

DIPLOMA IN ARTS TOURISM

SET 1

ASSIGNMENT ALQ # 2

“TAKING THE TIME TO LEARN”

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Keeping it Alive

Introduction

Charity begins at home

It's not every day you are invited to California, especially in October when Scotland will be bracing itself for a long cold spell. As part of my certificate in Arts Tourism, Gordon Prestoungrange invited both myself and colleague Sylvia Burgess to attend a Mural Symposium in the city of Lindsay, by the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California.

A charitable venture the Baron Courts, was established in 1998, echoing an ethos of community regeneration and tourism. Three years later Prestoungrange Arts Festival was christened and continued with the idea of raising the profile with arts initiatives, believing that linking Arts to History makes heritage more accessible. It was by chance that Gordon Prestoungrange stumbled upon Chemainus and the Global Association of Arts and Tourism and that is why we were in Lindsay, to find out even more.

“Who said it was just Art”

My plans to travel light were dashed when I was asked to carry 200 of our newly printed Prestoungrange 2006 Publicity brochure along with all other relevant literature, the coal trail, a mural leaflet and the latest edition of our Brushstrokes leaflet which is distributed around Prestonpans. The response from fellow delegates made the extra baggage fee worth paying.

Arrangements that Karl Scultz our Set Advisor, colleague and dare I say chauffeur, met us at Fresno Airport in his bright canary yellow VW beetle, with added butterflies and flower power art work from bumper to bumper I knew if nothing else it was going to be a colourful journey.

Sooner than expected we arrived at Lindsay. Whilst checking in at the Olive Tree Motel reception, we spotted two large boxes, which we knew were the carrier bags from Bulgaria, designed to coincide with this event to promote 2006 in Prestonpans, Scotland. No time to relax we unpacked and then set about gathering the promotional leaflets into the carrier bags.

We had already ventured to Exeter town when it came clear there was little or no chance in Lindsay to spend the dollars burning a hole in my wallet. It was here in a quilt shop I spoke to an assistant who not only knew Prestonpans, but was taught in the same high school my son attends today. That's something to think about locally, sewn quilts on sale on our on-line boutique. Who said it was a small world?

I felt a little nervous not quite knowing what to expect during the following days. I only wish there had been an informal BQ or supper the night before to give an opportunity to meet up with everyone involved, I'm sure those folk who had attended on their own would have benefited instead of staying in their hotel rooms.

In My Opinion

.... Too many vouchers

The schedule ran from Thursday 16th October to Saturday 18th October. Registration and breakfast started from 8.00am the first day. I joined a confused queue at the registration reception, wondering why I had to wait to collect nametags plus individual vouchers for lunch/breakfast and dinner. I immediately thought it would have been much easier if candidates simply signed in and picked up a survival package for the three days. It would certainly give the ladies on the registration desk time to answer any enquires as well as direct us to the breakfast bar hidden at the back of the hall. One thing I did learn from my days in hospitality you can't start a busy day on an empty stomach.

Lindsay town's Theatre seemed the obvious choice for the presentations and for the speakers to amplify their expertise. I had already highlighted areas I thought would interest me on the conference schedule. I was here to compare and find out how others had gone about getting it right and hopefully learn from their experiences to put us on the right track.

Who better to open the conference than Bill Drennan the anchorman who took Lindsay on board and saw it through. His enthusiasm and hard work had encouraged others, mostly volunteers. In the background was Carolyn Callison another jewel and Bill's right hand lady, keeping all those links together.

Dozens of folk interested in mural art sat amongst us, including artists, authors, technical experts, economic development officers and enthusiastic people from communities sharing their contributions and plans for the economic recovery in their towns.

The conference schedule was varied and guest speakers presented their experiences within short time slots, giving convenient time-outs for water/coffee breaks at the Grind across the street.

The Grind was a designated area to take refreshments and network. It was also set out for all those connected with the Global Arts Association to display their wares. We even rustled up a small table to rest our carrier publicity packs.

As 12.30pm drew closer, our colourful corner caused quite a stir. Candidates assuming we were caterers with carryout-boxed lunches formed a queue. After a few disappointed sighs the bags were quickly snatched away as consolation prizes.

It did not take me long to understand the “power of the idea” and the ability to make it work, especially as the bags were a regular sight during the three days. There was a general buzz about our plans for 2006 and interested parties were keen to hear additional information. I obtained a copy of the Data Base of all candidates contact details as well as a handful of business cards and promised we would confirm all information on our next get together in Nevada.

Since our return I have asked PR Advisor and Design Consultant Pauline Jaffrey to put together with her contacts in the Scottish Tourist Board a “What’s on in East Lothian” a guide to what we can offer locally. This will be ready for when we travel to Nevada, Ely in August 2004 as planned.

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What Next?

Today's Essential Ingredients in the regeneration recipe.

