



Art Works!

Building on strengths and working together key to increasing regional prosperity

About 300 arts, business and civic leaders participated in the groundbreaking Art Works! Gala, Creative Economy Showcase and Conference, March 13 and 14. Drawing a capacity crowd, including 60 exhibitors, is virtually unheard of for a first-time event. Based on the turnout and the rich dialog, it appears that many people in the arts, business and local government sectors are enthusiastic about capitalizing on our artistic and cultural assets.

Connecting, communicating and cross-pollinating ideas



Dancers interact with live silk painting

The Opening Gala held at the Rothwell Student Center at the University of Wisconsin-Superior featured a broad array of local talent, including Cellist Kathy McTavish, Poet Laureate Barton Sutter, live silk painting by Lee Zimmerman, dancers choreographed by Megan Abel, a performance by Singer/Songwriters Bill and Kate Isles, screening of local films by 4 Track Films, Emily Alworth and Mike Scholtz and a performance by Juliana Bertelsen and Lisa McKhann of the Over the Top Dance Company.

The blend of talent, interactive program elements and networking among Gala attendees exemplified a key point from the conference: *Connecting, communicating and collaborating across sectors makes things happen.*

Density



Potter Karin Kraemer (left) and Keynote Speaker Elizabeth Currid discuss Kraemer's work at her studio in Superior's Old City Hall

While in the Twin Ports, Keynote Speaker Elizabeth Currid, author of *The Warhol Economy*, visited the studios of Potter Karin Kraemer and Crayon Artist Tiona Marco in Superior's Old City Hall building.

Over lunch at the Red Mug Coffee House—where she raved about her Panini sandwich—Currid talked about the importance of *density*.



The Messenger, by Crayon Artist Tiona Marco

New York City's arts, music and fashion sectors exemplify the density principle on a grand scale. The scene is vibrant because so many creative people from all over the planet decide they need to be in New York to make it.

Density works on several levels. It concentrates artists, musicians, designers and other cultural producers where the cross-pollination of their ideas creates new value-generating projects and products. It works for the producers, and it works for patrons who can spend a day, a week or a lifetime checking out a rich variety of creative experiences and products conveniently clustered in one area. It also works for the local and regional economies where all the action occurs.



Elizabeth Currid addresses a capacity crowd at Lake Superior College

In her keynote address, Currid stressed that density works at different scales. Communities of any size can apply the principle to boost their local economies.

On a smaller scale, Superior's Old City Hall provides a local example. The Red Mug Coffee House is housed in the same building with several artist studios and shops. The Red Mug is a gathering space for artists, patrons and people who just wander in for a good cup of coffee. The same cross-pollination of ideas that works for New York is at work right here. Similarly, more people and potential customers are drawn to the building by multiple attractions under one roof.

Between the mega scale of New York City and the micro scale of Old City Hall is the arts district or corridor model that has been successfully implemented in cities across the nation. Art Works! Finance Committee Chair and Panelist Jon Heyesen summarized his visit to Paducah, Kentucky. In 2001, Paducah set out to transform an area of deteriorating old homes into a self-sufficient, creative neighborhood designed for artists, by artists. The City of Paducah and Paducah Bank made the project a front burner priority. In a few short years, the Artist Relocation Program www.paducaharts.com transformed a blighted area into a thriving arts and gallery district. The program, which attracted more than 70 artists, is nationally recognized for using the arts for neighborhood revitalization and is fast becoming a national cultural destination.

On the same panel with Heyesen, Duluth LISC Executive Director Pam Kramer shared specific ways Duluth can use an arts district approach to revitalize neighborhoods and create new opportunities for people of all socioeconomic levels.

Stronger communities



Sibley Johns tells how the Music Resource Center helps teens

Art Works! Panelist Sibley Johns, executive director of the Music Resource Center www.musicresourcecenter.org in Charlottesville, Virginia, shared how the gift of a music studio from the Dave Matthews Band and support from the city and individual donors allows the center to provide an after-school program for teens.

Participation is open to any teen who wants to learn how to play an instrument or write, produce or record a song or video. By giving teens a positive outlet for their energy, the city of Charlottesville has reduced teenage crime while spurring new economic activity.

Locally, Armory Arts & Music Center supporters were intrigued by the Charlottesville model and plan to investigate whether a similar approach might be incorporated in a renovated Duluth Armory.

Charlottesville is also home to a downtown pedestrian mall with more than 150 shops and award-winning restaurants. A magnet for art, music, dining, shopping and entertainment, the mall also features the renovated Paramount Theater, one of a few community-supported restorations of historic theaters in the country.

Creative tourism

Increasingly, people are traveling to locations for vacations that offer a mix of cultural and creative opportunities. Art Works! Panelist Tom Maguire, senior planner of culture and heritage tourism in Santa Fe, spoke about the expanding niche of *creative tourism* which involves people making art or participating in some way rather than just being an observer or spectator.

Maguire invited interested parties to Santa Fe this September 29 through October 2 when the city, in partnership with UNESCO Creative Cities, will host an international conference *Creative Tourism; A Global Conversation*. www.creativesantafe.org/news.php The conference news release explains that “creative tourism is travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place,” providing a “connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture. So going to a gallery and then eating an enchilada dinner is not creative tourism; creating a clay pot and preparing and enjoying an enchilada dinner with a group of people is creative tourism.”

In our region, for example, the natural beauty of Lake Superior and arts resources could be combined to offer creative tourism packages such as digital photography instruction combined with field work shooting the endless images of the North Shore.

