

Arts Pave Wisconsin's Way Forward

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Wisconsin just concluded an intense campaign season this fall. Candidates on all levels talked about strengthening the economy, transforming education and ensuring a good quality of life for everyone, everywhere in the state. That's why I wanted the candidates to talk about and plan for investment in the arts, culture and the creative economy in their strategies for success.

If there ever was a time that we needed the arts, it's now. Wisconsin should use its abundant arts and creative resources to advance the state's priorities: to incubate, attract and retain business, revitalize the economy, sustain good-paying jobs, provide a quality education for all students that prepares them for the 21st century world and workforce, enhance quality of life, and keep communities livable.

The shift from a traditional commodity-based, mass production economy to a knowledge-based, 21st century creative economy demands strategic focus and vision on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. The Council on Competitiveness recognized the importance of this strategy back in 2005: "from an economic development perspective, many communities are still pursuing the old, incentive-based strategies. These don't work in a world in which firm success depends ever more on the quality of ideas and talent, and ever less on traditional infrastructure."

That's where the arts come in. The qualities that the arts provide -- economic vitality, educational advancement, community spirit, civic engagement -- are the qualities Wisconsin needs. More than ever, investment in the arts, arts education and creative economy is not separate from the overall priorities of the state -- it's vital to the overall health and well-being of the people of Wisconsin and all of the state's communities.

I have the pleasure of traveling the state on a regular basis, and can tell you that there are authentic and unique arts and creative assets around every corner. The state's arts sector already packs a substantial economic and civic punch.

Wisconsin currently boasts more than 10,500 arts-related organizations and businesses, supporting jobs for nearly 46,000 people, and the nonprofit arts sector provides a \$418 million economic impact.

Our performances and concerts, designs and crafts, galleries and cafes, museums and theaters, festivals, heritage celebrations and art exhibitions help make our state a high-quality place to live, work and play. Everyone, everywhere in the state is involved in the arts in some way -- it's not just something that only a few people participate in and enjoy.

Wisconsin could realize even more benefit and impact with pro-active, coordinated statewide policies and strategies that use the arts and creativity to compete in the global economy. So I'd like to understand our newly elected lawmakers' plans for 21st century investment throughout the state, by asking them these questions:

- How will you invest in creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship to generate and support 21st century jobs and sustain vibrant and livable communities throughout Wisconsin?
- How will you help your constituents participate in and benefit from the state's outstanding local, regional and statewide arts sector and creative economy?
- How will you prioritize the arts and creativity in education so that every Wisconsin student has access to arts experiences and the skills needed for the 21st century world and workforce?

The arts are paving the way forward for Wisconsin. Let's ask our leaders to invest in this critical sector to benefit the state's people and communities now and into the future.

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