

## Searching for an 'art space'

*Local groups back study in Lake Elmo area*

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Linda Baumeister/Review

The volunteer board at the Lake Elmo Regional Art Center is supporting a study in Washington County in order to determine what new arts facilities they could support.

Salavador Dali, Leonardo Da Vinci and Pablo Picasso aren't from Washington County, but that doesn't mean there isn't art to be found there.

An assemblage of St. Croix Valley arts groups have hired Artspace Inc., a Minneapolis-based consulting firm, to conduct a study of communities in Washington County in order to determine what kind of new arts facilities they could support.

Groups backing the study include ArtReach Alliance, Lake Elmo Regional Art Center (LERAC), the Phipps Center for the Arts, Stillwater Area Public Schools Community Education, Trinity Lutheran Church, Theater Associates of Stillwater and the Performing Arts Steering Committee and Valley Chamber

Chorale, according to a press release from the St. Croix Valley Community Foundation (SCVCF).

"We want to see the kind of needs that currently exist and might exist in the future," said Jane Hetland Stevenson, president of the SCVCF.

Artspace will be analyzing what artists in the area need in terms as space - short term and long term; if some art could cohabitate in a singular facility and what "the ecosystem for arts in the Valley is," said Wendy Holmes, vice president of resource development.

The board at the LERAC has been involved in the study since its beginning stages about a year ago, says board chair Karen Johnston.

"We've been attending the meetings facilitated by them (the SCVCF) to discuss art needs," she said. "We're working together, as a group, to see how we can make the best use of the dollar we have available."

The first phase of the study is already under way. It includes an organization assessment focusing on 22 non-profit cultural organizations in the greater Stillwater area, according to the press release. Study questions about how cultural facilities fit into cities' landscapes are being directed toward city and community leaders, Hetland Stevenson said.

The second phase, she said, involves surveying local artists in the Valley area for their input about the possible components of a regional art facility.

The projected cost of the study is over \$50,000 and Hetland Stevenson said the art groups have raised over half that amount already, mainly through funding from foundations and private donors.

Art groups were trying to put together plans for a combined art center and now the partnership between SCVCF and Artspace might allow for a more unified vision, according to Hetland Stevenson.

"There is a perceived need that there does need to be some sort of (regional) facility," she said. "As the community foundation for the region, we saw that six or seven arts groups were putting together plans for a facility; they were going to all go to the same private funders. It would look like the arts community in the area didn't have its act together. (We decided) let's step back and decide what is needed; the kind of space that is needed and let's put everybody's ideas on hold until we can figure out what we can do."

When people think of the art community in Minnesota, Minneapolis and St. Paul are usually the first two cities that come to mind, said Hetland Stevenson. By conducting the study, and possibly constructing regional art centers, the SCVCF hopes to offer a destination outside of the Twin Cities to view the works of local artists.

"There is a strong feeling of many in the valley that there are enough artists, and there is enough quality art being produced here," Hetland Stevenson said. "It should market itself and prove to be a destination for people interested in the art. This is a remarkably rich region for the arts."

For Johnston, art is an invaluable part of the human experience.

"Art exposes me to things outside of day-to-day life; it challenges me to think about things differently," she said. "It enriches people's lives."

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