

By John Ostrout

Investing in the arts makes pays off.

From SoNo to Stamford and Westport to Silvermine, the economic impact of the arts is growing. This economic upswing makes clear: public investment in the arts yields substantial returns. Today, more than 30,000 Connecticut jobs are part of an arts industry that generates a total economic impact of \$1.36 billion a year.

Just in our Congressional District, cultural organizations spend some \$123 million a year in 1996 dollars. From 2.2 million admissions they generated a total income of \$113 million and created \$997,000 in state and federal taxes

Fourth Congressional District organizations employed some 6,789 people. In addition, they provide work for 5,505 artists and involve 20,160 volunteers. On a typical year, these volunteers donate 525,100 hours of their time to support the arts in this region.

Our data and conclusions come from research showing arts and cultural organizations as important economic engines. After looking at more than 2,000 Connecticut arts and culture organizations, a study conducted by Economics Professor Gregory H. Wassall of Northeastern University shows an average Connecticut arts or cultural organization spends about \$245,000 a year and employs 15 people. Based on these

findings, we can project the economic effect of arts and cultural organizations on today's economy.

This year, Connecticut's \pm 2,000 arts and culture organizations will record more than \$516 million as income. They will welcome more than 24.5 million people to their events. That is twice the population of all six New England states - or eight times Connecticut's population.

This success did not come overnight. In his first term, Gov. John Rowland won General Assembly support to double the budget of the Connecticut Commission on the Arts. We have used our funds to help arts organizations ranging from the Norwalk Symphony to the Fairfield Orchestra as well as (groups in New Canaan/Ridgefield/Westport area).

During the past 22 months, the State of Connecticut has committed more than \$23 million to improving our arts infrastructure. Matching contributions from the private sector push the total value of this investment to \$53 million.

Gov. Rowland and his Administration recognize the central role the arts can play in spurring economic development and reviving urban centers. In a planned and prudent manner, they have invested in arts and entertainment institutions across Connecticut. Each investment is designed to yield a dollar for dollar return to the community.

That's why the State is helping the Polka Dot Playhouse in Bridgeport, the Schubert Theater in New Haven and the Palace Theater in

Stamford. The magnitude of state support for 16 projects in less than two years is unprecedented. Connecticut's strategy of investing in arts infrastructure has already gained national attention.

We need now to focus local attention on supporting Connecticut's arts. We need to make clear the link between the arts and economic vitality. Beyond generating economic activity, the arts shape the quality of local life. Efforts to retain current or attract new business often turn on an area's quality of life. The symphony series at the Norwalk Concert Hall, artisans at Silvermine and summer concert series across the region are tangible signs of the arts that we can both see and support.

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