

THE ARTS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Wisconsin's communities are quietly remaking themselves as vibrant places to live, work and play

In terms of American democracy, the arts are for everyone. They are not reserved for the wealthy or for the well-endowed museum, or for the subsidized theater. As America emerges into a different understanding of her strength, it becomes clear that her strength is in the people, and that it lies in the places where people live. The people, if shown the way, can create art in and of themselves...opportunities must exist in places they have never existed before."

Robert Gard, 1910-1992

The arts are authentic

The economic, educational, political, social and cultural pressures on Wisconsin are intense, and are particularly so in the small towns and rural areas that define Wisconsin. Traditional ways are making room for the new in dozens of the state's small towns and rural areas, as these communities wrestle with the fragile balance between the past and the future.

This is nowhere truer than in the amount and scope of arts activity taking place in small towns and rural areas. As our world changes rapidly around us, small communities in Wisconsin are quietly remaking themselves as vibrant places to live, work and play. In the past thirty years, arts programs, projects and facilities have exploded beyond the limits of the metropolitan and suburban areas of Wisconsin to become a statewide cause for pride. Wisconsin's small towns are seeing a surge in the numbers of new and revitalized arts organizations, renovated arts facilities, and other artistic endeavors, to make their communities economic, educational and tourism draws.

The arts taking place in a small town are no different than those in a larger community, although there are technical and artistic differences between the metropolitan arts organization and the small-town volunteer community group. The passion that produces the artwork is the same, and deserves the same level of respect.

In these communities, the arts are more personal. Many of the people involved don't consider themselves artists or arts administrators, or think that they are "in the arts." Those are terms that big-city people use. The rural folks are making things happen with their neighbors, producing community projects such as theatrical productions, or festivals, or school mural projects.

Wisconsin has a proud heritage of grassroots arts involvement since its early days as a state, thanks in large part to the ways in which the Wisconsin Idea connected civic involvement, public education, access to the newest ideas and fulfillment of creative potential for all of its citizens.

The UW-Extension's Office of Community Arts Development, led by Robert Gard, professor, folklorist, and author, laid a lot of groundwork in the middle part of the last century. The first artist-in-residence programs in the country were established by the University of Wisconsin, bringing renowned artists such as John Steuart Curry and Aaron Bohrod here to inspire - and to gain inspiration - from the people of the state. Bob Gard, known to the arts world as the "father of community development," had a mission to help rural people find ways to express themselves, and tirelessly traveled the state to make this vision come alive. Gard and others involved in civic affairs believed that the arts played an integral role in making a community

whole, and urged arts groups to work with athletic groups like football teams, churches, ethnic organizations, day care centers, senior centers, and others, in the service of this healthy whole community.

That philosophy continues - and has been strengthened - in the present day. Although the arts have always been close to the hearts of the people of Wisconsin, the vital economic, educational and social roles that the arts play in our lives have begun to be validated by the community at large as people seek authenticity in every aspect of their lives.

The arts ARE economic development

In his 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Dr. Richard Florida of Carnegie-Mellon University writes that creativity and innovation will be the fundamental skills needed for success and growth as our country moves towards a "creative economy," and that the presence of arts and cultural opportunities make a community more attractive to an educated and creative workforce. Dr. Florida says, "in the new economy, the quality of a region's lifestyle has as much to do with its success as its business cost structure, taxes or physical location. Places that succeed in attracting and retaining creative people prosper; those that fail don't. "

Tom Still, President of the Wisconsin Technology Council, says, " Wisconsin's economy has been shaped and reshaped over the years by citizens who adapted quickly to changing times, from the advent of modern farming techniques in the late 19th century to the industrial boom of the 20th century. We now stand at just such an economic crossroads in the history of the state. To build a 21st century economy anchored by technological innovation, Wisconsin must make the most of its people, resources and opportunities, and it must meet the challenges posed by the rise of the 'knowledge economy.'"

Wisconsin is beginning to use creativity and the arts to help resolve our budget problems, attract and retain business, grow the economy, and stop the "brain drain" of young people leaving our communities for better opportunities. Investment in cultural programs and opportunities can no longer be considered a separate priority, but should be considered vital to the overall health and well-being of the people of Wisconsin.

The arts have a growing and positive impact on Wisconsin's economy

Ten Wisconsin communities, and the entire state of Wisconsin, were included in "Arts & Economic Prosperity: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts Organizations and Their Audiences", a landmark survey released in summer 2002 by Americans for the Arts of the economic impact of the arts across America.

Wisconsin's survey showed that **the state's nonprofit arts industry generates \$289.8 million in economic activity every year, including \$38 million in local and state tax revenues.** The \$289.8 million total includes \$190.5 million in spending by arts organizations and \$99.3 million in event-related spending by arts audiences (excluding ticket revenue). **In addition, Wisconsin's nonprofit arts industry supports nearly 9,500 full-time equivalent jobs.**

The ten Wisconsin communities studied as part of the survey were Beloit, Chippewa Valley, Door County, Fox Valley, Green Bay, Janesville, Madison, Milwaukee, Waukesha, and Wausau.

