

Welcome to American Mosaic from VOA Learning English.

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

On the show today, we play more hit summer songs.

We also learn about the best places in America to visit during the summer.

But first, we go to a small town in Maryland that is supporting its local artists.

Seed Project

A small town on the Eastern Shore of Maryland has become a patron, or supporter, of the arts. The community hopes its effort will permit local artists more creative freedom. Avi Arditti tells how.

Vicco von Voss has been making furniture from reclaimed woods for 20 years.

“When I get a tree that has been blown over by a hurricane or strictly taken down by a tree company, I have the opportunity to give this tree a second life.”

Mr. von Voss is known for creating beautiful and useful pieces.

“Part of my philosophy is that if it took a tree 80 years to grow, I need to build something that will last for that same duration.”

The artist formed that philosophy when he lived in a 10-square-meter home he had built near Chestertown, Maryland.

“I grew to understand and love nature. But it wasn’t just loving nature, it was observing the real subtleties of the land, of the trees. And with that, I thought I’ve got to become a steward of nature.”

Mr. von Voss makes his living mostly by building specially ordered furniture. As soon as a piece is done, it goes to the customer. So, he was faced with a problem when a local museum invited him to exhibit his furniture at an art show next year. He didn’t have a collection.

“Basically the idea of borrowing my clients' pieces for two months was not an option. I couldn't go and say 'I need to borrow your dining table for two months.'”

Art gallery owner Carla Massoni came up with a solution. If people were to loan the artist money, he could delay the sale of furniture and gather a collection for the show. After the show, he could sell the pieces and pay back the loans.

Ms. Massoni called her idea the “Seed Project.” She says 20 people have contributed money so far.

“Many of the people that are involved in this probably wouldn't be able to purchase a piece of Vicco's work. But they still want to be part of the process of his creating these pieces.”

Bob Ingersoll is one of the Seed Project's supporters.

“It seemed to be such an interesting project. Here I had a chance to help Vicco concentrate more on creating pieces of art. I expect to see a beautiful piece come out of this or more, many pieces.”

Art gallery owner Carla Massoni says this willingness to help could have something to do with the community's historic connection to the area's farmland and river.

"What Vicco does is using the natural resources of the region, trees, the connection he has to the living, breathing environment that he is a part of. Many people share that philosophy as well."

Vicco von Voss says the Seed Project has permitted him to grow as a craftsman.

"I thought, what a phenomenal opportunity to get out of my own box and create something very unique and very sculptural, much more artistic but still functional than what I have created in the past."

The Chestertown community hopes the Seed Project could expand into support for more artists and craftspeople in the future.

Summer Travel in America

A listener from Brazil recently wrote to us asking for some advice. He's planning a trip to the United States, and wanted to know about the best places to travel in America. Today, we tell about the most popular places to visit in the country, and hear about what makes them so appealing.

Each of the 50 states in America has interesting things to offer visitors, but some are more popular than others. Washington D.C. is famous for its historical places, like the White House and the Lincoln Memorial. Visitors to Los Angeles, California can see the Hollywood Walk of Fame or shop at stores on Rodeo Drive where they may see a star or two. The Grand Canyon in Arizona appeals to hikers, climbers and nature lovers as does Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.

Trip Advisor is a website where people can write reviews about their travel experiences. There are also ratings for hotels, restaurants, and places people have visited around the world. Every year, Trip Advisor makes a list of the top 25 cities to visit in the United States. The results are based on the opinions of visitors to the website.

This year, Trip Advisor said the top five cities named were New York; San Francisco, California; Chicago, Illinois; Las Vegas, Nevada and Orlando, Florida.

Brooke Ferencsik of TripAdvisor said the top picks on the list were not surprising. And it's no secret why New York City was named the number one destination.

"New York City is just the place that has it all, and travelers know that. It has world class cuisine, accommodations, attractions and entertainment. People rave about seeing the Statue of Liberty as the bucket list attraction that everybody needs to see. And the Empire State Building, visiting Central Park, and of course the great museums."

New York City is sometimes called "the city that never sleeps" because it can be very busy. It is an exciting place for many people because there is so much to do. But the city might be too busy for travelers looking for rest and calm. They might want something more like Myrtle Beach, in the state of South Carolina, which made it to number 21 on TripAdvisor's list.

“Myrtle Beach is a really popular spring break destination. A lot of people come to Myrtle Beach for great weather, it’s a wonderful family vacation spot, the beaches – got the wonderful Atlantic beaches there – there’s a lot of family-friendly parks and waterparks.”

Many people take time off from their jobs in the summer to travel. Because there are many tourists visiting other places, June until August is known as “high season.”

Traveling during the high season can be crowded. Hotels, restaurants, and transportation might also be very expensive. If you want to save money on a trip, it is a good idea to plan to leave before or after the summer months. These times are known as “shoulder seasons” for travel.

“If you’re looking for value, try to think about travelling through the shoulder season if it’s possible – the shoulder season being the fall or the spring. The weather is still very good in some of these destinations, and you can get better prices.”

America's major cities are still the most popular destinations for visitors. Ferencsik says this is because of the good quality of services they provide tourists.

"They do a great job of giving travelers what they want while they're on vacation. They cater to every type of traveler need. So whether you're traveling alone, you're traveling for business, you're traveling with your family – whatever it is, those destinations are really tuned in to delivering amazing experiences and just a lot of different opportunities when you're there."

More Summer Songs

To start off the summer this year, Rolling Stone magazine released a list of the 50 best summer songs of all time. The magazine's many other "best of" lists include the 100 best singers, the 100 best guitar players, and even the 500 greatest songs of all time. Madeline Smith plays some of the tunes that made the Rolling Stone summer list.

If you have ever heard any of the Beach Boys' songs, you probably are not surprised that some appear on the list. The Beach Boys came to fame in the 1960s with cheerful pop songs about sunshine, riding the ocean waves and living a summer lifestyle. Their song "California Girls" made it to number four on Rolling Stone's list.

A Learning English listener suggested another Beach Boys song, "Kokomo," as their favorite summer song.

The Lovin' Spoonful was also a popular 1960s band. Another Learning English listener said that group's "Summer in the City" is a favorite. The song is number 7 on Rolling Stone's best summer songs list.

"Summer in the City" talks about the hot, dirty and uncomfortable conditions that a summer day can bring. But it celebrates the season after sundown. The lyrics are *cool town / evening in the city / dressing so fine and looking so pretty*.

We leave you with a song not on the Rolling Stones list. But a listener loves it. Here is "Summer of '69" by Bryan Adams. The song tells a story of nostalgia, a longing for the past.

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly. Our program was written by Katy Weaver and Madeline Smith, who was also the producer.

Do you have a question about American life, people or places? Send an e-mail to mosaic@voanews.com. We might answer your question in a future show. You can also visit our website at learningenglish.voanews.com to find transcripts and audio of our shows.

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