

June 23, 2010

Dear Friend of The Other Side,

Innocent of any real crime, our city of Utica endures under the harsh judgment of the global economy and a firmly, even cravenly, materialist society. Such a city, left to its own devices, is damagingly limited by the unimaginative, uncompassionate and extremely low horizon of expectations offered by the narrative framed by the global corporate economy and its materialist base. This story provides meager soil for the seeds of hope that every community needs to become a place where human beings can live and thrive. It's time to take over the story and tell it ourselves.

Increasingly I am told how much The Other Side, as well as the Café Domenico, mean to people who live in this community. People have different ways of articulating it, but what they mean, I think, is *thank you for giving us places that feed a need other than the material one which is the only one freely recognized today. Thank you for publicly recognizing that superfluous needs – like those for art, conversation, beauty, imagination, the needs of the soul - are not superfluous at all and that in fact they are necessary for the heart (whether of community or individual) to function. Thank you for maintaining the belief that face-to-face relationship cannot be replaced by the gadgets supplied to us in infinite bounty and ever-increasing technical wondrousness by our kind corporate benefactors, who want us to remain “connected.”* Ha-ha.

That's the problem – our kind, corporate benefactors don't want *anything* of us but that we keep buying, consuming, paying for the privilege, and not noticing too closely the real cost of our way of life, costs to the earth, to invisible people in other cultures and countries, and to our own souls. Our communities have been sold out for a mess of pottage and 500 cable channels. Gradually, like everyone else, inasmuch as our awareness depends upon what information we gain through media, and through commerce restricted to one-size-fits-all big box stores and restaurants, we lose our given, common sense ability to discern what *exactly* is going on. Even if we can go on line and read the truth from any number of websites, its not the same - *is it* - as people in conversation with their neighbors acknowledging what is missing, what we long for, what isn't right about how we and our communities are being treated.

One of the ways we can remain conscious and awake in these critical times is to be intentionally engaged with local, face-to-face community, and to give our energies to the *superfluties* of art, conversation, imagination, creativity, the great tradition of the humanities, at the local level.

The Other Side, in its beautiful smallness, has managed each year to bring more of itself into being. This year, on top of the *Imagining America* partnership in the Humanities with Hamilton College, we launched the successful *Talkin' 'Bout Jazz* series with the help of a generous grant from the NYS Council on the Arts. To Orin and myself, jazz expresses America's soul like no other music. It is another one of those “necessary superfluties,” like poetry and very good wine, worth acquiring a taste for.

In addition to these programs, The Other Side saw a host of groups focused on books, films, spirituality, alternative medicine, and other non-bottom-line activities, regularly meeting in our space, and remains an incubation space for *your* visionary idea. Those of you who receive our calendar, either via email, at our website (www.theothersideutica.org) or at the Café or The Other Side, already know these things. Finally, with the memorial service for my father-in-law, the artist Sebastian Domenico, on June 5, which commemorated the life of “one of our own,” who attempted to leave the pack and take “the road less traveled” of meaning and integrity, we put forward the powerful suggestion that heroism is not limited to police work, war (and getting rich)!

The message of The Other Side of Utica, its founder’s message, is that human beings are not infinitely replaceable; each is a unique expression of what some call the Divine, and therefore each has intrinsic worth. There are different ways given to each of us – varied gifts – by which this truth may be expressed, and this is mine. But I hope you will join me, not only in being pleased that Utica has such “cool” spaces, but also in intentionally taking on the adult work that is needed to take back and defend human communities. Cast your vote on the side of the small, local, slow and superfluous, and thus enable the destructive corporate system, helpless to stop itself, to die.

In the coming year, look for the jazz program and Imagining America program to continue to bring us high quality entertainment, and the fruits of scholarship. We’d love to see more poetry theater, like last February’s fine Yeats program. The spiritually focused reading group, *Temenos*, is headed toward providing programs that open the fundamentals of religious/mythological experience to a wider audience. We’ve got John Taylor Gatto, author of *Dumbing Us Down* and anti-school prophet extraordinaire on our guest speaker list. Maybe Ira and Tim will cook up another of their attractive film series. Best of all, this independent space reminds us, in all of its activities and programs, that we hold a line here in Utica against the further demeaning of human community and culture. Everything does, and must, connect. How we live our lives matters on the micro- and the macrocosmic levels.

The facts: Rent, utilities and insurance costs for one year total \$9,460. (We have no paid staff.) This means, if 95 people pledged just \$10 per month, we could easily meet our basic costs. Chances are, given the state of the economy, we won’t hear from 95 of you. But if those of you who are able can pledge \$20 per month, this would go a great way toward keeping The Other Side a stable enterprise, especially during July-August when our activities slow down. Please consider giving your support, in *whatever* amount you can afford. You can make monthly or quarterly payments, or you can write out a check for the year’s pledge to: The Other Side, c/o Kim Domenico, 17 Grant St., Utica, NY 13501.

Thank you for your support!

Kim Domenico, President, The Other Side of Utica, Inc.