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Arts groups gain info on patrons, projected needs

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If knowledge is power, then the power of arts organizations in the St. Croix Valley is growing quickly.

Arts organizations in the area are seeking information from their patrons and supporters through two surveys, and are using the information to strengthen their organizations.

Jill Shannon, a representative from the St. Croix Community Foundation, has been attending city council meetings throughout the valley, seeking financial support for the organization to conduct a facilities assessment for the arts in the Valley.

And two weeks ago, ArtReach Alliance unveiled information from a survey asking who attends arts events in the valley, and how they can be best served.

The results were unveiled at an event Jan. 31 at The Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, Wis.

The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council and the St. Croix Valley Community Foundation provided funding for the survey.

The purpose of the ArtReach survey was "looking at why people choose to participate in the arts, what they are looking for, how do they find it, and what do they think of the quality," said Jessica Pack, executive director of ArtReach Alliance.

It included information about arts organizations throughout the St. Croix Valley, as they work together already, a characteristic Pack considers unique.

The information will be used to determine how best to use the resources of arts organizations and how to develop new audiences, Pack said.

What the organization was trying to find out was, when it comes to the arts in the St. Croix Valley:

- why do people choose to show up?
- why do they stay home or go elsewhere?
- what are they looking for?
- how do they find it?
- what's their opinion of the quality?
- what brings them back?

To answer these questions, online and paper surveys were given to 907 of those attending arts events or other community events or public places in the valley.

When the surveys were tallied, more than half of the respondents were between the ages of 36 and 65, and two-thirds had a bachelors or advanced degree. More than 70 percent were women. A third of them lived within the Stillwater 55082 Zip code, with the next largest group, 17 percent, living in and around Hudson, Wis.

For those who do not attend art events, the ticket price was the major barrier for not attending an arts event. Simply not having enough information about the event was a barrier for people, especially younger people.

At the same time, a third of those 46 to 65 said there was no barrier to them attending arts events, and that number grew to 40 percent for their older counterparts.

Respondents were asked how they value the arts, and many answered they participated for entertainment reasons, and for the beauty of the art. By far, theater and the fine arts were what people preferred when it came to participating in the arts. More than a majority

had been to a play, a music concert or a craft fair during the past year.

Local newspapers were the most frequently cited source of information regarding arts events, followed by friends and family and information sent either by traditional mail or e-mail.

Respondents were most likely to attend events in Hudson (73 percent), Stillwater (71 percent), River Falls (35 percent) and Marine on St. Croix (30 percent).

Art facilities survey

Meanwhile, the survey planned by the St. Croix Community Foundation is seeking information on what arts facilities are available in the greater Stillwater area, in an effort to provide facilities for arts programming without duplicating efforts in a number of communities.

The two surveys should complement one another, Pack said, as they are both seeking information on how best the arts can serve the residents of the St. Croix Valley.

The facilities survey, to be conducted by Artspace, a Minneapolis organization, will involve 22 cultural organizations in the region and local artists.

The cultural needs assessment is in the fundraising stage, with the hope of raising \$56,521. Part of that will come from participating organizations, individuals, and grants from foundations. Municipal governments are being asked to fund 20 percent of the study, or almost 23 cents per capita.