

... YOU CAN SEE SPARKS

Out of the roughly \$1 million the City of Sparks budget dedicated to the redevelopment, \$150,000 was earmarked for public art in Victorian Square. M. Francine Burge, special events supervisor for the City of Sparks, began working on a plan.

"I developed an arts and culture advisory committee, and we put together our own strategic plan for what we'd do with that \$150,000," Burge said. "I think everyone assumed I would just take that money, buy a piece of art, and call it done. But the construction still isn't done, and it won't be for a few years. It's hard to gauge what it will look like, so I wanted to use this time doing research."

Burge reached out to Shoshana Zeldner, who was, at the time, Nevada Arts Council arts development director. (Today, she's special events program manager for the University of Nevada, Reno's School of the Arts.)

"I want to see more national funding for the arts in Nevada—we don't have that many projects funded in the state by the National Endowment for the Arts," Zeldner said. "So I suggested we pursue the NEA Our Town grant, which is intended for creative placemaking."

Creative placemaking, according to the NEA, integrates "arts, culture

and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities by advancing local economic, physical, and/or social outcomes."

They were awarded \$50,000, which would fund efforts to gather input from the public and use the input to create a plan for how and where art would be integrated into the redeveloped downtown.

Burge's early research helped her to identify Shelly Willis, a seasoned, innovative public art planning consultant with experience in creative placemaking. Willis was hired to work with the city to gather the input needed to plan public art that would both reflect downtown Sparks' existing personality and transform it in a positive way. So, if the goal is creative placemaking, why not be creative about gathering that input? Why not use art to help plan the art? The idea became a community engagement campaign, Together We See Sparks, funded by the

NEA grant and in-kind donations.

"We wanted to do something fun and get people really engaged with art so that it's not just a survey," Burge said. "It's going to get their hands a little dirty and find out how they really feel about their city."

Burge's committee put together a call for artists to submit proposals for how they would solicit community input. The two local artists who were selected were Jen Charboneau of Reno and Paul

Fenkell of Sparks, each receiving \$4,000.

Charboneau's project, "Sparks Seen Zine," will be a mobile community art bike where people are invited to share their stories and experiences of Sparks while the artist draws gesture portraits of participants. Fenkell's project, "The Big Easel," is a shade structure providing a place for people to write and draw their thoughts on living in Sparks and



the Truckee Meadows. The artists' projects already have begun appearing at downtown events this summer. Additionally, Sparks residents can visit the campaign website, TogetherSparks.com, and share their input through a survey.

The campaign continues through October 15, at which point all the input will be analyzed and a public art plan for Victorian Square will be developed. It may result in sculptures, murals, benches, water features, lighting design, bike racks or something else altogether that reflects Sparks' personality and potential.

"Sparks is beloved," said Willis of the feedback she's already heard in her time working on the campaign. "Almost everyone across the board says they want to maintain the hometown feeling. They want to grow smartly, efficiently and to keep it family oriented. They don't want to reject tourism—they realize that's part of Sparks' identity. But they want it to be a place for the people who live there. ... Sparks was really hit hard by the recession, and this redevelopment represents hope. But everyone wants it done right. They don't want it to become Anytown, USA. They want to maintain its identity. There's a real love for that town." □

"THE #1 COMEDY CLUB IN THE COUNTRY"
- USA TODAY

JUL 9-14
MANNY MALDONADO
COMICS UNLEASHED & COMEDY CENTRAL
with Special Guest PHIL MEDINA & OSCAR OVIES

JUL 16-21
JACKSON PERDUE
COMICS UNLEASHED & COMEDY CENTRAL
with KAREN RONTOWSKI & DRAKE NELSON

JUL 23-28
JIMMY SHUBERT
LAST COMIC STANDING & ENTOURAGE
with JASON LAWHEAD & DAVE MENCARELLI

SUN-THURS 7:30 PM (Dark Mon) FRI & SAT 7:30 & 9:30 PM

50% OFF **2 FOR 1 SPECIAL**
1 free ticket with the purchase of a full price GA or VIP ticket.
Offer NOT valid for Special Events. Management reserves all rights.

ticketmaster® **LFRENO241** **SILVER LEGACY**
*Artist Subject to Change **RESORT • CASINO • RENO**

1-800-MUST-SEE (1-800-687-8733) silverlegacy.com

7/21 | 7P.M.
UPSTAIRS AT
GREATER NEVADA Field

ADELITAS WAY
SAVAGE
TAKING DOWN