

# Stillwater Gazette

Study finds arts are big business in the Valley; Local groups hope data will spur further arts support  
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Photo by Jens Gunelson, University of Wisconsin-River Falls St. Croix Valley Community Foundation President David Griffith and Minnesota Rep. Julie Bunn (DFL-Lake Elmo), far left, were among the more than 200 local arts supporters who attended a half-day forum on the economic impact of the arts in the St. Croix Valley at the Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, Wis., Monday.

"Some of us understand the importance of the arts from the perspective of culture and artistic expression, but there are others for whom the important message is in the numbers. People who say, 'Demonstrate to me that this can ultimately have an economic impact on me, my workers, my business, and my community,'" Griffith said. "This helps arts organizations do that."

Stillwater Living Publisher Peter McNiff agreed. As a board member of ArtReach Alliance, an umbrella group for local artists and arts organizations, McNiff is part of a team working to establish a new arts center in downtown Stillwater.

"This report gives us a nice surge and it gives us some hard data that we didn't have," he said. "We got some very concrete, very current data that really states our case wonderfully."

Now that St. Croix Valley arts organizations have this information, the question is, how will they use it?

For McNiff, the answer is clear.

"We need to grab that information, package it well, and bring it to everybody who we want to influence with it - our local, county, regional, and state legislators on one side, and the broader community on the other - just to say, 'Look, the arts aren't just for the stereotypes that might come to mind; it really is going to be great for everybody,'" he said.

State Sen. Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury) told arts leaders they as a group need to do a better job of trumpeting their successes and the contributions they make to their local communities - and not just when it is time to ask public officials or grant agencies for more money.

"Arts organizations need to continue to toot their horns, even after the concert is done," she said. "Whenever arts organizations get another round of funding, many of those groups seem to breathe a sigh of relief and step back. And when that happens I think we then lose the opportunity to build on that."

State Rep. Julie Bunn (DFL-Lake Elmo) said the arts need to be a critical component of any economic development plan, because they are important to the kinds of creative and educated workers communities are trying to attract.

"The arts are not a luxury item. They are not a luxury item culturally and spiritually, nor are they a luxury item in terms of the economy," she said. "They are a key factor of the quality of life that attracts, maintains, and stimulates great-thinking people."

Both politicians and state and national arts advocates urged local arts leaders to speak up and get more involved in the local government decision-making process.

"This sets the stage for creating a knowledge base that can be shared and understood by more people than those already in the arts community," said Robert Meyer, executive director of the Lake Elmo Regional Art Center. "Instead of seeing art lovers as a strange and isolated group of people who are self-serving, this will help others see that they serve the community in roundabout ways."

Representatives from several local arts groups said they hope the will help inspire civic leaders to further embrace the arts and view them as a vehicle for economic development.

"This (report) is what we wanted to see, but now we want to capitalize on it and grow with it and go someplace else and partner wherever we can and cause it to grow even more," Meyer said.

AFTA's Cohen said that strategy could work well in the St. Croix Valley.

After traveling the country to visit many of the 156 communities and regions that participated in the nationwide study, Cohen said the region has a unique opportunity to build on its already strong arts community in a way that would draw art lovers to the area, both in the short and long term.

"This is an oasis of natural and cultural resources that is remarkably close to a major urban center," he said. "In most big cities, you have to drive a couple hours to get to a place like the St. Croix Valley. People here are so fortunate to have this kind of community and to be so close to a big city, too. ... To be able to work in the city and come out and have this kind of good quality of life and community livability is fabulous, and there's a real opportunity there."

*For more information on the study, click on one of the links below:*

[St. Croix Valley summary report](#) (961 KB PDF)

[St. Croix Valley one-page summary](#) (52 KB PDF)

[http://www.scvcf.org/community\\_partnership\\_arts\\_mean\\_business.htm](http://www.scvcf.org/community_partnership_arts_mean_business.htm)>Additional information from the St. Croix Valley Community Foundation

[http://www.artsusa.org/information\\_resources/research\\_information/services/economic\\_impact/default.asp](http://www.artsusa.org/information_resources/research_information/services/economic_impact/default.asp)>Additional information on the national study

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