

History of The Baldwin City Community Mural Program

Jeannette Blackmar, March 2021, updated November 2024

The idea of a community mural program was initiated in January 2016 during a Baldwin City Tourism Bureau strategic planning session at the Three Sisters Inn. Tourism Bureau participants met to review annual plans referencing the “Baldwin City, Kansas Visitor and Tourism Development Plan” (2011) that included development of “murals depicting local historic events” to attract visitors to downtown Baldwin City.

The creation of a mural program became part of the Baldwin City Tourism’s Bureau long-term strategic priority to create a cultural tourism program leveraging Baldwin City’s rich historic and cultural heritage as a core resource to instill community pride among residents, increase visitors to Baldwin City and train and employ a cadre of local artists. Spearheaded by Jeannette Blackmar, Executive Director, Baldwin City Chamber, and Lucretia Carlson, Co-Chair Baldwin City Tourism Bureau, a series of public interest meetings were held in 2016 that resulted in the creation of the Baldwin City Community Mural Program.

Fundamentally, the mural program emphasizes community engagement and collaboration that includes a representation of arts and cultural nonprofits, local artists, residents, Baker University, USD 348, elected officials, downtown business owners and other community leaders.

Importantly, the development of mural themes would not be pre-determined but derived through deliberative discussion focused on topics such as “Who are we?”, “What is our history?”, “What makes Baldwin City unique?” by Baldwin City residents, local artists and program partners. At its core, the vision for the mural program embeds identity, placemaking, community pride and heritage and creates opportunities for respectful and engaging discourse among community members. The mural program would both train local artists in the skill of mural making and employ these artists to create murals in downtown Baldwin City working in collaboration with the Baldwin community. While initially focused on downtown Baldwin City, the program could extend beyond.

Efforts to create murals were aligned with the Baldwin City Chamber of Commerce and City of Baldwin City’s community visioning work that sought to identify Baldwin City’s assets, growth opportunities, challenges and strengths. The Program formally kicked off in May 2016 with plans for the first mural in partnership between the Chamber, Tourism Bureau, Lumberyard Arts Center and City of Baldwin City. All murals as part of the program seek to engage community participation, showcase Baldwin City’s cultural and/or natural heritage, integrate student apprentices from both USD 348 and Baker University and feature an interactive element in the mural design.

BC Community Mural Team's first mural: Maple Seed Fountain

Lead Artist - David Loewenstein

The Baldwin City Community Mural Project was a \$7,460 private-public partnership between the Baldwin City Tourism Bureau, Lumbyard Arts Center, Baldwin City Chamber of Commerce and the City of Baldwin City. The project produced a downtown mural located at 608 High Street showcasing Baldwin City's cultural heritage. Importantly, the project provided an innovative way for citizens of all ages to engage with their City and with each other by leveraging the creative tool of community-participatory art. Specifically, the mural was created through a citizen engagement design process that embedded community visioning. Inclusive citizen visioning is essential to the creation of the City's growth plan. Additional project outputs include increased awareness and pride in Baldwin City's cultural heritage; downtown beautification; local artist training; community building; and awareness of the Baldwin City Community Mural Program.

The 18 month project (January 2016 – June 2017) consisted of a 15 month planning phase and 3 month implementation phase with a total of 25 public engagement events, participation of 12 local businesses, 14 local artists and total of attendance of 667. The project hired experienced community muralist, Dave Loewenstein, to lead the three-month implementation phase with assistant artist, Nicholas Ward, and three local artist apprentices—Meagan Young, Ella Conover, and Alaina Shifflebien. The development of the mural theme was derived through an intergenerational community visioning session, and four Mural Design Team meeting, consisting of 17 citizens, who conducted research, sketched mural theme ideas on paper for public input and provided consensus on final mural content. Following, the community was invited to paint.

Between 2016-2019, two additional murals were completed in downtown Baldwin City with financial support from community donations, the Maple Leaf Festival Committee and in-kind support. These murals grace the facades of Jardon Insurance, the Lumbyard Arts Center's alley door, and the space facing the downtown Fire Station. Formalization of the program continued with logo development, the creation of a Facebook page – Baldwin City Community Mural Project, and regular monthly meetings.

In 2017, spurred by the creation of the Baldwin City Community Mural Program, the City's Facade & Mural Grant program was reevaluated and a separate grant program, "Public Mural Grant Program," was created to support the development of murals in Baldwin City. The Baldwin City Community Mural Program has received recognition from surrounding communities. In 2018, Ottawa Main Street and Ottawa CVB used our program as a model to create their community mural finished in 2019. In 2020, the Eudora Chamber of Commerce expressed interest in establishing a mural program based on our program.

Between 2019-2020, the Program hit a hiatus and shift in organizational lead partners due to staffing changes at the Chamber, Lumberyard Arts Center and Baldwin City Library as well as dissolution of the Baldwin City Tourism Bureau in 2018. Due to these developments, the mural program shifted organizational leadership to the Lumberyard Arts Center with partners, Baldwin City Library and the Baldwin City Chamber of Commerce. Led now by Jeannette Blackmar (Executive Director, Lumberyard Arts Center), the mural program seeks to continue where it left off: creating murals throughout downtown through collaboration and establishing a “Baldwin City Mural Walking Tour.”

