



## The Humboldt County Export Economy: ARTS & CULTURE

Prosperity! was developed with the direction of over 300 business and community people. It's about growing and sustaining our community—our people, our businesses, our environment, our lifestyle. It's about competing—and winning—in an extremely competitive global marketplace.

It's the North Coast strategy for economic development. And it's working.

The export industries of Humboldt County grew wages 11.2% in the last two years...that's faster than the whole economy, and that's the point. These industries *drive* the local economy...and *thrive* on the quality of life that we all cherish.

Few first-time visitors to Humboldt County are surprised to find artists among its inspirational landscape. What they don't expect to see is the regional arts stronghold that Humboldt has become—a cultural community as diverse as its society, representing every artistic medium with a concentration of talent usually found only in urban areas.

“We have some fantastic artists who are working from their souls and really pushing themselves, and that creates quality art,” says Sally Arnot, board president of the Humboldt Arts Council, a nonprofit corporation dedicated to promoting the arts. Outstanding post-secondary arts education, active member organizations and a supportive citizenry have nurtured arts and culture to where they are an indispensable part of Humboldt's unique quality of life.

But as an economic force in the county—essentially a group of hundreds of small businesses—the arts have reached a turning point. Growth in the number of artists and a community reputation that gets bigger every year have made cohesive marketing more important than ever.

That's because sustainability in a rural area like Humboldt County means profiting from a good reputation by attracting outside dollars, either in the form of long-distance sales of artwork or through art tourism. And few individual artists can do it alone. ►

Fine artists face the biggest challenge. Although The Ink People Center for the Arts in Eureka has more than 750 members, its executive director, Libby Maynard, estimates that only about 50 local fine artists make a “really good living” selling work out of the area. Artists who sell mostly inside the county, where a lower median income means less discretionary income for buying art, usually can’t support themselves without a second job.

Humboldt Artworks is a local firm that specializes in the sale and marketing of original art, but sales outside the county make up only about one-quarter of the revenue for its 30 represented artists, says founder Angeline Schwab.

The county’s distance from major urban areas makes marketing more difficult and expensive, Schwab says, including higher costs for travel and a professional Web site. Moreover, relatively few of the county’s small, high-quality galleries can afford to advertise out of the area.

Woodworkers and other artisans in the county may not get rich—“You don’t see us driving BMWs around,” says woodworker JoAnn Schuch—but the high prices of custom furniture pieces, for example, mean individual craftspeople don’t have to attract as many buyers as fine artists do to make a living. Schuch sells most of her work locally.

“Even though Humboldt County doesn’t have as many people who can afford our work as there are in San Francisco, it does have enough to support people like me,” she says. Schuch is a founding member of the Humboldt Woodworkers Guild, a consortium of craftspeople that was more active a few years ago when grant money

was prevalent. Today the group maintains a Web site featuring the work of local artisans, from furniture and cabinets to metalwork and textiles. Other craftspeople, through the nature of their product or their different business goals, have grown to serve markets primarily outside the county. Companies such as Holly Yashi, Anthony Kahn Furniture and Lamps by Hilliard, with multiple employees and outside dealers, have taken their art into the wider realm of “art manufacturing.”

Likewise, the performing arts in Humboldt County have had great success in connecting with audiences and performers outside the region. Although most of its 45,000 annual guests come from the immediate area, Center Arts at Humboldt State University (HSU) has contributed immeasurably to the county’s reputation in the arts world. Each season its lineup includes artists and performers of international renown. “Literally almost every artist who comes here comments on how great our audience is,” says Director Roy Furshpan. “I think that’s something that makes people want to come back here, and they tell other artists that this is a great place to play.”

Down the road in Blue Lake, Dell’Arte International has a similar influence: attracting students in ensemble physical theater from around the world; traveling the globe to present original works; and drawing 5,000 people from along the West Coast each summer for its Mad River Festival. In all, Dell’Arte generates well over \$1 million each year for the local economy, the organization says. In recent years, the number of students in its International School of Physical Theatre has tripled, and marketing for the Mad River Festival has expanded to include 15,000 direct mail pieces, e-mail blasts, and local TV and radio advertising, says Michael Fields, producing artistic director. “We’re starting to see more destination audiences who are coming here specifically for that event, or who come here and include that event as part of their stay,” he says.

