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Courtesy of Prairie Loft Center

Thanks to funding from Nebraska Cultural Endowment, Prairie Loft Center for Outdoor and Agricultural Learning can host events like the Flatwater Music Festival.



Courtesy of Prairie Loft Center

The Talbot Brothers perform at the 2019 Flatwater Music Festival.



Courtesy of Hastings Museum

Hastings Museum hosts the Native American Festival, featuring this young dancer, with funding from Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

Endowment preserves arts, cultural nonprofits through pandemic

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In a time when most people were thinking about where to buy that next bottle of hand sanitizer or roll of toilet paper, one Nebraska organization was trying to figure out how to keep local museums and cultural centers from going under.

The Nebraska Cultural Endowment is a unique organization that uses both public and private funds to sustain arts and humanities throughout the state of Nebraska.

In 2020, the endowment was able to provide more than \$1 million in programming and sustainability dollars to aid arts and humanities programs across the state.

“We’re very lucky to have this resource in our state,” said Kyle Cartwright, executive director of the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. “This model that the cultural endowment operates on is nationally unique. There are no other public/private endowments that support arts and humanities in the nation.”

The Nebraska Cultural Endowment was created in coordination with the Nebraska Legislature in 1998 as a way to combine privately-raised and publicly-matched dollars that would then be distributed primarily

through the Nebraska Arts Council and Humanities Nebraska.

About one-third of the budgets for the two agencies comes through the fundraising efforts of the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

“We lean on the expertise of the two councils to hand out the money,” Cartwright said. “They’ve built grant programs and strategies and relationships with communities that have worked and done as was intended.”

The endowment’s goal, which obviously aligns with those two organizations, is to help fund and provide arts and civic education, literacy, fine arts, performing arts and more options to all Nebraskans young and old.

That can mean everything from helping to fund the annual Native American Festival at the Hastings Museum to covering the cost of busing to send a group of students from a rural area to see a theatrical production in a larger community.

“That’s one thing we like to talk about that is popular with state senators and donors is the school buses that take kids to programming,” Cartwright said. “In rural areas, access to programs can be limited. These grants aim to take kids to these programs.”

Through Humanities Nebraska, the endowment

is able to help fund the cultural speakers and programs that visit schools, museums, libraries and other facilities.

“In broad strokes it’s a lot of different things,” Cartwright said. “It’s art, civic education, literacy, fine arts, performing arts. You name it. That takes shape in a lot of different forms and communities.”

Cartwright said he has seen many donations come from supporters here in south-central Nebraska. Hastings Attorney Chuck Shoemaker currently serves as treasurer of the endowment’s board of directors.

Additionally the endowment has given out money to dozens of organizations in this area through the Nebraska Arts Council and Humanities Nebraska.

Some of the organizations in the Hastings area that have received endowment funds include the Hastings Museum, Hastings Community Theatre, Hastings Public Library, Hastings Symphony Orchestra, Prairie Loft Center for Outdoor and Agricultural Learning and numerous schools.

Area beneficiaries include the Minden Opera House and the Willa Cather Foundation.

“I really like to tell the story of Willa Cather and how her legacy turned Red Cloud into a cultural hot spot,” Cartwright said. “I



Courtesy of Hastings Museum

Native American, Oglala Lakota dancer, singer, flute player, and storyteller Garan Coons performing at the Hastings Museum’s Native American Festival.

think it’s eleven times the number of people who live there that visit there annually. I love telling that story. We’re proud of the success there.”

The Cather Foundation was one of the organizations that received endowment funds in 2020 to help keep them operational when there were no guests coming through the doors.

“Lot of arts and culture nonprofits depend on tickets and sponsorships and a lot of that dried up last year for a lot of organizations,” Cartwright said.

The \$300,000 that the endowment earmarked specifically for pandemic relief came due to the

organization’s fiscal responsibility.

Cartwright said they were able to provide those funds without dipping into the endowment’s principal which would have impacted the power of the endowment going forward.

Cartwright said that many organizations across the state have been able to weather the storm that is the pandemic not only through the support of the cultural endowment but through the support of local individuals.

“The beautiful thing about Nebraska and Nebraska communities is there is the sense of collectiveness and interdependence. We

support the small businesses, the museums, the symphonies, the things that matter to the community,” he said. “We’ve absolutely seen that.”

Going forward, Cartwright said the endowment’s continuing goal will be to provide that support to the arts and humanities in a way that helps keep them sustainable long into the future.

In all, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment has distributed over \$15 million to fund arts and humanities programs throughout Nebraska since the endowment’s inception.

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Nebraska Cultural Endowment doubles your donations with public support to enhance the programs and grants of the Nebraska Arts Council and Humanities Nebraska.