It pays to note that the previous economic impact survey of the arts in Wisconsin, released in April 1996, recognized the state's nonprofit arts organizations' \$112.9 million in expenditures which supported over 5,506 full-time jobs in the state.

The arts are basic to education

Learning in the arts helps young people achieve high academic expectations and contributes to their positive social development. Studies have shown dramatic results in learning, both in the arts and in other academic and social areas, when students have had long-term exposure to arts-integrated curricula or arts-infused programs outside their schools. An analysis of the U.S. Department of Education's database of 25,000 students revealed that those students with high levels of arts participation outperform "arts-poor" students by virtually every measure. Similarly, comparisons of student achievement in 14 high-poverty schools in Chicago showed that the students in schools with arts-integrated curricula advanced along many dimensions more quickly than did those in "arts-poor" schools.

Children who receive arts-integrated education develop quick minds, discipline, focus, judgment, personal drive, experience in teamwork, attention to detail, grasp of the "big picture," and an essential urge to continue learning. In addition to strengthening young people's capacity to learn, engagement in the arts allows young people to have positive outlets for their boundless energy and imagination. By cultivating their joy, talent and voices, Wisconsin's young people are better prepared to assume their roles as productive and creative citizens.

There's an arts building boom in Wisconsin

In addition to the increase in programming by already-established organizations, nearly 100 Wisconsin communities have recently completed or are currently in the midst of exciting arts facility projects, which represent over \$500 million in private investment and demonstrate state citizens' support for the arts in small cities, towns, and rural areas.

These include Madison's Overture Center, Wausau's ArtsBlock, the Milwaukee Art Museum's Calatrava addition, Solon Springs' Lucius Woods Performing Arts Center, Green Bay's Meyer Theatre, Osceola's St. Croix ArtBarn, Beloit's downtown Fine Arts Incubator, Chippewa Falls' Heyde Center for the Arts, Sauk City/Prairie du Sac's River Arts Center; and Sturgeon Bay's Third Avenue Playhouse.

Many of these are located in the state's small towns and rural areas; over half are attached to school buildings, making them comprehensive cultural centers used by the entire community.

The arts promote tourism

Cultural tourism, an expanding focus of Wisconsin's second-largest industry, is playing a major role in the growth of the arts on the rural landscape. In a January 2001 national survey, the Travel Industry Association of America asked a series of questions to determine the length of time that travelers extend their trips because of cultural activities or events. This study underscores the importance of arts, culture and heritage as an effective product for tourism professionals to market their communities both domestically and internationally. Sixty-five percent of U.S. adult travelers (92.7 million) included a cultural, arts, heritage or historic activity while on a trip of 50 miles or more, one-way, during the past year. Visiting a historic site such as a historic community or building was the most popular activity among travelers, followed by visiting a museum, seeing live theater and visiting an art gallery. Of the 92.7 million who included a cultural activity while on a trip during the past year, 32 percent added extra time to their trip because of the cultural activity or event up from 29 percent in 1998.

The Fall Art Tour in southwestern Wisconsin (Baraboo, Spring Green, Dodgeville and Mineral Point) and the Dunn County Artists Tour in northwestern Wisconsin (Menomonie, Colfax, and Downsville) are two excellent examples of successful tourism endeavors that use the arts as an economic development advantage. These events were begun by area artists who decided to take their destinies into their own hands, wanting to

make their living as artists in their own communities and knowing that people hunger for that personal connection between artist and art devotee.

The arts are a prime consideration in corporate relocation

Business, political and education leaders see a link between a quality arts environment and a growing, thriving economy. Wisconsin cities, competing for business investment and most livable awards, promote their arts along with their natural resources. A national survey conducted by the Conference Board, an organization of top corporate officials that tracks economic trends, found the availability of cultural activities ranked third among the concerns of large businesses. John Naisbitt, author of Megatrends and Megatrends 2000, says a vibrant arts community is critical when corporations decide where to locate and when people decide where to work.

Roundys and Rockwell International have relocated to Milwaukee, in part due to its arts scene. Amery, a town of 3,000 in northwest Wisconsin, attracted a Mayo Clinic-affiliated medical center due in part to the presence in the community of the nationally-acclaimed Northern Lakes Center for the Arts.

The arts build families and communities

Arts activities help family members share positive experiences, discover new talents and ideas, and grow together. They help cultural groups explore and build on their heritage and share that heritage with others. They encourage the expression, refinement and exchange of ideas and strengthen democracy. The arts are a basic component of vital communities.

The arts revitalize neighborhoods & encourage new investment

Milwaukee's Historic Third Ward and Green Bay's Broadway District are just two examples of neighborhoods brought back to life by nonprofit galleries and performance spaces. The arts draw restaurants, retailers and new residents, stabilizing neighborhoods while creating jobs and tourist destinations.

The arts are cost effective

One tenth of one percent of Wisconsin's state budget is allocated for the arts. In fact, it costs less to fund the arts throughout the state of Wisconsin than it costs to build 30 miles of highway. A little arts funding goes a long way because the arts, as an industry, deliver tremendous impact from a comparatively small investment. Government funds typically are matched from \$1 to \$10 with corporate, foundation and other community funds. When public funding is cut, there is a decrease in private support.

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