

Winter Park spotlights culture with new Weekend of the Arts

BY MATTHEW J. PALM
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This weekend, Winter Park will raise the curtain on a musical, a play, classical-music concerts and numerous museum exhibits — par for the course in Orlando's northern neighbor. But a new initiative wants to make sure everyone knows it.

A web page now lists the city's arts happenings in one place, and banners hanging throughout Winter Park urge residents and

visitors to “be inspired.”

Up next: The cultural push's first major event. The new Weekend of the Arts runs Friday-Monday, the culmination of more than a year of work devoted to putting culture at the heart of the city's reputation.

“It's the arts that make this such a wonderful place to live,” said Ena Heller, director of the Cornell Fine Arts Museum, during a reception celebrating the

Please turn to **ARTS**, A10

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FROM PAGE ONE

ARTS

Continued from **Page A1**

initiative at the Rollins College museum this month.

Not only residents benefit from the arts, officials said at the event.

“It's exhibitions and venues like this that really drive guests to our community,” said Mayor Steve Leary, calling cultural events the “cornerstone of tourism in our city.”

Leary and others tout statistics from a survey by advocacy organization Americans for the Arts that show cultural organizations in the roughly 10 square miles of Winter Park spend \$16 million each year and support 1,649 full-time jobs. Meanwhile more than 1 million people annually attend an arts event and spend millions on everything from tickets to pre-show dinners to parking and babysitters.

“Can you imagine? This

little town generating almost \$46 million in economic activity” because of the arts, said Jan Clanton, a member of the city's Arts & Culture subcommittee.

That panel was formed after a 2015 city program to create guiding principles for Winter Park's future. Arts and culture landed squarely in the spotlight: “Winter Park is the city of arts and culture, cherishing its traditional scale and charm while building a healthy and sustainable future for all generations” reads the official vision statement.

Since its establishment in September 2016, the Arts & Culture subcommittee has set about branding the city along those lines, creating a hashtag for social-media users — #wpinspires — and an official logo, both of which grace new banners that have been seen along such major city thoroughfares such as Park and Or-

ange avenues. A new web page to find local events was established at cityofwinterpark.org/arts-culture.

The Weekend of the Arts is the group's first high-profile event. Admission to institutions such as the Morse Museum of American Art will be free. The Bach Festival and the Casa Feliz Historic Home will offer free concerts. The Autumn Art Festival and Winter Park Sidewalk Art Festival will host special programs.

The city spent about \$25,000 to promote the arts initiative, said Clarissa Howard, director of the city's communications department, which runs the Arts & Culture subcommittee.

“It's nice to have city support,” said Heather Alexander, executive director of Winter Park Playhouse and one of the subcommittee members. “Going forward, we'll have this engine to promote the arts in Winter



MATTHEW J. PALM/STAFF

This new banner outside the Winter Park Playhouse on Orange Avenue is a part of \$25,000 campaign to put the city's robust arts and cultural scene in the spotlight.

Park. That can only help us.”

“Alone, they're strong” said Howard of the city's multiple nonprofit cultural organizations. “But together, we're powerful.”

She tells of meeting a 50-year resident attending the Cornell Fine Arts Museum for the first time.

“That's who we're trying to bring in,” Howard said.

“We want residents and guests to rediscover Winter Park.”

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