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Branding Tool

## Public art aims to prime economic pump in North Fulton

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Public art is the focus of a number of communities in North Fulton County seeking to reap aesthetic and economic development benefits.

“Art, including public art, drives economic and social prosperity,” said Rochelle Mucha, chair and founder of Roswell Arts Fund, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that collaborates with the city of Roswell and raises funds to increase the city’s public art inventory and initiatives.

This organization’s initiatives include ArtAround Roswell where, in partnership with the city, it hosts 10 established works of art on loan to the city by their artists for display in selected parks from April through December.

Public art programming benefits communities in a number of ways, according to Mucha.

“Public art enables places and cities, to ‘brand’ themselves, letting residents and visitors know how they want to be experienced and how they want to be known,” Mucha said.

She cites a June 2017 “Arts & Economic Prosperity” study from Americans for the Arts, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing the arts and arts education in America, which reports that, on a national basis, the arts collectively stimulated \$166.3 billion annually in economic activity in 2015, generating some \$27.5 billion in government revenue and supporting 4.6 million jobs.

“The arts play an important part in economic development, as companies now base much of their location decisions on access to talent,” said Bethany Usry, vice president, Economic and Talent Development for the Greater North Fulton Chamber of Commerce.

And when it comes to talent, “The skilled workforce of today seems more inclined to live closer to where they work — and access to cultural activities is an important part of that equation,” Usry said.

Prior to 2016, Alpharetta worked with the development community to ensure that public art installations were included as elements of larger development projects, Assistant City Manager James Drinkard said.

The city began a concerted public art initiative with its FY 2016 budget (July 1 – June 30), according to Drinkard, with some \$150,000 budgeted for the Downtown Sculpture Project. Based on the theme



SPECIAL/HALES PHOTO

“Sweet Pops of Brilliance” by Craig Syder is located in East Roswell Park by the lake.

"Instruments of Inspiration," the project is comprised of original pieces of outdoor art representing musical instruments, meant to encourage the emerging downtown Alpharetta music scene.

Subsequently, including in its just-adopted 2018 budget, Alpharetta has included at least \$50,000 in its capital budget for public art installations, according to Drinkard. "Our intent is to leverage the city's investment to encourage private donations to expand the public art initiatives."

With Alpharetta's public arts program still in its infancy, "It will be interesting to see what the public views as being most important, or popular, about the program as it develops," Drinkard notes.

"Public art has clear and direct correlations to the enjoyment residents and visitors find in the community," he said. "We also believe that public art enhances the creative environment of a community, which is something that is important for a place like Alpharetta, that has a dynamic tech environment."

The city of Milton's Cultural Arts Committee began meeting a few months ago with the purpose of enhancing the quality of life for its residents and business community, and to encourage local exploration, generate civic pride, showcase local artists, and increase tourism, said Sarah LaDart, economic development manager.

"Our board is in the early stages of defining what cultural art means to them."