

OPINION

GUEST EDITORIAL

Public art could make Elko beautiful, vibrant

By CATHERINE WINES

I am writing in response to the editorial in Thursday's paper about public art.

I appreciate and understand the concern about spending public funds on art endeavors in hard economic times. Much like the Elko Convention Center, Ruby View Golf Course and the City Park System, all funded through public means, art is not essential to survival but I believe it is vital to our existence.

President John Quincy Adams once made a formal statement on government sponsorship of art, viewing it as an index of our progress as a country and a way to mark our place in the history of civilization.

As Elko considers our cultural future, I encourage you to look for inspiration from the past. I believe this type of initiative is exactly what the founders of our country had in mind when they set up a system of government where people decide for themselves. Much like we were once faced with the question of the viability of a convention center, a golf course or a park we are now charged with the decision — does public art have a place in Elko?

It is difficult to find direct economic justification for public art. However, indirect benefits have been part of the American landscape for generations. In Richard Florida's book "Rise of the Creative Class" he documented what makes cities viable. Across this country, thriving cities all have public art in common. A perfect example is Salt Lake City. Their government dedicated a great deal of resources to public art for the 2002 Olympics. Salt Lake will reap those rewards for years. Ely,

our southern neighbor, also has a very positive indirect payback from their public mural program. Florida's book also points out the positive recruiting tool a colorful city gives businesses trying to bring in quality employees and their families.

Several years ago USA Today published a study about the top 10 things that make people happy. Number nine on the list was a person's urban environment. Public art obviously plays a key role in a prosperous, happy city.

It was mentioned in the editorial a better way to fund public art is to deal with each case specifically and used the water tank as an example. The reality of that project is a mural on the tank will only be funded if there are dollars left over after the utility portion of the painting is done. This is in fact a good example why money should be set aside, so projects don't get pushed to the side.

This is *not* a tax increase. It will take \$1 of every \$100 spent on public works and redirect it to public art, enhancing Elko's culture.

I love Elko and am proud to call it my home. I also feel very fortunate to own and operate a business here. The outcome of Tuesday's vote will not change those feelings in any way. As I said before I understand the reservations to such an initiative but I also believe in the promise of a vibrant, beautiful city that will be a source of pride for years to come.

I close with a quote from Jasper Johns, "Art is much less important than life, but what a poor life without it."

Catherine Wines is chairman of the City of Elko Arts and Cultural Advisory Board.