



WONDERGROUND

THE INCREDIBLE CONNECTIONS GROWING UP ALL AROUND
SPOKANE'S UNIVERSITY DISTRICT

WELCOME TO THE WONDERGROUND

Earlier this year, Mayor David Condon gathered a group of Spokanites, including Council President Ben Stuckart, to discuss creating a festival to showcase the art, culture, ideas and innovation happening in our city.

The group was an interesting mix of non-profit and academic thought leaders, along with representatives of the University District, Downtown Spokane Partnership, Visit Spokane and others.

Events like what Mayor Condon envisioned exist in a few places (the Aspen Ideas Festival is probably the most famous) but Spokane's spin would be unique. Most are centrally curated. Ours will be distributed among the artists, big thinkers and organizers already showcasing amazing work in our area. The idea is to demonstrate not just our biggest ideas, but an intangible part of civic life that Spokane does better than most: work together.

After discussion, the organizing committee decided to name the event **Wonderground**, because it feels like that's what we're building in Spokane, an infrastructure of cooperation and community that isn't always easy to see, but whose impact is felt.

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BRIDGING THE GAPS

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Studio Cascade, part of SCJ Alliance
South Landing Lofts
Fresh Soul
UGM Student Impact Center
Carl Maxey Center
The Black Lens
WSU Health Sciences Spokane
University of Washington/Gonzaga
University Regional Health
Partnership
Whitworth University
Hospital District
East Sprague Business District

As it came time to imagine the University District's magazine for this year, we began to see evidence of this everywhere. New partnerships begin daily. Connections we knew were happening took on a more profound resonance viewed through this lens. So we started fleshing out some of the most compelling examples of places we see deep, intertwined connections and how the fruits of that communal work sprout up in surprising, delightful and increasingly powerful ways.

What follows are six stories of our region—a representative but far from exhaustive sample—demonstrating the rich, interconnected ways we are making Spokane stronger by building together.

To everyone who shares this vision, **welcome to the Wonderground.** ●

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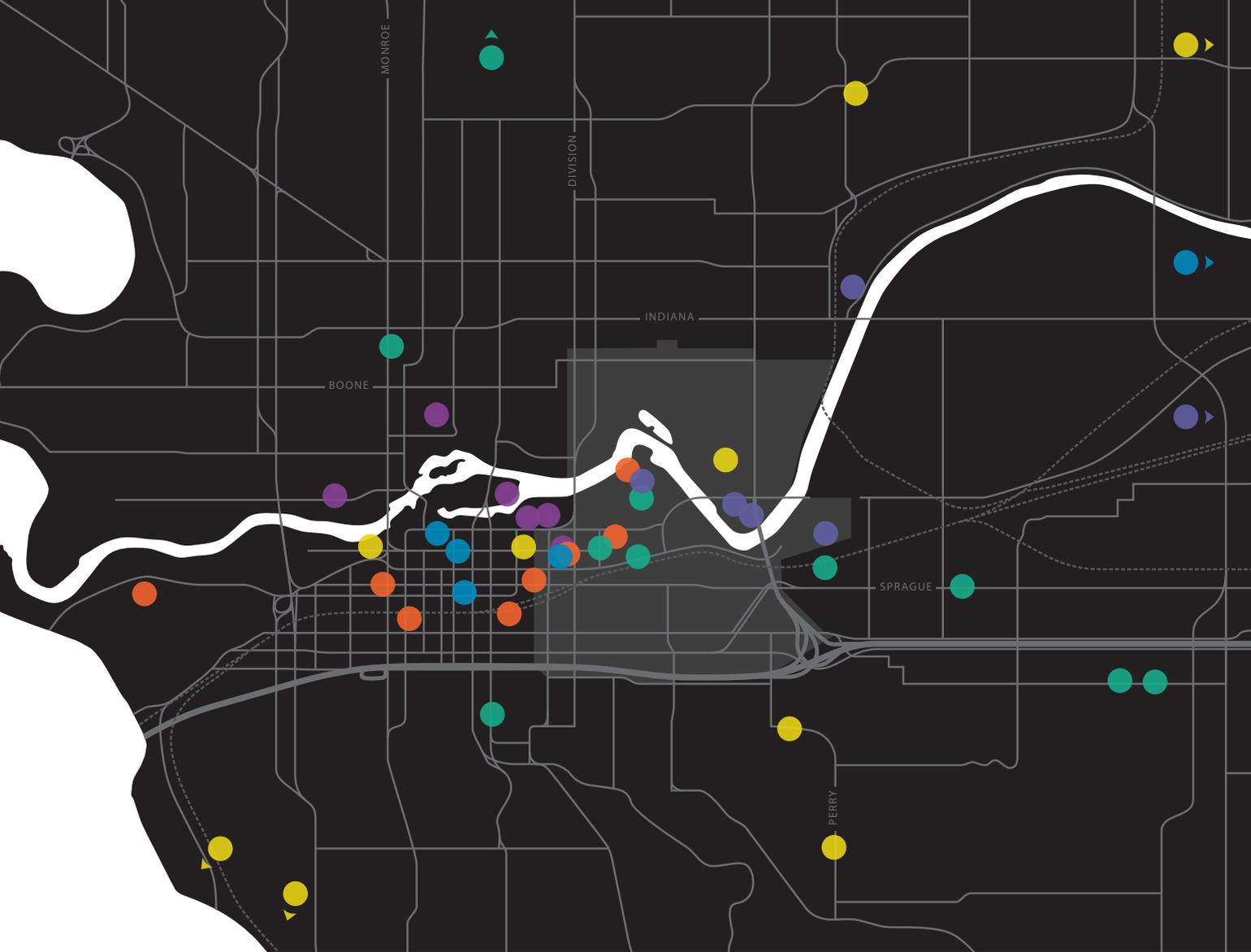
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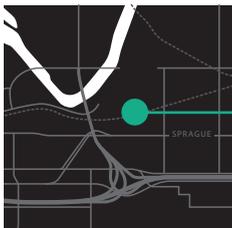
Cover Image:
Main Street's
popular Saranac
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Top Left: Recent Whitworth grad Lexi Chan at UGM's Student Impact Center

Right: Rendering of the Gateway Bridge and future Catalyst Building (courtesy of McKinistry)

BRIDGING THE GAPS



THE GATEWAY BRIDGE IS JUST ONE VISIBLE SYMBOL OF A CITY BUILDING NEW CONNECTIONS

The University District Gateway Bridge, at the east end of downtown Spokane, has already made its mark on the city's skyline. That striking visual is just a teaser for the impact the bridge is set to make on the communities it connects. The pedestrian overpass links the University District's academic core—a medical education hub boasting Washington State University and University of Washington/Gonzaga University medical schools—to a historic business district on the path to revitalization as well as the Hospital District and several East Central neighborhoods. Promoting the health of people, communities and business is as much a part of the bridge as is its 120-foot iconic arch.

Just east of the bridge site, the East Sprague business district was, in recent years, the focus of a City of Spokane "Targeted Investment Pilot" including street renovation and an affordable

housing development among other revitalization efforts. Now, street trees line the freshly-paved corridor. Forty-year-old businesses and new restaurants stand side-by-side along streets that now feel safe and walkable. As the City of Spokane, private investors and local stakeholders contribute to this fresh take on a once-struggling business district, a delicate balance is being navigated: Welcoming a brighter future that includes those who have been there all along.

