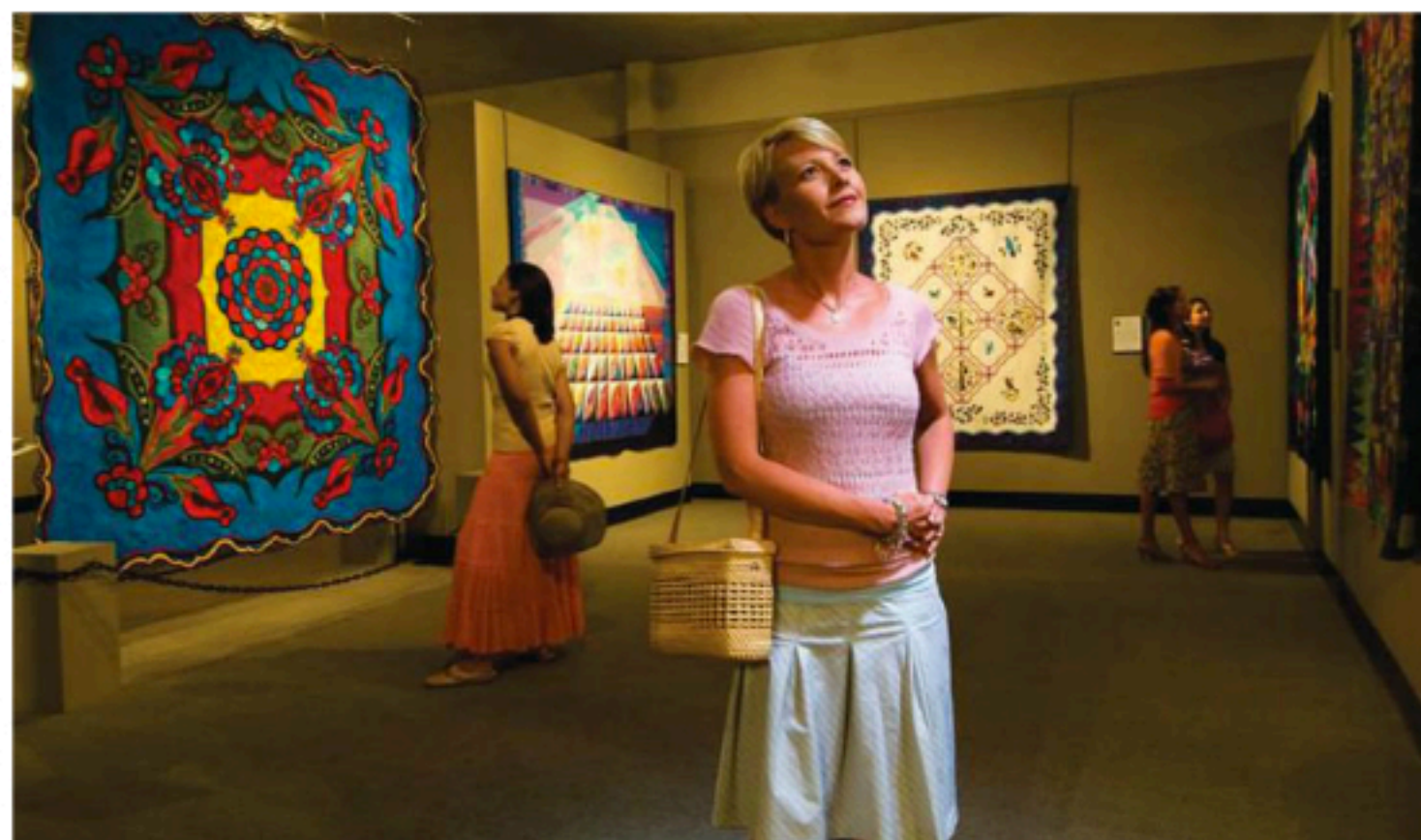
about the world heritage sites such as Mammoth Cave here in Kentucky, these are special designations of the Earth. UNESCO is of the people — the seven thematic networks with Creative Cities are Literature, Film, Music, Crafts & Folk Art,

Design, Media Arts and Gastronomy. UNESCO has 69 member cities in 39 countries.

