

THE ARTS

While the arts have become more accessible to Nebraskans, some local arts councils are having problems getting people to attend events. Ron Bowlin, director of Kimball Hall at UNL, says Nebraskans recently have become more cautious when spending money on entertainment because of the economy.

In Ogallala, a farming-ranching community in western Nebraska, the agriculture crisis and general decline in the economy has affected the

amount of local donations to the Ogallala Regional Arts Council, said council president Laurie Wrage. When the council was formed about 10 years ago, she said, the community "was extremely enthusiastic.

"But now people who were giving \$100 are giving \$50," she said. Most of the donations come from businesses. And in a smaller town, businesses feel the crunch of a sagging rural economy, she said.

Most of the work at the community arts councils is done by volunteers, but costs remain high.

In Ogallala, Wrage said, more than 20 hours of volunteer work went into preparing for the Tulsa Ballet of Tulsa, Okla. The Dec. 9 performance will cost the council \$4,700, plus advertising.

Wrage said she is concerned that not enough will come out for the show. Attendance has been low, she said. For most of the shows, about 150 people have been attending.

"If we only get 50 people there, we have to wonder if this is worth it or not," Wrage said.

She and other volunteers have either full- or part-time jobs that don't let them go out to different groups and encourage them to attend the shows, Wrage said.

Some experts say exposure to the arts is important during tough economic times, so Nebraskans' money would be well spent.

"This may be hard to swallow," said Bowlin of Kimball Hall, "but when times are tough, the arts are most important because they bring people together, and togetherness is important in trying times.

"The challenge is to provide shows that counter the sense of futility and hopelessness," he said.

Once such example was the play "Quilters," which played at Kimball two years ago. The play expressed the joys and hardships of farming on the Plains.

"Art should be a way of helping people cope with the times," he said.

But not all of the empty seats can be blamed on the economy, experts say. Nebraskans' tastes also have something to do with it.

Said Wrage of Ogallala: "A certain faction of the community is artsy. If the shows are too classical, some people won't come."

Sometimes, Ogallalans are unwilling to try something new, she said. The 60- to 75-year-olds "are at everything," she said, but the children and the parents don't come often enough.

Wrage said she'd like to raise support for the arts in her community by bringing in a popular performer like Frank Sinatra. A big name might beef up the declining membership, she said.

Nebraskans' taste for arts has changed over the years, Bowlin of Kimball said.

In the early 1970s, Nebraskans, especially students, were more interested in seeing serious performances

than they are today. The social and political climates were more active then, he said, which may have contributed to Nebraskans' willingness to experience different art forms.

Nebraskans were more willing 10 years ago to see classical musical shows than they are today, he said. At that time, about 10 classical music performances were shown each year in Kimball Hall. Today, however, about six are shown each year, Bowlin said, and attendance of those shows is down.

"Today there's more interest in being entertained than being challenged," he said. Performances now are more geared toward the individual — his or her desire to get a job and be successful.

"It (the trend) verifies that the arts are an expression of the times," he said.

One reason some Nebraskans don't attend shows, especially classical shows, is because they think they won't understand them, Lusk said.

To help educate audiences about complex operas or plays, some officials have started

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in the arts*

have changed.

—Bowlin

organizing sessions scheduled just before performances to enlighten audiences on what they're about to see. Over the past 15 years, the stage at Kimball Hall has seen a broad representation of American and European arts — both traditional and modern theater, music and dance, Bowlin said. Kimball has managed to attract well-known groups such as Alvin Ailey, an East coast dance company.

Bowlin said Nebraskans get a good deal. A show in New York City or Boston often costs about \$50, he said. In Nebraska, a show of similar quality and content will cost between \$10 and \$15.

In Scottsbluff, the Western Nebraska Arts Center opened in the early 1970s. The building displays visual art shows throughout the year. They also have a performing arts series that has included such plays as "Pinochio" and "The Nutcracker Suite."

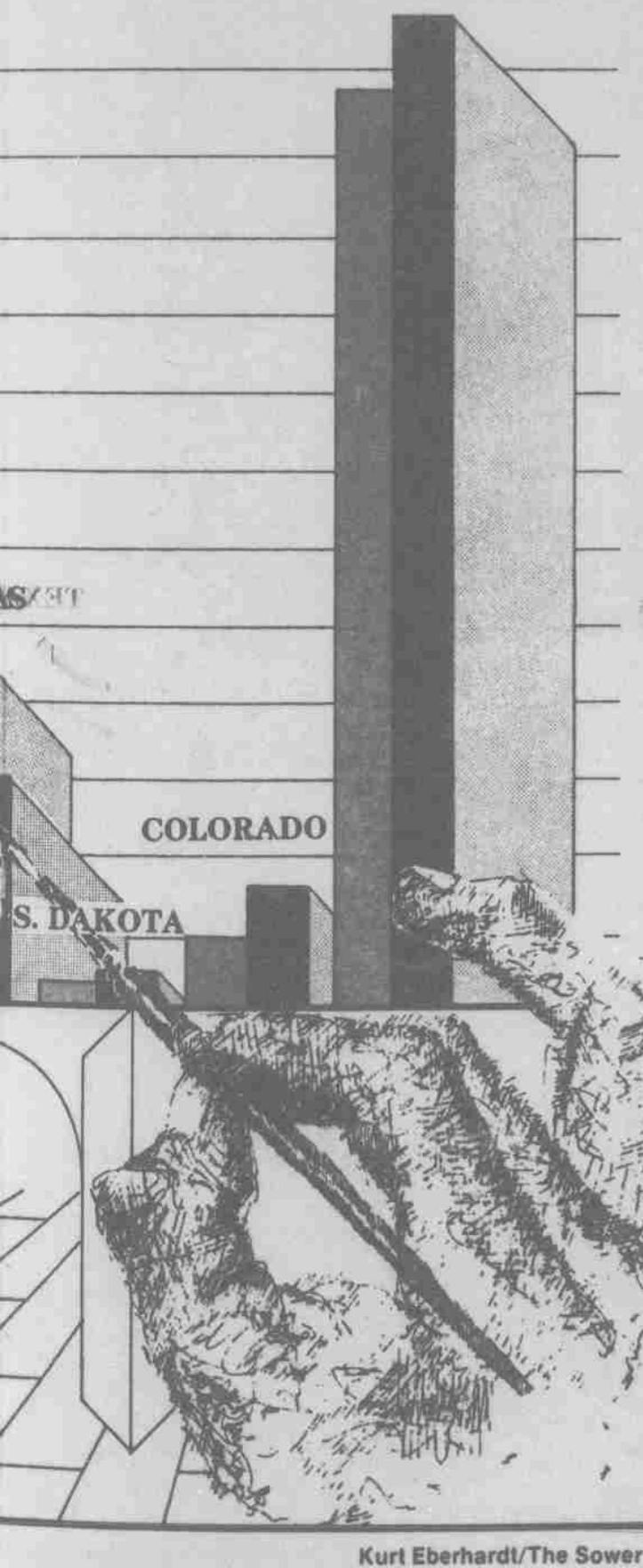
The center's administrative assistant, Molly Kyle, says the center also offers foreign films and craft workshops. The gallery is used by many local artists, says director and visual arts coordinator, Lanny Fiegenschuh.

"We offer something that no one else can offer in the area," he said.

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State Art Associations

CALIFORNIA



Kurt Eberhardt/The Sower