Other major annual events, including music festivals such as Reggae on the River,

Blues by the Bay and the Redwood Coast Jazz Festival, draw thousands of visitors and can, in a single weekend, pack a huge economic punch. In the same way, the county’s appeal as a film backdrop can bring as much as \$250,000 in spending to the community during a two-day commercial shoot, says County Film Commissioner Barbara Bryant.

The 2001 feature film *The Majestic*, shot in Ferndale and Trinidad, brought almost \$9 million in spending to the county, she says. Since then, new direct flights between Los Angeles and Arcata have begun to strengthen ties with the film industry. Now Humboldt needs to increase its film production and digital media capacity to attract more projects, Bryant says. “It would create new, high-paying jobs,” she adds.

But amid the million-dollar cultural success stories, how do individual artists share in a prosperous future?

To begin, fine artists have to know they can make an economic difference, Arnot says. For proof, just look at Old Town Eureka. In the mid-1990s, the Arts Council set up 14 “phantom galleries” there that spruced up empty spaces and quickly attracted the attention of renters. “The arts create community,” Arnot says. “That’s why Old Town really developed. It was artists with their sweat labor.”

Such an undertaking would be more difficult now, however, in the absence of federal and state grants for the arts, which budget cuts have largely eliminated. Maynard recalls a time when the California Arts Council provided for up to 17 artists in residence in the county. Not so today. Fortunately, the North Coast Cultural Trust, part of the Humboldt Area Foundation, has continued to provide funding for local artists and organizations who undertake community-based projects. Last fall the Trust gave away almost \$39,000 in grants. Another grant round in early 2006 totaled \$20,000. “We are getting more requests than we have dollars to fund,” says Kate Ortiz, the Trust’s

program officer. “Without a doubt, there is a real need. We especially feel that with arts organizations.”

Schwab says rural artists can't rely on grants forever but instead must hone their business skills and apply best practices in marketing their art. “No one's going to help us unless we help ourselves,” she adds. She was instrumental in organizing once-a-year business classes for artists through the North Coast Small Business Development Center, an offering that, ironically, depends on limited grant funding. The same goes for a “Selling What You Make” class sponsored by the Woodworkers Guild and the Arcata Economic Development Corp. a few years ago. Although the course was a great success and even created a one-hour video, it died when the grants dried up. The latest effort is an introductory course on basic business skills for art students at HSU, many of whom graduate to form the newest generation in the local arts community.

Better business and marketing acumen also means rolling the county's diverse artistic offerings into one or more cohesive Humboldt brands. For her fellow artisans, Schuch aspires to an enduring image like that enjoyed by Swiss watchmakers, whose reputation for craftsmanship is known the world over. Better use of the Internet is another way the county can overcome its isolation and reach out to the wider world, Arnot says. The Humboldt Arts Council Web site, linked with the well-trafficked site of the Humboldt County Convention and Visitors Bureau (HCCVB), will soon feature every member artist, for example.

Individual artists also could come together through a proactive solution to the current shortage of affordable studio and light industrial space, Maynard and others suggest. New, empowering work areas such as artist-owned condominiums, cooperative studios or workshop clusters would not only allow artists to share tools and expertise, both business and artistic, but also would help unify the community and its marketing image. The Kinetic Lab in Arcata is one successful example of cooperative studio space supporting artists and inspiring more art.

Of course, achieving unity among a group of rugged individualists as diverse as Humboldt County's fine artists is never easy, but that's precisely one of the goals of North Coast Open Studios. This year the annual studio tours, which in 2005 recorded 5,000 studio visits and \$300,000 in sales, pulled together 170 local artists and art-based manufacturers over three weekends in June. Thousands of guidebooks with maps were part of a marketing campaign that covered ground between southern Oregon and the Bay Area, says Schwab, project director for the event. Moreover, staging the tours over three weekends has allowed more events, such as “Arts Alive!” in Eureka, to share the same tourist traffic. Arnot believes there should be more of such event packaging year-round. Last year she moved the annual “Art, Wine and ▶

## Art & Culture Industry Goals

**VISION: A vibrant economy and community that is known for its support of artistic endeavor**

**GOAL 1: DEVELOP REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS FOR LOCAL ARTISTS.**

STRATEGY 1A: Link Arts & Culture events to cultural events within the greater North Coast region. Attract people within driving distance (SF Bay Area to Southern Oregon as a cultural loop).

