

Artistic Pawtucket

Projo.com

01:00 AM EST on Monday, February 16, 2004

The most unlikely transformation in Rhode Island might be Pawtucket's emergence as an arts mecca. Its mayor of six years, James Doyle, received last month the Arts Advocate award from the Arts and Business Council of Rhode Island.

"When you assist artists," Mr. Doyle said at the time, "you are helping small businesses, which can ultimately revitalize a city."

And six years ago, few would have considered Pawtucket a likely candidate for revitalization, let alone arts meccahood. But the city now has a robust arts-and-entertainment district and an annual film festival. It played host to last year's Convergence sculpture festival. The new Sandra Feinstein Gamm Theater has relocated from Providence. A growing number of mills have been rehabbed with lofts affordable to artists, including some who have also relocated from the state capital -- whose own arts bureaucracy is being revamped.

The most important decision made for artists by Mayor Doyle, we would guess, has been to hire Herbert Weiss to coordinate the city's arts programs. Mr. Weiss has been a dynamo at creating and carrying out Mr. Doyle's arts policy. He operates at a high level, thinking up new and better ways to make Pawtucket attractive to artists and art patrons; but he also operates at ground level, taking visiting artists around and trying to persuade them to move to Pawtucket.

Mr. Weiss's plucky creativity has contributed to Mayor Doyle's success, but would not exist without Mayor Doyle's support. Both have worked wonders for Pawtucket's artists and art patrons, in fact, for all Rhode Islanders who love art -- not least for its benefits to the economy. Bravo!