

Dick Maggiore: The arts color Stark County's brand

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By Dick Maggiore Special to The Canton Repository

If I were a painter, I would love adding color to my canvas. If I could sculpt, my clay would take the shape of inspirational people. If I could sing, my song would be joyful.

I am neither painter, sculptor nor singer, but I consider myself part of the arts community in Stark County. So are you and your family and your neighbors. Stark County is home to one of America's most vibrant arts scenes and it is accessible in every town within our county and beyond.

That the arts touch all of us in Stark County is a credit to the work of ArtsinStark.

The nonprofit organization awards grants to support artists of all types. The biggest beneficiaries, however, aren't simply those in the visual and performing arts, but also the people who live, work and play in a community made better because of art.

Many here, myself among them, believe the arts are a vital component in our community's brand. It is not a stretch to say the elevation of the arts here has helped shape and define Stark County — the way we who live here experience it and the way others from elsewhere perceive it.

Since 2004, ArtsinStark has been the name of the organization that was founded in 1968. It's more than a foundation; it's literally a force.

This point has been made clear to me hundreds of times, most recently during a luncheon presentation at our agency by Chris Thompson, a consultant on matters related to civic organizations' teamwork and collaboration.

As he led a discussion with our associates, Thompson made point after point about an organization's ability to address and resolve challenges and opportunities. His examples reminded me of the connection the arts are establishing with the development of creative solutions in businesses and schools throughout our community.

Collaboration in the creative space, Thompson said, amplifies our abilities. He was talking specifically about collaboration between people within an organization, but it's also clear that tenant applies for all in the line of sight or within earshot of artistic successes.

The arts in Stark are everywhere. Think the Canton Symphony Orchestra at the Umstattd Performing Arts Hall and the Players Guild Theatre in the Cultural Center for the Arts Complex. Think First Friday in downtown Canton and the SmArts program that supercharges our students as they learn with minds opened by the arts. Think "The Eleven" series of public art works memorializing the 11 greatest moments in pro football history.

Think more. Think blocks of cultural exhibits and shops in Louisville, Alliance and Minerva. Think about the Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series at MassMu. Think about our communities' celebrations of their own histories. Think about 350 new pieces of public art throughout Stark County.

I know I haven't listed everything touched by the arts in Stark, but I hope you see the picture that I see: a community whose brand is boosted by the arts.

The arts are evident in multiple visual and audio arenas. They are evident in the attention we gain when national media come to Stark County for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's growing celebrations.

But they also are evident in the rising test scores of students in our county's schools. ArtsinStark President and CEO Robb Hankins asked us to believe that the arts can increase test scores. That might be why his first name is spelled with an extra 'b.' That extra 'b' stands for "Believe." The rising test scores of students in our county's schools lend credence to his claim. We are believers.

Just as important is the fact the arts are evident in the economic boost that results when thousands of visitors flock to events and attractions. Best of all, the arts are evident when they elevate our community pride and inspire us to dig a bit deeper in our jobs and service work. We are believers.

I am inspired by those for whom art is a gift they are willing to share.

The arts have become an inextricable part of the Stark County brand experience. Thanks to ArtsinStark, we are a cooler, smarter, happier and richer place to live, work and play. Treat yourself by giving to the arts.

Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of Innis Maggiore, founded in Canton in 1974 and today the nation's leading positioning ad agency, building strong brands for companies in competitive markets here and across the country.