

## Arts and Culture By Lauren Serrato

A recent national study showed that West Valley nonprofit arts organizations and their audiences contributed \$23 million in direct economic activity, more than \$2.5 million in local and state government revenues, and contributed to over 1,000 jobs in the West Valley.

In addition to the economic benefits arts and culture has on the region, the museums, art galleries, events, festivals and art venues found in various places throughout the West Valley each serve to increase the region and its residents' quality of life.

For instance, highlighting more than 250 artists and craftsmen from around the country, in addition to the various local eateries, Litchfield Park hosts their annual Fall Festival of Arts on the first weekend of November.

Home to the state's largest festival wine garden, each year the city of Litchfield Park welcomes residents, tourists and four legged friends to the center of town along Old Litchfield Road and Wigwam Boulevard.

The city takes pride in their commitment to arts and culture, according to Tricia Kramer, Litchfield Park's community and recreation services director, adding that it plays a vital role in residents' quality of life.

"Litchfield Park's Arts and Cultural experiences come primarily through special events, like our Festival of Arts. We put a lot of effort into special events because they add to our residents' high quality of life and community pride," Kramer said.

Kramer emphasized that while Litchfield Park residents enjoy and benefit from local art and festivals, she added the entire region and state have the opportunity to take advantage of a community that prioritizes quality of life.

"They [festivals and art] also showcase our beautiful city to visitors and tourists. Attendees who had a great time at our festival will return to shop, dine, and perhaps even live, based on that experience. Arts and Cultural programming and events absolutely contribute to overall economic growth in the West Valley," she said.

Travel about 10 miles north to Surprise, the West Valley Arts Council serves 13 municipalities in the West Valley, acting as an advisory and advocate for inclusive art and culture; a creator and facilitator of innovative arts education programs for all ages; a resource and promoter of local artists; and provider of leadership in identifying trends and impact of art and culture in the West Valley.

"Arts and culture is incredibly beneficial to us economically, socially, and educationally," Michael Denson, executive director of West Valley Arts Council said.

"The vibrancy of our cities, the contributions made to economic growth, and the future prospects of our children are all affected by a community's art and culture activity. Studies have shown that students who engage and study arts-centric subjects are more likely to earn higher education degrees, stay employed, and are more likely to vote as young adults."

In addition to providing the region with an outlet to experience arts and culture, West Valley Arts Council serves as a resource to students.

“Arts advocacy and programming for youth is key to the activity of West Valley Arts Council throughout the West Valley. Through our summer apprenticeship program we facilitate partnerships between teens, master artists, and community leaders, all working together to revitalize communities with public art. This is one of the only programs in the West Valley which uniquely combines and fosters arts education, professional development, and career planning specifically for teens,” Denson said.

“We have found that this program continues to have a significant impact on communities, in particular the public works acting as a point of pride. But we have also seen our youth walk away with greatly improved self-esteem and confidence, as well as increased motivation for higher education and community engagement after high school.”

In 2020, West Valley Arts Council created programming and opportunities specifically designed to recognize and promote artists of color in and around the Valley.

IMPRINT: Celebrating Cultural Diversity in the Arts is a series of exhibitions, workshops, lectures, and celebrations that gives the community the opportunity to experience the significant and positive contributions artists of color have had, and continue to have, on our community.

“Exposure to art and culture produces well-rounded adults who are more likely to volunteer and contribute as empathetic citizens. This is particularly important to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion as the arts allow us to broaden our way of thinking by breaking down boundaries through education, engagement, and awareness,” Denson said.

“We believe that it is incredibly important to provide frequent opportunities to engage with the richness, beauty, and unique perspective of the diverse cultures existing in the valley because our community, our region, is very diverse. And as the West Valley continues to grow, art and cultural activity will become more and more vital in ensuring that we are fostering and promoting unity, engagement, and connectedness within all communities.”

Creative sectors in the West Valley have proven to positively impact cities in more ways than one. Studies have shown that arts and culture are good for the economy, help attract and maintain talent throughout the region, improve safety in neighborhoods, increase quality of life, and provide an additional outlet for people to gather.