



Annual ArtPrize competition pumps millions into Grand Rapids' economy

GRAND RAPIDS -- In downtown Grand Rapids, the popular HopCat pub is serving up suds and burgers as fast as it can these days.

The reason: ArtPrize, the annual public art competition drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors to Grand Rapids, showing that cultural events can support the bottom line as well as the mind and heart.

Now in its fourth year, ArtPrize invites artists from around the world to create a work of art that is placed in any of numerous public indoor and outdoor venues, mostly in the downtown area. The public gets to vote on their favorites, and the winner receives a top prize of \$200,000. A second judging by a professional jury results in a \$100,000 prize.

From the beginning, ArtPrize proved a huge economic boon for restaurants, hotels and many other businesses in Grand Rapids.

"They're our three busiest weeks of the year," Garry Boyd, manager of HopCat and two related eateries, said of the annual run

of ArtPrize. "We plan way ahead for this stuff."

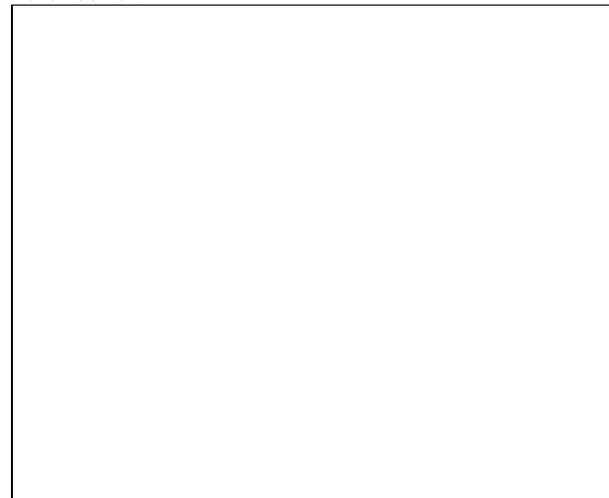
ArtPrize boosts HopCat's revenues by an average of 25% over a normal week. And each of the years that ArtPrize has operated, HopCat has seen a boost over the same week of ArtPrize the year before. Last week, with the competition's opening, business was up 10% over the same ArtPrize week last year.

East Lansing-based Anderson Economic Group studied the impact of ArtPrize in 2011 and reported that more than 200,000 visitors came to Grand Rapids during ArtPrize. More than 73% of visitors came from outside the city, 31% traveled from outside its metro area and more than 5% came from outside Michigan.

Counting hotels, restaurants and other businesses, ArtPrize pumped an estimated \$10.1 million in net new-visitor spending into the local economy.

"It was a terrific draw into the community,

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and they're spending money at restaurants and shops and other forms of entertainment," said Scott Watkins, a senior consultant at Anderson and a coauthor of the study. "That serves as a catalyst for downtown Grand Rapids."

Not the least of ArtPrize's attractions is that the event is free and open to the public. Watkins said visitors perceive value in the free event, so they're more willing to splurge on other things.

"Realizing value and having a good time, they're more inclined to spend money at local eateries and shops and galleries," he said.

For art enthusiasts, it's no surprise that cultural events can boost the bottom line, said Jennifer Goulet, president and CEO of the nonprofit arts advocacy group ArtServe Michigan.

ArtServe released a report earlier this year showing that 211 arts and culture organizations in the state contributed \$462 million and more than 15,000 jobs to the Michigan economy in 2009.

"Arts and culture across the state are powerful tools of economic development, providing jobs and generating spending in local economies," Goulet said Wednesday.

Besides bringing in tourism dollars, arts and culture boost the economy by creating a desirable identity for communities, helping to attract and retain talented people. And arts as part of a school curriculum help train children to be the

innovators of tomorrow, Goulet said.

"Those are valuable contributions that are essential at a time when we're looking for every possible way to strengthen Michigan's economy," she added.

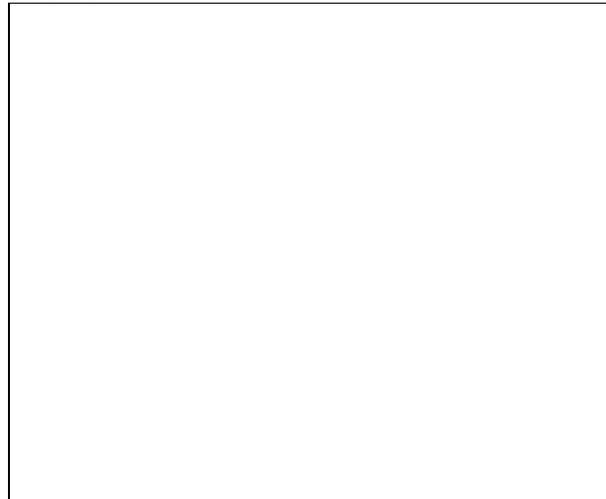
Contact John Gallagher: 313-222-5173 or gallagher99@freepress.com

More Details: If you want to go At freep.com

This year, ArtPrize features more than 1,500 works, with artists from 41 states and 10 foreign countries. ArtPrize continues through Oct. 7. For more information about visiting, go to [www . artprize .org](http://www.artprize.org) .

See more photos from ArtPrize

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Lindsey Bond, 9, touches "Our President," Michigan's Gerald R. Ford. ArtPrize opened last week and continues through Oct. 7.



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"Scrapie Dick" is one of the more than 1,500 entries in this year's ArtPrize in Grand Rapids. More than 200,000 visitors came to the city for the contest last year, an impact study showed. / Sept. 25 photos by MANDI WRIGHT/Detroit Free Press



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Lindsey Bond, 9, touches "Our President," Michigan's Gerald R. Ford. ArtPrize opened last week and continues through Oct. 7.

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