

## 02 | Who is Cary?

Public art is an expression of a community—its people, heritage, thinking, and culture—through the perspective of artists and parameters developed by the municipal art program. Understanding Cary within this context, therefore, is the first step in the process of creating and reviewing unique works of art that are community-based and site-specific. Heritage, local culture, and community values are key to defining community character and infusing place with meaning and identity. Identifying these themes challenges artists and policymakers to remember, celebrate, and reinvent community identity. Placing public art in highly visible locations in the public sphere promises exposure to many people who can learn from and discuss the piece and its context.

### Historic Cary

Cary was considered an advantageous location because it was on the main road between New Bern and Hillsborough, two of North Carolina's largest colonial towns (HP MP). The earliest businesses include the Ordinary, an inn established by John Bradford in 1760, and a stagecoach stop that resident Nancy Jones had converted from her home: the building is still standing. Beginning in the 1800s, cotton farmers began moving to Green Level in the western part of Cary. Some of the farmers constructed a sawmill for cutting lumber, while others continued to farm cotton. The area of Green Level is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Cary started to develop more briskly in the mid 1800s when the North Carolina Railroad expanded, running through the Town and connecting it to a major transportation route in 1856. Frank Page became a railroad agent and the town's developer. He called his town "Cary" after an Ohio abolitionist and Congressman whom he admired. In 1868, Page built a hotel to serve railroad passengers coming through Cary. The Second Empire building still stands and serves as Cary's Page-Walker Arts & History Center on Ambassador Loop. Page and others also built a private school for their children called Cary Academy, which eventually converted to Cary's first high school. In 1871, Cary was incorporated and Frank Page became the first mayor. The following year another rail line, now CSX Transportation, was constructed just north of downtown, spurring further growth.

Agriculture remained a major part of Cary's economy throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Local farmers started growing bright leaf tobacco in the late 1880s, which later supplanted the cotton industry that had been destroyed by the boll weevil. One of the main farm cooperatives was located in the Village of Carpenter, which still remains and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the early 20th century Cary offered services and retail stores for local residents and the school community. In 1909, the Bank of Cary was chartered; other businesses included small grocery stores, a drug store and Frank Page's old hotel, now known as the Page-Walker Arts and History Center. For items that could not be purchased in Cary, there was daily passenger service to Raleigh on both railroad lines.

A fire in 1908 destroyed the largest commercial building in town (Frank Page's former tobacco factory building), which housed the Episcopal chapel, Mayor's office, the Post Office, a gristmill, a cotton gin and two lodge halls. In the 1930s, the Great Depression hit Cary. The Bank of Cary failed, and by October 1932 the town was bankrupt due to poor management and bookkeeping. After these setbacks, Cary rebounded in 1946, in part due to the construction of the Raleigh-Durham International Airport; originally a military facility, it was completely converted to civilian use. In combination with post-WWII growth, this led to the development of residential suburbs in the Town of Cary.

# Cary Today

Today, Cary is a large suburban town located within the vibrant and productive Raleigh-Durham metropolitan region of North Carolina. Its prime location near both Raleigh and the Research Triangle has made it a desirable place for people to live and work. Within the past five years, Cary has been selected by several national magazines as one of the most desirable places to live in the United States. This is not a surprise given the abundance of parks and greenways, low-crime rate, upscale shopping options, premiere sports facilities, a visual and performance arts presence, and nearby employment centers. These characteristics have made Cary a desirable community and contributed to the growth of the Town.

For the past 40 years, Cary's population has grown by leaps and bounds. From 2000 to 2010, the population grew 43 percent according to the US Census, making Cary the largest town in North Carolina and one of the fastest growing municipalities in the state. During the same time period, the population also grew more diverse. Both the Asian and Hispanic/Latino population nearly doubled, with Asians now representing 13% of the total population—the largest minority group in Cary. Overall, the community is relatively affluent, with a 2009 median household income of \$91,000, which is more than double that of the State of North Carolina and the United States as a whole. (Town of Cary Population and Housing Trends Report of Spring 2010.)

Cary has been proactive in managing physical growth and its expanding population. In the 1960s, the Town anticipated future development pressure from the Research Triangle and adopted a planned unit development ordinance to ensure that new neighborhoods were well designed and included parks and open space. By the 1980s, however, Cary's residential development was out-pacing commercial and industrial growth; resulting in a tax base that struggled to support the increasing need for residential services. To promote a more balanced economy, Cary revised its land use plan in the early 1990s to promote mixed-use centers in order to increase tax ratables and encourage more walkable, sustainable neighborhoods.

