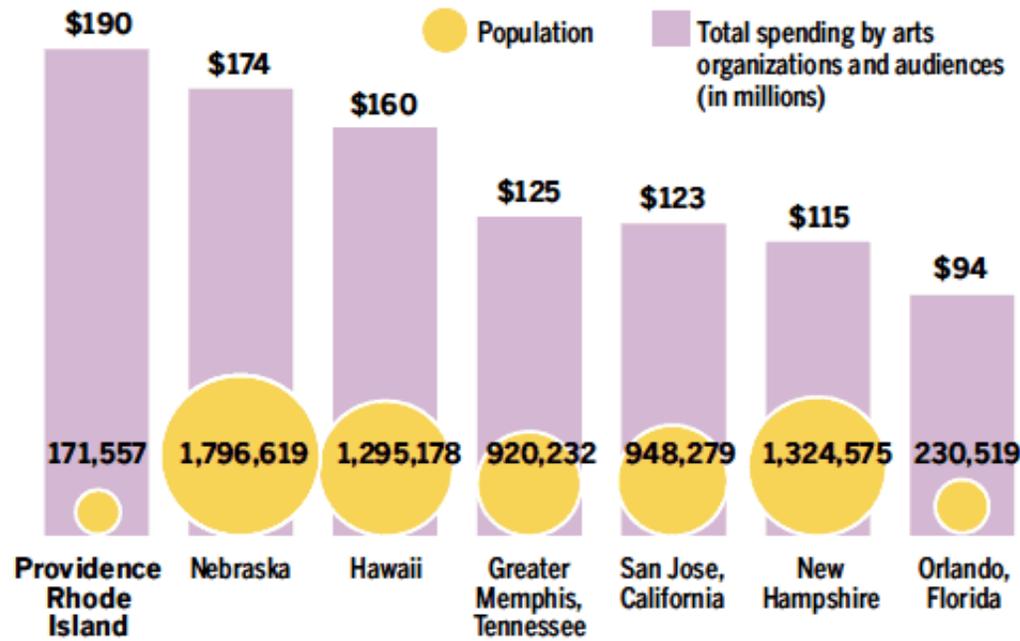


Though Rhode Island is the smallest state, it enjoys an outsize reputation as a cultural force. For a key to the above illustration, turn to **A10**.

# Arts are alive and well in Providence

The arts industry in Providence generates a surprising amount of revenue compared to several larger cities and even some states.



SOURCE: Americans for the Arts

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL



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THE ARTS | R.I.'S INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

# A rich mosaic

Thriving cultural scene is an economic powerhouse

By G. WAYNE MILLER JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Twilight envelops Grant's Block, this inviting open space in the heart of downtown. A growing crowd relaxes on lawn chairs and benches. Conversations abound; laughter rings out; a child plays with a dog. Every table outside adjacent café Tazza is filled.

This is the city in comfort mode, with a hint of anticipation in the air.

When the equipment is ready, host Michael Gazdacko welcomes everyone to a novel sort of performance that began in Japan and has taken especially deep root in Rhode Island.

"We're here at Grant's Block for the 40<sup>th</sup> Pecha Kucha night in Providence," says Gazdacko. He thanks sponsors Tazza and Block owner Cornish Associates, headed by developer and arts patron Arnold B. "Buff" Chace Jr.

Gazdacko relates the history of Pecha Kucha (roughly "chit-chat" in Japanese), an evening of storytelling that can feature local artists, musicians, dancers, filmmakers, photographers, actors, designers, civic leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs or intellectuals, depending on who fills out the lineup of eight first.

"It was devised in Tokyo in 2003 by a group of architects, not from Japan, who wanted to get together with like-minded individuals and find a way of sharing ideas and promoting creativity," Gazdacko says.

This is the way: 20 slides for each speaker, 20 seconds' talk per slide, a computer advancing the slides beyond the speaker's control. The result is a story six minutes and 40 seconds long; eight stories are presented per evening. In this outdoors Pecha Kucha, the slides will be projected onto a screen hung on an old brick building.

