

Silver Medal Winner  
Artists for Humanity EpiCenter  
Boston, Massachusetts



This is an excerpt from:

# Building Sustainable Neighborhoods

THE 2007 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

Richard Wener, PhD  
with Emily Axelrod, MCP; Jay Farbstein, FAIA, PhD; and Robert Shibley, AIA, AICP

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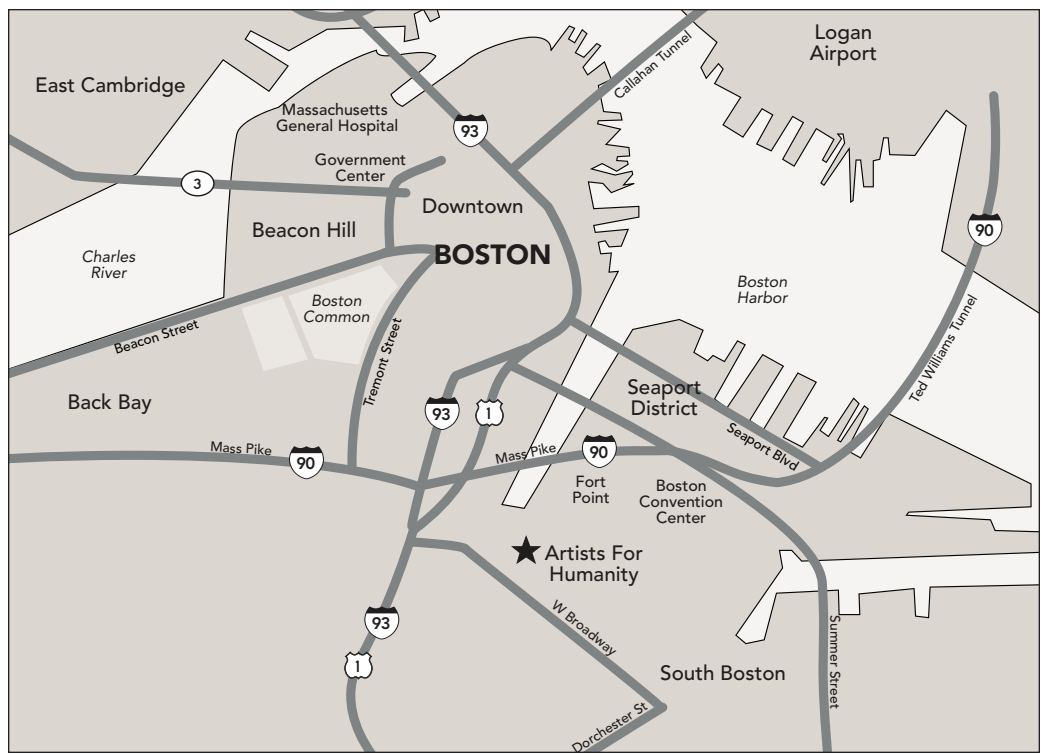


Library of Congress Control Number: 2002104398  
ISBN: 1-890286-07-9

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COVER PHOTOS: Olin Partnership, Jim Brozek, Seattle Housing Authority, Arrowstreet Inc., Alberto Vecerka/Estó



# AFH EpiCenter At-A-Glance

## WHAT IS ARTISTS FOR HUMANITY (AFH) EPICENTER?

- ❖ A youth-run arts micro-enterprise dedicated to the “voice, vision and virtuosity” of urban teens;
- ❖ A program that tries to break the cycle of urban poverty through the fusing of art and enterprise;
- ❖ A 23,000-square-foot LEED Platinum building, located at the intersection of the Fort Point and South Boston neighborhoods in downtown Boston;
- ❖ A full-service art business, offering sculpture, painting, urban arts and media, silk-screening, photography, mural painting and web design;
- ❖ A 5,000-square-foot downtown gallery, available for lease for parties and events, and featuring a rotating exhibition of EpiCenter youth art.

## PROJECT GOALS

- ❖ To provide art instruction with training in the marketing of art to inner-city teen artists;
- ❖ To create a learning environment characterized by respectful and supportive relationships;
- ❖ To bridge economic, racial, and social divisions by cultivating self-sufficiency through paid employment in the arts;
- ❖ To provide an employment environment characterized by high expectations and a commitment to helping teens reach their full potential;
- ❖ To give inner-city teens a voice through exhibitions, public presentations, and permanent installation of their art;
- ❖ To contribute to environmental quality and awareness by creating the first LEED Platinum building in downtown Boston;
- ❖ To make a commitment to the Fort Point artist community and to South Boston by building in this transitional area;
- ❖ To provide a safe and meaningful place where teens are respected for their contributions.



## Project Chronology

**October 1990** Susan Rodgerson, an established artist working in the South End area, develops the concept of a teen art program in the Boston public schools.

**May 1991** Rodgerson initiates a teen art program at Martin Luther King Middle School (MLK) in Mattapan.

**Summer 1991** Six young artists, several of whom had been in the MLK program, begin working on a large-scale collaborative painting at Rodgerson's studio.

**1992** AFH is named and incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization, co-founded by Susan Rodgerson and a small group of teen artists.

**1992** First AFH Board of Directors is named.

**1994-2000** Program continues to grow and expands twice within the Fort Point area, into two different warehouse spaces.

**1990**  
Susan Rodgerson develops AFH concept.

**1991**  
AFH program launched in a Boston Middle School.

**1992**  
AFH achieves a 501 C-3 status; Board of Directors named.

**1994-2000**  
Programs grows in 3 different locations.

**2000**  
Capital campaign for EpiCenter is launched.

**2003**  
Groundbreaking for EpiCenter.

**2004**  
EpiCenter completed.

**2005**  
EpiCenter awarded LEED platinum certificate.

**2000** AFH is given notice at their third location and decides to acquire its own property.

**2000** Anonymous \$250,000 grant launches capital campaign.

**2000-2001** AFH raises \$1.3 million to acquire property and develop new building.

**2001** Current site purchased.

**2001** Arrowstreet selected as architect.

**2002** Five planning/design workshops are held with the architect and AFH staff and students.

**May 2003** Ground breaking for EpiCenter.

**2003** AFH undertakes comprehensive business plan led by Community Partners Consultants, Inc.

**2004** EpiCenter completed.

**2005** EpiCenter awarded LEED Platinum certificate from U.S. Green Building Council.

**2006** AFH completes \$6.8 million capital campaign.

## KEY PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

### *AFH Staff and Board:*

SUSAN RODGERSON, Executive/Artistic Director

ANDREW MOTTA, Director of Operations

JASON TALBOT, Co-Founder, Special Projects Director

ROB GIBBS, Co-Founder, Studio Director

DAVID WALEK, AFH Board Chair

NICK RODRIGUES, Sculptor, mentor

PATRICE MAYE, Director of Development

Artist Mentors and young artists

### *Consultants:*

JIM BATCHELOR, Architect, Arrowstreet

MARK KELLEY, III, Sustainability Consultant (by phone)

