

Community Investment

BY FLORA MARIA GARCIA

As United Arts of Central Florida (UA) prepares to kick off its 2013 Collaborative Campaign, I want to share with you the reasons why the arts are an important investment in our community, and hope that it will compel you to make a contribution.

The arts beautify our community. They are food for the soul. They inspire us and challenge our thinking. But what many people do not realize is that the arts also foster economic development, improve education, bolster tourism and attract high-level businesses.

The existence of a strong, high-quality cultural community not only adds to the quality of life, but increases a region's ability to attract and retain high-level employees. Major urban centers such as Charlotte, Chicago, Denver, Seattle and Portland reference a strong arts and cultural environment as a *determining* factor in the recruitment of new companies for the city.

Hospitality-industry studies show that arts and culture are a magnet for tourists. Cultural travelers stay longer and spend more dollars—usually twice as much as local audiences.

In the four counties that UA serves, the arts generate \$181 million in direct economic activity and support 6,703 jobs.

The arts have a powerful effect on our children's ability to learn all subjects. A recent study published by the Florida Department of Education addressed the effect of the arts on all 12th-grade students. The results demonstrated a strong relationship between children who



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participated in school arts experiences and higher academic success, proven by *higher grade-point averages and higher scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and on both the math and verbal portions of the SAT exam.* The data further demonstrated that students participating in arts classes for eight or more semesters benefitted even more and graduated at higher levels.

The arts build communities. They are a common denominator that can bridge the gap between cultures, races, generations, economics and beliefs. They foster tolerance and understanding of diverse cultures and engender an appreciation for the global community that is Central Florida. The arts are civic catalysts that support a strong democracy, engage citizens in civic discourse, dramatize

important issues and encourage collective problem solving.

Through public art, a community can create a sense of place that is not only original, but welcoming. In many cases it helps establish a community's identity. Consider the St. Louis Arch, or the Eiffel Tower, or a more recent example, Millennium Park in Chicago, with the enigmatic "Bean" by internationally recognized artist Anish Kapoor.

What other sector touches our lives in so many remarkable ways and on so many levels? UA's primary goal is *to increase funding for the arts*, so that we, as a community, can provide a stable backdrop for our cultural assets and individual artists, and so that the creative individuals in our community can continue to do the inspirational work they do to engage our children and make Central Florida an even better place to live.

Whether you designate your gift to a specific group, or you contribute to UA's Arts for All Fund, which is part of the Collaborative Campaign and distributes funds to nonprofit groups representing the arts, sciences and history in Central Florida—you, in turn, invest in the long-term well-being of our community. Thank you for your continued support!

Flora Maria Garcia
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