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## Art groups look for ways to replace funding

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) CRYSTAL LAKE - A chorus of "hallelujahs" rose from the Raue Center stage, blending with voices below as audience members joined professionals in navigating the best-known movement in Handel's "Messiah." Afterward, still glowing from the experience, Mary Wornstaff and Chris Rakow raved about having the opportunity to sing the classical verses that they first learned in school.

"The music is beautiful," said Wornstaff, 58, who traveled from Aurora for the traditional holiday sing-along. "It's inspiring, it's uplifting, it's fun. I love it."

"It's timeless, and it's the best you can sing for the season," said Rakow, 64, of West Chicago.

**Arts** venues and organizations across the state will be offering similar events as the holidays draw near, taking advantage of the annual opportunity to celebrate the season through music.

And like the Raue sing-along, many area events receive some of their **funding** from the Illinois **Arts** Council. But if **funding for the arts** continues to be sliced in future budget appropriations, such experiences could be in jeopardy, **arts** advocates warn.

The council, which provides operating grants for local **arts** organizations, will be getting \$7 million less than anticipated after Gov. Rod Blagojevich vetoed \$480 million from the state budget.

As a result, the council since has cut grants to **arts** and culture **groups**, including a handful in McHenry County, by an average of 28 percent to 30 percent, council Executive Director Terry Scrogum said.

"Our greatest concern is the impact upon some of the small

organizations throughout the state and even some of the smaller **to** mid-sized organizations, especially in the rural areas," Scrogum said. "In many cases, the state funds are the main funds they receive **to** fund operations."

One such organization is Woodstock's TownSquare Players Inc., which gets its single biggest source of support from the Illinois **Arts** Council. The community theater **group** will receive \$2,000 less from the council this year than last year, when it received \$4,790.

The **group**, which will celebrate 40 years next year, already is projected **to** run a budget deficit of more than \$10,000 at year's end, TownSquare board president Paul Lockwood said. Board members are working on creative **ways to** raise funds and cut expenses, which could include scaling back future productions, he said.

"Audiences unfortunately, **for** whatever reason, sometimes forget that there's quality theater being done at the Woodstock Opera House," Lockwood said.

"I'm hoping that through whatever publicity efforts we put out there, that people will start **to** realize that bringing live theater **to** Woodstock is not something that happens forever without support of the community," he added.

The Raue Center, which will get about half of the \$19,030 it received last year from the **arts** council, also is turning **to** donors, and, in some cases, artists themselves, **to** make up the difference.

Richard Kuranda, Raue executive director, said that while **funding** from the **arts** council had been fairly steady in recent years, overall support **for** the **arts** had declined as consumers and governments alike tightened their belts.

"It stands **to** reason that people are more concerned about life-supporting initiatives [when the economy is weak]," Kuranda said. "And there are charities out there that during difficult times tend **to** pull a little bit more attention, and rightfully so."

Still, **arts** advocates argue, local **arts groups** provide residents with a valuable cultural experience at an affordable price, close **to** home, while driving money back into the economy.

An Americans **for** the **Arts** study found that nonprofit **arts** organizations in Chicago generate \$1.1 billion annually in revenue, including \$45 million in state tax revenues.

"The **arts** are proven **to** stimulate economic growth, **to** support jobs, **to** attract tourists, and **to** deliver important tax revenues," said Ra Joy, executive director of the Illinois **Arts** Alliance.

**Arts** programs also give residents **a** chance **to** appreciate other worlds in **a** way that other entertainment, such as movies and TV, can't, said Lockwood, who performed in the TownSquare Players' recent production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "State Fair."

"The idea of seeing your friends and neighbors performing **for** you the work of **a** talented playwright, that has **to** mean something nowadays," he said.

As officials work **to** restore **funding** in the 2009 state budget, they urge residents **to** make their voices heard in Springfield **to** ensure the future stability of the **arts** in Illinois.

"[If these dollars aren't restored], it very well could mean less **art** in schools and neighborhoods throughout the state," Joy said. "And particularly **for** small **to** mid-sized organizations, it means they could be forced **to** close their doors."

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