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Artists impact Colorado economy

Study: Arts rank fifth among employment sectors

BY STACY NICK • STACYNICK @COLORADOAN.COM • FEBRUARY 6, 2009

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Starving or not, artists in Colorado are working.

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According to a study by Colorado Council on the Arts released Thursday, the arts accounted for 3.9 percent, or 122,000, of the state's estimated 3.2 million jobs. That makes Colorado's creative enterprises the state's fifth largest employment sector, on the heels of biotechnology and IT and telecommunications and outpacing defense, agribusiness and food processing.

They may be a nonprofit, but the Fort Collins Symphony still means business, symphony Board President Jan Jorgensen said.

"The feeling I'm getting as of late is that the arts are not credited as a real business," she said. "It's seen as a luxury."

But each symphony concert costs between \$35,000 and \$50,000 to produce; multiply that by 10 shows a year and that's significant money funneling into the economy.

"A lot of people would be surprised to learn that, at any given concert, we employ about 100 people," Jorgensen said. "These are people who live here, who work here and who spend money here."

"I was stunned, once we got rolling, how huge our payroll was," said Nick Turner, co-owner of the Candlelight Dinner Playhouse. Despite the difficult economy, Turner and his partners opened Candlelight eight months ago and employ about 60 people ranging from actors to stage crews to wait staff. The venue also contracts with more than a dozen local and regional vendors, including Johnson's Corner, which provides its famous cinnamon rolls to the dinner theater for its dessert menu.

The CCA study also noted that employee earnings in arts-related jobs — including employee benefits — was approximately \$5 billion.

"This research clearly demonstrates that the creative sector is a large and important sector of Colorado's economy," Colorado Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien said in a news release Thursday. "Our next step is to more fully understand the challenges in each industry sub-group and identify areas of opportunity."

challenges.

The state's recently proposed budget balancing plan would cut the council's \$1.6 million in state funding by almost 50 percent, meaning there will be some tough choices when it's time to decide what nonprofit arts groups receive grants.

And like most industries in this economy, the arts are facing plenty of



Carol Simmons, a jewelry artist, works Thursday in her studio at the Poudre River Arts Center. The Colorado Council on the Arts released a study Thursday saying 3.9 percent of the state's estimated 3.2 million jobs are in the arts sector. (Photos by V. Richard Haro/The Coloradoan)

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A variety of polymer clay pendants created by Simmons are on display at the Poudre River Arts Center.

ON THE INTERNET

Visit www.coloradoarts.org to read the full "Colorado: State-of-the-Arts - Key Findings from The State of Colorado's Creative Economy Report."

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CCA Executive Director Elaine Mariner is travelling the state talking with arts organizations to determine what are the biggest challenges facing the arts and how groups can capitalize on their strengths.

“You are all creative people,” Mariner told an audience of Northern Colorado arts representatives last week.

“I don’t think any of you is ready to take your toys and go home.”