

Love on the Southside

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the November 10, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Arts in Bethlehem* 

Urban Arts Trail

As Gadfly said earlier, “How cool is this!” Tip o’ the hat to Missy Hartney and crew.

Selections from Jennifer Sheehan, “Streets of Southside Bethlehem become canvas of new ‘Urban Arts Trail.’” Morning Call, November 10, 2020.

Under an awning on East Third Street in Southside Bethlehem is a piece of magical, musical beauty.

Vibrantly painted and cheerful, the piece, entitled “Love,” is the antidote for today’s world — a public piano begging to be photographed, enjoyed and of course played.

The piano is proof that sometimes, to appreciate art, you just have to hit the streets.



Photo: 'Love' is a public piano, a new piece of public art that's part of the Southside Arts District's new Urban Arts Trail. (Jennifer Sheehan/THE MORNING CALL)

“Love” is the latest newest piece added to a new “Urban Arts Trail” in Southside Bethlehem. From mosaics to murals, visitors can see a wide range of public art by simply walking the streets of the southside

It is a 2.75-mile trail that's, for the most part, easy to walk and with plenty of stopping points along the way.

“Art is uplifting. It starts conversations,” said Missy Hartney, downtown manager for the SouthSide Arts District, Bethlehem Economic Development Corporation. “People want to be able to do things outdoors and get outside their houses. Being able to put this trail downtown is really important for the time we’re in.”

Hartney said she was inspired earlier this year by a walk with her kids on Easton’s Karl Stirner Arts Trail, a self-guided tour through outdoor public art following Bushkill Creek.

Over the past few years, the Southside’s sidewalks have evolved into a bit of a public art gallery with interesting sculptures, murals and painted everyday objects.

Hartney thought about all those pieces and how organizing a trail could help connect them.

“I thought what if we connected all these pieces downtown with an explanation of who created it and why,” Hartney said. “You follow the trail, stop along the way and have coffee or visit a public art gallery.”

The trail starts at 324 S. New St., which is a public garage. It’s easiest to park there. Then you can walk through the business district, checking out 31 different stops including murals, sculptures, artist-designed bike racks and more. Each spot on the trail offers artist information and details about the pieces.

The route is basically a loop between East Third and East Fourth streets. It’s a pretty easy walk for the most part. My daughter, Norah, and I walked it and started late morning, working a lunch break into the middle of the trail.

The first section of the trail focuses on the area around the Banana Factory, with several interesting pieces, including the whimsical mosaic/sculpture “Mr. Imagination Bus Shelter” and “Homepage to Humanity,” a trio of concrete sculptures.

Walking up Third Street you’ll see several pieces including a large mural of a steelworker and a trio of happy cartoon music notes.

Then you’ll see “Love,” Southside’s new public piano, created by artist Chris Colon. The piece is outside Northampton Community College Fowler Center, under an awning. The idea: Take an old piano and turn it into a functioning public art piece, using weather-proof paint and other elements. There are public pianos around the world, designed to provide the public a chance to just play and enjoy their beauty.

Colon’s piece was designed around the message of “Love.” The piece is joyous, vibrant and cheery, and quite fun to play.

After you reach the SteelStacks area, that’s when the walk gets a little more difficult. We also got a little confused with the trail’s directions here so it may be best to use your phone’s GPS at this point, which is what we did. This part is also uphill and it’s fairly steep, so keep that in mind.

Once you get up to the next segment of the trail, you’ll be rewarded with some truly beautiful art.

Our favorite: The largest mural, “Calma,” designed last year by artist Pau Quintanajornet. It’s outside Cafe the Lodge and highlights the cafe’s mission, focusing on mental health recovery. The cafe is a great mid-way point to stop for a cool drink or lunch. (Highly recommend is the Cuban sandwich.)

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