

40 WEST ARTS

Celebrates 10 Years

A DECADE THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

By William P. Marino

40 West Arts' 10th birthday is a big deal. Of course, there were nay-sayers! Those who thought it wasn't possible to form an arts district on West Colfax. But now, we've made it to double digits—and survived a global pandemic. It's a big deal—not for any individual, but for all who have been involved along the way. This selection of photos and captions highlight a hint of the first 10 years of what Colorado Creative Industries Director Margaret Hunt called “the little arts district that could” for the scrappy, bootstrapping manner we became known for on our way to becoming Lakewood’s state-certified creative district. The formation of 40 West Arts was an intentional act—performed with a passionate purpose—a collaborative strategy to restore vibrancy to West Colfax, to once again allow it to shine with its special brand of glitter and grit. For more “inside scoop,” talk to the “40 West Champions” many of whom are responsible for the formation and underpinnings of 40 West Arts and are depicted on the following pages.



In the summer 2011, after a series of community meetings at Molholm Elementary designed to build on the recommendation from a 2006 Action Plan to start a West Colfax-based arts district, RMCAD graphic design students and faculty unveiled the original brand for 40 West Arts District to a crowd of 200+ people at a garden party on the historic campus of Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design.

In the early days of 40 West Arts (before any gallery opened) our first arts programming called “Art Along Colfax,” placed local original artworks on easels in publicly accessible locations in businesses for patrons to enjoy. Rockley Music (pictured here in 2011), FirstBank, Powell Insurance Agency, and the newly opened BID office were among the early adopters. Before the program ended shortly before 40 West Gallery opened on Teller Street in late 2012, 40 West Arts had 19 participating art venues along West Colfax Avenue.



Photo: Barb Gal



Photo: 40 West Arts



Photo: City of Lakewood

Community interest grew at every meeting held at Molholm Elementary as locals rallied around the notion of starting a arts district along West Colfax the meetings (spearheaded by Roger Wadnal’s team from the City of Lakewood’s Research & Comprehensive Planning Division) started in February of 2011 with a handful of attendees and soon expanded to dozens in subsequent meetings—culminating in a special unveiling event on the lawn at RMCAD. Simultaneously, organizers were working to form a local business improvement district to provide a funding mechanism. Both 40 West Arts and the Lakewood-West Colfax BID were officially formed later that year. The BID took the lead in operationalizing the arts district.



Photo: 40 West Arts



Photo: William Marino



Photo: 40 West Arts

With strong and growing community connections, the milestones started mounting up. In late 2012, due to the generosity of Jerry and Gloria Enger of Enger Enterprises, longtime property owners on West Colfax, 40 West Arts was able to open its community gallery—a gamechanger—giving the new district a place to hold events and to host programming. Above: In the back warehouse of the original gallery (before there was a theater), 40 West Champions, who nurtured the early days of 40 West Arts, make a celebratory toast as a packed house listens to what's next—applying for state certification as an official Colorado Creative District.



Photo: 40 West Arts



Left: A 40 West Champion and a fervent supporter of all things 40 West Arts, Judy Cybuch, shown here in her gallery with then state representative Andy Kerr (now Jeffco Commissioner), opened The Gallery of Everything, the district's first gallery in 2012. Originally on Ammon Street, the gallery was eventually re-located to Lamar Station Plaza, and converted to Red Herring Art & Supply in 2019 under the new ownership of another 40 West Arts champion, Kris Autobee.



Photo: 40 West Arts



Photo: Dave Rein



Photo: 40 West Arts

Above: Lakewood Arts Council, the oldest arts organization in the city, (est. in 1988) made the decision to move to Lamar Station Plaza in the core of 40 West Arts in 2014, and helped build on the growing momentum of the arts movement on West Colfax. The plaza owners, Broad Street Realty, provided the incentive—five years of free rent. Lakewood Arts became the 3rd gallery in the district, following The Gallery of Everything and 40 West Gallery.

