



AKRON // 2019 Summary Report



atplayakron.com
@PLAYakron

an ART x LOVE production

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Introduction

In June of 2017, Art x Love embarked on a Knight Cities grant project to produce an 18-month, 24-neighborhood series of interactive art challenges, strategically designed to bring diverse people together and encourage deeper community connections. We called this project @PLAY.

Our team explored every street in each neighborhood, interviewed thousands of residents, and developed 93 interactive art challenges based on our learnings. We hired 168 local artists and collaborated with 8,775 residents to produce more than 100 pieces of public art, and reinvigorate more than 50 public spaces across Akron.

We are deeply grateful to the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for giving us this opportunity, and to the City of Akron, Summit Metro Parks, Akron Public Schools, Akron-Summit County Public Library, Summit County Historical Society, and our numerous neighborhood partners for their outstanding support

We called our project @PLAY because we believe that the most responsible way to evolve and improve our way of life is to do it together. Playful collaboration and creative opportunities challenge the way we think about ourselves, our environment, and our capacity for change.

This document represents @PLAY's Summary Report, which includes a snapshot of our neighborhood learnings, creative initiatives, and testimonials. We will follow this with in-depth neighborhood reports on our website: atplayakron.com

Thank you for taking an interest in this project. We hope it inspires you as much as this community inspired us. As one of our team members said, "@PLAY taught me how to human better."

We look forward to humaning with you in the future.

Sincerely,



Mac Love
Chief Catalyst
Art x Love, LLC

Project Overview

Lead Organization: Art x Love, LLC
Address: 157 King James Way, Akron, OH 44308
Email: contact@artxlove.com
Website: artxlove.com
Team: Mac Love, *Chief Catalyst*
Allyse Love, *Chief Meddler*
Josy Jones, *Interactive Manager*
Chris Harvey, *Creative Manager*

Knight Cities Project: @PLAY Akron
Fiscal Agent: The Miami Foundation
Purpose: To foster civic engagement and increase neighborhood vibrancy with a series of interactive art challenges and playful activities in Akron neighborhoods.
Approach: Art x Love explored every street in all 24 Akron neighborhoods, conducting field and ethnographic research with stakeholders and residents to assess challenges and opportunities to improve quality of life. Creative solutions were sourced from the neighborhood and tested with residents, to inform and inspire production of @PLAY interactive art challenges.
Terms: June 1, 2017 to November 30, 2018
Amount: \$252,500
Website: atplayakron.com
Facebook: @PLAYakron
Instagram: @PLAYakron
Twitter: @PLAYakron

By The Numbers

The measure of @PLAY's success is not the scope of work, but the legacy it inspires among those who participated and continue to learn from what we discovered and created together.



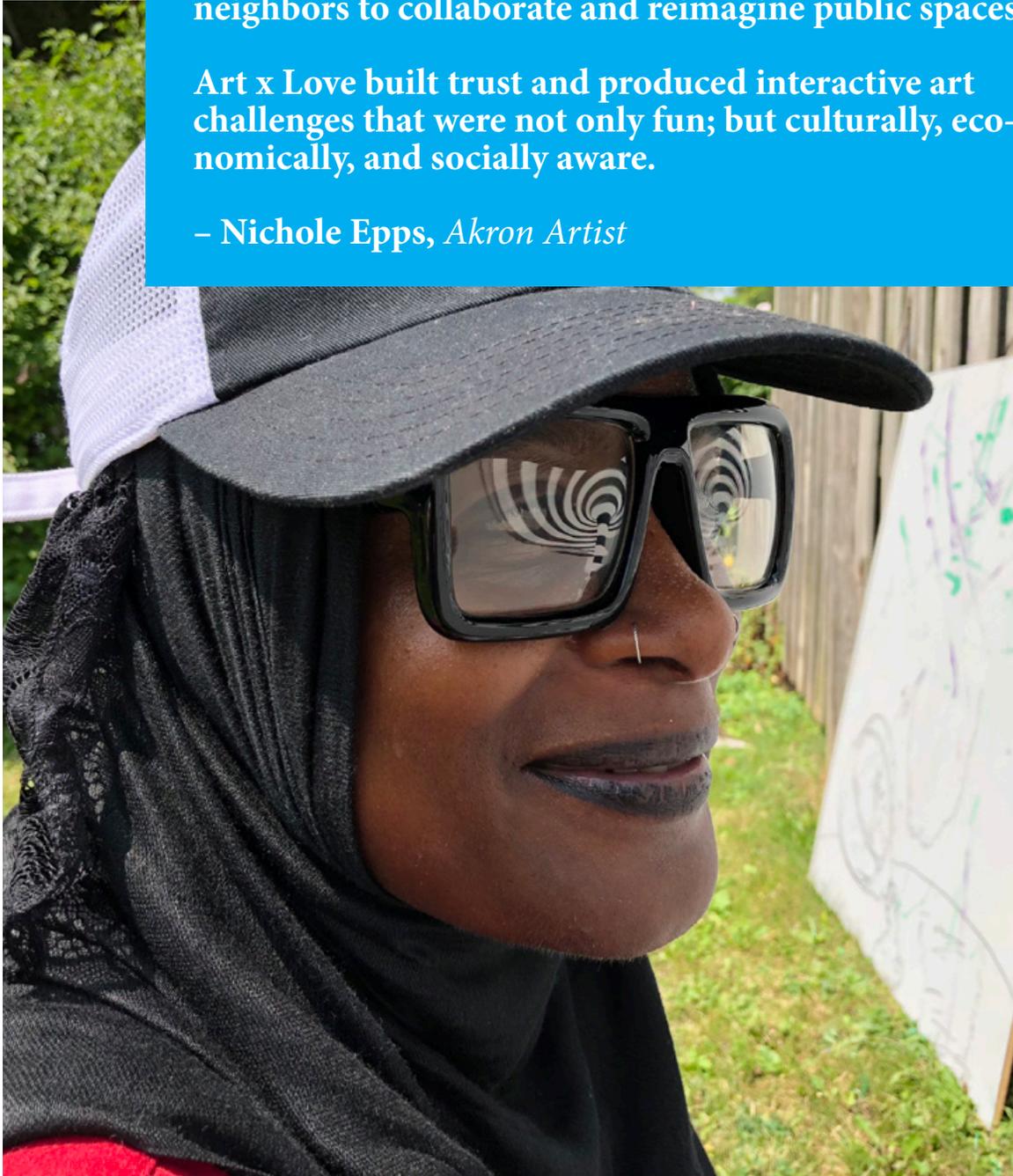
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@PLAY afforded countless opportunities for artists and neighbors to collaborate and reimagine public spaces.

Art x Love built trust and produced interactive art challenges that were not only fun; but culturally, economically, and socially aware.

– Nichole Epps, Akron Artist

”



Cascade Valley

@PLAY = Transformed
Artists = 17
Participants = 319

Discovery: A gorgeous recreation corridor with high traffic areas that pose serious pedestrian challenges. Historic neighborhood identity has been decimated by urban planning and poor reputation. @PLAY arrived at a time when many organizations had made promises and failed to deliver.

Strategy: Improve pedestrian experience and enhance unique neighborhood amenities.

Key Developments: Initial support of neighborhood UoA sculpture project collapsed due to poor organization and communication. @PLAY stepped in to address challenges and opportunities.

Interactive Projects: *Block Party* murals, *Pedestrian Beauty* street mural, *Wingline Bench Party* installation, *Cascade Village Garden* fencing, *Rebranding the City* at Beech St. Trailhead.

Outcome: Cascade Valley has an attractive new pedestrian corridor and wayfinding attraction, and the *Block Party* murals and benches have turned an unused green space into an attractive and expansive space for liesure and play.



Clockwise from top left: (1) Mother and daughter painting at the *Block Party*, (2) One of four wingline benches and murals created and installed by the @PLAY project, (3) *Pedestrian Beauty* street mural at North St. & Howard St., (4) residents enjoying the new fence at Cascade Village Garden, made with repurposed wood from Merriman Valley.

Chapel Hill

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 0
Participants = 240

Discovery: A diverse and historic neighborhood that suffers from retail and shopping-mall stigma. Chapel Hill residents have strong ties to North Hill, and similar interests, but in order to enhance neighborhood identity, highly differentiated amenities need further support.

Strategy: Enhance communal spaces and unique neighborhood features.

Key Developments: Residents loved the concept of a *Super Community Garden*, but @PLAY failed to procure additional support to address this need. We were able to convince First Serve to expand their volunteer efforts to include Bettes Cemetery, and to work in collaboration with the local Boy Scouts of America to improve wayfinding, add parking, and install stairs to the entrance.

Interactive Projects: *Climax Park @PLAY, First Serve - Bettes Cemetery @PLAY.*

Outcome: Multiple communal spaces were enhanced, but work at Bettes Cemetery remains incomplete while the sign awaits repairs.



Clockwise from top left: (1) Bench fixed and wind chime installed at Climax Park, (2) Wind chime installed at the old Bettes School playground, (3) Bettes Corners Cemetery, the final resting place of Nathaniel Bettes, a Revolutionary War hero who served under George Washington at Valley Forge, (4) new steps and a parking lot were added at Bettes Corners Cemetery, to improve access and wayfinding, but the sign was removed and has not been replaced.

Coventry Crossing

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 6
Participants = 63

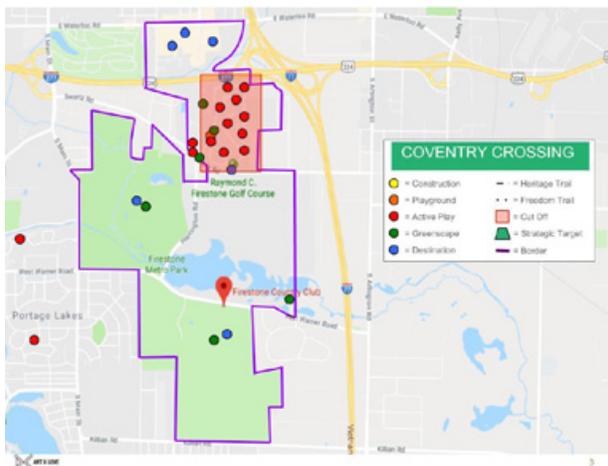
Discovery: This newly designated neighborhood was once part of Firestone Park. Many residents consider the main roadways too dangerous for kids to freely access park spaces on their own.

Strategy: Create "destination-worthy" public art to enhance neighborhood identity and improve wayfinding. Activate the neighborhood with a *Pedal to the Metal* bike rack and tour to stimulate exploration and raise awareness. If weather permits, produce a sledding event.

Key Developments: *Pedal to the Metal* initiative failed to launch because bike rack designs were deemed "too artsy." *Akron Rising* and *Rings of Akron* benches were commissioned to provide "destination-worthy" amenities and raise neighborhood awareness. Winter activation proved unfeasible due to warm weather and scheduling conflicts.

Interactive Project: *Rebranding the City* at Coventry Oaks

Outcome: The performance of *Rebranding the City* was well received, but attendance was below average. *Akron Rising* and *Rings of Akron* benches are ready and await installation.



