

**Arches Project funded by a Challenge American Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and coordinated by the Roanoke Arts Commission**

**Project Location** – Under Memorial Ave Bridge along Greenway and adjacent to Vic Thomas Park

**Individuals Involved**

Projects developers - Heather Lyne, VA Tech Graduate student; Doug Jackson former RAC member and Capacity Development Specialist For VDHCD; Susan Jennings, Arts and Culture Coordinator for the City

Advisors for project development – Liz Belcher, Greenways Coordinator; Pete Eschelman, Roanoke Outside; Donnie Underwood and Michael Clark, Roanoke City Parks and Rec; Aaron Fallon, TAP; Chris Chittum, City of Roanoke Planning; Bob Clement, former Neighborhood services for City; Luke Pugh, Roanoke City engineer; Amar Bhattari, Commonwealth Catholic Charities (consulted by intern)

Current Committee - Polly Branch and Gerald Hubert – Artists; Lara Thompson and Linda Pharis – Greater Raleigh Court; Bill Houck – Roanoke Neighborhood Advocates and Norwich Contact, Trevor Saas – Wasena, Jordan and Robin McLamb – Mt. View, Doug Jackson –VA Dept. of Housing and Community Development and Susan Jennings – City of Roanoke, Donnie Underwood or designee – Parks and Rec., Tonya Pickett – Current Neighborhood Coordinator for City of Roanoke

**Project Description:** The Roanoke Arts Commission’s “Arches Project” seeks to engage four Roanoke neighborhoods (Norwich, Raleigh Court, Wasena, Mountain View) through a professionally guided public art project on the greenway under the Memorial Avenue Bridge. We also hope to engage, in particular, the residents of the Roanoke Terrace Apartments. *Total Action for Progress*, a local community action agency and our facilitative partner in this vision, offers affordable housing to immigrant and refugee families from Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Albania, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Cuba, Sudan, Haiti and Iraq at the complex. Memorial Bridge marks their closest access point to the greenway and the proposed site is visible from the main entryway. Local artists will be involved in both the planning and implementation of the project.

**Major Project Activities:** We (the RAC) began this project serendipitously by scoping out sites with transformative potential along the Roanoke River Greenway. The greenway is an accessible way to extend the reach of the arts beyond the downtown. Refugee and immigrant families living at the Terrace Apartments were brought up as being culturally underserved and vulnerable.

We agreed that the isolated section of the greenway underneath the Memorial Avenue Bridge could benefit the bordering communities through the addition of public art.

We envision holding forums with the residents to find out what kind of project they would like to see on their section of the greenway. Memorial Bridge marks their closest access point to the public space. We also plan to engage the five Neighborhood Organizations (Wasena, Mountain View, Raleigh Court and Norwich) in a similar fashion. We will eventually bring the emerging leaders of the Terrace Apartments' group into meetings with the Neighborhood Organizations. The Planning Department will provide a facilitator to lead these input meetings. These meetings are an opportunity for the city to hear the stories of a population often not granted a voice. A community-based public art project will bring diverse parties together over the shared aspiration of making the greenway inviting, safe and distinct to the character of the neighborhoods it parallels. Whether the piece be permanent or temporary, it will challenge the citizens in Southwest Roanoke to interact with their neighbors in a meaningful way. We hope a 'new' community will emerge from this project.

### **Goals for the Arches Project**

- a) Diversify traffic on the greenway
- b) Present great Art to public
- c) To produce a Greenway node that is interactive with an international appeal
- d) To engage at least 3 of the 5 neighborhoods in the project
- e) Assure that the Art is sustainable, low maintenance and in alignment with the overall park plan
- f) Involve the community by forming a visual attachment to the art
- g) Engage the residents in the process
- h) Possibly form a new resident group for the Terrace apartments
- i) Develop a gateway to other parts of the Greenway
- j) Make this project a pilot/model for future neighborhood projects