"It has now grown to 542 cities worldwide," Gazdacko says. "But we're the only one in the world that does it every single month. And this month, we had backup presenter upon backup presenter. We had waiting lists, people wanting to get on."

No surprise there.

Rhode Island's bountiful arts have made this geographically small state a national cultural force. The industrial revolution is memory now, but an age of creativity endures here in the place where Samuel Slater transformed water power into riches. Unlike textile manufacturing, which has mostly disappeared elsewhere, the arts engine is a fundamental of the economy.

"The arts in Providence, in greater Rhode Island, are so important to the local community," says Gazdacko. "We have such a thriving cultural awareness, even for such a small state."

That "results in a great deal of economic activity," says Randall Rosenbaum, executive director of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts.

He speaks of business generated by the hundreds of nonprofit artistic enterprises and artists throughout the state. RISCA supports many of them with grants from funds originating in private and institutional sources and the state and federal governments, notably the National Endowment for the Arts, a legacy of the late Sen. Claiborne Pell. (For-profit enterprises, such as multiplex cinemas, acts that play arenas and other venues, and TV and movie production, also contribute substantially to the state's economy.)

Rosenbaum cites Trinity Rep, a RISCA beneficiary, as an example of the direct economic impact of the nonprofit arts.

In presenting plays, he says, “they pay actors. They build sets. They create costumes. They do promotional activities. They do everything associated with the direct payment of people and the purchases of goods and services to actually put the show on. That’s easily quantifiable.” Trinity Rep employs more than 100 and has an annual operating budget of nearly \$8 million, of which more than half goes to salaries and benefits.

Less precisely calculable, Rosenbaum says — but nonetheless significant — is the dollar value of the indirect economic activity arising from nonprofit art. Patrons pay to park, hire babysitters and frequent restaurants. Out-of-town patrons stay at hotels, dine, shop and visit museums and other attractions. The tourist factor is substantial, here in this state an hour’s drive from Boston and less than four from New York.

“All of the economic activity that’s happening as a result of an active arts community is having a profound impact on our state’s economy,” Rosenbaum says.

Although the impact cannot be calculated to the penny, the nonprofit New England Foundation for the Arts, using data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, describes a robust effect.

In 2009, the foundation found, direct and indirect nonprofit arts spending in Rhode Island totaled \$673 million and supported nearly 8,000 jobs. “In aggregate,” the foundation said, “every \$1 spent by a Rhode Island nonprofit arts and cultural organization became \$2.10 in sales for business in Rhode Island.”

Rosenbaum sees yet another impact, with economic implications that defy precise quantification but are “really profound,” he asserts.

“Artists live and work in our communities. They pay taxes. They send their kids to school. They participate in community life. They do a significant amount of [unpaid] work contributing to that community by providing educational services, by helping to train the next generation of artists, by being active in after-school programming...

“That has a profound economic effect — and it also has a profound effect on the community and the quality of life that we all enjoy.”

A tour of the RISD Museum, the crown jewel of Rhode Island’s fine-art institutions, begins at the new media gallery, where “Navigating the Personal Bubble,” an exhibit by Wendy Richmond, is showing. Literally, showing.

Three video images fill three large wall-mounted screens. Each is a close view of the face of a person using a computer in a public space such as a coffee shop or library. Lost in their digital worlds, they frown, grin, sniffle, nod, squint, sigh, scratch — and more, as Richmond’s descriptive words on a sign explain.

“It’s mesmerizing,” says Donna Desrochers, director of marketing. “Sometimes we have whole families that are just sort of sprawled out and watching.”

The tour continues into the 19<sup>th</sup> - century American painting gallery, with its collection of works by Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent and Thomas Cole. When the tour is complete, visitors have strolled through galleries with costumes, textiles, sculptures, photographs, ceramics, furniture, silver, jewelry and more. They’ve seen works by Picas-so, Monet, Renoir, Warhol and other giants.

“We have over 86,000 works of art from all time periods, from all over the world,” Desrochers says. “All media, right from ancient times to contemporary. There literally is something for everyone.”