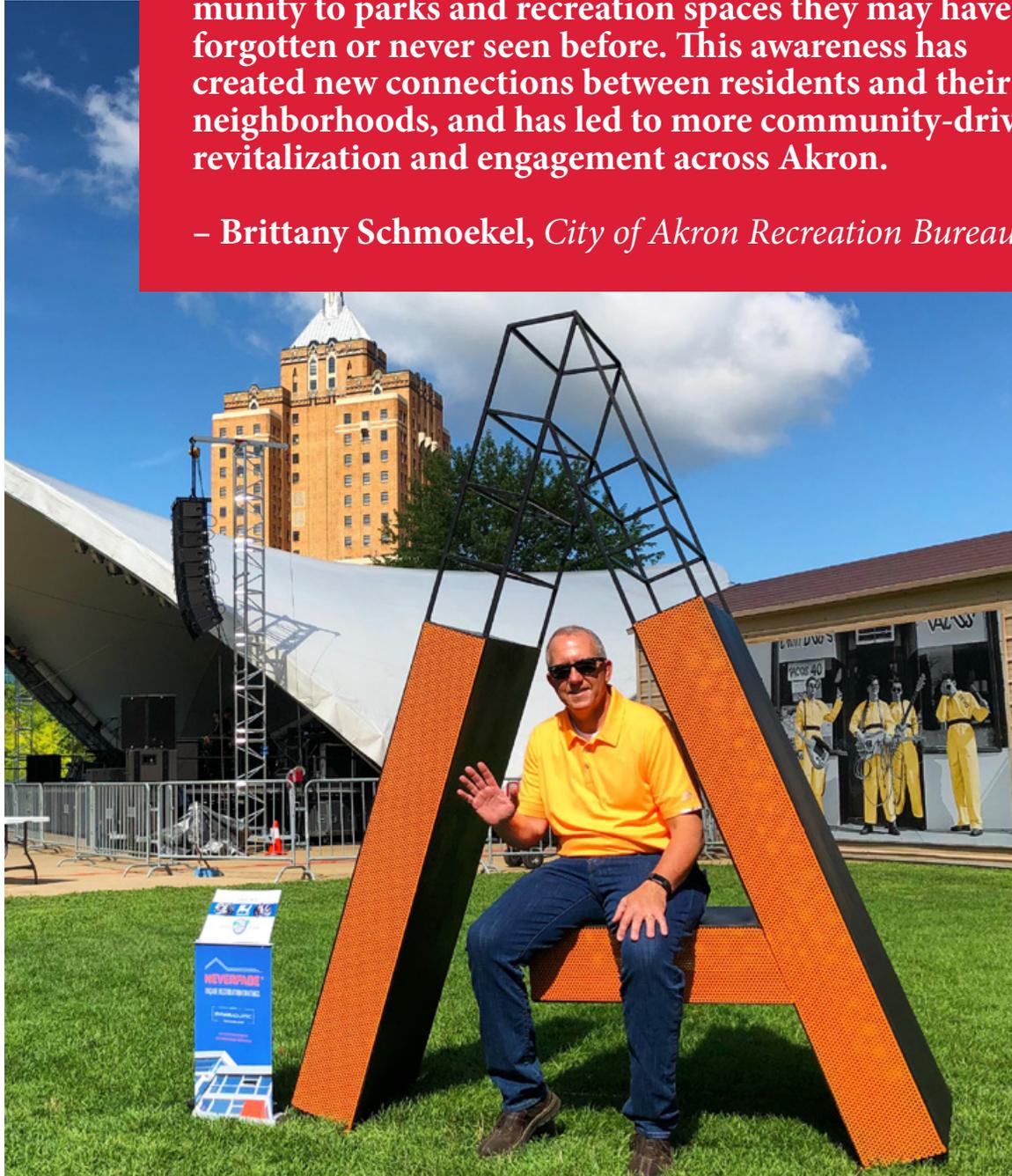
Clockwise from top left: (1) Coventry Crossing neighborhood mapping, (2) *Rebranding the City* at Coventry Oaks, (3) *Pedal Spot* concept art by Krunchworks, (4) *Akron Rising* benches by Jeremy Jenkins and John Communale.

“

@PLAY acted as a living treasure map, leading the community to parks and recreation spaces they may have forgotten or never seen before. This awareness has created new connections between residents and their neighborhoods, and has led to more community-driven revitalization and engagement across Akron.

– Brittany Schmoekel, *City of Akron Recreation Bureau*

”



Pictured: Mayor Dan Horrigan poses with an *Akron Rising* letterform bench at the Signal Tree Festival in Lock 3, in Downtown Akron. Hundreds of residents followed and did the same.

Downtown Akron

@PLAY = Activated
Artists = 57
Participants = 1,176

Discovery: Downtown Akron's development is at odds with the residential community. Inconsistent public spaces contribute to a negative experience and perception that there is "nothing to do."

Strategy: Engage downtown residents and improve quality of local programming for all.

Key Developments: The Park East residential area was selected by Mural Arts Philadelphia for investment, freeing @PLAY to invest elsewhere. Metro RTA collaborations failed to launch.

Interactive Projects: *AKRON* mural at Signal Tree '17, *Akron Rising* bench at Signal Tree '18, *Urban Troubadour* at Art x Love, *CUBE + Art* public discussion, *Yoga Squared @PLAY Silent Disco*, Akron Children's Museum *@PLAY Silent Disco*; *Rebranding the City* at Art x Love, Akron Art Museum, Innerbelt Forrest, Signal Tree '18; *First Serve - AKRON* mural, *Picnic Table Painting*, *#CHIMEinAkron* creation and bench prep, *Beyond the Dream* at City Hall, *@PLAY Summary Exhibition*.

Outcome: Art x Love's Downtown Akron studio proved to be an ideal location for neighborhood networking and creative development. Thousands of residents passed through and were able to contribute and leave a mark across multiple neighborhood initiatives.



Clockwise from top left: (1) the *AKRON* collaborative mural draws a crowd at Signal Tree '17, (2) *Urban Troubadour* performs, (3) *@PLAY Silent Disco* Yoga at Lock 3, (4) *CUBE + Art* public discussion at Art x Love.

Downtown Akron



Clockwise from top left: (1) *Beyond the Dream* murals installed at City Hall, (2) *First Serve* work site, (3) *Rebranding the City* at Art x Love, (4) *Rebranding the City* at the Akron Art Museum, (5) *Akron Rising* bench unveiling at Signal Tree '18, (6) painted guidelines for Downtown Akron Partnership's *Northside District* street mural by April Couch.

East Akron

@PLAY = Transformed
Artists = 19
Participants = 431

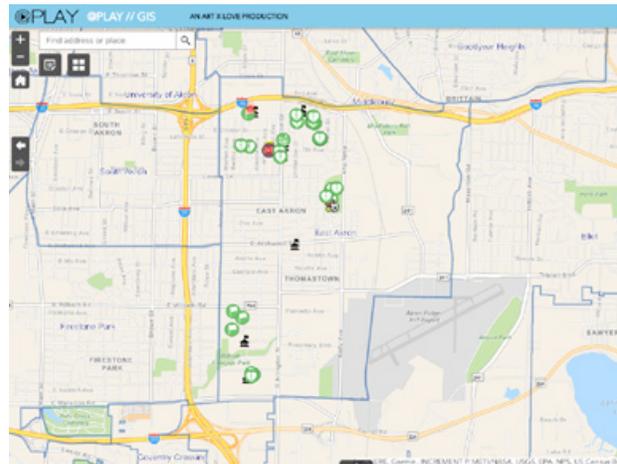
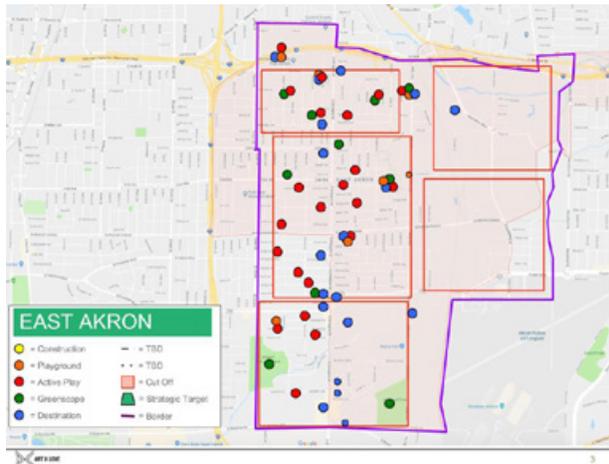
Discovery: East Akron is divided into three areas (North, Middle, and South) with clearly differentiated residential experiences, challenges, and aspirations. There is also a gap between legacy residents and a new generation that needs more support, opportunities, and investment.

Strategy: Engage residents in all three areas with distinct and unifying neighborhood projects.

Key Developments: The *Heart of A.KING* mural was commissioned for East Akron, but strategic wayfinding locations have rejected offers to install it. Residents were strongly interested in a *Silent Disco Dustup*, but our team determined this would not be as impactful or sustainable as needed.

Interactive Projects: *HYPE Kids Murals*, *Bubble Fest* at Joy Park, *AKRON* collaborative mural with YMCA, *Chalkboard Rainbow Bridge* at Jonathan Ave., *Rebranding the City* at Minson Plaza, *ArcGIS Mapping* with the City of Akron.

Outcome: More than a dozen pieces of public art have been installed across the neighborhood, and residents are embracing new corridors and opportunities for growth.



Clockwise from top left: (1) @PLAY neighborhood mapping, (2) @PLAY ArcGIS Mapping collaboration with the City of Akron, (3) one of twelve *HYPE Kids Murals* installed at key pedestrian corridors throughout East Akron, (4) *HYPE Kids* at work during a 2-day collaboration.

East Akron



Clockwise from top left: (1) Local kids activating the chalkboard wall, (2) the Eller Boys & Girls Club team posing on top of their *Rainbow Bridge* paintscape, (3) *Rebranding the City* at Minson Plaza, (4) residents painting an AKRON mural at Joy Park, (5) families having fun at *Bubble Fest*, (6) artist Salwa Abdelmajeed and our East Akron mural.

“

The @PLAY project is a model of engagement and community empowerment through public art.

Mac and the Art x Love team worked tirelessly to identify stakeholders and grow relationships in all of the neighborhoods.

@PLAY stands as a powerful illustration of art's ability to amplify and strengthen people's attachment to where they live.

– Kyle Julien, *Director of Urban Planning, EANDC*

”



Pictured: Local children and families having a blast with Dr. Awesome, the 4x Guinness World Record Holder for largest indoor and outdoor soap bubble, at @PLAY's Bubble Fest in Joy Park.

Ellet

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 8
Participants = 153

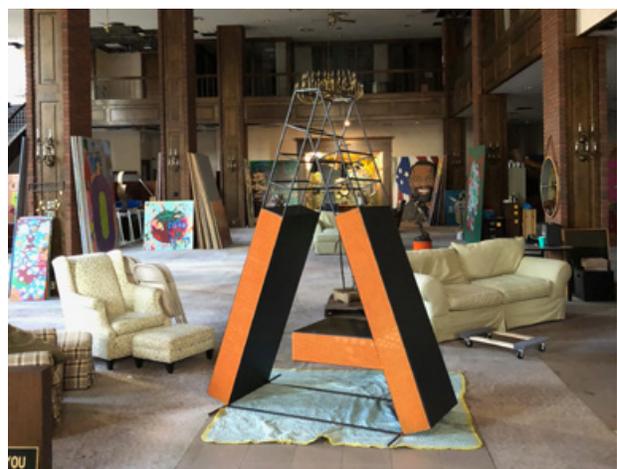
Discovery: A huge residential neighborhood with several of Akron's most iconic destinations. A complicated and negative stigma permeates outside neighborhood perception.

Strategy: Enhance business corridor and turn negative associations into positive equities.

Key Developments: The *Great Streets* initiative supplanted our initial strategy. *SmELLET Food Fest* was abandoned due to implementation and scheduling challenges. *Pedal to the Metal* failed to launch. A local shooting inspired our *Color Splash Party* and *Rebranding the City* event, but it had to be rescheduled due to rain.

