

Daily Chronicle

Debbie Armstrong: The economic impact of arts and culture

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Arts promote true prosperity. They inspire us, foster creativity and beauty and help us express our values, and build bridges between cultures. We are fortunate to have a wide range of arts and cultural events and venues in DeKalb County. Our performing arts events feature the best of local, regional and national events.

Part of the current marketing strategy at the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau is to educate and help position our area as a destination for arts and culture visitors. They have a profound effect on us both socially and economically as evidenced in numerous studies.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that the arts and culture sector represents 3.25 percent of the nation's GDP. The nonprofit arts industry alone generates \$135 billion in economic activity annually that supports 4.1 million jobs and generates \$22.3 billion in government revenue. In short, arts mean business.

- Arts travelers typically stay longer and spend more than traditional travelers.
- Two-thirds of domestic travelers include arts in their trip.
- Students with an education rich in the arts have higher GPAs, standardized test scores and lower drop-out rates.
- Students with four years of arts or music in high school average 100 points better on their SAT scores.
- Nearly one-half the nation's healthcare institutions provide arts programming for patients, families and even staff.
- A higher concentration of the arts in a city leads to higher civic engagements and more social cohesion.
- The new trend is young workers are moving to culturally thriving communities and then finding work.

An Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organization study that was done for the Greater Rockford Area (2010) found that Arts and Culture event attendees spend an average of \$17.51 per person (excluding the cost of admission).

The Egyptian Theatre attracts more than 30,000 visitors annually. Last year, 130 private and

public events were held there. Ticket purchases were from 23 different states and 36 counties in Illinois. We can estimate that more than \$525,000 was generated by those that attended these events. That doesn't include the cost of a ticket or lodging.

The Stage Coach Theatre sold 9,000 tickets for performances last year. Four thousand of those guests were from out of our area.

DeKalb also is home to Northern Illinois University, which has a current enrollment of approximately 20,000. The College of Visual and Performing Arts at Northern Illinois University is one of the most rich and vibrant academic artistic communities in the nation.

The School of Art and Design is the first choice for undergraduate art majors in Illinois. The School of Music houses the premiere graduate string quartet training program in the nation. Its graduate program in jazz studies is ranked in the top 10 nationally. The School of Theatre and Art has one of only three academically based Meisner training programs available nationally. The NIU Theatre and Dance Department sold 7,500 tickets for its 2013-2014 season. That doesn't include attendance at musical performances and museums on campus, as most of those events are free to residents and visitors.

The Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra was named Community Orchestra of the Year in 2009 by the Illinois Council of Orchestras. The group consists of professional, student and dedicated amateur musicians. Last year, more than 1,200 people enjoyed the beauty of their performances.

We've only taken a look at a small segment of the arts and cultural attractions that we have in DeKalb County. However, the economic and social contributions they make to the region are vast. Make sure that you discover and support the wonderful arts and culture venues and events that we have in our own backyard. For a comprehensive lists of events and attractions, visit www.dekalbcountycvb.com.

Until next time, safe travels. Wishing everyone health, happiness and prosperity in 2015!

- Debbie Armstrong is executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

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