

CASE STUDY UPDATE | ELKIN, NC

2018



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In spite of economic challenges, Elkin has the potential to capitalize on its artist community and proximity to wineries.

A small town tucked into the Yadkin Valley Region, Elkin has a historic downtown and a concentration of artisans living and working. In 2007, the town launched a program designed to match experienced craftspeople with new artists and provide them with training and support to start and grow new businesses. The Growing Entrepreneurs program evolved in conjunction with a guild called the Yadkin Valley Craft Guild. The original case study in 2010 focused on the ways the arts and craft sector could catalyze small business growth and attract tourism and highlighted the need for a support system for artisans, training and access to financing. However, much has changed in the intervening years since the case study was written. Elkin was hit hard by the economic recession and the Yadkin Valley Craft Guild storefront has closed.

In light of the recession, many of the actors involved in the Craft Guild including the NC Rural Center, Homegrown Jobs Initiative and the Town lost funding. Although the Yadkin Valley Craft Guild disbanded upon the closure of the storefront, the NC Foothills

Arts Council has still been active in arts programming in Elkin. The organization is headquartered downtown and promotes both music and fine arts. However, the Arts Council should not be viewed as a replacement for the guild since arts are distinct from crafts, which are a different mode of production. There is an organization in nearby Wilkesboro, the Blue Ridge Artisan Center, which could serve a similar role to a craft guild.

Around the same time the Craft Guild closed, Elkin hired a "Main Street and Community Manager" – Laura Gaylord – to assist with the town's accreditation through the NC Main Street Center and focus on small business development. She received funding through the NC American Planning Association's "Great Street in the Making" program in 2013 and has also supported the farmer's market and theatre restoration. Furthermore, a linear park and a brewery have opened downtown, bringing renewed vibrancy to the area.¹

¹ Holbrook, Karen. "Craft Brewery Coming to Main Street." Elkin Tribune. July 18, 2015.

Another important development in the region is the proliferation of wineries. Outside of downtown, there are 15 wineries within a 10-mile radius and 57 wineries within a 50-mile radius.² The growth in the wine industry has led to an increase in tourism in the area. Elkin has a unique opportunity, being positioned at the center of the Yadkin Valley American Viticulture Area, to integrate some of the local history and artisans that keep that history alive in the new wine economy. Although Elkin has experienced some economic challenges, the town is showing signs of recovery and has the potential to capitalize on its artist community and proximity to wineries.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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² “Wineries and Vineyards in North Carolina.” NC Wine. Accessed March 8, 2018. <https://www.ncwine.org/>