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CULTURE

Telluride wins Governor's art award

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In Telluride, art is everywhere. It is the free play that packs the local bar on a Tuesday night. The plein air artists who dot main street in June. The locally-made fashion lines that float down the catwalk at the AIDS Benefit. The music festivals that fill Town Park on long summer days.

For its many commitments to the arts, the town has received the Governor's Art Award. The annual award recognizes a Colorado town for its collective efforts to enhance the community and economy through arts. Though it typically is only given to one community at a time, this year Telluride split the award with Creede.

Mayor Stu Fraser and Telluride Council for the Arts and Humanities Executive Director Renee Marr both traveled to Denver last week, where they accepted the award from Gov. Bill Ritter at the Denver Art Museum on Friday.

It was part of Arts Advocacy Day, and a number of legislators were there to see the two little towns get some recognition.

Marr, who met Gov. Ritter for the first time at the event, said it was an exciting honor.

"It's a great recognition for our community and the amount of effort that individuals and governments and non-profits put into the arts here," Marr said.

Fraser said Telluride's focus on arts is something to be proud of.

"The arts are extremely important to us," he said. "Everyone in the region should be very proud of the relationship we share with the arts."

Telluride's prize: an original mixed-media collage of its own iconic downtown surrounded by mountains, created by Grand Junction artist Gayle Gerson. The framed piece will be hung in Rebekah Hall, Fraser said.

The award is given by the Colorado Council on the Arts, and aims to honor towns that use arts to enhance the culture and economy of their community.

With all of Telluride's special events, festivals, art walk, concerts, plays, dance performances, artist studios and art classes, it would seem like a shoe-in.

But the competition out there is actually pretty stiff, Marr said. Bigger towns are able to give an impressive amount of funding for public art and other projects.

And this was actually Telluride's second shot at the award. The town applied in 2008, the last time the award was given (it went on hiatus due to budgetary constraints). It lost out to Loveland, but it was the first town ever to be given honorable mention. Telluride took this as encouragement to give it another shot, Fraser said.

So Marr applied again, this time swaying the review panel with the community's commitment to funding art.

Although the award usually honors a single recipient, the review panel this year strongly felt both communities showed exemplary commitment to the arts, according to a release.

Creede was selected in part because of its transformation from a dying mining town to a thriving tourist destination, with the arts as a catalyst, according to the release. Telluride, meanwhile, impressed the panel with its high level of support for locally grown arts programs. The panel noted a strong commitment to fund local arts by: the Town of Telluride, the Telluride Foundation, The Telluride Mountain Village Owners Association and San Miguel County.

Marr noted that even in these down times, arts organizations have banded together to make sure that the art scene remains vibrant — and that in turn helps the economy.

"The town has a lot of really wonderful arts and cultural programs that go on and it's such a strong base for tourism as well," she said. "People come here for the festivals and the arts and the culture."

In the release, Ritter emphasized the importance of keeping art alive and well in the state.

"Not only are the arts a way to share our heritage and show us new ways of thinking and seeing, the arts are also a way to grow jobs and revitalize Colorado's economy," he said.

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