What happens when you take a small Louisiana community, infuse it with a number of enthusiastic artists from a wide array of disciplines and throw in the combustible energy of an ambitious hometown boy with a vision for change?

“We call it The Arnaudville Experiment,” says George Marks, the painter and Arnaudville resident considered the driving force behind the city’s recent cultural explosion.

Several artists work and live in Arnaudville. Local resident Lori Henderson’s work hangs in her workshop.
A professional artist with aspirations of taking his career to New York, Marks returned to his hometown of Arnaudville a few years ago when his father fell ill. After getting reacquainted with the community, Marks realized it was just what he was looking for.

“Although, on the surface, Arnaudville appeared to be this picturesque community, it was suffering the fate of many small towns,” Marks says.

So the Experiment began with Town Market, a place Marks envisioned as a platform to promote the culture of the area. The idea took off, and soon artists from across the country were coming to Arnaudville to set up shop.

Now, the city is home to an impressive list of artist studios, shops, restaurants and arts-related businesses, creating a much-needed economic boom for the city. And the economic growth spurred by the Arnaudville Experiment has started to seep into the neighboring communities of Grand Coteau, Sunset, Opelousas, Breaux Bridge and Leonville.

While the future of this boom is hard to predict, Marks is very clear about what the “Experiment” is not intended to be.

“It's not going to be a Cajun theme park,” Marks says. “I'd like to see Arnaudville remain a small community free from strip malls, subdivisions and big box stores. It should remain a collection of people that are inspired by the diverse cultural contributions of Acadiana.”

Barns and trees line the roads of Arnaudville creating an idyllic country setting.

**ART ... OUT OF CONTEXT**

“I'm a culture junkie. I like people and places,” Marks says. “I especially like it when those people and places are out of context, especially when they collide.”

Marks considers the art renaissance in Arnaudville to be a perfect example of this cultural collision.

“Art in Arnaudville? A bit out of context, don't you think?” Marks says. “Art in urban places or planned communities — well that is expected. But art in Arnaudville?”

Marks also offers his take on why this cultural collision has worked so well here.

“I think it is because it inspires people,” Marks says. “There was an underlying sense of desperation here. I think a lot of people consequently want to be part of something positive. That's the spirit of the place. It's kinda like, 'What's your dream'?”