



Bringing People Together Through the Arts

Although the expression of art begins with an individual's vision, the process can reach out to many community stakeholders to create a blend of assets, strengths, histories and cultures. Building community through the arts becomes the collective expression of the area's identity. This article describes three ways that communities are built through the arts: local festivals, public-private partnerships and projects that engage residents.

One way that communities strengthen the links and relationships between people is by celebrating the arts through festivals, often inspired by cultural heritage, music, local agriculture or food. These celebrations build a sense of community and bring together local residents and visitors. Santa Barbara celebrates its version of Carnavale in June. Eureka's trend-setting Kinetic Sculpture Race is held during Memorial Day weekend. Gilroy has a Garlic Festival every July. Hundreds of festivals are held annually, generating tremendous community participation and revenue.

An Essential Component: Public-Private Partnerships

The synergy of collaboration is also evident through public-private partnerships and artists' residency programs. Although



Works by Glenn Berry at the Morris Graves Museum of Art, Eureka.

Patrick Davis, executive director of the Santa Barbara Arts Commission, often finds public-private partnerships challenging to implement, he believes there is really no substitute for them. Even when there appears to be a shortage of financial resources, leadership from the public and private sectors is critical. "You must go in knowing the public sector has a real responsibility and the community has enormous resources," says Davis.

The challenge of building community is similar in both large and small communities. However, the key to successful arts programming lies in the value people place on the arts. The funding and human resources to transform artistic vision into reality naturally follow. Two areas that place enormous value on the arts as part of their culture are the Humboldt County/Eureka area and the Santa Barbara region.

Engaging the Community

Humboldt County is in a fortunate position. The community has very strong business partners and 55 percent of the area residents consider themselves artists, according to Debbie Goodwin, executive director of the Humboldt Arts Council, a



Sculpture works by Mel Schuler at the Morris Graves Museum of Art, Eureka.

county arts agency. When the Humboldt Arts Council undertook the daunting task of saving the local Carnegie Library, which was slated for demolition, and converting it to an art museum, they believed from the outset that the community would be supportive.

In 1996, a \$1.5 million capital campaign was initiated to create a state-of-the-art 13,000 square-foot exhibition and meeting center, setting a new standard for the region. This endeavor was quite an accomplishment for Eureka, a small, rural community with an average income of \$25,000, reports Goodwin. Construction began in March 1999, culminated by a huge celebration on opening day, Jan. 1, 2000. The former library is now the Morris Graves Museum of Art, named for a local, internationally known artist.

"This was truly a grassroots effort from the beginning," said Goodwin. "People gave money who had never given money to the arts and are now strong supporters." Everyone in the community was invited to suggest how to use the library building and rallied around the cause. General Hospital in Eureka, Tri-City Publishing and Humboldt Bank all contributed time and talent to develop and implement the marketing campaign, raising the project's visibility. For residents who purchased bricks for the sculpture garden, the bank offered free checking accounts for life as a donation incentive. The Humboldt Arts Council is now engaged in a \$2 million endowment campaign to sustain the museum and its arts programs.

Arts Programs Offer Youth Something Different

Santa Barbara blends its economic future, its architecture, its history, its public life and the arts into a lifestyle. Noted arts designer Michael Pittas says "infrastructure of the spirit" is what gives Santa Barbara its place in history. Santa Barbara is also unique in that the city contracts with the county-operated Santa Barbara Arts Commission to serve both entities.

The Santa Barbara Arts Commission offers a number of residency programs to engage youth in the arts. However, one stands out as particularly noteworthy, connecting with its own history and people. The Chumash Maritime Association includes those who live in the Santa Barbara area and nearby Channel Islands. The Chumash Indians once inhabited the Santa Barbara area. Canoe building as a native art form was all but lost until recently. A group of artists teach youths, ages 13-18, how to build wooden canoes called *tomols*. The artists add an interpretive component so the youths learn about the history of Central California's coast and how it is intertwined with the Chumash and their canoes. Once the

canoes are built, youths and adults take paddling trips along the coast.

"Our job is to create a cultural ecology that is really unique to Santa Barbara County, and the Chumash are very important to that," says Davis.

Arts Champions Lead the Way

Although organizations implement arts programs, they are often spearheaded by individual arts champions, who give their time freely and tirelessly, advocating for public art, education or residency programs for youth and emerging artists. A determined champion of the arts often keeps projects moving and brings a voice the community hears.

Santa Barbara's Mayor Harriet Miller is one advocate whose tireless leadership has time and again led to substantial support for public art and arts organization funding through redevelopment dollars and other sources.

"She understands the economic consequences of investing in the arts," says Davis. "If you have an arts champion who also understands the process of developing the arts, they identify opportunities we would otherwise miss."



Chumash Maritime Association Artists in Residence Grant Program teaches youths to build traditional wooden canoes.



Ballet Folklorico dancers at a Cinco de Mayo festival in Dixon.



Music draws a crowd at the Mission San Carlos, Carmel.

For More Information

Communities interested in learning more about establishing or expanding local arts programs may find these resources helpful:

- The California Arts Council offers program and funding information of interest to cities and counties at www.cac.ca.gov.
- The California Association of Local Arts Agencies is a membership organization of art agencies (www.calaa.net) that offers a "Tool Kit" for communities considering the creation of a local arts agency.
- A compendium of local arts projects and resources will be available in fall 2000 from the California Arts Council and the Institute for Local Self Government.

This article is the third in a four-part series, which is a collaborative project sponsored by the California Arts Council, a state agency, and the Institute for Local Self Government. The California Arts Council is committed to making quality art available and accessible for all Californians. The Institute supports local communities through a variety of programs.