“We’re hoping that this transformation is an exercise in local empowerment, where the people who’ve invested here and made their livelihoods here can be part of it,” says Bill Grimes, principal

are making plans to develop the South Landing Lofts that will include a 1,500-foot retail space with nine apartments above.

“I envision the future of our neighborhood as pedestrian-, cycle- and business-friendly with just the right edge of industrial grit to pay tribute to its hard-working roots,” DePaolo says. “With the Catalyst project and the EWU presence, I hope the neighborhood will be energetic, youthful, and filled with people who want to learn, contribute, play, commute and live there.”

The multi-million dollar Catalyst Building (see our story on page 10), slated for completion in 2020, will move 1,000 students and three degree



*Placing industry and academia
alongside one another in one building
is key to that vision.*

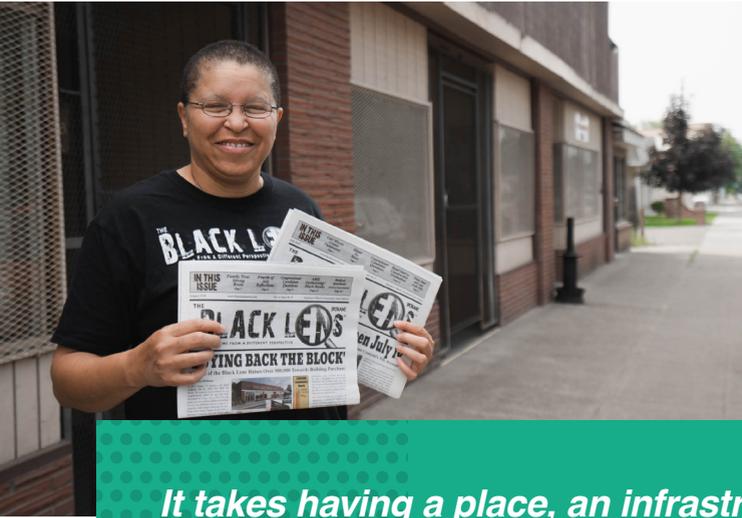
— LATISHA HILL

at Studio Cascade (part of SCJ Alliance), a community planning and design firm.

Grimes and clinical social worker Lucy DePaolo, who are married, believed in the vision for the area’s future long before it began to take shape—they bought three parcels of land near the south landing of the bridge in 2012, five years before the bridge broke ground. Avista Development (a non-regulated subsidiary of the utility company) has sought input from local business and property owners like Grimes and DePaolo to help create and cast a vision for the District’s future. Grimes and DePaolo

programs from Eastern Washington University’s Cheney campus to the Gateway Bridge’s south landing—along with a few carefully selected, cutting-edge business tenants.

From the beginning, the Catalyst project has been centered around innovation in bio-science, medical technology and data science. Placing industry and academia together in one building is key to that vision, says Latisha Hill, Avista’s Senior Vice President of Development.



It takes having a place, an infrastructure, to be able to address some of the issues that are taking place right now in terms of disparities.

— SANDY WILLIAMS

“That’s where innovation can really take place differently than it has in the past,” she says. “We want to put folks there who really want to make a change in the world. When you start a project that way, the conversations are a lot different.”

The Gateway Bridge’s south landing location at the Sprague and Sherman intersection signifies a long-term vision: rekindling a connection between East Sprague and the rest of its East Central neighborhood, which the I-90 freeway bisected when it was built in the 1960s.

“It really is a vein that connects the north side with the south,” Hill says. While that connection isn’t strong yet, Hill expects increased traffic to the area will draw new business investments.

Sandy Williams, East Central resident and editor of Spokane’s only African American-owned newspaper, *The Black Lens*, isn’t waiting for developers to invest in her community, though. Inspired by the late Spokane civil rights

The University District Gateway Bridge, under construction.

Top Left: Sandy Williams of *The Black Lens*

Bottom Right: Najahna, 14, studies with a group of teenagers and mentors at the Student Impact Center



lawyer Carl Maxey, she and a group of co-organizers are making their own plans.

“It takes having a place, an infrastructure, to be able to address some of the issues that are taking place right now in terms of disparities,” Williams says. This June, Williams announced plans for the Carl Maxey Center, a future hub for Spokane’s African-American community.

A smattering of other home-grown businesses have popped up along the Sprague and Fifth Avenue corridors in recent years, including the just-opened Fresh Soul, a soul food restaurant that’s both an employer and mentorship program for the teens who work there. Williams says the area has finally mustered a critical mass of home-grown businesses, infusing the corridor with new energy.

Ryan Brown from the Union Gospel Mission (UGM) sees the University District’s student populace as a perfect fit for the Gateway Bridge’s vision of connecting districts for mutual benefit. As he sees it, students can apply their learning in the community, thereby improving people’s lives.

Brown founded UGM’s Student Impact Center, a faith-based youth hang-out and resource center staffed by resident interns from local universities, including Whitworth University. Set in a renovated historic hotel on East Sprague, the Impact Center provides much-needed work experience for students and a supportive atmosphere for local at-risk youth.

Anyone aged 13–19 is welcome—and Brown says so far, the center is used by neighborhood kids and homeless youth alike, with little judgement between them. While they’re there, youth can access homework help, computers, space to lounge and even washing machines. In the evening, everyone sits down for a big family dinner.

“We specifically only bought one big giant table because we want kids to have that family experience, sitting around the table,” Brown says. “That’s kind of our motto there: We’re not a facility, we’re a family.” ●

For even more pedestrian connectivity in East Spokane, try the **Ben Burr Trail**, which connects Underhill and Liberty Parks in East Central with Martin Luther King Jr Way.





If we want to move fast, setting up these clusters that have a tightened focus—that is how we can really leverage the asset of Spokane’s University District.

— DEAN ALLEN

Dr. Todd Beyreuther
(second from left)
and colleagues
at the McKinstry
Innovation Center

CRITICAL MASS

DEEPER CONNECTIONS FUELING A MORE INNOVATIVE SPOKANE

Designer and artist Travis Masingale sits with a cold brew coffee, working from a tablet at Lindaman's Bistro. We're perched on Spokane's lower South Hill, near the Hospital District, just south of where ground is breaking on a project that will change his professional life—and the lives of many others.

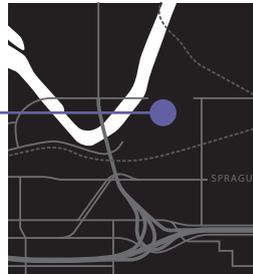
As an Associate Professor in Eastern Washington University's popular Visual Communication Design (VCD) program, Masingale will relocate from Cheney to the Catalyst Building at the south landing of the Gateway Bridge in 2020.

Masingale believes the projects will impact our whole region. "For our students and faculty, it radically changes the experience and opportunities," he says. "To be so close to other academic and industry experts, for shared learning, internships, guest speakers, collaboration on projects... it's a real plus for our program."

He adds, "Being downtown, our students will be able to engage with business, arts, and culture in ways we haven't before."

