

THE 'ARTS' PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT

By: Mike Shubic

What do the communities of Sedona, Taos, Jerome, Scottsdale, Santa Fe and Bisbee all have in common? They all got their start and have flourished due to their embracing the "arts." Art is the very essence of life and has been a part of the fabric of society since the beginning of time. Art adds culture, sophistication and thought-provoking dialogue wherever it is present and can be the very foundation of economic development and revitalization efforts.

According to an article entitled, "*The Artist Dividend*," in the July 2007 issue of *Urban Land Magazine*, cities large and small from one end of the country to the other are courting artists of all disciplines to their communities in order to establish a "creative class." City leaders have recognized that by embracing the "arts," economic opportunities will follow.

Organizations such as Artspace are available and have helped numerous communities with strategy, rehabilitation and construction of artist work/live spaces across the country. "There's much more visibility and understanding about how artists can be catalysts for economic development. It's become the development tool *du jour*. It's very, very trendy," says Wendy Holmes, Artspace's VP of consulting and resource development.

An article entitled "Arts scene fuels Chandler with cash" ran on 8/1/07 in the Tribune newspaper. It outlines the investments the city of Chandler has made in its art scene and the dividends that have been paid since doing so. According to the article, the economic impact directly related to the "arts" has increased 83% since 2002 from \$3.9 million to \$7.12 million. The beneficiary? Restaurants and local retail shops!

A wonderful idea about developing a true "downtown" Apache Junction was on the table a while back with developers and city officials, but for whatever reason this deal has yet to get off the ground. In order to move forward with this "downtown" vision, it's imperative that quick and decisive action be taken before the

surrounding land becomes chain-linked transient ridden blight. Something needs to jump start the downtown development activity.

Councilman Serdy's beautification idea for the "Focal Point" is a great first step. The next step could include the development of an exploratory committee and collective partnership with Central Arizona College (CAC), city of Apache Junction, the Superstition Area Cultural Alliance (SACA), a developer and a philanthropic group such as the Virginia Piper Foundation to put together a plan to build an art and cultural facility on the former Grand Hotel site. Once built, the facility would be financially self-sufficient and could be run by a board of directors. The facility would house art studios for various disciplined artists, a gallery, outdoor amphitheater that could be used for the performing arts and festival activities. The educational component could include CAC expanding their art classes to an off-site campus, while integrating a working culinary school restaurant or bistro offering gourmet meals at a fraction of the price. Additionally, the developer component could include supporting retail, such as a coffee shop, art supply store and office space for creative professionals such as graphic designers and architects. By establishing a multi-tiered partnership, the burden on the taxpayer would be minimized and create a wonderful tax base for the city, all the while, jump-starting the overall development of "downtown" and generating a "creative" economic hub for the community.

We have a unique opportunity in our community to build a *creative* economic cluster, and one day become a Taos or Sedona, but it takes vision, leadership, political will and the support of the community. The question is, are we going to continue to sit idly by and allow fragmented growth to occur, or are we going to put forth a viable vision for the future? It's up to you. It's up to all of us.

Mike Shubic is a freelance marketing professional and resident of Gold Canyon. Mr. Shubic is an active member of the community serving on several boards and organizational committees, from the City's Economic Development Action Plan Task force (EDAPT), Superstition Area Cultural Alliance (SACA), to the Business and Property Owners network (BPO). Mr. Shubic can be reached for comment by visiting his website at www.ShubicMarketing.com

