

Creative Connect founder Dan Semenchuk will be hosting the next free social gathering for artists and creative people inside the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Arts on April 10, 2012.



Creatives Make Connections at Monthly Meetings

Alicia Cormie • *College Times*

On the second Tuesday of each month, more than 80 creative professionals gather at varying venues to throw aside formal agendas to connect.

Since its initiation in 2003, Creative Connect gatherings have offered a non-threatening environment where creatives can meet, socialize and grow Phoenix's creative community.

With a passion for connecting people, Dan Semenchuk started Creative Connect with the original tagline "no agendas, no egos, no kidding" and for nine years has kept the same format.

"I want people to form long-standing personal relationships that, if need be, will evolve into business relationships," Semenchuk said. "And when it evolves into a business relationship it's because you know them personally so you trust them and have confidence in them."

At Creative Connect people have built friendships, located office space, created business ideas, found jobs and met creative professionals to collaborate with.

For Phoenix native Joey Parks he even met his wife.

"I met my wife on a Tuesday at about 6:30 p.m.," he said.

After attending Creative Connect for more than five years, Parks got more than a love story.

"The people that I met there were completely

instrumental in what I'm doing now," Parks said.

When Parks attended his first Creative Connect gathering, he was working as a ghost-writer and spent his days working solo and isolated from Phoenix's creative community.

"My mental impression of what a creative community was in Phoenix was that there wasn't one," Parks said.

Parks spearheads the 26 Blocks project that showcases the talent of 26 Phoenix-based writers and photographers who created artwork reflecting the identity of Phoenix's city blocks. He drew on relationships developed at Creative Connect to form the majority of the talent pool and now plans to replicate the project in New Orleans.

While the people he met through Creative

Connect still affect his everyday life — from his life partner to his current project — Parks never directly got a job from showing up each month.

"You don't go because you are looking for work; you go because you want to connect with other creatives in Phoenix," Parks said.

And that outcome is exactly what Semenchuk envisioned for Creative Connect. It is not designed to be a networking event where people get to know each other from a business standpoint but for an environment that fosters communication, collaboration and cooperation.

"What I saw happening was that people weren't spending time together like they used to and, specifically within the creative process, the whole collaborative process was being minimized," Semenchuk said.

That problem was compounded by the sprawling nature of Phoenix. For many, communication occurred via email and freelancers spent their days working from coffee shops where the most social interaction they got was with their local barista.

He sought to create an event appealing to right-brained creative types — meeting at intriguing venues sans schedules.

"If there is a challenge, it's, statistically, creative people are by nature introverted," Semenchuk said. "In effect, what I've done is created a social gathering for introverts but it actually really works."

Each month Semenchuk seeks out venues

energizing for creative types such as art galleries and ad agencies.

The next meeting, on April 10, will take attendees on a guided tour of Scottsdale and Tempe's public art project IN FLUX and end at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art lounge.

Passionate about fostering the local creative community, Semenchuk has more plans for Creative Connect.

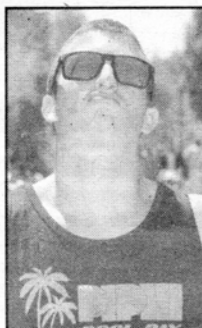
He hopes to create a college version starting at Scottsdale Community College, create a mentoring program and produce a visual display of what Phoenix's creative community is churning out each year.

"I think there is a need to encourage the creative community," Semenchuk said. "There is good stuff happening and all too often we don't see it and we get discouraged."

For now, he'll stick to the tried and true format he started more than nine years ago.

"People show up really to socialize and to connect," he said. "Every time, there will be somebody new, somebody different and somebody very interesting. I keep going because each month I will always, always, always meet someone new and interesting and for me that's part of the motivation."

Creative Connect is open to the public and meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. For more information, visit www.creativeconnect.org



Where's the best creative hangout?

Brennan Smith

"The Vista gym
#YOLO."