Since graduating from the EWU design program, Masingale has spent a couple decades participating in Spokane's visual arts scene, helping emerging artists and designers get their start professionally and creatively while helping instill the importance of giving back to their community. The way he sees it, the new setting will enhance all of it. And not just the proximity to downtown.

The Catalyst Building itself will be a marvel of design and innovation. A 159,000-square-foot joint project of Avista Development and the building systems experts at McKinstry through South Landing Investors, LLC, the structure will use a new generation of sustainable materials and smart systems, instantly carving out a new class



of buildings in Spokane and the nation.

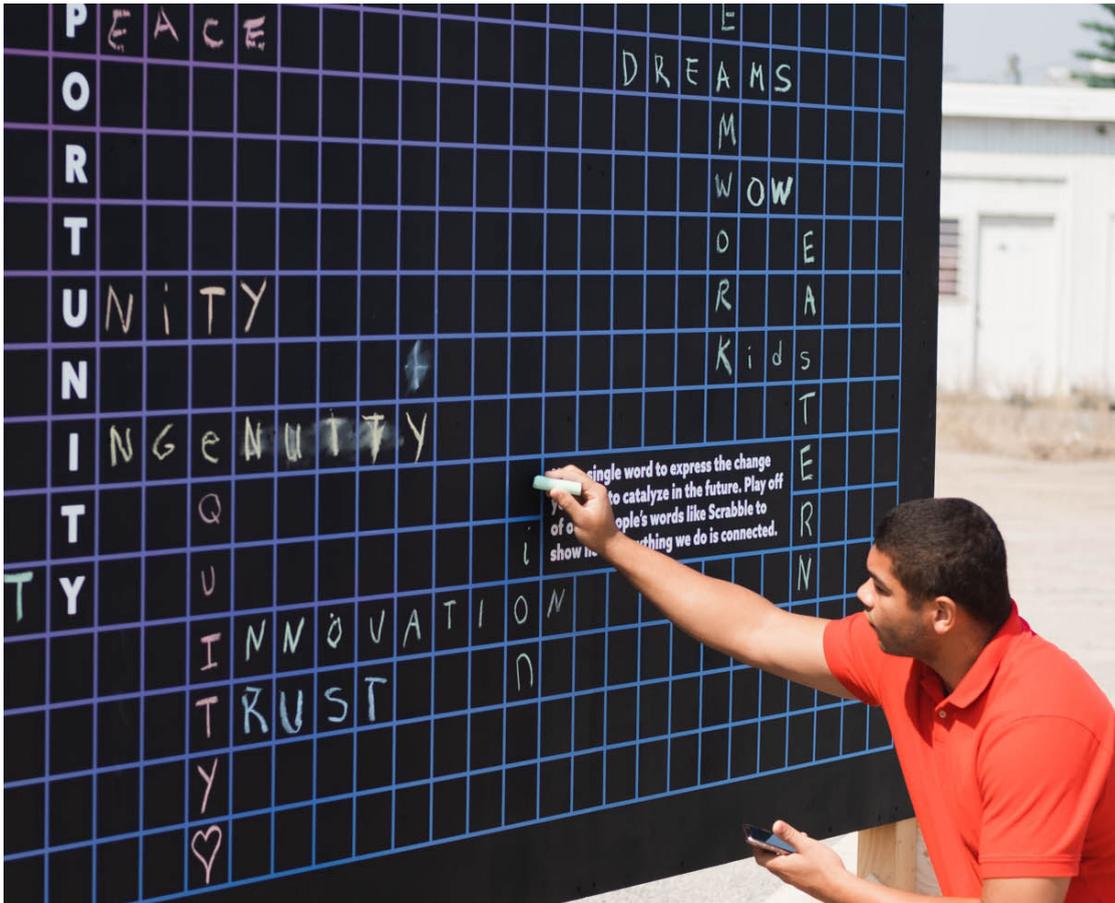
Built not just for hyper-efficiency and smart energy generation but with a concern for the environment that begins at the level of raw materials, the

Catalyst will feature structural Cross Laminated Timber (CLT), an innovative wood technology which puts to use small-bore timber harvested from sustainably managed forests. Small-bore timber—think of the thickets of scrub pine that fill the West and burn so easily in seasonal wildfires—can't be used in other applications, so CLT as a process can help forest health and limit carbon emissions caused by fire or decay. The Catalyst Building won't just be energy neutral, it will actually create more energy than it uses, sharing the surplus with nearby buildings.

Equally innovative are the plans for when the doors open in 2020. In addition to the VCD program, the Catalyst Building is envisioned as an incubator that will intentionally mix EWU's Electrical Engineering and Computer Science departments with several private industry tenants in the design, data, energy and construction sectors. To start, these will include Avista, McKinstry, and Kattera, a California-based leader in CLT technology whose owners have Spokane roots. (Kattera has also chosen nearby Spokane Valley for its first major CLT production facility, a 250,000-square-foot factory currently under construction.)

For McKinstry CEO Dean Allen, a member of South Landing, LLC, the Catalyst Building is the anchor facility in a series of what he calls "industry clusters"—the second of which will be announced soon.

For Allen, clustering is key. "We are purposeful about how we invest in our communities and how



we hope academia and industry will collide,” he says. “There are a lot of incubators around the world, but we’ve learned that the question is: Do you have a critical mass of thinkers, innovators, and talent that centers around a specific cluster of industry? That’s where we see momentum. And, if we want to move fast, setting up these clusters that have a tightened focus—that is how we can really leverage the asset of Spokane’s University District.”

McKinstry has a long history of supporting STEM education and invests deeply in the idea of incubation, having created its own Innovation Centers in both Seattle and Spokane over the past decade. Allen says that, in the process, they have learned a lot about cross-disciplinary collaboration. Catalyst will be the next step in the evolution of that thinking.

Allen casts a vision of the power of intentionally shared spaces, which he has witnessed at the company’s Innovation Centers. A group of academic researchers share a daily coffee with industry leaders who are creating new products and services—and jobs—in a related business sector. Across the atrium, talented and motivated students

grab lunch with leaders in their field, picking more experienced brains as they plan for their careers. Grants get co-authored. Products are developed. Walls come down. Better ideas come to life.

For the Catalyst Building, the product of these sorts of close collaborations will be built into the walls, quite literally. Allen shares a story from McKinstry’s Spokane Innovation Center, the historic street car maintenance building the company redeveloped in the University District and opened in 2012. Five years ago, a Washington State University architecture and structural engineering researcher and professor, Dr. Todd Beyreuther, partnered with McKinstry and they co-founded the Energy + Ecology Innovation (E2i) Lab. One of Beyreuther’s key research areas was focusing on new research and development in wood building products. McKinstry’s expertise is as a design-build HVAC company that works primarily in metals, so Allen remembers thinking, “Sounds like a pretty wacky idea, but let’s see what comes of it.”

Fast-forward through some great industry connections for Beyreuther, along with a thousand

concepts and ideas and iterations and conversations and “what comes of it” is the CLT wood product that Dr. Beyreuther’s current employer, Kattera, will be using to build the very bones of the Catalyst Building.

