

When I took my position as director of the Arts Council of Southeast Missouri a little less than a year ago, I had no idea what sort of an environment I was going to encounter. Although I was familiar with the Arts scene in Cape Girardeau, it seemed that it was an often-overlooked aspect of our community.

A few months into my position, I realized this was a complete misconception. The arts were not overlooked at all; they were thriving. Visitors, and residents alike, had access to an immense community of arts organizations in Cape Girardeau spanning multiple disciplines—theatre, dance, visual arts, and public art. Every segment had its representation and was striving towards the same goal—that goal being to promote an awareness of the arts through exhibits, workshops, shows, and other programming.

While I had once thought that the biggest challenge for the Arts Council would be to properly market arts events and programs, I quickly came to realize that even more challenging was the task of bringing together the multiple facets of arts in the community. The Arts Council is an organization that exists to not only connect the public with the arts, but to also provide resources for local arts groups and artists, no matter their discipline or affiliation. We firmly believe that unity is paramount to the vitality of the arts, and we are encouraged by the many arts organizations that are working hard to obtain it.

When I look around now, almost a year later, what I see in our community inspires me.

Galleries, shops, and other organizations, stand united. Members of the group Arts Around Town hold monthly meetings to discuss First Friday events, upcoming workshops, and successes within the arts community—no matter how great or how small. Local artists work with area non-profits to host plein-air events and fundraisers, and local non-profits seek ways to highlight arts programs throughout the community. Cross-promotion has increased, and the arts scene as a whole is benefiting from this increase.

Why is this important? Numerous studies have indicated that the arts are the lifeblood of any thriving community. Artistic endeavors encourage creative thinking, local spending, and facilitate a culture of lifelong learning. If the arts prosper, Cape Girardeau prospers.

At the Arts Council we encourage you to look more into the arts scene in Cape. Attend a theatrical performance at Southeast Missouri State University, view a First Friday Exhibit Opening at Bilderbach Art Plaza, read a poem written by an elementary student at the Arts Council—our area has so much to offer and it's only getting better!