With his stewardship of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, Senator Pell became Rhode Island’s foremost champion of creative enterprise, starting in the 1960s. But the arts have been appreciated here since Colonial times. The state headed toward national recognition when Gilbert Stuart, born in 1755 in

Saunderstown — and best-known for his painting of George Washington that appears on the \$1 bill — began to show his work.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century unfolded, landscape painters gravitated to Rhode Island's picturesque shore. Newport arts flourished. An artists' colony and an arts association emerged in Providence. The prestigious Providence Art Club opened, and wealthy merchants and industrialists collected fine art. A member of one such family helped move the state toward greater prominence.

Helen Rowe Metcalf, wife of Jesse Metcalf, mill owner (and, later, shareholder in The Providence Journal), led the group that founded the Rhode Island School of Design in 1877. According to its charter, the school's mission was training students in industrial design and art "that they may successfully apply the principles of art to the requirements of trade and manufactures." RISD was also to play a role "in the general advancement of public art education by the exhibition of works of art ..." Hence, the museum.

More than a century-and-a-quarter later, Metcalf's ambitions have been surpassed as RISD has expanded its mission, embracing media that were not imagined in 1877 —and becoming an economic dynamo. According to its latest figures, RISD today has 1,116 employees, including museum staff but not including temporary positions. Of its \$142.9 million annual budget, more than \$72 million will be spent on employee salaries and benefits.

About 100,000 people visit the RISD museum annually. But attendance figures do not fully capture its economic importance, any more than Trinity Rep's would (for the record, Trinity's attendance was 130,000 last year). And not just in the direct and indirect ways that RISCA's Rosenbaum enumerates. Together with the state's other arts assets, the museum underpins something bigger.

"A rich cultural landscape is in many ways as equally important as a diverse and thriving business community," says RISD museum director John W. Smith. An accomplished art historian and curator, Smith says that rich culture was an additional attraction helping to lure him from the Smithsonian Institution last year.

"RISD is both a major regional enterprise, benefiting the economy through hiring, spending and investment, and a cultural institution of international prominence that draws talent from around the world," says Jaime Marland, RISD's director of media relations.

"The many RISD alumni who have chosen to live and work in Rhode Island are making powerful contributions to the state's knowledge-based industries and Providence's long-standing reputation as a center of arts and culture. Through start-up companies, public programs and partnerships with nonprofits and other institutions of higher learning, RISD faculty, staff and students have enriched the city and state throughout RISD's long history."

The same holds true for other Rhode Island schools with strong arts programs.

Along with live music, "WaterFire" and other attractions, the RISD Museum is featured in the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau's marketing to out-of-town conventioners. Under the banner "Providence: The Creative Capital," a bureau ad running in trade publications features a photo of the museum's Grand Gallery.

"We know you want ample meeting and hotel space, a convenient location, and a compact, walkable downtown," the ad reads. "We've got all that and something more."

Bureau head Martha Sheridan's mandate also includes marketing the area to out-of-town visitors — "cultural tourists," as they are sometimes called, travelers in search of more than beaches, a bay and nature, though Rhode Island offers those, too.

Recent press suggests that Sheridan has succeeded. In a July 11 story, The New York Times featured the RISD Museum, the Big Nazo puppet lab, and the Cable Car Cinema. Like Portland, Ore., and Austin, Texas, The Times wrote, Providence is "a town many times more creative and cosmopolitan than its modest population (178,000 residents) and municipal troubles suggest."

Statistics published by the advocacy group Americans for the Arts confirm that impression. The group's fourth Arts and Economic Prosperity report, a study of 182 cities, states and regions, released in June, stated that the economic impact of nonprofit arts and culture in Providence alone totals \$190 million a year. That was more than the entire states of Delaware, Hawaii, South Dakota or New Hampshire — all with more people than Providence. (New Hampshire and Hawaii, for example, each have about 1.3 million residents.)

As Sheridan notes, Rhode Island food is the icing on Rhode Island arts. In its latest listing of America's Favorite Cities, Travel & Leisure ranks Providence second among visitors for "food/drink/restaurants" of the 35 communities surveyed — ahead of New York, New Orleans and Chicago, which are not, shall we say, chopped liver. San Juan, Puerto Rico, was number one.

