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ALBUM, the Chronicle, Saturday, January 26, 2008 3

— SPECIAL NEIGHBOR —

Dahlberg brings people together through creativity

By DAVID HINCHEY
Chronicle Staff Writer

WILLIMANTIC — A Willimantic man was recognized for submitting one of the Top 100 breakthrough ideas for the Make It Your Own Awards — awards that encourage community development.

Steven Dahlberg, along with others in a group that have met since last summer, submitted their application to the Make It Your Own Awards, a new grants program that aims to increase and strengthen citizen involvement and looks for a more inclusive and innovative approach to grant making.

Dahlberg — a self-employed consultant for the International Centre for Creativity and Imagination — is looking to open up the creative minds of those in town, as his project is titled “Weaving a New Willimantic.”

The ICCI is a “firm dedicated to applying creativity to improve the well-being of individuals, organizations and communities,” according to the group’s web site, www.appliedimagination.org.

Dahlberg has an extensive background in creativity, as he was head of the Massachusetts-based Creative Education Foundation. He also has 15 years of experience teaching creative thinking and problem solving around the world.

“The idea is to both unleash and harness people’s creativity

and diversity as the threads that can weave a new Willimantic,” Dahlberg said. “This picks up on our thread-mill history by putting a modern twist on what we are producing.

“We want to start with citizens’ ideas that have been generated in previous community forums and work to translate more of those ideas into reality,” he said, adding he is hoping to use community members’ creativity and imagination to help “weave the community we want to see.”

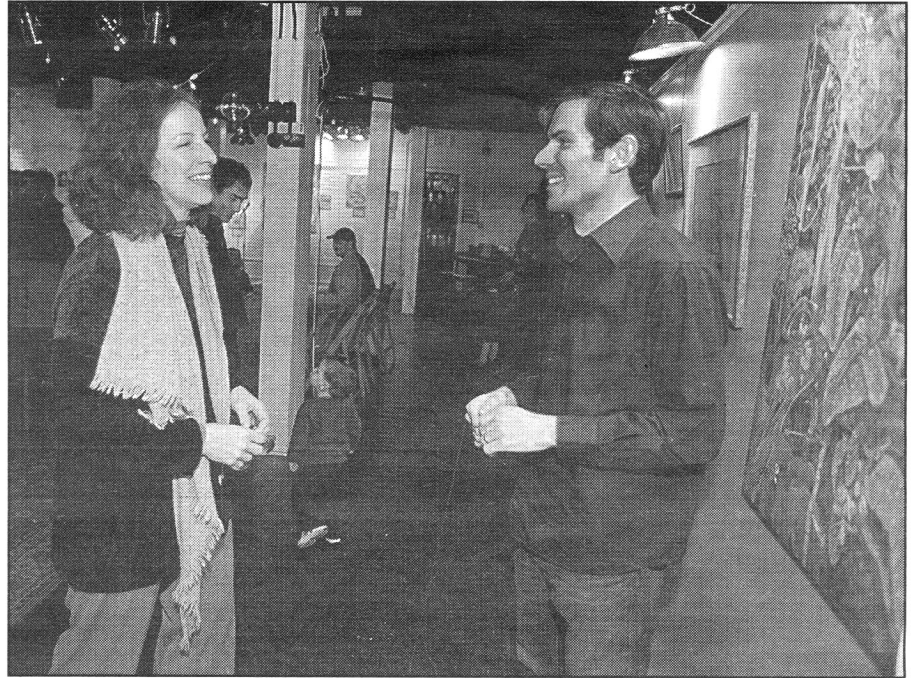
He was selected in the Top 100 out of 5,000 applications that were submitted, as a panel of judges will select the Top 20 and award a \$10,000 grant in February 2008.

The online community will then vote for the top four, which will receive an additional \$25,000.

Dahlberg said in his application that Willimantic has a number of “citizen-centered” organizations that focused on creative projects.

However, Dahlberg’s application said the organizations don’t necessarily coordinate and don’t necessarily include a large number of community voices.

His plan, however, would reverse that trend, writing in the application that he sees creativ-



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Jane Hanick, executive director of the Windham Art Center, speaks with Steven Dahlberg, a self-employed consultant for the International Centre For Creativity and Imagination. Dahlberg’s group was recently recognized for submitting one of the Top 100 breakthrough ideas for the Make It Your Own Awards — awards that encourage community development.

ity as a source of empowerment that would move the community from ideas to inclusive dialogue to community engagement.

Dahlberg gave an example in his application of a project he had worked on for almost two years, which brought people together, engaged a cross-section of residents and created a “community-level context for what’s possible.”

His application said the project was a participatory public art residency in which nearly all 1,300 elementary school students designed and painted 64 unique banners (made from recycled vinyl billboards) that were hung on Main Street lampposts.

Dahlberg said in his application he coordinated local businesses and individuals to support a pub-

lic opening exhibition, which the Windham Arts Collaborative hosted.

Dahlberg also has other projects, one of which includes a “Young Poets” group at the high school.

Dahlberg said in an e-mail the group received a \$2,000 grant from the Connecticut Commission

(Dahlberg, Page 16)

Dahlberg brings community together through creativity

(Continued from Page 3)

on Culture and Tourism Arts Division, and that they are working on raising the \$2,000 match through fund-raising.

Dahlberg said the group is working on a semester-long creativity project, called “Think and Be Heard: Celebrating Our Strengths and Creativity,” which will include Main Street banners designed and created by Windham

High School students, a screening of the film “Freedom Writers” and a visit from a Freedom Writers student, a screening of “The Hip Hop Project” documentary and a visit from the film’s subject Chris “Kazi” Rolle.

To view Dahlberg’s application visit, <http://miyo.casefoundation.org/weaving-a-new-willimantic> or to view other applications visit www.casefoundation.org/top100.