We have a unique opportunity in August 2006 when Prestonpans town hosts a Global Mural Conference which will welcome delegates from towns around the world who are also associated with using arts to help with its economic regeneration. As a result of attending the Lindsay conference we hope to go forward and underline the ever-increasing popularity and vibrancy of the visual arts in this corner of the World.

We have started already and defined our own place, namely the Gothenburg. Here we plan to run facilities to accommodate functions, bistro services and be a home to the Arts Festival Programme. To finance the Arts, we need to generate interest and more importantly, cash, and that is why the re-establishment of the towns own Fowler's Ales will be brewed in a microbrewery housed inside the Gothenburg. Recognising that the introduction of a microbrewery would be an ideal way of sustaining a past market and will contribute in the economic revival of the town.

A rosy year in prospect

Another year over, and what have we done?

- Published and distributed issues 4#5#6 of Brushstrokes, a newsletter informing the local community of our plans and news.
- Invited the Lord Mayor Gotborg(Sweden) to Prestonpans to unveil our 7th Mural, followed by a reception attended by residents and press at our new Heritage Centre.
- Published three new additions 14#15#16 to our Historical Series.
- Gained three separate grants for the Murals painting programme.
- Started phase one of the restoration programme to the Gothenburg to its original 1908 state.
- Developed a microbrewery.
- Re-produced coal trail leaflet that would be used in Museums and Tourist Board outlets
- Completed three new murals.
- Introduced Arts Festival online souvenir boutique.
- Introduced Art Classes locally, tutored by muralist Andrew Crummy.

And 2004 promises to be a good year. The doors will re-open to the Gothenburg/Heritage Centre and will welcome all wishing to utilise our facilities, gatherings, functions, exhibitions, tourists and the in-house brewing school members.

There is plenty in the pipeline to start 2004. Commissions of murals, painting and additions to our Historical Series. An exhibition of the works achieved by our very own Art Classes to be unveiled in the Gothenburg, and the shipment of two trees from Canada as part of a Totem Pole project, and these are just the tip of the iceberg in our future plans.

Making a difference”

It's a fact a fast growing population in East Lothian will grow by 650 a year until it touches 100,000 in 2016 – one of the fastest rises in Scotland. The 'Edinburgh' effect is almost entirely responsible for the surge, manifested in a massive demand for housing. Attractive East Lothian, with its sandy beaches, emerald golf courses and good quality of life, beckons many from the city – and even outwith Scotland. So now we know some of our targets. Having worked for some years in the management/hospitality environment I am well aware of the lack of quality food and drink establishment in East Lothian and the few that have kept their reputation are well past their “sell by date”.

Its very hard to forecast accurately how the Gothenburg will perform in terms of visitors, but if we give them a reason to visit and tell them what is on offer under one roof!

“Come here have a nice lunch, buy a book, purchase local art and craft, taste our own brewed beer, enjoy teas poured from our 21st century interpretation of the once famous Prestonpans Pottery of yesterday”.

The plans look and promise to be wonderful but we will have to find the balance between success and sustainability. We must have knowledge and know what our public need and how to give it to them. I have learnt planning, management and development is our way forward. We have a team who are productive in use of their time, who set goals and deadlines, recognise what is achievable and work together to re-enforce belief in where we want to get to.

We have just recently welcomed Adele Conn a local Marketing Manager to develop our market and assess using her sources how we get the right information. We have to learn how to influence our customers to use our products or service as well as anticipate and satisfy their requirements, an example taken from the Chemainus success story.

Identifying and comparing with the speakers presenting their stories, it became apparent to me they all in some way had got it right! There was no secret they just set goals and got on with it. Find the most important asset and invest in them I remember hearing. We have invested, and have tapped into a lifetime of experience from all those involved with the Baron Courts. Be patience especially when dealing with the usual suspects and doubters lurking in the background. Don't put obstacles in your path take a leap, put in the necessary work, or try and do something else. Find the roads-in to gain political support from Local Councils, network other businesses. We have taken listened and learnt, identified some of our mistakes. Now we have taken another route and approached the Economic Development Networks locally, resulting in positive support and advice especially on the funding programme.

Exeter Town expert spoke of establishing relationships with schools and raising the profile of local history with the 3rd Grade Students. We have also tried with local schools and converted our Historical Series into on-line Teaching Resource packs for schools to utilise but unfortunately it seems to be a non-runner. Having children myself I know that you have to try something different, possibly design an interactive CD game, or tell the story on CD narrated in a local Prestonpan accent.

A Bright Future

Lorraine from Ely recognised the need for “home grown jobs” or real jobs and to capitalise on local talent. They even created local town yellow pages, using thirty businesses and entered a profile page for each and in turn the businesses gave their support.

Our future is staring us right in the face a new generation of community based realistic projects have to be established, to encourage youth to continue in their heritage. We have identified the economics of this particular environment and have always felt that using local craftsmen and restorers was the right path to follow.

