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Guthrie Green, new venues turn Brady District into showplace for arts

BY JAMES D. WATTS JR. World Scene Writer

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 **Related Story:** Brady District dining scene explodes as new venues move in

Next week, the Guthrie Green - the city block-sized park in the center of the Brady Arts District - will open to the public with three days of events, from puppet shows to fireworks, with concerts ranging from Western swing to reggae music, electric blues to orchestral classics.

It's only the latest in a series of major construction and renovation projects to be completed in this area, bounded by the Brady Theater to the west, ONEOK Field baseball stadium to the east, the venerable Cain's Ballroom to the north and Archer Street to the south.

About \$110.5 million has been invested in this relatively small patch of real estate, ranging from major commercial development (the Fairfield Inn & Suites currently under construction on Main Street; the residential spaces at the Tribune Lofts and the Metro @ Brady, both on Archer Street) to small retail establishments, from major arts organizations establishing new facilities to nonprofit galleries.

By year's end, what just a couple of decades ago was thought of by many as a kind of "no man's land" between north and south Tulsa will be transformed into a showplace for the arts, an area that is hoped will become a destination for local residents and visitors.

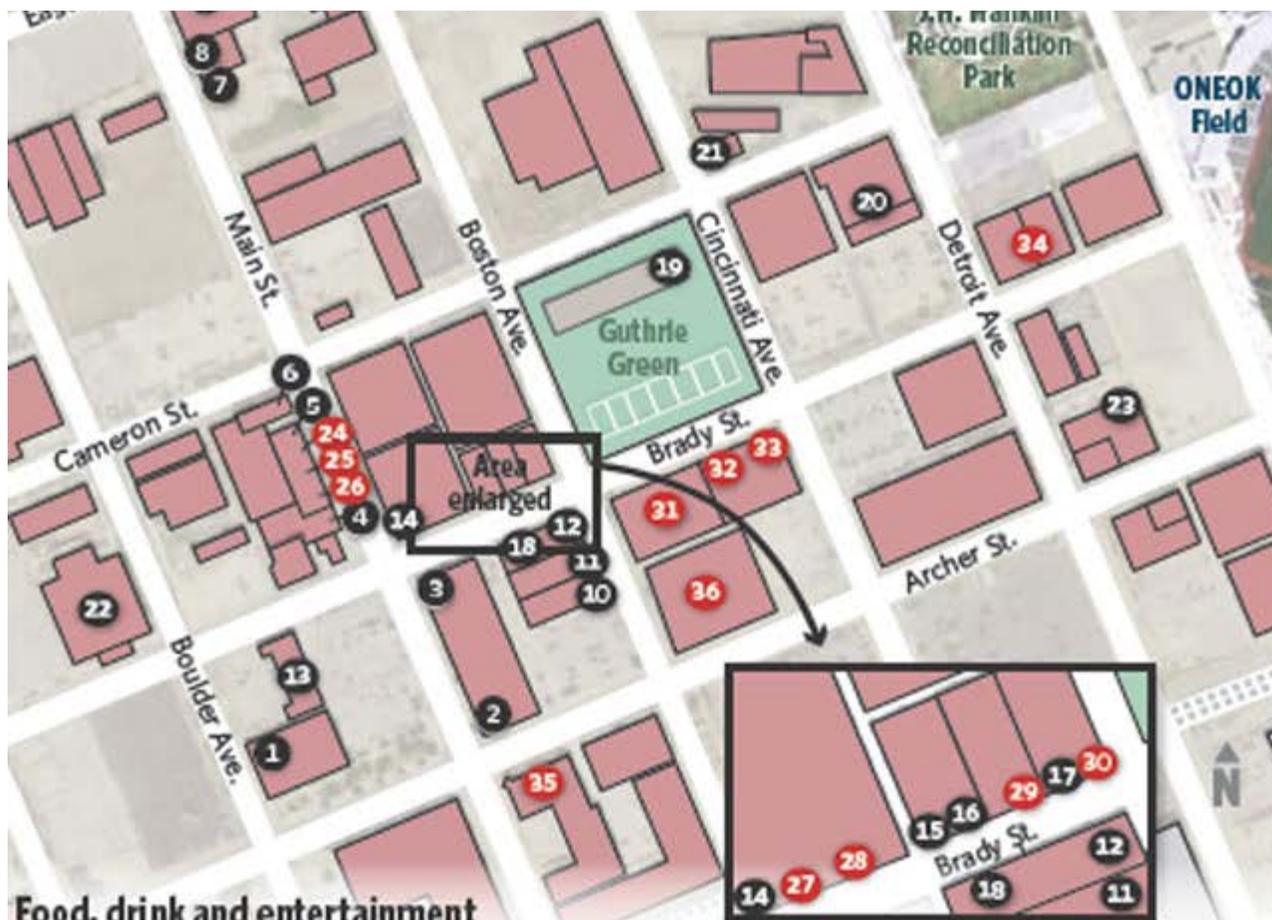
Creating a "destination" is one thing. Making it a place to which people will want to return again and again, or even choose as where they would like to live, is another thing entirely.

