

'Powerful' KCCI changing city life

Projects include film festival, Get Gaines Going

By Steve Liner
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Knight Creative Communities Initiative volunteers continue to push for development of the Gaines Street corridor as part of Get Gaines Going. (Democrat files)

The Knight Creative Communities Initiative (KCCI) began a year ago as an effort to determine ways to keep young professionals in Tallahassee. Key volunteers say the result is "powerful, sustainable, important" community action.

And, they say, the success points to a new era in Tallahassee's political and economic life.

"What we need most here is private investment," said Leon County School Board Member Sheila Costigan. "KCCI proves it's now time."

In a recent interview, Mike Pate, area director for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation that provided funding for KCCI, called the program "enormously successful," lending credibility to rumors the Knight Foundation will soon announce a second-year grant to extend the project.

Two of the three KCCI initiatives hosted visible public events in May: the very first Tallahassee Film Festival and the public unveiling of Sustainable Tallahassee. And volunteers continue to apply pressure to state, county and city officials for action on development of the Gaines Street corridor as part of Get Gaines Going.

In the meantime, Pate has been quietly assembling his case for what could become a second year. This week he will meet with KCCI's community advisory group in what could be a last step before a new financial proposal is finalized.

Pate and volunteers point to the results of KCCI as an unqualified success.

"We had no idea the talent in Tallahassee or the response we would get," said Costigan, a Knight community advisor and key volunteer in the Get Gaines Going effort.

Costigan and others point to the success of the KCCI process as proof Tallahassee is "ripe for a new approach to community action."

KCCI was first announced in January 2007. The Knight Foundation funding was used to draw together volunteers interested in the creative side of life in Florida's Capital City. Forums were held in a format developed by Richard Florida, a professor at George Mason University, to facilitate "community-up rather than to-down" development.

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The forums delivered the ideas for the film festival, a program to support environmental action and resource conservation, and defined the need to press forward with cleanup and redevelopment of Gaines Street.

Hundreds participated in the original sessions, called throughout the community by more than a dozen local catalysts.

Pate said the Knight Foundation specified only a single imperative for programs that would grow out of KCCI: They must be viable, ongoing nonprofit organizations by the end of the first year. He said all three efforts have recently attained that goal. Each group's leaders said recently their efforts will continue.

Organizers of the Tallahassee Film Festival, Sustainable Tallahassee and Get Gaines Going are taking long-term views and highlighting the communitywide impact of their projects.

"This is a very large issue that encompasses concerns about the energy we use and our weekend yardwork's impact on water quality," said Kristin Dozier of Sustainable Tallahassee. "All of us should think about the products we use, where they come from, how they are used and what happens to them when we're done."

"We are the creative hub of Tallahassee where visual artists, performance artists, small businesses and entrepreneurs can find a place to showcase their work in an 18-hour downtown environment," Costigan said of Gaines Street.

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