

Lock, Stock and Barrel

By Kim Thomas



Thankfully, the fad of making furniture out of barrels breathed its last uncomfortable polyester pillowed-and-splintery breath in the living rooms of the 1970s, and went the way of the daisy-print dinosaurs, along with all the avocado-toned appliances in the kitchen. But they still make for quite an art statement.

Jamaica. The Nash Brighton Project is the non-profit organized effort founded by Nathan Cryder along with John and Lillian Nash.

With the recent opening of Buster's on Manchester Street, the District is making inroads toward becoming a new arts and culture destination for Lexington. Lexington artist and former UK basketball player Lavon

Sam Wilson — Creative Rebirth

Wilson emphasizes this piece "definitely was inspired by what is happening in Lexington right now, and a big part of this transformation is the Distillery District. It isn't

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—artist Lavon Williams



Artist Lavon Williams

Williams contributed a barrel to the Tuesday fundraiser, and says, "I think the Distillery District is one of the most exciting projects I've heard about in many years. If they do it right, it will be a big boost for Lexington and attract kids to the universities and colleges. It would be great if it became a home to local artists. Lots of other cities have these kinds of art districts, but Lexington needs it. It seems like 10 or 20 years ago, all the artists in the area knew each other and regularly hung out with each other, but you don't have that anymore."

When Cryder put out the call to local artists, he rounded up some of the area's best, and charged them with the task of creating works of art from oaken bourbon barrels. As expected, each artist interpreted their work in unique style and visual voice.

Lavon Williams (on the cover) a member of the 1978 UK basketball championship team and now acclaimed artist admits he was intrigued with the barrel concept. "I've never done a 360 degree piece before, and have really been wanting to do one. I just wanted to see what would happen. It represented possibilities. I thought it would be extremely challenging, but because the wood was so nice to work with, it was actually easier than I thought it would be. The oak that they use for those barrels is definitely special oak. It moves really easy — about on the same level as poplar — and has a nice, even grain to it. The biggest challenge was actually getting it through the door. I just recently had hernia surgery, and that thing was really, really heavy. I was afraid it might put me back in the hospital," he laughs.

Any whiskey worthy of being called Bourbon had its coming of age whilst soaking in the traditional oaken barrel. Hence, the barrel is the inspiration, and the subject of this Tuesday's Spirits of Giving benefit (September 29th at Buster's, in the Distillery District, of course).

The barrels were decorated by local artists, and will be auctioned off to raise money for the Nash Brighton Project. The Global Gain project's initiatives help the impoverished seaside village of Brighton in

just about the so-called 'creative class.' The only avenue into a vibrant future for all Lexingtonians is one we must travel together."

Wilson's journey into the barrel art event took the path through social media. "I learned about the project through Twitter. Though I and everyone involved with our piece had little time to devote, it seemed like an opportunity to make a statement, so we carved out the time and effort. The result was well worth it."

Wilson admits that his barrel concept "took about 3 months to complete." Wilson's barrel theme is Creative Rebirth, "how, through collaborative reinvention we create the future from the legacy of the past. Lexington has a rich and proud history, and we are of the opinion that its best days are ahead of it. That is what this piece is about."

Anna Dickens and Joshua Gregory — "Vessel"

Lexington artist Anna Dickens and woodworker Joshua Gregory confirmed that this is their first collaborative project. However, Dickens explains they had considered barrel art before. "Josh and I had already mentioned to one another that it would be interesting to do some sort of art project by using a bourbon barrel. Then I saw something about the project, actually on facebook. I mentioned something to Josh, and we created a proposal."

The theme of their barrel is entitled "Vessel." It uses the repetitive forms of the staves of the barrel to create a new sculpture which ref-

erences and relates to other natural forms.

Dickens says that taking the barrel apart was definitely the biggest challenge. "We both gained an amazing appreciation and respect for the cooper's craft. Since we had never worked with the medium before, we



"Vessel"

spent a lot of time experimenting with possible designs. In fact, our first idea for the sculpture didn't work out. We underestimated the weight of the staves, and the end result would not stand on its own. Luckily, we ended up liking our final design even better."

Dickens and Gregory's artists' statement describes the piece: "The sculpture at hand is created from a bourbon barrel. While maintaining some recognition of its former self, the bar-

Going (g)Local

'Spirits of Giving' Fundraiser in Lex's Distillery District

By Nathan Cryder

I made a list of people who needed just a little bit of money. And when the list was complete, there were 42 names. The total amount of money they needed was \$27. I was shocked.

—Muhammad Yunus,
awarded 2006 Nobel Peace Prize

Lexington's Nash Brighton Project brings the Nobel Prize winning concept of micro-loans to the bluegrass, with a Community-to-Community twist on sustainable micro-finance.

