

0 funding, where art thou?

For the benefit of full disclosure, let me admit that I have a soft spot for the arts, having at one point in my life trained as a violinist with the intention of eventually playing professionally with a philharmonic orchestra.



Editor's Notebook
Cindy Barth

Although I no longer am chasing that dream, I still pursue other arts-related interests on a frequent basis because I believe in their importance to community life.

While Central Florida is not a huge mecca for the arts, we still have valuable arts assets and stand to lose more of these groups if we can't figure out a way to secure funding for them. It's a problem complicated by an economy that still shows only slight signs of life, with unemployment almost three times higher than normal and budget

cutbacks by every business in town. Let's face it: It's hard to get people or companies to give money to the arts when most of them are dealing with their own budgetary shortfalls.

Here are the startling numbers behind what's happening in the arts community: In 2007, Florida was 11th in the nation in per-capita arts spending. This year, it's 44th, having watched state funding go from \$32.2 million in 2006-2007 to just \$850,000 this year.

On the local front, 20 Orange County arts groups asked the state for \$1.9 million this year but only got \$95,000, collectively.

In the past few years, we've watched The Orlando Opera file for bankruptcy, arts groups having to team up to share resources just to get work done for scheduled performances, and funding agencies cut back on the amount they can give because of their own drops in collections.

The lost funds in all of this total about \$7 million during the last two years.

Unfortunately, arts groups become an easy target for cutbacks when state and local governments face billions in budget shortfalls and companies must weigh paying worker salaries and benefits versus supporting theater, art, music and the like.

However, as United Arts of Central Florida CEO Margot Knight points out, "we give back more than we get in government funds."

For example, a recent study by Citizens for Florida Arts Inc. shows the state's nonprofit arts and culture industry generated \$3.1 billion in economic activity in 2008, including 88,236 full-time equivalent jobs, \$196 million in local government revenue and \$249 million in state government revenue.

Ironically enough, driving economic growth has become every legislator's buzzword in the past year, and we know from study after study that arts and cultural offerings are among the biggest draws for corporate relocations as quality-of-life issues.

All of this is not to say that the Legislature didn't face a thankless job in deciding what to keep, what to cut and what to table in the 2010 budget.

The sad reality is that many of these arts organizations may not exist a year from now. And those that do may offer fewer shows, concerts and exhibits because they've been forced to cut back on staff and hours of operation. Then what will be left to fill the seats of the planned new downtown performing arts center?

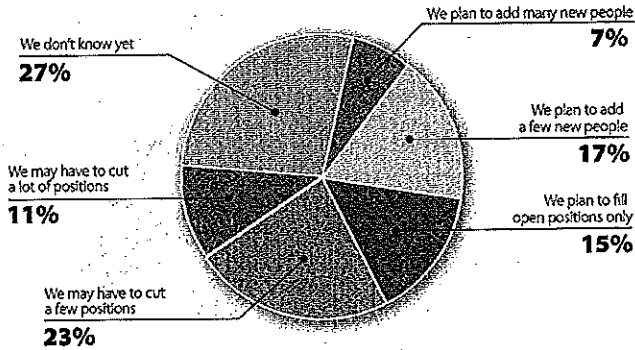
To become a world-class city, Orlando must find a way to maintain — and grow — its arts and cultural offerings. A smart way to start would be to make state budget cuts fair across the board and not disproportionate like what's happened with arts funding this year.

Our region stands to be a lot less desirable if the music stops, the curtain no longer rises and must-see exhibits no longer put Orlando on their itinerary.

Central Florida Business Pulse

An unscientific, Internet poll designed to check the mood of the community and spur discussion.

Will your business be hiring in the second half of 2010?



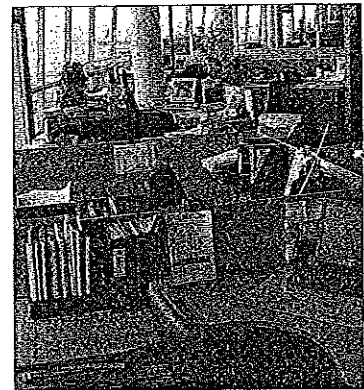
What you said:

Dick H.: I see many local governments having to make tough choices and lay off people to make budgets work. Also with more upcoming layoffs on the Space Coast and the winding down of census workers, I see unemployment rising further in the second half of the year in Central Florida.

Michael D.: There's been significant improvement from this time last year. We've already added almost a dozen people and are looking forward to adding more. This may not take so long to recover from as had been expected.

Donna V.: My company isn't sure yet what we'll be doing in the second half. Business has picked up some, but not enough yet to need more people. We're keeping our fingers crossed.

John M.: Everyone keeps saying things are getting better, but I'm not seeing it yet. And looking ahead, things don't look much better for summer and fall.



NEXT WEEK'S QUESTION:

Which piece of the Obama administration's financial reform do you think will be most effective?

To participate in OBJ's weekly survey, visit our Web site, orlandobusinessjournal.com, and look for the link under "Business Pulse Survey."

This week's online stories

Most viewed

- Disney launches monthly payment program
- US Airways boosts Space Coast ad campaign
- Magic sign PepsCo as 3rd founding partner
- Seaside issued agreement order from OCC
- BP oil spill costs reach \$24 billion

Most e-mailed

- Surf attraction opening at Fantasy World
- .Com Marketing selected for GovFL
- Pizzud starts work on Exploration Park
- Seminole high schools in top 3% nationwide
- 4PSA opens U.S. headquarters in Orlando
- Floridians' confidence in economy plummets



Stories posted and updated throughout every business day
orlandobusinessjournal.com