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Manitou artis and designing new self-view of community  
By Roma Green

A lot of people in Maniotou Springs hope there town someday will become the Taos of Colorado-a national center for arts and crafts.

Mayor George Miller, an art lover with a particular interest in the theatre, believes that arts and crafts bushinesses are the kind Manitou most needs to attract.

And Councilman Ken Olson, in agreement with Miller, adds that art and artists argument the uniqueness of the community.

"The art community already present in Manitou, makes it the kind of place artists wat to live, He explained. "Manitou could get a reputation like Santa Fe or Taos, because it, too, has beauty of landscape and architecture, as well as art."

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, business people and artists in Manitou had an oil and vinegar relationship. Today thing are different. Someone or something has shaken the bottle, and not only do the town groups mix well, they are often one in the same.

The reason, historically, for the aversion between business and the art community, had to do with the Haight Ashbury, L.S.D., love beads and hippies.

Artists, never know for conformity, were often "hippies," and the establishment wanted all "freaks" to clear out of town.

"The old conflict between the hippies and the straights is dying," Miller sadi. "The really radical people, with nothing to offer but their radicalness, have moved on. Those of us who are straight have gotten used to those that aren't and vice versa."

Darryl Murphy, Commonwheel Artists chairman and director of Apricorn PreSchool, believes the old troubles haven't completely disappeared, but are definitely on the wane.

"A number of the people, identified as hippies, have taken more responsibility in the political system here. As a result, the attitude of the city council has softened," he said.

But there are still a few conservative businessmen who think our art fairs are flea markets competing with their businesses," he concluded

Commonwheel, a cooperative for artists, was established by Mike Mroz, owner of Morningtown restaurant, about 2 1/2 years ago.

"The inital idea of Commonwheel was that it would serve as a cooperative for all artists - people in theater, dance, music, painters, sculptors . . . but through time and evolution it began to serve graphic artists and sculptors primarily," Mroz said.

Lynn Loftus, a member of the co-op who is on the board of directors for Commonwheel, admitted that Commonwheel had dealt effectively only with the artists and crafts people so far. But in the future, she said the group will once again try to offer help to every artist.

"We are gradually expanding," she explained. "In 1976 we had the first Renaissance fair. They included theater people. We had them write the scripts for an original puppet show."

“And we’re trying, now, to do some educational things. Last summer at the fairs we had classes for 3 to 6 year olds. We’ll soon be having classes offered through the Free University.”

One of the groups’ major accomplishments, members agree, was the first Commonwheel Fine Arts Juried show in the Miramont Castle. Prize money, \$650, awarded to artist selected by judges from other cities. This probably will become an annual show.

The MayBe Shop, acquired by Commonwheel almost a year ago, has given members a place to sell their arts and crafts.

There is a strong feeling of “community” among the artists of Manitou. Susan Morris, assistant manager at Meadowfound and a potter, served to express the attitude of the majority.

“Manitou springs is an artists’ haven. It is different than the city. Here there’s unity and we share our ideals,” she said.

“I’m in a babysitting cooperative” she explained. “Several of the other women in it are artisans. We do things to help each other because we care. Many of us are products of the hippie movement, and we still believe you should love your neighbors.”

“There’s a real community feeling here in Manitou, especially among the artisans,” she continued. “We’ve joined together in helping each other. We trade work and we do each other favors.”

As a money maker for the city, art ranks high in the hopes of most residents. “Arts and crafts represent a potentially large source of income to the city resulting from sales tax revenues,” Miller said.

Ms. Morris believes that these days, the market for art is increasing, not just in Manitou, but in society as a whole. “People aren’t buying things that are mass-produced. There’s a more human feel to a hand-thrown pot.”

“And what could be better for the city than art?” asked Darryl Murphy. “I don’t see any other industry that could be more positive than art - it’s a good clean business.”