And the people who have staked their claim to a portion of the Brady Arts District - as artists, business people, developers, residents - are hoping that out of the dust of construction will come a living, growing community.

Long time coming

All this activity in the Brady Arts District might seem to have started in only the past couple of years, arising out of the 2010 PlaniTulsa comprehensive plan for the city. But the idea of turning this portion of Tulsa into an arts district has been in the works for several decades.





DAVID HOUSH/Tulsa World

Food, drink and entertainment

- 1 Bar 46, 107 N. Boulder Ave.
- 2 PRHYME Downtown Steakhouse (fall opening), 111 N. Main St.
- 3 Laffa Medi-Eastern Restaurant & Bar (fall opening) 111 N. Main St.
- 4 Chainera Café (fall opening), 212 N. Main St.
- 5 Vanguard Music Hall, 222 N. Main St.
- 6 Hunt Club, 224 N. Main St.
- 7 Soundpony Lounge, 409 N. Main St.
- 8 Crystal Pistol Saloon, 417 N. Main St.
- 9 Cain's Ballroom, 423 N. Main St.
- 10 Hey Mambo, 114 N. Boston Ave.
- 11 Classic Cigars & Lounge, 118 N. Boston Ave.
- 12 Club Majestic, 124 N. Boston Ave.
- 13 Mexicali Border Café, 14 W. Brady St.
- 14 The Tavern, 5 E. Brady St.
- 15 Valkyrie, 13 E. Brady St.
- 16 Glacier Fine Chocolates, 15 E. Brady St.
- 17 Caz's, 21 E. Brady St.
- 18 Caz's Chowhouse, 18 E. Brady St.
- 19 Lucky's on the Green, Guthrie Green
- 20 Spaghetti Warehouse, 221 E. Brady St.
- 21 Gypsy Coffeehouse, 303 N. Cincinnati Ave.
- 22 Brady Theater, 105 W. Brady St.
- 23 Rusty Crane, 109 N. Detroit Ave. (fall opening)

Art venues and merchants

- 24 Tulsa Violin Shop, 220 N. Main St.
- 25 Mocha Butterfly, 216 N. Main St.
- 26 Studio 212 and Event Center, 212 N. Main St.
- 27 Chrysalis Choyez Atelier, 7 E. Brady St.
- 28 Tulsa Artists' Coalition Gallery, 9 E. Brady St.
- 29 Tulsa Glassblowing Studio, 19 E. Brady St.
- 30 Brady Arts Studio, 23 E. Brady St.
- 31 Mathews Warehouse: Woody Guthrie Archives, Brady Craft Alliance Gallery and Headquarters, Tulsa Symphony Orchestra headquarters, 102 E. Brady St.
- 32 Philbrook Museum of Art's Eugene B. Adkins Collection and Study Center and the George R. Kravis II Contemporary Design Collection, 114 E. Brady St.
- 33 The University of Tulsa/Gilcrease Museum Zarrow Center for Arts and Education, 124 E. Brady St.
- 34 Living Arts of Tulsa, 307 E. Brady St.
- 35 Native Mist e-cigarettes, Corvid Art Gallery, Colors of Etnika (opening Sept. 30), all in ground level of The Metro at Brady Apartments, 10 E. Archer.
- 36 Hardesty Arts center, Archer St. and Boston Ave.