Interactive Projects: *Color Splash Party* collaborative murals, *Ellet Welcomes You* collaborative mural, *Rebranding the City* at Davenport Park

Outcome: The *Color Splash* and *Ellet Welcomes You* murals await completion for installation. Our interactive art challenges suffered from competing interests and scheduling conflicts.



Clockwise from top left: (1) Concept art for *Ellet Welcomes You* mural installation, (2) a young resident admires her work at the *Color Splash Party*, (3) *Akron Rising* sculpture awaiting installation at a site to-be-confirmed in Ellet, (4) *Rebranding the City* at Davenport Park.

Fairlawn Heights

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 7
Participants = 61

Discovery: A wealthy and proud residential neighborhood that would prefer to have fewer people traveling to and through it. Stakeholders specifically directed us to invest our funds elsewhere.

Strategy: Enhance neighborhood identity and support Akron exploration and awareness. Improve safety and flow of traffic in pedestrian corridors.

Key Developments: Communication broke down with local stakeholders, preventing @PLAY from scheduling a neighborhood performance of *Rebranding the City*. Neighborhood residents took it upon themselves to advocate for "reduce speed" signs. Several multi-neighborhood initiatives were supposed to include Fairlawn Heights but either failed to launch or await installation.

Interactive Project: *Rings of Akron* bench (awaiting installation).

Outcome: The *Pedal to the Metal* bike tour failed to launch. Resident's unselfish support for further @PLAY investment across other neighborhoods significantly improved those projects.



Color Schemes



- Orange - Recreation & Play
- Blue - History & Culture
- Yellow - Industry & Innovation
- Red - Neighborhood
- Green - Nature & Waterways
- Purple - Community & Teamwork



Clockwise from top left: (1) Fairlawn Height's pedestrian corridors are beautiful, but the lack of sidewalks in residential areas make walking dangerous due to speeding traffic, (2) a local tree is transformed into a *Rings of Akron* bench by Kontour Woodworks, (3) concept art for 1 of 12 *Pedal Stop* installations, (4) preliminary elegend for *Pedal to the Metal* bike racks, which was developed as a 12-neighborhood incentivized tour across Akron.

Firestone Park

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 6
Participants = 143

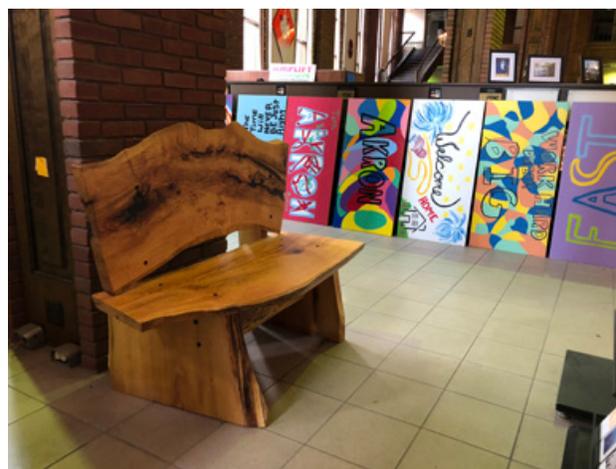
Discovery: An aging residential neighborhood that longs for safety and a new identity. Recreation spaces lack attractive seating, and surrounding manufacturing corridors are unwelcoming.

Strategy: Install “destination-worthy” art to enhance neighborhood status and produce an original play (*Rebranding the City*) to share resident’s stories and challenge neighborhood perceptions.

Key Developments: *Pedal to the Metal* bike tour failed to launch. *Great Streets* program made business district planning potentially redundant. *Akron Rising* and *Rings of Akron* benches are complete and await installation. Resident interviews for *Rebranding the City* were pivotal for understanding perspectives on a range of subjects across Akron’s neighborhoods.

Interactive Projects: *Rebranding the City* at Firestone Park Community Center.

Outcome: Work in Firestone Park is unfinished. We hope to have @PLAY’s murals and benches installed by Spring ‘19.



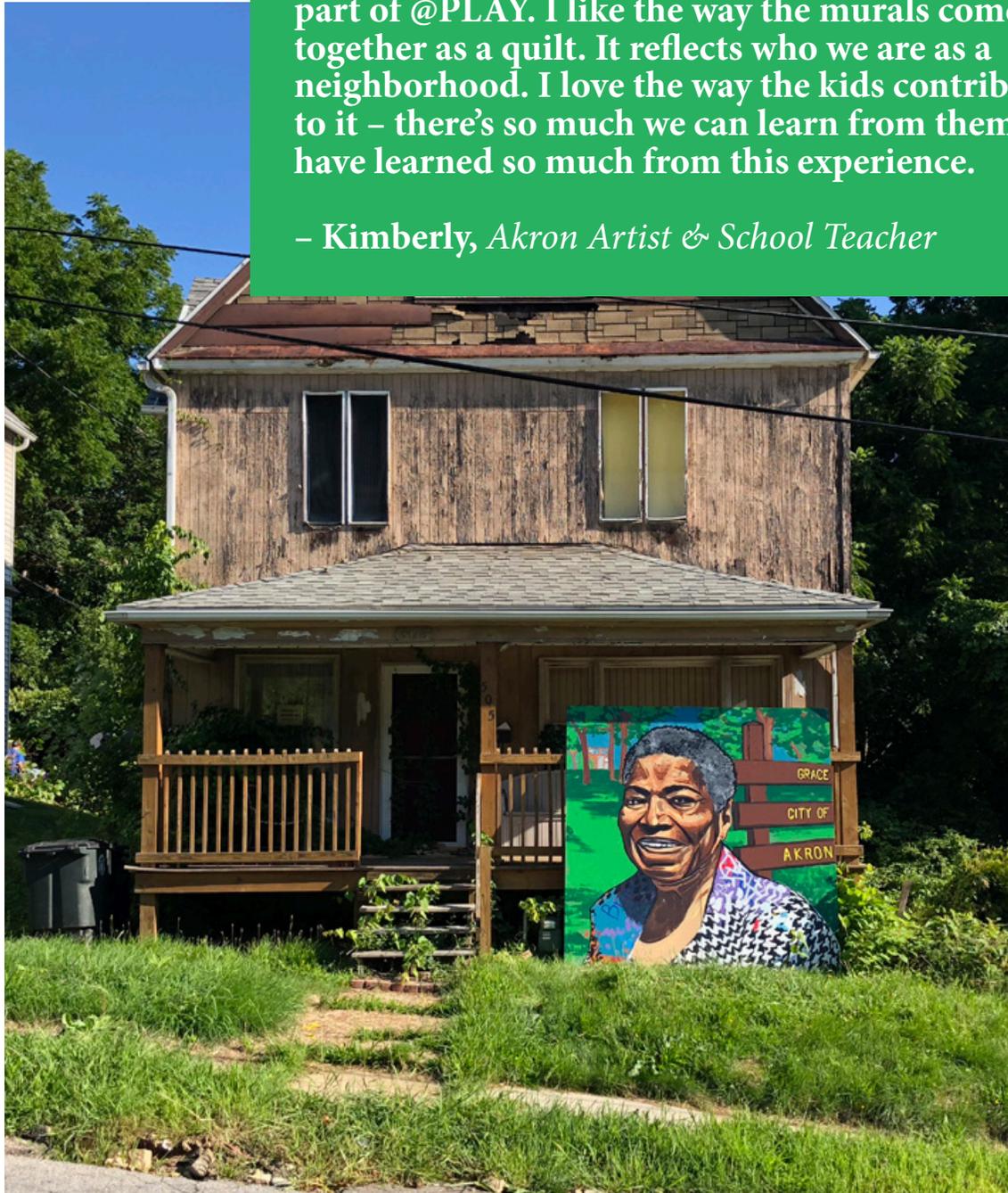
Clockwise from top left: (1) *Rebranding the City* performed at the Firestone Park Community Center, (2) *Akron Rising* letterform sculptures awaiting installation, (3) *Rings of Akron* local tree bench by Kontur Woodworks, (4) revised bike rack design for *Pedal to the Metal*, which key partners deemed “too artsy” to support installation.

“

I like the idea that everyone has a piece and a part of @PLAY. I like the way the murals come together as a quilt. It reflects who we are as a neighborhood. I love the way the kids contribute to it – there’s so much we can learn from them! I have learned so much from this experience.

– Kimberly, Akron Artist & School Teacher

”



Pictured: our collaborative portrait of Ethel Chambers was temporarily installed in front of her house to compliment and support a neighborhood day of cleaning and repairs.

Goodyear Heights

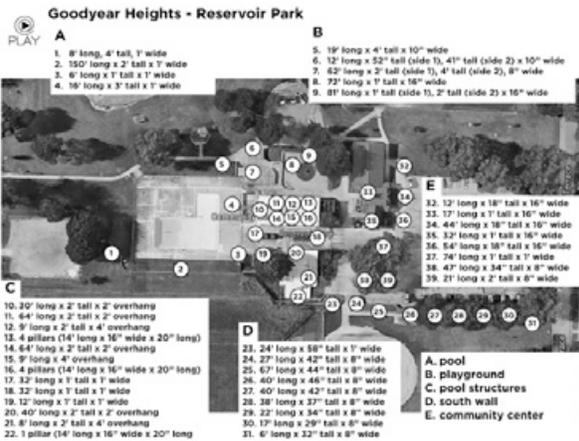
@PLAY = Transformed
Artists = 18
Participants = 853

Discovery: The top priority for residents was to make Reservoir Park a “more colorful, comfortable, family friendly place.” Historic neighborhood features would benefit from further investment.
Strategy: Enhance Reservoir Park and generate equity-building momentum across key corridors.
Key Developments: Numerous delays due to cold temperatures. City plans to destroy the pool and community center were thwarted. Several murals were vandalized following installation, but anti-graffiti coating proved effective. Vandalism was removed and has not returned.
Interactive Projects: *Reservoir Park Paintscape Party, Seiberling CLC Paintscape Party, Goodyear Volunteer Bench-Making, Goodyear Volunteer Mural Restoration, Reservoir Park Pool Party*
Outcome: Pool attendance more than doubled, and the neighborhood was awarded a \$100,000 Parks Challenge grant to continue improvements. Reservoir Park has been reinvigorated, and is now the hub for local events, reigniting civic engagement and neighborhood appreciation.



Clockwise from top left: (1) the Reservoir Park Community Center before, (2) the Reservoir Park Community Center after @PLAY, (3) the Reservoir Park Playground and Picnic area before, (4) the Reservoir Park Playground and Picnic area after @PLAY power-washed the walls, painted the perimeter, and upgraded the benches.

Goodyear Heights



Clockwise from top left: (1) strategic planning, (2) residents at the *Paintscape Party*, which moved inside due to cold temperatures, (3) a resident leaves her mark on the *Reclaiming Akron* mural, (4) people flock to the pool, (5) new seating and shaded areas prove successful, (6) A-Minus performs family friendly rap at the @PLAY Pool Party.

“

The pool's attendance more than doubled this summer, and @PLAY's artwork and clean, bright scenery were the catalyst for the revival of this community asset. It has proven to be the springboard for additional interest in the continued improvement of the park.

– Sharon L. Connor, *The R.I.G.H.T. Committee*

”



Pictured: Goodyear Heights residents turned out in droves for *Night Out Against Crime*, which was relocated to Reservoir Park following @PLAY's successful transformation of the facility.

