

stuff!" Soon afterward the "Wooly Women," as they're known now, joined the co-op and are members today.

The Artisan's Circle dedicates its 750 square feet of space exclusively to displaying the artwork. There are no studio workshops. All artists work from home or other facilities. Artists can participate in one of three ways: owner, renter or commission. Those who buy into the co-op are owners. Renters pay for space on a regular basis but are not part of the ownership. Commission only is artwork that is accepted to be displayed by various artists. The sales split for commissions is similar to a traditional gallery. Only three commission displays are allowed at any given time. The artists make a good profit on their work, Gibson says, but not enough to maintain a lifestyle. "We all have regular jobs to pay the bills. Maybe someday we'll make enough to be self-sufficient." She credits the mass appeal of the work for the co-op's success so far. "We try to be middle-of-the-road. We don't want to be so extreme that only 1 percent of those who come in will buy. We don't want to turn anyone away."

The co-op has grown from the seven original members to 19 and Gibson says it is at capacity. She says she and the others had considered moving to a larger facility where they could include handmade furniture, but the economy hasn't cooperated. "General Motors plants are closing down and there's a ripple effect," Gibson explains. She's not ruling out expansion for the future, though, saying taking chances is part of her nature. "We opened a year ago in October when the economy started

WWW.LANSINGBUSINESSMONTHLY.COM

## Using the Power of Art to Resurrect the Economy

by Tamera McBride

During a recent strategic planning meeting of the board for the Lansing Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), a no-interest loan was voted into effect. The board earmarked a hundred thousand dollars in an effort to support the arts and culture industry during a particularly challenging time in our economy and community. This no-interest loan pilot program, similar to that in the Kalamazoo region, is the first of its kind in the Lansing community, and will support a wide variety of arts and culture disciplines and the economy as a whole.

Lansing residents have access to a culture-rich diet including events, venues and wares. Arts and culture disciplines are essential to any community's economic health, and Lansing can certainly use a dose of good health! Bob Trezise, president of the LEDC, says, "While the board voted it into effect, Marchelle Smith was the driving force behind bringing this no-interest loan program to fruition." Smith, the LEDC's special projects director, explains, "Most people consider arts and culture fluff, but it's a key factor in determining economic growth."

If Lansing is to be a contender for companies relocating to Lansing and bringing new jobs to this community, it must think how these decision makers think. Heads of organizations must consider their employees and their families. How a community supports a company's employees and its families is important to the overall health of our economy. Corporations considering a move take multiple factors into consideration, and arts and culture is one of them. "It is an area we can't afford to cut, and the LEDC is making it easier for multiple arts disciplines to thrive," says Smith.

Smith says larger nonprofit (and for profit) organizations have easier access to lending institutions. The

LEDC's Arts & Culture Matching Fund program fills this gap and provides an additional resource.

"We have already approved three applications," says Smith. After the LEDC's board approves an application, the entity has four months to secure 100 percent match from other private sources. Among the criteria for this no interest loan are: The entity must be a nonprofit arts and culture discipline and organization, have a board of directors who participate in implementing fundraising activities, employ a unique mission that they are contributing to the city's economic development philosophy and provide measureable goals and objectives for past and upcoming programs.

Lastly, while not a criterium, Smith emphasizes that priority consideration is given to those nonprofit arts and culture disciplines that can illustrate collaboration with other arts and culture entities.

The no-interest loan is available to those nonprofit arts and culture disciplines located in the city of Lansing. Smith says they are emphasizing celebrated districts such as Downtown Lansing, Old Town and East Michigan Avenue, "which have significant economic impact moving forward." Qualified applicants can obtain \$5,000 to \$50,000 under this new program.

Lansing is a city of robust arts and culture disciplines, including the Lansing Art Gallery, BoarsHead Professional Theater and the Lansing Symphony Orchestra, as well as a multitude of venues, festivals and events. To maintain the health of these entities, "we will perform annual reviews to measure the fund's success and its economic impact," Smith says. "And we are optimistic the program will help revitalize our community and economy as a whole." ■