

March 30, 2009

Dear Friends of FOTM:

The Art Community needs your help at tonight's Ventura City Council meeting. Our city is facing major cuts in funding for the arts. Aside for the cuts that directly affect FOTM, these cuts will result in less arts programming that will reduce the tax revenue generated by the creative community. Please read my comments below. A similar version of this letter was originally published in a 1999 LA Times Op-Ed that coincided with the largest political forum in the history of the City of Ventura with over 450 arts advocates in attendance. The Arts Forum and the community activism that preceded the event was largely responsible for successfully seating an arts friendly City Council. I have updated the letter to reflect the current statistics.

If you are able to attend the 6 p.m. Council Meeting, please look for "Arts in Partnership" blue and yellow stickers to identify all those in the audience that support the arts. At the very least, please drop a quick note to the city council at [council@ci.ventura.ca.us](mailto:council@ci.ventura.ca.us) and [culturalaffairs@ci.ventura.ca.us](mailto:culturalaffairs@ci.ventura.ca.us) to voice your support to maintain their level of commitment for the arts. Now more than ever, support for the arts is critical in raising much needed tax revenue to help support other departments and essential services.

Thank you!

Donna

March 30, 2009

Supporting the Arts is Good or the City Coffers - Op-Ed/Letter to the Editor  
By Donna Granata, Founder Focus on the Masters  
FOTM, 1147 E. Main St., Ventura, CA 93001, 805/653-2501

Dear Editor,

Supporting the arts though tax dollars in these economic times is a very complex issue. As Ventura's city council debates over where to cut 11.4 million from the annual budget, you are likely to hear the question: How can we justify spending any money on the arts when our police, fire, senior and youth services are threatened? The answer is simple: A strong cultural community contributes to a healthy economy, which is necessary to generate the local tax revenues to support basic social services. Our cultural community more than pays for itself - it defines our city's image and character. Strong, varied and sophisticated arts programming "at home" in our city keeps our residents from spending their "culture dollars" elsewhere. A healthy state of the arts also attracts additional revenue from outside our area in the form of cultural tourism. The inflow generated from the arts is good not only for our souls but for our community's wallet as well.

The economic impact of the arts is hard to dispute. According to Ventura County and the Arts: Impact & Opportunity for Community, a 2008 Ventura County study funded by the James Irvine Foundation and the Ventura County Community Foundation, arts organizations "bring about over \$121 million to our regional economy, are responsible for nearly 2,100 jobs in the county and contribute a total of \$21 million of tax payment to various branches of the government". This is a very cost-effective solution to generating income for our community, especially in these tough economic times. Think about the last time you attended a gallery opening or performance. You more than likely gassed up the car, went out to dinner, attended the event and paid a babysitter - all while having a great time. Some of you may have even bought artwork or joined a non-profit organization to further support its efforts. Every step of the way you contributed to the economic vitality of the community.

A strong cultural life brings both "cents" and "sensitivity" to our community. In addition to a positive economic impact, the arts have a tremendous impact on our youth and overall quality of life. Students exposed to the arts have higher SAT scores, a lower dropout rate in school, improved attitudes and behavior, resulting in lower delinquency, and perform more community service. Communities with an active cultural life attract individuals who traditionally have a higher income, are well educated, esthetically conscious and philanthropic. They create tax revenue by spending money in our local businesses. Cultural supporters make for good neighbors.

We all want to preserve what we love about Ventura and get through the economic challenges we face. Our cultural community is another asset worth supporting, not only to improve our quality of life, but our economic base as well. We need leaders and a community with a true understanding of the how the arts are intertwined with our community's life for its economic, social and educational well-being. Let's put the arts to work to get us through these challenging times.

Donna Granata, Artist/Educator  
Founder/Executive Director, Focus on the Masters  
2005 Cultural Plan Steering Committee Member