The basic concept was defined in the 1992 Brady Village Plan, a 10-page report compiled by Downtown Tulsa Unlimited, that called for the area to "come alive with galleries, antique shops, museums, bed and breakfast inns,

ethnic and specialty restaurants, and other forms of entertainment," according to a Tulsa World article.

But the first real attempt to bring the arts to Brady was in 1989, when local artists created the Tulsa Center for Contemporary Art, or TuCCA, in the Hickock Building at the corner of Boston Avenue and Brady Street (now home to Caz's Chow House).

TuCCA would be gone in less than two years, but it certainly was the start of the Brady Arts District.

"After TuCCA opened," said Steve Liggett, executive director of Living Arts of Tulsa, "a lot of other people started moving into the region. David Sharp, who owns a lot of the property in the region, was really the one to encourage artists to set up shop here.

"Tulsa Artists' Coalition moved in - we had places like Gallerie Europa, the Crain-Wolov Gallery, Devena's Fine Photography," he said. "Living Arts had a space on north Main Street, where the Hunt Club is now."

The other major starting point for the Brady Arts District was the opening in 1992 of the Spaghetti Warehouse - just across Detroit Avenue from Living Arts of Tulsa's current location at 307 E. Brady St.

That same Tulsa World article about the Brady Village Plan states: "In other cities, including Oklahoma City and Dallas, the Spaghetti Warehouse restaurant has sparked a revival in business in old warehouse areas near downtown. Developers hope the restaurant ... will do the same for the Brady Village."

That the restaurant chain opened its Tulsa location in the Brady District was a matter of happenstance. The site that had been originally chosen for the restaurant, on the far east edge of downtown, was destroyed by fire. The Brady site was the second choice.

But as far as Donna Prigmore is concerned, Tulsa's Brady area is obviously the first choice as a place deserving this kind of renaissance.

"This is really where Tulsa began," she said. "The whole city started from these few blocks."

Brady Arts Studio, which Prigmore operates with fellow artist Mel Cornshucker, is a bit unusual among the businesses in the area as it has always been a working artists' studio. Unlike the nearby Tulsa Glassblowing Studio, which also is primarily a workspace for artists, Brady Arts Studio has no retail display area.

"We had bought the complete studio of a ceramic artist - all the pottery wheels, kilns, everything - up to and including a claw-foot bath tub," Prigmore said, pointing to the cloth-draped item. "We needed a great big empty space, and I knew this place was vacant."

Cornshucker joined the enterprise a short time later when he was looking for a studio in which to craft his pottery, which has earned many awards and international acclaim.

"It's great for us because we're able to have a working studio," he said. "We also hold classes, and those fees pay for the rent."

First Fridays

One of the greatest challenges in years past for those who operated galleries in the Brady area was getting people to cross over the bridges and railroad tracks to see what was to be seen.

"Typically, the bulk of the people who come to see a specific exhibit come on opening night," Liggett said. "You might get a few people over the next few weeks but not many."

"That's one reason," he said, "why I love the whole idea of the Guthrie Green, as something that will draw people to this area and encourage them to explore what's here."

Prigmore added: "The Brady area really isn't on the way to anywhere else. It's a place that is easy to pass by, which is why it's important to make it a destination."

That is also one of the ideas behind the Brady Arts District's "First Friday" program. On the first Friday of each month, area galleries open new exhibits and hold receptions for the artists, the studios offer demonstrations, and retail outlets remain open extended hours.

