



Culture For All.

Transcript for Episode 5: The Arts Mean Business

Matt Olin [00:00:00] I'm Matt Olin, I'm the co-founder of Charlotte is Creative and the host of Creative Mornings Charlotte. Not only do I want to stay here but I want to start investing in this city. I want to get my uniform dirty, because this is my family now. I believe that arts and culture and science and history fortifies our sense of home and family and belonging. And so the more we can invest in that, I think the more that our city is going to grow in a really organic healthy way where people who are moving here are choosing to stay here and really invest their financial and their social and their creative capital here rather than taking it somewhere else. Can you imagine if every Charlottean said, "I have some financial capital, I have some social capital, and I have plenty of creative capital inside of me." If we all started investing that, in our community, imagine what's possible here.

Glenn Burkins [00:00:56] Hi I'm Glen Burkins and I want to thank you for taking the time to listen to this series of podcasts designed to inform and educate Mecklenburg County voters on their proposed quarter-cent sales tax to stabilize and transform the arts and cultural community and ensure cultural equity. You will have a chance to vote on this initiative November 5th. And listening to this podcast is one of the best ways to prepare yourself for that vote. First, if you're unfamiliar with the proposed sales tax I recommend you stop listening to this podcast and tune into the first episode of the series. You'll get a complete overview of the tax and more context on what we'll be talking about today.

Glenn Burkins [00:01:37] In 2018 nearly three million people attended arts, science and history programs supported by the Arts and Science Council. More than one million of those attendees were not from Mecklenburg County according to the most recent Economic Impact Report published in 2017. The arts and cultural community in Mecklenburg County generated just under \$243 million in economic impact annually, supported more than 7,600 full-time jobs, and delivered \$21.6 million in local and state revenue.

Glenn Burkins [00:02:12] In this episode we're going to speak with different community leaders about the local economic benefits of Charlotte-Mecklenburg arts and cultural community. You'll hear from Steve Pearce of The Charlotte Regional Business Alliance about the core economic benefits of the arts and cultural sector. Timothy Hager, a public relations practitioner and a local actor, will highlight how access to the arts creates critical thinkers and problem solvers. You'll also hear from Jennifer Appleby, Marcie and Marty Kelso, and Linda Lockman-Brooks, four business owners whose operations thrive on the richness and diversity of the creative class. But first let's get back to Matt Olin and hear how his experiences with Children's Theatre of Charlotte helped shape him into the creative he is today.



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Matt Olin [00:03:06] For me personally, I grew up in Charlotte and my access to the arts organizations in town as sort of an emerging young creative myself changed the course of my life and empowered me to pursue so many different things as I as my career unfolded and as I sort of followed my creative notions. I don't know if I would have had the wherewithal to do that if I hadn't had access to arts and culture and science and history here in Charlotte growing up. Number one I would have to say the Children's Theatre of Charlotte. I was called to be in theater projects as a young boy. I don't know what that was about, I wanted attention, I wanted to step into a world of imagination, I wanted to co-create with other kids whatever it was. Those notions led me to the Children's Theatre of Charlotte, back when it was on Morehead Street, and I tell people that my creative self really cracked open inside those rooms at the Children's Theatre of Charlotte. I'm deeply thankful for the for that experience and for those years that I spent there.

Glenn Burkins [00:04:23] One of Matt's goals that he solves each month through the Creative Mornings speaker series is to illustrate that everyone, even you listening to this now, is creative.

Matt Olin [00:04:33] When we gather people together every month at Creative Mornings Charlotte, we remind everyone that everyone is creative. Everyone is creative, and I think we forget that we all have creative power and energy inside of us. Some people confuse creativity with artistic ability. You know there's almost like this confusion between I'm creative and I'm artistic. Those who are quote unquote 'artistic' are certainly creative beings, no doubt. But even if you can't draw a straight line like me, you're still a creative individual and if you can still harness that creative ability and energy and thinking inside of you then you can bring that to your job. You can bring that to your schoolwork, you can bring that to your family, and the way you grow and run your family, you can bring that to your community, and the way that you serve your community, you can bring that to your city in the way that you bring creative problem solving to some of the challenges that we're all facing here in Charlotte as we grow. And quite frankly you can bring it to your life in the way that you hack your life in creative ways. I believe that access to creativity growing up sets the foundation for you to actually access that innate creativity inside of you in all aspects of your life for your entire life.

