

My name is Lori Robishaw and I live in Niantic. I'm writing as a relative newcomer to the state who has spent her career working in the management of nonprofit arts organizations. I am currently involved with a new venture in Southeastern Connecticut, a regional cultural coalition that will join with similar alliances throughout the state to ensure that all its nonprofit cultural organizations are well positioned to contribute to the state's vibrant creative sector.

Last year this region was grateful to receive two small grants from the Connecticut Office of the Arts to complete a cultural assessment in both the greater Norwich area and southern New London County. After a thoughtful and strategic process, our planning groups combined efforts to form a Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition, which will primarily serve all of New London County. The arts and culture industry in this part of the state continues to deserve support from the General Assembly via funding through the Department of Economic and Community Development, and I urge you to restore \$2 million to arts and culture grants.

In the year-and-a-half I lived in this area, I've climbed to the top of **Mystic Seaport's** historic whaling ship, the *Charles W. Morgan*; learned about President Woodrow Wilson's artist wife Ellen and her stay with the Old Lyme artist colony at the **Florence Griswold Museum**; made faces at Juno, the **Mystic Aquarium's** adorable beluga whale as he circled the tank; researched the history of the internationally prominent **Eugene O'Neill Theater Center** in Waterford as it prepares to celebrate its 50th anniversary; listened to the incredible story behind New London's individual artists coming together to create **Hygienic Art**, an art gallery, art park, and residential artists co-op in the heart of the city; received a personal tour of the **U.S.S. Nautilus at the Submarine Force Museum** in Groton given by a former five-time submarine captain; wept copiously at the conclusion of **Goodspeed Musicals'** stellar production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* in East Haddam; discussed the challenges that Waterford-based **Sonalysts Studios** has experienced working with entertainment unions; attended the **U.S. Coast Guard Academy's** annual Christmas service featuring its Glee Club; and become better versed about my own family's ancestry via the **Leffingwell House and Museum** in Norwich. And I know I've only seen the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the richly diverse cultural assets offered in this region.

The above-named entities make Southeastern Connecticut a highly desirable place to live, which is why I moved here. I daresay many other professionals who value arts and cultural opportunities for themselves and their families act on similar considerations.

The recently released "Arts and Economic Prosperity IV" study for the State of Connecticut showed that nonprofit arts and culture are a \$653 million industry, supporting more than 18,000 jobs and generating \$59.1 million in local and state revenues.

The arts are essential to the health and vitality of all of Connecticut's communities, especially in challenging times. They enhance community development; spur urban renewal; attract new businesses; draw tourism dollars; and create an environment that attracts skilled, educated workers and builds our third millennium workforce.

When we invest in the arts, heritage, and culture, we are investing in an industry that is a cornerstone of tourism and economic development, whose documented benefits include more vibrant competitive communities and safer and more creative kids, plus the beauty, exploration, provocation, and inspiration of the arts themselves.

Again, I urge you to restore \$2 million to arts and culture grants.