

Around Town

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Arts give monetary, creative boost to economy

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In 1999 a group of artists with studio space in downtown Durham decided to organize a downtown visual arts walk. Combining a gallery walk and an open studio tour, the Durham Art Walk's mission was to highlight the rich downtown arts environment and recognize the importance of the creative process that links artists, businesses and cultural organizations.

Apparently they were ahead of the curve. Three years later Richard Florida published "The Rise of the Creative Class," which set forth a cluster of indicators that predicted a flourishing urban community. Talent, Tolerance and Technology are Florida's "three T's," qualities that Durham can claim in abundance. "To attract creative people, generate innovation and stimulate economic growth, a place must have all three." (source: Catalytix, Inc., A Richard Florida Creativity Group)

To gather detailed data on the creative class and "creative clusters" at work in North Carolina, the North Carolina Arts Council sponsored research by Carrboro-based RTS to study creative clusters within North Carolina. The 2006 study revealed the depth and breadth of creative industries in our state's economy.

"As globalization brings advanced economies into ever closer competition with each other, creativity is becoming an increasingly critical competitive advantage. The status of the arts is rising substantially with respect to economic development. ... First, the arts represent a direct source of jobs and wealth that is undervalued and undercounted as a share of local economies. The people and companies that produce and use art or design -- for example, the artists, performers, architects, publishers, graphic designers, animation and advertising agencies -- and those that produce films and videos, leisure software, fashion apparel, and ornamental woodwork together make up large shares of many regional economies." (Source: Introduction to Clusters of Creativity, The Role of the Arts and Design in North Carolina's Economy)

In Durham, we have been building our natural creative resources for years. According to the North Carolina Arts Council database, Durham is home to 398 arts and cultural organizations and 1,282 artists who are making art and developing creative skills every day. And that doesn't begin to count the ways in which this creativity informs work in laboratories, kitchens, classrooms, studios, computer terminals and daily life. In the midst of our, economy creative energy is a vital resource. Creativity helps established businesses find new ways to do business.

We hope that you are already stretching your creative muscles enjoying the artistic and creative opportunities available to you in this community. For more opportunities to participate in arts and cultural activities, visit www.durhamarts.org and www.durhamculture.com. If you need some assistance finding your artistic niche, give us a call.

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