[00:05:55] Steve Pearce of the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance echoed exactly what Matt Olin was speaking about. Many of today's modern employers that Steve works to attract are seeking a skill set rooted in creativity and critical thinking. In fact, it's something he talks about while recruiting businesses on a daily basis.

Steve Pearce [00:06:14] My name is Steven Pearce. I'm vice president of economic recruitment with the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance. The skill set that I came into the workforce with or what my employer was looking for was, how much experience do you have



and how much education do you have. The skillset that employers were looking for today is just that it's a skill set. It's less about how much experience or education you have, how can you demonstrate rather that you have a specific set of skills. So I mean Tim Cook from Apple recently came out and said that when they were looking at software developers and coders, a four-year degree was practically irrelevant his mind. This is a man who runs one of the, from a market cap perspective, one of the highest valued companies in the entire world, top three. This guy is saying he cares very little about a four-year degree. That's a complete 180 from what anybody in the business world is used to in this shift is happening really fast. So when I'm working with companies that are looking at Charlotte region it can be tough sometimes if all they ask us to help quantify that. We have the employees in our market. They need to be successful. Well you can go run off the statistics you want to off of four-year degrees and awards that people have earned from colleges and universities but a lot of times it doesn't answer the question. If you can go back though and you can demonstrate that what students are being taught in their curriculum is a creative approach to solving problems, that's where the rubber meets the road. That's what employers today are wanting to see. They're not wanting to see that you have a certain degree, they're wanting to see that you've got the creative problem solving, the creative thinking the ability to think outside of the box that they need in their workforce. Because I can tell you every day I walk in to my job, I've got a set of things I'm expecting to do and then there's the reality there's all the things that come up that I wasn't planning to address that I had to think critically and create creatively about how to solve these problems. And so I think what we need to do in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, we need to do as a state, as a nation, is we need to figure out how do we put students at a young as as early as possible in their development in situations where they have to be creative because that's the number one skill set that employers today are looking for. And some people are born within a naturally large dose of creativity. Others like myself you work at that over time and you start to learn. Because your creativity maybe looks different some from somebody else's. It's not wrong, it's just different in that everybody has a different flavor of creativity and that's good that's to be celebrated as part of creativity and uniqueness is all about.

Glenn Burkins [00:09:06] Steve's job isn't only attracting new businesses to our region. He also closely monitors the impact the current arts and cultural community has on the local economy. He says it's one that's often greatly overlooked.

Steve Pearce [00:09:20] If you look at the creative workforce in the Charlotte region, it's actually significant and I think it kind of flies under the radar sometimes. I think it can be easy to miss unless you're looking for it. In the economic development world there's a number we look at a lot to kind of judge the impact that a particular sector has in our market compared to other markets and that's called the location quotient. Location quotient is a measure of the relative size of a sector in a given geography compared to the national average. So the location quotient for Charlotte for the creative economy is 1.13. That means that it's 13% more



concentrated in the Charlotte region than what it is on the national average. That's good news for us. That demonstrates very quickly in one number that we have a highly concentrated creative workforce in the Charlotte region. And that's taken straight from Bureau of Labor Statistics numbers. So the federal government measures the types of employees in every location in the US and we're 13 percent more concentrated here than what you would expect to find in any other geography in the US. So that's one way to look at it that we have a heavy concentration of that day. The thing is you look if you look at the expenditures of arts and cultural organizations and if you look at the expenditures of their audiences that's a significant investment in our region. Without that investment we will we will lose a lot. So the number for our region is \$332 million dollars annually. If you look at Charlotte-Mecklenburg specifically, that accounts for nearly \$243 million dollars. And important nuance to those numbers is that more than half of the arts and cultural attendees are from outside Mecklenburg County. So again, I'm a numbers guy so the answer I think about your question in terms of what do the numbers say, but take away the \$332 million dollar economic impact take away the 1.13 location quotient for the create a workforce, that's a significant hit to our economy if we didn't have that. And so my response to you is that the cultural or the creative workforce is important because it's a significant driver for our economy. We have to continue to invest in and continue to cultivate what is a growing and thriving part of our regional economy.

