



**The Community Foundation of Tompkins County**  
**and**  
**The Community Arts Partnership (CAP)**  
***Arts and Culture, Commerce and Community: Independent and Interdependent***  
**A Critical Issues Roundtable**  
**March 31, 2004**

The Community Foundation of Tompkins County held its third 2003-2004 Critical Issues Roundtable on March 31, 2004, at the Clarion Conference Center in Ithaca, New York. Co-hosting the event was the Community Arts Partnership (CAP), the primary advocate for the Arts in Tompkins County. The topic was *Arts and Culture, Commerce and Community: Independent and Interdependent*.

Over 90 people attended the March 31 conversation on *Arts and Culture, Commerce and Community*. Participants represented government representatives, staff and board members from the various arts organizations, artists, patrons of the arts, educators, economic development and business leaders, local funders, and representatives of the Social Service community.

The 2003-2004 Critical Issues Roundtables are a series of community-focused conversations hosted by the Community Foundation. Each roundtable features a strategic topic that addresses the quality of life for those who work and live in Tompkins County. The roundtables are provocative discussions that lead to action, produce more effective strategic decision-making and planning practices, promote positive results for our communities, and foster enlightened philanthropy.

**Framing the Discussion: The Arts and Culture of Tompkins County**

Preliminary to the general discussion, Richard Driscoll, Executive Director of the Community Arts Partnership (CAP), presented information entitled *Locally By the Numbers*. Ithaca and Tompkins County are known throughout New York State as home to 83 arts and cultural organizations based either in the community or as part of higher education institutions such as Cornell University and Ithaca College. Among these are professional groups, volunteer-driven organizations, and affinity-based efforts. Over 600 artists in all disciplines call Tompkins County home. With the arts as a major competitive asset in our community, Tompkins County has the capability of using these assets productively while also converting them into economic and quality-of-life improvements.

Among the local statistics were these:

- \$6,000,000 in estimated total of budgets for community-based arts/cultural organizations;
- 65 full-time and 405 part-time persons employed by community based arts/cultural organizations;

- 450,000 estimated total attendance for performing arts, museum and gallery visits, including arts-in-education school contacts;
- 100,000 tickets sold at the Ticket Center in 2003;
- 33,000 names in the Ticket Center Master File, 30% of which are from outside Tompkins County;
- 125 local businesses typically supporting the arts and culture (out of 2500 businesses registered in Tompkins County);
- \$248,000 County Room Tax dollars dedicated to arts and cultural organizations for general operating support, project support, and stabilization/development in 2004; and
- 85% return-on-investments to municipalities when local government supports the arts,

Taking the *By the Numbers* to a broader framework reflected:

- The total not-for-profit and commercial state arts and cultural organization budgets in New York State are \$5.3 billion, and the total economic impact of these organizations on New York State is \$13.4 billion (represents 2.5 times the return on investment/based on 1995 numbers).
- The total public sector cash investment in the arts represents \$197 million while the total tax revenues generated by arts-related economic activity represents \$761 million (380% return on investment/1995 survey).
- As an example, for the Lincoln Center in New York City, there has been a 225% increase in property values for the Lincoln Center neighborhood in the first 25 years since its construction and operation.
- Arts and cultural attractions are one of the seven most important variables influencing business relocation and employee decisions to relocate to an area.
- Culture visitor expenditures versus general recreation expenditures are also impressive (\$615/trip versus \$425; 4.7 nights vs. 3.3 nights; and the cultural visitor is likely to have extended impacts on the local economy through hotel or B&B stays and restaurants).
- In some major industries, support for the arts is a workforce issues. General Electric, for example, believes that the arts develop and attract the kind of educated, creative, collaborative workers it needs in its businesses.
- For many businesses surveyed in 1997, CEO's of 37% believed that the general public is more likely to purchase products or services from companies they know support the arts.

## **Results of General Discussion**

Participants were involved in small-group conversations about the impact of the arts on their personal lives and then in more general discussions regarding strategies that will strengthen and extend the vitality of the arts and cultural advantages of Tompkins County.

