

Art and Culture are Worth a Thousand JOBS

By Maury Forman

I have been pretty fortunate in choosing locations where I want to live over these many years. I have resided in some of the best places in America: Houston, New York and Seattle. I have also relocated to some more rural areas such as Eugene, Galveston and Madrid, New Mexico.

I mostly moved from a rural area to an urban one because I missed the one amenity that communicates across barriers of language, class and culture... the arts. As a theater major, I realized if I was unable to succeed on stage, at least I could enjoy, appreciate and support the creative arts as a patron.

There used to be a time in economic development when people went to where the jobs were. But now that equation has flipped a bit as companies begin to relocate to where the right people are. People who create jobs want to live in places that have a diverse cultural mix and an innovative and educated workforce. Business location decisions are increasingly influenced by factors that cater to people's personal lives as well as their professional ones.

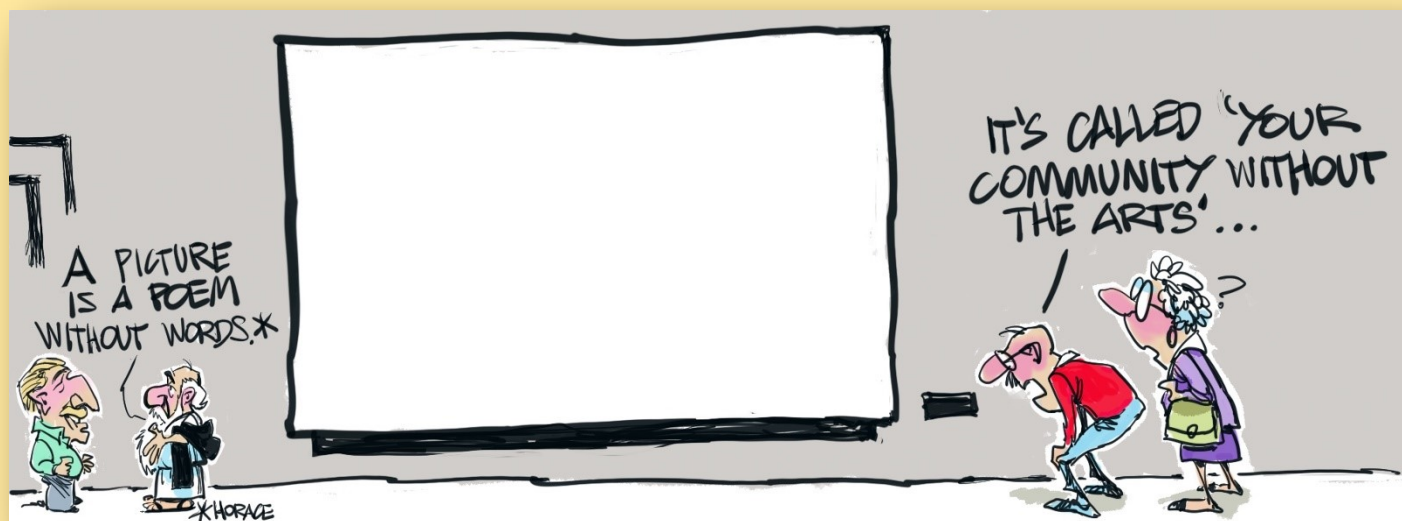
Art and culture are more than just a go-to on date night. The creative arts have a wider, more measurable impact on our economy, health, society, education and our well-being. Those communities that partner with arts and culture organizations and incorporate them into their economic development strategy are recognizing that it is a community resource and treasure.

I bring this up now because a new government report says that the arts and cultural sector contributed over \$763.6 billion to the American economy — more than the agriculture, transportation or warehousing sectors. The arts created 4.9 million jobs and those employed in the sector earned more than \$370 billion, according to the findings (I guess all artists are not starving after all). The arts sector includes not only visual artists and cultural performances but also large economic sectors such as fashion, publishing and broadcasting which are among the fastest growing sectors of the American economy.