From the very beginning, 40 West Arts relied on partnerships with the community to build momentum. The West Colfax Community Association played an integral role in supporting and promoting the emerging arts movement, and continues to do so. Above: (left to right) Nina Rockley, Bunny Malm, and Maddie Nichols—all active WCCA board members at the time were invaluable advocates of the new arts district. Left: A group of WCCA volunteers celebrate helping The Action Center paint its shelter on West Colfax.





Another major milestone was the opening of RTD's W Line in April 2013. Above right: 40 West Arts held a pop-up festival on Lamar Street to celebrate the opening; Top and above: Renowned Lakewood Artist Lonnie Hanzon created the iconic "Lakewood Legacy Trees" art installation at Lamar Station that recounts Lakewood's history in the corridor. Middle right: Always strong supporters of the arts initiative on West Colfax, Lakewood City Manager Kathy Hodgson and then Lakewood Mayor Bob Murphy enjoy the first trip on the W Line.



Photo: Kathryn Zeigler



As the first few years progressed, the impact of 40 West Arts became more visible in the corridor—from the many artistic box wraps along light rail and at local intersections to the ever-growing number of new murals in the corridor, like the one (directly below) on Lamar Street along light rail (“Omning Birds” by Bobby Magee Lopez) and the sculpture in the new Lamar & 14th Ave. roundabout (bottom center: “Connected” by Christopher Weed)—both award-winners in 2015. Also in 2015, (left and below right) new median monuments marking the district core.

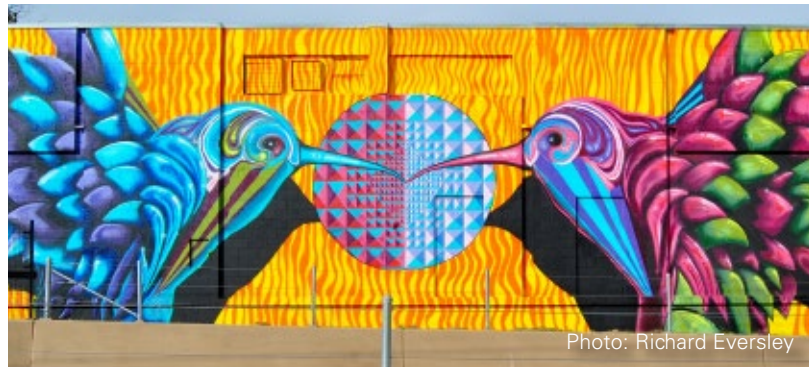


Photo: Richard Eversley



Photo: Benjamin Waldman



Photo: Will Strathmann

In 2014, Mayor Murphy celebrates the first mural in 40 West Arts’ COLorFAX program (an initiative to bring color to Colfax). The mural was conceived and implemented by Lakewood folk artist Johanna Parker, a board member at the time, who designed the mural and led volunteers in painting the wall on the King’s Rest Motel.

It wasn't long after creative district certification that 40 West Arts and its partners started to rack up awards, including leadership awards from CBCA and American for the Arts, multiple accolades from Westword and 5280 magazine, and this one (right): the ULI Impact Award in the INSPIRE category for their partnership in creating the 40 West ArtLine. Left to right: Kevin Yoshida, Vanessa Zarate, Roger Wadnal, Alexis Moore, Bill Marino, and Jeff Temple.



Photo: 40 West Arts



Photo: 40 West Arts



Photo: William Marino

Above: Rick and Patty Yaconis (front row on right) brought live theater to the district in 2013 with the E Project's EDGE Theatre. Theater board members along with local dignitaries cut the ribbon on the set of the first production in the new 80-seat theater (built in the warehouse in the back of 40 West Gallery). Middle Right: Benchmark Theatre took over the space in 2018 and continued the tradition of compelling live performances in the district.



Photo: William Marino



Left: In 2012, Julie Byerlein and Johanna Parker received the first “Making Your Mark” awards at a 40 West Arts fundraising gala and variety show in the Mary Harris Auditorium stage at RMCAD.

