



Women in Business



Tapscott Gets Down to Business at Artworks

by Dan Aubrey

M'kina Tapscott takes a seat at the Up One Down coffee shop in Trenton to talk business.

In her case, it's running an urban arts organization.

Tapscott recently took the helm of the nonprofit Artworks Trenton.

Situated in a former Sears warehouse in the capital city, the organization is known for its artists' studios, workshops, exhibitions, and two signature art events: Art All Night is the 24-hour arts festival, and Art All Day, a day for visiting Trenton artists' studios and seeing exhibitions around the city.

Its current business model is a \$400,000 budget that allows for two full-time and two part-time employees.

A native of Texas and a product of the Houston art scene, Tapscott replaces Lauren Otis, who announced he was ending his six-year tenure in late 2021.

Otis successfully maintained the organization through two difficult times. One was after the popular Art All Night festival became the site of a shooting. The other involved guiding the organization through the uncertainty of the pandemic.

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Now Tapscott, the first woman of color to run the 34-year-old arts center, is following the organization's pre-established two-year plan as well as looking to the future of both the organization and city.

With 15 years of experience working with community arts development, starting with the Houston-based social and art service program Project Row Houses, Tap-

scott says she senses opportunities for more public engagement in the arts.

For proof, Tapscott points to the growing number of Trenton public art projects. That includes Artworks' active leadership with the recent New Jersey State Council on the

Arts/NJ Transit's Trenton Transit Station arts project and work supported by a Bloomberg Philanthropies Asphalt Art Grant. She also mentions initiatives and programming happening in the public schools.

"I feel this means the city is asking for more opportunities. The community is asking for it," she says.

'As a child, having a family that allowed me to express myself in art making and going to see plays changed me. I think I'm a kinder person. I think that's because of art,' Tapscott says.



Another is the potential "economic upgrade in Trenton because of the engagement with the arts" — a phenomenon that has worked in other small post-industrial cities but has stalled in Trenton.

Tapscott then jumps ahead and starts talking about something that has also happened in those small cities: gentrification.

"There is opportunity for renewal without displacement," she says. "Finding the balance is tricky. Art has been used by cities to revitalize the area but not able to provide the services for the people who are living in those spaces."

But that will wait. Tapscott says

M'kina Tapscott is the new director of Artworks Trenton. The photographs behind her are from Edwin Torres' exhibition 'Towers: Holding On,' on view through February 26.

now is the time for Artworks and other nonprofits to help communities reconnect and rebuild after the effects of the pandemic. "This is time for nonprofits to turn the gas on, rev up our engines, and actively find ways to find ways to deal with mental health and wellness and getting back into the stride of things."

Assessing the state of the non-

profit arts business, she admits that "times are tight" and funding organizations presents a lot of challenges. "It will be difficult. Artworks will need to prove to people why it is important."

To do that, she will have to tap into variety of her past experiences. In addition to Project Row Houses,

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