

Hobbs center promised funds for renovation *if* it can raise \$40,000 Arts center aims for \$500,000

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Lea County has never been known as an "arts community," but that is changing and if \$40,000 can be raised an additional \$500,000 will skyrocket the local arts into public view.

The Lea County Commission for the Arts is seeking donations for a renovation project for the Center for the Arts building on Broadway. If the commission can raise \$40,000 by March the J. F. Maddox Foundation has promised an additional \$500,000 to the renovation of the building, said David Sadler, past president of the commission.

"We really want to raise the money before the end of the year," he said. "We are ready to break ground and if we wait the cost of construction could change.

The \$540,000 renovation will give the Broadway building a new face, new entrance, new lighting, new heating and cooling equipment and new office supplies.

The commission was estab-

lished in 2001 and the building opened in 2004. In that time strides have been made, but renovations are needed to take the next step in promoting the arts in Lea County, said Carol Hammond, director of the center.

"(Lea County has) made great strides in the last 10 years," Hammond said. "The museums have come to the forefront in the last 10 years. It is changing a lot. This building has changed things a lot. We have a place to have classes, to have displays and exhibits. We may not be like some of the other arts communities, but we are wanting to be a very prevalent part of Hobbs. The opportunities are unlimited to what we can do."

Arts and culture tourism is an untapped resource in Lea County. In Connecticut arts and culture tourism is a \$14 billion industry. While Lea County may never share that kind of prosperity, there is a draw to the area generated by the talent of local artists.

"We have visitors from

Ontario, Canada, the UK, Ohio Michigan, San Antonio and that is just in three pages," said Sadler as he thumbed through the center's guest book.

"A lot of our visitors are from other states," Hammond said, "especially with some of the businesses that are now in this community. There are employees with more of an arts background here looking to see what we have to offer. People who come to the casino want a break or are looking for something to do, they come here."

In fact, some of the area artists command prices for their work in the same range of many artists around the county, said Glynese Floyd, commission president.

"The subject matter is different — we run towards the western skies, the western heritage — but the quality is the same as you will find anywhere," she said.

The upgrades to the center will help change the perception that there isn't an arts culture in Lea County, Sadler

said, and will help tap into the arts and cultural tourism industry.

"Part of our whole ideal is to change that perception about Lea County," he said. "You don't have to go to Santa Fe to get good art or to get good symphony. I have cried, laughed and had joy right here in our local theater. There is a musician here that could be a national sensation. Don't tell me we don't have what it takes to make Lea County better."

Perhaps even more importantly, the upgrades will help the center further bring arts and culture to Lea County students through the summer and after-school programs.

"Not all children are interested in sports, and sports is pretty dominant in Hobbs," Hammond said. "Those children need something other than sports. All kids love art. It gives them the opportunity to develop that skill."

In a letter to the center one parent expressed how much the arts mean to her son.

"The Center for the Arts after school program has been a great thing in our lives," the letter reads. "My son is an ADHD child and doesn't play sports. He does love to draw, play with clay, paint and be creative. The after school and summer arts program is a place where he can go and learn as well as nurture his skills in art. This art program is truly wonderful."

The commission is accepting donations of all sizes but has special donor recognition levels for donations from \$999-\$10,000. All donations will be recognized when the renovated center opens and permanently memorialized on a plaque that will be installed in the building.

For more information on the center or to donate contact the Center for the Arts at 397-2787 or drop by at 122 W. Broadway.



From left, Glynese Floyd, Carol Hammond and David Sadler pose outside the Center for the Arts building on Broadway. If the center can raise \$40,000 the Maddox Foundation will donate \$500,000 to remodel the building.

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