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Greenwood sees Old Town as unique district

By Ryan Trares

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In a small section of Old Town Greenwood, visitors can walk from art gallery to boutique to tea shop.

Wine lovers can sip a glass of cabernet and sample Gruyere cheese. Top-notch sushi and classic Italian restaurants are side-by-side on Madison Avenue.

Cities with similar areas have applied to make these sections state-recognized cultural districts. The designation helps support tourism and establish the area as a destination, taking advantage of a wide marketing campaign to get people to the neighborhood.

That could be an option for Greenwood in the future, but the city isn't quite ready yet, said Christian Maslowski, executive director of the Greater Greenwood Chamber of Commerce.

"We've got this area that's organically grown into this incubator for the arts. We're excited about what's happened there. It's our place for tourism and recreation," he said. "Whether it's officially recognized or not, that's some place we already talk up."

Greenwood leaders have put an added emphasis on the arts in recent years. The annual WAMM Fest attracts thousands of people to the Old Town area to listen to music, browse artist booths and sample some of the performing arts.

A public art trail was established along Smith Valley Road, featuring large sculptures from three national artists.

The Southside Art League has re-established its gallery in the Old Town area.

Together with eclectic businesses such as Vino Villa, a wine bar and emporium, and Yokohama, a sushi restaurant, Greenwood has carved out its own cultural niche, Maslowski said.

Becoming an official cultural district is an idea that those in the arts community recently started to look at.

The cultural district program was established by legislation passed by the General Assembly in 2008 and is overseen by the Indiana Arts Commission.

Organizers wanted a way to recognize areas in the community where cultural aspects such as art galleries, music venues and theaters served as the foundation.

The Greater Greenwood Arts Council investigated submitting an application to be a district, council president Jim Stockman said.