Below: Joe and Luanne Margotte light up the dance floor during 40 West Arts’ 2014 gala at the Elks Lodge, while others (middle left) look on and enjoy the show.



Left: Mayor Bob Murphy, 40 West Arts Board Chair Bill Marino, and CCI Director Margaret Hunt celebrate the news that 40 West Arts was granted the official designation as a state-certified Colorado creative district in June 2014 and (Bottom right opposite page) later that year, 40 West Champion and board member Julie Byerlein and then Gov. John Hickenlooper pose in Salida, the venue for the first official convening of Colorado Creative Districts.



Photo: Kathryn Zeigler



Photo: Kathryn Zeigler

Right: Friends Win Doak, Brittany Truman, Jaia Lovett, and Katy Zeigler enjoy the sights and sounds at 40 West Studio, a welcome addition to the district that opened in 2016. Middle and far right: During a 2021 First Friday visitors to the Studios enjoyed family fun and a free classical guitar performance by Alfredo Muro.



Photo: William Marino



Photo: William Marino



Photo: Miranda Samon

From its inception, 40 West Arts focused on creating community arts events and experiences that everyone can enjoy—from Colfax Art Crawls and outdoor festivals to family friendly hand-on activities. Far left opposite page: A crowd at ArtFest at Lamar Station Plaza enjoys the music of Graham Good and the Painters. Middle left: The ever-popular “Bad Astronauts” bring their unique performance that includes dance, music, and lights to a 2017 Colfax Art Crawl. Left: Liz Black leads a troupe of circus entertainers through the district on First Friday. Below: The Handsome Little Devil’s series of Joy Bomb parades in 2020 & 2021 featured entertainers that delight the crowd at every stop along the route.



Photo: Miranda Samon



Photo: Kathryn Zeigler



Photo: William Marino

Right: A group of volunteers prepare to cut the ribbon on the 40 West ArtLine. Funded in part by a National Endowments for the Arts grant, the ArtLine launched in June 2018. This exciting amenity in the district is a 4-mile walking and biking outdoor art experience connecting three area parks with 80+ art installations. It continues to grow in popularity as the City, 40 West Arts, and the BID work to add even more art and activities along the route. Recent additions include Katy Casper's series of murals, called "Wild Urban Medicine" on multiple buildings at Lamar Station Apartments, funded by the owners. Below right: City Planner and 40 West Arts board member Alexis Moore has been a steadfast advocate for 40 West Arts and the ArtLine.



Photo: Will Strathmann



Photo: Kathryn Zeigler

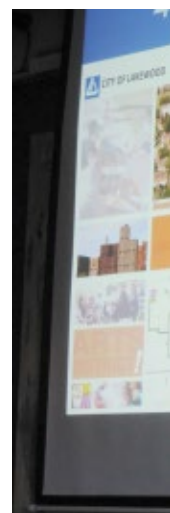




Photo: 40 West Arts

Left: Ryan Mathews was the first Artist in Residence for 40 West Arts. This award-winning program in partnership with Metro West Housing Solutions (Lakewood's Housing Authority) delivers free arts programming to kids and families throughout the district. Below: Volunteers finish up a "Kaleidoscope Crossing" along the ArtLine at the intersection of Pierce Street and W. Colfax Avenue.



Photo: Clarke Reader / Lakewood Sentinel



Photo: Will Strathmann

From the committee that put forward the notion of an arts district in the original 2006 West Colfax Action Plan, to the Lakewood staffers who believed it was possible and brought the nascent idea to a series of community meetings to cultivate it, and the dozen or so "champions" that met twice a month for two years to nurture it along with the newly formed business improvement district, to the early artists and neighborhood regulars that came out to support it, many, many people helped put 40 West Arts on the map. Yes, this 10-year anniversary is a big deal. Kudos to the community and to all who shared in making the dream a reality.