High Hampton

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 6
Participants = 85

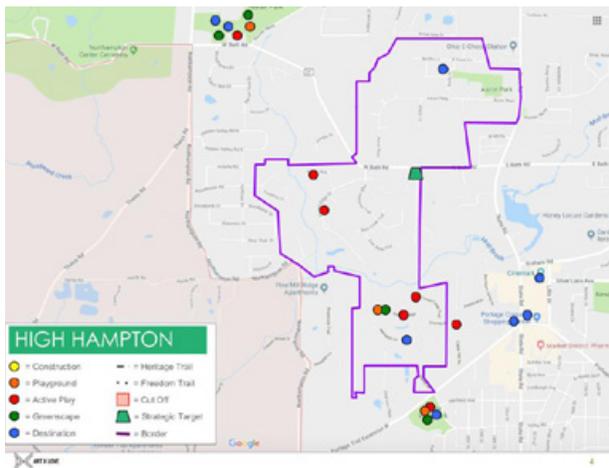
Discovery: A new neighborhood with an aging population that self-identifies as Northhampton. The residential corridors are highly clustered, including the assisted living facilities, with outdoor gathering areas that lack distinction.

Strategy: Engage the clusters, enhance neighborhood awareness, and celebrate local history.

Key Developments: It was difficult to capture resident input due to gated communities, aging population, and the time of year we conducted research. *Pedal to the Metal* failed to launch. Residents were more interested in seeing further improvements to other Akron neighborhoods.

Interactive Projects: *Rebranding the City* at Maplewood Assisted Living Center

Outcome: Our *Rings of Akron* benches are complete and await installation. Our *Rebranding the City* performance was a big success, and in one case, engaged four generations of one family.



Clockwise from top left: (1) neighborhood mapping revealed a lack of central amenities, including the false designation of Ascot Park, which is really a cluster of trees and weeds nestled between industrial complexes, (2) *Rebranding the City* performs for residents and guests at the Maplewood Assisted Living Center, (3) a lonely public bench in one of many residential clusters, (4) *Rings of Akron* benches awaiting installation.

Highland Square

@PLAY = Activated
Artists = 15
Participants = 693

Discovery: An iconic neighborhood with a status that is highly concentrated on the central business corridor. The neighborhood struggles with crime, drugs, and party culture. Its artistic identity needs greater support and opportunities for emerging artists. Amazing history is still underleveraged.

Strategy: Challenge narratives and expand creative identity beyond the Market Street corridor.

Key Developments: Our parklet projects had to be abandoned when the furniture maker we hired forfeited their contract. PorchRokr invited us to lead their interactive art programming in 2018, which afforded us a new opportunity to create placemaking enhancements with public art.

Interactive Projects: *Rebranding the City* at Stagefest, *PorchRockr @PLAY Remix* interactive art district, *PorchRockr @PLAY Silent Disco*.

Outcome: The *PorchRokr @PLAY Remix* generated more than 16 murals, many of which await installation pending further collaboration with neighborhood partners.



Clockwise from top left: (1) one of the approved seating designs for Highland Square's parklets, which had to be abandoned, (2) *Rebranding the City* performs at Stagefest, (3) local artist, Lindsey Jo Scott, hands out paint and brushes to eager participants, (4) Roger Riddle listens to his *@PLAY Silent Disco* headset at PorchRokr.

Highland Square



Clockwise from top left: (1) a new artist @PLAY, (2) one of several placemaking opportunities on W. Exchange St., (3) residents and visitors participate in the @PLAY Remix, (4) the *Shine Bright* mural made people's day, (5) a young resident makes her mark, (6) people kick back with live music next to one of @PLAY's two interactive mural walls.

Kenmore

@PLAY = Activated
Artists = 17
Participants = 653

Discovery: Historic neighborhood identity is at odds with new resident demographics and aspirations. Outstanding neighborhood corridors require distinction and better connectivity.

Strategy: Create a platform to discuss, share, and understand differing visions for Kenmore. Encourage residents to embrace change and honor neighborhood legacy with future investments.

Key Developments: Art x Love referred the Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance to a visiting graffiti artist for a quick mural opportunity. Several hundred coloring books were mistakenly thrown out by participating venues. The Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance agreed to fully finance the production of the winning *Kenmore Imagineer* entry.

Interactive Projects: *Kenmore Better Block* collaborative mural, *Kenmore Imagineer* interactive coloring book, *Kenmore Imagineering* interactive events, *Kenmore Imagineer* exhibition at The Rialto

Outcome: We received 150+ submissions from 50+ residents, with 14 artists receiving prizes, and several receiving commissions as a direct result of their participation.



Clockwise from top left: (1) the *Kenmore Better Block Mural* collaborative mural tested color associations, (2) the *Kenmore Imagineer*, (3) testing the *Kenmore Imagineer* concept and instructions at Kenmore's first *Busk 'Til Dusk*, (4) a local resident poses with her entry at The Rialto, while other participants are interviewed by NPR.



I know how trying it can be to engage people in positive change when they've experienced only disinvestment in their neighborhood. @PLAY came at a time when our community felt beaten down and neglected, and it helped us turn a pivotal corner.

Art x Love truly went above and beyond the scope of the grant to make an immediate and lasting impact in our community.

- Tina Boyes, *Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance*



Pictured: resident's entries for the *Kenmore Imagineer*, pulled from submission boxes that were distributed across several participating neighborhood venues, including the Kenmore Branch Library.

Merriman Hills

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 6
Participants = 29

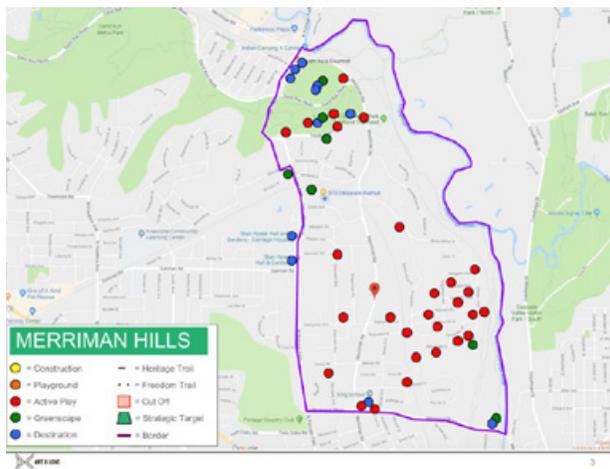
Discovery: A historic neighborhood with impressive homes and amenities. Residents have limited experience with neighborhoods outside their routine.

Strategy: Inspire exploration of Akron’s neighborhoods, improve awareness of surrounding amenities, and enhance points for historic distinction.

Key Developments: Stakeholders referred our team to the NextDoor app as a central forum for communication, but the platform proved inconsistent and unreliable. Our *Pedal to the Metal* bike racks and multi-neighborhood tour failed to launch. Collaboration with Stan Hywet could not be arranged within our timetable.

Interactive Projects: *Rebranding the City* at Big Bend.

Outcome: Nobody showed up for our performance of *Rebranding the City* at Big Bend, despite extensive advertising and support from Summit Metro Parks. One *Rings of Akron* benches awaits installation, and plans for the bike racks were given to local stakeholders for further development.



Clockwise from top left: (1) mapping insights from neighborhood exploration revealed a highly active and playful residential community, (2) *Rings of Akron* bench by Kontur Woodworks, (3) *Bike Akron* strategic planning for our *Pedal to the Metal* bike tour, (4) the *Rebranding the City* cast was all smiles despite poor attendance at Big Bend.

Merriman Valley

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 0
Participants = 125

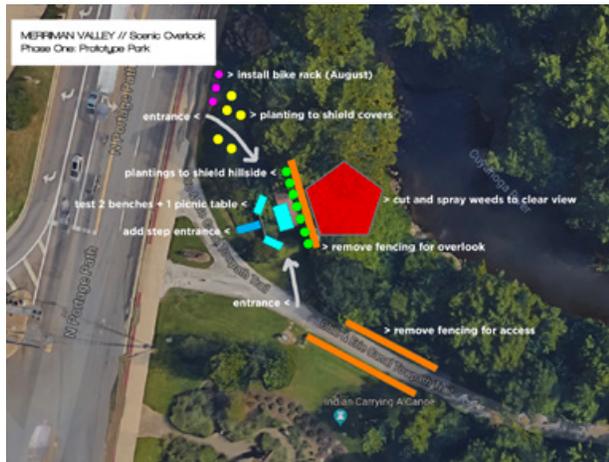
Discovery: A humble residential neighborhood that is surrounded by outstanding retail and environmental amenities, but lacks the prestige to inspire trial and capture loyalty beyond Akron.

Strategy: Create more secondary and tertiary opportunities for visitors to improve their neighborhood experience. If possible, make improvements to Karona Park.

Key Developments: Rumors of a Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railway stop inspired long term consideration. Continued deterioration of Karona Park was discovered too late to address. Collaboration with Summit Metro Parks and the City of Akron was difficult to negotiate but proved fruitful for a Phase 1 test of the *Scenic Overlook* concept.

Interactive Projects: @PLAY *Towpath Scenic Overlook - Phase 1*

Outcome: A successful partnership with the City of Akron and Summit Metro Parks was established to continue *Scenic Overlook* testing and development. Old fencing was repurposed to support construction of Cascade Village's Community Garden fence in Cascade Valley.



Clockwise from top left: (1) strategic planning for the @PLAY *Towpath Scenic Overlook*, (2) original fenceline obstructing access to the Indian Portaging a Canoe statue and historic Portage Path trail, (3) our newly accessible parklet and neighborhood gateway, (4) the first *Rings of Akron* bench, created specifically for Merriman Valley.



We are approached, on a regular basis, to provide labor or materials for projects. Most of the time these “asks” don’t take into consideration the reality of our ability to help or if a proposed project actually aligns with our mission. Every time we have had the opportunity to be involved with @PLAY it has been a respectful collaboration from the project inception to completion.

– Nick Moskos, *Chief of Planning & Development, Summit Metro Parks*

Middlebury

@PLAY = Activated
Artists = 20
Participants = 906

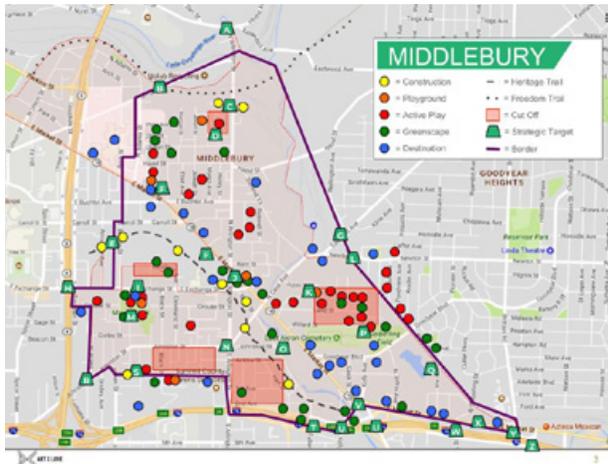
Discovery: Neighborhood divided by major roadways and sub-branded corridors (i.e. East End, Summa, etc.). Residents strongly desire more color, positivity, and hope in their environment.

Strategy: Bridge the gaps and fill “the donut hole of investment” with inspired creativity.

Key Developments: Initial research revealed strategic disconnect between neighborhood stakeholders and residents. The success of the collaborative mural district inspired a 2-month extension and generated 10 additional murals.

Interactive Projects: *Amplify Akron* collaborative art district, *Meet Me in Middlebury @PLAY Basketballs*, *Amplify Akron* mural installation, *Return Home* collaboration with Neighborhood Network, *East Side Leaders* mural installation on E. Exchange St.

Outcome: An @PLAY Basketball was left with an invitation to *Amplify Akron* at every neighborhood basketball hoop. Over 300 local school children and several hundred residents contributed to the collaborative murals, enhancing neighborhood equity and building a stronger sense of pride.



