



Clipping Report June 2007



Arts are essential for local economy '05 figures up 72 percent from '00; arts groups should help forge future

In Fort Collins, the arts rock.

At least that's what the latest study on the local economic impact of arts and culture indicates. The study, commissioned by Arts Alive Fort Collins and conducted by a national arts advocacy group known as Americans for the Arts, revealed that nonprofit arts and culture groups generated \$16 million for the local economy and supported 467 full-time jobs in 2005. Those numbers have increased 72 percent since 2000, when the same group found that the arts contributed \$9 million to the local economy.

The findings are significantly far beyond financial considerations. Those who enjoy and support the social and cultural impact of the arts on the community should be pleased to find that access to diverse offerings appear only to be growing, which makes Fort Collins more attractive to visitors. That also means the creative influence on the community is enhanced, perhaps boosting tolerance, according to Colorado State University economic Stephan Weiler.

History has shown that the strongest communities are successful because they are able to unite a social hunger for culture with economic opportunity. In Fort Collins, both UniverCity Connections and the Downtown Development Authority's Beet Street concepts are seeking to capitalize on the arts to boost the city's economic health as well as its interest in the arts. For example, the Americans for the Arts study included how much residents and visitors paid for performances as well as food and drink, souvenirs and lodging (about \$16.70 per person per event for Fort Collins residents; and about \$26 per person, per event for out-of-town visitors).

Supporters are even considering the formation of a scientific and cultural facilities district that would provide a reliable revenue stream for arts groups to broaden their economic impact and social scope.

While it is too early to weigh in on the viability of a ballot issue, such a multi-pronged conversation about the important contributions of the arts to the community is essential. Arts groups must be at the table when it comes to planning Fort Collins' future.

Originally published June 25, 2007



Arts return economic favor to supportive city

BY PAT FERRIER

PatFerrier@coloradoan.com

If the arts are an important economic development tool as well as food for the soul, then Fort Collins is offering a veritable smorgasbord.

The nonprofit arts and cultural groups and their audiences in Fort Collins contributed nearly \$16 million and 467 full-time jobs to the local economy in 2005, according to a recent study commissioned by Arts Alive Fort Collins and conducted by the national arts advocacy group Americans for the Arts in Washington, D.C.

The economic impact is up 72 percent from \$9 million in 2000, when Americans for the Arts did its last study.

That's money spent on goods and services, salaries, meals, drinks, souvenirs and lodging, according to the survey that looked at 156 communities. It does not include ticket sales.

Nonprofit arts also contribute \$1.67 million in local and state government revenue.

The growth of the arts in the time between the two studies is a result of the community realizing the arts are important, said Wendy Ishii, founder and artistic director of Bas Bleu Theatre.

"It's no longer just us saying, 'This is good for you' like vitamins," Ishii said.

"It's something we always should have known because historically the great cultures of the world have treated arts and culture as equally important as science and technology. Now that awareness is beginning to happen" in Fort Collins.

People who don't necessarily care about the arts do care about the economy, she said.

"When they look at the study, they'll have to say, 'Holy cow, who would have thunk it?'" she said.

And when sentiment is backed up by statistics, people "are more likely to pay attention," she said.

While the local economic impact is significant, and it's made great strides in the past few years, it is half what comparable cities such as Boise, Idaho, and Burlington, Vt., contribute to their local economies.

Though a bit bigger than Fort Collins, Burlington's arts scene contributes nearly \$27 million and Boise contributes \$38 million in economic benefit.

Abilene, Texas, with a population of 115,000, contributes \$18 million and supports 540 jobs in the local economy.

Colorado State University economist Stephan Weiler said, on one level, the arts are just another

industry.

On another level, he said, the arts make a city more interesting for residents and for tourists drawn by performance and visual arts and culture.

Thirdly, creative activity tends to breed more creativity, Weiler said, and create a city that's more tolerant of differences and new ideas.

"The arts are a direct way of being part of that process and an indirect signal that a place is tolerant and interesting," he said.

That philosophy is part of what's fueling the Downtown Development Authority's Beet Street concept and the UniverCity Connections collaboration to make Old Town a cultural hub that draws tourists and acts as an economic engine.

"That has really helped to raise awareness across the community, and people have embraced the concept," Ishii said of the DDA and UniverCity's efforts. "Beet Street has a ways to go, but I think it has helped us."

Bas Bleu is seeing an increase in community support through donations and grants, Ishii said.

In 2004, the theater company moved into a new building at 401 Pine St. Since, it has raised \$1.7 million toward a \$3 million capital campaign; received a \$19,000 grant, their biggest ever, from the Colorado Council on the Arts; and a \$250,000 commitment from the Downtown Development Authority to upgrade the exterior of the former Giddings Building.

A move to form a scientific and cultural facilities district, much like Denver and its surrounding counties, will help infuse more cash into the financially strapped arts scene, said Denise Freestone, director of OpenStage Theatre.

