

Study: Arts fuel N.J. cities' growth

Cultural institutions contribute \$200M to Newark and New Brunswick

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As lawmakers were hammering out a budget deal that includes increased arts funding, the state's cultural leaders gathered in Trenton yesterday to tout a new study showing the economic impact of the arts in Newark and New Brunswick.

The millions of dollars invested by the state to support the theaters, arts centers and museums in those cities generate more than \$200 million annually in economic activity, according to a new national study, Arts & Economic Prosperity III.

"For the investment made in the arts by government, there is a tremendous return," said Linwood Oglesby, executive director of the Newark Arts Council. "This study shows the power of the arts."

Conducted by the national advocacy group Americans for the Arts, the Arts & Prosperity III report states that the nonprofit arts and culture industry in the United States generates about \$166 billion annually. Arts organizations themselves spend \$63 billion a year, while audiences spend an additional \$103 billion in event-related activities such as dining, parking and shopping.

In Newark, nonprofit arts generates \$177 million in local economic activity; New Brunswick's arts scene yields \$36.5 million.

"New Brunswick is living proof that the arts can be the heart and soul of urban economic re-

development," said David Gray, interim executive director of the New Brunswick Cultural Center, the umbrella organization for the city's arts institutions. "We knew that the arts were a key component in the revitalization of New Brunswick. Now . . . we are able to tell you what the economic impact of the arts is over the course of a year."

The findings were released in Trenton yesterday as legislators were working out the details of the state budget for the 2008 fiscal year. Lawmakers added \$900,000 to the state arts council budget, bringing it to \$21.9 million. While that is \$2.9 million more than last year, the arts council budget is still less than the \$22.7 million high of fiscal year 2006.

Although failing to restore all arts council funds, lawmakers are proposing an additional \$7.4 million in 14 pet projects, including a \$2.5 million increase for the Newark Museum — bringing its state grant to \$4.9 million — and another \$1.5 million for the Battleship New Jersey, bringing its grant to \$3 million.

The budget also includes grants of \$500,000 for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, \$400,000 for the Walter Gordon Theater at Rutgers University-Camden, \$350,000 for the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, \$300,000 for the Paper Mill Playhouse and \$100,000 for the Bergen Performing Arts Center.

The Edison Symphony Orchestra is slated to receive \$100,000, thanks to the efforts of Assemblyman Peter Barnes (D-Edison). The orchestra

is not registered as a charitable institution with the state Division of Consumer Affairs and has never applied for funds from the arts council. On its Web site, it promotes just two performances for 2007-2008: an October concert at the State Theatre in New Brunswick and a second in April 2008 at the Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank.

Privately, arts leaders cite this kind of big grant to a small institution as the reason why lawmakers should not circumvent the arts council by awarding no-strings-attached political grants. Publicly, they say they are grateful to lawmakers for additional funds.

And they see this new economic impact study as fuel for the future.

"The fiscal year '08 budget has been resolved, so it won't have an immediate impact on funding," said Mark Packer, president of ArtPride/NJ, the statewide arts advocacy organization. "However, this kind of data has a long shelf life. We hope, looking forward to fiscal year '09, that we can see the restoration of the arts council's budget."

Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan, Jr. (D-South Plainfield), the lone lawmaker present to hear the results of the economic impact study, said the increase in arts funding is a win for the state. "People have a tendency to call attention to the economic impact of the arts, but it's more than that. It gives folks the opportunity to perform, to stress their individuality," he said.

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