

# The Region's Cultural Sector Gives Back

BY G.K. SHARMAN

The economic impact of the arts in Central Florida adds up for the community.

Last time you went to a concert or a play, did you have dinner first? Maybe you paid for parking or valet service. You may have hired a babysitter too. If you live in Melbourne or Lakeland, perhaps you opted to stay over in Orlando rather than drive home right after the show.

If so, congratulations — your choices helped make arts and culture a significant part of the Central Florida economy.

People don't usually think of the economic influence of the arts, says Flora Maria Garcia, president and CEO of United Arts of Central Florida, "but the cultural sector is not a luxury. It's just as important as any other part of the economy to the life of Central Florida, and it's a sector that needs to be supported."

Arts and cultural organizations in the seven-county region generated \$399.9 million in direct economic activity, according to the *2017 Arts & Economic Prosperity 5* (AEP5) report. A project of Americans for the Arts, AEP5 is the latest, largest and most comprehensive research project measuring the economic impact of nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences. Done every five years, the 2017 study surveyed 341 regions across the country.

In Central Florida, where more than 690 nonprofit cultural organizations and government programs make up the seven-county region, 218 participated in the study. So, while still conservative, the numbers are up considerably, and they paint a picture of both a thriving arts community and an overall economy that's improving.

In 2012, direct economic impact totaled \$264 million — some \$135 million less than this year's study at \$399.9 million. In terms of employment, this year's report found that culture supported the equivalent of 13,764 full-time jobs, up from 8,966 five years ago. The arts also generated \$39.9 million in revenues for local and state governments, an increase of more than \$3.9 million from 2012. Total audience attendance clocked in at 6.79 million in the 2017 study for the Central Florida Region.

Garcia notes two factors that fueled the increase.

"The difference is, we had more organizations participate," she explains. "We also have the Dr. Phillips



The Orlando Science Center serves a half million people each year.

Center now — that's a big-budget participant that really made a difference in our numbers. The Dr. Phillips Center and similar facilities with budgets of \$1 million or more really help 'move the needle.'"

Smaller facilities and groups count too. The numbers reflect how much visitors "want the real Florida and a sense of uniqueness," she continues, "and arts and cultural organizations provide that."

The final lesson of the research involves the future: Arts organizations need to understand the importance of the figures, Garcia says, and how to leverage them when speaking with funders and elected officials.

So go ahead — buy those tickets. Make reservations for dinner and/or a hotel. You'll not only be doing it for your love of the arts, but also for the economy of Central Florida.

For more information about the study, visit <http://tinyurl.com/UAresearchAEP5> or contact Trudy Wild at [Trudy@UnitedArts.cc](mailto:Trudy@UnitedArts.cc). **OAM**

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