

Beyond borders: Collaboration and expansion in the arts

John W. Barry, Poughkeepsie Journal 11:44 p.m. EDT September 11, 2014

As arts organizations expand and collaborate, they help drive the economy by generating hundreds of millions of dollars in economic impact and creating thousands of jobs.



(Photo: John W. Barry/Poughkeepsie Journal)

Like a performance by the Charlie Daniels Band that the Bardavon 1869 Opera House recently co-presented in Saugerties, upcoming concerts the Mid-Hudson Civic Center will stage in Orange County can offer music fans the chance to enjoy live music with their Hudson Valley neighbors.

These concerts are also examples of how organizations in Dutchess County that present the arts are expanding and collaborating on a regional level. Both instances are part of a larger trend in which a regional approach to the arts is shaping cultural events that drive the economy.

The Mid-Hudson Civic Center recently purchased the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center. The Bardavon collaborates on an annual concert with HITS-on-the-Hudson, an equestrian facility in Saugerties. In 2006, the Bardavon took over the Broadway Theater at Ulster Performing Arts Center in Kingston; and Bardavon Executive Director Chris Silva and Stephen LaMarca, managing director of theater production for the Bardavon, became programming consultants with the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center in Great Barrington, Mass.

"I never thought I could see Jeff Beck in the area," Bill Houghtaling of Staatsburg, a Bardavon member, said of the legendary guitarist. "But lo and behold, they got him at UPAC."

Collaboration and expansion, experts say, help groups expand their base and cultural offerings, nurture larger audiences and draw from a larger source of funding. At stake, for those who stage the arts, their audience members and the taxpayers who support the arts are hundreds of millions of dollars in economic impact and thousands of jobs.

According to a recent study by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at the State University of New York at New Paltz, the arts across Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester counties generate nearly a half-billion dollars in economic activity and are linked to 4,970 jobs. Also, audience spending on lodging, food, recreation, retail and transportation accounted for \$498 million injected directly into the region's economy. The value of volunteer labor accounted for another \$28.7 million.

That study also identified collaboration among arts groups as a priority.

"It's not much different than the push for shared services between towns," said Janis Benincasa, assistant director of CRREO. "It often makes sense in terms of saving money and keeping taxes down. I think there is a push in general for that."

Benincasa singled out the Hudson Highlands Roundtable, whose co-founder is Susan Sayre Batton, managing director of Dia: Beacon, as a "model" for collaboration because it goes beyond the arts. Along with representatives of the arts, like Dia, the Hudson Highlands Roundtable includes a range of groups, including the Beacon-based environmental group Clearwater and Beacon Institute for Rivers and Estuaries.

"I think that if there could be collaboration between and among organizations who work in the same medium," said Benincasa, "... or in the case of Susan Batton's group, a multidiscipline collaboration, you could do more with less."

As groups collaborate, they are expanding.

Poughkeepsie-based Arts Mid-Hudson changed its name from the Dutchess County Arts Council to reflect its broadened mission.

Already responsible for distributing state funding for the arts in Dutchess and Ulster counties, Arts Mid-Hudson earlier this year took on the same task in Orange County. Arts Mid-Hudson Executive Director Linda Marston-Reid said expanding beyond Dutchess sets the stage for increased collaboration among arts groups. She also said the New York State Council on the Arts prioritizes funding for groups that collaborate with other organizations when possible and maintain a wide geographical reach.

The Mid-Hudson Civic Center's addition of the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center has prompted President Paul Lloyd and his staff to broaden their focus on programming events, rather than simply renting out space. And the revenue could cover costs for repairs needed at the Mid-Hudson Civic Center.

"There's no secret that the civic center is tired and it needs help," Lloyd said. "This gives us more cash flow to fix the problems that we have."

John W. Barry: jobarry@poughkeepsiejournal.com, 845-437-4822; Twitter: @JohnBarryPoJo

BY THE NUMBERS

The arts in Dutchess County

\$28.5 million: Economic impact.

\$62 million: Audience spending on lodging, food, recreation, retail and transportation

1,015: jobs.

Source: Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at SUNY New Paltz

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