

Dept. of Administration: DOA and Tourism Secretaries highlight importance of creative economy in Southwest Wisconsin with local arts and culture tour

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Prairie du Sac, Sauk City, and Spring Green, Wis. – On Thursday, June 23, Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) Secretary-designee Kathy Blumenfeld and Department of Tourism Secretary-designee Anne Sayers met with eight organizations in Southwest Wisconsin to discuss the role of creative organizations and businesses in Wisconsin’s economy and their impact on the pandemic recovery. Governor Tony Evers has made a historic investment for the tourism and entertainment industries totaling over \$200 million, the latest of which invested over \$20 million to support [Tourism Capital Investment](#) statewide.

Joined by Creative Wisconsin director Anne Katz and Jerry Exterovich with Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation Office of Rural Prosperity, the Secretaries kicked off the day at Maa Wakacak Studio. The group met with Little Eagle Arts Foundation director and artist Melanie Tallmadge Sainz, who runs the Ho-Chunk arts and cultural organization in Prairie du Sac. The visit also included a tour of the Earth, Water, Sky art project on the Great Sauk Trail, and a discussion on the importance of economic development for Ho-Chunk Nation artists.

“Seeing our unique cultural institutions be brought back to life through targeted support from the State is a wonderful and affirming experience,” said DOA Secretary-designee Kathy Blumenfeld. “Southwest Wisconsin wouldn’t be the same without these organizations, and the Evers Administration is proud to support and

protect our incredible arts and culture institutions so they can be enjoyed by both locals and visitors for years to come.”

At the Witwen Park, the Secretaries met with Wormfarm Institute directors Donna Neuwirth and Jay Salinas. A historic gathering place for over 100 years and an agri/cultural creative economy center for Sauk County, the Witwen Park plays a central role in Wormfarm signature event, the Farm/Art DTour, which this year takes place October 1 -10. The visit closed out with a roundtable to discuss the impact of the creative economy and pandemic recovery with local area arts organizations, including the River Arts, Inc., based in Prairie du Sac, the Baraboo-based Al. Ringling Theatre and Circus World, and Reedsburg-based Wormfarm Institute.

“Each of these discussions clearly illustrated the powerful role Wisconsin’s arts and cultural institutions play in the lives of both residents and visitors,” said Tourism Secretary-designee Anne Sayers. “These organizations help enrich our tourism offering by providing entertainment, inspiring creativity and encouraging understanding while driving economic impact. I applaud the resilience, innovation and leadership displayed by the Wisconsin arts and culture community as they put the state’s investment to work to continue to power the creative economy.”

The day wrapped up with a visit to American Players Theatre in Spring Green, which provides a world-class, Shakespeare-focused theater experience for more than 100,000 visitors each year. The Secretaries participated in a meet and greet with American Players Theatre directors, as well as stakeholders from Taliesin Preservation Inc., and the Wyoming Valley School Arts Center, based in Spring Green. American Players Theatre was a recent recipient of a \$971,360.00 award through the Tourism Capital Grant Investment program, to make necessary improvements to the APT parking lot, including expanding capacity, improved LED lighting, and storm-water management. The roundtable discussion centered around the importance of preserving and amplifying the unique cultural offerings in Spring Green, as well as common workforce issues of housing and staffing.

Participating organizations had received support through either the 2020 Cultural Organization Program grant, the Live Entertainment Venue Grant, Event Venue ARPA Grant, or other pandemic relief which helped to preserve Wisconsin-based cultural institutions. Each organization provided an update on how they are faring economically, as well as the impact of federal stimulus dollars, and the need for continued economic recovery and growth in Sauk County.

The tour was organized by Create Wisconsin, a statewide network working to promote public-private partnerships, policies and programs that activate and strengthen state and local economies and communities through creative economic development and community cultural development.

“We were thrilled that the Secretary-designees of Administration and Tourism, and a senior staff member of WEDC’s Office of Rural Prosperity, were able to join Create Wisconsin and partners to learn about the unique organizations and communities that are creating an authentic sense of sense of place and are major drivers of the economy in Sauk County,” said Anne Katz, director of Create Wisconsin. “The state’s investment in the region’s creative economy really made a positive difference over the past two years. As we all build a vibrant, equitable post-pandemic world, that kind of investment is still critical for the region and its people to rebuild and thrive.”

Wisconsinites can visit BadgerBounceback.wi.gov to view pandemic-related assistance information for families, farmers, businesses, organizations, and communities, as well as the latest data and success stories about how COVID-relief investments are making a difference across the state. For updates on other recovery-related grant opportunities, sign up for the [Badger Bounceback update list](#).