Clockwise from top left: (1) neighborhood mapping and insights, (2) *Meet Me in Middlebury @PLAY Basketballs* were delivered to 50 local hoops, (3) *East Side Leaders* mural wall installed on E. Exchange St., (4) the *Middlebury* collaborative mural from *Amplify Akron* was briefly installed on E. Market St. before being moved to The Well CDC.

Middlebury



Clockwise from top left: (1) installing *Beautiful* on E. Market St., (2) a student leaving her mark, (3) a passerby contributes to the *Free Wall*, (4) retired Akron Fire Chief, Argy Pickle, "came to paint", (5) school children at *Amplify Akron*, (6) Dee McCall savors a donut and checks off "paint a mural" on her Life Bucket List.

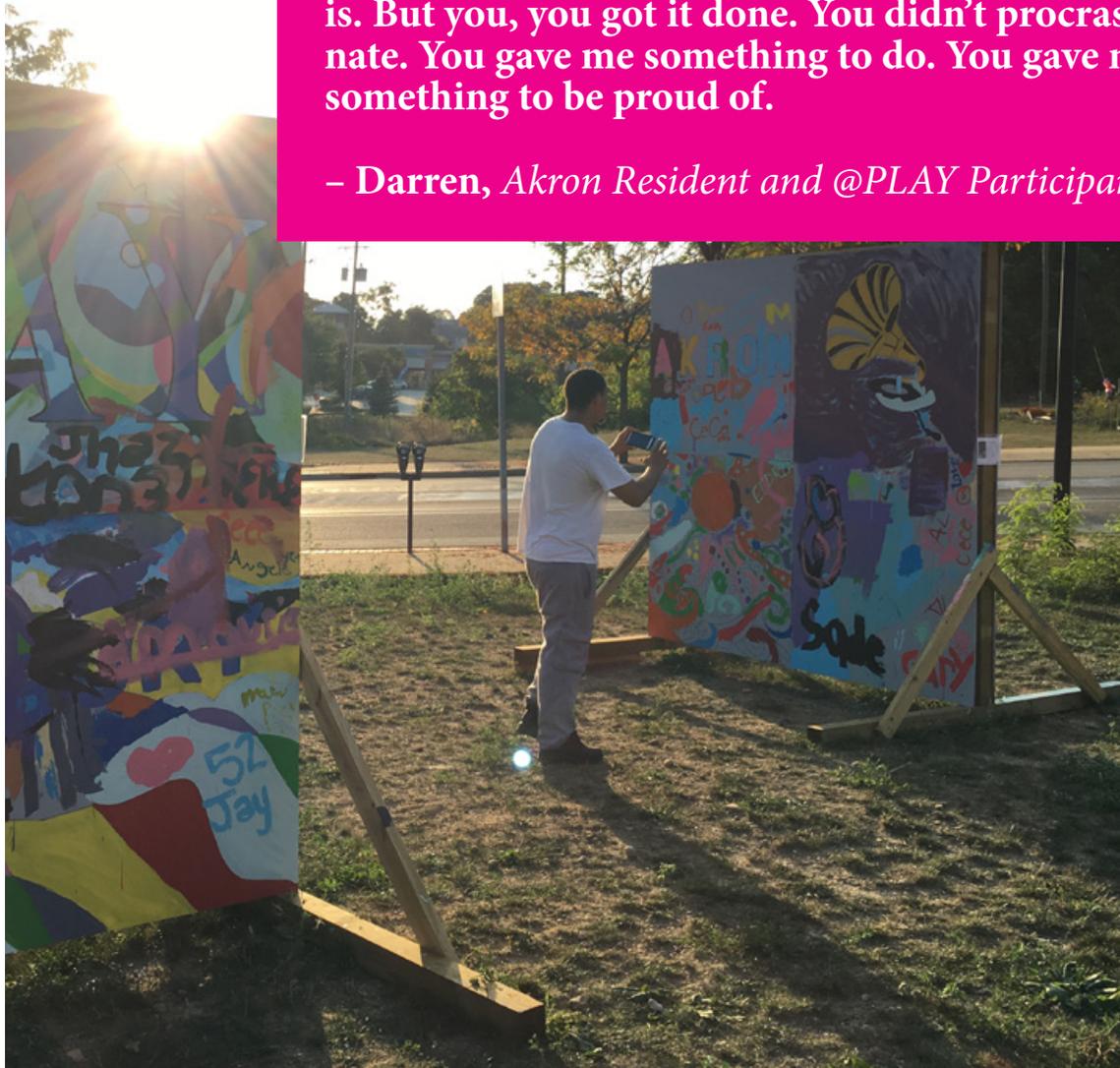
“

It relaxes me. It gave me somewhere to be, to just be able to think, to clear my mind, clear my thoughts, and get my things situated in order.

You stuck to your word as a man. Not too many people do that nowadays. They'll sell you something good, but the product isn't what they say it is. But you, you got it done. You didn't procrastinate. You gave me something to do. You gave me something to be proud of.

– Darren, Akron Resident and @PLAY Participant

”



Pictured: A local resident and participant, photographing their work at *Amplify Akron*, in Middlebury.

North Hill

@PLAY = Transformed
Artists = 11
Participants = 408

Discovery: A diverse neighborhood with a rich cultural history, but declining quality of public spaces and shifting demographics have caused a rift between new and legacy residents.

Strategy: Enhance communal spaces to foster new relationships.

Key Developments: Residents loved the idea of a “Super Community Garden,” but were not aware of existing ones. Further research revealed a need for healthier, more accessible food options. Art x Love applied for a grant to address this need but did not receive it. Conflicting resident perspectives inspired production of the *My Home, Akron* documentary. We referred Shane Wynn to the North Akron CDC for a resident portrait series. Art x Love also chose to serve as a strategic and creative consultant, and a project leader for First Serve’s North Hill initiatives.

Interactive Projects: *Waters Park @PLAY, McClain Park @PLAY, First Serve - Suddieth Park @PLAY, First Serve - Pitkin & Dayton St. @PLAY, First Serve - Pitkin Point @PLAY, Silent Disco Dustup*

Outcome: Numerous public gathering spaces in North Hill were transformed by @PLAY.



Clockwise from top left: (1) Waters Park as we found it, (2) @PLAY painted and installed a new picnic table, repaired and refurbished eight benches to support this iconic destination, (3) Josy Jones preparing a wind-chime neighborhood chandelier for installation, (4) EbaNee Bond conducting neighborhood research.

North Hill



Clockwise from top left: (1) a student installing a wind chime, (2) volunteers at the @PLAY Silent Disco Dustup, (3) repairing Suddieth Park, (4) new landscaping, picnic table, and repaired bench at Pitkin Point, (5) a colorful North Hill Donuts mural, (6) a new picnic table, soccer field, and solar powered lights installed at the old Harris School site.



“ Art x Love created a sense of pride, a sense of ownership, and a sense of belonging for residents and volunteers, as well as making a significant visual impact in Akron’s neighborhoods.
– Sue Wimer, *First Serve* leader ”

Northwest Akron

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 6
Participants = 172

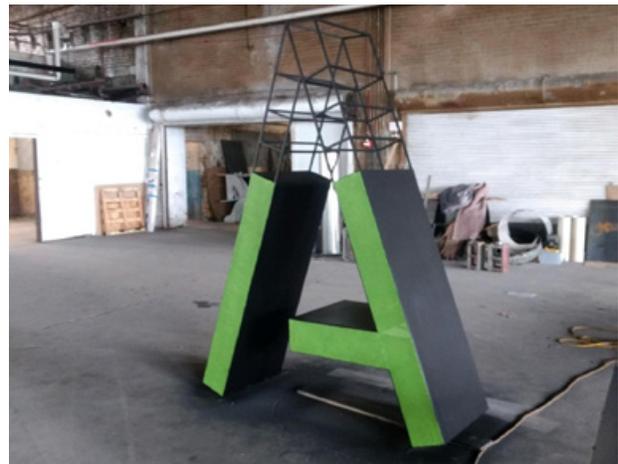
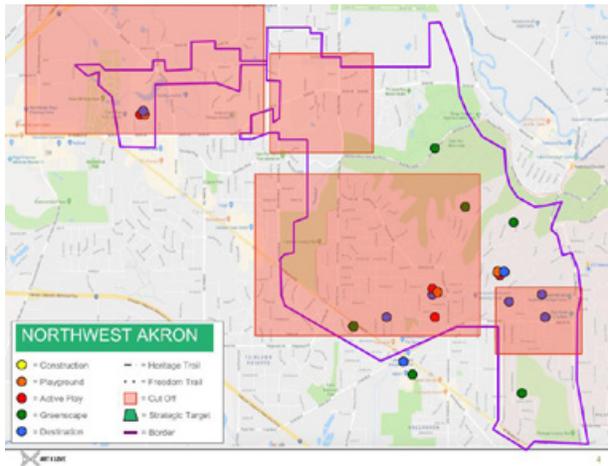
Discovery: A beautiful residential neighborhood with incredible parks, recreation corridors, and several pockets of economic disparity.

Strategy: Enhance depressed corridors, improve neighborly fabric, and leverage outside-neighborhood initiatives to broaden overall appreciation and creative opportunities for residents.

Key Developments: @PLAY RTA Fun Bus & Seating collaboration with Metro RTA failed to launch due to changing leadership and Metro's new strategic planning initiative. *Rebranding the City* performance at North Hawkins Park was cancelled due to rain and an unforeseen casting change.

Interactive Projects: *Rebranding the City* at F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm, *Heart of A.KING* for Northwest Akron Branch library.

Outcome: *Akron Rising* bench and several collaborative murals await installation, pending further collaboration with local stakeholders.



Clockwise from top left: (1) mapping reveals economic disparity, (2) *Rebranding the City* had a full house for its final performance at the F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm, (3) a "destination-worthy" *Akron Rising* bench awaits installation in Northwest Akron, (4) Dierre Fleetwood's *Heart of A.KING* awaits installation at Summit-Akron Public Libraries.

Sherbondy Hill

@PLAY = Transformed
Artists = 14
Participants = 506

Discovery: Former Lane-Wooster neighborhood struggles with new identity, high infant mortality, a lack of high-quality amenities, and lack of opportunities for residents.

Strategy: Develop destination-worthy attraction(s) and enhance neighborhood amenities. Find a way to tackle pressing neighborhood issues, including disinvestment and health disparity.

Key Developments: Strategic considerations for West Akron made Perkins Woods Pool a priority. *Lane Field Day* initiative failed to launch due to local stakeholder fatigue. We commissioned a neighborhood artist to paint a mural in a strategic corridor but they forfeited their contract. Permission to work on the pool was delayed due to potential closure of the facility. Installation of a *Pedal Stop* for *Pedal to the Metal* failed because design could not be approved.

Interactive Projects: *Perkins Woods Pool Party*, *Goodyear Volunteer Paintscape Party*.

Outcome: Transformation and revitalization of the pool has a huge success, stimulating future investment from the City of Akron and raising awareness of the pools as a local amenity.



Clockwise from top left: (1) Perkins Woods Pool as we found it, (2) Goodyear's volunteers at work on the paintscape, (3) residents dive into the *Perkins Woods Pool Party*, which attracted 300+ people, (4) City officials worked side-by-side with local residents and volunteers to revitalize Perkins Woods Pool.

