



Impact of the arts

After a yearlong initiative in 2015 to draft a vision for the city's future, Winter Park is looking to the arts to help bolster the economy and local culture.

TROY HERRING
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

If you take a walk around downtown Winter Park, you'll probably see the blue banners hanging from street lamps.

In white, sans-serif font, they read, "Arts & Culture," and "Be Inspired" — it's one of the many means of marketing that the city has been utilizing to promote the arts as a part of its vision program.

Back in 2015, the city decided to undergo a yearlong initiative to look toward the future of the community and figure out what it needed to do to help build the future for the area.

That initiative took the form of a combination of research and focus groups, and led the city to discover the things that really resonated with residents.

Through the year, the arts and culture was a topic that bubbled up consistently. It makes sense when you consider the city's history, said Clarissa Howard, director of communications for Winter Park.

"After we (the city) was first established in 1882, arts and culture has always been a prominent part of our college, the First Congressional Church, and it still is today," Howard said. "And with the vision it still will be 50 years from now — so it surpasses time."

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— Clarissa Howard

DOLLARS AND SENSE

With the vision program came forth the Arts and Culture Subcommittee, which works under the overseeing eye of the city's Public Art Advisory Board. The group is made up of seven main members, but they represent 22 different art entities.

As a part of the process, the city asked Americans for the Arts — a nonprofit organization that focuses on advancing the arts throughout the country — to work on analyzing the economic impact of art in Winter Park.

In its recently released report, Arts & Economic Prosperity: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts & Cultural Organizations & Their Audiences, the group found some impressive numbers regarding the role art plays in the community.

Because it takes time to collect and organize data, the report focuses on the 2015 fiscal year. In that year, the city saw a total industry expenditure of just under \$46 million — \$16.5 million of which came from the arts and cultural organizations themselves, and the remaining \$29.4 million brought in by visitors to those organizations.

Comparing those numbers to the median of other similar areas examined by the group, about \$40 million more was spent at Winter Park organizations by their audiences.

DIVERSITY IS KEY

So what's been the driving force to helping lead Winter Park in the realm of art? According to Kyle Dudgeon, CRA/economic development manager for the city, it all comes down to the unique variety of art and culture offered.

"Any time you're dealing with civic economics, it's really important to be diverse," Dudgeon said. "So it's not just about making sure it's a good place for our producers that service men and women, but also getting that arm of the creative class that helps drive in people, as well as support a really strong work force."

Dudgeon isn't wrong. Those who take in the arts in the area have a wide variety to choose from that attracts people from all backgrounds, Howard said.

"The great thing about having that many arts and cultural organizations in such a small area is that you don't only have to like just painting, (there is also) visual arts, and clay — it's so diverse," Howard said.

That diversity meshes into the attendees that made their ways into local arts institutions in 2015.

MOVING FORWARD

Of the 1,070,230 visitors to the galleries, museums, and other places of cultural in Winter Park, 576,854 (53.9%) came from out-of-town tourists — the other 46.1% were visits from residents.

In every category Americans for Arts examined — meals and refreshments; souvenirs; ground transportation; overnight lodging; and miscellaneous items — tourists outspent locals an aver-



Photos by Troy Herring

age of \$34.89 to \$18.81.

It's something that is pretty normal for communities in general, Dudgeon said.

"It's not uncommon to see," he said. "The really important takeaway is where we lie, from a competitive advantage standpoint, is this driver in the market of experience, and experience is really driven from authenticity and that's why people want to come into Winter Park — for the authenticity."

"So that puts us in — particularly in a guest and visitor perspective — a much better position to do whatever we want," he said.

While the incoming visitors are, of course, always welcomed by the city, Winter Park also is taking steps to help motivate locals to take in the arts.

Winter Park, alongside the arts organizations in the city, have numerous events spread out through 2018, with the biggest being the inaugural Weekend of the Arts that will take place from Feb. 16 to 19.

The hope is that the event, and the branding of "Rediscover Winter Park" will help draw visitors from the city and make it an arts destination for years to come.

"From the subcommittee level, to have more people experience the organizations and their offerings would be a success," Howard said. "Overall, we do hope to increase the visibility and awareness of these gems."

BY THE NUMBERS

Economic impact of spending by arts and cultural organizations and their audiences

\$29.4 million

Event-related spending by arts and cultural audiences (excluding the cost of admission)

\$27.48

Average spent per person at nonprofit arts and cultural event (excluding the cost of admission)

SOURCE: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Cultural Organizations and Their Audiences in the City of Winter Park, Florida (FY 2015)