

# Supporters rally as arts funding dies

By Corinne Abell  
staff writer

**THEY SANG. THEY CLAPPED, they listened, they questioned, but mostly they wept silent tears. It was a rainy Wednesday morning, and for them, the sun was setting on the glory days of the arts in Michigan.**

About 100 supporters of the arts from across the state attended a rally at Arts Center in Lansing, sponsored by Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan and Michigan Advocates for the Arts, to discuss the state of the arts.

Marilyn Wheaton, director of CCAM, chaired the rally. Dressed in a "Last Art Before Michigan" T-shirt, said the protest was held "to provide opportunity to be informed, to be inspired, to be empowered."

Ready with information were members of the arts community, legislators and arts lobbyist Richard J. Allen. Ortheia Barnes sang a set of Motown songs, with one, "There's a Winner in You," dedicated to Wheaton and other people in the arts.

Allen explained the legislative process that led to deep cuts in arts funding. She said that a 9.2-percent cut in funding to all state programs, including arts funding, is now in effect. "This was passed by both houses and signed by Governor Blanchard," in December.

The new administration then issued an executive order that eliminated all grants and further cut funding to the Michigan Council for the Arts. This wasn't accepted by legislators.

Then, a freeze was put on any further payments of current grants. As a result, those promised payments for the rest of this fiscal year are in limbo, unsure when or if the payments will be made.

Allen suggested that legislators could be counting on the death of some programs, which would ease the arts funding burden.

Meanwhile, back at the Capitol, Gov. John Engler will submit the 1991-92 budget today. Allen warned "Expect that you will be treated abysmally. There will be practically nothing in it for you."

Allen predicted slow or no arts-funding payments in the current budget, and said he had little hope for any arts funding in the year ahead.

"You'll need overwhelming legislative support to combat line-item vetoes," Allen said. "We have to win them back. We can't spend the next two years trying to win veto overrides."



Ortheia Barnes provided a special Motown brand of musical inspiration.

REP. JAN DOLAN, R-Farmington, defended the budget cuts while proclaiming her affection for the arts.

"The policy of the House and Senate has been to keep adding new programs with no thought of where the funding is coming from," Dolan said.

She urged arts advocates not to become polarized over the issue, "to work both sides of the aisle," and said there would eventually be an effort to restore some arts funding.

"We're going to put things back in the budget, but it's going to take both sides of the aisle," she said.

She said that one group favors total government funding of the arts, and that another believes in private funding only. "The middle group is where I'm coming from," she said.

Further advice came from Rep. Paul Baade, D-Muskegon, who listed attracting new businesses and tourism as two strong reasons for funding the arts.

Both flourish in a culturally exciting atmosphere, he said. Businesses



Opinions about the state of the arts in Michigan are exchanged in the hall by Rep. Jan Dolan (R-Farmington), left, Joe P. Bianco, Jr., executive vice president of the Founders Society of the

Detroit Institute of Arts and Lisa Steele, director of marketing Detroit Institute of Arts.

like to be in places where there are museums and cultural activities and tourism thrives on festivals, theater and musical productions and other arts events, he said.

"It's not difficult to make a financial case for arts in the state's economy," he said.

Saying there are plenty of facts to support his contention, he told the audience, "Go for it. This is what they (legislators) understand and need to hear and see."

Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington, voiced his own disillusionment just before speaking to the gathering.

For 25 years, arts programs have made a tremendous difference to the people in our state. We have been a model to other states.

"This is a tremendous tragedy for the leadership to be totally destroyed because of the Governor's ideology. He never articulated this. It was not part of any political platform."



Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington, and a fellow legislator wait their turn to speak at the rally for the arts in Lansing.



Marilyn Wheaton, executive director of Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan, urged those attending the rally to make appointments to see their senators and representatives before the day was over.

Staff photos  
by Jerry Zolynsky

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