

## **The arts are a vital state cornerstone**

By Karen L. Paty

As Georgians, we know our state is an inspirational place to live and work and that it is as rich in its cultural resources as natural ones. Georgia artists such as Otis Redding, Flannery O'Connor and Benny Andrews shaped the course of music, literature and visual arts in our state, country and world. They are just a few names in a lineage of Georgia's artistic ancestry that has molded the course of popular culture and bred our robust and thriving arts community.

For each artist's name that becomes indelibly etched on pop culture consciousness, there are thousands of others in our state who may be less known, but whose impact is just as profound.

According to the 2012 Nonemployer Statistics, Georgia is home to 19,433 self-employed artists. They are a vital component of a thriving sector of our economy: the creative industries. The creative industries in Georgia represent nearly 5 percent of the state's employment and \$29 billion dollars of annual revenue. These numbers tell the story of the significance of the creative workforce and define our state as a place of inspiration, ingenuity and innovation.

Fueling this cultural ecosystem is the nonprofit arts community; the state's visual arts, dance, music, theatre, literary arts, cultural arts centers and presenting houses. In Georgia, this sector includes approximately 2,400 organizations with assets totaling \$2.5 billion dollars. These organizations are caretakers of our cultural identity and successful businesses that contribute to our local and state economy through direct expenditure and by stimulating local spending. However, the public value of these institutions has deeper roots and a wider reach than statistics alone.

Arts and culture, and the individuals and organizations that uphold, propel and champion them locally, are intricately connected to the success of our communities. The arts are a vehicle to transfer and celebrate local history and culture and to develop a sense of community by defining a collective identity of place. These shared identities tell a collective tale of what makes us distinctly and uniquely Georgian. It is a story of a state that is vibrant, diverse, rich in cultural traditions, and poised to be at the cutting edge of industry and innovation.

Education is inherent in that success both now and in the future. Arts education prepares students to be entrepreneurial, critical thinkers and creative problem solvers – critical 21st century skills. The benefits of arts education include higher test scores, attendance rates, and graduation rates, to just name a few.

The potential of the creative sector in our public life requires collaborations between artists, the public and private sector. It takes organizations, institutions, government and industry to leverage resources to create a vibrant, thriving Georgia that values and employs the arts.

Let us not forget that Georgia art belongs to each of us as a contributor, participant, audience member, observer and advocate. The arts are not an accessory to a vibrant Georgia, but the cornerstone of it.

*Karen L. Paty is executive director of the Georgia Council for the Arts.*

[ Source: Atlanta Journal-Constitution 2014 <http://atlantaforward.blog.ajc.com/2014/09/03/georgia-arts-and-culture/> ]