

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.

The Power of Place

Some communities are connected by geography. Others are connected by symbols.

Think about the places that immediately come to mind when you picture the Quad Cities. The bridges stretching across the Mississippi. The glowing crown of the Figge. The colors dancing across the river at night. Winter Lights at the Quad City Botanical Center. A mural tucked into a downtown alley only made possible by the sweat equity of talented young Quad Citizens. A sculpture unexpectedly waiting in a public space. A concert gathering strangers under the same sky. These things matter more than we realize. They become landmarks. They become memories. Eventually, they become part of our shared identity.

For some people, the symbol of the Quad Cities is a bridge. For others, it's the river. For others, it's music, architecture, art, or light. What makes these symbols powerful is not the object itself. It's the meaning we attach to it. The way it reminds us where we are. The way it connects us to one another. The way it transforms a collection of cities into a community. That's why public art matters. Public art isn't decoration. It's storytelling. It tells people who we are. It tells visitors what we value. It creates moments of surprise in ordinary places. It invites conversation. It creates belonging. And when organizations across our cultural ecosystem work together, something remarkable happens. The symbols begin speaking to

one another. A lighted bridge reflects on the river. The glow of Winter Lights illuminates the night sky. The colors of the Figge's Evanescent Field dance nearby. Each experience stands on its own. Together, they create something larger. A sense of place. A shared cultural identity. That is what Culture Bright is strengthening. Not simply events. Connections between people and place. Because when creativity becomes visible, something changes. People begin to see their community differently.



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They begin to see one another differently. And perhaps most importantly, they begin to recognize that they are part of a story much bigger than themselves. The strongest communities are not remembered because of their infrastructure alone. They’re remembered because of how they make people feel. That’s the power of place. And that’s exactly what we’re building here. Culture matters here. And it always will.

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

