

WEST VIRGINIA

OVERVIEW

The main state agency overseeing cultural and arts development in West Virginia is the Division of Culture and History which seeks to identify, preserve, protect, promote, and present the ideas, arts, and artifacts of West Virginia's heritage.¹ In carrying out this mandate, the Division is broken into four sub-agencies: archives and history; arts; historic preservation; and museums. The Division's main offices are in the Cultural Center at the Capitol in Charleston, which is home to the State Museum and Theater, State Archives and Collections, and a library for genealogical research. At the Cultural Center, the Division programs a full year of events and exhibits along with administering four historical sites, each with their own program schedules, in other areas of the state.

As expected, the activities of all these sub-agencies play an important role in the preservation of arts and culture in the state; however, the West Virginia Commission on the Arts, established in 1967, remains of greater significance to arts and culture-related activities. The Commission works with artists, arts organizations, schools, and community groups to promote a thriving environment for the artistic, cultural, educational and economic development of the state. There are 12 members on the West Virginia Commission on the Arts along with nine staff members who help direct its daily operations. In order to finance the Commission's activities, the West Virginia Division of Culture and History receives annual support from the Legislature, the federal National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and a special grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation for competitive arts grants approved by the Commission and for arts administration servic-

es to arts organizations and individual artists across West Virginia.

According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, funding for the arts in West Virginia did not suffer the kind of cutbacks most of the other states around the country experienced between fiscal year 2001 and 2005. In fact, funding levels between these two periods actually increased, marginally, from \$2.3 million to \$2.4 million, a trend evident in only three other SLC states during this time period.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

In November 2004, a study sponsored by six state arts and crafts organizations and the Small Business Development Division of the West Virginia Development Office indicated that the arts and crafts industry contributed more than \$54 million to the state economy each year through the sale of related products.² In order to gather this information, the study queried some 2,539 artists and craftspeople

in the state about their overall sales, income, studio situations and needs. The study's results fully demonstrate the significance of the industry as a form of livelihood for thousands of West Virginia residents. Furthermore, the results reinforce the importance of public policy pertaining to the arts and the need for public policy decisions to direct further investments into this growing sector of the state economy.

While this study focused solely on the producers of arts and crafts, it did not consider the potential contribution of shops, galleries, craft schools and publications. The study forecasts that, when these are included, the comprehensive economic impact of the arts and crafts industry exceeds \$81 million annually, an impressive figure indeed. Among the highlights of the study were the following:

- » The direct impact of the artists and craftspeople working in the state is \$54.5 million annually;
- » The estimated comprehensive economic impact of the arts and crafts industry, including crafts retailers, organizations and publications is \$81.2 million per year;
- » The vast majority of artists work solo in a studio (approximately 70 percent) located in their home or on their property (88 percent). While 21 percent indicated that they work in a studio with a partner or family member, an additional 7 percent of the survey respondents are owners/partners in a studio with paid employees;
- » The mean age of craftspeople in West Virginia is 54, only modestly older than the average of other working West Virginians. (This is consistent with the hypothesis that craft producers typically require higher than

average skill sets than that of other workers – skills that are acquired during a prolonged period of time.);

- » The annual household income derived from craft-related activities was reported to be \$13,114. This income provides, on average, 27.5 percent of the total household income, while 12 percent of respondents indicated that craft income was the only source of household income;
- » Approximately 75 percent of the items produced by West Virginia artists and crafters are sold within the state;

- » On average, wholesale revenues account for 48.9 percent of the annual sales/revenue, while direct retailing accounts for an average of 37.7 percent of annual sales/revenue;
- » Crafts fairs provide the largest source of retail sales, representing 36.9 percent of total sales, studio sales account for 34.7 percent, while commission sales comprise 14 percent of total retail sales annually; and
- » Woodworkers appear to have the highest average sales at \$25,476 per year, followed by artists and

craftspeople working in paper (\$24,263), leather (\$23,500) and fiber/textiles (\$22,224).

In closing, the approximate \$54 million the arts and crafts industry contributes to the state economy every year is only \$13 million less than the personal consumption of fuel oil and coal in West Virginia and only \$32 million less than software consumption. When one factors in the potential comprehensive economic contribution, the crafts industry falls just behind the software industry in West Virginia, certainly an indication of the significant economic importance of the industry to the state's economic wellbeing.