STRATEGY 1B: Develop arts and culture as a part of a branded image for Humboldt County. Example: “Art Is In our Nature” or “The Arts Grow Here”.

STRATEGY 1C: Develop film and television industry in Humboldt County

STRATEGY 1D: Develop artists ability to be successful in the business of art

**GOAL 2: DEVELOP INFRASTRUCTURE THAT SUPPORTS ARTISTS TO LIVE, WORK, EXHIBIT.**

STRATEGY 2A: Encourage long-term affordable housing & studio space for artists within cultural districts (Old Town Eureka, Arcata)

STRATEGY 2B: Develop multiple public venues for music, theatre and arts exhibits

STRATEGY 2C: Include public art and funding in all major developments (i.e. murals and landscaping)

STRATEGY 2D: Encourage development of community based media infrastructure

STRATEGY 2E: Improve infrastructure for moving transportation of people, data and products

**GOAL 3: STRENGTHEN OUR CREATIVE COMMUNITY.**

STRATEGY 3A: Increase opportunities for arts and culture in education K-12, university, college and lifelong learning

STRATEGY 3B: Intentionally encourage linkages and cross-pollination between the arts and other industries, disciplines and sectors (tourism, manufacturing, information technology, agriculture, etc.)

STRATEGY 3C: Acknowledge and celebrate local Native American traditions

STRATEGY 3D: Acknowledge and celebrate traditional folk arts in the region

*Developed by Arts and Culture industry leaders in their Prosperity! industry cluster work-plan.*

## HIGHLIGHTS

Source: Dennis Mullins, EDD:  
[www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov](http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov)

In 2005 there were 39 establishments within the Arts & Culture cluster. This number decreased by 4.8% from 2003, while the number of employees rose by 6.3%. During this same period, total wages rose 7.8% to almost \$11 million. Average wages also rose by 1.4% to \$24,658 per person. The Art & Culture cluster represents 1% of the total economy and 2% of the base economy in Humboldt County.

# ARTS & CULTURE



Cheese” reception at the Morris Graves Museum of Art to the Friday before Open Studios, with great results. By achieving such a critical mass in art tourism, the HCCVB can easily see the importance of arts and culture in attracting and retaining visitors. “For a great portion of the tourism dollars coming into the community, the arts are making that happen,” Arnot says.

There’s also more to North Coast Open Studios than meets the eye, as the collaboration between arts and economic development organizations and a \$15,000 Headwaters Fund grant for the event suggest. Schwab believes it could be the way individual artists come together to project a Humboldt brand and develop the arts community’s next generation of leaders. Some artists involved

with Open Studios have even suggested it could be the start of a trade association, although that idea is perhaps years away. “Open Studios is definitely a catalyst for this kind of thinking,” Schwab says. “It’s a grass-roots approach.” And it’s in the best spirit of Humboldt County. ■

## ARTS & CULTURE: Assets and Opportunities

### ASSETS

- Humboldt County has more media outlets per capita than anywhere else in USA
- Our region is in the middle of the San Francisco to Ashland, Oregon cultural loop.
- Citizens from diverse backgrounds value the arts and culture community.
- There are established efforts to build business abilities of the arts community.
- The “Talent Pool” of established and emerging artists is extensive.
- There are many well established arts and culture events that are marketed out of the area.

*Developed by arts and culture industry representatives through the Prosperity! process.*

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop access to markets for artists, galleries and open studios.
- Continue to build marketing efforts to identify Humboldt County as an arts destination.
- Build the synergy between music, performance and visual arts events (e.g. Mad River Festival/Humboldt Folklife Festival and Open Studios).
- Encourage cross-pollination and collaboration between local communities with diverse peoples and cultural disciplines.
- Offer more arts and culture in the schools.
- Continue to focus on the business of art.
- Support projects that help the arts and culture community share resources

### RESOURCES

- Arts Alive! And Arts Arcata
- Dell’Arte International
- Fire Arts Center
- Handweavers and Spinners Guild
- Humboldt Arts Council
- Humboldt Community Media Center
- Humboldt Folklife Society
- Humboldt Woodworkers Guild
- The Ink People
- Mateel Community Center
- North Coast Open Studios
- North Coast Storytellers
- Redwood Arts Association
- Redwood Coast Writers’ Center