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**SOUTH CAROLINA ARTS COMMISSION\***

## EMBARGOED UNTIL

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# Aiken welcomed to the ranks of S.C. Arts Commission-designated cultural districts

**COLUMBIA, S.C. – The South Carolina Arts Commission is announcing that the southern Midlands city of Aiken is home to the 12th South Carolina Cultural District designated by its board of commissioners, the third in FY24.**

Aiken's district is the first South Carolina Cultural District in the Central Savannah River Area. Residents and visitors enjoy an abundant and diverse range of cultural assets nestled among its iconic, tree-lined streets.

"With the third certification this fiscal year, it is tremendous to witness the momentum for cultural districts in communities around our state. The certification in Aiken will not only bring value for the creative industries in the area but also highlight the power that arts, culture, and design bring to the vibrancy and livability of the city. The dedication to this program will help Aiken's goals towards creating and reinforcing social infrastructure, connecting individuals to the community, and providing resources to develop, thrive, and sustain," said SCAC Public Art Coordinator **Margot Lane Strasburger**.

Responding to the designation, **Mayor Teddy Milner** said, "I am so proud of Aiken and the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism for all the hard work they put into this certification. This certification has been something Aiken has had in its sights for some time because we have so much to offer our locals and cultural travelers."

Within the district are public art pieces; multiple performance spaces, classrooms, and conference rooms; event spaces; studio spaces for classes; and an outdoor event area. This includes the streets, sidewalks, and landscaped parkways, which are also used for events. A plethora of arts-related classes take place in the district, several at the Aiken Center for the Arts—a 2023 recipient of the SCAC's Governor's Award for the Arts in the organization category.

Aiken, and the Aiken Downtown Cultural District, emphasize events. Upcoming highlights include:

- Aiken Youth Orchestra, Ensemble and Group Strings Concert: Creativity Out Loud Performance Monday, May 20 the Amentum Theatre
- Live music at Amp The Alley: Thursday, May 30 with Keith Gregory in the Alley (Thursdays until October)
- Artisan crafters, farmers, and bakers at Market in the Alley: Thursday, June 6 in the Alley (Thursdays in June)
- Art show - 2024 Aiken Artist Guild Annual Member Show through June 13 at the Aiken Center for the Arts
- Hops & Hogs Festival: June 7-8 in the Newberry Hall festival area
- Juneteenth Celebration: Saturday, June 15 at the Center for African American History Art and Culture

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“Aiken has a list of things it is known for: horses, trains, and trees. Now with the appointment by the South Carolina Art Commission, we can proudly add art and culture to that list. For a city of 32,000, Aiken boasts two orchestras, an annual jazz festival, a spring concert series, an award-winning art center, weekly music downtown, and a community theater group that is second to none with more to come,” City Manager **Stuart Bedenbaugh** said.

“As a long-time Aiken-area resident, I am so proud my home can now claim a South Carolina Cultural District. While it is a point of pride, I know that there are many who share my joy and will take advantage of all that Aiken has to offer. I invite everyone to come and enjoy Aiken as we celebrate this great honor,” SCAC Board Chair **Dee Crawford** said.

### **About the South Carolina Cultural Districts program**

[Legislation ratified in 2014 by the state General Assembly](#) authorizes the SCAC to grant official state designation to cultural districts. The legislation specifies the following goals of this program:

- attract artists, creative entrepreneurs and cultural enterprises to communities
- encourage economic development
- foster local cultural development
- provide a focal point for celebrating and strengthening local cultural identity

The SCAC defines cultural districts as strollable geographic areas with a concentration of cultural facilities, activities, and assets. They are easily identifiable and serve as centers of cultural, artistic, and economic activity. They frequently have galleries and artist studios, theaters and other live performance venues, public art, museums and arts centers, and arts schools in addition to non-cultural attractions like parks, restaurants and bars, and other commercial activity.

“More and more cities and towns are putting creative placekeeping and placemaking at the heart of economic development, growth, arts programming, and livability. The South Carolina Arts Commission is proud to welcome Aiken as its 12<sup>th</sup> cultural district. As the program grows, we are eager to work with more places who recognize that arts and creativity are vital to moving their communities forward,” SCAC Executive Director **David Platts** said.

### **About the Aiken Downtown Cultural District**

The district is in the heart of downtown Aiken, which contains many of Aiken’s art landmarks. It includes the Aiken Center for the Arts, Amentum Center for the Performing Arts, the Aiken Art Walk annual event, Newberry Street Festival Center, several public artworks, and The Alley, the outdoor social hub for downtown that offers live music seven months of the year.

The extension streets east of Newberry Street (Chesterfield and York streets) are home to the city’s Center of African American History Arts and Culture (CAAHAC) as well as the annual arts and crafts festival, Aiken’s Makin, one of the largest in the Midlands, and it begins at Chesterfield Street and runs east. Nearby, two churches along Richland Avenue are venues to secular and non-secular performances. St. John’s United Methodist is famed for its Schantz pipe organ, which includes seven divisions, 62 ranks, and 3,615 pipes; it is used in public programs.

Moving south toward Colleton Avenue you’ll find the Aiken County Public Library, which offers both books and programming for adults and children, including story times, book clubs, Crafternoons, language exchanges, and movies. Located across the street from the library is the Wilcox Hotel, an historic property serving as a piece of living history infused with art by virtue of frequent live jazz in the evenings.

### **About the South Carolina Arts Commission**

The mission of the South Carolina Arts Commission is to promote equitable access to the arts and support the cultivation of creativity in South Carolina. We envision a South Carolina where the arts are valued and all people benefit from a variety of creative experiences.

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A state agency created by the South Carolina General Assembly in 1967, the SCAC works to increase public participation in the arts through grants, direct programs, staff assistance and partnerships in artist development, arts industry, arts learning, creative placemaking, and folklife and traditional arts. Headquartered in Columbia, S.C., the SCAC is funded by the state of South Carolina, by the federal government through the National Endowment for the Arts, and other sources. Visit [SouthCarolinaArts.com](https://SouthCarolinaArts.com) or call 803.734.8696, and follow @SCArtsComm on Facebook, Instagram, and X for #Arts4SC and #SCArtists content.

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