The measure will likely be on the November election ballot. If the revenue stream does come through, "the economic impact is going to grow substantially," Freestone said. "The individual groups will be able to basically fine tune and hone what they're presenting."

The Arts Alive survey shows an annual attendance at arts and cultural events of 638,118, up from 416,678, in 2000, about 70 percent of whom are Fort Collins residents.

Each person spends about \$16.69 per event on items such as meals, refreshments and souvenirs, compared with \$26.10 by out-of-town attendees.

Originally published June 21, 2007

Councilman seeks to get RTA issue back on track; bringing it to voters

BY JASON KOSENA
JasonKosena@coloradoan.com

Councilman Diggs Brown is expected to announce tonight his intent to introduce a motion to keep Fort Collins involved in the Regional Transportation Authority discussion and bring the issue to voters in November.

"What I believe is this is an opportunity for everyone on council to sit back, take a breath, rethink their position and listen to the citizens of Fort Collins," Brown said. "I don't think that council gave the people of Fort Collins a chance to express how they felt about this issue during the last meeting."

The RTA proposal last was discussed at a study session Tuesday when a majority of council expressed a desire for Fort Collins to pull out of the RTA process.

Because it was a study session, no public comment was heard and no formal vote taken.

"It's my philosophical belief that when you do have a resolution or an ordinance, something that is going to impact everyone in Fort Collins, then everyone in Fort Collins should be able to share their views with council and vote on the issue," Brown said.

The RTA already has been added to council's June 19 meeting agenda.

Although inviting public comment on the issue will be valuable, council member Lisa Poppaw said it's unlikely council's direction on the RTA will change.

"I look forward to having the public comment which is always welcome," Poppaw said. "It's not going to change the fact that this is a fatally flawed plan. I welcome the opportunity to reiterate what all the problems are on this RTA proposal. I welcome that and look forward to the discussion."

Council also will hear updated reports from city staff on the status of the Downtown Development Authority, Beet Street and UniverCity Connections.

"I think it's exciting the things that are happening downtown," said council member Ben Manvel. "I am just excited that areas and aspects of the city that have been around for years are finally moving up to the front burner and we are going to start seeing some action on those issues."

Manvel said Fort Collins is ready for the new changes and development to the downtown area.

"We're not just coasting along," he said. "We have idea people in town who are making things happen. This is creative people doing things for the community they love and we can't go wrong with that."

Comments by: **ericlevine**

Posted: Tue Jun 12, 2007 11:12 am

A word count has again shown Coloradoan RTA articles biased in favor of their own pro-RTA position.

Although this article gives 101 quoted words to Brown and 65 to Lisa, weighted to be sure, the title itself really shows the bias. "Councilman seeks to get RTA issue back on track..."

Today's companion poll piece was even worse. Again, just looking at quoted text, the special interest paid pollster got 187 words to spin their side, while again only 55 words are quoted which are not from this pollster. It's all from Lisa.

Not only are there 7 members of Council, but there are quite a few public interest and environmental groups. At Council's worksession on the issue, there was an hour and twenty minute opposing/alternative presentation, also debated. The Coloradoan has been determined not only to hide this fact, but also to exclude these RTA members from any comment. They have yet to print a single word from any of these informed opponents.

This is very poor and biased coverage indeed.

Comments by: **alan apt**

Posted: Tue Jun 12, 2007 10:27 am

I appreciate Lisa Poppaw's honesty in the face of non-stop misinformation and biased media coverage, or lack of coverage of the real issues. We can and will do better than the current RTA; thanks to Poppaw, Manvel, Ohlson, and Roy. Why Brown, Hutchinson and Troxell want our taxes to pay for regional roads, when we cannot pay for our own, is fiscal folly at best; especially considering other potential community ballot issues.

Comments by: **ratchet**

Posted: Tue Jun 12, 2007 8:37 am

Lisa's right. The more people learn about this RTA plan the less they are going to like it.

Comments by: **jgless**

Posted: Tue Jun 12, 2007 7:58 am

Interesting that Poppaw gets singled out by bloggers, reporters, and oversampling pollsters. Where's the commensurate outrage aimed at the 5 "big strong men" on the Weld County Commission who unilaterally pulled out of the RTA even before there was a proposal on the table?

Comments by: **Steve Sycks**

Posted: Tue Jun 12, 2007 6:52 am

Although inviting public comment on the issue will be valuable, council member Lisa Poppaw said it's unlikely council's direction on the RTA will change.

Wow....The heck with what the public has to say, (we) have made up our minds and that's that. Well, it looks like mom has taken control of the city council! It must be hard to keep an open mind when you yield so much new found "power" or is it the power has found mom?

What "value" is the public input IF the public input is ignored BEFORE they hear it? Just playing the citizens of Fort Collins for fools?

Those 58 votes that got Lisa on the council isn't a mandate to run amuck. The public has a vested interest in this issue and the four have decided the public has no place in this?

