

# THE OFFICIAL SPONSOR:

## Partnerships Between Business and the Arts

by Georgine Clarke

*“To give back to the community”*

is a phrase used often by businesses when asked why they support arts activities—programs ranging from museum exhibitions to festivals to symphony concerts.

One side of that story is that the arts help provide “quality of life”—dynamic, creative communities that can attract new corporations and contribute to economic growth. The other side is that a successful business, in turn, sees the opportunity to contribute back to its neighbors with financial support making quality art accessible to a wide range of people.

The late Wynton M. “Red” Blount founded Blount International, a New

York Stock Exchange international manufacturing company headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama, with operations and distribution in more than 130 countries around the globe. He also built a \$21.5 million theatre in Montgomery for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and helped a wide range of other arts organizations. He said, “It takes commitment—a personal interest and involvement—to successfully build a long-term partnership with the arts. As business leaders, it is imperative that we lead the way. From small businesses to large businesses, each can contribute in some way to the overall development that will pay enormous dividends, both economically and culturally. If you want a city that will be remembered long after you are gone, make the arts an integral part of the long-term strategic plan for growth.”

The Business Committee for the Arts, Inc. a national not-for-profit organization founded in 1967, conducts regular surveys to determine the level and trends in business support to the arts in the United States. Nationally, among companies with annual revenues of more than \$1 million, the survey reports that in 2001 the total dollar amount contributed to the arts was \$1.56 billion, representing a median contribution to the arts per business of \$4,000.

The reasons for such support? 65% said, “Good thing to do;” 35% said, “Tied to business goals.” In a brochure produced by the Montgomery Area Business Committee for the Arts, Inc., Jake Aronov of Aronov Realty Management Company brings the two ideas together. “Larger businesses, along with smaller ones, succeed only to the extent that they make life better for



*The Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Montgomery, Alabama.*

their customers, so it is an easy extension of that purpose to make our community better through investment in and support of the arts.”

Another way of phrasing, from a brochure produced by the Louisiana Division of the Arts:

### THE HOUSE THAT ART BUILT

*This is the new truck,  
bought by the man  
who owns the store  
where the mommy shopped  
for the pink ballet slippers  
that made the little girl smile  
when she danced in  
the house that art built.*

Business support for the arts generally comes from several departments in the corporate budget. The International Events Group (IEG), headquartered in Chicago, defines a philanthropic donation, (“Good thing to do”), the most common relationship, as one considered support of a cause without any commercial incentive.

IEG further suggests that sponsorship support (“Tied to business goals”) is generally undertaken to assist with commercial objectives and comes from marketing, advertising or community relations budgets. Corporate sponsorship is one of the fastest growing areas of partnership between business and the arts today, with a 1999 figure of \$460 million in arts sponsorship by businesses in North America. Maximizing corporate marketing goals

## National Survey of Business Support to the Arts

Companies with annual revenues of more than \$1 million contributing to the arts

ALLOCATION OF BUSINESS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARTS	TOTAL
Museums	22%
Symphony Orchestras	19%
Arts Education Programs	17%
Theatre	11%
Other Music	8%
Public Radio and Television	5%
Dance	4%
Performing Arts Facilities	3%
Literary Arts	3%
Opera	3%
United Arts Funds	2%

REASONS FOR BUSINESS SUPPORT OF THE ARTS	TOTAL
The arts in the K-12 curricula increase academic performance and SAT scores	41%
The arts have a proven positive impact on the local economy and tourism	31%
The arts help address social issues in and out of the workplace	21%
Attendance for arts performances and events surpasses attendance for professional sports events	19%
The arts in and out of the workplace help attract and retain employees	14%

*Percent identifying each as a “very important” reason for their company’s support of the arts*

ARTS INVOLVEMENT TIED TO BUSINESS	TOTAL
Offers networking opportunities and the potential to develop new business	22%
Can stimulate creative thinking, problem-solving and team building	74%
Offers special benefits for employees	64%
Can help to recruit and retain employees	57%
Has the potential to increase its bottom line	52%

