



Pain in the arts



Your Turn
Jim Ward
Guest columnist

Without financial backing, the arts are at risk of disappearing

The arts feed our souls. They entertain, they cajole, they reflect who and where we are. And they do one more thing that is rarely acknowledged: They feed the economy.

The arts are critical to the future of Phoenix. We will not succeed unless we value arts as a key to attracting and retaining the economic development we need. Yet that conversation has withered. It's time to re-engage – and revive the idea of seeking public financial support for arts and culture.

"This conversation is vital to Phoenix's future," says John Graham, president and CEO of

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Arts

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Sunbelt Holdings. "To attract the knowledge economy jobs of the future, cultural and economic development leaders need to sing in harmony."

We have a good foundation to start from. Consider these numbers:

—Non-profit arts organizations within Phoenix spent \$164.6 million for goods, services and salaries in fiscal year 2015, according to Arts and Economic Prosperity 5 released last year. Audiences totaling nearly 7 million people spent another \$237.2 million before or after performances for total direct spending of \$401.8 million, according to the same study.

Mesa and the West Valley added another \$52.6 million for a total of more than \$450 million accounted for in the report. Scottsdale, Tempe, Chandler and Gilbert did not participate, so we know the actual number is larger still.

—Non-profit arts groups make a greater economic contribution than a Super Bowl, and they do it every year. They contribute more than the 2017 Final Four did. And they deliver more than four times as much as the last BCS championship game played in Glendale.

As Sue Pepin, president and CEO of the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, recently noted: "No longer do community leaders need to feel that a choice must be made between arts funding and economic prosperity. The arts mean business."

And this direct contribution to the economy is just the beginning. When companies consider relocation, a vibrant cultural scene is vital, especially for knowledge-based companies.

Yet, in Phoenix, the arts and economic development rarely are mentioned in the same sentence. We need to change that.

Stuart Graff helped choose new headquarter cities for Valspar and Newell Rubbermaid. The top three factors in both decisions were the impact on the current executive team, the quality of the labor pool, and quality of life.

"This is where arts and culture are vi-

tal," says Graff, now president and CEO of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in Scottsdale. "Arts are not a nice to have, they're a must have. Companies are not going to relocate and make that investment if their employees aren't going to have a high quality of life for themselves and their children."

A community's reputation largely flows from the quality and diversity of its cultural offerings. Think of New York, and you see Broadway, the New York Philharmonic, world-class museums. Chicago: Millennium Park and its bean, the Field Museum, the Chicago Symphony, Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. Iconic cultural institutions define communities.

Several steps can build the vital arts and cultural community knowledge companies value:

--A sales tax.

Let's revive the idea raised a decade ago to add a one-tenth-cent statewide tax to support the arts and culture. It was first floated after young professionals told a 2006 survey that the Phoenix metro area fell short in providing the strong arts and cultural sector they valued. We were – and remain -- at risk of losing smart young people.

Those young people ranked Denver a full point higher on a 10-point scale of perceived vitality.

The difference?

Denver has supported the arts via a one-tenth-cent sales tax in the seven-county metro area since 1989 – with overwhelming voter approval every time it's been on the ballot. In fiscal 2015, the tax generated \$50 million and supported 272 arts, culture and scientific non-profits.

Public support did not reduce private support of the arts, resulting in metro Denver residents enjoying "a much richer and more diversified selection of cultural alternatives" that goes "a long way toward making Denver a more attractive place to work and play," Lauren Schmitz of The New School for Social Research concluded in a 2012 study.

Denver is not the only city to publicly support the arts. Places as diverse as Salt Lake City and San Francisco have similar districts. Columbus, Ohio, with half the



Phoenix Symphony maestro Tito Munoz conducts the ASU Symphony Orchestra in a run-through of "Dependent Arising" by composer Earl Maneein (with the mohawk) and violinist Rachel Barton Pine. TODD VIGIL

population of Phoenix, spends 16 times more on the arts. By emulating these examples, we can boost our attractiveness to high-tech, knowledge-based companies.

-- Increased corporate support.

Ticket sales do not cover the cost of non-profit arts operations. We depend on contributions, and perhaps we have erred in framing donations as philanthropic. When a business supports the symphony, opera, ballet, theater or a museum, it promotes its own self interests. It helps make the Valley more attractive to re-locating businesses, causing opportunity to ripple through the economy.

Corporate support, unfortunately, has been Phoenix's Achilles heel. Last year, businesses donated \$5.6 million to the arts. Compare that to Miami, with a quarter of our population but four times more corporate support for the arts. Or Columbus, where businesses donate \$13 million.

--Avoid boom and bust.

In exchange for greater support, arts groups need to stop the cycle of boom and bust, of flying high in good times and scrambling for survival in bad times. We exist to produce art, and we need to keep

our feet on the ground. We can't fulfill our mission if we fail to run a sustainable business.

Collaboration is a great way to do this. The Phoenix Symphony, Opera and Ballet have worked together on fund-raisers, which generates more income because we share costs for a single event.

We could do more. In Philadelphia, a dozen organizations sell tickets through a common site. There's no reason we couldn't create something similar in Phoenix, reducing overhead for everyone.

If there were no museums, no theaters, no ballet, no opera, no symphony, no public art, our great weather would not be enough to lure knowledge companies to the Valley.

In today's knowledge- and creative-based economy, the best jobs will flow to communities where arts and culture are fully embraced. We're not that community yet, but the goal is in reach. Let's go for it.

Jim Ward is president and CEO of the Phoenix Symphony, a partner in a venture capital firm and former president of LucasArts and senior vice president of LucasFilm.