"The First Fridays have helped everyone I think - if only to make more people aware that we're here," Cornshucker said. "And when I take part in an art show around town, I'm always talking up the First Fridays, telling people they need to check it out."

The September First Friday will quite possibly draw the largest crowd, as it will coincide with the opening of the Guthrie Green.

New kids on the block

"We took part in our first 'First Friday' in July," said Nikki Warren, co-owner with Kim Grayson of MOCHA Butterfly, 216 N. Main St. "And I have to be honest, I was surprised at how many people we had that night."

MOCHA Butterfly is a small boutique specializing in clothing and other items made or designed in Tulsa. Warren and Grayson opened the store about three months ago.

"We looked at some other neighborhoods, but this place really felt like the right spot for our store," Warren said. "Other people said this area is perfect for what we do."

"What we've really come to appreciate," she added, "is that this really is a community where everyone supports each other. When people come to our store, we always encourage them to go to the other places in the neighborhood."

"I know that the people at Chrysalis, which is just around the corner, send people to us," Warren said.

Joe and Kathie Vogle have operated Native Mist, a store that offers smoke-free alternatives to regular cigarettes, for about four months out a storefront at 10 E. Archer St.

It's one of several street-level businesses in the residential complex called Metro @ Brady. Besides Native Mist, there is the recently opened Corvid Gallery and a new shop called Colors of Etnika, which is scheduled to open in late September.

Native Mist is the Vogles' first retail business, which grew out of the couple's own use of the product to help them quit cigarettes.

"The product is no different from nicotine patches or gums," Joe Vogle said. "It produces no carcinogens. Some people use it to help them stop smoking, others for when they are in places where they can't smoke."

As specialized as their business is, the Vogles said they also have been surprised at the amount of business they've had.

"One Friday night," Kathie Vogle recalled, "we had the place filled because a band that was playing in the area showed up."

"A man from Chicago was staying in town and happened to see our store," Joe Vogle said. "And he was here every

day for the next three days. We have customers who come from Skiatook, Bartlesville, all over the region."

The couple chose the location in part because it was close to home, and because "the place was ready for us to move in," Joe Vogle said. "And of course, they were all talk about how this place was going to take off once everything was built."

"We're really looking forward to the hotel (Fairfield Inn & Suites) opening," Kathie Vogle said.

The ah-ha moment

The Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa has been working to create a place for itself in the Brady Arts District for nearly a decade. At one point, it was going to turn the Mathews Warehouse into a center for the visual arts.

Now, the council is preparing for the Dec. 14 opening of the Hardesty Arts Center at the corner of Archer Street and Boston Avenue, just south of the Mathews Warehouse.

The three-story facility will house the council's offices, as well as exhibition and studio space that will allow it to expand its educational programs.

"We wanted very much to be a part of the renaissance we knew was coming to the Brady District," said Ken Busby, the council's executive director and CEO. "Every city needs a vibrant downtown, and we wanted to be part of that excitement.

"Also, in our education programs, we often work with at-risk youth," he said. "Being in the Brady District brings us closer to areas of town that have the least access to arts education. We'll also be in a facility designed to let people create and experiment with all forms of art. Harwelden's a lovely place, but it's not a place where you can get messy. And making art can get messy."

Being in the Brady District will also foster the kinds of collaboration among individuals and groups that the Arts & Humanities Council has always supported, Busby said.

"We're pretty much going to be in the middle of it all," he said.

What's missing?

Cutting-edge contemporary art venues. Studios designed to help people create. Satellite sites of the city's two major museums. The complete archives of one of the most influential Oklahomans of the 20th century. Unique retail shops. An increasingly diverse array of restaurants and watering holes. Two venerable performance halls. High-style residences. A boutique hotel. A new park with a professional performance stage, a gourmet restaurant and all the greenery that can fit into a single city block.

All this in a place that has seen more than 100 years of Tulsa history.

But with all that's in the Brady Arts District, is there something still missing?