“That’s my favorite recent Innovation Center story,” Allen says, laughing. He doesn’t think CLT is so wacky anymore. Neither does the Avista Development team that’s partnering closely on not only the Catalyst Building, but also on a broader Catalyst project which seeks to accelerate productive collaboration in the University District.

Nor does it seem quite so crazy to invest in the future of Downtown Spokane and the University District as they grow together—a city core and a hub that are clearly on the rise.

In June, along with Avista CEO Scott Morris and Cowles Company Chairman Betsy Cowles, Allen led a tour of Spokane for the Washington Roundtable, a group of 50 executives from the state’s top companies. The mission—Allen calls it “giving the pitch”—is to show not only why McKinstry set up a headquarters in Spokane

several years ago, but also why they are now helping lead another investment of over \$100 million in the south landing area alone.

Perhaps what makes Catalyst most unique, though, is the way big-picture ambitions like Dean Allen’s are built on a scaffold of human-centered design solutions for those like Travis Massingale and his students, who will live and work and study in the University District and surrounding neighborhoods, sparking new and more frequent interactions between students and cross-disciplinary thinkers.

Allen believes this could become a model of living and working that will spill out of the Catalyst project and become part of the larger culture here, impacting not just the students and entrepreneurs of the University District, but the entire region.

“The lifestyle, the cost, the culture of Spokane—and this new juxtaposition of academia and industry downtown—make it a great place for a Washington company like ours to put down roots and be a strong part of the community,” Allen says. ●



Left: Catalyst groundbreaking attendee writes his hopes for the neighborhood in a crossword

Right: Leaders break ground on the Catalyst project

BUILDING A WON

FOR TERRAIN, CARVING OUT SPACE FOR ARTISTS TO THRIVE STARTS BY LISTENING TO THEIR NEEDS, THEN DREAMING UP BIG SOLUTIONS



Reinaldo Gil Zambrano stands alone in his studio at Richmond Art Collective, bright sun hitting him through the south-facing windows that look over Sprague Avenue toward the train station, trying to figure out where to begin.

A celebrated young printmaker from Venezuela and adjunct professor at Eastern Washington University, he is beginning a series that explores paranoia and fear. He's wrestling with the expressions he'll use to help the viewer engage with these emotions from different perspectives. Saranac Art Projects will show the work all September. But first, Reinaldo has to make it.

After finishing his MFA at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Reinaldo moved to Spokane to teach. "Since coming here, I've

been impressed by the community, the support," he says. "When I am surrounded by others making art and sharing it, it inspires me to do my work, even when I don't feel like it."

That idea—that art is made by people, but catalyzed by community—has been at the heart of a decade-long experiment seeking to fundamentally change the way people think about Spokane, and how Spokane thinks about its artistic community.

In 2008, while Reinaldo was still growing up in Venezuela, a group of

"Growing up here, you are fed this narrative that if you want to thrive as a creative person, you have to leave. So people left."

— GINGER EWING



born-and-raised Spokanites were witnessing the mass exodus of the most creative and talented young people they knew and wanted to see if they could stop the bleeding. "It was this self-fulfilling prophecy," says Ginger Ewing. "Growing up here, you are fed this narrative that if

Left: Reinaldo Gil Zambrano in his studio at Richmond Art Collective

Top Right: Poet Mark Anderson performs at Terrain 9

Bottom Right: Zambrano sorts prints of his work

WONDERGROUND



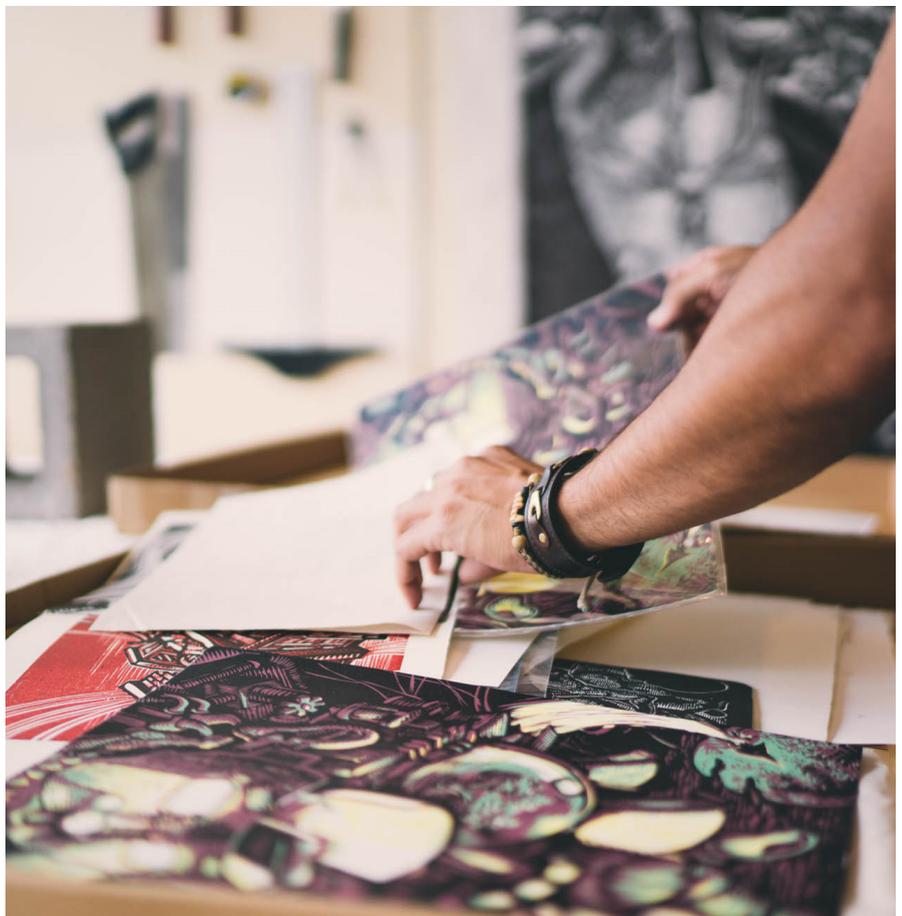
you want to thrive as a creative person, you have to leave. So people left.”

“We heard so many people saying the same thing—there’s no creative community here,” Luke Baumgarten adds, “so we asked the question: Why can’t we create a community out of all the people saying that?”

Ewing, Baumgarten, Patrick Kendrick, Sara Hornor, and Mariah McKay formed an organizing committee (briefly called “the Wonderground Collective”) and planned a one-night exhibition, concert, and celebration called Terrain, to get all those artists, musicians, comedians and writers in a room to show their work, build connections with one another, engage with the broader community and hopefully stay.

A decade later, that one-night experiment has become a movement.

That first party was such a hit that Terrain (the organization) still holds Terrain (the event) every year on the first Friday in October during Spokane Arts’ Arts Month.



Top Left: Over 9,000 people attended Terrain 10 in 2017

Bottom Left: 20,000+ patrons bought over \$120,000 at Bazaar 2018

Top right: A couple enjoys musical acts at Terrain 10

Bottom Right: Mackenzie Fagras dances at Terrain 10



Terrain 11 | October 4 and 5 at 314 W. Riverside Ave, the Jensen-Byrd Building. For more information go to TerrainSpokane.com

The founders knew they had struck a chord, but they had also thrown open a door. A diverse group of creative people began reaching out. Younger artists asked for help connecting with the establishment. Institutions like the Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture and the Spokane Symphony asked for help connecting with younger audiences.

