

40 Years of Advocacy for the Arts

We all know that Minnesotans are taught to be modest. Because of that, our artists and arts organizations who contribute so much of their talent and inspiration to our state sometimes don't get the recognition they deserve for all that they do: creating, expressing, entertaining, and constantly challenging the way we see, hear, explain, and understand the world.

So, it's time for the rest of us to loudly sing the praises of artists and the arts and to proudly celebrate four decades of the extraordinary work of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, or MCA. Without MCA we simply wouldn't be the nation's leader in arts policy that we are.

For 40 years, MCA has been the catalyst in thoughtful and productive efforts to support the arts across Minnesota, making us a national leader in per capita arts funding, and in statewide support for theater, music, the visual arts and arts education, from Minneapolis to Montevideo, from the Guthrie to Grand Marais.

On November 1, MCA will celebrate its 40th birthday as the oldest and most successful arts advocacy organization in the United States. We celebrate not only the extraordinary 11 Regional Arts Councils, which fund organizations large and small in all 87 counties. We celebrate, too, a recognition that few states can assert. That is, the arts are more than an "amenity" to beautify our communities, although they are, certainly, that. No, more than that, the arts are a necessity — a public good — to enhance our quality of life, to promote beauty and free expression, and to add to our collective sense of wonder. The

arts also increase student SAT scores and keep some kids in school who would otherwise drop out.

We also celebrate the power of the artist and arts organizations. With MCA as a guide, thousands of artists and their supporters have strategically looked beyond their own walls to understand that by banding together with other and diverse groups they could be a powerful political force for change, and for the benefit of our state and all of its citizens.

With MCA's advocacy, the partnership between the Minnesota State Arts Board and Regional Arts Councils feeds resources to all levels of the arts ecosystem . . . from the largest, world-class arts organizations that give our state an international reputation and give hundreds of thousands of people their access to the arts ... to the mid-sized and small organizations creating artistic innovation and enlivening Main Streets everywhere ... to the individual artists who make it all happen and create the art in the first place. All this, in turn, results in access to the arts for all Minnesotans no matter where they live or what their circumstances.

The nonprofit arts provide more than \$1 billion in annual economic impact to Minnesota. With more than 42,000 artists, Minnesota is a hub of artistic energy in the Midwest. Minnesota has one and a half times the number of arts businesses per capita than all of our surrounding states, on par with California and New York. MCA's work has fostered that density of artistic activity.

And, of course, MCA was a lead member in the remarkable coalition of hunters and anglers, and conservation, clean water, and parks and trails advocates

who teamed up in 2008 to help pass our groundbreaking Legacy Amendment to make sure that their constituents — who overwhelmingly supported the amendment — had access to the best arts resources possible.

Minnesota is unique in the country for having dedicated funding for the arts in its state constitution. The arts are a major thread in the fabric of Minnesotans' lives. For 40 years, MCA has led that cultural effort.

So, we're delighted to stop being modest, excited to celebrate Minnesota's commitment to the arts, and thrilled to honor the advocacy and successes that Minnesota Citizens for the Arts has led and forged. Happy Birthday, MCA!

Arne Carlson, Former Governor

Peggy Burnet, Chair, Minnesota State Arts Board

Wendell R. Anderson, Former Governor

Kate Wolford, President, McKnight Foundation