To that question, everyone has an opinion.

"A grocery store," Joe Vogle said. "Not just for the Brady area, but for the downtown area. Right now, if you live or work downtown, the closest grocery store is the Reasors (at 15th Street and Lewis Avenue)."

Prigmore goes a bit further.

"If this district is going to evolve into what everyone hopes it will be," she said, "it needs to be a place that will attract

artists to live and work here. So there has to be services - a grocery store, gas station, a dry cleaner, all these things."

"My biggest fear," Liggett said, "has always been that, once artists move into an area, fix things up and make the area a little more appealing, then the rents go up to the point that only commercial clients can afford to live and work there.

"That's happened time and again in other cities - New York's SoHo is maybe the prime example," he said. "I think there should be areas of town that are specifically rent-controlled that will provide creative people with places where they can live and work and contribute to the community.

"And by creative, I'm not talking specifically about artists," Liggett said. "Creativity takes many forms, which is something Living Arts has always stressed."

Warren said more retail outlets would be nice, especially ones that deal in more specialized merchandise, "stuff that you aren't going to find at any mall," she said. "People are willing to go to places when they know they are going to find things they won't see anywhere else."

Warren added that more family-oriented businesses would be a plus.

"We've got plenty of bars and restaurants around here," she said. "And we do see a number of families along our street, but they're here to have a meal and then they're gone. Having family-type things here will do a lot to keep this area alive."

Busby said what the Brady Arts District ultimately needs is something "not arts-related but neighborhood-related."

"And that is every storefront being filled," he said. "More housing, more affordable housing, all done in ways that suit the neighborhood. A place has to have a certain density and be walkable in order to become a destination.

"I also think that it should all be as arts-oriented as possible," Busby said. "Even the retail shops should have an arts flair to them. It's important to be focused on that, because when you call some place an 'arts district,' then people are going to expect to experience what that promises."

Still under construction

Boulder Street Bridge: Scheduled to be completed late summer 2012.

Fairfield Inn & Suites, on Main Street between Archer and Brady streets: Scheduled to be completed October 2012.

Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa's Hardesty Arts Center, Archer Street and Boston Avenue: Grand opening weekend Dec. 14-16.

Mathews Warehouse Project, Brady Street between Boston and Cincinnati avenues:

- **Brady Craft Alliance:** Scheduled to be completed February 2013.
- **The Woody Guthrie Archives:** Scheduled to be completed April 2013.
- **The Philbrook Museum of Arts' Eugene B. Adkins Collection and Study Center and George R. Kravis II Contemporary Design Collection:** Scheduled to be completed April 2013.

Griffin Communications/KOTV, 303 N. Boston Ave.: Scheduled to be completed late 2012.

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Associated Images:



Art admirers gather at the Tulsa Artists Coalition Gallery in downtown Tulsa's Brady District. JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World



Chas Foote trims a clay piece he's working on during a pottery class at the Brady Artists Studio. Tulsa World



Kimberly Grayson (left) and Nikki Warren co-own the Mocha Butterfly boutique. JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World file



The Brady District is visible from the roof of the Zarrow Center for Arts and Education. The new Guthrie Green is in the foreground. CHRISTOPHER SMITH / Tulsa World



Bill Copeland works to make white chocolate creations at Glacier Fine Chocolates. MIKE SIMONS / Tulsa World file



Joe Vogle opened Native Mist in the residential complex called Metro @ Brady. The store offers smoke-free alternatives to regular cigarettes. JOHN CLANTON / Tulsa World



"I think there should be areas of town that are specifically rent-controlled that will provide creative people with places where they can live and work and contribute to the community," says Steve Liggett, director of Living Arts of Tulsa. MIKE SIMONS / Tulsa World



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B.Brother (5 hours ago)



Oh, do you mean Communist Green?

the moon shall rise again (1 hour ago)

"Right wing, left Wing, chicken wing, it don't mean a thing to me," woody Guthrie

2 comments displayed

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