

Providence Journal Editorial

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Expansive Convergence

For most of its history of 14 years, the Convergence Festival has been primarily a Providence affair. The festival was born in 1983, featuring one day of sculpture on display in Roger Williams Park. Eventually, the festival hopped to downtown Providence, and since then has added locations around Rhode Island and has broadened its offerings to virtually the full range of arts.

Convergence 2001, set for Sept. 7-13, is, therefore, more truly convergent than any previous one. This year, Pawtucket shares top billing with Providence in its offerings of art, and nobody should be surprised. While Providence has been making its merry way as an arts venue, Pawtucket has taken great strides to overtake the capital in its commitment to art and artists.

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theater and Stone Soup Coffeehouse have moved from Providence to Pawtucket. Sculptor Howard Ben Tre and painter Gretchen Dow Simpson are internationally recognized artists with studios in Pawtucket for years. Mayor James Doyle instituted an arts district with its own set of incentives for artists. "We're not Boston or Providence," he says, "but we're this David that sits between two Goliaths."

Pawtucket is not the only place hitching its arts community to the Convergence bandwagon. Two years ago, Westerly and its burgeoning arts community were featured. This year, participation has grown: Newport, Warwick, Cumberland, Burrillville, Kingston, West Kingston, Wakefield, Tiverton, Middletown and Woonsocket.

For years, it has been said that Rhode Island has more artists per capita than any other state. Convergence 2001 has taken that idea and will run farther with it than ever before. Festival director Bob Rizzo, of Providence's Office of Cultural Affairs, and the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation's tourism office have done a good job making the festival an all-state affair. We intend to enjoy the heck out of it.