JOHN DALZELL, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Hickory Consortium

ADAM BICKELMAN AND BENNY WONG, MassDevelopment (by phone)

### *Community:*

MAYRA RODRIGUEZ HOWARD, South Boston Neighborhood  
Health Center

DAN MCCOLE, South Boston Arts Association

LEAH BAILEY, Boston Globe Foundation (by phone)

SUSAN SILVERBERG, Community Partners Consultants, Inc.

## Project Description



Portrait by AFH Artist Deanna Hillery.

The Artists for Humanity EpiCenter is located in South Boston, adjacent to downtown. The project sits at the junction of three neighborhoods. To the immediate south of the project is an historic residential neighborhood locally known as Southie. It is a neighborhood of about 29,000, traditionally an Irish-Catholic enclave of three-decker residential buildings and local businesses. In the “old days,” according to a Southie native, “each of these houses would be occupied by three Irish families with eight to ten kids.” Densities were high and Southie has a long history of neighborhood pride and loyalty. It is infamous for racial tensions, which culminated in its opposition to court-mandated bussing at South Boston High School in the 1970s.

Bounded on its east side by Boston Harbor and on its south by a major highway, Southie is isolated from other parts of the city, a fact which has contributed to its cohesiveness and sense of independent identity. But Southie is changing. Parts of the neighborhood are beginning to gentrify, though the predominant character of the neighborhood remains blue-collar. A casual drive around the area reveals a considerable amount of new infill housing and rehabilitated older structures, as well as several large-scale new developments and condominiums. Southie is, however, also home to three of the nation’s oldest housing projects, run by the Boston Housing Authority. These projects, once mostly white, are now racially mixed, predominantly low-income



Asian and Latino, and have had a history of high crime. Community members report growing levels of addiction to oxycontin and heroin among their youth populations.

To the north and east of AFH lie the Fort Point and Seaport districts. The Seaport district is the site of major and ongoing urban redevelopment, including the new Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, Seaport Hotel, several office buildings, and the new Institute for Contemporary Art. The Seaport District is also the proposed location for the new “green” city hall, advocated by Boston Mayor Thomas Menino. The Fort Point area, which also abuts AFH, is home to many historic wharf buildings, handsome three to four story warehouse structures, formerly used for industry and manufacturing, which are currently being converted to loft-style housing and office use. There is a large population of artists in the area, originally drawn by the warehouse spaces and affordable rents. Four buildings, including AFH, are now artist-owned in what has become one of the largest concentrations of artists in New England.

### EARLY DAYS

In 1990 Susan Rodgers, an artist working in the South End neighborhood, began to consider how to combine her art with teaching at-risk youth. Her interest was not just in providing art training, but in art as a vehicle for breaking the cycle of poverty by



| SOUTH BOSTON DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE 2000 |          |              |
|---------------------------------------|----------|--------------|
|                                       | BOSTON   | SOUTH BOSTON |
| Population                            | 589,141  | 29,965       |
| White                                 | 54.5%    | 85%          |
| African- American                     | 25.3%    | 2%           |
| Asian                                 | 7.5%     | 4%           |
| Latino                                | 14.4%    | 7%           |
| Median Income                         | \$39,629 | \$40,312     |
| Unemployment                          | 4.6%     | 5.6%         |
| Homicides                             | 39       | 8            |

Source: South Boston Data Profile, Dept. of Neighborhood Development, Boston Redevelopment Authority, 5/1/2006

*Clockwise from top left: Channel Center in South Boston, typical homes in South Boston, new and old construction in the neighborhood.*

teaching young people to develop entrepreneurial skills. Rodgerson believed that “young people can provide, through their creativity, tangible services to the commercial world.” She focused on at-risk teens, most of whom were receiving little or no exposure to art in the public schools and were also dealing with the pressures endemic to low-income communities: gang violence, drugs, and violent crime.

The program began when Rodgerson connected with Dr. Steven Leonard, a creative and risk-taking principal of the Martin Luther King Middle School (MLK), located near Boston’s Blue Hill Avenue in the heart of warring gang territory. Rodgerson proposed a program that would teach art and introduce entrepreneurial skills. Dr. Leonard readily agreed, and with a group of about 20 students she embarked on the pilot program that would eventually become Artists for Humanity.

In teaching at MLK, Susan found that many of the teens were seriously interested in the arts, and that the art they were doing gave voice to many of the most challenging issues in their lives. When the MLK school year ended, some of the students she had met at MLK and others who had heard about the program began dropping by her studio after school. Susan welcomed them and encouraged their work. By 1992 the teen artists were beginning to sell their work informally at school events and in their neighborhoods.

Rodgerson decided to develop the program and expand it into a more entrepreneurial and formalized model.

In 1992, AFH was formally designated as a 501(c)(3) corporation. From 1992 until 2004 the program was forced to leapfrog to different studio spaces to stay one building ahead of the gentrification. Susan notes that she was extremely lucky that her landlord, the Boston Wharf Company, was supportive of the program, giving her increasingly large amounts of space for a very low price. For instance, they provided AFH 35,000 square feet for \$1,600 per month, thus allowing her to offer studio space to local artists in exchange for providing art instruction to the AFH teens.

During these years, Rodgerson and her teen artists and co-founders helped the program grow by seeking various kinds of support and grants, and through fledgling entrepreneurial activity. The young artists began by selling silk-screened T-shirts at school and community events, expanded to running a kiosk in downtown Boston, and began to be recognized around Boston. Andrew Motta, AFH Director of Operations, first joined Susan in 1995 to direct the silk screen studio, and run the T-shirt operation. Andrew said he was attracted by the way AFH connected kids with sales and with the corporate world. Carlo Lewis, another of the first AFH teen artists, is now a professional architect, working in Atlanta. Several other young adults who met Susan at the MLK School still support or work with AFH today.