## Town Center Revitalization

Much of Cary's land use planning in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on neighborhood development and growth in its hinterlands. As a result, the core of Cary—its downtown—was left to its own devices. Predominantly one-story stores and services interspersed with several public buildings, downtown Cary could not compete with the growing number of mixed-use and commercial centers throughout the town. In 2000, Cary began to focus its planning efforts on the revitalization of downtown. With an outer boundary of Maynard Drive (referred to as the Maynard Loop) and an inside core centered on Chatham Street and Academy Street, a Town Center Area Plan was adopted in 2001 with recommendations that included increased commercial density, a cultural arts district, and urban design strategies. The plan led to subsequent studies, including a Cultural Arts District Plan and Town Center Design Guidelines.

While progress in revitalizing the town center has been slow, partially due to the recession, three important milestones occurred in 2011. First, the Town completed a renovation and conversion of the Old Cary Elementary School into the Cary Arts Center, which has been well received by the community and is a cultural anchor to the downtown district. Second, Cary hired a Downtown Development Manager and appropriated funds for a comprehensive redevelopment strategy. Third, one of the first tasks of the Downtown Development Manager was to acquire a vacant building on Chatham Street for possible use as a film and performing arts facility. These renovations are currently underway.

## The Arts, Parks, and Sustainability

Cary has a rich assortment of local cultural arts facilities and programs. In addition to the Cary Arts Center and the Page-Walker Arts & History Center, Koka Booth Amphitheatre and Sertoma Amphitheatre in Bond Park provide performing arts programs. Arts and crafts festivals are held twice each year. The Applause!

Cary Youth Theatre is held at the Cary Arts Center and numerous classes and performances in the visual and performing arts are sponsored by the Town and other organizations.

In addition to its commitment to cultural arts, Cary is dedicated to parks, conservation, and environmental stewardship. The Town of Cary currently has 29 park areas and 60 miles of greenways open to the community. The parks system offers a variety of active and passive recreational venues, from field and court athletics to contemplative relaxation. The natural and planted vegetation in Cary is also characteristic of the community. The mixed coniferous and broadleaf forest in the rural areas, the mature tree canopies in the older residential neighborhoods, and the well-landscaped highway corridors all combine to create a lush green backdrop.

Water conservation is important to Cary because of its continued population growth and the limitations of Jordan Lake as a reservoir. The town has adopted regulatory programs and promotes public awareness of water conservation and the economic and environmental benefits of efficient water use. In 2001, Cary became the first municipality in North Carolina to require reclaimed water systems for non-residential projects. The reclaimed water is used for irrigation, manufacturing processes, industrial cooling, street washing, and dust control at construction sites.

## Expressing Local Themes in Public Art

The above highlights of Cary's history, character and community values are just a hint of the many themes that can be explored through expressive and interpretive public art. Additional themes may be discovered through local research and may be unique to a site or neighborhood, or representative of the broader community values and heritage. Cary's most recent public art projects have been created around such community and site specific themes. "Bowstring Vines", by Michael D. Stutz, adorning a greenway and pedestrian bridge, reflects Cary's commitment to sustainability and its connection with nature. The project consists of a series of flowing steel vines that frame each entrance to the bowstring pedestrian bridge. "Growing" from the ground beneath the abutments, then wrapping around the top cord of the bowstrings, the vines connect the bridge and its users to the surrounding natural environment. New bus shelters feature glass windscreen etchings by Susan Harbage Page of wallpaper designs and architectural details from Cary's historic sites.

Artists Norie Sato, Jim Hirschfield and Sonya Ishii, as members of the Design Team, collaborated with Clearscapes architects to develop a series of integrated artworks for the renovation of an iconic old school building into Cary's new Arts Center. The artists' goal was to inspire creativity, create a sense of energy emanating from the Center and to honor the landmark building's history. The design concept included the use of a Harlequin's pattern that celebrates the intersection of performing and visual arts, historic photos, art school and other school references, and a strong presence during both the day and night. Layers of meaning within the art should be revealed to audiences over time, encouraging diverse interpretations that inspire conversation.