

City is portrait painted in arts

Officials say looking good has taken larger part in feeling good

By Judith Shulevitz
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When jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie strolled down Church Street this past weekend in mid-jazz festival, he was, recounts Mayor's Arts Council Director Susan Green, astounded.

"This is America?" Gillespie is said to have remarked. What he was referring to was obvious to anyone in town at the time: the sheer number of folks — an estimated 25,000 — who turned out for the festival's free and ticketed events.

Burlington, arts programmers, artists, and city officials agree, has become something of a local mecca for the arts. And as the U.S. Conference of Mayors decided Monday, that is in large part due to the efforts of Mayor Bernard Sanders' Progressive administration.

"One of the things that we pride ourselves, and work hard on, is to make sure that the arts are available to people from all walks of life," said Sanders. "I don't want to attack other programmers, who do good programming, but we don't want to have events where tickets are \$25, \$30 at a time."

Terrance Demas, resigning director of the George Bishop Lane Series, the University of Vermont's performing arts series, agrees that since the Mayor's Arts Council was formed four years ago, the arts community has witnessed an "explosion of performing and visual arts."

"The council can take credit for enfranchising people who would otherwise not have gotten involved. It has done the kind of events that got people who wouldn't go to the Mozart Festival or the Lane Series to participate on a remarka-

ble level," Demas said.

That, of course, is the Mayor's Arts Council's statement of mission, and the approach of other city organizations involved in promoting the arts: "To make the arts accessible to all regardless of economic and social restraints."

Green, in the application for the U.S. Conference of Mayors' award, stressed that under Sanders' guidance, several city departments had "incorporated the arts into their agendas."

For example, Michael Monte, assistant director of the Community and Economic Development Office, said that when CEDO — cited by the mayors' conference Monday for its achievements in urban design — was founded in 1983, it broadened the city's former policy of focusing strictly on matters of finance and engineering. Now, anyone planning a project also considers aesthetics.

"Now we look for people who are a little more visionary," Monte said. "We look for the architect who is somewhere between the structural engineer and the artist. That was the strength of some of our proposals."

Other accomplishments lauded Monday include the city's support for the re-introduction of arts education into elementary schools — before this year, Burlington schoolchildren had had no arts programs for 15 years — arts summer camp programs, and art for the elderly. "My sense is that we're doing more than ever before to help people in the community develop leisure skills," said Maggie Leugers of the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Promoting the arts has, as well, its financial rewards. While there is no study



ROB SWANSON, Free Press

MAYOR BERNARD SANDERS speaks at a City Hall news conference Monday. Later in the day, he said the city is 'proud and delighted' to receive recognition.

summing up the arts' economic impact on Burlington, the last survey done by the New England Foundation for the Arts estimated that for every dollar spent on the arts, \$5 more is spent on purchases of such items as gas, meals, and clothes.

Pam Hurst, director of tourism for the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, said literature put out by her office "talks about the cultural activities in Burlington as being one of its primary attractions."

While observers of the Sanders' administration cheer on its artistic successes, many voice concern that when the mayor leaves office, as he is planning to do next year, public support for the arts may vanish.

Monday Sanders addressed that issue, saying he had appointed a task force of about a dozen people involved in the arts "to effectively structure an arts council as a formal part of city government."

"I want to make certain that after I am out of office the arts office remains an important part of city life," Sanders said. "I don't want it to be dependent on my administration."

Free Press Staff Writer Paula Routly contributed to this report.