

Arc greenspace recognized for transformation of blighted property

By Mike Crowley

MEADVILLE TRIBUNE

A community-oriented project nearing completion in downtown Meadville has received recognition as a “Great Place in Pennsylvania.”

The Arc Community Greenspace was honored by the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Planning Association, which called the project a 2023 Great Transformation. The categories recognized this year were public spaces and transformations. The program, in its 10th year, honored four nominations this year, bringing the overall total of Great Places in Pennsylvania to 55.

Mark Weindorf, executive director of The Arc of Crawford County, called the recognition “awesome.”

“This is going to be an exciting space for Meadville. We’re really looking forward to getting it completed and getting people to use it,” he said. “It’s been a long time coming. The pandemic slowed us down. It’s been four-plus years in the making and finally this fall it’s going to be a great asset to downtown Meadville.”

Great Places have “a sustainable vision for

the future and serve as a model for other communities,” said an announcement from the American Planning Association’s Pennsylvania chapter. “These high-quality examples of successful planning efforts that build healthy and vibrant communities throughout the Commonwealth help to achieve the Chapter’s mission and vision.”

The Greenspace, located adjacent to the Arch Street gateway into downtown Meadville, was previously a blighted lot occupied by a dilapidated building, the former Meadville Club. In See ARC, Page A5

Arc

Continued from Page A1 response, The Arc, the city, and the Art & Environment Initiative led by former Allegheny College art professor Amara Geffen began collaborating in 2018 to address these issues.

Stakeholder meetings and a series of community engagement events resulted in a community-inspired vision for the site. Subsequently, myriad in-kind services, together with public-private funding, brought the site design to fruition.

Geffen said that community buy-in and support from the state were instrumental to the project’s success. An initial grant from Pennsylvania Council on the Arts’ Creative Communities Initiative “really set all of this in motion,” she said, leading to additional support locally and from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

“It’s great for Meadville,” Geffen added. “It shows we know how to work together and get things and how to make sure the community has input in those things.”

The outcome is a vibrant community gathering place that incorporates native landscaping, streetscape improvements, a performance stage, benches, colorful shade umbrellas, solar-powered umbrella tables that provide free WiFi and

evening lighting, and an Americans with Disabilities Act-accessible walkway. Unique to the design is that the painted walkway has the appearance of a stream to highlight historic Mill Run that runs underneath. It has also spurred improvements to neighboring properties and strengthened stakeholder synergies.

Joining the Greenspace as a 2023 Great Transformation was downtown Pittston in Luzerne County. Additionally, McDade Park in Lackawanna County and Pearson Park in Lawrence County were designated as Great Public Spaces.

The Arc Community Greenspace, located on Market Street between Chestnut and Arch streets, will host a slate of family-friendly events on Aug. 4 from 5 to 9 p.m. during Thunder in the City. The free event will feature an inflatable obstacle course, a country dancing demonstration, a community line dancing class, and other activities for parents and kids.