

The arts and community/economic development in Dane County

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The arts make a community great. They invent the future and preserve tradition, help embrace and celebrate diverse perspectives, enable distinct and numerous forms of expression, nurture healthy families, create a community that is a desirable place to live, and are essential to economic and educational vitality.

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.

Business, political and education leaders across the country see a growing link between a quality, diverse arts environment and a thriving economy. 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".

Counties across the country, including Montgomery County, MD; Hillsborough County, FL (Tampa); Broward County, FL (Ft. Lauderdale); Mecklenberg County, NC (Charlotte); Multnomah County, OR (Portland), to name just a few, have built successful county-wide and regional approaches to arts development. They have strengthened their support for the arts and elevated arts issues to the critical place in public discourse they deserve. The communities in these counties and the counties as a whole have been rewarded with a more diverse arts scene, richer artistic offerings, more stable arts organizations and a more stable community of resident artists. As a result, these communities have witnessed more interesting and varied urban and rural landscapes and built environments, improved educational outcomes for their children, livelier towns and neighborhoods, and strong economic growth.

Dane County already has a strong Cultural Affairs Commission, which has done a great deal to raise the profile of the arts in Dane County, and strengthen the county's communities, over the past 25+ years. The next step is to build on the solid foundation created by the Cultural Affairs Commission, and develop comprehensive connections between the arts, business, education, government and civic institutions. As we make and sustain these connections, we will reap greater economic, educational and civic benefits for the benefit of all in Dane County.

Just a few examples:

- Cultural planning process for facilities and programs
- Artists involved in regional planning and facility development process
- Workplace giving campaigns for the arts
- County Awards in the Arts -- honoring artists, arts groups, and individual, org, and corporate volunteers and supporters
- Arts information and education programs and services, such as an artist/arts org electronic database, half-price ticket booth, arts hotline, arts website, electronic and print newsletters

"To build a 21st century economy, 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.'" *Tom Still, Wisconsin Technology Council*

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