

THE SACRAMENTO BEE sacbee.com

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / Our Region

Marsalis orchestrates cheers for Sacramento arts drive

MAYOR INVITES DISCUSSION OF FUNDING OPTIONS

eortiz@sacbee.com

Published Thursday, Sep. 24, 2009

Internationally known trumpeter Wynton Marsalis lent his high-wattage celebrity Wednesday to Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson's "For Art's Sake" initiative at a meeting at the Sacramento Ballet's studio.

The soft-spoken Marsalis delivered a bracing message about how elemental the arts are in establishing a national cultural identity.

But he said, "In our culture we don't really value the arts at all."

His message was delivered to a packed room of more than 130 area arts stakeholders and fell mostly on the ears of the converted.

The famous trumpeter came to Sacramento at the urging of Johnson.

"Our biggest problem is our lack of cultural identity," Marsalis said. "We as a country do not know how we can teach our culture or what that means."

"We in this room are in the business of turning that around," said Marsalis.

Johnson also invited Randy Weeks, executive director of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. Weeks helped create an arts district and tax fund for arts and humanities organizations in Denver in the late 1980s.

Denver citizens voted by a 3-to-1 majority to increase taxes to support the arts.

The result was the creation of the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District and a fund drawn from a 0.1 percent retail sales and use tax.

That district distributes approximately \$40 million annually to more than 300 organizations, Weeks said.

"Today, the organizations have grown as the sales tax base has grown," Weeks said.

Selling the idea was no easy matter, said Weeks, given the fact that Denver was in the midst of a recession.

"The fund has greatly stabilized the arts community and has taken away the element of, every year, these organizations having to go after funding," said Weeks.

The approach in Denver is one of several under consideration by the funding subcommittee of Johnson's arts initiative.

Some options may ultimately test Sacramentans' willingness to support arts organizations. They include sales, property and use taxes and other funding streams. Models for private and corporate funding have not been discussed as thoroughly.

Johnson said the group is only at the exploratory stage.

"This initiative is really about educating us and making our case and building awareness and pointing to examples," he said.

"We want to show people that if this is truly what they want to happen here, then they will have to step up. If they don't, then that's fine as well."

ShareThis