The same specialists now form part of a dying trade and it is here I think we should start, at the grass routes within the schools. Encourage these businesses to offer apprenticeships and give hope and choice back to next generation. By retaining this workforce we hopefully will capitalise from their spending power. They buy into our service and we re-invest into their future.

The word is according to the Style magazine a supplement in the “Sunday Times” newspaper, that future customers are “Going Local” as more empathise in 2004 will be socialising in the neighbourhood and in local venues with families and friends.

We have to plan ahead and not miss any opportunities it is not good enough just to market locally. We want to also focus on the bigger towns and cities and entice those that often use the by-pass to come and visit and see what they are missing and then come back. Here we need the help of East Lothian Council on how they can help with signs to encourage the public the pay our town a visit.

Setting standards, community pride came across loud and clear during our three days Mural Symposium in California. We are learning and working towards improving the image of the Town and in such a way creating major interest locally. Here we can also create wealth and contribute in the regeneration of a town not unlike Chemainus by welcoming hordes of guests and visitors.

We have already enjoyed national and local coverage from BBC Scotland TV and Radio and reports in all the Scottish Press when The Lord Mayor celebrated with the Community our John Muir/Gothenburg Mural. The Baron Courts Offices are located on the first floor of the Gothenburg directly opposite the mural and I have noticed a steady flow of cars stopping to see the mural to take snaps.

The Real Thing

Thinking back to the October conference in Lindsay and glancing at my shrivelled copy of the schedule today I still wonder why James Prigoff, Author and Photographer of Spraycan Art won me over. It certainly was not highlighted as my top four presentations most likely to interest me. Perhaps the thought of it being so removed from anything I do on a daily basis.

James flashed up a wonderful display of images with all the relevant background of the individuals responsible.

Spraycan Art started in a hostile environment and created a new art form, not unlike what we are trying to achieve.

By example the youth started to excite and capture the imagination of their neighbourhoods with vibrant colours and powerful images, it was above all fun something forgotten in today series art world.

Spraycan Art fought a fierce battle against the “powers that be” they express their ideas and thoughts and remaining anonymous write where and what they wanted. Surprisingly enough they still want to be liked and accepted by the public.

On a personal point I don't really want to understand but enjoy their pieces of art, you don't have to analyse everything you see. I know that when I think of spraycan art I think of accessibility and social inclusion, working and learning together. This is where I believe I have a role to play working within the Baron Courts.

GREY MATTER

Perhaps if the Nova paint specialist had a hands on presentation involving some of the audience I may have enjoyed or even wanted to listen. Even I was aware one had to prepare walls before painting them. How long will the paint last I heard the question asked and the answer a triangle balance a) Location b) surface preparation and c) type of paint to be applied.

Lighting, moisture and surfaces were all dealt with in great detail; lots of questions did cross my mind if only the artists familiar to Mark in the audience would let the novices get a word in:

1. Can we get Nova paints in the UK
2. What do we use for preparation of sea walls
3. Can children work with such paints

Maintenance of our murals will shortly have to be considered and a plan of action drawn up budgeted and managed, which is something, highlighted during this presentation. One thing we did get right two years ago was the purchase of a three tier scaffolding apparatus, light and easily erected, and has been used on several occasions saving us quite a bit.

CONCLUSION

Keeping it Alive

As I type our Muralist Andrew Crummy is painting his latest creation onto a Power Station wall during the Christmas Break. His idea of adding known characters to his designs ensure that they will sustain interest in the area as the extended families grow and return to remember.

We still have a duty to preserve and maintain the art displayed in order for it to be economically viable. We are planning to produce a new mural leaflet, which we hope will help preserve and promote the Murals in Prestonpans.

I can see in years to come open art markets setting up stalls beside the murals, arranged lectures, exhibitions, summer evening story telling and book signings underneath the murals, walks specially designed around our mural trail booklet, guided tours, culture holidays breaks, not everyone wants to take off to the sun.

At the moment if you wish to stay in this town there is one Bed and Breakfast, perhaps in the future Hotels, Motels, Guest Houses and lots of Bed and Breakfast businesses will pop up to accommodate our visitors.

There is so much more to tap into, art schools, theatres, music, dance, and drama just to start off with and hopefully using others arts enhance our existing murals,

CONCLUSION

If nothing else writing this assignment gives me time to reflect on what I really did learn from the Congress at Lindsay, California and how my role can play an important part in our future. We need to keep surprising people! The worst thing you can do is to stop wondering what to do next. I certainly ask a lot more questions now and listen to the answers.

Another quote springs to mind when I think of the conference by Nathan Zakheim “Expect the best and plan for the worst”

Before I finished up for the Christmas break I received numerous enquiries whether we will be selling Christmas cards and calendars for next year?

Next Year!

There certainly is a “wind of change” in Prestonpans and the growth of a serious tourist industry!

