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Local Locals: Pat Morrissy

By [Winstina S. Hughes](#)



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Patrick Morrissy, executive director of [HANDS Inc.](#), received a citation in 2006 from [Senator Frank R. Lautenberg](#) celebrating his organization's 20th anniversary in working

to stabilize neighborhoods in Orange and East Orange, by redeveloping targeted abandoned properties, expanding home ownership opportunities, cleaning up industrial brownfields and engaging citizens in planning for the future of their neighborhoods and cities.

Mr. Morrissy has lived in South Orange since 1984. His wife, Jean, was president of the South Orange Maplewood Education Foundation for three years. He has a son in college and twin girls who just graduated from Columbia Senior High School. He coaches his girls' ultimate frisbee team, Sparkle Motion, and said he would like to be known for his involvement in the sport, which was invented at CHS.

Recently we asked Mr. Morrissy about his work.

HANDS Inc. is one of the organizers of a large, regional curated art show that opened on May 1st called "[Uncharted Territory](#)." How did the event come about?

The event was spearheaded by Terry Boddie a photographer, one of the first arts tenants in the Valley Arts District, and Lorena La Grassa. Terry is a local artist and the curator for this event.

This is, I think, a block buster show. Terry has had several exhibition projects before, but this show is different. He wanted something big.

Terry's show included 18 visual artists, installations specific to the site in semi-abandoned property. Artists were chosen to use raw and finished spaces in the emerging arts district that connects the townships of Orange and West Orange.

HANDS Inc' identifies and invests in people locally. In the past Terry would go outside of the community to exhibit his work. Today Terry brings artists from outside of the area into the valley, including artists from South Orange and Maplewood.

"Uncharted Territory" is based in the Valley Arts district that connects the townships of Orange and West Orange. What are some of the goals of your organization in creating the Valley Arts District?

HANDS Inc. has existed in Orange, N.J. since 1986. We engage people in comprehensive planning about the future of a given neighborhood and support individuals and community organizations contributing to this effort.

The Valley Arts District features affordable live work space for artists and interesting entertainment venues. We've engaged the community in the Valley Arts district revitalization. We've connected with community leaders, held community meetings, wrote surveys and wrote up results and circulated these documents throughout the community.

Together HANDS Inc. and the community created a vision for Orange, N.J. We want to make Orange the Urban Village of the 21st Century, a just and beautiful city.

Our organization also works to identify artistic talent in the community and draw it out. We work with people who have a sense of community, more than just their own work and their own lives. Terry is one of those people.

Could you tell me about upcoming exciting redevelopment projects or events in the Valley Arts District?

We renovate buildings in the district. We preserve, recycle, and sustain. HANDS Inc. will be renovating the Stetson Hat Factory owned by the Stetson brothers 100 years ago. We will be renovating a glass factory and the Monroe Calculating Company building. The Monroe building is a beautiful art deco building built in the 1940s. We want to preserve and restore it. By the end of the summer a total of 26 spaces in the Valley Arts District will be occupied. Currently 15 of our 100 spaces are occupied.

We have a theatre group, Luna Stage, coming into a performance space. They are from Montclair and are moving into an existing building in the Valley, the Arts Garage and Performance Space on Valley Road. That building is undergoing a complete renovation. Luna Stage is a regional repertory theater, 16 years old. It's losing a home in Montclair but gaining a new one in West Orange.

In addition, a New Daily Soup Café will be opening on location in June. We've finished the renovations of the old glass factory which will be the new home of Daily Soup Cafe.

What do you love most about your job?

My greatest joy is connecting with other people who have vision and energy and love to create community. That's really what this work is about