“There are only a few cities around the world who have been awarded the Creative Cities designation. The other two U.S. examples are Iowa City, recognized for literature, and Santa Fe for crafts and folk art. Paducah is the seventh city in the world to receive the designation, along with Kanazawa, Japan; Icheon, South Korea; Hangzhou, China; Aswan, Egypt; and Fabriano, Italy. Five additional cities were added this past winter.

“We saw this designation as a way for Paducah to stand out. We have a long-standing tradition of heritage crafts in Kentucky. No matter where your ancestors came from, whether down the Ohio River or through the Cumberland Gap, most every pioneer came through Kentucky. Through that passage, these early settlers brought with them their own cultural heritage. If you think of it in quilt terms, they left us with pieces of themselves.

“This connectivity became very clear during the years after Kentucky began the first



Quilt Documentation Project in the country, and other states followed, documenting their own quilts. As a result, in 1995, the Quilt Museum developed ‘Gatherings: America’s Quilt Heritage,’ an exhibit that presented representative quilts from states across the country. The featured quilts’ stories and patterns reconnected families from coast to coast. A quilt connection story I love happened when Roland Freeman’s ‘More Than Something to Keep You Warm’ exhibit was on display at the Quilt Museum. A visitor was drawn to a quilt that told a tragic African-American family story. As he read the narrative displayed with the quilt, he suddenly realized the story was about his family. Whenever quilts are displayed, people, places and times are reconnected.

“Our UNESCO designation happened because we met all their requirements. We already had the Quilt Museum and a huge festival. We also had all sorts of community activities that centered on the quilts. Our entire community got behind this concept and supported it. It takes more than just the arts to make a city a designated Creative City.



Having a strong presence of artists living in our community was an important factor as well.

“It took us five years to complete the application process. Our residents found ways to connect our arts and heritage, to bring our people together, to tell our stories. We constantly work to keep the stories alive, authentic and integrated throughout the community. Paducah has had several cities, both in the U.S. and abroad, contact us for guidance as they pursue the UNESCO Creative Cities designation.

“The Paducah CVB has incorporated being a UNESCO Creative City into our brand. That means advertising to a demographic that is looking for an authentic experience. Advertising campaigns have centered on the ‘creative connection’ that is available in Paducah as a UNESCO Creative City. Broadcast and print advertisements encourage people to visit Paducah to connect with an authentic, globally celebrated creative culture — and to connect with their own creativity through creative workshops, performances and attractions.” **KYC**

Paducah *Facts*

National Geographic Traveler 50: World’s Smartest Cities lists Paducah in the number 5 slot of the essential places, people, trends and ideas that have turned the world’s most intelligent cities into travelers’ hottest tickets.

Paducah School of Art & Design expanded state-of-the-art training facilities and its campus in the LowerTown Arts District and launched its inaugural Master Workshop Series.

River’s Edge International Film Festival’s 10th anniversary featured a diverse lineup of films from the United States and 10 foreign countries, with *Proud Citizen* from Bulgaria named Best of the Fest.

River Discovery Center brought the fastest-growing international team sport to the heart of America’s inland waterways for the third annual Dragon Boat Festival on the Ohio River.

Paul Lorenz hosted the first exhibition of Pintura Fresca, recent works by abstract painters from across the globe, at STUDIO mars in

Paducah’s LowerTown Arts District, and participated in a three-month artist residency through the Shangyuan Art Museum near Beijing, China.

Market House Theatre’s Kids Creative Arts Street Fair featured hands-on creative experiences and ongoing educational programming for youths through more than a dozen arts and culture organizations.

Internationally renowned acts performed, including the Moscow Festival Ballet’s *Swan Lake* at the Clemens Fine Art Center, the Moscow Ballet’s *Great Russian Nutcracker* at the Carson Center and Italian pianist Antonio Pompa-Baldi, Paducah Symphony Orchestra’s guest artist for Rachmaninoff’s *Piano Concerto No. 2*.

“Wall to Wall” floodwall murals earned TripAdvisor’s title of Top Attraction in Kentucky for providing an accessible, public art experience open 24/7.

McCracken County Public Library partnered with the **Kentucky Humanities Council** to present *Quilting: A Legacy of Love*.

For more information about UNESCO, visit www.unesco.org, and for more information about things to do in Paducah, visit www.paducah.travel.