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## ArtsFairfax: Creating a vibrant arts community that's attracting businesses, residents and visitors alike

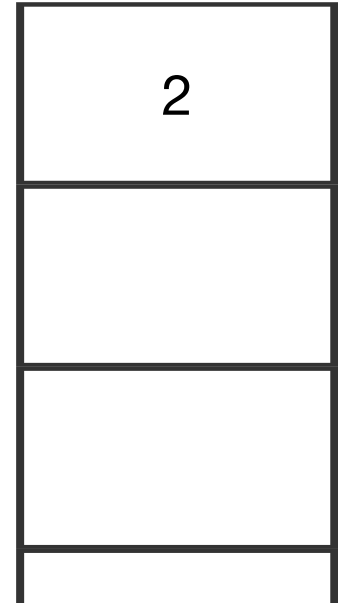
By Jennifer F. Cochran for The Business Voice Jul 18, 2019




ARTSFAIRFAX's Imagine Art Here 2015 Tysons Tiles Public Art project at Tysons West.

Jennifer Heffner

Maybe you've heard the expression, "The 'earth' without 'art' is just 'eh.'" An active arts culture is vital to a community. It enhances the health and happiness of those who live there, fosters innovation, and attracts business. In Fairfax County the arts have become an integral part of the community landscape, thanks in no small part to ArtsFairfax.



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Incorporated in 1964 as the Arts Council of Fairfax County, ArtsFairfax awards about \$500,000 in annual grants through five programs that serve all arts disciplines. Its goal? To strengthen Fairfax organizations, support and honor Fairfax artists, cultivate creativity, encourage equitable access to county-wide artistic experiences, and mobilize the arts as a tool for ensuring a creative economy.

“Art is a great way to enhance the community and serve as a community builder,” said Linda Sullivan, president and CEO of the nonprofit. “Fairfax had a rural start, and as DC grew, Fairfax was known as a suburb. Now, Fairfax has more than 1 million residents who enjoy attractions such as Wolf Trap, Mount Vernon, the Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, and more. ArtsFairfax is excited to be part of this community and help further enhance the community connection to the arts.”

In addition to meaningful grants process, ArtsFairfax has initiated many programs that affect the local community. It serves as a partner to host the annual Creative Aging Festival, which occurs each May at senior centers and community locations throughout the county. ArtsFairfax also created the Artist Residency Program in which artists serve as residents within local middle schools to provide cross- disciplinary education. Also, ArtsFairfax hosts an annual awards event to recognize extraordinary contributions of artists and arts organizations.

“Access to the arts is vital in creating a vibrant community that attracts top talent and fosters innovation, which are essential to success for our customers and our stakeholders,” said Mike Coogan, Vice President and Director of Community Relations and Corporate Responsibility at Leidos and an ArtsFairfax board member.

To further connect the community to the arts, ArtsFairfax has piloted public art projects that include community engagement elements. Both Tysons and Seven Corners have public art installations, and in June a public art project kicked off in Springfield. The Tysons Tiles project by Julia Vogl was launched in 2015, and in 2018 the Annandale-based artist team known as surcreative LLC installed an interactive 8-foot, solar-powered cube in Seven Corners that included portraits of community members who participated in the project by responding to questions such as, “What do you consider home?”

Sharon Bulova, Chairman of the Fairfax Board of Supervisors, noted that during her time in office, Fairfax has grown dramatically. “As we have matured as a county, culture and the arts have taken their place as an integral part of our community landscape,” she said. “Fairfax boasts fantastic orchestras, bands, community theatres, choirs, dance companies, arts classes and more. ... These opportunities add depth, creativity and friendships to people's lives, and are so valuable in fostering healthy and happy communities. The arts also create tremendous tourism and economic opportunities, especially when people enjoy restaurants and shopping along with cultural events.”

Julie Carter, President of Carter Consulting Group and a board member of ArtsFairfax for seven years, acknowledges the effect of art in a community. “Employees demand it. People don’t want to live in a community that doesn’t have cultural amenities. Art provides a lively, creative, innovative community where diverse points of view are celebrated.”

Sullivan notes that the future of the arts in Fairfax County is exciting, and with rapid growth underway in so many areas, the public at large is taking stock in cultural amenities. “Residents want the arts reflected in their own community. They want access to the arts where they live.... A creative economy fuels innovation, provides jobs, and creates a sense of place where people want to live, work and play, and we look forward to being a part of that.”

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To learn more about ArtsFairfax, visit [www.artsfairfax.org](http://www.artsfairfax.org).

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