

Art funding axed



DALE HOGG/Great Bend Tribune

The Barton County Arts Council's gallery at 1401 Main is located across the street from the county courthouse in Great Bend, where county commissioners voted 2-2 Monday to cut BAC funding.

County says NO to arts funding

By **CHUCK SMITH**

csmith@gtribune.com

By a split decision, the Barton County Commission decided Monday not to fund the Barton County Arts Council for 2009, despite a decision during this year's budget preparations to fund it with \$7,725 in county tax dollars.

Commissioner John Edmonds said he had two reasons to oppose the support.

He said he held throughout his career as a state legislator that government should not fund the arts and he said he continues to hold that belief as a county official.

And, he added, even if such support was appropriate, the county is in a position that it needs to distinguish between those projects that would be "nice to have," as opposed to those that are necessary.

When the issue was brought to a vote, Edmonds and Commissioner Kirby Krier were opposed to the funding. Commissioners Jennifer Schartz and Kenny Schremmer voted to approve the issue.

Since it was a tie, the motion to approve the funding did not pass.

Commissioner Homer Kruckenberg is recovering from surgery and, therefore, was not present.

Arts Council Director Karen Neuforth, who had presented a program on the county council, its economic impact on Barton County, and its plans for the coming year prior to the vote, suggested after the funding was denied that she would return with additional input on the economic impact the group has on the county economy. "The arts are a formidable industry in the United States," she commented, adding that they employ a significant number of people.

Locally, the arts council facility offers a retail outlet for 50 people who sell their work, adding to the local sales-tax income and providing those artists with income that turns over in the economy.

During her initial program, Neuforth had also noted that the arts council adds to the local economy by bringing visitors into the community for special

events and exhibits, during which they spend money in the local economy.

Commission Chairman Schartz said it is a good idea to invest tax dollars into the Arts Council; that, for one thing, it continues to follow the county strategic plan and its emphasis on programs that help promote tourism in the county.

During the last budget session, she noted, the commission that was then seated had agreed to provide the support and had included it in this year's budget. "These people are counting on that money," she said, adding that if Edmonds wanted to cut the funding, he should consider it at the next budget season, this coming July.

Edmonds contended that pulling the funding is in keeping with the same measures that are being taken at the state level as a reaction to the current economic crisis, "to the tune of \$300 million." "It's neither inappropriate nor unfair."

Edmonds urged that he is not opposed to the arts. He's just opposed to tax dollars being used to fund them.

BAC program plans to enrich the community

By **CHUCK SMITH**

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Barton County Arts Council Director Karen Neuforth may not have realized just how accurate she was Monday morning when she suggested, "funding in the next few years is probably going to be tight."

She found out how tight during the Barton County Commission meeting when the commission failed to rally enough votes to approve a \$7,725 expenditure that was included in the county budget for this year.

Prior to the vote being taken, Neuforth had presented a program on plans for the arts program this year, during its 10th anniversary. She noted the program continues to impact community tourism, revitalization and

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workforce development.

Nationally, Neuforth said, the arts develop an estimated \$166 billion in the economy.

Locally, the impact is fundamental. Every time there is an arts program, a performance, an exhibit, people come to town for the event and they will have a significant impact on the local economy. "A couple will probably drop \$100."

The arts council stresses its connection with education, encouraging schools, teachers and students to par-

ticipate in council projects.

Community art also has a positive impact on the quality of life in a community, making it more attractive to those considering it for their location.

Cultural tourists, who tend to stay longer and spend more money than other visitors, are another important benefit of public arts programs, Neuforth noted.

Plans for the coming year include an art show incorporated in the Wings and Wetlands birding festival, an arts and crafts fair, children's theater, and a grass roots arts festival.

It's not that we don't love the arts, Leonardo. It's just that some of us county commissioners needed a doorway into the snack room. Besides, it's just a picture!



PUBLIC FORUM

Poor decisions can even destroy miracles

Dear Editor,

During the Second World War, a bomb completely destroyed the church that housed the now priceless "Last Supper," by Leonardo Da Vinci.

All that remained after the war was the tattered wall with the "Last Supper" painting, still preserved.

That priceless painting was spared, but not by the county commissioners who would surely have voted to

have it replaced by some giant lighted road signs.

Oh, by the way — when the church was reconstructed, someone decided they needed a doorway into the refectory, so they cut it right through the bottom of the painting.

I'm sure they all said they loved the arts as well.

**Robert Joy,
Ellinwood**

Community needs to feed need for beauty

Dear Editor,

Wise leaders, philosophers and teachers through the ages have understood that public servants have a responsibility to care for the human spirit.

Art and music create the soul.

For those who cannot afford quality art in their homes, for those who hunger for beauty and for those who experience the call to develop their artistic talents such places of

meaning provide inspiration and give life most especially in hard times.

The decision of the Barton County Commission not to fund the arts weakens our community and is indeed unfortunate.

**Sister Louise Hageman,
Great Bend**

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GREAT BEND TRIBUNE
OPINION

• PUBLIC FORUM

County should fund arts

Dear Editor,

I'm writing this in rebuttal of Mr. Edmonds's remarks on funding the Arts Council.

From my point of view, he knows nothing about art.

All he has to do is look around him.

Even as a state legislator he never backed art, so he most likely never looked beyond his nose at the art in the capital.

Go to states like Colorado and New Mexico and tell them that art has nothing to do with the economy or ask Kenny Schremmer, a member of the commission. He has auctioned enough of my artwork for charity.

Without art we would lose all contact with nature and the real things in this life.

Tom Nulton,
Hoisington

Drugstore cowboy should keep arts commitment

Dear Editor,

Preserving our downtown is important.

Take, for example, the old McCoy Shoe Building in Great Bend, right across the street from the courthouse.

The building had been unoccupied for years. Several years ago the Harper family agreed to sell the building at a reduced price to a young volunteer organization called the Barton County Arts Council, Inc.

Over the years, we have restored the building and created a solid anchor for the intersection of Forest and Main.

Members of the Arts Council donate hundreds of hours each year to create a small oasis for those interested in art such as film, photography, painting, sculpture, poetry and prose, right in the heart of downtown.

The group actually has a national profile, thanks to our nationally recognized film festival, and some of the programs we have pioneered.

Now newly-minted County Commissioner Edmonds wants to gut the \$7,725 in annual funding that Barton County commissioners budgeted for our organization last summer.

As treasurer of the Barton County Arts Council, Inc., I can tell you this funding being taken away could result in the organization being shut down.

Edmonds is treasurer of the Barton County Historical Society, which is scheduled to get \$51,500 from the commission soon.

Does anyone seriously think he will try to gut this funding?

As we are working to revive the downtown, it is especially important that we keep our commitments made in the County Strategic Plan and in the August budget meetings to the Barton County Arts Council.

As Abraham Lincoln once said: "When you have got an elephant by the hind leg, and he is trying to run away, it's best to let him run."

This drugstore cowboy Edmonds needs to let go of the elephant's hind leg and let the County honor it's earlier commitments to the downtown.

Things may be different in Kansas City, where Edmonds moved here from, but out here we keep our commitments.

**Marty Keenan,
Great Bend**

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