

Downtown Longmont gains Colorado Creative District designation

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The Longmont Downtown Development Authority's Del Raey Heiser, left, and Kendra Munk install a new banner in a kiosk in the 500 block of Main Street on June 12. The LDDA found out on Wednesday that it has officially been named a Colorado Certified Creative District. (Lewis Geyer / Longmont Times-Call)

After having initially failed to achieve the sought-after designation earlier this summer, the Downtown Longmont Creative District has officially been named a Colorado Certified Creative District.

"Our community has worked very hard the past three years to achieve this designation," said Kimberlee McKee, executive director of the Longmont Downtown Development District.

"It is an honor to be recognized by the state for all the hard work put forth by our volunteers, artists, business owners, creative partners and city government."

The designation was announced Wednesday by Colorado Creative Industries, a division of the state Office of Economic Development and International Trade and by the Boettcher Foundation, a nonprofit that supports the state's creative districts program.

McKee had been told by telephone in June that Longmont's application hadn't resulted in the designation because some of its initiatives weren't far enough along, such as artists' incubator spaces that are to be part of the Roosevelt Park Apartments Building.

But McKee said Wednesday that Downtown Longmont Creative District representatives met with state officials to give updates on the status of such projects and to provide additional information the state was seeking, particularly about Longmont's plans for sustaining the district in the future.

That apparently satisfied state officials' concerns. The Downtown Longmont Creative District resubmitted its application in September and was approved for the Certified Creative District designation announced on Wednesday.

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The designation, which is for at least five years, comes with a \$10,000 grant the Longmont District can spend on its programs in the current 2014-15 fiscal year, to be followed with a \$5,000 grant in fiscal 2015-16, McKee said, adding that the district plans to use that money to leverage more funds.

She said the designation also will qualify downtown Longmont for two Colorado Department of Transportation highway signs noting the district's presence and will give the Longmont district a closer working relationship with the Colorado Tourism Office.

"I think it's great," McKee said. "We've been working toward this since the (state) program started in 2012.

The Longmont Downtown Development Authority actually paved the way for the Downtown Longmont Creative District with the adoption of an Arts and Entertainment District Strategic Plan in 2011.

Colorado Creative Industries noted in its Wednesday news-release announcement that for the past three years, "artists, community members, arts organizations, business owners and local governments have worked together to implement that plan, and the area became known as the Downtown Longmont Creative District in 2014.

Among the successes already achieved by Longmont's arts and entertainment district, state and LDDA officials said, have been:

- Redevelopment projects such as the Roosevelt Park Apartments with its residential, restaurant, spa, and future art studio tenants, as well as the downtown's alleyway and breezeway improvements.
- Retail attractions such as new galleries on main Street as well as an art education center, new retail businesses and restaurants.
- Artist collaborations such as phase-one completion of an outdoor gallery, including a mural painted by nationally recognized artist Gamma Acosta.

Downtown Longmont is joining such other state-certified Colorado Creative Districts as: 40 West Arts District - Lakewood; Corazon de Trinidad; Denver's Art District on Santa Fe; Downtown Colorado Springs; the Greeley Creative District; the North Fork Valley Creative District; the Pueblo Creative Corridor; the Ridgway Creative District; the RiNo Art District in Denver; the Salida Creative District, and the Telluride Arts District.

Gov. John Hickenlooper said in a statement in the state's news release that "the 2014 certified creative districts are great examples of how the arts create exciting places for people to visit and live ... These districts not only increase quality of life, they also help with economic vitality of the area and attract people from all over Colorado and the country."

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Longmont Downtown Development Authority's Del Raey Heiser shows the LDDA's new banner June 12 which is displayed in the downtown kiosks. (Lewis Geyer / Longmont Times-Call)