

Promoting the Arts

State council visits Elko to discuss 'values and vision'

ELKO — Is Elko an arts town?

One visitor described it as the "Paris of the Sagebrush," according to architect Catherine Wines, who is also chairman of the City of Elko Arts and Culture Advisory Board.

Wines was among about two dozen residents to attend a Nevada Arts Council forum Tuesday at the Western Folklife Center to discuss advancement of the arts in Elko. Representatives of visual, musical and performing arts shared their ideas about local challenges and opportunities.

There was a diversity of opinions to go along with their diverse backgrounds. Most agreed that Elko has a wide variety of art-related events but they suffer from declining participation, so the focus was on how to get more people involved.

Cowboy poet Waddie Mitchell pointed out that Elko has a rich heritage of Basque, native, cowboy, sheepherder and gold mining traditions. Some of the participants wanted to see Elko capitalize more on the Western theme, while others wanted to take a broader approach.

Aside from the convention center, Elko lacks a central space for art gatherings. Susan Boskoff, executive director of the NAC, said some communities have established a "makers space" for artists to share knowledge and give others the opportunity to experience the creative process.

Promoting the arts is not only beneficial to communities but also helps draw tourists. That's why the council is a division of the state Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs. The current round of meetings is a follow-up to the council's earlier "Values & Vision" program that visited here in 2008.

According to the group's annual report, more than \$36,000 in state grant money was awarded in Elko County last year. The largest recipient was the Western Folklife Center, host of the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. The event has been held in Elko for the past three decades, and it started a trend that has resulted in similar gatherings across the country and beyond.

Other grant recipients included Great Basin College, Northern Nevada Concert Orchestra Association, Elko Boys



Jeff Mullins/Elko Daily Free Press

From left: Great Basin College President Mark Curtis, architect Catherine Wines, and Tracy Beatty and Claudia Wines of Northeastern Nevada Museum discuss the status of arts programs in Elko during a Nevada Arts Council forum Tuesday at the Western Folklife Center.

The Elko Arts and Culture Advisory Board meets on the first Wednesday of each month at Elko City Hall

& Girls Club, and Western Shoshone basket weavers.

After discussing Elko's assets and challenges, the forum was split into small groups in order to develop priorities for the future. Among their ideas:

- Have an "arts ambassador" who connects with city and county leaders to promote funding
- Offer training to artists and groups on how to promote their own events
- Establish a central outdoor space for art-related events such as concerts
- Combine unrelated attractions, such as a farmers market, with art events to draw a wider audience
- Educate residents about the arts through public lectures, including guest lecturers at schools
- Offer social media training to help

connect with younger audiences

- Develop a public space along the river walk, with a fountain and hanging garden
- Find grant writers to apply for funding and establish a pool of funds
- Establish art education as a core curriculum in public schools
- Develop more events for teens and young adults
- Have contests such as decorative painting of fire hydrants
- Distribute flyers about art programs on mining buses
- Find entry points to get new people involved in the arts

After the event, Wines said she was pleased to see "a diverse group of people who are interested in nurturing and growing the arts in Elko. The arts, in all forms, are a vital part of any community that strives to facilitate a high quality of life for its citizens."

Wines said it was helpful to learn about what is going on in other communities in Nevada, through the Arts Council.

"It's even more important for the NAC to know what is going on in Elko and assist art endeavors any way they can," she said. "But, ultimately progress in the arts in our community is going to happen right here in Elko, not in Carson City."