

We Built This City - Digital City Launches

“One thing everyone involved in this project agrees on,” Gary Glassman says, beginning the most recent planning meeting for Digital City, “Is that Rhode Island has the potential to be a national, and even international, powerhouse in the field of digital media by 2020 - maybe sooner.”

There’s no dissent in the room - 40 or 50 digital media artists have gathered at The Design Center in downtown Providence to help make this goal a reality. They range from college students to college deans, from freelancers to ad agency creative directors, from the director of the State’s Film & Television Office, to the City Planner for the City of Providence. But they are united in their belief that Rhode Island can establish a firm, large footprint in digital media in this decade.

Digital media requires mostly brains, creativity, passion, hard work and talent - things we have in RI. What we don’t have is infrastructure - and Digital City is intended as a step in addressing that shortfall.

There have been a number of meetings building toward this one - planning has been going on for over a year. This one’s a little different, because this is the first one since the Rhode Island Foundation announced initial funding support for the project. The driving force behind this endeavor is Glassman, President and founder of Providence Pictures, a local production house that produces documentaries for Nova, Disney, and other prominent media companies.

Glassman has successfully drawn some potent partners to the project as well. Most of the Providence area Universities are collaborating in one way or another, and the Founding Director of the Harrington School of Communication and Media at URI, Renee Hobbs, has taken a leadership role, as has the City of Providence’s Director of Arts, Culture and Tourism, Lynne McCormack, and legendary RI actor wrangler Anne Mulhall, Founder of LDI casting. With the help of the RI Foundation, there is also now a dedicated project manager, Taliesin “Tally” Gilkes-Bower, who’s come in from a media career in New York to helm the planning activities.

The vision for Digital City is to create an incubator-like environment where digital artists can share expertise and inspiration, show their work, get help when they’re stuck, and share some of the less commonly used, more expensive components of digital media creation, like green screens, sound studios, carefully calibrated color-correction stations and equipment.

Clearly, it’s an idea a lot of locals can get behind. Rhode Island has a powerful legacy in film and media, even while there seems to be political love-hate ping pong with the idea (such as capping the tax credit for film production, stifling an industry that was bringing a lot of work to the state - or any of a number of controversial decisions around the 38 Studios debacle). No one at this meeting would mention 38 Studios, but for those who felt the investment might have been more productive spread among a number of smaller start ups. Well, there’s no 75 million dollars here - but the start ups are clearly still raring to go!

Digital City developments will continue to be driven by the enthusiastic and collaborative members of this local industry.

Added August, 2014: For more about Digital City, you can now visit them at <http://digitalcityri.org/>