



## Jean Maginnis: A Transformational Vision

Part of “Making Change Happen: Women Creating a Better Maine”

Written by Janice Rogers

Jean Maginnis is, quite literally, changing the landscape in Maine. As founder and executive director of the Maine Center for Creativity, she is the driving force behind Art All Around™, the international design competition to transform 16 tanks at Sprague Energy Corporation in South Portland into a monumental work of art. This project marks the largest canvas (261,000 square feet) for public art ever developed by a group of citizens at an industrial site.

Maginnis’ vision for this project came to her in 2003 when she and her husband were biking along

the South Portland waterfront toward Bug Light Park. It was a beautiful day, and they stopped to admire the view before them: the skyline, the lighthouse—and the tank farm. “I always tell my kids to appreciate what you have in front of you,” Maginnis says. “At that moment, I remembered a gallery opening I had been at the night before, and I could imagine the colors from the paintings I had seen superimposed on the tanks. It improved the view.”

To Maginnis, the vision symbolized how the arts and industry could come together to attract people to Maine. The image stuck with

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her—and the next week she mentioned it to her women’s book group, who encouraged her to put the plan into action. A year earlier, a personal journey of reflection and self-definition had led her to create her own mission statement: “To inspire, facilitate and encourage individuals and organizations to be creatively expressive.” She contemplated ways that she could align her values and mission with her work, and how she might best give back to the community.

Inspiration came when she was invited to participate in a 2003 trade mission to Ireland as part of her job at Swardlick Marketing Group. She was struck by how well the Irish culture fosters and supports the country’s creative economy—as well as how it provides the infrastructure for artists to succeed. “I thought about how Maine needs to think differently about the arts and new ideas,” she says. “I wanted to provide more opportunities for working artists and the creative industries, in order to show that we truly value the arts here.”

Later, when she visualized the art on the tankers on that fateful bike ride, she realized what a bold statement painting the tanks could make about the arts and innovation in Maine—how it could help promote Maine as a destination that welcomes creative people, professions and industries who would contribute to the vitality of the Maine economy.

When she shared the concept with her women’s book group and their friends, their response was overwhelming. “Not one of them said ‘No,’ or ‘This will never work,’” Maginnis remembers. Instead, one by one the women agreed to help her get the project off of the ground. “That’s the wonderful thing about women,” Maginnis says. “Not only will they provide you with encouragement, they’ll also pitch in and do the hard work with you.”

The next several years were full of change and challenges. Maginnis left her job at Swardlick

and founded the Maine Center for Creativity. The nonprofit organization’s goal is to build Maine’s reputation as a place where creativity and innovation are thriving. “It takes a hell of a lot of faith to leap into the abyss!” she says, laughing.

Maginnis dealt with resistance to new ideas and a fair amount of criticism. However, over time the project’s advocates and funders increased in number, and each one helped her to move it along in some way. After two and a half years of hard work—and with the support and encouragement of colleagues, board members, an advisory council, the senior leaders at Sprague Energy Corporation and hundreds of volunteer hours from both women and men—the Art All Around™ international competition was launched in March 2008. In October, Jaime Gili’s design was selected from more than 560 submissions from 73 countries. Painting the tanks will begin in spring 2009 and take up to three years to complete.

Today, Maginnis continues to bring Art All Around to completion and is seeding another high visibility project. Painters, Players and Poets™ will showcase Maine’s talented visual artists, musicians, performers and poets. She hopes her work will inspire other women to have the courage to follow their own ideas. “Change can be painful, but it can also be exciting,” she says. “Don’t be afraid to shake things up—well-behaved women don’t make history!”

How are you shaking things up?

Tell us.

