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Friday, April 3, 2009 | Modified: Tuesday, April 7, 2009

Road to Recovery: Nonprofits vie for federal funds

Silicon Valley / San Jose Business Journal - by [David Goll](#)
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Every sector competing for federal stimulus funds has its advocates, and it may seem that the arts have an unfair advantage when it comes to star power. Silicon Valley arts groups count among their backers singer Linda Ronstadt and jazz musician Wynton Marsalis.

But considering the competition, the organizations will need all the celebrity backing they can muster to prevail.

"It's going to be highly competitive," said Bruce W. Davis, executive director of Arts Council Silicon Valley.

He said 19 area arts organizations have applied for stimulus funds. They are lined up with thousands of others across the country hoping for infusions of \$25,000 or \$50,000 that may only be used to retain paid staff or pay contractors who supply them with services.

To qualify, they must have received National Endowment for the Arts grants at least once over the past four years.

Their requests come on the heels of \$50 million of the \$787 billion stimulus package being set aside for nonprofit arts organizations nationwide — a one-time shot during 2009-10 at temporarily shoring up staffing levels.

Knocking on Congress' door

Ronstadt, a consulting artistic and educational director of the San Jose Mariachi and Latin Music Festival, was joined by jazz musician Marsalis and singer Josh Groban in urging Congress to dedicate greater resources to support arts education nationwide.

Ronstadt appeared before a House of Representatives subcommittee on behalf of Arts Council Silicon Valley — which provides arts funding and services to local groups, schools and artists — and the Mexican Heritage Corp.

Davis said local support for the arts began to wane with the sale of San Jose-based media giant Knight-Ridder Inc. in 2006. The company had made \$2 million in annual contributions to nonprofit organizations.

"We lost \$750,000 (in nonprofit donations) in San Jose alone," he said.

But arts organizations are nothing if not resilient, Davis said. They have reduced staff hours, pared back on productions and whittled away at marketing budgets to make ends meet. Other than one notable closure, the American Musical Theatre of San Jose late last year, Silicon Valley's arts groups have stayed afloat. Ticket sales have remained strong, he



Vicki Thompson

Emily Ray, music director of the Mission Chamber Orchestra, said the group is looking for funds outside the stimulus.

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said.

However, Davis added, though the stimulus funds are welcome, they don't represent much of a windfall.

"It's a stopgap to halt the bleeding," he said. "And it's just one-time funding."

Davis said arts are a big business in Silicon Valley, generating more than \$166 million in annual economic activity and creating more than 3,900 jobs in Santa Clara County, according to a 2007 Arts Council study.

Some of the region's biggest, most high-profile arts institutions are forgoing stimulus funds. In the case of San Jose Repertory Theatre, it's simple math — Michelle Hou, communications manager, said the Rep received NEA funding five years ago and so missed eligibility by one year. Virginia Perry, senior director of marketing and development for Opera San Jose, said because the federal money would have to be spent only during the 2009-10 season, it wasn't worth making the effort to apply. She said the opera company's expenses for next year have already been reduced to deal with the economy.

"We must plan our productions far in advance, so we're already planning and hiring for the 2010-11 season," Perry said.

Some smaller groups are seeking outside help. The Mission Chamber Orchestra, which performs in San Jose's ornate, 86-year-old Le Petit Trianon Theatre, is applying for \$17,000 from Meet The Composer, a New York organization that promotes the creation of original musical compositions. Emily Ray, the chamber orchestra's music director, said she wants the funds to commission an original work by Ashu, a 26-year-old California saxophonist who has performed in such venues as Carnegie Hall and the Vienna Konzerthaus.

The Mexican Heritage Corp., sponsor of the annual San Jose Mariachi festival, a Mexican dance troupe and arts education programs for Latino students, is seeking as much as it can — \$50,000. Its president and CEO, Marcela Davison Aviles, was also on the recent Washington trip.

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