As Terrain has grown from a one-off art party to a cultural juggernaut with a permanent art gallery, performing art space, and year-round programming, the organization has focused on responding to community needs by building connections.

Their answer to the philosophical questions—*How can we define art in broader, more inclusive terms? How can we knock down walls, promote equity, leave behind snobbery and gatekeeping?*—became the scaffold of Terrain’s mission.

More specific needs have yielded more concrete results. For instance, the most persistent question—*How can I make money through art?*—collided with the reality that Spokane County’s surprisingly robust community of working artists (7,000 strong) was being starved by a pitifully anemic market (visual art sales were just 33% of the national average in 2014).

“We did some quick math,” Baumgarten remembers. “If art sales here are a third of the national average, we could either ask the people already buying art to buy three times as much ...

We are always reaching out, pointing to tangible events to say these doors are here, and that’s great work.

— JACKIE



For information on Spokane Arts Month, go to SpokaneArts.org/artsmoonth

or try to triple the number of art buyers.”

By then, Terrain’s flagship event was routinely drawing crowds of 5,000 people (those crowds have since swelled to over 9,000 in 2017), so people were engaging with art. They just weren’t buying it.

The result was Bazaar, a summer art market with affordable booth fees for emerging artists, and the requirement that vendors sell at least half their work for under \$100—allowing first-time art buyers to follow their heart without worrying so much about their wallet. Sales for the one-day market have grown steadily from \$36,000 in 2014 to over \$120,000 in 2018.

In 2012, when the owner of a vacant building downtown publicly complained about vandalism, Ewing—now Terrain’s Executive Director—instantly thought of artists’ constant requests for more public exhibition opportunities. This sparked the idea for Window

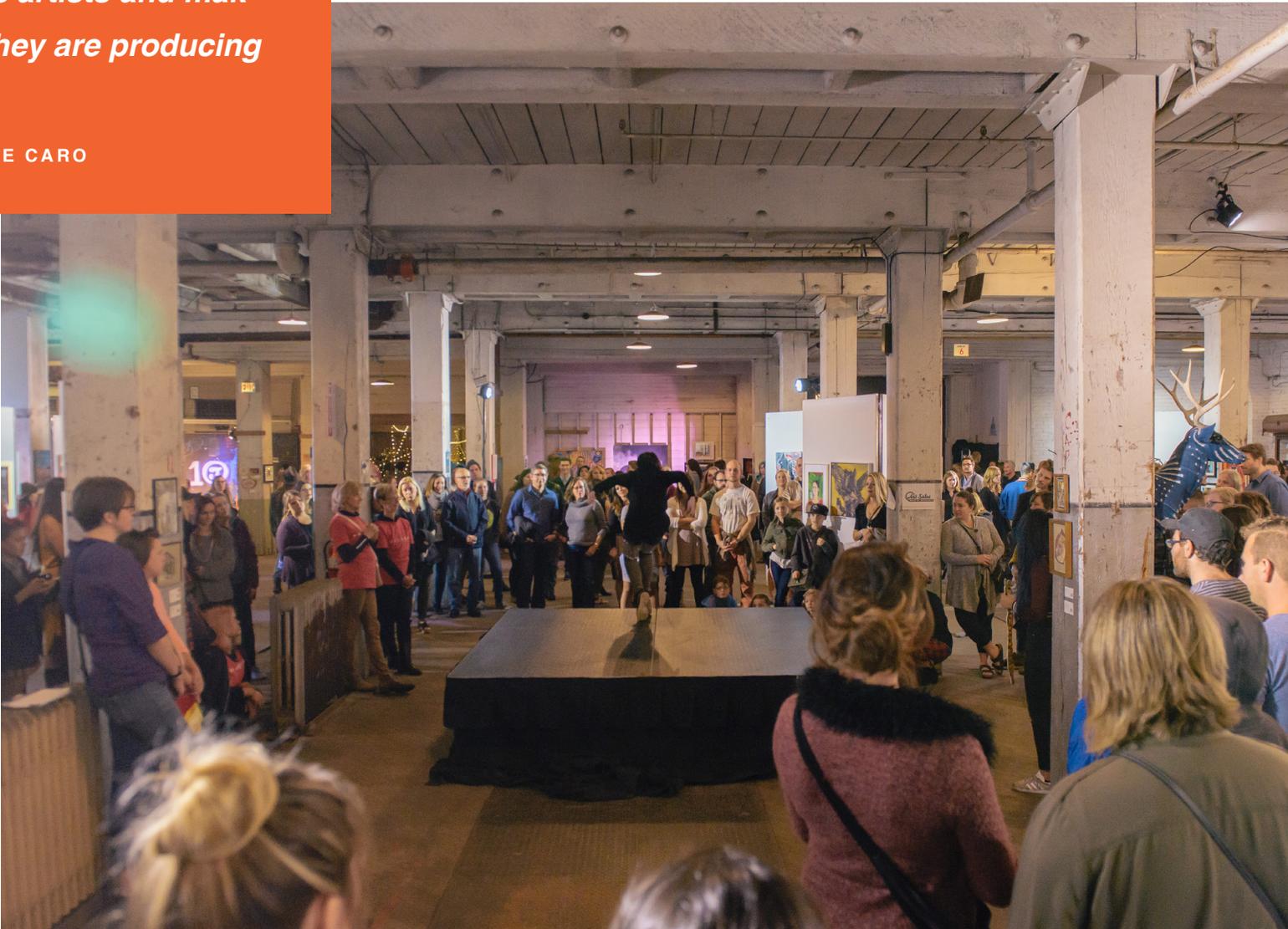


Dressing, a program activating vacant storefronts with public art installations.

When artists began finding greater sales success, they came back wanting to deepen their entrepreneurial toolkit. This led to Creative Enterprise, a partnership between Terrain and the Avista Center for Entrepreneurship at

*...ing out, always
...e artwork and
...e artists and mak-
...ey are producing*

E CARO





Vintage Shop

Riverside

TOTEM PENDANT
by Paul Deane

BAZ
HOME APPLIANCE
RESTROOM
BAR

NORDS

For more information on the Wonderground festival, go to wondergroundspokane.com

Community Colleges of Spokane that offers an intensive 12-week business bootcamp for artists and makers.

In 2017, Creative Enterprise's toolkit led naturally to participating artists wanting a communal space to get real-world experience selling and interacting with the public. Pop Up Shop was born: a year-round brick-and-mortar storefront at the Steam Plant featuring art, apparel, and home goods from 20 local makers.

Now 10 years old, Terrain's organizers imagine spending the next decade helping grow these programs and working to ensure that, as people continue flocking to Spokane as quickly as they used to leave, artists of all ages will have a stronger and stronger voice in the city.

And while there are many different modes of engagement going on, from education to retail, Jackie Caro, Terrain's Operations Director, says

the underlying drive of everything the organization does is to strengthen Spokane's creative scene by increasing access to it.

