

## GIVING

# Local arts thrive through partnerships

BY WILL PRATHER

Owner, Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre, Board Member of the Alliance for the Arts and Trustee for the Southwest Florida Community Foundation

It's been nearly 15 years since I moved to Southwest Florida. Back then, Fort Myers was regularly referred to as a cultural desert. Today, that landscape is vastly different as we've become an oasis of culture with an expansive Arts scene that continues to grow and prosper.

This past month, the Lee County Tourist Development Council and Board of County Commissioners in partnership with the City of Fort Myers, Alliance for the Arts, and the Southwest Florida Community Foundation awarded nearly \$1,000,000 in grants to support the Arts and Attractions in Southwest Florida. These types of grants would be unheard of several years ago and it's a perfect example of our local governments and community partners coming together to realize the importance the Arts play in enhancing our quality of life. Not only do these grants make our area more attractive to live in, but they also simultaneously enhance the visitors experience to the millions of tourists who visit our region every year.

The importance of supporting the Arts in our community has finally become a priority thanks to the leadership and vision provided by the Alliance for the Arts and the Southwest Florida Community Foundation. By building bridges to other organizations and listening to the needs within our community, these two organizations have spoken with one voice in their efforts to lobby both gov-

ernment and individual donors in their support of the Arts.

Of course none of this would have been possible without the vision exhibited years ago by community leaders such as Barbara B. Mann and David Robinson who began preaching the importance the Arts would play in our lives. Thanks to their leadership and many others after them, individuals and corporations based here in Southwest Florida continue to support the Arts both in their patronage and financial support.

However, our work is not done. Over the next few years, this cultural growth will continue to need the support of all of us if they are to continue to flourish. Whether it's the new world headquarters of the Art of the Olympians or a new gallery in Matlacha, these organizations will thrive only if they develop the partnerships needed to be successful. Unlike many other businesses, Art organizations cannot survive as an island upon themselves. Instead, they must reach out and build partnerships that will allow them to survive.

The Arts offer us all the unique opportunity to experience emotions such as joy, passion, anger, and even sorrow. These artistic experiences reflect our own individuality that is unique to ones own interpretation of that experience. Without these experiences, our lives would become dull and uneventful. By working together and continuing to support the Arts in Southwest Florida, our community will continue to thrive and ultimately become the best place possible to live and visit. ■

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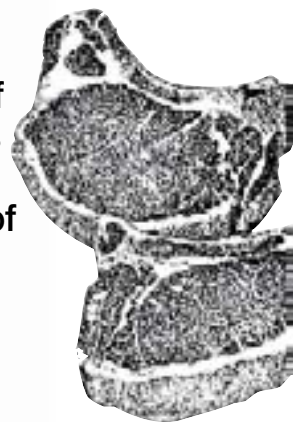
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