

CULTURE BRIGHT:

A SUMMER ESSAY SERIES

Reflections on art, culture, and the future of the Quad Cities from **Jen Lewis-Snyder**, President & CEO of The Cultural Trust.

Nature, Wonder, and Belonging

Some of our most important memories happen outdoors.

A walk with a grandparent.
A summer evening with friends.
A child discovering a butterfly.
A first date.
A family photo.
A concert beneath the stars.
Long after we forget the details, we remember how those moments made us feel.
Connected.
Present.
Alive.
That is the power of nature.
Not simply its beauty.
Its ability to slow us down long enough to notice what matters.
Ryan Wille understands that well.
As Executive Director of the Quad City Botanical Center and a longtime baseball coach, he has spent years helping people grow.
Athletes.
Plants.
Ideas.
Communities.
The work is remarkably similar.
You plant seeds.
You nurture potential.
You create the right conditions.
Then you watch something extraordinary happen.
For generations, the Quad City Botanical Center has provided a place where people can step away from the noise and reconnect with something larger than themselves.
The gardens are filled with plants, flowers, trees, and landscapes.
But what people truly find there is something harder to define.
Wonder.
The feeling that comes from seeing something beautiful.
The feeling that comes from discovering something unexpected.
The feeling that reminds us there is still more to learn, more to experience, and more to appreciate.
Wonder has a remarkable way of bringing people together.
It crosses generations.
It welcomes newcomers.
It invites curiosity.
And perhaps most importantly, it creates belonging.
You do not need expertise to enjoy a garden.
You do not need special knowledge to appreciate a sunset.
You do not need permission to experience joy.
Nature welcomes everyone.
That spirit sits at the heart of the Botanical Center and at the heart of Culture Bright Summer Series.

Both are built on a simple idea.
Extraordinary experiences should be accessible to everyone.
This summer, audiences will gather among blooms, trees, and open skies for Bluegrass on the Grass.
Railroad Earth and Yonder Mountain String Band will transform the gardens into one of the region’s most unexpected cultural destinations.
Not because the gardens are becoming a concert venue.
Because they are becoming something even more powerful.
A gathering place.
A place where nature, music, art, and community meet.
A place where people can share experiences that feel both personal and collective.
The strongest communities are built through those moments.



“Wonder has a remarkable way of bringing people together.”

Moments of wonder.
Moments of connection.
Moments that remind us we belong to one another.
That is what the Botanical Center has been cultivating for decades.
Not simply gardens.
A sense of belonging.
And perhaps that is one of the greatest gifts culture can offer.
A reminder that beauty surrounds us.
That community is all around us.
And that sometimes, the brightest future begins by slowing down long enough to notice both.

To learn more about The Cultural Trust and its Legacy Partners, go to CultureBright.org.