"We are always reaching out, always pointing to tangible artwork and events to say these artists and makers are here, and they are producing great work," Caro says. "And when the community sees it, they support it." ●

Left: Friends meet amid the crowds at Bazaar 10

Below: Top Right: Ginger Ewing, Jackie Caro and Luke Baumgarten



DEFYING CONVEN

LINKING VISITORS TO NATURE, CULTURE AND EACH OTHER, THE CONVENTION CENTER EMBODIES THE BEST PARTS OF SPOKANE

Listen to the sound of the Spokane River and its thundering falls, a sound that has beckoned people to gather for centuries. Walk through the 100-acre Riverfront Park and hear the laughter and lilting music of the Loeffl Carrousel in the summer and the frosty rasp of skates on the ice ribbon in winter.

Stroll south from the park and you'll find a downtown bursting with life and historic charm. You'll catch the rumble of passing trains as you wander from shop to shop, the local art, craft and culture serving as guideposts through the maze of century-old buildings.

Go north and you'll land in Kendall Yards, a purpose-built neighborhood that has risen from a rail yard to embrace community, culture and environmentalism. Head east on Main and you'll hit a food co-op, an arthouse theater and bespoke retailers on your way to the University District, where a new generation of bold leaders and technologies are being forged.

This is the heart of Spokane, where pieces of the past intermingle with the energy of the present—an energy that increasingly feels powerful enough to propel this city to an electrifying future. "Spokane is transitioning from a nice little town in Eastern Washington to a thriving city," says Stephanie Curran, CEO of Spokane Public Facilities District.

In the center of all this is the Spokane Convention Center complex, a gleaming white, 390,000-square-foot structure stretching along the banks of the river gorge. Floor-to-ceiling glass frames the park, ensuring every space comes with a view, connecting people with the stunning natural beauty surrounding them.

"I've gone to conferences around the country and what we have in our convention center is rare," says Lars Gilberts, CEO of the University District. "I can step out of a session and de-stress by the falls or have tons of options for dinner, music or a show in the evening." With shoreline reclamations recently completed, \$100 million committed for renovations to the park and the INB

Performing Arts Center, and soon a high performance and all-electric Central City Line ferrying people through the core and to points beyond, things are only getting better.

For locals living this life in real time, every day, it's easy to miss the importance of proximity for visitors who experience a place in sharp, brief snippets.

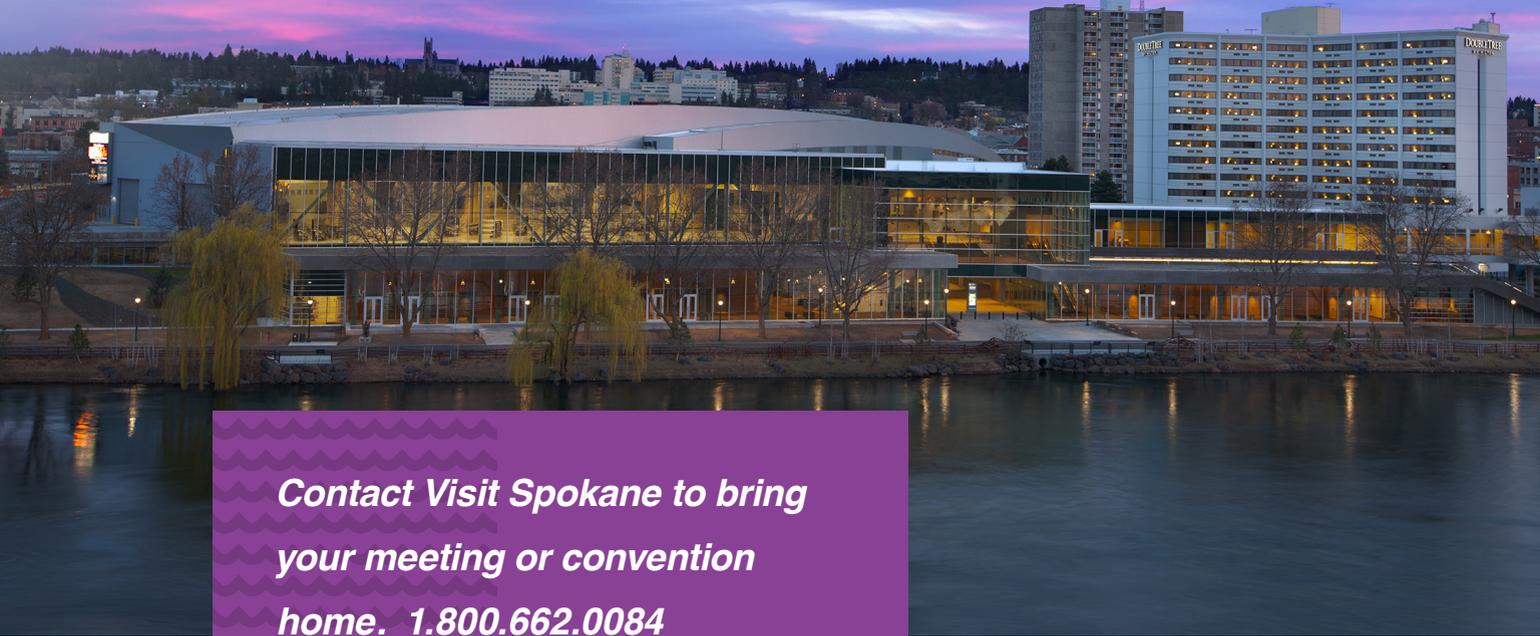
More than 200,000 visitors attend conventions here every year, and because of the embeddedness of the Convention Center and the surrounding hotels, each guest has access to the best of what we are blessed with and what we are building—Spokane's natural beauty and its urban energy.

Because the average convention-goer spends \$234 per day, it's understandable that Curran's mission is as steady as the river, "Generating economic impact for the region." Economics are part of the engine propelling Spokane's change. Another is the completely authentic drive for human connection that visitors find when they arrive.

Spokane has beauty and spirit and we welcome the world to share our unique urban experience. ●



TION



Contact Visit Spokane to bring your meeting or convention home. 1.800.662.0084



A woman wearing a wide-brimmed hat and overalls stands in a field of tall grass. In the background, a herd of black cows is visible. The scene is set outdoors with trees in the distance.

GOING

WITH THE

GRAIN

This page: Beth
Robinette in the
pasture at Lazy R
Ranch

Right: Shaun
Thompson-Duffy at
The Grain Shed

A COALITION OF CHEFS, FARMERS AND FOODIES WORK TO KEEP \$1.4 BILLION IN SPOKANE

Watching Shaun Thompson-Duffy and his crew make bread is like stepping back in time.

The entire process is labor intensive. It begins and ends with local products and human hands. The grain comes from area farms and is ground into flour with an actual stone mill. Formed in traditional proofing baskets, the loaves are left to rise for nearly a day before baking.

“We do pretty much everything the hardest way possible,” Shaun says with a wry smile, but it’s for a reason. Using old varieties of grain maximizes nutrition and flavor. Stone milling preserves those nutrients better than commercial processes. The slow, natural leavening aids digestion and gives each loaf an incredible flavor. The wood fired oven, well—“Wood fire is just badass,” Shaun says, laughing.

People seem to appreciate the effort.

