

# Emily changed the culture

By Steve Krause / The Daily Item | Posted: Friday, April 17, 2015 3:00 am

LYNN — Emily Ruddock had a wide-open palette when she became director of the city’s Downtown Cultural District 11 months ago, and by all accounts she took full advantage of it.

However, an opportunity came up with a marketing company that she said she couldn’t turn down, and today will be the last day in her brief tenure with the city.

“She’s the first director we had,” said James Cowdell of the Lynn Economic and Industrial Corporation, which split Ruddock’s salary with the Department of Community Development (and will do the same to her successor). “She had the ability to bring everyone together, elected officials, artists ... everyone came together to take this brand new initiative and bring it forward.”

Ruddock leaves with a full slate of activities planned, and a long list of events that have gone off smoothly under her watch.

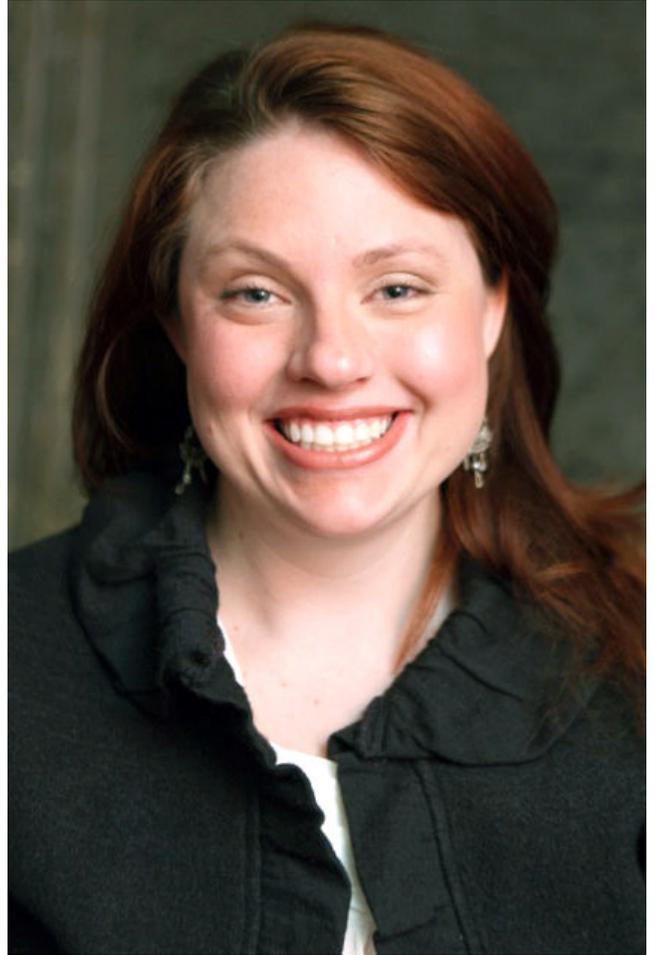
“We produced eight events in six months,” Ruddock said, “including an outdoor pizza-tasting night and a film screening, and a road race.

“Also, we started the ‘Creator Conversation,’ which was a meeting I hosted once a month and that was open to any artist or craftsperson in Lynn. We tried to help steer them in the direction of the district.”

Things are still happening, Cowdell said.

“There’s a big festival that she planned, an outdoor festival, happening June 12-13 in Downtown Lynn,” he said. “Also, the EDIC is putting \$2 million into the old Arnold Stationary building on Central Avenue to house eight artists to both live and work.”

Both Cowdell and Charles Gaeta, head of the Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development (who was on the board that hired her), agree Ruddock will be tough to replace.



Emily Ruddock

“We’ll definitely miss her,” said Cowdell. “We’ll take what she’s done as we look to her replacement, to make sure arts and culture are key components of the downtown area.”

“(Emily) has accomplished a lot of things, and she has a lot of things ready to go,” Gaeta said. “She really did an exceptional job of planning. We were fortunate to have her, even if it was only for a short period of time.

“But,” he said, “she’s left the district in good shape.”

Gaeta said that because summer is soon approaching, and because there is a slate of events in the making, “we hope to hire someone for the short term, on a consultant basis, and then go forward later in the summer to get someone in there full time.

“We’ve identified some people,” he said, “Hopefully we can move ahead quickly and not miss too many opportunities.”

Ruddock said that arts and culture help keep a community vibrant, but, just as important, they create a ripple effect in so many other ways.

“I had the chance to speak before the City Council a few times, and they really get what arts can mean to a community,” Ruddock said. “I think often times, arts and culture are put in narrow boxes, and people think, ‘oh, that’s for kids.’ But it does help them learn. I’ve read that children who read music can also be successful in math.

“Also,” she said, “if we don’t talk about lifelong participation in arts, we’re doing ourselves a disservice. Senior citizens really love them. They can express themselves that way. Arts and culture are part of what makes up a balanced life.”

Then, there are the business benefits.

“Everyone who goes to an event, or sees a play,” she said, “will spend an average of \$20-\$30 at local businesses such as restaurants.”

Corey Jackson, who is the managing director of Arts After Hours Inc., lauded Ruddock for her work.

“She was an incredible asset to the Downtown Cultural District,” he said. “She was able to form strong support networks at the local and state levels, and lay a great foundation on which we can build the district moving forward.

“We will deeply miss her positive attitude and collaborative spirit.”