Next Tuesday (September 29th), my non-profit organization, Global Gain, and Jim Beam Brands will be presenting "Spirits of Giving," a bourbon-themed event featuring local the work of eleven local artists who transformed new oak bourbon barrels into works of art. The barrels will be auctioned off at the event, and the proceeds will benefit a Lexington-based project that aims to create a new microfinance program to help lift Jamaican families out of poverty.

Through the Nash Brighton Project, anyone in Lexington with \$5 or \$500 to spare can become a benevolent banker by providing a small loan to help a Jamaican family in a poor, coastal village called Brighton start their own small business. This simple but extremely effective concept of micro-loans to the poor (more than 95% of loan recipients pay them back in full plus interest) is what led to a 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for Muhammad Yunus, the originator of the concept.

"If you look at financial systems around the globe," says Yunus, "more than half the population of the world...do not qualify to take out a loan from a bank. This is a shame."

Even those already familiar with micro-finance may not realize that internet developments are revolutionizing the micro-finance industry every bit as much as eBay and Amazon revolutionized commerce. Websites like Kiva and Prosper have taken microfinance from a bank-centric model to a people-centric model. Just as eBay offers the "peer-to-peer" (often abbreviated as P2P) sale of goods, Kiva and Prosper offer peer-to-peer microlending, with lenders typically coming from developed countries like the U.S. and loan recipients coming from underdeveloped countries.

The Nash Brighton aims to put a twist on the P2P model by creating more of C2C (community-to-community) model. Individuals and families from Lexington will



Photo by Tanya Henderson

John and Vivian Nash are the owners of Nash Academy of Animal Arts on Lane Allen Road and the inspiration for the Nash Brighton Project

not only be able to go online to find a family they would like to provide with a loan, they will also be able to receive weekly video updates from them and even visit them in-person in Jamaica. At least three times a year (winter break, spring break, and summer break), Global Gain will organize "sustainable vacation" packages to Brighton for individuals and families from Lexington who have participated as lenders in the micro-finance program.

"I love the idea of combining fun volunteer activities with traditional vacation activities," said Lexington resident and downtown developer **Phil Holoubek**. "My wife, **Marnie**, and I are constantly trying to come up with ways to instill in our daughters the importance of lending a helping hand, so a trip like this with other like-minded families from Lexington would be ideal for us."

Lexington Urban County Council Member, **Jay McChord**, who is also married with two young daughters, echoed Holoubek's sentiments. "I think a trip like this would give our girls a greater appreciation of other cultures and the comforts that we tend to take for granted at home. And with kids being so tech savvy these days, I also think they'd have fun and learn a lot through the online exchanges. I guess this is

a little like a 21st century version of having a pen pal."

For children in Lexington to be able to communicate online with children from Jamaica via email, instant messaging, and video is a bit like the pen pal experiences many of us remember from our youth — only cooler. For us "grown-ups," the experience could perhaps be thought of as the 21st century "adopt a family" concept. However, instead of *giving away* the "equivalent of a cup of coffee per day" (how can we forget Sally Struthers?) and receiving an occasional letter and pictures, you *lend* whatever amount you can afford and receive frequent video and blog updates and opportunities to make real and lasting friendships.

The old model creates dependence, whereas the new model creates *sustainable* micro-enterprises that will continue long after the loan you made has been repaid.

The project's inspiration and namesake are **John and Vivian Nash**, owners of the Nash Academy of Animal Arts on Lane Allen Road. The Nashes have been visiting Brighton for over twenty-five years and have long considered many of the villagers there as family.

"To be able to offer other families in Lexington the same kind of experiences we've been blessed with over the years would be a dream come true," said Vivian. "The people in Brighton are so warm and friendly and interesting that you can't help but have an amazing time down there. However, you also can't help but be a little saddened seeing the conditions so many of them are forced to endure. This project is all about replacing that sadness with hope."

My path crossed with the Nashes about two months ago when their son-in-law, a good friend, invited my wife and me to stay at their home in Jamaica. We had never even met them before, so the fact that they were offering up their gives you a sense of just how generous and hospitable they are. On our first full day in Brighton, they learned about my experience running a non-profit that aims to connect "social investors" in the U.S. with worthwhile projects in developing countries. They asked me to talk with a couple people from the village who had helped them construct the foundation of a community center and preschool back in 2006. One of them was a 21 year old young lady who had been teaching a dozen or so preschool-aged children out of a 60 square-foot abandoned shack. The only reason the project had stalled was that John had been diagnosed with bladder cancer and was advised by his doctors not to travel abroad.