When we stopped by in late June, Shaun and his other partners in The Grain Shed—a new bakery and brewery started by a cooperative of local farmers and producers—had been open less than a month, but people from the Perry District had already learned to stop by before work to grab a loaf, because they’re often sold out by the time they return home.

Shaun grew up outside Dallas and went to culinary school in Houston. He developed a love for baking in Austin and at Michelin-rated restau-



practices but didn’t find any. Then Shaun and his family moved to Spokane for his wife’s career and things fell into place. He met Joel Williamson, one of the co-founders of LINC Foods, who introduced him to grain growers on the Palouse, and the final piece of his puzzle came together.

“My introduction to the Palouse was like ‘Wow, this is something pretty special,’” Shaun says. “There are people here doing it right, and people doing it, like, really, really right.”

Both Joel Williamson and Beth Robinette represent the fourth generation of farming families.

Beth’s family had been on their land since 1937 and had been doing innovative, sustainable ranching practices before it was cool. “We’re kind of the hipsters of grass-fed beef,” Beth says, laughing. Despite the innovation, by the time she graduated from college, Lazy R Ranch was struggling. “We were still at the whim of the commodity market,” she says.

Joel, meanwhile, had always loved food and knew he wanted to help people, but didn’t know where to begin. “I was doing all these different things,” he remembers, “city government, nonprofits, organizing—and I couldn’t figure out how to make the impact I wanted.”

The pair bonded over similar memories of growing up on a farm surrounded by family, their mutual love for Spokane, and the belief that the city was on the verge of blossoming—it just

There are people here doing it right, and people doing it, like, really, really right.

—SHAUN THOMPSON-DUFFY

rants in Chicago, then got serious about being a commercial baker at the end of his time in Chicago and while living in Portland, Oregon.

His idea of baking went even further than just traditional processes, though. It went all the way up the supply chain, starting with the grain itself. While in Portland, he searched all over the Willamette Valley and into California for farmers who were growing the right grains with the right



needed a little help. Looking for answers to the Lazy R's woes, Beth was getting ready to start an MBA in sustainable business. "I thought, 'Oh, using business for good ... that's interesting,'" Joel says. He decided to enroll, too. LINC Foods came out of those shared roots, Joel's graduate thesis, and hundreds of conversations with small farmers, end users, economic analysts and food nerds.

Sustainable farmers needed more places to sell than just farmers markets, and area institutions wanted local, chemical-free food but didn't know where to look. More broadly, a 2012 economic analysis noted that 51% of farms in the Spo-

kane region operate at a loss. "We import most of the food we eat locally," Joel says. "We export most of the food we grow, but it's on the commodity market, so it leaves for pennies on the dollar." He sighs. "Something like \$1.4 billion dollars per year is leaving the community." According to the report's author, this bleak picture is replicated in almost every community across America.

It seemed like a lot, trying to solve a problem plaguing all of agricultural America, Beth says, "but we both have a little bit of a chip on our shoulder, and we love Spokane." So the two started LINC Foods to try and solve it.

In sustainable farming speak, LINC (which stands for Local Inland Northwest Cooperative) is what's called a "food hub," but it's probably easiest to think of it as a distributor. Like any food distributor, LINC connects farmers and ranchers with end users like grocery stores, trendsetting restaurants, hotels and the Convention Center. Unlike almost all distributors, LINC focuses entirely on local farmers who farm sustainably and without any pesticides or





Farmers were telling us, “We can grow more, but I wouldn’t know where to sell it.”

— JOEL WILLIAMSON

hormones, often focusing on rare or heirloom products.

LINC’s pitch for consumers is that the produce is healthier and tastier, the meat is hormone-free and humanely raised, and that it all comes from our region, so it’s less impactful on the environment and more of the money stays here.

The problem historically is that the only outlet for this kind of produce is the farmers market. “Farmers markets are

great, but that can only get you so far with sales,” Joel says. “Farmers were telling us, ‘We can grow more, but we wouldn’t know where to sell it.’”

Meanwhile, organizations like Empire Health Foundation were working with rural school districts—and now Spokane Public Schools—on returning to scratch cooking, which naturally shifted the conversation to locally grown goods. In higher education, Gonzaga University was trying to get local, chemical-free produce into its dining halls

Left: Joel Williamson at The Grain Shed

Bottom left: The herd at Lazy R Ranch

Righthand page: Produce growing at Full Bushel Farm



Top Right: Produce from Full Bushel Farm

Bottom: Shaun Thompson-Duffy loads bread into the wood fire oven

but didn't have connections to growers. LINC makes those connections.

When LINC began, in summer 2014, their cold storage was an old reach-in Pepsi cooler at the Comfort Inn on 3rd Ave in Spokane. Their delivery truck

was Joel's little Scion xB. Both Joel and Beth admit it was a pretty janky beginning. Growth has been quick and steady, though, and so has the drive to diversify. It's incredibly complex work matching the inventories of over 50 small farmers with the needs of customers, a job made more difficult because the product is perishable and the growing season only lasts a few months.

Task one was finding a year-round revenue source, so less than a year after starting, LINC raised funding to buy a commercial malter, betting that our area's abundant cereal crops and an increasing demand for malted grains among craft brewers and distillers could help support the region's many grain farmers and bring LINC stable revenue. They made their first batch of malt in April 2016. In June of that same year, looking for a stable stream of demand for produce LINC could control itself, they started a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program to sell weekly boxes of produce and protein directly to consumers.

The CSA has grown rapidly and as we talk at the malting warehouse in Spokane Valley,



Joel looks over plans to expand their current 8,000-pound-per-week system to 68,000 pounds per week. He says he has a hard time wrapping his head around everything they've done in under four years. That first growing season with the Pepsi cooler and the Scion delivery truck, he says LINC did a little over \$30,000 in sales. This year, Beth thinks they'll get close to selling \$1 million.

Perhaps more important than the money being made, though, is who's making it.

The truly unique thing about LINC is that it's a worker- and farmer-owned cooperative. There are farmer and consumer coops (like REI) across the U.S., but neither Beth nor Joel thinks there's anything quite like LINC.

Beth gives Joel credit for the idea and jokes that they didn't want to be the only ones responsible for making these huge decisions, but the reality is, both had seen generations of their families struggle to get a fair price for their hard work. "I think that giving employees and farmers ownership over the company is absolutely one of the biggest reasons that we're successful," she says. It's a different way of thinking about business that focuses on community and shared success. LINC's model is also beginning to create a sense of regional continuity, connecting urban and rural in a way we haven't seen in generations.

That's where Shaun Thompson-Duffy—the bread baker with an eye toward doing things differently—re-enters our story. Given that LINC focuses on connecting business by connecting people, it's probably not surprising to learn that, when Shaun met Joel, and Joel introduced Shaun around to the region's grain growers, what developed was a relationship that goes way beyond buyer and seller.

Don Scheurman, a grain farmer based in St. John, had spent nearly a decade painstakingly resurrecting heritage grains that haven't been grown commercially in decades. Slowly, season after season, Don built up enough seed stock to get commercial quantities of strains with names like Purple Egyptian Barley and Turkey Red Wheat. Don sells these heritage varieties (called "landrace grains") all over the country to Beard-Award-winning chefs like Philadelphia's Marc Vetri and New York's Dan Barber, but he is also passionate about changing the way people eat locally.

