

Why arts and culture matter

Published November 26, 2017 12:01AM

Kristina Newman-Scott

What comes to mind when you think of arts and culture in Connecticut? Perhaps the Garde Arts Center, the Mystic Ballet, or maybe the Florence Griswold Museum. In a state with an abundance of arts treasures, it's easy to answer this question without hesitation. There is so much to choose from, especially among landmark institutions that have high profiles and are well known far beyond the borders of our state.

But perhaps you're not passionate about classical dance, theater, or visual art. Why should the arts matter to you? The answer is that the arts affect every facet of our lives, sometimes in quiet ways. They occur in our schools, hospitals, senior citizen facilities and veterans' centers, and countless other places throughout our communities. An often overlooked aspect of arts and culture is the tremendous economic impact they have in our communities.

Arts and culture across Connecticut are actively creating jobs, attracting tourists, and adding to the quality of life that supports business growth for our towns and cities. For these reasons, the Office of the Arts is positioned within the Department of Economic and Community Development and supports the health of Connecticut's creative industries.

A valuable creative industry player that is worth highlighting at this time is our nonprofit sector. Nonprofits are generally viewed as an economic drain, but in reality the arts and culture nonprofit sector delivers economic gains for Connecticut. The data from a recent Arts and Economic Prosperity study conducted through the Americans for the Arts shines a light on the value the arts have in our communities.

Our nonprofit arts and culture sector is a \$797 million industry — one that supports more than 23,000 full-time jobs and generates \$72.3 million in local and state government revenue. Without factoring in the price of admission, the average resident who attends an arts-related event spends \$23.78, and the average non-resident spends \$49.78 per person. Whether it's dinner, lodging, picking up a souvenir, or paying the babysitter, those who attend arts-related events support local businesses.

Let's take a look at that jobs number again. More than 23,000 are employed at nonprofit arts and cultural institutions, an industry known for its deep community roots. Nonprofit museums and performing arts venues invest in their communities and maintain a workforce that remains close to home. Jobs are not shipped overseas and, once invested in a place, these nonprofits maintain a presence and add value to a community. In many cases these nonprofits breathe life into blighted properties, add foot traffic in downtowns, and create places where residents are proud to say they work, live, and play in their community.

Our office will point a spotlight on the many ways the arts are a powerful economic driver and affect our lives over the next few days, during Connecticut's Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 Tour. Randy Cohen, the vice president of policy and research at the Americans for the Arts, will be in Connecticut to talk about the recent study. I invite you to join us at College Street Music Hall in New Haven for a free public presentation from 3 to 5 p.m. Wednesday or catch a live streaming of Randy's talk at 9 a.m. on theday.com Thursday when he makes a visit to New London, made possible by The Day.

Grounded in data, Randy Cohen weaves together the national, statewide, and local story of the arts and culture nonprofit sector and how it plays an important role in our towns and cities. So the next time you think about the arts, consider the many ways the arts are making your community a more vibrant place and how the arts fuel the economy and support local

businesses.

Kristina Newman-Scott is director of culture in the Department of Economic and Community Development, where she oversees the Connecticut Office of the Arts and the State Historic Preservation Office.