Timothy hager [00:11:50] My name is Timothy Hager. I'm the EVP of public relations for Foundation For The Carolinas.

Glenn Burkins [00:11:55] A writer since college, Timothy has worked in communications at Children's Theatre of Charlotte. In addition to being a working actor, he says that a creative mind is essential to any problem solving.

Timothy Hager [00:12:07] Well it's funny you know when you think about building a team or skill sets it's amazing how many people will tell you they're not creative. You know I'm not creative, I don't write I don't do this, but then when you actually drill down to what they do you see that they are actually very creative in the way they approach problems. An arts background isn't essential to doing a job necessarily, but a creative mind is essential to any problem solving for arts, science and history organizations and working artists themselves.

Glenn Burkins [00:12:34] Timothy says that a designated revenue stream would allow everyone to focus less on where the money is coming from and more on creating their art.

Timothy Hager [00:12:44] If actors or artists or dancers had a supplemental income and able to do this full time? I know several people off the top of my head who would love to do this full time. As of right now I know zero people who act full time even people who work for Children's Theater or have other jobs they do. I know of no professional, and maybe they just



don't know me, who does this full time and this is all they do. So that would change a lot of lives. I know people who are willing to live the bare minimum but they know that if they want to do this for a living they have to move to Atlanta. They have to move to Los Angeles, they have to move to New York or Wilmington, but they can't do it in Charlotte.

Glenn Burkins [00:13:38] The inability to be more focused on their art due to a lack of funding is a familiar sentiment we found in two other Charlotteans who have worked extensively in the cultural community. Keith Cradle and Tom Hanchett. You'll hear Keith speak first, followed by Tom.

Keith Cradle [00:13:54] Yeah so you know you know that conversation is the same across many organizations and always a question on boards for and you're hearing this. You know it's always going to be financial. I mean people need money. And so while the institutions, they have an operating budget and that's going to be salaries, benefits, all the other things. When you're asking them to do programming to bring things to the city to do installations to fund things that aren't in their scope, if they don't have the money they can't do it. And so what you have is again I think is a stagnant institution. So let's say the Bechtler couldn't do community based programming. All you've got to have be able to do is walk in and see what exhibits on this month and leave out. And that's all they will be able to do. And that will be every institution. They can only do what they're going to be tasked to do without added money added added value. And so you know I guess I think the committee really has to look at that. Do you want your institutions to be more and more in the community to create a bigger footprint or do you want them to scale that back because we don't want to fund it? And so again that conversation is across the board everywhere. You know everyone needs a little bit more. And I think this community has to push to make sure they get that little bit more.

Tom Hanchett [00:15:08] That's the thing that's in common is how much of the organization's energy is dedicated to making the next payroll to raising the basic money that keeps the lights on that keeps the website current. And I just can't help but imagine how much more creative we can be if our culture makers in Charlotte know that there is a guaranteed stream of income. It will never be enough. We'll still be raising money. That's a good thing because raising money connect you with a community. But having that base amount that pays for the work-a-day folks, not just the janitor. I was staff historian at Levine Museum of the New South. We found it fairly easy to raise money for a new exhibit, but fairly hard to raise money for the ongoing salary of the staff historian. And so I'm retired so I can say this but if we need cultural workers and our community having a guaranteed source of minimal income for those organizations is going to make this a more robust community for all of us.



Glenn Burkins [00:16:31] Charlotte is home to several strong marketing firms of different sizes. One thing their leaders all emphasize is how important having a strong creative and cultural community is to business.

Jennifer Appleby [00:16:41] In order for us to be more competitive and differentiate ourselves from other cities we need a strong creative community and a strong cultural community.

