

# Being about the business of culture and art

Liz Swaine 11:39 p.m. CST January 15, 2016



Liz Swaine

168 CONNECT [TWEET](#) [LINKEDIN](#) 1 COMMENT [EMAIL](#) [MORE](#)

When a publication as prestigious as Bloomberg’s Businessweek flashes a headline saying “Investing in Culture is Good Business” you can figure there’s something to it, whether you consider yourself a patron of the arts or not.

There definitely IS something to it, and that something has been on the state of Louisiana’s radar since 2007, the year lawmakers enacted legislation creating Cultural Districts in the state. The districts were intended to spark community revitalization based on cultural activity by offering incentive in return for investment.

To help alleviate some of the fear and risk, tax credits were made available for revitalization of certain commercial historic buildings, many of which – in addition to being old – were in bad shape, a dicey location or both. These historic tax credits have led to some amazingly successful revitalizations, returning vacant and underutilized buildings to work – and to tax rolls – as residential, office, retail and performance space.

The sales tax breaks for one of a kind works of art offered by the state help energize art marketing and sales, leading to more of both. The limited incentives also help the Cultural Districts meet their goals of adding business opportunities and new markets for cultural products; increasing artist production; renovating older buildings; increasing cultural activity; and creating a greater sense of community identity.

That is a great list and honestly, if we can encourage even a few of these things, our community is all the better for it. This brings us to our local Cultural District reports that I sit down to write each year around the holidays. As part of remaining in good standing with the state they want a report that shows outcomes; what we're doing and how it's working.

Each year as I pull the data I am surprised by all that we do, but this year, the surprise bordered on shock. As I went through the pages of information on exhibits and performances, painting classes and photography shows, music festivals and studio tours, book signings and building remodels, public art installations and street fairs, it became clearer than ever that art and culture mean money, jobs and a sense of community accomplishment and pride.

I've spent the last few days digging through numbers, but a few that I want to share are especially impressive. In downtown Shreveport's Cultural District alone, there were 107 art sale events and 130 cultural events in 2015, and it's possible I missed a few. In addition to the sales and events, the downtown district was honored with state and national awards and grants given both for performances and to expand the business of art.

People attended the 40th year of the Red River Revel, the Louisiana Film Prize, the Texas Avenue Makers Fairs and our 130- plus events in the hundreds of thousands. That's hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom have formed their impression of our community based on our energetic creative class. Those events spurred increased interest in downtown as a whole, which no doubt helped encourage the seven new building projects in 2015 and the desire among many others to find a project downtown.

We can call it the Cultural Cycle, one that helps shape and revitalize the physical, social, and economic character our community. No matter what it's called, it's working. Let's keep it going.

Liz Swaine is executive director of Shreveport's Downtown Development Authority. Email her at [liz@downtownshreveport.com](mailto:liz@downtownshreveport.com).