



**Written Testimony in Support of FY2011 Appropriations For
The National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by Terri Aldrich, Executive Director, Minot Area Council of the Arts, Minot ND
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
“Arts Build Communities”

April 13, 2010

Chairman Moran, Ranking member Simpson and distinguished subcommittee members, it is indeed an honor to have the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of local arts agencies in rural communities. My name is Terri Aldrich. I am the Executive Director of the Minot Area Council of the Arts in Minot North Dakota. I have served in that capacity for 10 years. I am here because I am passionate about the arts.

Minot is the smallest community in the nation to be home to a symphony orchestra, an opera company, 5 dance studios, and numerous art galleries and performing arts organizations. I know the positive impact the arts have on the economy and quality of life in rural communities. Arts organizations help to build vibrant communities if they are good stewards of funds with which they have been entrusted.

Minot, with approximately 36,000 people, is the geographic, economic, and cultural hub of NW North Dakota. Our geographic area is defined by vast space. Minot is located near two Native American reservations, Fort Berthold and Fort Totten. Radiating from the hub of the NW quadrant you will travel at least 100 miles to reach any community with population exceeding 15,000 people. Along the way, you will encounter very sparse traffic and pass through several small towns with populations ranging from 250-1000 people where the approximate median income is \$26,348.

Arts events in rural communities are generally accomplished without paid staff and with shockingly small budgets. Even the Minot Symphony Orchestra operates with a part-time Executive Director. Few rural arts organizations are likely to meet the requirements necessary to qualify for a grant directly from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

However, the Minot Area Council of the Arts was awarded an NEA grant in the amount of \$12,000 ten years ago. This allowed us to hire a part time arts education coordinator and to bring working artists into schools that could not afford to hire an art teacher. This program

sustained the coordinators position, provided a source of income for working artists on a contract basis, and expanded the number of students reached by more than 200% over ten years. The impact of that program is felt today through arts instruction that meets our state's fine arts standards, and in our local economy.

NEA funds reach rural arts organizations mainly through our state arts agency, the North Dakota Council on the Arts. Roughly 25 % of the organizational membership of the Minot Area Council of the Arts receive funding from the agency, which also grants funds to schools and individual artists. Our state agency is not a bureaucratic cliché. Their great staff provides exceptional service and communicates openly.

Evidence of the impact of the arts in our region was brought home to me when I was president of our local Convention and Visitors Bureau:

- 1) While in Canada at a petroleum conference, company executives expressed interest in our community. They told me that our arts and culture were important in retaining and attracting a quality workforce.
- 2) A Development Director in Garrison, ND told me that they are able to draw thousands of visitors to their community because of a vital, active, arts council. Their annual "Dickens Festival" has made Garrison a holiday destination for visitors who shop, patronize the restaurants, buy fuel and attend performances. In other words, arts profoundly impacted tourism, North Dakota's number two industry, second only to agriculture.
- 3) In Stanley ND, a community of 1200, individuals organized to renovate a historic church. It became an appealing arts and performance venue. After participating in a standing room only event, many of us who had traveled 50 miles patronized the local drug store for a 1940's confection called a "Whirl-a-Whip" and dined in the café. The arts drew the visitors and local businesses reaped the benefit.

Artists help to build rural communities in myriad ways:

- 1) A potter in Burlington, a community of 1000 sells products in exclusive shops on a national scale. The revenue comes back to benefit our local economy.
- 2) A young North Dakota artist bought an abandoned church. After renovations, he set up his studio and residence at that location. A historic building was preserved, a town gained a new destination point and the dollars from the national sales of his artwork benefited the tiny rural town he called home.
- 3) Valuable skills come to a community's workforce through artists who supplement their artistic income by working outside the arts. Frequently in my own office, I observe the creative ways musicians solve problems. Musical training enables them to quickly isolate problems and persevere in reaching successful solutions.

The Arts and Economic Prosperity Study accomplished through Americans for the Arts revealed that the nonprofit arts industry annually impacts the greater Minot area with \$8.6

million in economic growth. It generates \$476,000 in revenue to state government and \$363,000 to local government while supporting 188 full time equivalent jobs. Obviously the arts are not a hindrance, but rather a substantial contributor to economic prosperity.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you some of what has been accomplished through the arts in the Minot area. I know the impact of the arts on rural communities. I hope I have communicated clearly the way in which the arts add value to education, the economy, and ultimately the quality of life in our rural areas.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this subject about which I am passionate. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.