During our stay in Jamaica and the following week in Lexington, the complete concept for the Nash Brighton Project began to take shape. The Nashes were absolutely correct that education was the key to breaking the cycle of poverty in Brighton. Missing, though, was a sustainable way for Brighton's families to pay for a quality education, as well as job opportunities once children graduated. When I suggested tying in a community-to-community microfinance program and sustainable tourism offerings for participants on the lending side, the Nashes were on board.

I began organizing *Spirit of Giving* to raise capital for our most pressing need — a small community center in Brighton to serve as the project's operational base. In addition to the bourbon barrel art, the benefit also includes a Jim Beam-sponsored small batch bourbon tasting, hors d'oeuvres (that pair beautifully with bourbon), and live music from local jazz and blues legend Tee-Dee Young. So, why a bourbon-themed event? Well, why not? I try to live by a simple rule that explains both the Nash Brighton Project and *Spirits of Giving* — do what you love!

Spirit of Giving will be Tuesday, September 29, at Buster's on Manchester Street.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

rel has been deconstructed to create a new form which references ideas and patterns found within the natural environment. Through simplicity of design and construction the repetitive forms draw connections to patterns in nature like the spirals in a sea shell, waves upon the shore, or light broken and shining through a forest. Like all sculpture, the object should be walked around to experience the organic and exponential changes from different vantage points."

"The form itself draws to mind a Vessel or container. The material's former life as a Vessel or barrel is not completely forgotten...."

"Incidentally, the artists have also dubbed this piece as a kind of traveling or installable art. The sculpture can be folded up, transported by the ropes, and then installed in various locations with ease." (Anna Dickens has a B.A. in painting and art history from Asbury College. Joshua Gregory is a woodworker who studied at the Columbus College of Art and Design and currently works with his family at Gregory Designs Inc.)

Tim Jones — Barrel of Monkeys

Tim Jones finds that "the more I work, the more happy accidents fall my way. So I keep busy. I'm a designer and photographer by day so I try and use that knowledge and experience to make new things that keep me up at night. Cutting out what is unnecessary and leaving only what conveys a message and evokes emotion is the challenge of being a graphic designer. This barrel reflects those challenges and has transformed into an icon that most everyone can relate to. Have fun with it."

"Nathan Cryder asked me if I wanted to participate after a conversation via twitter. I liked the idea and said yes.

"As a graphic designer, concept and message is a large part of what I do. I knew I wanted the barrel itself to be the main part of the idea and be as interactive as possible. By choosing a Barrel of Monkeys it allowed me to communicate everything I wanted it to say and do. I cut out everything that was unnecessary and left only what conveys the message. This barrel has transformed into an icon that most everyone can relate to, and the best part you can play with it just as we all did as kids."

Jennifer Palmer — Spirit of Kentucky

Jennifer Palmer points out that location influences her artwork. "I am inspired by the events that I experience in my daily life. I paint from the rural setting of my studio and incorporate these environments into the artwork. My focus is on the process and the materials. When working with wood, my goal is to keep the integrity of the material and allow the natural beauty of the wood grain to become a focal point."

"For this piece, I was influenced by the beauty of the wood in the barrel and I wanted to capture its essence and allow it to be the focus of the piece. I also wanted to have a subtle hint that this piece came from a bourbon barrel. I suggested that with the selection of materials and the process of creating the final piece. Inspired by the barrel and the horse spirit of Kentucky, I decided to do a portrait of a horse. I wanted to capture that spirit into the piece by using a subtle and elegant line drawing of an abstracted portrait of one of my horses onto the head of the barrel. I chose to use charcoal and ink washes to create a contrast between the raw wood and the background. The charcoal was used as a metaphor for the charring of the interior of the barrels for the process of aging the bourbon."

Palmer became involved in this project after seeing the call for entries and sending in a application. "As an artist, it is great to be able to use our talents to benefit a cause. I worked on the barrel for about a month. The large part of the process was deconstructing the barrel down to this section that I chose. And after completing the charcoal drawing and the background, I did glazes of color to create a subtle shift between the raw wood of the horse and the background. The process of glazing is slow and tedious, since you need to let one layer dry before you do the next. However, it is a wonderful technique for creating subtle shifts in color."

"I wanted the barrel to retain the integrity of the wood and the process of making bourbon. I reflected this in the materials I chose and I decided to do an abstracted charcoal drawing of the horse to reference the spirit of the horse that Kentucky has. The tricky part was just working with deconstructing the barrel, due to the hardness of the wood and the awkwardness of cutting a barrel. The wood was amazingly strong."

Staci McKnight Maney — Heritage

Maney submitted her concept after a call for artists through LexArts, and says, "My barrel has eleven layers of brushwork." Three-dimensional work was an admitted challenge. She says, "I work primarily on canvas and with fiber, and the only place in my house that I had room to work on it is in my entry way, so people entering or leaving my house had to squeeze by this big barrel in various paint stages - for three weeks!" she laughs.

