

The American Spirit

Young Artists Help Revitalize Their City

(NAPSA)—When thinking of Detroit today, images of abandoned buildings and urban decay may come to mind. That's what many folks think Detroit has become in the face of escalating unemployment, rising poverty and increasing crime. But there is a growing community of creative individuals who are undaunted by the stereotypes and are banding together to revitalize this once-great city.

By moving back into the city and taking advantage of inexpensive living spaces, they support restaurants and retailers while creating an inviting vibe in what was once a nearly abandoned urban center.

Just look at 22-year-old Veronika Scott, a graduate of the design program at Detroit's College for Creative Studies. Today, she's running a nonprofit company based in Detroit that produces innovative, self-heating coats that transform into waterproof sleeping bags. She calls it "The Empowerment Plan" and hopes to produce 1,000 coats in 2012. The Empowerment Plan provides homeless with skills they need to earn a living, creating the coats needed to survive the winter.

Another CCS graduate, Kobie Solomon, 33, is also doing his part to bring vibrancy back to downtown Detroit. Kobie is a celebrated graffiti artist who combines his formal training as a fine artist with his passion for "aerosol art" with stunning results that have earned him commissions from a variety of clients, including Reebok, T-Mobile and General Motors. He recently completed the largest single graffiti mural in Detroit's history at the



Kobie Solomon is among a growing community of creatives who are banding together to revitalize Detroit.

Russell Industrial Center, a former auto factory turned into a professional center for commercial and creative arts.

And then there's the young, talented musician Sean Forbes, who is deaf. His mission is to build a bridge between the music industry and deaf people. He grew up in Detroit, experiencing great music in his own way. Now, he is the co-founder of D-PAN, the Deaf Professional Arts Network, a non-profit organization that focuses on translating popular artists' songs into American Sign Language music videos. His enthusiasm has captured the attention of actress Marlee Matlin, who appeared in a music video with him, and Jack White and Bob Dylan, who have both donated songs for D-PAN's use.

These three entrepreneurial artists are being featured in a new three-part television series airing on Ovation in April called "Motor City Rising." The series features many others who are using art and creativity to make a difference.