

Benchmarking Central Ohio 2008 Letters to the Editor

The Columbus Dispatch

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Arts ranking needs greater perspective

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Columbus is lacking an arts and cultural scene? I beg to differ. I write in response to Monday's Dispatch article about the "Benchmarking Central Ohio 2008 report" ("Grim reality: Perception is that city lacks in arts"). Quoting the report, the article stated that Columbus ranks 16 out of 16 cities for our number of arts organizations.

That statistic was part of a 2006 national report titled "Cultural Vitality in Communities: Interpretation and Indicators," which ranks the top 50 cities on seven indicators. But one statistic is not a clear picture of our city's artistic community. Here are three other rankings from that report, which help to offer a more comprehensive look:

- * Columbus is No. 1 for nonprofit community celebrations, festivals, fairs and parades.
- * Columbus places 25th out of 50 for the number of arts nonprofits.
- * Columbus ranks 12th for contributions to arts nonprofits.

Additionally, Columbus is 10th in the nation as a "top arts destination city" in June's American Style, which judged cities based on the quality of arts offerings. Nashville, No. 1 on the Benchmarking report, ranked 22nd in American Style, and Portland, with the third-highest number of arts organizations, placed 11th on the magazine's list.

While we might not have the sheer number of arts organizations, we clearly have a top-quality arts and cultural community. And I encourage Columbus residents and visitors to continue to support it.

BRYAN W. KNICELY President Greater Columbus **Arts** Council Columbus

Education may be at root of arts deficit

Published: April 12, 2008

I have been pondering the study regarding Columbus' ranking at the bottom in arts ("Grim reality: Perception is that city lacks in arts," Dispatch article, Monday). My family moved to Columbus nearly three years ago to find that the arts seemed very much in their infancy. We have, over many years, lived in Indianapolis, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and, most recently, Ann Arbor, Mich. All of these cities have well-established and vibrant arts communities that are well-supported and attended. Obviously Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles are in a different class and cannot be used as a comparison. However, Indianapolis and Ann Arbor can be considered similar in composition to Columbus. Both municipalities have very fine and well-supported art, theater, music and museums.

While Columbus does have a good but small Museum of Art and one of science, some local live theater and good-to-excellent music groups and series, they, by and large, are not well-attended. This surprised me for a city this size. Pop music and sports events seem to be the only things that generate interest in Columbus.

We have attended Columbus Symphony performances with more empty seats than filled ones; we recently attended a remarkable performance by a world-class string quartet at the Columbus Museum of Art, sponsored by the Jefferson Academy of Music, and it was only a third filled; and on Sunday we attended the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra performance that only filled half of the Southern Theatre. All of these events were well-publicized and received excellent reviews in your newspaper.

In contrast, Ann Arbor (a tenth the size of Columbus) fills a 4,000-seat auditorium for a well-known series of 15 concerts featuring visiting orchestras, soloists, etc.; it supports a contract symphony for six weekends a year, two equity theaters and many smaller groups. Both cities are blessed with at least one major university. The difference may be the extensive arts programs in the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

The issue, it seems to me, is that there are not enough arts offerings per capita, because there is not enough interest being raised to create the market. Part of this may be because many schools have dropped arts education or have greatly reduced their programs, creating a void in the market for the arts.

Unless the next generation is educated in the arts, the city will be doomed to be at the bottom of the list for years to come.

MICHAEL BRITTENBACK Bexley

Survey overlooked some Columbus gems

Published: April 14, 2008

As a Shaker Heights Buckeye close to Columbus for years, I take issue with the city's low ranking reported in last Monday's Dispatch article, "Grim reality: Perception is that city lacks in arts." How could the survey insult the botanical gardens at Inniswood and Chadwick Arboretum, the Franklin Park Conservatory and the Park of Roses, not to mention Dawes Arboretum, 30 miles to the east? And it further insults the wonderful, internationally known Columbus Museum of Art.

Whoever said Columbus is a fast-food and football town has missed all the great restaurants.

DAN ELLIOTT Shaker Heights

Comparing Columbus

Web-only letter, Friday, April 18, 2008

We commend the Dispatch for helping the community learn about Benchmarking Central Ohio 2008, prepared for The Columbus Partnership by Community Research Partners. The project aims to stimulate discussion about how central Ohio compares with other metro areas, and it has done just that, particularly with regards to the Arts Establishments indicator. However, some clarification is needed:

We were aiming for breadth in the selection of indicators, with a focus on economic competitiveness. A report focused on a single topic, such as the arts, could capture many more dimensions of that issue.

We did not conduct a survey. Each indicator uses quantitative data, available from a single source, that is regularly updated. The Census Bureau was the original source of the Arts Establishments data.

The project does not include collecting data on the diverse local and national perceptions of "quality" regarding the arts—or the other 59 indicators—although we hope it is a vehicle for surfacing these observations.

We encourage examination of patterns across indicators, a new feature in the 2008 report. For example, the Arts Establishments ranking may reflect our low rate of small business formation, rather than the lack of a "cultural scene." The many other city ranking methodologies—including those that paint divergent pictures of our community—also bring valuable information to the table.

We certainly welcome, and will consider, this robust dialogue as we plan for Benchmarking 2009.

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