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Leading with heart in the Charlotte arts community

By Michael J. Solender

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A burgeoning group of socially responsible entrepreneurs wants to expand Charlotte’s network of visual, performing and literary artists to a wide audience. ● Culture C

AKA Creative works to connect like-minded individuals interested in commercial ventures that focus on addressing social and community challenges and issues.

“Social innovation simply means heart over money,” said AKA Creative founder Jesse Shane, 34. “I see many talented young people in this town with ideas, and I know how networking and collaboration can help transform these into action. We are interested in helping make those connections.”

Now the group is hosting a social mixer and conference called Culture C – community, collaboration and creativity – Thursday at Packard Place uptown and Friday at Mint Museum Uptown.

Shane expects about 200 people to attend the event, which will host speakers, panel discussions and workshops. Topic areas include social innovation, entrepreneurship and the power of collaborative relationships.

AXL, AKA’s charitable foundation, will host a “cutting party” at the conference where participants will be invited to cut denim “uppers” from blue jeans that will be used to create shoes for Ugandan children. The shoes are the first line of defense for the children who face attacks from jiggers – parasites that enter the body through open sores, often through the soles of the feet.

“It is one way we can make a difference,” said Kester Garraway, 30, director of AXL Foundation.

Discovered through word-of-mouth by Charlotte’s arts crowd, AKA has hosted fashion shows, artist

Culture C, a two-day conference and social mixer that celebrates collaboration, creativity and community in the social innovation, creative arts and entrepreneurship sectors.

When: 6-10 p.m. Thursday, Social Mixer, Packard Place, 222 S. Church St.; 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday, Conference and Workshops, Mint Museum Uptown, 500 S. Tryon St.

Tickets: Free with advance registration: <http://culturec.us>.

AKA Creative: www.akacreative.com.

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 A photograph showing a group of about seven people, including men and women of various ethnicities, gathered around a dark wooden table in what appears to be a meeting or workshop. They are looking towards the camera or engaged in conversation. There are laptops, papers, and some food items on the table. The background shows a bright, modern interior with large windows.

exhibitions, poetry slams, spoken word and musical performances over the past two years. It wasn't uncommon for 200 people to attend an event.

The networking and connections made were natural extensions of the gatherings.

"What we're about is more than a building," said Shane's wife, Lindsay Rose, who is director of operations and events. "We look for ways to connect people in the community; every one of our events has a community building aspect."

This was in evidence last August when AKA organized and hosted their biggest event to date, a block party held in Charlotte's Elizabeth neighborhood with more than 700 people. The event featured a grocery give-back where 100 bags of groceries were assembled at "filling stations" by festival goers with food donated by farmers and Earth Fare. The bags were distributed to those in need by Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry.

"People of our generation take inspiration from those who forged change through political means in the civil rights era," said Kia Moore, who heads AKA's communications. "We've been raised in a brand-driven society, and what we are doing is using corporate principals to make social impact."



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