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Dufferin Arts Council: Why thearts are more important than ever

by SHIRLEY BOXEM

I'm a relative newbie to the arts scene. That is, recognizing the arts for its importance to me and everyone. It's no secret that the arts play a pivotal role in livable communities.

Cities and towns that demonstrate active and dynamic arts and culture are more attractive to individuals and businesses. Ask anyone that's on a physician's recruitment team and they'll tell you that candidates are looking for those qualities as much as any other.

Supporting local arts and culture is not just about enjoying art events and exhibitions; it's about investing in the cultural, economic, educational, and social well-being of your community. The arts enrich our lives in many ways.

The Ontario school curriculum states that ?the intellectual and emotional development of children is enhanced through study of the arts. Exposure to the arts at a young age has been linked to improved academic performance, enhanced creativity, and better problem-solving skills.

Arts education is essential for the holistic development of children. Supporting local arts and cultural programs ensures that children have access to these educational opportunities, setting them up for future success.? And yet, the arts are lacking if not absent in many schools.

As for the adults, funding for the arts isn't an option in many municipalities. Arts organizations are usually expected to raise their own funds through sponsorships, events, and donors. That often leaves little energy to do the work. Funding requests are typically met with a standard requirement to frame the case around jobs and the economy.

That case can be made. In his book ?The Compassionate Imagination ? How the arts are central to a functioning democracy,? Max Wyman addresses this.

A 2019 Statistics Canada report showed the direct economic impact of the culture industries in Canada in 2016 (latest census with analyzed stats) was 58.9 billion, a 16 per cent increase over 2010. Equal to $1,611 per Canadian and 2.8 per cent of GDP.

StatsCan's definition of culture is audiovisual and interactive media, visual and applied arts, writing and publishing, live performance, private heritage and library resources, and sound recording.

To illustrate in the greater context:

? Arts and Culture: $58.9 Billion

? Agriculture, forestry fishing and hunting: $39 Billion

? Accommodation and food services: $46 Billion

? Utilities: $46 Billion

? Sports: $7.3 Billion

The arts clearly stimulate economic growth in a region.

Visitors not only spend money on tickets to performances or art exhibits but also on hotels, restaurants, and local businesses.

By supporting local arts organizations, you contribute to the creation and sustenance of employment opportunities.

?The arts also foster creativity, which is a driving force behind innovation in various fields, including technology, business, and science. When you support the arts, you contribute to a culture of creativity that can lead to breakthroughs and advancements in other sectors.?

In my role as the Grants Chair for the Dufferin Community Foundation, I noted that half of the recent grant applications for Arts and Culture funding were from social service agencies. They weren't arts organizations, but they used the arts to support and heal their clients. The increase in art therapy programs and businesses tells us that engaging with the arts can have therapeutic effects on individuals. The arts are used to reduce stress, improve mental well-being and as an outlet for self-expression.

Citizens are suffering from a lack of belonging like never before as reported by the Community Foundations of Canada, whereas communities that prioritize the arts tend to have increased civic and social engagement.

Art events and cultural activities provide opportunities for people to come together, share experiences, and connect with one another. This sense of community fosters social cohesion and a greater sense of belonging.

By supporting local arts and cultural initiatives, you contribute to the overall health and happiness of your community and neighbours. With what we're seeing in the news and elsewhere, we need the arts more than ever.