*Percent who “agree strongly” or “agree somewhat”*

ACHIEVING A MORE EFFECTIVE BUSINESS-ARTS RELATIONSHIP	TOTAL
Offer greater K-12 arts education initiatives	75%
Broaden arts programs to reach the underserved in the community	74%
Provide more tangible benefits such as discount tickets, use of their facilities and workplace programs	72%
Offer opportunities for employees to serve as volunteers in the arts	72%
Be willing to work with a company’s advertising, marketing and public relations departments	66%
Offer greater opportunities for company recognition such as signage, product displays and promotional tie-ins	63%
Understand a company’s operating objectives	46%
Offer more tie-ins with a company’s products and services	44%

*Excerpt for the National Survey of Business Support to the Arts, The BCA Report: 2001 by Business Committee for the Arts, Inc.*

is significant in the sponsor relationship. This marketing concept is that supporters of the arts would use or feel more favorably toward a business sponsoring an arts or cultural event than one that does not.

Increasingly, arts organizations and events in Alabama are providing sponsorship opportunities. Eric Jambor, Director of the Sidewalk Moving Picture Festival in Birmingham notes, "A huge percentage of our income comes from sponsorship, allowing us to keep low ticket prices for the presentation of new films to the public." Such sponsor designations as "Official Hotel" and "Official Airline" provide in-kind rooms and tickets for artistic personnel, greatly impacting possible event costs.

As a new event, Sidewalk has worked to attract national sponsors from such related fields as film technology and production. Growing national interest indicates event success and also attracts other sponsors. Jambor says, "We build collaboration. It's more about first getting national sponsors involved at a small level and then working for an annual commitment. He continues, "We have an open relationship with our sponsors—the more you put in the more you get out of it. We encourage our sponsors to find fun ways to get their customers involved." He uses the example of advance sale tickets available only at certain sponsor locations. To document annual success, Sidewalk sends press kits after the event containing publicity and reviews of the year's program and beginning a request process for the next year.

Eileen Kunzman, Founder and Director of Magic City Art Connection, Operation New Birmingham's annual arts festival, emphasizes, "Without our



*The Magic City Art Connection, Birmingham, Alabama.*

business partners and friends, we're not going very far. They are critical—providing 50% of our support."

She believes there are four important aspects in the relationship between business and an art event. "The first is being interested in the arts—having the insight to see the importance. The second is to say 'yes' by making funds available." (Both cash dollars and in-kind services are very important. Services, such as donation of all the festival signage—are sometimes "very hefty.") "Third is to become personally involved by volunteering and serving on committees. Fourth is leadership, serving on the board."

Many corporations buy art at Magic City for their offices. Kunzman notes "Arts in the workplace say something about that company; how they feel about their employees; how they feel about the community and creativi-

ty." She comments that a sponsoring business, while being a good community citizen, also gains in return from "associating its name with a quality event, with a large public audience and with the high energy atmosphere the arts generate."