Sherbondy Hill



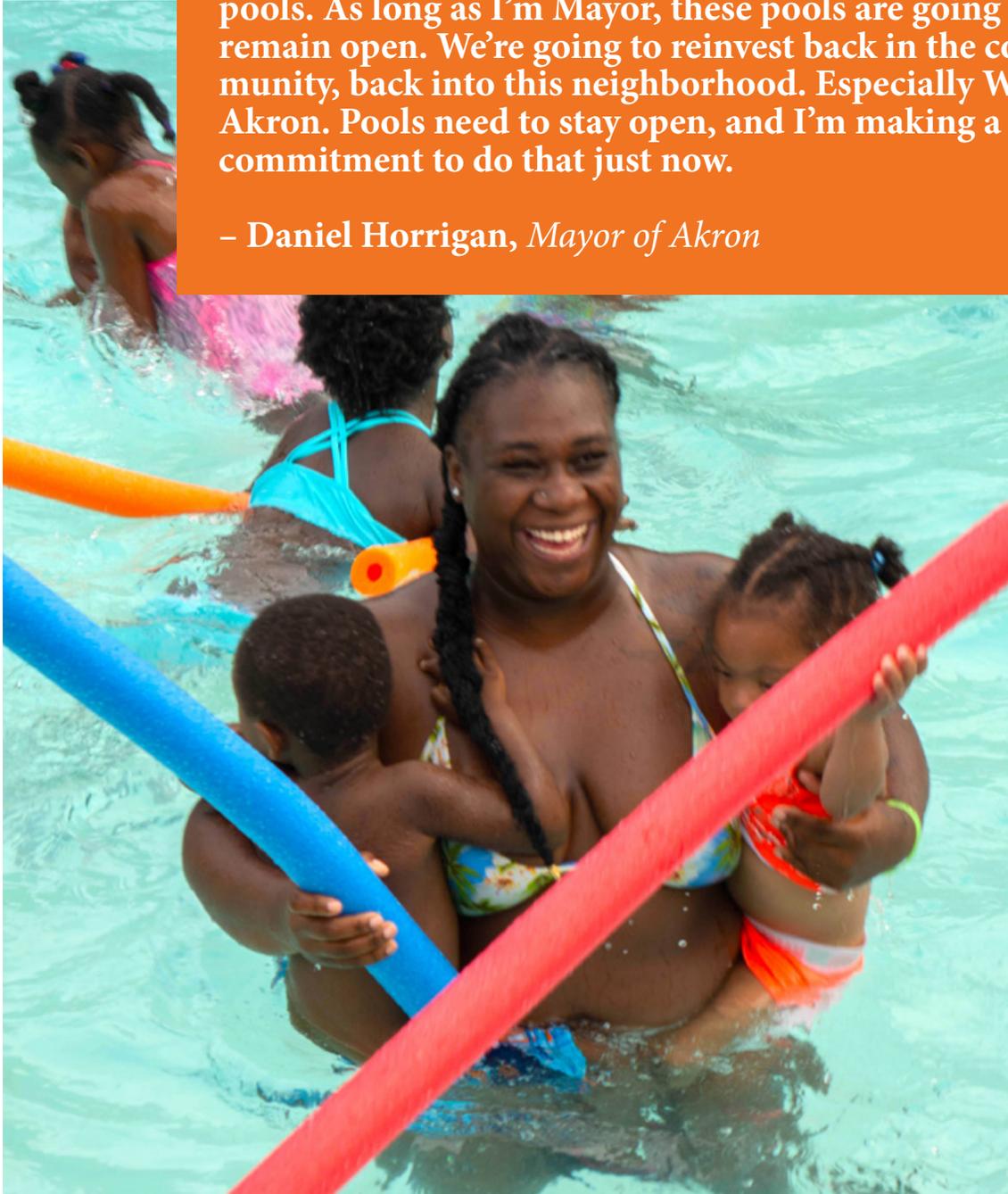
Clockwise from top left: (1) view from the Sherbondy Hill, (2) Jeremy Jenkins posing with his Akron Rising benches, (3) Kevin Richards having fun removing 30 years of grime, (4) the new paintscape, (5) Mayor Horrigan at the Perkins Woods Pool Party, (6) a line of residents wait to enter the pool.

“

Mac Love did a great project. I've come full circle on pools. As long as I'm Mayor, these pools are going to remain open. We're going to reinvest back in the community, back into this neighborhood. Especially West Akron. Pools need to stay open, and I'm making a commitment to do that just now.

– Daniel Horrigan, *Mayor of Akron*

”



Pictured: one of many families enjoying themselves at Perkins Woods Pool. Residents thought the pool had been closed years ago, and are grateful it is open so they can teach their kids how to swim.

South Akron

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 12
Participants = 282

Discovery: Neighborhood lacks clear identity, but is known for its dedication to helping people recover from addiction. Recreation areas and industrial corridors are in poor condition.

Strategy: Rebrand neighborhood experience with public art, and celebrate the spirit of recovery with an interactive theatre production that challenges and engages new narratives.

Key Developments: Morgan Park improvements discouraged due to pending demolition projects. Art installations await further collaboration with neighborhood partners.

Interactive Projects: *Rebranding the City* at Men's CBCF, *Rebranding the City* at Women's CBCF

Outcome: *Rebranding the City* successfully challenged neighborhood perceptions and spread the spirit of recovery across Akron with authentic stories sourced directly from resident interviews. The performances at Oriana House's facilities proved particularly successful, with many attendees continuing to sing the theme song several weeks after the performance.



Clockwise from top left: (1) Despite extensive vandalism, partnerships for mural installation have been delayed due to absent or delinquent property owners, (2) *Rebranding the City* performs at the Women's Correctional Facility, (3) *Zen Reflection* is installed at the Front Porch Cafe, (4) *Rebranding the City* at the Men's Correctional Facility.

“

@PLAY's work to make Akron an increasingly vibrant place is appreciated by our state and local communities. Art x Love's service to the community and Akron will continue to develop our city's culture for year's to come.

– Tavia Galonski, U.S. Representative, Ohio's 35th House District

”



Pictured: residents and volunteers paint a street corner for @PLAY's *Pedestrian Beauty* mural at Ira Ave. & Lake Shore Blvd., one of Summit Lake's only residential crosswalks to the waterfront.

Summit Lake

@PLAY = Transformed
Artists = 19
Participants = 345

Discovery: A proud residential and recreation area that has suffered from historic pollution and neglect. New investment is making a positive impact, but residents were fatigued by research and question strategies that have failed to extend into the residential corridors.

Strategy: Improve connectivity, and serve as a strategic and creative consultant to improve efforts.

Key Developments: We saved this neighborhood for last to avoid conflict with Civic Commons, and partnered with First Serve to improve the impact and success of their neighborhood projects.

Interactive Projects: @PLAY *Parcours Trail* and *Basketball Court* restoration at Open M Park, *First Serve - Bench Making*, *Courtside Seating*, and *Staircase Building* at Open M Park, *First Serve - Pedestrian Beauty* street mural, *Rebranding the City* at REACH, *Sunset Bench* on Penn Ave.

Outcome: The new parcours trail and rehabilitated basketball court at Open M Park have been embraced by residents, with many taking it upon themselves to program the space. The sidewalk murals are a positive spark. @PLAY also has \$15,000 left to build a playground for residents.



Clockwise from top left: (1) strategic neighborhood connection plan for @PLAY's First Serve projects, (2) the *Pedestrian Beauty* mural at Ira Ave. & Lake Shore Blvd., (3) the local 5k Girls running team paints the courtside seating platforms, (4) volunteers and residents build and test the new staircase and parcours trail at Open M Park.

Summit Lake



Clockwise from top left: (1) excavating and cleaning an old pavillion foundation, (2) a painted picnic table complements the scenic overlook, (3) 1 of 8 parcours stations, (4) Open M Park as we found it, (5) *Rebranding the City* at the REACH Opportunity Center, (6) an approved and financed playground design, awaiting installation.

“

I personally worked with Mac to review projects in the neighborhood, watching him go door-to-door and collecting individual feedback.

Several years ago, Summit Lake had the highest murder rate and number of drug arrests in Akron. @PLAY has helped advance the growing pride in the neighborhood.

I believe that Art x Love's team has dramatically changed the perception of Akron through their work.

– Allen Park, *First Serve* - Summit Lake leader

”



Pictured: one of @PLAY's two new custom-painted backboards at Open M Park. The basketball court was resurfaced and repainted thanks to the generous support of Akron Public Schools.

University Park

@PLAY = Engaged
Artists = 9
Participants = 249

Discovery: A historic neighborhood with a high student population that lacks awareness of local amenities, and strongly desires unique and fun experiences beyond campus.

Strategy: Develop and support collaborative opportunities with neighborhood residents and University of Akron students. Improve overall experience across strategic neighborhood corridors.

Key Developments: Knight-funded #ZipsInvade initiative significantly improved student awareness beyond campus. Collaboration with the University of Akron's SpringFest, New Roo Weekend, and Holiday Festival failed to launch due to scheduling conflicts.

Interactive Projects: *University of Akron EXL @PLAY, UnClass: Beyond the Dream, Engineering: Project Sprinkles, Engineering: Project #CHIMEinAkron, Communications: @PLAY internships*

Outcome: University Park residents enthusiastically supported and participated in @PLAY initiatives, with several murals awaiting installation in the neighborhood. Our University of Akron collaborations were highly successful, inspiring development across multiple neighborhood initiatives.



Clockwise from top left: (1) University of Akron engineers refine concepts for mobile splash park amenities, (2) the *Project Sprinkles* team tests out a prototype "splash toy" in a remote location, (3) the EXL team poses after scaling a rope-lined cliff in Chapel Hill, (4) UoA UnClass team at *Beyond the Dream*, in West Akron.

Wallhaven

@PLAY = Activated
Artists = 4
Participants = 521

Discovery: Popular residential district suffers from an inconsistent and sometimes dangerous pedestrian experience. Neighborhood identity is tied to retail corridor instead of high quality of life.
Strategy: Improve pedestrian experience with creative energy that differentiates Wallhaven as a superior social and retail area versus suburban alternatives.

Key Developments: Partnerships to transform utility kiosks into *Powers of Akron* public art wraps failed to launch. Key stakeholders did not qualify locations for mural installation.

Interactive Projects: @PLAY Interactive Arts District at the Akron Arts Expo '18, @PLAY's Plein Air Painting at Hardesty Park.

Outcome: Dozens of residents participated in the *Plein Air Painting*, which inspired development of the collaborative murals for the *Akron Art Expo*. The main feature in the September Arts Issue of *Akron Life Magazine* was @PLAY at the Akron Arts Expo. Several large format murals are complete and await approval for installation across the neighborhood.



Clockwise from top left: (1) Residents at @PLAY's Plein Air Painting in Hardesty Park, (2) participants leave their mark at the Akron Art Expo, (3) Lizzi Aronhalt posing in front of her *Sea Turtles* mural, (4) a submission page from the *Powers of Akron* utility box wrap initiative.

West Akron

@PLAY = Activated
Artists = 5
Participants = 237

Discovery: A proud neighborhood which has suffered from disinvestment, violence, and declining amenities. Transient residential life has deteriorated properties and social fabric. Business districts are a shell of their former glory, but hope is emerging with a new generation of leaders.

Strategy: Improve public spaces and enhance profile of neighborhood business district.

