

the Sopris Sun

Local arts symposium ponders familiar challenges

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On a springish morning, May 2, arts organizations from throughout the Valley convened for the first-ever State of the Arts Symposium at TACAW. The event was organized by Amy Kimberly, former executive director of Carbondale Arts, as part of her Change Leader project with Colorado Creative Industries. Kimberly told The Sopris Sun she hopes the symposium becomes an annual event.

"Arts are at the essence of who we are," she said, introducing the day. The agenda included several presentations, panels, group discussions and a scrumptious lunch catered by Epicure Catering (and prepared in TACAW's all-electric kitchen). After lunch, everyone was invited to get active with a little dance and stretch led by Dance Initiative.

Participants were first treated to a keynote by Christy Costello, interim director of Colorado Creative Industries, giving a snapshot of how the state benefits socially and economically from arts and culture. Colorado Creative Industries was established in 1967 as the official state arts agency and

began operating out of the Office of Economic Development and International Trade in 2010.

"Arts and culture are pretty magical," said Costello. "They provide a tremendous economic benefit and also make us healthier, safer and more connected." For example, more than \$1 trillion was added to the United States' gross domestic product in 2021 thanks to the arts and culture sector. This is far above mining (\$333.9 billion) and outdoor recreation (\$454 billion).

Costello showed how \$1.4 million came to Colorado arts in the form of post-COVID federal relief funding, while more than \$100 million was distributed by the state itself. State funding came through the Colorado Arts Relief fund (\$23 million) and Community Revitalization grants (\$85 million), and both are now concluded.

She said that arts and culture are bouncing back faster than the rest of industries in the United States, contributing \$5.4 billion to Colorado's economy in 2021. Colorado is also consistently among the top 10 states in terms of number of residents that participate in some form of art-making, she said.

Then, Meredith Badler spoke on behalf of Colorado Business Committee for the Arts, a non-governmental organization that advocates for the state's creative economy. One statistic she gave is that cultural audiences spend an average of \$31.47 per person when attending an event, benefitting peripheral industries like transportation and food services.

The Colorado Business Committee for the Arts created a grassroots mobilization platform for contacting state and federal representatives in support of arts funding. The Arts Action Network is a "quick, easy but impactful way you can get engaged," said Badler. In this way, they helped secure an additional \$20 million on top of the initial \$65 million for post-pandemic Community Revitalization grants. You can sign up at CBCA.org/colorado-arts-action-network

Looking more locally, Michael Stout, education director at Carbondale Arts, informed the audience of the risk that "we are losing our creative sector" due to the Valley's high cost of living. According to a 2018 Artspace

study, 68% of Carbondale creatives said they had considered leaving due to the affordability crisis which has only gotten worse.

Inevitably, this crisis came up again during a panel with local governments, as well as during breakout sessions. "The principal threat," said painter Michael Kinsley in a breakout session, "is an extremely inflationary economy [and] the affordability of housing and child care." He spoke in favor of having government involved in solutions.

Another panel gathered Spanish-speaking creatives to talk about outreach. "When I've been successful," said Gaby Galindez, "it's not just a partnership. It takes a lot of legwork. It's not just translation either, though that's a good start." She suggested getting the whole community involved early in the process, rather than as an afterthought, and also understanding there are cultural differences to contend with.

MinTze Wu, executive director of VOICES, took the opportunity to ask about the term "Latinx" and what the preference is for identifying our Spanish-speaking community. She was informed that it's important to read the audience. Some may prefer "Latino," which is more traditional though gendered, and others might like "Latine" which is gender-neutral and more pronounceable than "Latinx."

The day ended with two panels focused on funding. Regarding the high number of nonprofits in the Valley competing for donors, "relationship building eliminates competition..." offered Allison Alexander, director of strategic partnerships and communication at the Aspen Community Foundation. And, "impact doubles through collaboration."

Regarding capital campaigns, "It is easier to invite people to join a party than ask them to start the party," said TACAW Executive Director Ryan Honey. Meaning, organizations should get the ball rolling first, then solicit donations. And lastly, when it comes to asking for money, "If I ask you, you can say 'no.' If I don't, you can't say 'yes.'"