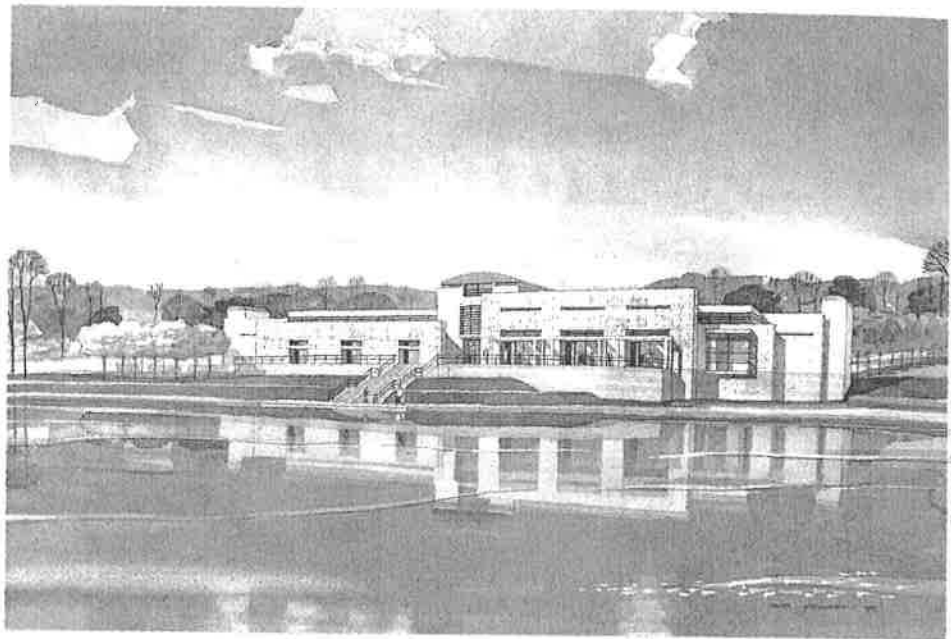
"Where else can a company get exposure to 90,000 people who see your name over one weekend in a positive environment?" asks Jo Ann Henderson, Festival Director of Panoply, the annual event produced by The Arts Council of Huntsville. She reports that their sponsors have opportunities such as Exclusive Beverage Provider, Entrance, Stage and various children's activity sponsorships, as well as the Art Marketplace. "Businesses like the feel of the festival, the family environment and the quality entertainment," she notes. Their employees also come and work together as volunteers at the event, identified by wearing T-shirts with the company logo and building such intangible benefits as camaraderie, pride and job satisfaction.



*Panoply Festival of the Arts, Huntsville, Alabama.*

Institutions, such as the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Art, currently under construction at Auburn University, provide high quality and high public visibility. "Businesses are interested in being involved," says museum Director Dr. Michael De Marsche. "Financial institutions are often specifically interested in education. A partnership with the museum and its outreach to schools is very attractive." With a sponsor, plans are being developed to bring every 3rd grade student in Lee County to the museum. In a non-urban environment, the museum can become the center of the community. De Marsche continues, "There is a return benefit there. Corporate events held in the museum are a benefit to them. This also allows the museum to present itself to other corporate leaders."

The Energen Corporation has established its own art event, and is currently mailing the prospectus for its 4th annual art competition celebrating "the wonder of Alabama art." Four winning entries become part of the permanent "Alabama Collection", and are displayed at Energen Plaza, the company's headquarters in Birmingham. Purchase awards range from \$5000 to \$2500, providing both visibility and financial support for Alabama artists. Jack Mann, chair of the employees committee that organizes the exhibition, comments, "The chairman of Energen values education, the environment and the arts." As umbrella corporation for Alabama Gas and Energen Resources, the company is particularly interested in art related to the environment—landscape and wildlife. Purchases of non-representational art are also made.



*Muir Stewart, The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University, watercolor, 2001, from the permanent collection of The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University.*

Mann says that the idea began as the company located in its new building. They decided to purchase and display Alabama art, and the competition grew out of that need. He says, "The employees love having art in the building. They feel very free to give their opinion about the art and vote for their favorite non-prize winner."

The international business community is locating in Alabama. The mission of the Birmingham International Festival, now celebrating its 53rd year, is to "build bridges of understanding with the nations of the world through arts, education and economic development programs." Each year a different country is featured through such events as educational programs in the schools, a three-day street festival and a business and trade forum and exchange. This view makes a tight connection between the arts and business, showing a strong inter-relationship and tying a cultural view with economic investment.

The Festival also honors companies and individuals from both the United States and the featured country with Crystal Crown Awards, recognizing strong social responsibility programs, including support for the arts.

Executive Director Iris Gross says these awards then "lead to relationships, which is how business is conducted."

Johnny Aycock, President of the West Alabama Chamber of Commerce notes that Canadian, French, Japanese and German companies are well established in the West Alabama area. "They came to this community to invest, to build their company, to build a plant, to build products and to make money." But in return, "they are very active corporate citizens." He continues, "Without financial and leadership business support, we would not be as rich culturally as we are. These corporations enhance the level of investment in the arts. They also enhance community visibility. The new, international flavor changes attitudes, giving a progressive can-do edge that trickles down to the entire community."

Aycock concludes, "It's good business to invest in the arts." ■

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