

# Opinion

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## The Columbus Dispatch

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# Local arts mean business

Study finds culture huge boost to economy

**W**hen central Ohioans admire a painting in a gallery, enjoy the symphony, rock out at a concert or amble around an arts hop or festival, they probably aren't thinking "Wow, this is a really great economic-development opportunity."

Even so, the arts don't only sate the soul; their impact in greater Columbus can be measured in cold cash: The arts create jobs, provide tax revenues to state and local governments and create an environment that attracts visitors, a creative class of workers and leading-edge employers.

These are the findings of a national study, Arts & Economic Prosperity 5, which examined the impact of arts spending in 341 cities and regions, including Columbus and in all 50 states. (Read the study at <http://www.gcac.org/about/research/>) The

results are what anyone who has been in Columbus since the last study, released five years ago, might expect: Our arts are thriving.

The study found that the nonprofit arts- and -culture industry in greater Columbus generates \$412.3 million in annual economic activity and supports the equivalent of 14,980 full-time jobs. That's a near doubling of economic impact since the 2012 study, which pegged the arts' impact to our local economy at \$226 million and 8,500 jobs.

Some of these impressive gains result from a stronger economy; the 2012 survey collected data in 2010, during the Great Recession, when discretionary dollars were scarce. And only 64 nonprofit arts groups participated, compared to 91 this round.

But the fact that this new survey includes more organizations reflects a growth in new arts organizations — for instance, the Pizutti Collection.

To determine economic impact, the survey takers questioned organizations on

their costs and salaries and surveyed people attending events, asking how much they spent. Cultural attendees shelled out an average of \$24.98 per person, per event. That figure rises to \$36 per person for those traveling to the event.

And here's a bit of news of which tourism officials should take note: 43 percent of out-of-town visitors and 35.4 percent of local residents reported they would have traveled elsewhere to attend a similar cultural event, say the ballet, a science or history museum or the opera.

"If a community fails to provide a variety of artistic and cultural experiences," the study says, "not only will it fail to attract new dollars from cultural tourists, it will also lose the discretionary spending of its own residents who will travel elsewhere for a similar experience."

This study importantly quantifies a sector of the economy most often thought of as a "nicey" when in fact patronage of the arts, both by government and the private sector, pays returns to local businesses, including hotels, restaurants and shops. Such information gives the arts community leverage when it seeks government support, because the dollars chipped in for arts also return in the form of hotel bed taxes, sales, income and property taxes.

"When we support the arts, we are investing in a community," said Randy Cohen, vice president of research and policy at Americans for the Arts, which produced the national arts-economic-impact survey.

Equally important, the arts attract the so-called "creative class"; thinkers whom businesses are looking to employ.

All arts capture the human experience and tell a story. But this year's survey changes the story of the arts from, "once upon a time" to a spreadsheet showing a very real happy ending for those who invest.