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Note from the Mayor: Arts and culture make a community where people want to be

By RHONDA POWNELL Guest columnist Dec 4, 2018

I love Winter Walk. Experiencing one of the most beautiful downtowns in Minnesota by candlelight is truly magical. The caroling, horse-drawn wagon rides, musical performances, model trains and specialty shops full of wonderful gifts all combine to make a one-of-a-kind special evening with family and friends.

It has become a beloved Northfield tradition for 20 years, a delight to the full range of members of our community. From the lights, to the music, to the many other artistic expressions, Winter Walk creates a warm and inviting space where people want to be.



Pownell

Northfield values our vibrant culture, celebrated arts and excellent quality of life. Winter Walk is an wonderful example of this. The beautiful voices of the St. Olaf Christmas Festival, just completed, bring over 10,000 visitors to town, and is another arts event that's also a magical experience. And there's the Vintage Band Festival, filling every corner of our small town with the sounds of great and unexpected music. Numerous other arts events both attract non-residents and bring locals together every year, whether to Arts Guild offerings, college-supported performances and shows, or the music found every weekend in our downtown restaurants and breweries.

Our Northfield Arts and Culture Commission has been faithfully working over the past year on an updated Arts and Cultural Plan. Although much of our arts and cultural activity happens through the amazing efforts of individual volunteers or nonprofit organizations, the Arts and Culture Plan is an explicit statement of the city's commitment to the arts and a recognition of the arts' crucial role in the health of our community. It says, "Engaging in creative experiences through arts and culture provides the ultimate expression of our human experience and is essential to a thriving community," and lays out a plan for growing our local cultural life into the future.

Writer and community development consultant Peter Kageyama said, "When we have an emotional connection to our place, we are less likely to leave it and far more likely to champion and defend it in the face of criticism," and goes on to both provide data to back up his statement and explain the role that the arts play in "placemaking" and in building that emotional connection. In other words, a thriving arts culture makes

people love their town more. I think that's a good thing.

This holiday season, I hope you all will take a moment to appreciate the beauty of the season, whether that be local arts offerings or the natural and historic beauty of our great town. And with that appreciation, I hope you will consider volunteering to help fellow community members. I know the Community Action Center is always looking for help this time of year at the Food Shelf and for its Operation Joy program.

Wishing you and yours a joy-filled holiday season!

Rhonda Pownell is the mayor of Northfield, elected in 2016.