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Arts, culture named a priority for AZ Town Hall

Jon Hutchinson
Staff Reporter

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CLARKDALE - The Arizona Town Hall came to Clarkdale Wednesday. The Town Hall outreach program visits communities around the state to share thoughts and recommendations from the recent forum. In May, the Town Hall investigated, "Capitalizing on Arizona's Arts and Culture."

Several regional Town Hall participants took part in the local discussion panel. They included artist Ellie Bauer, who helped found Made in Clarkdale show and presentations, Patrick Schweiss, director of the Sedona International Film Festival, and Allen Affelt, who bought and restored the La Posada hotel in Winslow to its gracious state when it was a posh Fred Harvey railroad hotel.

Affelt, who personally gave visitors a reason to visit Winslow again, warned of the "vicious cycle" in which state officials have plundered revenues for arts and culture to balance the budget. By "disinvesting and disengaging" he said they are also crippling key reasons visitors come and, now, leave less revenue.

Instead, he urged a "virtuous cycle," in which people become "more engaged" and Arizona becomes "more attractive."

Affelt told the audience he paid only \$158,000, the value of the land, for the hotel property. He could not get a loan, but employed local people to build the furniture and chandeliers. He opened an art museum within the hotel and now a sculpture gallery has opened down the street and, for the first time, the Phoenix Art Museum Copperstate Road Rally stops in Winslow to visit the hotel. His occupancy is 98 percent.

Affelt says it is important to support the arts, with or without public funds.

Schweiss, who has been director of Sedona's film festival for seven years, said he "went kicking and screaming" to the Town Hall, expecting people to complain to one



VVN/Jon Hutchinson
Clarkdale artist Ellie Bauer speaks at the Arizona Town Hall at Yavapai College In Clarkdale. She is co-founder of the Made in Clarkdale art exhibition.



Patrick Schweiss of Sedona International Film Festival

another about the lack of support. Instead, he said, he came away with a real enthusiasm for a strong sense of collaboration, a strength in numbers.

"We are an economic driver," he reminded the audience. "We should not be optional. We are a necessity, we are the arts."

Bauer, told of how she had recently been a patient in the hospital in Reno, Nev., and met a doctor from Cameroon Africa, where Ellie had worked in an earlier life.

When she told him that she now is a professional artist, he said, "In your country, you separate the arts. It is part of our lives everyday. You ought to revere the arts everyday in your lives."

Rusty Foley, executive director of the Arizona Citizens Action for the Arts, said the arts are "an important economic sector" of this state, "a major industry." She said this is a deeply important message, "you have to influence the legislature and become part of arts advocacy."

In closing the briefing, Tara Jackson, president of the Arizona Town Hall, recalled that Steve Jobs, had said that one of his best college classes was the art class.

Go to <http://www.aztownhall.org> for the entire report and recommendations of the 98th Town Hall.

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