Glenn Burkins [00:16:53] Wray Ward president and chief creative officer Jennifer Appleby.

Jennifer Appleby [00:16:57] From a cultural standpoint it's going to attract businesses. When businesses want to move here, one of the things they want to know about is 'is the city committed to culture?' They want a rich cultural life for their employees. They want the opportunity for their kids to have a great education be able to experience plays and music and theater from a very young age. From a business and talent attraction and retention point of view we know that creative talent is attracted to other creative talent and we have to be more intentional as a city to make sure we are attracting, nurturing and supporting this emerging creative community that we have here. But we've really got to do a better job in making sure that we connect them that we promote them and that we make sure that everybody understands the importance of the creative community here in Charlotte.

Marty Kelso [00:17:52] The brain of a creative type is important to telling the story.

Glenn Burkins [00:17:55] Marty Kelso, partner and creative director for Kelso Communications.

Marty Kelso [00:17:59] For businesses, and conveying their brand their message all the things they do, want to convey in a very human level because we're all consumers. We all want to be told a story and not talked to by the brands and the companies that we do business with or trust. And I think having that creative class allows for the left brain to come into the picture and put things beyond the spreadsheet or put things beyond a corporate manifesto.

Marcie Kelso [00:18:25] We are an ambitious city. We're a city that has strives to be the best. And if we want to be the best we have to have the best cultural sector and we have to make those resources available.

Glenn Burkins [00:18:38] Marcie Kelso, partner and director of accounts and strategy for Kelso Communications.



Marcie Kelso [00:18:44] Because I can tell you right now that we, on many, many levels, and I can cite many many different ways, that we don't have the resources for the organizations to really become competitive in the state the nation and the world and we all want that because we want the best in opportunities for our people to learn to contemplate to appreciate. That's why I think having the opportunity to have a part of our sales tax go to supporting this sector is critical to showing our commitment to being the city that we say we want to be first as a corporate executive.

Linda Lockman Brooks [00:19:26] When I hired people and tried to retain smart energetic people having a vibrant cultural sector was important.

Glenn Burkins [00:19:34] Linda Lockman-Brooks, president of Lockman-Brooks Marketing.

Linda Lockman Brooks [00:19:37] Now as a business owner and as someone who wants to continue to thrive, I think that it's important as you think about creatives and there's been a lot of talk about the creative class. There's a lot of articles about that, but creating that class of smart thinking individuals who are making art, having art available to all kinds of populations. That to me creates vibrancy and that's everything from spoken word to visual arts to theater music. It runs the entire gamut.

Glenn Burkins [00:20:15] Linda also speaks about some of the benefits the designated revenue stream would have on nonprofit arts institutions that Dr. Cradle and Tom Hanchett spoke about earlier.

Linda Lockman Brooks [00:20:24] The nonprofits that focus on the cultural sector really do struggle right now. Their funding is year to year and it's very difficult to plan. It's very difficult to sustain programming if they lose a major sponsor. They have to shift so a dedicated revenue stream that they could count on that they could build over time planned on. It's not even about freeing up and it would, not that it wouldn't take stress off. But again it gives that idea as a business person. It gives you the opportunity to look at your P&L and look at what you're working with over time. So I think that that would be a big factor for nonprofits. Yes, they're doing the work because they have passion for it. It's that idea that creative class and yet they have to operate efficiently. So I think that the efficiencies would improve too with a dedicated revenue stream.

Jennifer Appleby [00:21:15] I'm in the creative business and we are responsible for building and promoting brands. So within my walls are designers, digital designers, writers, producers, directors, animators, illustrators, musicians all under one roof. So highly, highly creative. That's what they do in their day jobs. A lot of folks in their free time are painters, they're musicians. And so they have the creativity that they get paid for every day. But then they have a yearning



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to do other things also. So yeah they're just amazing. And one of our new inspire series tells the world and our customers what our folks do outside of the walls of Wray Ward. But my business depends on creative individuals. We have got to attract and retain great creative talent and they're not moving to Charlotte to work for Wray Ward unless they know that Charlotte is a town that supports creative individuals and also gives them the vibrant cultural life that they not only need but want and demand. So really important.