By 1999 AFH was well established, serving about 100 teens in the warehouse space, with a staff of nine to ten mentor artists. In 2000, a turning point came for the program when Boston Wharf Co. gave AFH notice at their Fort Point location, thus alerting Rodgerson to the possibility of multiple relocations and began to consider purchasing a building for AFH. By this time, local foundations and businesses were supporting AFH through grants, and/or through the exhibition and purchase of paintings, murals, and sculpture. Clients and supporters included such well-known entities as the CARLISLE Foundation; New England Biolabs; Grand Circle Travel; the Nielsen Gallery; the Boston Foundation, and the mayor's summer jobs program, which gave AFH \$12,000.



*Susan Rodgerson (at right) speaking with artist mentors.*

## A NEW HOME

At first, the AFH Board was unsure about the wisdom of owning or building. They agreed to conduct a survey to gauge the level of support for acquiring a building. Since some of Boston's largest foundations, many prominent local businesses, and a series of individual donors were already supporting AFH, they were approached first, and were positive.

The survey showed that a successful campaign was possible. In late 2000, AFH secured an anonymous \$250,000 grant to launch the capital campaign. Other major contributors included Grand Circle Travel (\$1,000,000), the CARLISLE Foundation (\$250,000), and the Fireman Charitable Foundation, run by Paul Fireman, founder of Reebok. The initial goal for the capital campaign was set at \$3 million.

After considering various locations, AFH chose to stay in South Boston. First, it was close to the resources of the Fort Point arts district; second, it abutted South Boston, an area where many low- and middle-income teens lived; and third, it was close to several modes of public transportation. With the help of a board member active in real estate, the current site was quickly located. Although it was then occupied by a dilapidated nineteenth century livery stable and had some site contamination issues, it did meet several important AFH goals and was purchased in 2001.

The original plan was to rehabilitate the historic building, but this proved impossible because of structural problems and cost. The decision to build a green building was never at issue for Rodgerson, a long-term environmentalist, or the young AFH artists who were committed to the concept of sustainability. The challenge was to find an architect whose values matched those of the program and who was comfortable with the inclusive design process that Susan envisioned. After considering several architects, Arrowstreet was selected both because they presented an affordable design that met the needs of AFH, and because they had on their team Mark Kelley, an environmental engineer who had a history of success in designing sustainable systems.

## BUILDING GREEN

The program for the facility included studio space for young artists, a gallery space in which their work could be shown to diverse audiences, and a venue for events that would provide revenue to the program. These concepts translated into a plan for a 5,000-square-foot central gallery for events and parties. The other spaces in the building would be devoted to studios for painting, silk screen, sculpture, photography, graphic arts, and the new urban media resources that AFH was developing, as well as AFH offices.

In 2003, AFH hired a local firm, Community Partners, to develop a business plan that would also inform the design process. The plan was to identify new clients from the Boston business community; to examine how well AFH was performing with their existing clients; and to help develop a strategy for using the new green building for marketing and programming. Community Partners identified potential new clients; laid out a series of program requirements to help make the building attractive for events; and suggested ideas for showcasing the green aspects of the building



Photo: Richard MandelKorn

Gallery Interior of EpiCenter.

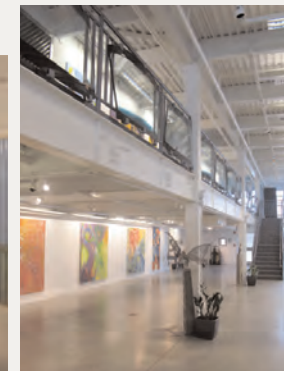
to the public at large. Many of the recommendations in the plan have already been implemented, and others are ongoing.

The site is an 11,000 square-foot-rectangle with an eight-foot height differential from the north to the south side. The program called for 23,500 square feet of building with an original budget of about \$2 million, i.e. under \$100/square foot. It became apparent that the initial budget was unrealistic given the relatively small size of the building and the difficulty of capturing any significant economies of scale. The budget ultimately grew to \$4.3 million, (\$183/square foot), still a good value, especially considering the addition of photovoltaic panels, valued at approximately \$500,000.

Given the parameters of the program, architect James Batchelor, working with Rodgerson and her team, developed a participatory process whereby AFH artists and staff could be involved in the design process. As Batchelor states, “we knew the best ideas would come from users, not architects.” The team, which then also included sustainability consultant Mark Kelley III, of the Hickory Consortium, organized five group meetings attended by AFH artists and staff. These meetings confirmed a strong commitment to sustainability on the part of the young artists, and also a desire to create a building which would stand out, giving AFH a visible and recognizable identity.

One of the key team players was Carlo Lewis, who started with AFH in its earliest days, first as a student, then as an artist mentor. Lewis had since completed architectural school and was hired by Arrowstreet to be on the project team. He is credited with several contributions to the design process relating to lighting design and the penetration of natural light into the building. Several other decisions involved teen input, most notably the choice to exclude air conditioning. The decision to build without air conditioning was a bold one—AFH is the first commercial building to be built in the U.S. in 25 years without air conditioning. Thoughtful siting, imaginative ventilation systems, and the sea breezes prevalent in the area have all contributed to the viability of this decision.

Given the long rectangular shape of the site, the building was designed to extend to the property lines on both the east and west, thereby precluding windows (as per the zoning code), on those



**Left:** Bathroom details designed by Carlos Lewis, sculptor Nick Rodriguez and AFH artists.

**Right:** Windshield railing designed by Rodriguez; student gallery below.



sides. Fortunately, a naturally cooled building works best with natural light on the north and south elevations. The design, therefore, placed large expanses of glass on the north and south ends, to naturally cool and heat the concrete slab, and to maximize the penetration of sunlight as much as 16 feet into the building. The floor-to-ceiling operable windows also optimized views toward downtown, and the glass garage door fully opens to a courtyard entry that is below-grade.

