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New study reveals economic impact of Centre County arts, culture and entertainment

STATE COLLEGE, PA, Aug. 5, 2024 – Arts, culture and entertainment are impacting the Centre County economy in big ways, according to the results of a new study commissioned by the Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB) and the Happy Valley Sports & Entertainment Alliance (HVSEA).

Conducted by EConsult Solutions, the study quantifies the current economic impacts from arts, entertainment and cultural events; associated visitor activity; employment; and operations of the county’s creative industries.

“This report demonstrates that there is a vibrant art, entertainment, and cultural scene here in Centre County,” said HVAB President and CEO Fritz Smith. “Because of the strong and nationally renowned reputation that Happy Valley has as a sports destination, the jewels that we have in the arts and cultural scene sometimes get overlooked. But anyone who has been to the new version of the Palmer Museum of Art understands that we value culture here.”

According to the study, annual patronage at Centre County arts and cultural venues, festivals, and events amounted to 897,000 unique visitors in 2023. Arts and cultural venues such as the Bryce Jordan Center, Eisenhower Auditorium and The State Theatre, among others, accounted for 722,000 of those visitors. Events and festivals such as the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts, People’s Choice Festival and Philipsburg Heritage Days, drew 175,000.

The study also found that arts, culture and entertainment, including Penn State activities and ancillary visitor spending, generated nearly \$181million in direct annual spending and a total economic impact for Centre County of \$282 million.

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That impact includes \$70 million in employee compensation, and 2,560 industry-supported jobs.

“The study will open some eyes for sure,” Smith said. “The economic impact of football season is much more obvious because it is compacted and easily observable. Over the course of the entire year, our robust arts and cultural offerings quietly but significantly benefit the local economy at a high level.”

Smith pointed to the region’s vibrant music scene as a segment of the arts and cultural sector with enormous potential. He cited the revitalized efforts at The State Theatre; Pine Grove Hall’s evolution as a premier live music venue as it prepares for the opening of a second restaurant, Flour & Stone; the inaugural Happy Valley Music Series at Tussey Mountain; a robust concert schedule at the Bryce Jordan Center; and the headline-generating Luke Combs concert at Beaver Stadium.

“This report gives us a baseline from which we can measure the growth of the art and entertainment sector moving forward, and we will be putting a lot of effort into just that,” he continued.

Smith said a large part of that effort will be driven by the HVSEA, which the HVAB established as a separate entity to grow the sports and arts and entertainment sectors.

HVSEA Executive Director Eric Engelbarts said the anticipated study results provide the starting point necessary for developing a strategy that effectively supports and builds on the county’s arts and cultural strengths. This includes promising new segments such as the film industry.

B. Stephen Carpenter II, the Michael J. and Aimee Rusinko Kakos Dean, College of Arts & Architecture at Penn State University, and Randy Houston, General Counsel, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, are HVSEA Board members and co-chairs of its Arts & Entertainment Committee. They are eager to begin strengthening this sector.

“Investing in arts and cultural production is an investment in economic resilience,” Carpenter said. “This economic impact study of arts, culture, and entertainment in Centre County is an important and necessary foundation on which to build a credible, focused, and strategic path forward for the Happy Valley region.”

Houston said it was “impressive and inspiring” to see the growth and expansion Happy Valley has undergone in the realms of arts and entertainment in the more than three decades since he was a Penn State student.

“It’s also inspiring – and yes, more than a bit daunting – to think of the challenges we face in continuing that growth and expansion now,” he added. “But it is precisely those challenges that the Happy Valley Sports and Entertainment Alliance was established to tackle head on.”

In the same manner that strides have been made to attract premier sporting events to Happy Valley, Carpenter said the HVSEA is ready to place more emphasis on the arts and entertainment component of the organization's mission.

"The arts attract visitors, which can lead to the creation of jobs, entrepreneurial ventures, and innovative work by artists, designers and other creatives," he said. "Put simply, the arts and other creative industries animate communities."

The full arts and culture study results, including methodology, are [available here](#).

EConsult Solution is the same firm that conducted the HVAB/HVSEA-commissioned 2022 study examining the impact of sporting events on Centre County.

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