"The beauty of it is those two things [the arts and dining] go hand in hand," Sheridan says. The cause is made easier by the presence of Johnson & Wales University, whose College of Culinary Arts ranks among the world's finest.

Through its official guide and website, [goprovidence.com](http://goprovidence.com), and other means, the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau also promotes AS220; Newport's music, folk and jazz festivals; arts festivals in Wickford, Pawtucket and elsewhere; the Rhode Island International Film Festival; the Preservation Society of Newport County's historic properties and collections; and more. These statewide efforts are joined by Rhode Island's several chambers of commerce, municipal groups and other entities. This is one big horn to blow.

The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts' grant summary for the fiscal year that ended on June 30 details 360 separate grants totaling \$1.5 million.

The smallest was \$122, for a high school arts project. The largest included "WaterFire," which received \$225,000; Trinity Rep, \$99,046; the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra and Music School, \$80,268; and the Providence Performing Arts Center, \$26,102.

Grant recipients must file reports, which allows RISCA to calculate return on investment. For the 2010-2011 cycle, Rosenbaum says, every dollar RISCA awarded generated \$22.65 in direct economic activity. The additional indirect return — dollars spent for hotels and dining, for example — is harder to quantify.

Harder still is the less tangible, but real, effect on the larger culture that RISD's Smith and Marland describe. Antonio Callari, professor of economics and director of the Floyd Institute's Local Economy Center at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa., has studied that.

His conclusion: when the arts are celebrated, a region's economy benefits in ways that might not be immediately apparent. Creative thinkers in engineering, software and many other non-arts disciplines like the arts and culture vibe, Callari says — gravitating to a Providence over, say, a Fargo or an Erie.

"It's not just the current spending impacts, both direct and indirect," Callari says. "It's the impact the arts have on the culture, the education of the people, the development of the creative spirit. It increases the possibility of attracting people who find themselves on the creative track, whatever their profession.

"People who tend to be creative like to live in areas where they don't feel under pressure to conform to any set of mores. Areas that tend to promote a culture of arts tend also to have the kind of cultural environment that is more open to people who are not necessarily in the arts."

On Grant's Block, twilight fades to dark as Gazdacko introduces the evening's Pecha Kucha performers. Gazdacko, director of development and operations for Urban Smart Growth, which owns Pawtucket's Hope Artiste Village, does not get paid to host Pecha Kucha. Nor do performers get paid.

One after another, men and women tell their six-minute, 40-second stories. Stories about global warming, gender equality, urban greens — and a tale of a child's fantasy that inspired another of Rhode Island's innovative arts centers.

“Growing up, I was known as a daydreamer,” Beth Cunha begins.

A photo of a young girl lost in thought appears on screen. Twenty seconds later, iconic images of comedy and tragedy stage masks appear.

“At 15, I went to a play,” Cunha says. “And it was all over. I knew I would become a teaching artist. I would take those two crafts, I would blend them together, and I would affect the lives of children every day.”

Years later, Cunha’s Center for Dynamic Learning reaches hundreds of children through its Traveling Theatre, Imagine Productions, and other endeavors. Its \$165,000 annual budget supports three full-time and six part-time staff.

Cunha shows slides of children rehearsing, performing and drawing.

“Explore, create, enrich,” a slide proclaims. Art for arts’ sake, and more.

Next month, Pecha Kucha will be staged somewhere else, as Gazdacko rotates through different locations and establishments. Pecha Kucha is free to attend, but businesses such as Tazza realize dollar rewards.

“Our sales increase. And staff is happy — they’re making more money,” says Tazza general manager Amy Stetkiewicz.

“It is always held on a Wednesday night,” Gazdacko says, “so a normally slow night turns into a great event with 100 to 150 people eating and drinking at a local establishment. The group that gathers to enjoy and present is such a diverse cross section of our wonderfully talented and diverse city.”

