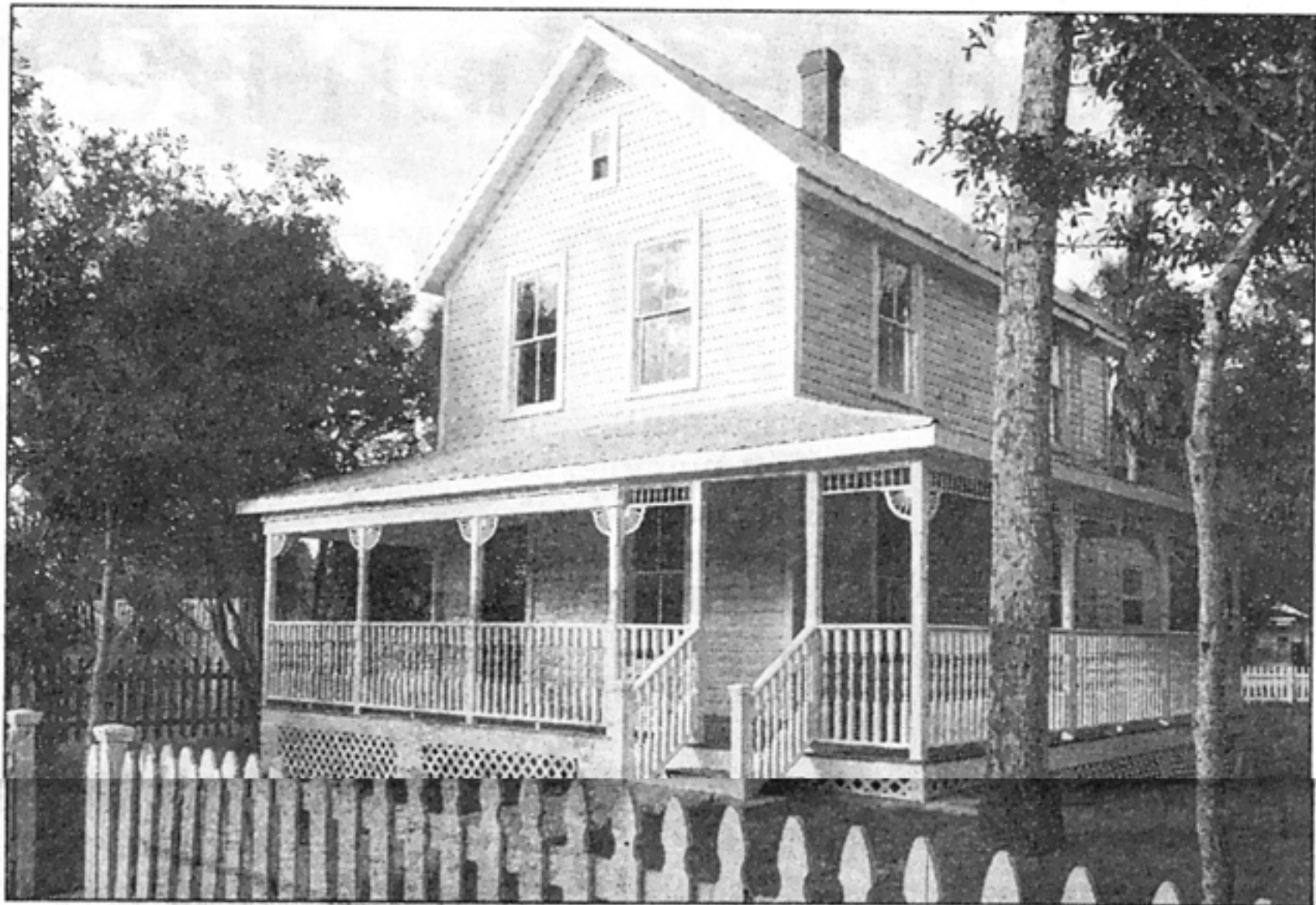




PHOTOS BY MICHAEL E. ARTH

'New Urban Cowboy'

(above) and after (right) shots in Michael Arth's film, set in DeLand.



Finding and filming peace locally and around the world

By Roger Moore

Sentinel Movie Critic

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Michael E. Arth was an artist, designer and utopian dreamer who decided a few years ago to give some of his ideas about livable cities and his brand of New Urbanism, which he calls "New Pedestrianism," a real-world tryout.

"I needed to come down from my ivory tower," he says.

He saw a run-down chunk of DeLand's downtown, four blocks nicknamed "Cracktown," and it called out to him. In 2001, he bought some properties, moved there with his wife and got to work.



Arth

"My wife *hated* it for the first two years we were here," he says, laughing, recalling the drug trade that his efforts interrupted and the Herculean task of turning old shacks into cottages that are now a centerpiece of

DeLand's "Garden District."

Arth videotaped the neighborhood, the projects as they progressed and his own epiphanies and setbacks, and filmmaker Blake Wiers took that and newer footage and made a film.

New Urban Cowboy: The Labors of Michael E. Arth, the documentary that resulted from that, is a film that captures Arth's irrepressible energy, his big ideas and his tireless optimism in reforming his adoptive hometown (he moved here from California) one block at a time. It will show at this year's Global Peace Film Festival in Orlando.

see for
yourself

The Fifth Orlando Global Peace Film Festival

When: Wednesday
through Sept. 30.

Where: CityArts Factory,
downtown Orlando at the corner
of Orange Avenue and Pine Street;
Orlando Science Center
in Loch Haven Park, Orlando;
Rollins College, Winter Park.

Cost: \$8 per film, with \$99 and
\$199 packages available.

Online: peacefilmfest.org.



Festival director Nina Streich says *New Urban Cowboy* "reflects a central theme of the festival — people finding positive solutions to making change in their world."

In making this film, Arth came to several conclusions about his ideas. He was better off planning new planned communities than attempting to fix broken old ones, "which are so geared towards the automobile that it's going to take decades for them to decline enough to fix."

He was troubled by how a downtown that was just starting to serve his live-shop-and-work-close-to-home concept was crippled "when they built a Super Wal-Mart out by the interstate."

And he saw, firsthand, that the nation's drug war "isn't working. All I'm doing redeveloping this place is moving addicts further down the road."

As he shows in the film, Arth, 54, sees the solution to many social ills as being related to the environment you live in. Widely praised for transforming a downtown neighborhood, he has run into more resistance to another of his more radical ideas, creating a village of small "Katrina cottages" and attractive barracks to house Volusia County's homeless, putting them on county land close to the jail, but also to mental health and substance-abuse assistance.

That idea, inspired by substance-abuser communes in Amsterdam, is still being studied, he says. Meanwhile, Arth is consulting with other communities looking at creating planned towns, and dreaming.

"The only risks to these ideas is that they won't work any better than what's already

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