The concept for this piece was inspired by the bourbon barrel itself. The images displayed on the barrel show a glimpse of Kentucky's bourbon making past. Particular emphasis is given to the distilleries within Lexington. Some of the paper used is from an etiquette book. The pages selected were giving the proper etiquette on how to entertain.

After sealing the barrel, rescued old book

pages were applied. Multiple layers of acrylic washes were painted to create depth and lend a sense of age to the piece. Then the images were transferred. The work was again sealed and lacquered. Finally, the recycled silk yarn was attached to the piece to add more dimension. This piece contains a total of eleven layers of paint, paper, transfers, and yarn.

She defines her artist's objective as, "To express the duality of language, combine the mundane with the extraordinary, and evoke thought and emotion through painted mixed media and fiber art."

Maney's art can be seen currently at the Nancy Barron & Associates Art Fever 2009.

Katie M. Blair — Spirit of the Bluegrass

Katie Blair has a B. A. in Fine Arts with an emphasis in sculpture from Asbury College, has experience as a painter, "but I also have and extensive background in sculpture. This project gave the opportunity to combine both. My inspiration for this piece was derived from a series of my own paintings that focused on the abstraction of string instruments. The idea originated from my past work with the human figure and the similarity they share with violins, guitars and cellos. This is significant because the majority of our lives are surrounded and affected by music; Kentucky itself is known for Bluegrass Music."

Blair's goal for this piece was to "encompass traditional views of Kentucky and represent them in an extraordinary light. The Bluegrass experience is about is all about horses, music and life. This bourbon barrel is a reflection of the true spirit of the Bluegrass.

Blair states that she was "looking to get more involved in the art community and saw a facebook call to artists willing to submit work for the bourbon barrel charity project. I saw the project as a great opportunity and challenge to utilize my sculpture background and painting in order to execute this project.

She says the toughest task was one of brawn, not brains, and that was "Finding men that were able transport the barrel!"

Elizabeth Quinley - Time in the Wind

Quinley got involved with the project because "Nathan sent an email and I thought it looked like fun and for a good cause. The hardest part was getting the barrel's wood to stick together." Quinley explains, "This piece is a mixing of the turning of time in the wind. The iron wraps are the wind and the wood represents time in the shape of an hour glass. The painting itself also reiterates this theme. What time has lain down is now being stripped away with the wind. The wind is ripping the color away and then the landscape itself.

Quinley's inspiration for this theme came from moving here. "I lived in a moun-

tainous area and when I moved here I noticed the increase in the amount of wind. It took about 4 to 4 1/2 weeks to complete the barrel after I got it apart. That was a beast!"

Pat Gerhard — Children

Third Street Stuff's Pat Gerhard agreed to paint the barrel without knowing much about the project. "I know Nathan, though, and just kind of assumed it would be a worthwhile cause ... and the more that I have found out about the project the more I love it! It reminds me of the three cups of tea story — building schools in Afghanistan, doing fund raising in order to educate children; though this is Jamaica, there is still a village, and a taking care of community, and a sustainability element! Sometimes it is hard to give a check to projects you want to send good thoughts, good energy, hope, to, but artists sometimes get asked just to give some work/time, and that is a wonderful gift to be able to give."

"My barrel is about children anywhere, or perhaps a little bit islander looking, having a wonderful time, as children do. It has lots of color, lots of high fives...some sunshine, some fish, some sparkles, big smiles!"

"The barrel is very heavy, oak and all, so that was the biggest challenge. I couldn't get it upstairs to my paint, so my paint had to come downstairs to the barrel. I love to paint, I love lots of colors,!"

LFUCG Council Member Jay McChord thinks this project shows great potential. "I love projects like this because it gives me a great opportunity to show my Kindergarten-age daughter how to look at creative solutions for problems that may have exponential benefits."

Since there will be babysitting at this event, barrel on down Manchester Street to Buster's on Tuesday. ■

Kim Thomas is a legal assistant at a downtown law firm, an NKU graduate, a member of the Chancel Choir, a Commissioned Stephen Minister, and a fan of single barrel anything.

INFO

10 new bourbon barrels were given to 10 local artists to turn into works of art. Bid on them at Buster's, Tuesday, September 29.

- 6:30-6:50 Bourbon tasting (& hors d'oeuvres)
 - 6:50-7:30 Live Jazz, Blues, & R&B with Tee-Dee Young's Band
 - 7:30-8:15 Bourbon barrel art auction
- Followed by more spirits and music.

100% of ticket sales and auctioned art benefit the Nash Brighton Project — a Lexington-based initiative to fund a school and microfinance program in rural Jamaica. ■