- During the 2020 pandemic, five murals were painted on Sullivan Square park benches to “create engaging spaces” as part of the City’s Sesquicentennial celebration to honor Baldwin City’s history, funded through a Douglas County Community Foundation grant.
- In 2021, Lisa Slavin with Baker University student, Elaena Steffen, led the creation of the “Baker Family Tree” mural located on the Baker Maintenance Building, 702 7th Street (by the Baker tennis courts). This project was part of a inter-term Baker University course taught by Cassy Bailey.
- In 2022, Christina Malicke served as the lead artist with BHS apprentice, Ainsley Weiss, to create a mural at the Baldwin City Chamber's office, "A Tour of History and Charm" that highlights Baldwin City's history, culture and its assets.
- In 2022, Meg Cundiff created and implemented the Baldwin City Library's mural, "Harmony Garden" with grant funding through the Douglas County Community Foundation.
- In 2023, lead artist, Becky Weaver, designed and led the community in painting "Cheers to Baldwin City!" at the Baldwin City Beer Company.
- In summer 2024, a the Baldwin City Community Garden "tailgate mural" was created with funding provided by the Chamber's Be Well Grant Program to promote our community garden. The mural's design was by Scott Braden.
- In the fall 2024, Katee Smith visioned our first 3D mural installed at the Baldwin City Library's circulation desk with the help from local Girl Scouts.

The Baldwin City Community Mural Program is one facet the Lumberyard Arts Center and Baldwin City Library plan to work with the City of Baldwin City to develop a robust arts and culture public policy to grow downtown vibrancy that will spur economic growth through cultural heritage tourism, attract people to reside in Baldwin City and create a dynamic creative community.

Baldwin City Mural Program Blogs and Articles

Maple Seed Fountain: Baldwin City's Community Mural

https://www.baldwincitychamber.com/2017/06/maple-seed-fountain-baldwin-citys-community-mural/?fbclid=IwAR1krAYa90-nZPra2Df1_UKW5FlBmdmsNGmwcYkUuYN05tTKRK3K-vq_llk

Painting the Town: Baldwin City Mural Project on the Horizon

<https://thebakerorange.com/13628/news/painting-the-town-baldwin-city-mural-project-on-horizon/>

Baldwin City Mural Project has Ambitious Goals

<https://www2.ljworld.com/news/general-news/2018/sep/04/baldwin-city-mural-project-has-ambitious-goals/>

Ribbon Cutting, Welcome Baldwin City Mural

<https://www.baldwincitychamber.com/2018/09/welcome-baldwin-city-our-third-community-mural/>

Sullivan Square Mural Benches

[Lucy's Legacy](#)

[Lumberyard Arts Center Through Time](#)

[Ecotones: Stability through Change](#)

[Evolving Pathways](#)

[Maple Leaf Festival](#)

Why Murals

Murals have the opportunity to tell a community's story, create a unique experience, engage citizens in public life, increase foot traffic and tourism, increase appreciation for the arts and artists, and increase overall attractiveness of the space. The intangible benefits of public art—esthetic beauty, cultural interpretation, education, inspiration, and general improvement of the physical environment—are well-known. But because these are considered “soft” benefits, they are sometimes dismissed.

However, experiences throughout communities across the United States show that public art can be a source of publicity and cash income, as well as beauty. Murals have become a unique and appealing way of increasing tourism and improving commerce. As noted by the American Planning Association (2011), “the recognition of a community’s arts and culture assets (and marketing of them) is an important element of economic development.” In fact, cultural heritage tourism is the fastest growing niche tourism industry contributing \$171 billion each year to the U.S. economy (McNulty and Koff, 2014). We envision the following outputs and outcomes to be achieved through the community-participatory mural program:

Outputs

- Implementation of cultural planning workshop(s).
- Local artists trained in the skill of mural making.
- Employment for local artists.
- Creation of downtown murals through a community participatory process.

Outcomes

- Increased community empowerment through community involvement and ownership of a local community initiative.
- Strengthened understanding and exploration of community values.
- Increased pride in place for the residents of Baldwin City.
- Development of new partnerships and strengthening trust among existing partnerships.
- Improved communication and cooperation among arts and other groups.
- Integration of culture into the larger community more effectively, increasing awareness of the potential of arts and cultural activity to contribute to community and economic development.
- Increased tourism and economic vitality to Baldwin City.

- Improved visibility of local artists, cultural workers and organizations.
- Improved access to the arts and development of larger audiences.

References

American Planning Association. 2011. Community Engagement – How Arts and Cultural Strategies Enhance Community Engagement and Participation. Arts and Culture Briefing Paper. Chicago: IL.

Destination Marketing, Planning & Development. 2011. Baldwin City, KS Visitor and Tourism Development Plan.

McNulty, Robert and Russell Koff. 2014. Cultural Heritage Tourism. Partners for Livable Communities. Washington, DC.