

While there are many factors that influence a company, or an individual, to select one community over another, the strength of arts and culture in a community is more important now than ever. The arts and culture sector and our economic vitality are connected in so many ways. As we continue to add quality jobs to the region, especially those that require innovation and creativity, our support for and investment in arts and culture becomes increasingly important.

As a community we have always had a strong interest in arts and culture, and our gaming and entertainment background has certainly helped to bring performers and artists to the region. While that big band era has passed, we continue to see community-wide interest and engagement in the arts in many ways. However, it may not be enough to really differentiate us from other communities. Every community has a bevy of museums, performing arts programs, and arts in the streets. If we truly want to be the next great city, we need to embrace the arts as an expression of “who we are” and what we value, the soul of our community.

But before we decide we need to do something more with arts and culture, we must review why this is so important, especially to economic development. According to Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, “a high-tech, highly educated workforce prefers a location with creative amenities...and a flourishing arts and culture sector can affect where workers in the information economy want to live.” The workforce we increasingly need to grow, our technology and advanced manufacturing sectors, makes decisions on where to live based on the feel of a community, far more than the Baby Boomer generation that moved to where the jobs were.

The arts and culture feel of a community add value in so many other ways. It adds creative and innovative jobs like those at the Generator, where Burning Man art is created and assembled, or the Philharmonic where the musicians are employed full time. The arts also drive tourism. The recent flood of Burning Man participants is the latest example of this, but there are visitors that come here to see a Broadway show at the Pioneer Center, to visit the Nevada Museum of Art, Art Town or other arts and culture venues and events throughout the region. Art sparks creativity and innovation, one of the top skills employers seek when hiring. And communities that embrace the arts have higher civic engagement, lower crime rate and lower poverty rates, according to the University of Pennsylvania research.

So as a community, what can we do to “embrace the arts?” We must do more; given that this is increasingly important to our economic vitality. The list is long and limited only by one’s imagination, but here is a short list - a place to start.

1. **Engage in the Arts.** This seems simple, but we often choose to watch yet another football game or *The Housewives* of another community, while our kids are on X-Box, Play Station or frantically working to get to the next level on another mindless game. With the systematic reduction of arts in our schools, a once a week, month or even year trip to an arts and culture event or venue is more important than ever. It will help to introduce the next generation to the arts and support the starving artists and the programs they provide.

2. **Add arts and culture as an expense line at your business.** There are many businesses that support the arts, but unfortunately, most do not. Before the great recession, businesses were more involved and supportive of the arts community. Let's get that back. Direct support as in a donation to your favorite arts program, season tickets, memberships, board involvement or just buying tickets for your employees will help. Better yet, ask your employees what they want to experience - you may be surprised.

3. **Encourage government support for the arts.** In times of tight budgets, the support for the arts is often the first expense to go. While we are not financially back yet, we are on the mend with sales taxes on the rise. So what can we do to invest in the arts? Waive fees for art projects, increase the financial support for the many arts programs, especially those that reach out to our kids, and proudly display art throughout the community. Yes, there are costs associated with all of these, but the investment in art is something that will help us revitalize our downtowns, fuel our economic vitality, and encourage others to invest in our community in other ways.

Arts and Culture are increasingly important to economic development. Name one great city that does not have exceptional arts and culture? The "new" Reno-Sparks is happening, but we need to embrace the arts in a new way as well, if we are to get to the next level on our path to greatness.

Join us at the next EDAWN community luncheon: Arts, Culture & Economic Development, on September 22nd at the Eldorado Resort Casino.