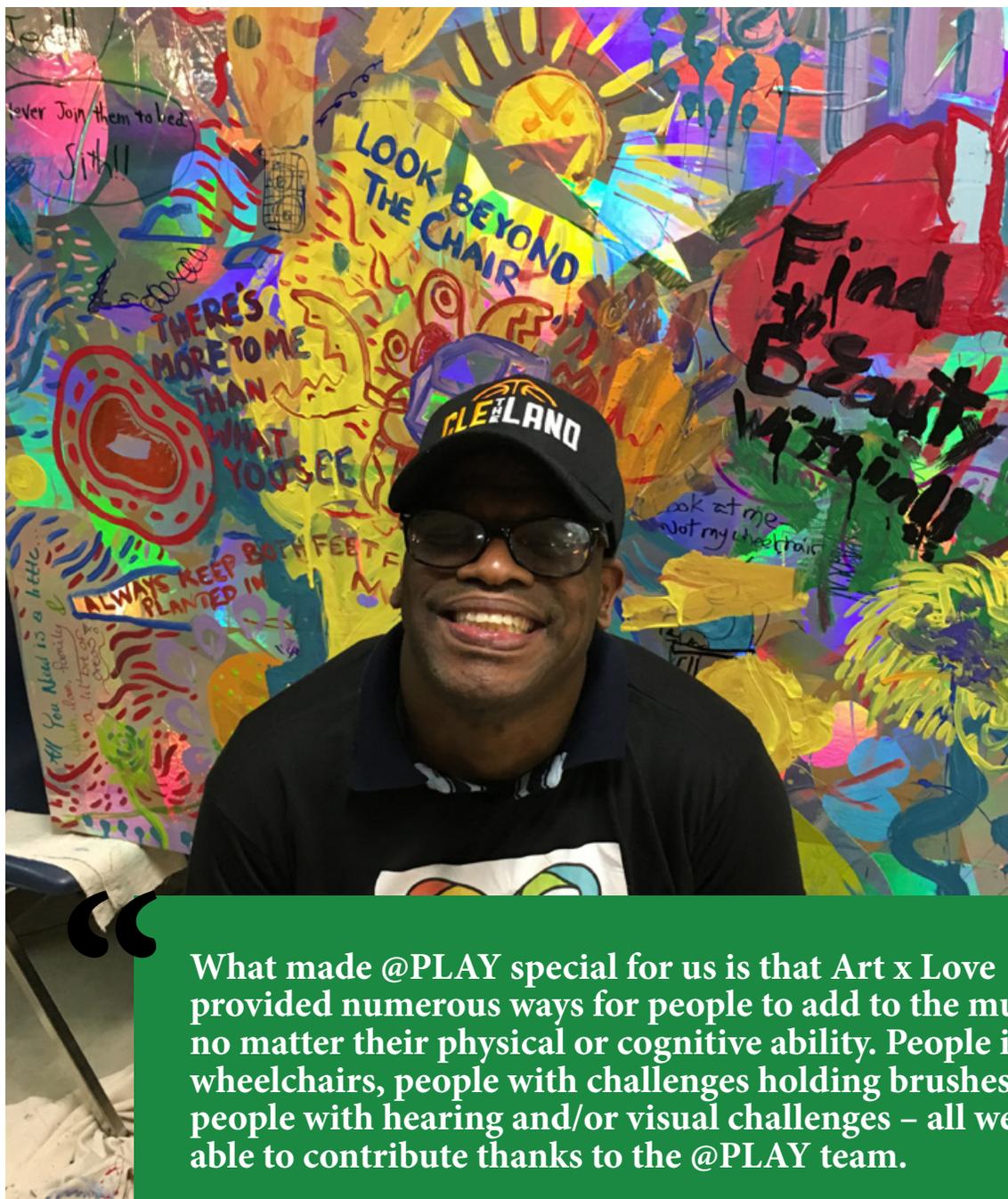
Key Developments: Art x Love spent 3x longer researching West Akron due to its diverse and sprawling residential areas. Akron's *Great Streets* program filled the void after @PLAY chose to focus on the Perkins Woods Pool. Art x Love began development of a strategic public art plan for Copley Road and handed it off to local stakeholders for further development.

Interactive Projects: *Beyond the Dream: Neighbors Reclaiming Akron* at Perkins Middle School, *A Very Special Celebration* with Theater on the Spectrum and Ardmore at the Black Box Theater

Outcome: The Perkins Woods Pool project inspired Mayor Horrigan to commit resources and reinvest in West Akron. The *Beyond the Dream* murals are permanently displayed at Akron City Hall.



Clockwise from top left: (1) 1 of 40 public art locations surveyed for development, (2) *A Very Special Celebration* with friends of Theatre on the Spectrum and Ardmore, (2) attendees at *Beyond the Dream: Neighbors Reclaiming Akron*, (3) stakeholders get a tour of Akron City Hall with the artists who created the *Beyond the Dream* murals.



“ What made @PLAY special for us is that Art x Love provided numerous ways for people to add to the mural, no matter their physical or cognitive ability. People in wheelchairs, people with challenges holding brushes, people with hearing and/or visual challenges – all were able to contribute thanks to the @PLAY team. – Wendy S. Duke, *Founder & Co-Director of CADA* ”

West Hill

@PLAY = Activated
Artists = 9
Participants = 160

Discovery: A historic neighborhood with outstanding live/work/play opportunities in the UPD40 district. The failed Innerbelt Project severed connections to Downtown Akron, which are now being restored. Residents want a cleaner, safer environment, that reflects their values and pride.

Strategy: Create the most fun, innovative, and inspiring neighborhood clean-up party anyone has every seen. Develop neighborhood iconography, and enhance neglected neighborhood corridors.

Key Developments: Collaboration with West Hill Neighborhood Organization (WHNO) stalled when research revealed a strategic disconnect with residents. UPD40 zoning for dual residential and commercial use was expanded by the City of Akron. The Knight Foundation supported our purchase of @PLAY *Silent Disco* equipment based on the merit of future savings.

Interactive Projects: *Silent Disco Dustup*, @PLAY *Printmaking Party*, @PLAY mural installations

Outcome: Less than 25% of Eventbrite ticket holders showed up for the *Silent Disco Dustup*, but door-hanger marketing proved highly successful as many residents cheered participants on.



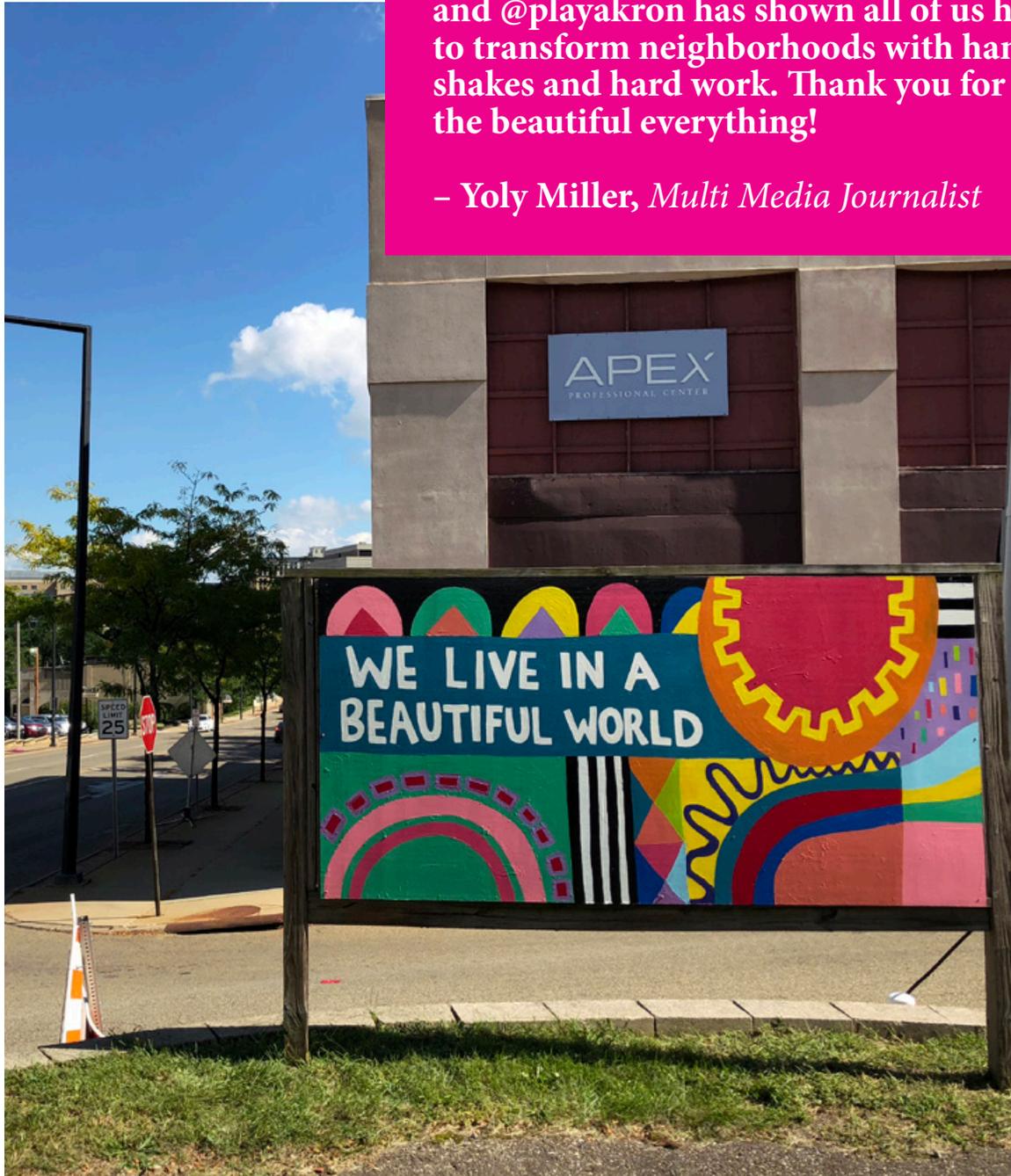
Clockwise from top left: (1) Residents create West Hill branded aprons, bandanas, and swag at the @PLAY *Printmaking Party*, (2) participants arrive at the *Silent Disco Dustup*, (3) people enjoyed the combination of a neighborhood-cleanup + dance-party + step-challenge + history-tour, (4) First Serve volunteers install murals on W. Market St.

“

There is no business like show business, and @playakron has shown all of us how to transform neighborhoods with handshakes and hard work. Thank you for the beautiful everything!

– Yoly Miller, *Multi Media Journalist*

”



Pictured: Lindsey Jo Scott's *We Live In A Beautiful World* collaborative mural greets people as they enter Downtown Akron on W. Market Street, in West Hill.

Interactive Art Challenges

@PLAY's interactive art challenges have been organized by neighborhood below, and include the following multi-neighborhood initiatives:

- *Rebranding the City: A Humanizing Tour of Akron* (x16 performances)
- #CHIMEinAkron placemaking installations (x20)
- *Akron Rising* letterform benches (x4)
- *Rings of Akron* local tree benches (x4)
- *First Serve* picnic tables (x4)
- *Heart of A.KING* travelling mural display at Summit-Akron Public Libraries (x3)
- *My Home, Akron* documentary film (x9 long form interviews)
- @PLAY ArcGIS Mapping with the City of Akron
- @PLAY Murals on panels (x100)

Cascade Valley
Block Party murals*
Pedestrian Beauty street mural
Wingline Block Party bench install
Cascade Village Garden fencing
Rebranding the City at Beech St. Trailhead

Chapel Hill
Climax Park @PLAY
First Serve - Bettes Cemetery @PLAY

Coventry Crossing
Rebranding the City at Coventry Oaks

Downtown Akron
AKRON mural at Signal Tree '17
Akron Rising at Signal Tree '18
Urban Troubadour performance at Art x Love
CUBE + Art public discussion
Yoga Squared @PLAY Silent Disco
Rebranding the City at Art x Love
Rebranding the City at Akron Art Museum
Rebranding the City at Innerbelt Forest
Rebranding the City at Signal Tree '18
Akron Children's Museum @PLAY Silent Disco

First Serve - AKRON collaborative mural
First Serve - Picnic Table painting
First Serve - #CHIMEinAkron creation
First Serve - @PLAY bench and mural prep
Beyond the Dream murals at Akron City Hall
*@PLAY Summary Exhibition**

East Akron
HYPE Kids Murals collaboration*
Bubble Fest at Joy Park
AKRON collaborative mural with YMCA
Chalkboard Rainbow Bridge at Jonathan Ave.*
Rebranding the City at Minson Plaza
ArcGIS Mapping with the City of Akron*

Ellet
Color Splash Party collaborative murals
Ellet Welcomes You collaborative mural
Rebranding the City at Davenport Park

Fairlawn Heights
n/a

Firestone Park
Rebranding the City at Firestone Park CC

* indicates a multiple-day event

Interactive Art Challenges cont.

