

# You'll Love Columbus

*By Katherine Calos - Times-Dispatch Staff Writer - Columbus, Ohio*

John Angelo has a critical test for whether a city rates as a destination.

"If a good friend called and said he had one week of vacation left to visit your city, would you say, 'Come! There's so much to do,' or, would you say, 'Do you really want to spend a week?'"

"When I lived in Cincinnati, I would say, 'Swing through, and then we'll go somewhere.'"

"Here, I would say, 'Come! We can do restaurants, galleries, bike trails.'" And that's just his short list for Columbus' Short North Arts District.

Short North Arts District refers to a mile-long stretch of High Street between the downtown Columbus Convention Center and Fifth Avenue. As executive director of the Short North Business Association, Angelo supervises the scene from his office in a Victorian cottage in Goodale Park.

Thirty years ago, the area was in steep decline.

"It was complete blight," Angelo said in his office. "There were derelicts breaking into this house and sleeping in the rooms. If you drove down High Street, you'd lock the doors and hit the gas."

Now it has become one of the trendy spots in the Midwest, with about 150 independent art galleries, specialty shops, restaurants, pubs and clubs. In Richmond terms, it's like a combination of Carytown's shopping district and the downtown art district at the heart of the First Fridays Art Walk.

In Columbus, the art buzz builds on the first Saturday when the monthly Gallery Hop brings about 10,000 people to High Street between 4 and 10 p.m. Street performers add to the lure of gallery openings.

Look up and you'll know you're in Short North when you see the lighted arches spanning High Street. This fall, they've been refitted with LED lights that can roll in colors to match the occasion.

"We can turn the district 25 shades of pink for the Susan B. Komen race [to benefit breast-cancer research]," Angelo said. "When 'Wicked' [the musical about the witches of Oz] comes to town, we can turn it emerald green." Light shows might become part of the attraction for Gallery Hop evenings.

On a midday visit, the arches were prominent just because they were there, not because they were lighted.

Our attention was focused on the restaurants and shops as we took a quick look between flights. While trying out Skybus for a trip to Los Angeles, we had a seven-hour layover in Columbus. It was just enough time to explore.

Our first stop was at Goodale Park for a rendezvous with Angelo and an admiring look at the water lilies. A block away through the Victorian District, we reached High Street.

Window shopping makes walking a pleasure. The occasional mural adds another surprise when an "American Gothic" design has the farmer's wife hanging upside down.

***"There's a great sense of discovery here," said Suzi West of Collier West home décor. "We specialize in one-of-a-kind, old and new, eclectic."***

***Chandeliers have become "the hood ornament of the brand," West said, glancing upward at chandeliers made of twigs, antlers, glass cylinders and even traditional crystal. "We're getting relatively notorious for them."***

***Our own purchase there wasn't as adventurous or as expensive. It was a \$4 pewter wishbone that my daughter plans to make into a necklace. Consider it a good-luck charm for her first year of college.***

If we'd been in the mood for fashion, we could have gotten high-end jeans at Dr. Mojoe; high-fashion footwear at the Little Shop of Shoes; "gently worn" clothes at Take 2 Apparel; designer attire at Rowe; or jewelry at Sherrie Galleries (where sculptural ceramics are the first thing to catch your eye).

If you like dogs, you'll have another reason to step inside the shops. A Dalmatian named Sam keeps watch over the Cookware Sorcerer. Another Dalmatian named Logan seemed to be able to wag his tail at the PM Gallery without whacking any of the pottery. The collection includes whimsical Pogs from Richmond sculptor Mary Garber, whose creatures borrow features from pigs and dogs.

Walking can make you hungry, and it's not hard to solve that problem. Would it be Rigsby's Kitchen for a top Italian experience, Rosendale's for a taste of the award-winning chef's creations, Surly Girl Saloon for "comfort food made with love and served with a side of sass," or RJ Snappers for fine dining on seafood?

We elected to be eclectic at Betty's Fine Food and Spirits, where the walls are decorated with slightly naughty, 1950s-style pinup girls. Diners perch on barstools while digging into anything from cheese ravioli served with homemade pesto sauce to Marge's meatloaf served with garlic mashed potatoes.

Leave room for dessert at Jeni's Ice Creams. Or just forget the meal and eat ice cream instead. Where else can you sample salty caramel and Thai chili among the signature flavors? Both are good, by the way. So was the coriander raspberry, lime cardamom and sweet corn with blackberry sauce (just sampling, remember, not gorging). If those sound too adventurous, you could stick with the Belgian milk chocolate or honey vanilla bean.

With more time, you could continue a few more blocks to the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University and see more dogs - on film this time. Photographs of Weimaraner dogs in fanciful poses are one of the main attractions of "William Wegman: Funney/Strange," a 40-year retrospective that will remain on view until Dec. 7.

A whole week might be needed to test Angelo's theory. One thing's sure. For a day or a weekend, there's plenty to see without even leaving his neighborhood.