

Arts Touted As Engine for Development

By JAMES D. WATTS JR. World Scene Writer



The Woody Guthrie Center is one of multiple establishments that moved into the Mathews Warehouse. At a special forum hosted by the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, the Brady Arts District was praised for having gone from being a largely derelict area of town to one of the city's destination showplaces in the past few years. Tom Gilbert/Tulsa World file

Tim Jones, whose Toronto firm Artspace is considered an international leader in using the arts and cultural activities to grow and transform communities, spoke Wednesday at a special forum hosted by the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce.

Jones' talk was preceded by brief presentations on ways that Tulsa has worked to incorporate and utilize the arts in revitalizing areas of the city by Ken Busby, executive director of the Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa; Jim Coles, economic development coordinator for the city of Tulsa and administrator of the city's Arts Commission; and local artist Bob Sober, part of the Urban Core Arts Project that plans to bring a series of temporary public art projects to downtown Tulsa, beginning in 2015.

The Artspace website describes the company as "a not-for-profit urban development organization that makes space for creativity and transforms communities."

In his talk, Jones said that, when it comes to creating the sort of "creative clusters" that will serve the needs of the arts and cultural community and advance multiple public policy objectives, the problem isn't finding the money to finance it — it's the lack of vision to preserve what's been created.

"Vision attracts investment," he said.

Jones praised the Brady Arts District, which in the past few years has gone from being a largely derelict area of town to one of the city's destination showplaces.

"Some of the things he talked about, we've already done in Tulsa, so it was kind of gratifying to know that we seem to be on the right track," Coles said.

One of those things, Cole said, was the city's purchasing of land in the Brady District from the Sand Springs Home, then offering the various organizations low-cost ground leases that allowed them to building their own facilities, including the Hardesty Arts Center, the Woody Guthrie Center and others in what was known as the Mathews Warehouse.

"He also had some good advice about active stewardship, which really resonated with me," Coles said. "With all the fantastic things that have been accomplished in the Brady District and elsewhere in the city, we still have to be vigilant and stay focused on keeping things new and invigorating. You can't rest on your laurels."

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