

The arts create jobs

In the Dec. 16 editorial, The Free Press raised questions about funds being distributed through the Legacy Amendment which Minnesota voters passed last November. The editorial suggested that those responsible for administering Legacy Amendment funds should prioritize projects in the future to focus on ones that create jobs.

However, what The Free Press failed to acknowledge is that the arts — both directly and indirectly — have a significant impact on economic well-being of our region, through job creation and work force development. As our community grows, a strong and vibrant arts community is becoming increasingly important to attracting and retaining employees in our region.

The quality and accessibility of the arts continue to come to the forefront when area clinics are hiring physicians or Minnesota State University is hiring professors. The arts are also a key factor when **Greater Mankato Growth** is encouraging new businesses to relocate to the area.

Americans for the Arts, a national arts advocacy organization, compiles a report entitled The Creative Industries which tracks both for-profit and nonprofit art-centric businesses. In Senate District 23 alone, there are 142 arts-related businesses which employ 996 people. These include businesses in film, radio and TV; visual arts and photography; graphic design, publishing, architecture and advertising; as well as museums, historical societies and performing arts organizations such as music and theater.

For-profit companies with an artscentric focus rely on the cultural amenities our community provides to sustain their businesses. This requires a stable and vibrant nonprofit arts community — which the Legacy Amendment is helping to secure.

More proof that the arts are critical to work force development comes from Ready to Innovate, a study by the Conference Board (serving Fortune 1000 U. S. companies) which provides researchbased evidence that connects the arts to innovation. The report finds that U. S. employers rate creativity and innovation among the top five skills that will increase in importance over the next five years, and rank it among the top challenges facing CEOs. While 72 percent of employers say creativity is of primary concern when they're hiring, 85 percent of these employers can't find the creative applicants they seek.

Another study that demonstrates the economic benefits of a thriving arts and culture industry can be found in The Arts: A Driving Force in South Central Minnesota's Economy. This 2006 study by Minnesota Citizens for the Arts and Americans for the Arts measured the total impact of the nonprofit arts industry in our nine-county region, including organization and audience expenditures. Area arts nonprofits had a total economic impact of \$ 8.9 million, and supported 248 full-time jobs. They generated \$ 4.5 million in resident household income, \$ 273,000 in local government revenue and \$ 816,000 in state government revenue.

The following year, Minnesota Citizens for the Arts released Artists Count! An Economic Impact Study of Artists in Minnesota. It measured the total economic impact of artistic spending by individual artists who live in southwest and south-central Minnesota. Artistic expenditures made to businesses located within the state totaled \$ 7.1 million and supported 252 full-time jobs. The report also found that only 6 percent of artists support themselves solely through their artwork, while 94 percent receive their primary income by working in other areas of business and industry. In addition, 87 percent of artists volunteer in their communities and 86 percent always vote.

Twin Rivers Center for the Arts works to support artists and arts nonprofits by strengthening the cultural infrastructure of our region.

Over the past few years, we have grown to an alliance of nearly 40 arts organizations in the **Greater Mankato** area. Many of these organizations serve a multitude of communities throughout southern Minnesota, and some have recently received grants from the Legacy Amendment — most in the \$ 4,000 to \$ 8,000 range.

Of the organizations who have received these Legacy Amendment grants, a good number of them — including Twin Rivers — are using it to increase hours for existing staff or add new staff positions — creating and sustaining jobs in our very own community.

With its recently-attained status as a metropolitan statistical area, **Greater Mankato** has solidified its position as a vital regional center in south-central Minnesota. Our community is a regional hub for education, health care, retail and industry.

It is critical that we also continue to grow as a cultural center. Existing data proves that the arts are an industry that is an essential cornerstone of tourism, economic development and downtown revitalization.

When support for the arts is increased — such as through the Legacy Amendment — it generates tax revenues and jobs and grows our creativity-based economy.

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My View

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