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AGN: Amarillo becomes model for Texas communities

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Master of the arts

By [Brad Newman](#)

Amarillo becomes model for Texas communities

Amarillo's arts community is a driving economic factor in the region worthy of imitation, according to a report released this week.

The Texas Cultural Trust included Amarillo in its study, "The Art of Economic Development," which highlights the creative sectors of five Texas cities.

"We're very impressed with what Amarillo has done," said Amy Barbee, executive director of the trust, a nonprofit organization. "It sees the value of using the cultural arts as a way to truly impact the economic value of the region."

Other cities included in the study are Clifton, El Paso, Rockport and Texarkana.

"We looked for the unusual suspects," Barbee said. "These cities can be used as examples of how other communities can benefit from the arts."

The Amarillo section of the report centered on the effect of the Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts.

The 5-year-old venue at 500 S. Buchanan St. is a tourist attraction. About 20 percent of those who attend performances there are from outside Amarillo, according to the study. Those out-of-town visitors to the center

generated \$3.8 million in economic activity.

The center also has been a catalyst for downtown redevelopment, the study found.

“Building the center downtown brought a focus back to that area,” said Melissa Dailey, executive director of Downtown Amarillo Inc. “That attention was a huge catalyst and sparked an interest in investing in downtown.”

The educational component of the center, Window on a Wider World, also was mentioned in the study.

WOWW, which launched in 2005, is designed to offer inexpensive, culturally enriching opportunities for students throughout the Panhandle. The program now includes participation from 43 schools comprising about 14,500 students.

The study also lauded the musical drama “Texas,” which stages each summer in the Pioneer Amphitheatre in Palo Duro Canyon State Park.

The family-friendly show, which is produced by the Texas Panhandle Heritage Foundation, attracts between 60,000 and 80,000 audience members each year, and about 65 percent of those travel from more than 125 miles away, according to the report.

In 2009, the production’s 44th annual season, tourists who attended the production generated \$17.5 million in economic activity, the study found.

The four other cities included in the trust’s study were lauded for similar arts endeavors that spurred economic activity.

“This is an awareness campaign,” Barbee said. “We need to look at the arts, not just as an enrichment, but also as an investment.”

The study, which was featured in an article in Sunday’s New York Times, should draw even more attention to Amarillo’s ongoing arts efforts, said Becky Zenor, vice president of the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce’s Quality of Life Council.

“This is something really special for Amarillo,” Zenor said. “It’s exciting to know that we are being used as a model statewide in the arts.”