- Arrowstreet, and Mark Kelley all wanted to achieve as high a LEED rating as possible for AFH. They noted, however, that in designing a sustainable building it is essential to define sustainability in terms appropriate to the project. In this case, the green measures were designed to minimize cost and to make the green elements as visible as possible, thus showcasing the importance of sustainability to the community. (Through renewable technologies and conservation features, the EpiCenter has saved AFH \$66,000 in operation costs each year, in comparison to a traditional building.) The green design is also seen as a central element in a healthier, more sustainable future for young people and their urban environment.

The EpiCenter is a 23,000-square-foot LEED Platinum building, which includes the following:

- A 49-volt large array of photovoltaic panels on the roof (once the largest array in Boston), generating a majority of the electricity used by the building;
- Sloping of the photovoltaic array to enhance snow runoff and sun capture;
- A heat recovery unit (HRU), which pulls fresh air into the gallery and studios;
- North/south siting of the building with no windows on the east and west sides, and full-height operable, double-insulated glass doors for the north and south facades, allowing cross-ventilation and minimizing heat gain from west facing windows;
- A modular gas heat system that allows individual modules to run separately;
- A fan-operated cooling tower which can be used for all or any combination of floors, drawing cool air in from outside and pulling warm air out of the building;
- A rainwater collection system, visible through a glass pipe in the gallery, used for on-site irrigation and storm-water management;
- Super-insulated walls (which can be viewed through a permanent cutout located in the gallery space);

Photos: Arrowstreet



- A concrete gallery floor which provides “thermal mass,” providing passive solar heating in the winter and maintaining coolness in the summer;
- Incorporation of recycled materials in several key elements of the building, including insulation and concrete;
- Automated lighting systems that include low wattage T-8 bulbs, daylight dimming, and automatic shutoff;
- A corrugated stainless steel exterior that relates visually to surrounding industrial buildings but also provides a high degree of reflectivity and low heat gain;
- Low-flow sinks and toilets that require approximately half the standard amount of water per use;
- The use of recycled building materials.

## DESIGN CONCEPT

The EpiCenter building reflects the architect’s intent to relate the design to its industrial context. Consistent with its setting, the building has a straightforward form, utilizing semi-industrial materials such

as concrete floors and exposed structure, in ways that enliven the space. Selected elements of the original historic building on the site were incorporated into the building, including the stone foundation, which forms the edge of the entry courtyard, and trolley rails that once crisscrossed the site and have been used in the donor wall sculpture and the structure for a future canopy over the main entrance. In the studios, the simple, transparent architecture of the building provides a light and airy space for the young artists. Architecturally, the EpiCenter is consistent with its industrial setting, but it stands out as something interesting and curious on the urban landscape. As board president David Walek states, “The new building put us on the map.”

The building also incorporates the work of several young artists. Young sculptor Nick Rodrigues, who recently graduated from art school, was approached by Rodgerson to create handrails for the building. The result was the signature system of car windshields that form the entry and interior railing. Rodrigues also created the diagonal grills for the cooling fans, the donor sculpture made from trolley tracks that stands in the front courtyard, and the structure for a future overhang. The bathrooms feature sheets of corrugated metal siding integrated into sinks, and corrugated plastics used as stall doors. Toilet paper is housed in cut-off bottoms of five-gallon plastic water bottles and milled industrial parts found on site (see p.43). Nick continues his affiliation with AFH as a full-time artist mentor, leading the sculpture studio program.



The EpiCenter has received its fair share of attention from the architectural community. Some critics, like Robert Campbell, suggest that this building relates to the original intention of the modernist movement, i.e. the application of architectural skills “to solving the problems of ordinary society.” The building has also received a joint award from the Boston Society and New York Society of Architects, commending the building for design excellence and sustainability. AFH also received an award from the AIA’s Committee on the Environment as one of America’s “Top Ten Sustainable Projects.”

## THEMES

The history and development of the AFH program reflects a consistent set of themes. AFH has remained committed to the idea of pairing art education and production with the sale and marketing of the work. This pairing is based on a commitment to seeing art as a viable tool for attaining financial self-sufficiency, breaking the cycle of poverty, and achieving a modicum of social justice. The parallel theme, which is reflected throughout the program and culture of AFH, is respect for each other and the environment. AFH works hard to create an environment of accountability—of young artists to each other and to their mentors; and of accountability in their relationship to the natural and built environment. This commitment is the organizing principle upon which the organization, its building, and its programs are based.

Left: First floor plan, Arrowstreet.  
 Top right: Stair and rail designed by Nick Rodriguez.  
 Top middle: Young artist at work.  
 Bottom right: Architect James Batchelor of Arrowstreet.

## FINANCING THE EPICENTER

The financing of the EpiCenter was remarkably straightforward. AFH ran a capital campaign which raised a total of \$6.8 million. The bridge funding for the building and construction process was secured through the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency, an organization that, among other things, works on behalf of non-profit entities to finance buildings that contribute to the state's economic development.

MassDevelopment issued a tax exempt bond of \$2.8 million for AFH, with a fifteen-year term, which was purchased by TD Banknorth. (For bonds of this sort, the federal government forgoes tax on the interest income and it is therefore offered to the recipient at 1-2% below prime. In the case of AFH, this financing saves them about \$50,000 per year in interest.)

Representatives of Mass Development stated that they had no problem supporting this particular bond issue. First, green building is a major priority for them; second, they see South Boston as an important area that would benefit from stabilization in the face of rapid gentrification; third, AFH was offering an important service to the youth of Boston. The MassDevelopment was so enthusiastic, in fact, that at the end of the process, they commissioned four major artistic works for their property at 100 Cambridge St.

