

What's Art? Building a strong arts community

Convention brings artists, students together

BY JENNA FROSCHE

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Building southern New Mexico as an arts community is a tough job, but according to David Boje, New Mexico State University business management professor, someone has to do it. That "someone" encompasses the entire community during the second annual What's Art? Convention Friday and Saturday, Oct. 2 and 3.

The Talking Stick Institute, joined by Alma d'arte Charter High School, will host this year's convention titled "Exploring the Creative and Green Economy of New Mexico" along with a street festival to celebrate the arts in the area.

"We want to include the sale of art and culture in southern New Mexico as the key focus," says Boje, who serves as one of the event's coordinators. "To do that, we're bringing in experts in arts and marketing for organizations to evolve the methods by which we operate."



One such expert is guest speaker John Villani, author of "100 Best Small Arts Towns in America" who will share his experience in communities that have made themselves as centers of art, creativity and livability at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 2, at Alma d'arte, 404 W. Court Ave.

NMSU students and faculty will participate in the convention, which will include 25 workshops, such as "Tactics for Selling," "Insuring and Collecting Art," "Art in the Schools," "Various Art Forms – Hip Hop" and

"Culinary and Ice Sculpture."

"We are really maturing as a convention – and instead of having groups talk about the future, we are giving workshop sessions to help grow the art economy here in the area," Boje says. "There are more than 130 arts organizations here and we are inviting them all to come and be a part of this opportunity."

Boje says he hopes the workshops will appeal to artists and collectors alike, bringing the two together to create what he refers to as the “creative economy,” with arts as an economic engine for the region.

“We are focusing on the business of art and using it as an educational opportunity for artists to use and students to learn,” he says.

The street festival event will be from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 3, on Court Avenue in front of Alma d’arte and will include vendors providing food, artist demonstrations, arts and crafts for sale, as well as entertainment, talking circles and more.

The event’s grand finale will take place at 3:30 p.m. and will include art created throughout the day, street festival participants and musicians, including singing by Yolanda Martinez and Karline Valentine, and drumming by New World Drummers.

“We have such a distinctive southern New Mexico flair to our arts and culture – it’s different than the north and it’s growing,” Boje says. “It can be truly marvelous, with good support, as more of an economic engine than it is now. Consumers haven’t quite learned that we have a worthy spot on the map in New Mexico.”

Boje’s business class of 30 students has been working with artists and organizations to help grow their small businesses in the area. They will spend the rest of the semester of Boje’s class working with various people on developing a creative economy in Las Cruces.

Tickets for the reception and workshops are \$35 at the door. The student price is \$25 at the door. For more information, visit <http://talkingstick.info>, contact Boje at 532-1693 or Irene Oliver-Lewis at Alma d’arte at 541-0145.