

PERSON OF THE YEAR TALKING POINTS

I thank the newspaper for the honor.

I'm sure my nomination pertains to First Friday and my role as an advocate for the arts. My being considered for this honor is an indication of how important the arts are in Lycoming County.

One of this year's important art events was the 10th Birthday of First Friday, of which I was the Program Developer.

When I realized that the other people nominated were people who lead our social services and people who led our humanitarian flood effort, my first inclination was to decline.

In Lycoming County, we are a great community because caring for each other is one of our most important values. The people, who care for others when they are in need, are more important than me.

However, because of my leadership role in First Friday I have become an advocate for the arts. As an advocate, I have an obligation to use this nomination as an opportunity to talk about the role and the importance of the arts in our community.

I was the chair of the First Friday Committee, but what that meant was that I was the leader of an amazing team effort.

The visual artists, the merchants, the Uptown Collective, the volunteers, the newspaper, Main Street, Our Towns:2010, the arts council, the Chamber, the Community Arts Center, the city, the county, we all worked together to create First Friday.

Historically the depths of our arts had been fostered by our two colleges, WASD music and art programs, the arts council, the symphony and art lovers such as Penny Austin and Fred Danielle.

The First Friday Committee supported by merchants like Bonnie and Bernie Katz, Otto's Bookstore, The Coffee and Tea Room, the Rizzo Family and manned by the artists: Ricky Molar, Jeanne Ryersbach Mary Farr, Jason Burgess and Lynne Maietta created a platform to showcase our arts.

First Friday nurtured and supported our arts, enabling them to reach the performance level that the community saw at the Governor's Awards in 2008.

At the Governor's Awards, I think that everyone saw what an "artistic soul" we had as a community.

We started First Friday with the goal that we could become the tourism brand of one of "the 100 Best Little Art Towns in America." Our arts' performance at the 2008 Governor's Awards showed we were a contender for the title.

Our arts are no longer just our joy; our arts and our culture have grown to become one of our greatest economic development assets.

To be an "Art town" is one of the best tourism brands in America. Under that brand we could bring all out tourist assets (music, visual arts, theater, architecture, and the culinary arts) together to create real economic clout for our area.

I am sure we would be known as Williamsport, "where the PA arts have gone wild"

As an added bonus, according to Richard Florida, once a professor of regional economic development at Carnegie-Mellon, being an "Art Town" is one of the three major elements a city needs to attract young entrepreneurs. Art Towns attract the people who are creating the new information economy.

This process has already started at the PJ Factory. With studios for artists and other creative small businesses, the Factory is becoming an "incubator" for the small businesses of the new economy.

The arts in Williamsport are bringing us joy, new tourist dollars and the ability to attract the creative small business owners of the future.

Investing in the arts is one of the smartest things we can do. The depth of our arts is increasing our joy while expanding our economic value.

The current era of what we hope, will be responsible gas development, will create local wealth and resources. We need to use this period of abundance to foster the development of our economic assets, such as the arts, for our future.

As an advocate for the arts in a harsh economy, I feel like a farmer in the middle of a bad winter. I have seeds and I must feed my family. However, I must also save seeds to plant in the spring. Without the spring planting, there will be no tomorrow.

In Lycoming County, we work hard to care for our families and our people. We are a good community because caring for each other is one of our most important values.

Yet, we must also think of the future, so we can continue to care for each other. As an advocate for the arts, I would contend our arts are one of the greatest seeds of our community's future.

So, am I person of the year? Maybe not in this year, when caring for each other's survival was so immediate. But I thank you for honoring me with the nomination, for it shows how important the arts have become to our way of life. And I entreat you to realize that supporting our arts is one of the major paths to a better future.