### EPICENTER COSTS

| FEATURE/SERVICE         | COST               |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Site purchase           | \$1,200,000        |
| Construction            | \$4,125,930        |
| Photovoltaic panels     | \$375,000          |
| Architectural services  | \$260,000          |
| Professional fees       | \$422,537          |
| Pre-development testing | \$81,093           |
| Furnishings, equipment  | \$67,287           |
| Studio build out        | \$63,977           |
| LEED commissioning      | \$20,000           |
| Financing expenses      | \$191,305          |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>\$6,807,129</b> |

Source: Artists for Humanity

### EPICENTER FUNDING SOURCES

| SOURCE            |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Foundations       | \$6,276,065        |
| In Kind Support   | \$170,000          |
| Individual Donors | \$371,414          |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>\$6,817,479</b> |

Source: Artists for Humanity

## AFH PROGRAMS

### ***Youth Run Micro-Enterprise Programs***

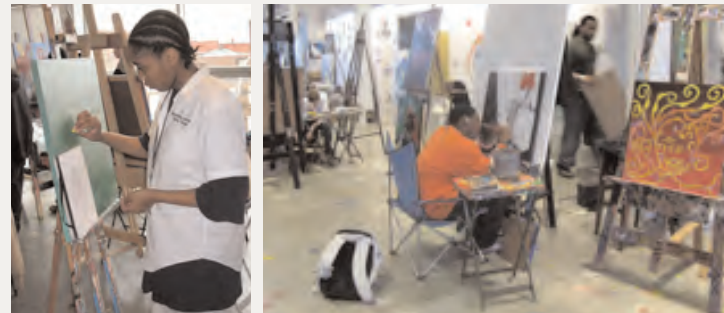
Since moving into the EpiCenter building in 2005, AFH has continued using its original program model, employing inner-city teens and working with them in small groups to create and sell art. The program develops entrepreneurial skills in the young artists and requires them to participate in outreach and marketing of their products and artistic pieces. AFH now employs 120 teens in up to four-year apprenticeships, in a variety of artistic endeavors including painting, printmaking, silk-screening, sculpture, photography, graphic design, web design, and urban media.

The program is organized in a three-day-a-week schedule, with the teens coming Tuesday through Thursday from 3-6 p.m. after school. (The summer program runs five days a week, from noon until 5:30 p.m.) During those hours, teens are participating on one of two levels: as unpaid and/or drop-in participants and apprentices/employees, working on pieces for gallery exhibition, or on pieces that have been commissioned by local business and organizations. The evening hours are generally reserved for mentor artists to use the studio space for their own work.

Entering teens must go through a series of steps to demonstrate their commitment to the program. Before becoming a paid artist,

each teen must take a tour of the EpiCenter and its programs—these are offered twice a month at no cost. If they are interested, teens must come back to the EpiCenter the following week at a designated time. Most kids that come for a second time are accepted into the program, unless they are either too old (over eighteen) or too young. (In general, AFH seeks to hire teens that are just beginning high school, at around fourteen years old, so they can continue with them for a full four years). Occasionally students are put on a wait list and are given the responsibility to check back about their status every 2 weeks.

Finally, before becoming a paid artist, each teen is required to work for 72 unpaid hours in the program, giving artist mentors a chance to gauge each student's degree of commitment and ability. Unpaid participants punch in and out at the office to verify their hours. The entering salary is minimum wage, and young artists get



*Young artists at work.*





annual raises based upon performance. In addition, older, more talented artists earn additional funds through commissions and receive 50%-80% of the sale price.

The painting studio is organized so that about 60 students are working at any given time, with five mentor artists, a ratio of about twelve teens per mentor. The mentor works both individually and with small groups to help develop the art, and to guide group projects such as large murals and paintings. In the silk screen studio, young graphic designers are creating silk-screened T-shirts that are regularly commissioned by outside clients (e.g. by the local bar Cheers), or for special events such as Earth Day. Youth receive base pay, with opportunities for earning commission on works sold. They have responsibility for the full business process: pricing a job, relating to the client, establishing and meeting deadlines, and staying on time and on budget – learning skills that will serve them in any future job setting. The sculpture studio and silk screen studio have both outgrown their spaces. Sculpture is growing rapidly,

with increased interest from young artists and a growing list of clients. They have begun to design signs for the Fort Point area and are venturing into furniture design and larger-scale projects.

The teen artists represent a racial and ethnic mix, coming from many different neighborhoods around Boston. AFH staff estimated that over 90% are either low-income or very low-income; about 35% of the teens are African-American; 20% Asian; 20% Caucasian; and 20% Latino. Eight kids are in recovery programs during the day and come in the late afternoon hours. A fledgling hip-hop performance project practices there at night.

When a young artist becomes part of the AFH program, AFH offers a variety of supports and incentives for good performance in school. On-site tutoring is available when kids are having difficulty in school; if grades fall below a 2.5 average, tutoring is mandatory. In addition, young artists receive a \$25 bonus for being on the honor roll and a free Mac laptop for getting straight As. Studio director and AFH co-founder Rob Gibbs notes the importance of the mentor relationship. Teens may fail to show up at AFH for a number of reasons, including problems at home or school. The mentor keeps track of how things are going at work and in their lives. AFH states that nearly 100% of their teens graduate from high school, compared with a 26% dropout rate in Boston. Eight-five percent pursue some sort of post-secondary education.

### ***Saturday Blast/Teacher Training Program***

AFH also runs a Saturday program for middle school students. This program is taught by three teen artists from the older group and is supervised by one adult mentor. It is also used as a teacher training program for AFH, mainly for their most dedicated teen artists. The goal for the teachers-in-training is that they learn to impart technical artistic methods, a love of the creative process, and a vision of themselves as successful adults. Mentors-in-training are all paid a special rate of \$15/hour for their work at Saturday Blast.

The program now regularly enrolls about 30 students and runs in three eight-week cycles from 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Focus in the Saturday program is on painting and drawing only, and young students come from as far as Hyde Park and Quincy. To recruit additional students to this program, young artists are offered a free water color set if they bring a friend. For this age group, however, transportation is a bigger issue, and one that AFH continues to consider.

### ***Cell Phone Environmental Tour***

Created by the Boston Museum of Science, a series of signs posted around the EpiCenter show a number to call for an audio explanation of the green features at each location. The audio presentations are by AFH youth and staff, the architect, and the environmental engineer, and give clear, understandable explanations of the green features of the building visible from each station. The final station features



testimonials by teens about how learning to operate and be responsible for the EpiCenter has raised their own environmental awareness, created an enhanced their sense of environmental responsibility, and created a personal commitment to sustainability in their lives outside of AFH.

### ***Spiritus Solaris***

*Spiritus Solaris* is the tour of the sustainability aspects of the building given upon request, typically twice each week. Occasionally tours are led by teen artists, but, as most occur during the school day, they are usually led by AFH staff. Over the last two years more than 2,000 people have taken the tour. Requests for tours come from youth and school groups, universities, architectural firms, and many international groups (including Norway, Germany, Great Britain and Ireland).