Rural communities that are experiencing brain drain and high unemployment should take note. The careers of today and tomorrow must not draw a line between urban and rural. Urban communities do not live solely by software manufacturing just as rural communities cannot live by agriculture alone. A thriving community needs artists, museums, music and visual arts. The community that scorns the humble artist in favor of the trendy programmer will have neither good art nor good programmers.

Can you put a dollar figure on what might happen to a patron after hearing a Beethoven sonata? A good painting, a great play, a sweeping symphony or a jazz concert can broaden our mind, enrich our imagination and heighten our senses. Quality of place has become important again in economic development and those

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places that recognize the arts will see the effects of brain gain, innovative entrepreneurs and diverse employment. Adding more foot-tapping, smile-inducing moments to our lives is sound public policy.

Here are my top ten ideas/trends that can move the needle for growth in helping rural economies grow in the next decade.

Communities should:

1. Consider the creative industry a vital part of their economic development strategy by identifying and mapping cultural assets).
2. Make small business assistance programs more accessible to artists and offer training programs to improve their business and marketing skills.
3. Work with downtown organizations and manufacturers to redesign spaces and establish networks to link local artists more strategically with creative businesses and property developers
4. Encourage art and design districts and historic preservation to turn around distressed neighborhoods.
5. Recognize the value of art and design in the development of workforce skills.
6. Incorporate the arts into a regional and state tourism strategy that focuses on rural communities and adding artists to economic development boards.
7. Attract the arts community by offering incentives supporting business collaboration.
8. Use traditional entrepreneurship tools such as incubators, co-working spaces, maker spaces, and pop up stores as well as startup capital and training to target makers, dreamers and doers
9. Create more art enterprise partnerships with businesses that include thinking local when seeking to design user-friendly products and driving innovation in areas from product development to advertising practices.
10. Promote the idea of "mentorships" for youth that can provide hands-on experience for students interested in pursuing the creative arts sector.



In addition to its other great work in supporting community artists, the ArtsWA creative districts program offers resources and guidance as well as grants in a geographically defined area where art, cultural, social and economic activity takes place. It's a vehicle to grow jobs and create opportunities in the arts. And it showcases the innovation and entrepreneurship Washington is known for.

The Arts Commission has attributed 207,000 jobs in Washington's creative economy, an increase of 4% from the previous year and many of these economic drivers are located in rural areas.

So whatever happened to those communities that I relocated from to get more arts and culture in my life? In Eugene, the Oregon Supported Living Program has become a leader in inclusive community arts for people of all abilities. The city also established its commitment to the visual arts through the Percent for Art Ordinance, which states that it is an "appropriate function of government to foster arts and the development of artists." Madrid, known as a ghost town when I was there, now has a population of about 300 and has more than 40 shops and galleries, several restaurants, a spa and museum. As for Galveston, it has created a 70-block historic downtown and is a veritable treasure chest of culture, from the 19th-century architecture that made The Strand a National Historic Landmark to its museums, galleries and theaters.

These are great examples of what rural communities can do to not only welcome the arts, but also integrate them into their economic development strategy.

Either that or they are great examples of what happens when I move away.

About Maury Forman

Prior to Maury's retirement after 26 years with the Washington State Department of Commerce as the Senior Manager for Rural Strategies, he was a Co-Founder of Reunion Theater in Houston Texas and also started Cartoon Inc in Washington State, curating cartoon art shows for museums and libraries. He currently spends his time writing and volunteering at the [Greater Seattle Bureau of Fearless Ideas](http://www.greaterseattlebureauoffearlessideas.org), a non profit that teaches children the art of writing stories. Maury's latest book, [Noah's Town: Where Animals Reign](http://www.noahstowntale.com), is a 21st century fable about disaster preparation and recovery. Milt Priggee's award winning cartoons can be found at <http://miltpriggee.com/>