The process of Patchwork

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This is a project inspired by who I am, what’s in my blood, what has shaped me into the person that I am today. I grew up on a dairy farm in a small community in North Carolina. My childhood was spent in fields and pastures, feeding baby calves and getting dirty amidst a day’s hard work. It is something I’m passionate about, something I will always be grateful for. And because my family decided to take on the project of restoring an old dairy barn in the Spring of 2016, I thought this capstone project would be the perfect opportunity to explore the possibilities for this revived history.
This project began with a little inspiration from a documentary known as The Last Barn Dance. It takes you through the story of a dairy farmer in Burlington, NC who is fighting to keep his family business alive and doing whatever it takes to be different in the industry. His story struck close to my heart because my family’s farm is under the same risk of dying in the next few years with no new generation to take over the business and keep it alive. To learn more about this documentary visit lastbarndance.com or watch it at http://www.pbs.org/video/2365624124/
Second Saturday is a movement within the Raleigh Food Corridor. Using events, exhibits, and demos, they seek to engage the local community in exploring and supporting local food. Instead of the organization planning the events, community members can plan and implement their own event by following a set of guidelines that are given. It is centered around bringing the community together to give back in some way. It allowed me to question several things in thinking about my own project: How can it go further? Do visitors to these events leave empowered or are they just provided with an experience once a month? How would this look different in a rural community rather than an urban one, where many of its roots lie in farming? To learn more about Second Saturday, visit secondsaturdayraleigh.com.
I began to dive into four major areas of research. Farming and the importance of growing our own food was the first area I looked into which then lead into agritourism - or providing some sort of activity that brings visitors to a farm. From there I started looking into community - what exactly is it and how is it formed? Which led to place-making or the sense of place that makes historical connections and tangible places important to us. After reading through several journal articles on these different subjects, I boiled the information down into this concept map and began finding connections that interlinked all four of these categories together.
Is it possible to preserve the past in an age that is so focused on progressing towards the next big thing? Can the past and the future somehow coexist together? Farming is a trade of the past that is slowly being forgotten as we move forward into the future. Having grown up on a farm, and knowing that there is no one in my family taking over the business once my dad and his brothers retire, this is a subject that is very near and dear to my heart. Farming gave us our start, it is essential to human life, and it doesn’t look like it’s going to be around much longer. But it is so vital. A documentary titled ‘The Last Barn Dance’ calls attention to this issue and takes you through the story of a dairy farmer in Burlington, North Carolina who is fighting to keep his family business alive and preserve what gave him his start. My research dives into the four sectors of farming, agrotourism, building community, and creating a sense of place and finds the connections that link them all together.

To build awareness of the value of farming in today’s society and to save the heart of rural communities, I propose the creation of a movement titled ‘Patchwork’. It will seek to build momentum towards an agriculturally aware and educated community, use farming to bring the people of a rural community together once again, and encourage community by providing a place to gather and grow.

This project will take place in 3 different phases. Using the rural community where I grew up as the setting for this project, I plan on mapping the history of the land to show the shift away from agriculture in the last 50 years and the unique history that made this area what it is. This will consist of interviewing locals to hear their stories, gathering data about the land and history of farms in the area, and mapping the results in a unique and intriguing way that can tell the story to the community.

Next, I plan to build up the momentum for this movement and get the community on board with a new kind of community center. This will include creating the brand, and designing a website where the mapping and stories will live.

Finally, I plan to ideate on the experience that this community center can provide on a small scale without planning the entire function. This will involve sending out a print piece that builds hype and draws the community in, and planning a sample event that could serve as an example for the possibilities to come.
The first Patchwork community to be formed will be in a small farming community within Reidsville, North Carolina - my hometown. The target community is formed in a two mile radius around an old white dairy barn off of Highway 158. This barn has been in my extended family for over 60 years and with my dad's recent purchase of it, my family has taken on the project of restoring it in order to have a place for the community to gather. This will be the site for all the Patchwork events.
This chart shows the breakdown of the target audience within the community as well as the intended timeline of experience. The audience consists mostly of families – either natives to the community, or new residents with no connection to farming. The timeline of experience assumes the user receives the mailer which sends them to the website, learns about the movement, marks an event on their calendar, heads to the barn for the event, and then leaves with keepsakes that keep them coming back.
I gathered inspiration for the look and feel of this project through several different sources. I wanted to create a map that showed information in a unique way, a mailer with direct and friendly language, and overall look that spoke of farming in a modern way.
To gather the information about the history of this community and the farms that either still exist or have had to sell out, I sat down with my dad, Kenneth Wright, to map it all out. We drew out the property lines on a birds-eye view map of the community and filled in the information of farm owner, type of farm, and when it sold out or if it was still in existence. I would then take this information to create an interactive map to share with the community.
Another way I gathered information was through interviews with two members of the community from an older generation. They shared their experiences of growing up on a farm, the hard work that was engrained in them, and their thoughts on the future of farming in our community. To watch the videos, visit the folder in the driver labeled “Interviews.”
The Patchwork name comes from the two concepts the movement aims to tackle: community - where bringing people together despite their differences forms a unique fabric; and agriculture, where the patches of land and farms covering an area form a landscape that resembles a patchwork quilt. These sketches show the beginning process of developing a brand identity.
After several iterations, the brand came down to a modern and clean mark that resemble rows of a field with the word “Patchwork” typed out imperfectly. The old typewriter font is paired with a hand drawn marker font to make the brand feel personal. The overall look and language aims to be friendly and reminiscent.
This card is sent out to everyone within a two mile radius of the Patchwork site to spread the word about the new movement and direct them to the website to learn more. The fabric envelope is used because it is representative of the patchwork of people that will be formed by this movement.
The website is formed as one long scrolling page broken down into 5 sections. All the information that one would need to understand who we are can be found on that page or on pop-ups that can be easily closed out. Headers at the top of the website scroll through to give some general statements about our movement. Below is a mission statement with the option to learn more in a pop up window about the who, where, and why of the movement. Next the user scrolls to the events section that lists out all the events for the month. They can then dig a little deeper into the history of their community with the interactive map and video stories.
This interactive map is how the community is able to dig through its history and see how important farming is to this area. With the option to enter in their home address, community members can see how they fit into the map. Then they can interact with it by choosing filters like the kind of farm, or the year. Rolling over the patches of land reveals the type of farm it is and once it is clicked on, the information about the farm, like the owner and the status, are shown in the bottom right corner of the map. To interact with the map, visit the swf file in the "Website & Interactive Map" folder in the drive!
Events are planned that are reminiscent of gatherings of the past. These events educate the community about some aspect of farming or farm life. One example event that was planned is the First Annual Community Corn Shuckin’. The day’s activities are explained on this card when people arrive. There will be a corn shuckin’ competition, an opportunity to learn how to cut and freeze their own corn, and lots of corn related activities like corn-hole, corn cob pipes, and grilled corn.
Several keepsakes were designed to send community members home with. Ziplock bags with branded labels are filled with the fresh cut corn to take home and freeze and screen printed canvas totes are given away to community members to carry their produce home after each event. After the Community Corn Shuckin', families get to leave with enough ears of corn for dinner one night that week.
Within Reidsville, the groundwork has been laid to really kick this off with more events and opportunities to reach out to the community. Around the state or even country, Patchwork has the potential to be carried to many other rural communities that are slowly losing their farms.