### ***Young at Arts***

AFH makes studio space available to Southie kids who are creating artwork for community events in South Boston, as part of a joint program with the South Boston Arts Association, South Boston

*Saturday Blast program.*

Association of Non-Profits, and the South Boston Community Health Center. The “Lighthouse Project” was one of their most successful projects. (See “Community”.)

### ***Inward Bound***

Inward Bound is a leadership training program for businesses and corporations, where leaders in the business sector come to the EpiCenter for two- to five-hour sessions to receive instruction in painting at a cost of \$200 per person. It has been tremendously successful with a number of corporations. Starwood Corporation has brought some staff for an initial session, and is planning to bring an additional 50 persons in the coming months. Other current clients include Social Venture Partners and Athena Health Group. Inward Bound is a significant source of exposure for the program.

### ***Rental Events***

Rental of the downstairs gallery is central to the AFH mission. In addition to providing a solid cash flow by serving as a venue for events from the business, retail, and philanthropic communities, it provides an opportunity to showcase the city’s largest collection of youth-created art, where works from teen artists are exhibited on a rotating basis. AFH estimates that 16,000 people have passed through the gallery in the last two years, many of whom purchase art or at least gain exposure to services offered by AFH.



The event business has exceeded AFH’s expectations. The first three years of the building has seen 202 events. The gallery, including the mezzanine, rents for \$5,000, and the third floor raw painting space can be included for \$9,000 inclusive. Projected income for the 2007 fiscal year from gallery rental is \$300,000.

## COMMUNITY

AFH has been strongly involved with neighborhood organizations that focus on arts and local youth. These include South Boston Artists Association (SBAA), an organization of about 35 artists working in Southie, who meet weekly at the famous L Street Bathhouse for discussions, critiques of each others’ work, and presentations; and South Boston Neighborhood Health Center, which runs the Institute for a Healthier Community. Dan McCole, Director of SBAA, notes that AFH produces “more good artists than all of the art schools in Boston put together.”

*Left: Sculpture Studio class in courtyard.*

*Right: Silkscreen Studio.*



Mayra Rodrigues Howard, who works at the Health Center, commented that many Southie kids are “just hanging out,” and praises AFH as offering a place to go to learn responsibility and a serious work ethic. She feels that the beauty of the AFH program is that it engages kids in a positive way, and is not “deficit driven” like most programs offered to kids of this age. She notes that people in Southie are becoming more aware of AFH as a resource, and that it is being sought out by the kids themselves.

These two organizations partnered with AFH in 2006 on the “*Young at Arts Lighthouse Project*,” initiated by the SBAA. Local carpenters and metal workers unions volunteered to cut out about

80 boards, roughly five feet by three feet, shaped like lighthouses. Teens from Southie were then invited to come to AFH to create a lighthouse from the boards to be displayed at community events and around the community, attached (by the metal workers) to light posts in the neighborhood. The project was an enormous success. About 60 kids and several local artists worked with artist mentors to create the lighthouses, which were first posted on street lamps in Southie, then moved to the South Boston street festival and exhibited at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center.

## ARTWORK AND CREATIVE SERVICES

AFH advertises services in sculpture, murals, graphic design, fine art, photography, large-scale banners, screen printing, exhibitions, and urban media. Young AFH artists have designed annual reports, provided artwork for publications, installed murals and photographic exhibitions in major public spaces, and continue to expand their market each year. At the time of the site, visit two projects were in the studio—a series of large paintings based on a Mandala theme for the upcoming annual AFH gala, to be held in the downstairs gallery, and a large painted mural for Project Hope in Dorchester, which has recently completed another LEED-rated building.

AFH has developed an impressive list of clients that includes some of Boston’s most well known businesses and institutions. Cheers

*Painting by AFH Artist Nestor Martino.*

bar, for example, is the biggest client for silk-screened T-shirts, buying about \$18,000 worth each year. Other clients of the silkscreen studio combined bring silkscreen revenues close to \$100,000 per year (but AFH anticipates the studio will earn \$300,000 in 2007). In addition to funding AFH with a series of grants, the Boston Globe Foundation uses AFH to provide photographs and graphic design for the citywide teen newspaper they support, entitled *Teens in Print*. They also commissioned AFH to design a new website for the *Teens in Print* initiative.

In 2006, AFH was commissioned to provide cover art for both the *Catalogue of Philanthropy* and the Grantmakers in the Arts 2006 Conference program. Staples Corp. also commissioned AFH to do a series of large works and sculptures for their corporate headquarters. AFH works can be seen around Boston in prominent locations: the Saltonstall Building at 100 Cambridge St., Terminal E at Logan Airport, BU Medical Center, Children's Hospital in Boston, and many others. A current list of clients, from 2003-2006, includes over 100 local institutions and businesses. In addition to those mentioned above, AT&T, Boston College, Boston Latin Academy, Boston Public Housing, Four Directions at Harvard University, Harvard Medical School, Harvard University Civil Rights Project, Mellon Bank, Northeastern University, Simmons College, and Trinity Church are among the most well known.



Each year AFH organizes 20-30 off-site exhibitions, showcasing youth artwork at fourteen permanent sites, with others soon to open. A selected list of recent events includes:

- **2004:** AFH commissioned by the City of Boston to design street pole banners for the Democratic National Convention;
- **2004:** AFH commissioned by MassDevelopment to do three large-scale paintings for permanent exhibition at 100 Cambridge St.;
- **2006:** AFH installed an exhibit of long-exposure photos for the Boston Globe Foundation's *Neighbor-to-Neighbor* Program;
- **2006:** AFH participated in *Bloomin' Arts*, a showcase of Boston youth arts programs hosted by the Hunt Alternatives Fund and Graham and Anne Gund;
- **2006:** AFH collaborated with youth from South Boston's *Youth at Arts* on the design and creation of 60 lighthouse-shaped paintings, each six feet tall that were installed on light posts along Broadway;
- **2006:** Mt. Washington Bank commissioned AFH's sculpture studio to create a series of steel-framed, fabric, and paper-mache-piggy banks for the Dorchester Day parade;

*Commissioned mural reaching completion.*



- **2007:** AFH installs 44 paintings and sculptures at Nellie Mae Education Foundation;
- **February 2007:** graphic art and silk-screened work on wood panels exhibited at 29 Newbury St.

