



June 3, 2009

Mayor clarifies ripple effect of arts funding on local economy

By **JENNA LONG**, The Daily Transcript

There is reportedly concrete evidence that art is more than just a luxury to sacrifice in times of recession, but an essential source of employment and revenue dollars that San Diego cannot afford to lose.

Mayor Jerry Sanders held a press conference Tuesday to release a 2008 report on the positive economic and community impact of local nonprofit arts organizations, stressing that continued funding for performing and visual arts is vital to San Diego's well being.

"Arts and culture are good for business in San Diego," said Sanders, in a brief address at the Old Globe Theatre Tech Center in southeastern San Diego.

He spoke of the 6,300 jobs made possible last year by the city of San Diego's Commission for Arts and Culture, which provides funding for 72 organizations through an organizational support program, subsidized by the Transient Occupancy Tax.

The 2008 report verified that San Diego's arts sector accounts for \$180 million in direct expenditures, a highly substantial economic boost to the region.

Victoria Hamilton, executive director of the city's arts commission, presented nationwide evidence of high rankings San Diego has received as a top tourist destination in terms of its arts and culture credentials, citing that the city boasts 1,140 works of art in its current collection.

Hamilton also referenced two local Tony award-winning theaters, The Old Globe and La Jolla Playhouse, which have collectively sent more regional productions to Broadway than any other U.S. city.

She joked that if Playhouse-born "33 Variations" takes home a Tony award for Best Play this Sunday, she'd be among locals that could say "I saw it here."

But the most amusing part of Tuesday's press conference was during host and Globe CEO Lou Spisto's speech, giving thanks to the city for all its financial support.

"We get quite a sizeable grant," Spisto said. "I was blown away by the amount of money this city gives."

After building on how generous San Diego has been to the arts, Spisto turned to Sanders and joked, "I take that back!" and "Change the tape!" to the cameraman, not wanting it to appear that arts funding has been too liberal.

Spisto also took time to talk about the Globe's newly-built tech center, "the engine of the operation," which houses the theater's costumes and props and provides a very large, covered area where complex sets are built.

After searching for the center's location for three years, Spisto credited Councilmember Anthony Young of the fourth district for his assistance in launching a residency project.

The project served as a catalyst for community development, which connected the Globe to its new surroundings and provided several ways for students to get involved in making theater a new option.

Spisto ended by reiterating his thanks to the city for giving back to the arts, and promising that upcoming Globe productions are "only getting bigger and only more and more elaborate."

Sanders closed the press conference by noting that it's easier to support the arts when you're able to see the economic benefits and impact it has on San Diego. "It's a win-win both ways," he said.

And in terms of future funding keeping local arts alive, Sanders modified an old theater expression by declaring, "The show must go on -- and it will go on."

###