

Expert says area has great arts and culture establishments

Continued from A1

million jobs and annually create \$30 billion in government revenue across the country.

In nearby Monroe County, organizations and their customers annually spend \$198 million.

The arts are responsible for more than 6,300 jobs in Monroe County, Cohen said.

Though the study does not cover Auburn, Cohen did say Auburn has 51 arts-related businesses that employ 277 people, and 107 businesses across the county employ 389 people.

Cohen encouraged both government and the people in the organizations themselves to look at art and culture as a viable industry.

"Don't think that an investment in the arts comes at the expense of economic development," he said.

His visit to Auburn comes at a critical time for the local arts scene. Organizers are working on an annual musical theater festival in 2012 they say will attract tens of thousands of tourists.

The city's comprehensive plan is expected to make arts development a priority in Auburn over the next decade.

And local businesses and organizations are discussing the possibility of a downtown arts district in the city.

Donna Lamb, of the Schweinfurth Arts Center and city's historic sites committee, said the local arts community is at a "tipping point."

As budgets tighten and

the economy struggles, it is important to show people that theater, music, art and history have a positive impact.

"We have to be much more savvy in the case that we make," Lamb said.

While in Auburn, Cohen had the opportunity to tour local establishments and said he is interested in including the city in a future study. Residents should be proud of what they have here, he said.

"I think there are great arts and culture establishments (here) ... and I visit 35 cities a year," Cohen said.

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