## LEADERSHIP

### **Staff**

The visionary leader of AFH is Susan Rodgerson. It was Rodgerson who conceived the basic concept seventeen years ago, and who led the growth of the program from a fledgling group of kids coming to her studio after school to the nationally-known art enterprise it has become. Susan shares credit with her young co-founders, several of whom now occupy leadership positions on the AFH staff and have been with AFH since they were fourteen years old. She remains both the Artistic Director and Executive Director. Co-founder Jason Talbot, who also met Rodgerson when he was a student at MLK School, is now Special Projects Director. Co founder Rob Gibbs, now the Studio Director for AFH also met Susan when she came to teach at MLK School when he was thirteen years old. Rob says that before his initial involvement with Rodgerson and the AFH program he had never had any exposure to the arts. Rob has now been with AFH for seventeen years and plays a critical role in the organization.



With the opening of the EpiCenter and resulting program and staff expansion, the administrative staff now includes twelve positions with most employees having multiple responsibilities on the floor, in the studios, and around the building. As Jason, the Special Projects Director, puts it, “we all just do what needs to get done.” In structuring the AFH administration, Rodgerson has kept the idea of succession firmly in mind. Although committed to AFH for the immediate future, she is working to build an organization that can run smoothly without her and is considering several former students as possible future Executive Directors.

### **Board**

The Board of Directors has evolved along with the AFH program and profile. At first, it consisted of artists and community members who could give artistic advice to the program. Today it has broadened to include business people and professionals as well. The board chair is a partner at a corporate law firm; others come from the real estate, contracting, and education worlds. Two of the original art entrepreneurs on the board noted that “the board reflects the multicultural, urban youth it represents.” Although the board was at first skeptical about Susan’s wish to build the new

**Left:** Co-Founder and Special Projects Director, Jason Talbot; Director of Operations, Andrew Motta; Co-Founder and Studio Director, Rob Gibbs.  
**Right:** Co-Founder Rob Gibbs.

facility, they have become believers and are now enthusiastically guiding plans for future land acquisition and expansion.

## FINANCES

### *The Organization*

AFH is not a typical non-profit organization. Although it is a 501(c)(3), it considers itself a micro-enterprise and is working on a business model. The model involves both finding new clients to increase the market for artists' work, and expanding the role individual artists have in working with these with clients. At the same time, they work hard to secure outside funding to support the program. Development staff target foundations, corporations, and individuals and are charged with bringing in close to \$1.1 million per year, to supplement the \$500,000 per year in earned income (2006).

Although there has been relatively little regular public funding, AFH has been a recipient of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council for more than ten years. The CDBG grants range from \$25,000 to \$30,000 per year, and represent federal funds dispersed by the Jobs and Community Development arm of the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

As AFH gains in reputation both in Boston and around the country, funding from foundations becomes somewhat easier to secure.

## AFH 2006 OPERATING BUDGET

| REVENUES                                 |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>EARNED INCOME</b>                     |                    |
| Sale of Student Products/Services        | \$297,630          |
| Gallery Rental                           | \$234,840          |
| <b>Total Earned Income</b>               | <b>\$532,470</b>   |
| <b>CONTRIBUTED INCOME</b>                |                    |
| Foundations and Corporations             | \$747,836          |
| Government Support                       | \$41,700           |
| Individual Donations                     | \$338,904          |
| <b>Total Contributed Income</b>          | <b>\$1,128,440</b> |
| <b>IN-KIND SERVICES</b>                  |                    |
| <b>Total Revenue</b>                     | <b>\$1,721,668</b> |
| <b>EXPENSES</b>                          |                    |
| Youth Salaries                           | \$282,124          |
| Admin. Salaries (27 full- and part-time) | \$801,234          |
| Payroll Tax and Fringe Benefits          | \$159,368          |
| Contract Labor                           | \$44,143           |
| In-Kind Volunteers                       | \$25,000           |
| Commission on Sales                      | \$23,339           |
| Supplies                                 | \$96,467           |
| Printing and Repro                       | \$38,297           |
| Bond Interest                            | \$51,070           |
| Insurance                                | \$103,318          |
| Consultant Fees                          | \$103,692          |
| Artistic and Educational Equipment       | \$11,190           |
| <b>Total Expenses</b>                    | <b>\$1,739,242</b> |

Source: Artists for Humanity



Several major foundations such as the Boston Globe Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Putnam Foundation, and others have offered multi-year grants and show every sign of continuing to fund AFH at increasingly high levels. A list of foundation proposals for 2007 included a list of more than 70 grant requests. Three are for \$100,000 each, one is for \$75,000, and five others are for \$50,000. The remaining grants are for varying amounts under \$50,000.

The Boston Globe Foundation, which gives away \$1.3 million annually in Boston, considers AFH a model for community-based programs. The foundation has a long history with AFH and intends to grow that relationship. In past years the foundation has provided three \$50,000 grants to AFH, one \$60,000 grant, and is currently considering a \$75,000 grant. The foundation director stated that the visionary quality of AFH leadership gives them total confidence in the organization. She notes that AFH is doing a fantastic job of serving an under-served population, based on a clearly articulated strategy that is working.

The fact that AFH has no endowment is consistent with the quasi-business model with which it is operating. The absence of an endowment does, however, force AFH to raise large amounts of money each year to cover the significant gap between earned income and expenses. An endowment would provide increased financial security for the organization and will be the focus of an upcoming capital campaign.

## IMPACTS

Although their recent expansion is still fresh, AFH is fast becoming a mature organization with demonstrable impacts.

- AFH reinstates the value of art in a poor community and demonstrates the way in which the arts can be a viable profession.
- More than 90% of AFH artists graduate from high school, though the drop out rate in Boston high schools is 26%.
- Eighty-five percent of the teens who started with AFH as young adolescents have gone on to higher education and professional training. Several have assumed positions of responsibility in the organization, and others have spent their teen years employed by AFH, learning about marketing, management, and responsibility.
- Several of the original teen artists have been full participants in the development of AFH, are considered co-founders of the organization, and now occupy full-time executive positions within the organization.