Goodyear Heights

*Reservoir Park Paintscape Party**
Seiberling CLC Paintscape Party
*Goodyear Volunteer Bench-Making**
Goodyear Volunteer Mural Restoration
Reservoir Park Pool Party

High Hampton

Rebranding the City at Maplewood

Highland Square

Rebranding the City at Stagefest
PorchRockr @PLAY Remix interactive art district
PorchRockr @PLAY Silent Disco

Kenmore

Kenmore Better Block collaborative mural
Kenmore Imagineer interactive coloring book
*Kenmore Imagineering interactive events**
*Kenmore Imagineer exhibition at The Rialto**

Merriman Hills

Rebranding the City at Big Bend

Merriman Valley

@PLAY Towpath Scenic Overlook - Phase 1

Middlebury

*Amplify Akron collaborative art district**
Meet Me in Middlebury @PLAY Basketballs
Amplify Akron mural installation
*Return Home collaboration with United Way**
East Side Leaders mural installation

North Hill

*Waters Park @PLAY**
*McClain Park @PLAY**
*First Serve - Suddieth Park @PLAY**
*First Serve - Pitkin & Dayton St. @PLAY**
*First Serve - Pitkin Point @PLAY**
First Serve - Silent Disco Dustup

Northwest Akron

Rebranding the City at the Nature Realm

Sherbondy Hill

Perkins Woods Pool Party
*Goodyear Volunteer Paintscape Party**

South Akron

Rebranding the City at Men's CBCF
Rebranding the City at Women's CBCF

Summit Lake

*@PLAY Parcours Trail at Open M Park**
*@PLAY Basketball Court restoration at Open M Park**
*First Serve - Bench Making**
*First Serve - Courtside Seating**
*First Serve - Staircase Building**
First Serve - Pedestrian Beauty street mural
Rebranding the City at REACH
Sunset Bench on Penn Ave.

University Park

*UoA EXL @PLAY collaboration**
*UoA UnClass: Beyond the Dream**
*UoA Engineering: Project Sprinkles**
*UoA Engineering: Project Chime-In**
*UoA Communications @PLAY internships**

Wallhaven

*@PLAY Akron Arts Expo '18 interactive art district**
*@PLAY Plein Air Painting at Hardesty Park**

West Akron

*Beyond the Dream: Neighbors Reclaiming Akron**
A Special Celebration with Theatre on the Spectrum

West Hill

Silent Disco Dustup
*@PLAY Printmaking Party**
First Serve - @PLAY Mural Installations

* multiple day event



Multi-Neighborhood Developments

@PLAY's key project developments are listed by neighborhood in the Neighborhood Snapshots section, with exception to the following multi-neighborhood developments:

- The City of Akron expanded from 21 to 24 neighborhoods after Art x Love was awarded the Knight Cities grant and before @PLAY kicked off in June, 2017.
- Initial neighborhood research in Middlebury, Kenmore, Goodyear Heights, East Akron, North Hill, Summit Lake, and Downtown Akron revealed resident's fatigue and frustration with unsustainable events, amenities, and projects. As a result, @PLAY pivoted its strategy to focus on initiatives that could achieve a 10-year impact with minimal maintenance.
- Due to the scope and long-term focus of the work, @PLAY required extensive collaborations and strategic considerations that made advance marketing of neighborhood initiatives difficult to achieve with more than 2-4 weeks notice. @PLAY relied heavily on direct marketing, social media, word-of-mouth and support from neighborhood stakeholders. As a result, some initiatives were not as well attended as they could have been.
- In December, 2017, we collaborated with Let's Grow Akron, Mustard Seed, City Sprouts, and the City of Akron on a proposal for an Art & Environmental Capacity Building RFP, with the goal of tackling Akron's infant mortality crisis with a super-community garden and multi-neighborhood nutritional awareness and accessibility program, but it was not selected.
- In March, 2018, the City of Akron asked Art x Love to submit projects for Goodyear's Week of Volunteering. @PLAY generated 40 projects across 24 neighborhoods and led 3 of them.
- In March, 2018, the City of Akron announced its *Great Streets* program to improve the business district corridors of 10 neighborhoods. This rendered @PLAY's concepts for strategic corridor improvements to West Akron, Ellet, Wallhaven, Firestone Park, and South Akron potentially redundant. As a result, @PLAY pivoted focus to other opportunities.
- In April, 2018, @PLAY commissioned production of a documentary film about differing neighborhood and generational perspectives on what makes Akron "home." The creative team had to forfeit the project midway due to unforeseen personal responsibilities, leaving Art x Love with over 24 hours of unedited footage and interviews with local residents.
- In June, 2018, after months of collaboration and planning, one of @PLAY's hired artists notified us that they were forfeiting their contract to build furniture for a multi-neighborhood placemaking initiative shortly before their first deadline. This forced a strategic reorganization and cancellation of several neighborhood projects, including initial plans for Highland Square, Firestone Park, South Akron, Northwest Akron, and Merriman Valley.

Multi-Neighborhood Developments cont.

- Changes in Metro RTA's leadership and a new strategic undertaking blocked plans to sponsor a "fun bus" and install or improve public seating at local bus stops.
- Art x Love partnered with First Serve for their interfaith day of service, which promised 700-1,000 volunteers for projects in North Hill and Summit Lake. We submitted 38 projects, 36 of which were selected, and then consolidated to 25 projects, which @PLAY led. On September 9, 2018, severe weather postponed 19 of our projects, 17 of which were rescheduled for September 30, 2018. Further work was required on 12 projects after First Serve.
- Art x Love partnered with a team of engineers from the University of Akron to develop four mobile splash park amenities that can be attached to fire hydrants anywhere in Akron. The team was able to complete 2-of-4 "splash toys" and will complete the rest in 2019.
- In September, 2018, Art x Love partnered with the City of Akron to develop the @PLAY ArcGIS Mapping system. This mobile and desktop application was specifically tailored for @PLAY neighborhood research, allowing our team to capture neighborhood insights on a shared platform that affords smart and efficient integration across City services.
- Art x Love developed bike racks for a 12-neighborhood *Pedal to the Metal* bike tour that failed to launch because the City of Akron thought the designs were "too artsy" and refused to help us install them.
- Art x Love developed four "destination-worthy" *Akron Rising* letterform benches, which await installation, pending ongoing collaboration with key partners.
- Art x Love developed four "destination-worthy" *Rings of Akron* local tree benches, which await installation, pending ongoing collaboration with key partners.
- Art x Love commissioned the *Heart of A.KING* mural, which is approved for a 3-year touring outdoor display at Summit-Akron Public Libraries, pending support for installation.
- The success of @PLAY's collaborative murals yielded more than twice as many paintings as expected, requiring additional time and work to complete. As a result, Art x Love has more than 40 pieces of public art that await installation.

In Review

Was this grant successful? Why?

Yes. @PLAY excelled at fulfilling the goal of fostering civic engagement across all of Akron, and increased neighborhood vibrancy and awareness with interactive art challenges and playful activities that far exceeded the scale and quality that was initially intended. Art x Love's highly innovative, responsible, and creative approach made an enduring impact that transformed Akron's environment and inspired local leaders to change their thinking and approach to research, neighborhood development, and creative collaboration.

What were the key outcomes of this grant?

Akron neighborhood awareness and interest has been significantly increased. @PLAY created hundreds of opportunities for local artists and residents to leave their mark on Akron, increasing neighborhood equity and reinforcing civic pride. @PLAY's focus on improving public spaces with enduring amenities has generated thousands of new impressions, building new relationships that will last for years to come. In the process, @PLAY helped preserve both of Akron's public pools, generated more than 100 pieces of public art, enhanced 16 public parks, produced an interactive theater production (*Rebranding the City*) that toured through 16 different neighborhood locations, built a parcours trail, and captured thousands of videos and photographs that have transformed people's impression of Akron. Furthermore, @PLAY created a foundation for growth that has contributed to further neighborhood investment, and served as a platform for the emergence and development of a new generation of local, civic, and creative leaders.

What did you learn that more people should know?

@PLAY's research exposed a disconnect between Akron's residents and local leaders, particularly with regards to the strategic intelligence driving many civic initiatives. In several neighborhoods, we found that more than 80% of residents had never participated in a public forum, 15% had no access to the internet, and more than 35% lacked knowledge of the free resources that are available to them. Given the fact that +80% of Downtown Akron's working population and +70% of *On The Table* participants (a strategic information gathering initiative) do not reside in Akron, it is clear that a lot of work needs to be done to improve the relationship and understanding between Akron's residents and leaders. Our recommendation, which has already been adopted by many organizations, is to better distinguish between resident and visitor input. @PLAY's direct approach to field, resident, and ethnographic research provided a depth of real, actionable intelligence, that directly contributed to the success of our partnerships and initiatives.

In The News

“Two Akron Projects Win Funding Through Knight Cities Challenge”
– Akron Beacon Journal, June 11, 2017

“Knight Cities Challenge Awards \$500k for Innerbelt, Neighborhood Projects in Akron”
– Cleveland.com, June 12, 2017

“Akron Social Entrepreneur To Create Neighborhood-Specific Art, While Working Towards His Mission”
– Forbes, June 28, 2017

“Signal Tree Festival Takes Root: Akronites Find What They Love in Themselves and Their City in One Place, in One Mural”
– Akron Beacon Journal, July 29, 2017

“Art x Love to Kick Off @PLAY, Knight Winner Mural Project, Sept. 2”
– Cleveland.com, August 25, 2017

“Mac Love: Fueling Akron Expression”
– The Devil Strip, August 31, 2017

“Successful Kenmore Better Block a Temporary Utopian Version of What Business District Might Become”
– Akron Beacon Journal, September 2, 2017

“Meet Me in Middlebury Event Creates Temporary Arts District”
– Akron Beacon Journal, September 2, 2017

“Share Your Vision for Kenmore Boulevard in ‘Imagineer’ Coloring Book”
– Cleveland.com, October 10, 2017

“Kenmore ‘Imagineer’ Coloring Book Contest Winners to Receive Cash Prizes”
– Cleveland.com, December 8, 2017

“Vividly Painted Murals Go Up in Akron’s Middlebury Neighborhood”
– Cleveland.com, January 28, 2018

“Knight Cities Challenge Winner @PLAY Asks North Akron Residents to #CHIMEinAKRON”
– Cleveland.com, March 29, 2018

“Knight Challenge Winner @PLAY, Goodyear Heights Residents Create Water-Themed Murals to Revitalize Reservoir Park”
– Cleveland.com, April 13, 2018

In The News cont.

“Local Artist Embarks on Journey to Bring More Art to Akron”
– Cleveland Magazine, April 23, 2018

“Akron’s Northside District Gets Colorful Makeover, Thanks in Part to 80 Volunteers”
– Akron Beacon Journal, May 24, 2018

“StageFest Takes Over Highland Square”
– Akron Beacon Journal, May 30, 2018

“Knight Cities Winner @PLAY Plans Busy July with Joy Park Bubble Fest and Swim Parties”
– Cleveland.com, July 5, 2018

“@PLAY brings Art and Activities to Akron’s Neighborhoods Throughout July”
– WKSU 89.7, July 9, 2018

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