Business rethinking the arts

Businesspeople are—well—busy! Often the challenges of increasingly competitive markets demand their full attention. It’s not that they don’t appreciate the arts. They just don’t have a lot of time to think about anything beyond the pressing priorities of the day.

Somebody taps you on the shoulder and offers an arts-related sponsorship opportunity. You write a check. You do your part to support the arts because it’s good for the community. Then it’s back to business.



Virginia Willard (left) and Linda K. Johnson talked about what can be achieved when business and the arts work together

Business leaders across the nation are discovering practical benefits to working with the arts to build the economy and the community. Supporting the arts is not just a handout.

Art Works! Panelist Virginia Willard, executive director of Northwest Business for Culture & the Arts www.nwbca.org, explained how her organization connects business and the arts to strengthen Oregon's culture and economy.

In addition to research, advocacy and fundraising, NWBCA provides training programs for young business leaders to prepare them for service on arts boards.

Quality of place is entering the lexicon of business leaders for a very practical reason. As significant numbers of workers retire in the next few years, employers will experience greater challenges attracting and retaining an adequate workforce. In this competition for human resources, attractive places to live will certainly have an advantage.

A rich cultural environment is increasingly important to people making up their minds where to make their homes. In fact, Dr. Richard Florida suggests that future economic growth will be “driven by the location choices of creative people.”

In addition to attracting members of “the creative class,” a vibrant arts and entertainment scene is also sought by the young professionals we hope will decide to put down roots in the area.

So what?

Evaluations of the Art Works! Opening Gala, Creative Economy Showcase and Conference tell us the events attracted a large, energetic audience with lots of ideas. They had fun and they were stimulated by speakers, panelists, performers, exhibitors and dialog with each other. While it's a real hoot to engage 300 creative thinkers in a day of exploration, the larger potential lies in eight new initiatives generated in the breakout sessions.



Facilitator Ann Glumac incorporates input from a breakout session into an action plan

Led by an experienced team of Blandin Community Leadership Program facilitators, Art Works! attendees broke into seven groups for concurrent sessions to brainstorm, prioritize and develop new local initiatives to put some of their great ideas into action.

The seven groups produced nine initiatives, two of which were similar enough they were merged into one initiative aimed at developing a *Twin Ports Arts Alliance* to continue the work of connecting and collaborating on strengthening the area's creative economy.

Would you like a little art with your music? One initiative team will explore whether organizers of the Homegrown Music Festival may be interested in incorporating a *Lake Superior Arts Festival* in Homegrown week. If that's not feasible, the group will research other possible dates for an arts festival.

Another team will work on a *Duluth and Superior Leadership Program* to develop arts board training for business people. Virginia Willard has graciously offered to serve as a resource for this team.

Where would you look if you were interested in arts-related employment? If one of the other initiative groups is successful, you'll soon be able to visit a *website listing Twin Ports job opportunities in arts and culture*.

The *Artists Mentoring Youth* initiative will look into ways to nurture aspiring young artists.



Duluth Mayor Don Ness (right) and Superior Mayor Dave Ross welcomed Gala participants

Duluth Mayor Don Ness and Superior Mayor Ross participated in the Opening Gala and issued a joint proclamation designating March 14 as Creative Economy Day in the Twin Ports. In remarks to the audience and media interviews, both mayors expressed their support for the arts.

Unfortunately, with the substantial fiscal challenges facing local government, there's a great deal of political pressure to cut spending on anything except essential services.

The *Public Arts Coalition* initiative will examine how the critical support of local government can be secured in an increasingly uncertain funding environment. Portland Artist Linda K. Johnson has offered to help.

Perhaps the *Duluth and Superior Art Corridor* initiative will identify ways for local government, business and the arts to work together to leverage funding that is already available for community and neighborhood development.

Take a leap! The *LEAP (Lake Effect Art Portal)* initiative will work on promoting creative tourism. Bringing new dollars into the local economy, of course, helps the cities and counties improve their financial health.

Initiative team representatives will meet with members of the Art Works! leadership team, May 13, to share progress reports and learn about a grant process to obtain seed money for their initiatives if needed. Thanks to the strong support of sponsors, exhibitors and attendees, conference organizers expect to have a positive balance remaining after the final accounting. Proceeds will be made available for grants to the initiative teams.

The glass is half-full (actually more than half-full)

For whatever reason, those of us who live here don't always recognize or fully appreciate our own strengths. Maybe we're jaded. Maybe our Midwest humility makes us uncomfortable blowing our own horns. But the natural beauty of Lake Superior and the quality and quantity of our artistic and cultural talent clearly provide a launching pad for greater prosperity.

But don't take my word for it. Keynote Speaker Elizabeth Currid is bicoastal, dividing much of her time between New York and Los Angeles. She's also a frequent visitor to London. What would an art-hip world traveler like Currid see in a place like the Twin Ports? Plenty.

After visiting the studios of local Crayon Artist Tiona Marco and Potter Karin Kraemer and viewing Opening Gala performances and Creative Economy Showcase exhibits, Currid said the quality of art being produced here is every bit as good as what's happening in New York or Los Angeles.

Currid's upbeat assessment of the artistic and cultural assets in the Twin Ports was echoed by our panelists from Portland, Sante Fe, Charlottesville, Paducah and Portland, Maine. They were impressed by the talent as well as the energy of the arts, business and civic leaders who participated in the events. We have more than enough to forge a top-tier creative economy.

With a positive attitude, a clearer understanding of our unique package of strengths and assets and a coordinated marketing strategy, we can shed our inferiority complex and position the Twin Ports where it belongs among the very best places to visit, live or do business.

To learn more about Art Works! and the eight new initiatives, please watch for new posts on www.artworkstwinports.org