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## **Revving Pawtucket's economic engine through the arts - by Donald Grebien**

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Donald Grebien

While many agree that a picture is worth a thousand words, it can also positively impact the economy of a community. Art and cultural activities, including live music, theater, dance performances and art exhibits, and especially events, prime a community's economic engine, bringing dollars to local businesses and enhancing the quality of life of residents.

While the arts are often the soul of a city, it is clear that it has had an impact nationally, statewide and in the specifically here in Pawtucket.

In 2019, arts and culture added \$919.7 billion to the United States' GNP, creating 3.2 million jobs, paying out \$447 billion in wages. The United States also had a \$33 billion trade surplus in arts and cultural commodities, notes the National Assembly of State Art Agencies.

According to the National Endowment for the Arts, during the past five years the federal agency distributed more than \$6,109,400 in grants in Rhode Island.

In the most recent information (2019) from the Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA), which is produced jointly by the National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Research & Analysis and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Rhode Island they noted that art and cultural activities added 3.3% or \$2.1 billion to Rhode Island's economy.

Over 18,000 workers in the state were employed by the arts and culture industries, with workers earning wages and benefits totaling more than \$1.1 billion.

More than 53% of Rhode Island's adults attended live music, theater or dance performances, while 28% attended art exhibits, according to the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, conducted in partnership with the United States Census Bureau.

Throughout the city of Pawtucket's 307-acre Arts & Entertainment District, you will find hundreds of painters, creative sector companies, fiber artists, sculptors, photographers and artists of all mediums working within 23 historic and adaptive reuse mills. The city's three theaters, ten art galleries, music venues, including The Met, Machines with Magnets and News Café, and the newly created National Park surrounding Slater Mill, create a reason for Rhode Islanders and tourists to come into the city for quality entertainment. The 23-year old Pawtucket Arts Festival, held every September, attracts thousands of people to experience art, "Pawtucket-style."

Since 1999 the city's arts policies would bring arts, craft persons and creative sector companies to underutilized or vacant mills. Developers have made approximately \$96 million in private investment in 12 new residential lofts. The city's mills are filled with artist studios and small creative businesses. The city's arts initiative also gave birth to the Jacqueline M. Walsh School of Performing and Visual Arts (JMW), one of the state's first high schools dedicated to the arts.

As reported in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Boston Globe, Pawtucket has gained a reputation of supporting its strong arts community. We have successfully transformed a formerly mostly industrial city into one with a vibrant, thriving arts community.

The city's Advisory Commission on Arts and Culture, created by ordinance, is committed to advancing my Administration's vision of promoting, facilitating and supporting artistic and cultural activities throughout the city. Through the efforts of chair Miriam Plitt and a nine-member commission that includes a public art committee, City Hall now houses an art gallery. In addition, you can view murals, creatively painted rain barrels by students of Pawtucket's JMW and artistically painted utility boxes scattered throughout the community. We are also one of the first communities in Rhode Island to adopt a percent for public art ordinance applying to both public and city-subsidized private development projects.

Now, as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, live arts and events can become more and more frequent and we look forward to that here in Pawtucket.

Join the evolution and Pawtucket's arts community. For more details, contact commerce director Jeanne Boyle.

Donald Grebien is the mayor of city of Pawtucket, R.I.

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