Get weekly boxes of fresh produce and optional protein from LINC Foods. Sign up at LincFoods.com/lincbox



Above: Culture Breads toast at The Grain Shed

The more they talked—eventually looping in Joel's brewing partner, Teddy Benson—about their philosophies of food, business and life itself, the more it seemed like whatever they were working on was way deeper than a business deal.

When The Grain Shed opened its doors in June 2018, it wasn't as a proprietorship or an S-Corp. It's another worker cooperative. A brewer, a baker, a distributor and a farmer, all trying to change the way we think about food.

The uniqueness of this story isn't lost on Shaun, and would have been all but impossible a couple years ago. "I think about what it would've been like trying to start a business and buy a house and raise a family in Chicago," he says, "It's so expensive and cutthroat and just ridiculously crazy. I mean it was just ... unimaginable."

Among serious chefs, being able to connect with a community the way Shaun has here is becoming much more important than doing the increasingly untenable big-city grind.

When he checks in with his friends who are still in other cities, he says, Spokane sounds amazing to them. "I talk to people that are just sort of tired [in bigger cities] and they're just looking for that small city that offers something cool," he pauses, "and like, Spokane's it." ●

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LOCAL DEVELOPERS BUILD COMMUNITY BY REIMAGINING CENTURY-OLD SPACES

If your only impression of The M was from the apartments inside, you probably wouldn't guess that it used to be a department store. Or that it's over 100 years old. A sleek, modern design on the inside is a striking contrast to the historic exterior that's been preserved along Wall Street.

Doug Yost, who manages the project for Centennial Real Estate Investments—a division of the Cowles Company—is certainly pleased with how quickly the development has come together, especially when other old buildings have sat empty for a decade or longer. When Macy's announced it was closing its store and vacating downtown in early 2016, Yost says the whole community seemed to rally behind the idea of not letting such a landmark building languish. "I've never experienced a project where we got so much support and cooperation from everyone," he says.

There's a powerful draw to a historic building, Yost says. "[People] grow up looking at these

buildings," he says, "but they might not have the opportunity to go inside and view them up close. What I'm finding is that everybody wants the historic atmosphere of the building, but they also want, you know," Yost gestures around the newly renovated penthouse space: "This."

Flooded with natural light and a dazzling view of the University District and the Gateway Bridge, this penthouse is one of 114 total units. For a city like Spokane, that has tended to grow out instead of up, a focus on housing in the urban core is "the logical next step," as Yost describes it, for a downtown area looking to grow as a community.

While Yost and Centennial's recent projects are focused on the top end of the market, another equally ambitious project in an even older building is working to preserve architectural history and affordable ambiance for the young people, artists, and creatives who have injected so much life into downtown.

Enter Ron Wells, a developer and champion for historic renovations who has been actively working to add housing and grow community in the downtown area for the past 35 years.

Wells is currently tackling the 118-year-old Ridpath Hotel, which is iconic to the city skyline, but has been vacant for a decade, having suffered through multiple fires, renovations and additions, legal battles, shady dealers—one of whom is in federal prison for fraud—and an ownership structure so labyrinthine, it took years of fighting to even begin the renovation process.

"These certified historic structures capture a time and place," says Ron Wendle, Wells' long-time friend and architectural partner. He and Wells are seated in an office (a back room, really) of the Ridpath, where Wells reminisces about how his love for historic buildings started as a boy growing up in North Carolina. That passion grew and helped sustain him through a lengthy legal battle for a chance to do this project. Almost two years on, the Ridpath renovation is nearing completion, with residents already moving in.

Neighborhoods respond to their environment and the individuals who inhabit them, maturing over years.

“Ron is into not just fixing up old buildings, but establishing neighborhoods,” Wendle says. Wells certainly seems committed to making downtown Spokane into a neighborhood. His work spans housing, dining, and office projects stretching from the edge of Browne’s Addition and includes the ambitious original renovation of the Steam Plant building.

The Ridpath is a comparable challenge, one that offers different benefits to downtown. It’s being repurposed as an apartment complex. Of the planned 206 units, 102 will be micro-apartments, averaging just 220 square feet apiece.

“Community design and development is really about a neighborhood,” Wells says. “You don’t

need more than five or six [buildings] to be a neighborhood.” A single block can be a neighborhood unto itself. The key factors are amenities, proximity and inclusivity.

Neighborhoods don’t just blink into existence, though. They respond to their environment and the individuals who inhabit them, maturing over years and even decades.

Just a handful of blocks away from the Ridpath, on Main Avenue, is the Community Building, a center for social change in the Spokane area.

Jim Sheehan, the founder of the Community Building, has spent the past two decades utilizing a large inheritance to renovate six brick and mortar buildings that host a collection of shops, cafés, bars, restaurants, co-ops, a movie theater, an art gallery, various non-profits and more.

“I’d say if this place and [Sheehan’s] projects had a thesis, it’s that community is one of the most important things and it has to be experienced,” Summer Hess, the Project Manager of the Community Building, says. “Jim and the people he’s hired over the years have really



Left: The view from the Ridpath

Right: Jim Sheehan, founder of the Community Building



focused on creating spaces where people can be in community with each other.”

Her point is backed up by the setting. The Saranac Commons, an open-air market inside an old garage, is surrounded by a handful of shops that include a bakery, florist, café, biscuit joint, nano-brewery, and a shop focused exclusively on showcasing Native American artists, artisans and makers (see magazine cover image).

More telling, though, is the open door that leads next door to a building not owned by the Community Building, where the comic book shop Merlyn’s is located.

Community is a broad term. It can be applied to a whole city, the downtown area or a single block on Main Avenue. Sheehan believes certain best-practices persist at any scale, though.

“Real community is completely inclusive,” Sheehan says. “When we get ourselves into issues, culturally, instead of throwing walls up around ourselves and building gated communities we break those walls down and come together.”

The Community Building typifies the idea of a Wonderground. It isn’t a discrete project that happens once and is complete. It’s a process that is always in conversation with its surroundings, and a place continually re-energized and rebuilt by the people who love it and strive to make it better.

If all goes to plan, the organizations, businesses, developments and initiatives we’ve talked about in this magazine—and more like them—will evolve in constant dialogue with the community at large, growing and changing to meet the needs of our increasingly vibrant, engaged region.

The hope—the great aspiration—is that, when Spokaneites of the future look back on how their region came to flourish, they’ll trace it back to a time when Spokane decided to dream more expansively and work more collaboratively, fundamentally changing the Inland Northwest into a more connected, resilient region than ever before. ●

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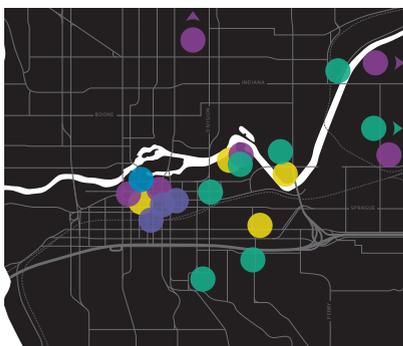
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