

6 YEARS OPEN TO
THE COMMUNITY8 PROGRAMS SERVING
DIVERSE NEEDS7 STUDIO
AREAS150 REFURBISHED
BIKES PER YEAR

HANDS ON

Making and remaking in Springfield

> MICHAEL DI PASQUALE '06MRP

Springfield, Massachusetts, is 25 miles from the UMass Amherst campus. The commonwealth's third-largest city is the birthplace of basketball, Dr. Seuss, and the country's first gasoline-powered automobile. A once-great manufacturing center, Springfield has made it through many ups and downs and still stands tall.

I've worked in Springfield for over 15 years. As the UMass Extension associate professor of regional planning, my role helps fulfill the university's land-grant responsibility to provide teaching, outreach, and public service to communities across Massachusetts. Moving beyond UMass Extension's original agricultural focus, my work addresses the needs of the state's urban areas, in particular nearby Holyoke and Springfield.

Many of my Springfield initiatives are based on a planning concept called "tactical urbanism."

Instead of creating long-term plans, this approach consists of low-cost, often temporary installations set up in cities as pilot projects to test new ideas quickly. It's a great way to work with the community to see what's working (and what isn't) in real time.

Make-It Springfield, the community art and makerspace I helped start, began as a way to bring life back to a row of vacant storefronts in the city's downtown cultural district. With help from UMass students and colleagues, I spent a long weekend in the spring of 2016 painting, cleaning, and moving furniture into a space that had sat empty for too many years.

We opened our doors for the first time in June of that year, starting off as a one-month-long pop-up. The opening was an unequivocal success: On our first day, 150 people came through the doors to sew, build small robots, and make art.

People kept coming. We adjusted along the way and have continued to grow. In the spring of this year we were able to scale up, moving into another vacant building five times as large as the original space. Make-It Springfield is now a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with four paid employees

that offers dozens of events and workshops—from stained glass design to bike repair—each month.

Even after helping build and furnish the original pop-up, UMass students continue to be involved in Make-It Springfield's success. Some volunteer to give workshops in creative arts and STEM areas. Others work in the bike repair shop, where they share their skills and serve as mentors to Springfield youth.

Make-It Springfield helps students see firsthand the benefits of the "tactical" approach to planning. Our success is visible in the surrounding neighborhood. A vacant building has come to life, transformed into a popular art and creative space. We're boosting the local economy. And our UMass students, many of whom will go on to be professional planners and urban designers, are learning real-life lessons from a nearby community.

Michael Di Pasquale, a licensed architect and registered urban planner, is an Extension associate professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning as well as the director of the UMass Design Center in Springfield, where he focuses on the revitalization of cities and towns in Massachusetts. He's also president of Make-It Springfield Inc.



See Make-It Springfield's current offerings: umass.edu/magazine/make-it