

2022 Create the Vote Candidate Survey

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on Arts and Culture in advance of the 2022 election. We'll post your responses on our website so that voters can make informed decisions about who will best represent the Arts and Culture community at the legislature.

We ask that you complete the survey by Friday, September 23rd. **We know your time is limited so we understand that your responses will be brief.**

Don't miss out on this important opportunity to be an Arts champion!

Email *

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Please share your name

Norman Needleman

What office and district are you a candidate for?

State Senate - 33rd

Every town in Connecticut can boast cultural assets that contribute to a vibrant community and improve the quality of life for its residents.

What are some exciting arts and cultural events and organizations that you have experienced in your community?

I blessed to live in an area of the state that is rich with incredible cultural and arts organizations and am thankful for the vibrancy and connection these organizations foster within my community. Arts and culture are a main focus in my life, and I currently sit on the board and am the Treasurer of the Ivoryton Playhouse. I'm lucky to have had numerous incredible experiences at The Kate, The Goodspeed Opera House, i-park, the Ivoryton Playhouse, Clinton Art Society, Florence Griswold Museum, the Connecticut River Museum, the Essex Steam Train and Riverboat, numerous local historical societies throughout the district, Epoch Arts, the Community Music School, Shoreline Arts Alliance/Connecticut River Valley Symphonic Band and so many others.

If elected, will you work to strengthen the arts and culture community in the town(s) you serve? If so, how? If not, why?

I have been working closely and supporting our local arts organizations for decades and am proud to have continued this support in my role as a State Senator for the past four years. My roles have included financial support, advocacy to ensure that state funding is reaching local arts organizations and making sure that my office served as a resource for arts organizations as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. I will continue this work and continue to advocate with the Department of Community and Economic Development to ensure that arts and culture remain a core pillar in their vision for our state's development.

Sandwiched between Boston and New York, Connecticut is often dismissed as a “pass through” state when it comes to tourism. Yet, our state has many world class arts institutions and a rich cultural landscape.

Why do you think arts and culture are important in Connecticut? What is unique about our state’s arts and culture?

Arts and culture create vibrant, joyful communities where we can come together to celebrate and have challenging conversations about society, ourselves, and our communities. Arts and culture are important to our local economies through tourism, inspiring young people to move into our communities and giving seniors meaningful experiences close to home. Connecticut has such a rich arts landscape that defines our collective culture as a state. The proximity of so many arts institutions and organizations mean that many of our residents live in places where they can have world-class, enriching experiences in their backyards and are able to weave arts and culture throughout their lives.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many people discovered that arts and creativity play a critical role in helping us cope with emotional stress and sustain our mental health. Art helped us process loss, fight loneliness, stay connected and feel hopeful.

Can you share a way that the arts have helped you, your family or your community get through the difficult times of Covid? How will that experience influence choices about the arts you would make as a legislator?

The arts have always enriched my life and that of my family and the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted just how important these experiences are to our enjoyment, our sense of community and to our education. During the pandemic, I had the unique opportunity to work with the Executive Director of the Ivoryton Playhouse to brainstorm about how we could continue to provide art experiences within our community and how to recreate the experiences that our audiences had before the pandemic. I’ll use this experience to continue to advocate at the legislature about the importance of arts and culture throughout a variety of sectors.

The arts and creativity have a proven track record of economic benefit to our state. The National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Research & Analysis and the Bureau of Economic Analysis report that, in 2020, arts and cultural production in Connecticut added \$8.9 billion to our economy and accounted for 3.2 percent of our gross state product, while the arts and cultural industries employed 49,159 workers with wages and benefits totaling more than \$5.1 billion. (https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/)

Despite these contributions, the arts have historically been first on the chopping block when it comes to budget priorities. What would you do to help keep arts and creativity funded in our state at a level that recognizes their economic importance?

I have and will continue to advocate to support the arts and humanities in Connecticut. I was one of the lead voices helping to secure over \$30 million in ARPA funds to create the CT Cultural Fund administered by CT Humanities to assist arts and humanities organizations with their recovery from the pandemic and to be able to increase the number of people within our communities they serve. I will continue to advocate for state funding to keep these vital organizations vibrant and will ensure that the Arts, Culture and Tourism Caucus remains a strong voice within the legislature.

Connecticut has not had an Arts Education Specialist at the State Department of Education (SDE) since 2016, when the last specialist left. This position is critical to assuring that our State and National Arts Education Standards are consistently implemented in all of Connecticut's school districts, especially those in under-resourced communities where students' access to the Arts is often extremely limited compared to affluent communities.

If elected, would you support refilling the Arts Education Specialist at SDE? If not, why?

Yes

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