

**ST CROIX VALLEY PRESS > NEWS****Painting a new arts vision**[Print Page](#)***ArtReach Alliance seeks to connect the St. Croix Valley and the arts in new ways.*****by Hannah Gruber
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STILLWATER — For the past 17 years, ArtReach Alliance, has striven to open doors for artists, business owners, and individuals of the community to participate in all facets of the arts: visual, literary, performance, and music. Now with a new board chair, the non-profit organization is going in a new direction to better impact the community.

ArtReach Alliance, originally the River Valley Arts Council, has evolved since its founding in 1992.

"It's our mission to connect the community to the arts. We have a vision for the St. Croix Valley and it has been our current chair's focus to help us clarify that vision," Executive Director Jessica Pack said.

Bill McCarthy became the new board chair January 1 after serving on the board the past two years. As a writer and resident of the St. Croix Valley, McCarthy has made his own contribution to the art community. He was nominated for the current year's Pushcart-Prize, an award given to small presses for the best poem published.

Over the years ArtReach Alliance has been primarily focused on Stillwater, however McCarthy was encouraged with the rest of the board to expand the focus to the St. Croix Valley.

"How can we have an impact from an arts standpoint, not just from our own municipality? What would it look like if it were a St. Croix Valley focus?" McCarthy asked.

To gauge why the St. Croix Valley participates in the arts, ArtReach surveyed 907 people in the community through a two-phase study that took place from July through October, Pack said.

"People attend arts events and are drawn to the St Croix Valley because of the river and the atmosphere," Pack said. "The history, natural beauty, the conveniences of being in the Twin Cities but having the small town atmosphere makes it very appealing to visitors and residents."

In the second phase of the study, ArtReach asked a series of questions of local arts organizations, businesses, and venues about how they communicate with their audience and what kinds of methods they use.

ArtReach held the Workshop for Stakeholders Jan. 31 at the Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, to share the information it found. Sixty people representing the local arts organizations and businesses from St. Croix Falls to Hastings and from New Richmond to River Falls attended the workshop.

Paul Creager, the founder of the Square Lake Film & Music Festival, attended to share his input.

"I was impressed with the visionary venue of people there. I didn't feel like we are outside the Twin Cities and that arts are going to be treated differently," Creager said. "I thought it was an intellectually driven group that was well-organized."

Creager shared his marketing success using modes geared towards 20- to 35-year-olds. They included modern electronic methods like e-mail and posting announcements on blogs, he said.

"The St. Croix Valley could do a lot more than we do now and I firmly agree with ArtReach, we can offer things that the city can't offer," Creager said. "We can really be a thriving arts community."

ArtReach also performed another study last year looking at the economic impact of the arts in the community. It revealed information regarding the impact of the non-profit arts on organizations and

audiences. It also looked at audience spending regarding the arts and the overall impact of the non-profit arts and culture industry. The study showed that non-profit arts and culture is a \$16.45 million industry that supports 384 full-time equivalent jobs.

"It's not about promoting individual artists, it's about pulling in audiences and customers. If we can create a bigger pie — I believe artists and the arts will do well," McCarthy said.

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