Marcie Kelso [00:22:36] I think part of it is going to be showing more. You're making more challenging ideas available for people to talk about and then understanding how to get them to talk about it. So it's it's a multifold challenge. Challenge one is having it, you know understanding how to make that happen. Challenge two is getting the audiences to partake, and then challenge three is beyond getting an audience to partake helping to understand how to talk about it ,how to do that work which enriches your life. It's not enough to go to the play. You've got to go to dinner after the play and talk through what how you were impacted. And I think all three things are what needs to be kind of added to the mix especially in places outside of the center city and Matthews.

Glenn Burkins [00:23:35] Lockman Brooks says investing in the cultural sector is about finding a connection.

Linda Lockman Brooks [00:23:39] I would just really rely on the idea of having a one-on-one conversation and finding common ground with people, asking them about what they like to do in Charlotte. What are the kinds of things that they enjoy, and wouldn't they want those things available to everyone and trying to tap into what is important to each individual. We live in a world now where in some respects it's kind of all about me. And that's OK but I think that those of us who are advocating for this really need to say, well find out, what does that mean to each person that they're talking to and really figure out where the connection is. So finding a connection where they might understand how it does connect to what they're interested in would be a way to have the conversation about it.

Glenn Burkins [00:24:24] Finally, Appleby says the arts mean business.

Jennifer Appleby [00:24:27] You know if you're a naysayer I would say, do your research. First understand the benefit that arts play not only from having a great quality of life but the arts also mean business from a job standpoint from an income standpoint we do know that the arts boosted our local economy by a staggering \$359 million dollars in one year. It also supports over 11,000 full-time equivalent jobs. So the arts don't play, I mean this is serious. The arts are a serious business and that's just in the cultural community. That doesn't even take into account the fuller creative community. So I think that when you get down to it it will pay dividends for a small commitment.



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Matt Olin [00:25:22] I think we can look at net migration rates. We can look at how many folks are coming into Charlotte but then how many folks are leaving Charlotte and connect the dots between the role of arts cultural history and science and actually retaining those citizens. Companies of all sizes and all sectors are have are deep in conversations around talent attraction and talent retention. I think there's something analogous here in that we're actually sort of talking about citizen attraction and citizen retention and the role that arts and culture plays in that conversation over time. If we can say gosh in 2016, 26,000 millennials move to Charlotte, cool we can celebrate that. But in that same year 21,000 millennials left Charlotte. That's actually not a net migration rate that we should be super pumped about. And I think we can start to connect the dots between the level of vibrancy of our arts and culture in Charlotte and an increase in net migration in our city that has real world economic impacts and otherwise.

Glenn Burkins [00:26:38] Thank you again for listening to this podcast. If you've gotten this far then you're clearly invested in helping our community make this important decision no matter how you feel about the tax. I encourage you to talk to your friends neighbors and county commissioner. Finally, I ask that you take this knowledge with you as you vote on November 5th. As a voter in Mecklenburg County, this decision is in your hands.

Glenn Burkins [00:27:03] Please remember to listen to other episodes in this series on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you get your podcasts. Subscribe for free and you'll get the second season of this podcast featuring more in-depth information about the tax to be released closer to voting time. Don't forget to submit a rating and a review, or just share this podcast with someone else you know who cares about the future of our community.

Glenn Burkins [00:27:28] Want your voice to be heard on this subject? Here's how you can share your thoughts about the proposed sales tax. Text or call 704.286.6288 to share your thoughts. That's 704.286.6288. If you call, you'll go straight to voicemail and can leave a message, thirty seconds max. Or you can send an email to asc@artsandscience.org. Your response may be used in a future episode of this podcast.

Glenn Burkins [00:28:01] This podcast was produced by the Arts and Science Council and GohJo Studios. Writing, field recording, editing, and mixing done by Andy Goh. Additional research and support provided by Krista Terrell, Bernie Petit, Lillian Parker and Giovanna Torres. Original music by Harvey Cummings. Thanks again for listening. I'm Glenn Burkins.