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TALKING TRAIL TELLS TALL TALES

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By Heather Rule

[New York Mills](#) welcomes you to experience our story with the addition of the New York Mills Small Town Big Life Talking Trail. There are seventeen documented sites marked with the city's history. We invite you to explore.

Accessing the Talking Trail is easy. Either download the free app on your smartphone, or call the phone number listed on each sign. Here is a sneak peek at one of the locations.



457 NEW YORK MILLS RETREAT AND REGIONAL CULTURAL CENTER

Olaf Pary constructed New York Mills' oldest building in 1885 as a general merchandise store. In 1940, Yalmer Karvonen bought it to sell furniture, household appliances and farm implements. Thereafter, the Karvonens moved their business to Perham, Yalmer's son Harold did not want the building to remain empty.

This is when the story of New York Mills' as an "Arts Town" began. John Davis, a graduate of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, moved to NYM in 1987. Having lived in New York City and Minneapolis, Davis was attracted to New York Mills for its rural location and small town quality of life. In 1990 he created an artist residency program called the New York Mills Arts Retreat. Specifically the goal was to bring urban artists into the schools and community. By providing an opportunity for the artists to experience the benefits of rural life completes the first half of the goal. And finally, for the town to benefit from the talent and different perspectives of visiting artists.

When the Pary building became available in the early 1990s, Davis jumped in to create the [New York Mills Regional Cultural Center](#) in 1992, thanks to generous community partners and grants. The Cultural Center started an arts revival that remains strong and vibrant, and serves as a model for rural arts centers still today. New York Mills also experienced tremendous economic growth following the Regional Cultural Center's beginning in 1992.

MAKING HISTORY TODAY

The Center has attracted national media attention from the Today Show, C-SPAN, the New York Times and National Public Radio through its annual Great American Think-Off armchair philosophers' debate. As a result, giving a presence far beyond Otter Tail County and

Minnesota. Thus, making New York Mills a national example. Demonstrating how the arts can be embraced in a rural community and reinvigorate the economy.

Consequently, the Center presents a year-round performing arts series, displays visual art in a historic gallery on Main Avenue, offers classes and workshops for all ages with a focus on lifelong learning, including outreach in schools, care centers and more. It also hosts a variety of annual community festivals and events. Visit [Kulcher.org](https://www.kulcher.org) to learn more about how the Cultural Center cultivates the arts in rural America.

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