



Importance of arts and culture spotlighted at Columbia County Creative Economy Forum

The importance of the creative economy in economic and community development was the focus of an event at Hudson Hall on December 8th. Hosted by Columbia Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) and titled “Columbia County’s Creative Economy: Arts, Culture, and Tourism Forum,” the event was attended by about 200 people who heard from a series of speakers that shared their experiences and expertise as leaders in the creative economy.

F. Michael Tucker, President and CEO of CEDC, said, “This event is not only about recognizing the creative economy of Columbia County as a strategic advantage and discussing how it positively impacts our quality of life today, but about recommitting to continuing to develop these assets and emphasize arts, culture, and tourism as a major part of economic and community development in future planning.”

The Keynote Speaker was Sarah Calderon, Managing Director of ArtPlace America, a New York City based collaboration between foundations, financial institutions, and government agencies that provides funding for art-based development projects across the country.

She highlighted the value of arts and culture in economic development and spoke about creative placemaking as a strategy for success. “We know that arts and culture production does add to the economy, but the arts, we believe, can do more than that. They can support equitable community development and ensure that any development has the community’s voice at the table,” she said.

She went on to discuss specific ways that the arts add to economic development and how engaging the arts community is essential for planning.

Calderon was followed by a panel that was moderated by Upstate Alliance for the Creative Economy Director Maureen Sager and included Basilica Hudson Co-Founder Melissa Auf de Maur, CEO of Proctor’s Theatre Phillip Morris, and President of Audience Research & Analysis George A. Wachtel.

Before beginning the panel, Sager spoke about a 2015 study on the Capital Region’s Creative Economy. “The Creative Industries are the sixth largest employer in this region and account for \$800 million in earnings. No one had ever looked at that before,” she said.

Morris discussed how Proctor’s plays a major role in economic development and planning in downtown Schenectady. “When we agree to do something together we can do better than when we try to do it individually,” he said.

Auf de Maur spoke about the evolution of Basilica Hudson since it was founded in 2010 and how Hudson attracted an artist like herself. “When I landed in Hudson ten years ago, it was the first time I fell in love with the United States,” said Auf de Maur, who grew up in Canada.

Wachtel reported on Audience Research & Analysis’s recent study on tourism in. “Tourism should be seen as an economic generator, not in a bad way, but in a way that assimilates what’s good in the community,” he said.

CEDC Board Chair Tony Jones noted that Columbia County has benefited from major investments in cultural institutions in recent years. “I am happy to say here today that CEDC is committed to maintaining and amplifying this momentum—and we are prepared to foster and support future projects that add to the quality, the diversity, and the depth of creative enterprise in Columbia County,” he said.

Hudson Hall was highlighted as the host of the event an example of the rise of the arts in Columbia County. The historic venue has recently completed \$8.5 million in restorations and has reclaimed its place as a pillar of the arts community in Hudson.

The rebirth of Hudson Hall, formerly known as Hudson Opera House, has occurred under the leadership of Executive Director Gary Schiro. Retiring at the end of this year, Schiro was recognized at the conclusion of the event for his nearly 20 years of service to the community.