Connections made; new possibilities explored; the culture celebrated; the economy energized, here in a place called The Creative Capital. [gwmiller@providencejournal.com](mailto:gwmiller@providencejournal.com)

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### ***THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL/CONNIE GROSCH***

Randall Rosenbaum, executive director of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, says the state's robust arts scene means business for the ailing economy.

## Send us your solutions

What do you think can be done to turn around Rhode Island's economy? Please send your ideas to John Kostrzewa, assistant managing editor / Business, Commerce & Consumer, Providence Journal, 75 Fountain St., Providence, R.I. 02902, or by e-mail to [jostrze@providencejournal.com](mailto:jostrze@providencejournal.com). Include your name, address, and contact information. Please keep your submissions shorter than 250 words.

## Reinvent R.I.: THE SERIES

Here are some highlights of the series, available online at [www.providencejournal.com/reinventrhodeisland](http://www.providencejournal.com/reinventrhodeisland)

March 18

R.I. can capitalize on unique assets to turn its economy around.

March 25

R.I. was a world leader during the Industrial Revolution. It can happen again.

April 1

What middle-class families are doing to make ends meet.

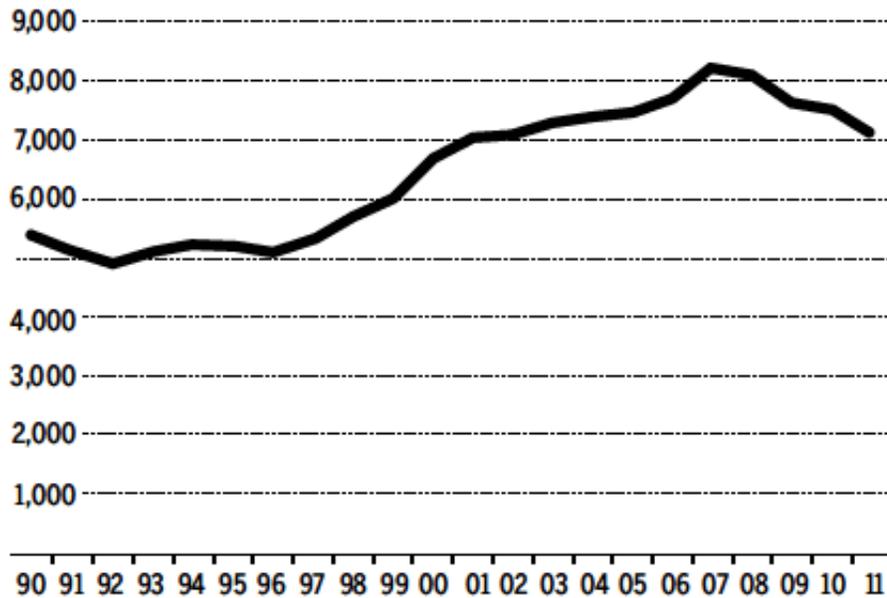


***THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL/STEVE SZYDLOWSKI***

The Grand Gallery at RISD Museum, the crown jewel of Rhode Island art institutions. Close to 100,000 people visit the museum each year, pumping tourist dollars into the state's economy.

## Employment in arts, entertainment and recreation

Jobs in the arts industry rose from 1996 until the start of the recession in 2007.



SOURCE: R.I. Department of Labor & Training

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

## On the cover

- 1: New Media Gallery, Rhode Island School of Design
- 2: Catherine Russell sings with Preservation Hall Jazz Band at Newport Jazz Festival
- 3: "WaterFire Providence"
- 4: Caroline Mailloux speaks at Pecha Kucha night, in Providence
- 5: Brian McEleney and Abbey Siegworth in Trinity Rep's "King Lear"
- 6: Jacky's Waterplace restaurant
- 7: The Providence Performing Arts Center
- 8: Bert Crenca, artistic director at AS220
- 9: Big Nazo puppet performs in Providence



***THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL/KRIS CRAIG***

Industrial designer Matt Grigsby talks about one of his projects at a Pecha Kucha night in Providence, which allows people to share ideas via six-minute slide-show presentations.