Participants were in general agreement that they learned something new as part of their discussions. Among the ideas mentioned most frequently were a heightened sense of the facts and data regarding our local arts and cultural organizations; the economic impacts of having a vital arts and cultural community; the quantity of people involved in arts and culture in Tompkins County; and the need for arts groups to reach out to broader segments of our community and our region. Many expressed concern that there was too little diversity of age, race, culture, and socio-economic representation among the participants, thereby limiting the collective wisdom of any ideas that might emerge.

When asked what three things might be needed to build and sustain the arts industry in Tompkins County for everyone's benefits, participants offered three major areas for future action:

- a) 27% recommended more integrated and collective communications and marketing as a strategy needed to strengthen the arts and cultural community itself and to expand the

- reach of the arts and cultural offerings to non-participating local audiences or more regionally represented audiences;
- b) 21% suggested fostering collaborations and partnerships among arts organizations themselves, as outreach to businesses, and with more diverse populations; and
  - c) 21% encouraged the development of broader networks for outreach that supports access to community members representing diverse populations and untapped audiences (age, race, culture, socio-economic, and lack-of-interest factors).

Among other ideas recommended were increased arts education programs done on-site in the schools throughout the county; an expanded role for CAP as the primary agent for arts and cultural activities and coordination; improved physical resources for performance-based groups (with the State Theater being mentioned as a primary location for central focus); and expanded sources of funding/revenues.

Most participants agreed that as a result of the roundtable there was not a consensus reached on issues and possibilities for moving forward, nor was there a sense that readiness for action was achieved. However, many did comment that they would like to see conversations like this one held more frequently as a means of reaching consensus and determining action steps.

### **Next Steps**

In closing, participants were asked to identify ways that they could help with future activities that would strengthen and enrich the arts and cultural climate for Tompkins County. Among their choices were creating partnerships, both in the community-at-large and within the arts community itself (76%); encouraging legislative support (13%); promoting advocacy for the arts and culture locally, regionally, and statewide (21%); and increasing public engagement in the arts/culture (23%). Forty-three people volunteered to help with future activities. They identified whether they would serve as leaders (7) or as team members (35).

The Community Arts Partnership will now move forward to consider the ways in which all of these activities and support can be mobilized to the best advantage of Tompkins County and specifically the vitality of our arts and cultural organizations located here.

### **Special Thanks to All**

On behalf of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County and the Community Arts Partnership, we thank all who participated in this roundtable on Arts and Culture, Commerce and Community. The discussion was lively. The results offer promise of future strategies to follow in strengthening and broadening our arts and cultural communities in Tompkins County. Best of all, there are those who have offered help in making these strategies realities.

Vital to the community conversation on the Arts was a dedicated planning team, whose work identified the main discussion points and identified preliminary background information that would be helpful to participants. The Planning Committee included: Matthew Braun, *Executive Director, DeWitt Historical Society*; Mary Beth Bunge, *Coordinator, Discovery Trail*; Eric Clay, *Board members and Grants Chair, Community Foundation of Tompkins County*; Richard Driscoll, *Executive Director, CAP*; Craig Evans, *Assistant to the Superintendent, Ithaca City Schools*; Brian Flack, *Director, Audience Services, Ithaca College Theater*; Danielle Farnbaugh, *Manager, Cayuga Chamber Orchestra*; Gary Ferguson, *Executive Director, Ithaca Downtown Partnership*; Martha Frommelt, *arts consultant*; Peg Hendricks, *Executive Director, Community Foundation of Tompkins County*; Vally Kovary, *Principal, International Planning Associates*; Perri Lo Pinto, *Director of Development, Racker Centers*; Ed Marx, *Tompkins County Planning Commissioner*; Doug MacDonald, *Economic Development Director, City of Ithaca*; Rhoan Morgan, *Director of Marketing, Hangar Theater*; Katy Pearce, *Board member, Hangar Theater*; Frank Robinson, *Director, Johnson Museum of Art*; Nancy Schuler, *Tompkins County Legislature*; John Spence,

*Board member, DeWitt Historical Society; Mary Kane Trochim, Principal, Concept Systems; and Wendy Woods, Director of Marketing, Kitchen Theater.* Our special thanks to all of these people and especially to Mary Kane Trochim for helping Richard Driscoll as a roundtable leader.