- As the first LEED-certified Platinum building in Boston, AFH has set an important precedent, and is having impacts well beyond the city. Having been a close observer of AFH, Mayor Menino has recently required developers of new buildings (of 50,000 square feet or more) to install more energy-efficient systems and has declared that the new City Hall, which he hopes to build in the Seaport District, will be a green building.
- The Boston Redevelopment Authority gives the EpiCenter great credit for sparking interest in sustainable building practices in Boston.
- Through attending programs in a green building and learning to care for it and understand how it works, many young people are gaining exposure to the values associated with sustainability. This awareness among the young can be assumed to have positive impacts on longer-term environmental issues facing the country.

Painting by AFH Artist Uro Nazy'at.

- The AFH model is unique, and is being adapted in other cities and other countries. AFH graduates are currently pioneering similar organizations in Brooklyn, NY and Oakland, CA. My Arts in Kansas City, MO. has based their entire program on the AFH model. Other programs based on the AFH model also exist in Woonsocket, RI (RiverzEdge Arts Project), Minneapolis, MN (Juxtaposition Arts), and Newport RI. Programs using the AFH model also exist in Ireland and England, and Haifa, Israel. AFH is now undertaking a feasibility study for establishing a replication project in Brockton, MA.

## FUTURE PLANS

- Given the fact that they are already outgrowing their new space, AFH is hoping to acquire two vacant parcels adjacent to their site. These spaces would allow for expansion of the sculpture and silk-screen programs, as well as other uses.
- AFH would also like to increase its energy production by adding sixteen wind turbines on the east wall of the building. Seventy five percent of the cost of the windmills could be covered by the Renewable Energy Trust of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative; another 25% would have to be raised. A model for the wind turbines was presented at the annual gala in April. The

windmills are expected to bring AFH energy production from its current 60% to close to 100% of its energy needs.

- An overhang using old trolley rails from the site was designed at the entrance, but was not completed at the time of construction, for budgetary reasons. The sculpture studio would like to complete it immediately, providing shading from summer sun. The estimated cost is about \$100,000.

- AFH plans to place an LED display on the back of the building to communicate “real time” environmental and energy information to the public. The sign would post data about the amount of energy being generated at a particular time, and other related information.

- Through their connection with Grand Circle, AFH is currently developing a collaboration with a school in Tanzania, to produce images on posters and banners for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

- Retail plans include the addition of an AFH pushcart at the Boston Farmers’ Market and a future store on South Street in downtown Boston, across from South Station. The space would allow for gallery and retail sales.

- An upcoming capital campaign would fund some of the projects mentioned above and would provide some kind of endowment for AFH. Although ideally the program is designed to be self-sustaining, earned income currently covers less than one-third of expenses, and there is still a need to raise considerable funds each year. An endowment would reduce the pressure for ongoing fundraising.

## Assessing Project Success

### SUCCESS IN MEETING PROJECT GOALS

**1.** *To provide art instruction with training in the marketing of art to inner-city teen artists.*

This is being accomplished very effectively by AFH. Programs are successful, and the numbers of teens enrolled in them is continuing to grow.

**2.** *To create a learning environment characterized by respectful and supportive relationships.*

The low mentor-to-student ratio and the commitment to teen success in school and at home are key elements of the supportive



teacher/student relationships at AFH. Young artists receive art instruction, job training, and mentoring in all aspects of their lives.

Within the walls of the EpiCenter, responsibility for the creation, marketing, and installation of art is shared among young artists, with support from their mentors. Similarly, responsibility for dealing with the day-to-day workings of the building and program, are, of course, assigned to administrative positions, but there is a notable fluidity of people “doing what needs to be done” within the organization. This sharing of responsibility and opportunity sets a tone of mutual respect.

*3. To bridge economic, racial, and social divisions by providing underserved youth with the keys to self-sufficiency through paid employment in the arts.*

The location of the EpiCenter and the mixed population from which it draws supports the goal of building bridges among diverse populations. This goal is furthered when young artists make connections with people in the business world at all levels, as they market and develop their art.

*4. To provide an employment environment characterized by high expectations, and a commitment to helping teens reach their full potential.*

The system of paying young artists for their work and connecting them with local businesses and institutions, which purchase and

commission work, is not only an art training program, but also a job training program. Coupled with the small group mentor system, the AFH model offers optimum opportunity for personal growth to this at-risk population.

*5. To give inner-city teens a voice through exhibitions, public presentations, and permanent installation of their art.*

There is no doubt that AFH has been tremendously successful in this area. The number of exhibits and shows and the diversity of settings, including the AFH gallery, have provided a wide and diverse audience for teen art work. The audience continues to broaden.

*6. To contribute to environmental quality and awareness by creating the first LEED Platinum building in downtown Boston.*

This has been AFH’s other major contribution to Boston and the larger community. The green design of the building and its ongoing use for environmental education have set several precedents. Not only is the EpiCenter the first LEED Platinum building in Boston, it is also the first commercial building in the country to be built without air conditioning in recent years. It has encouraged Boston’s mayor to require more sustainable features in future development in the city, and it provides a model to other for-profit and non-profit developers about what can be done within the context of quality architectural design.

*7. To make a commitment to the Fort Point artist community and to South Boston by building the facility in this transitional area.*

There is no question that the location of this facility, as described above, makes an important contribution both to the Southie residential community and to the Fort Point artist community. It provides an important resource to both communities, and a new model of art training in the country.

*8. To provide a safe and meaningful place where teens are respected for their contributions.*

For the teen population at AFH, having a safe environment is a key aspect of personal and professional growth. Urban poverty is too often accompanied by both physical danger and emotional stress associated with drugs, crime, and challenges to families. AFH can provide a consistent, safe environment, where teens are given the opportunity to develop personal skills and qualities that are not likely to emerge in typical inner-city settings.

## SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The Selection Committee commended Artists for Humanity EpiCenter for being the first building in Boston to achieve a LEED Platinum rating, for setting a new standard for construction in the downtown, and for having direct impact on the Boston Building Code. The excellence of the design and the “transparency” of the

green elements were applauded, as was the use of recycled materials in the building design.

All Committee members agreed on the excellence and innovative quality of the AFH program and felt it established a new direction for involvement of inner city youth in the arts. The concept of developing entrepreneurial skills through the arts was felt to bring fresh opportunity and thinking to a long-standing urban issue. Finally, the committee applauded AFH for its commitment to South Boston and to the Fort Point community.

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