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## Arts groups barter to save money

Catherine Jun / The Detroit News

Metro Detroit's arts institutions are huddling together to help each other out.

As donations have plummeted, several are turning to a creative money-saving solution: sharing. Through an online program, they're swapping what they can give with what they can use -- buses, museum tours, performance or office space -- even high-priced intangibles, such as marketing expertise.

Cranbrook Schools loaned to the Detroit Opera House a bus and driver to shuttle visiting ballet dancers from midtown to rehearsals at the Opera House downtown.

### Advertisement

"It was a great financial help to us," said Carol Halsted, director of dance for the opera house, who believes it saved at least \$5,000. The dance department expects thousands of dollars less in revenue this year, mostly from falling enrollment in summer courses and corporate donations.

What's made it easy to barter is a service called the Sharing Resources Clearinghouse. Run by the Cultural Alliance for Southeastern Michigan, it lets groups make offerings, and take something they might need. Since its founding, at least 40 organizations have signed up.

The behind-the-curtains bartering highlights the efforts arts and cultural institutions are making to survive in a rugged economy.

## Corporate donations down

In a survey of 200 nonprofits in the region, 65 percent of arts and entertainment organizations reported declines in money raised in 2008 compared to previous years, and another 25 percent remained steady, according to the Michigan Nonprofit Association. Much of the loss is due to dramatic falloffs in corporate giving. That has hurt every major arts and performance venue in the region. Most recently, the Detroit Institute of Arts announced plans to lay off 20 percent of its staff. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Michigan Opera Theatre were forced into deeper belt-tightening earlier this year when the GM Foundation canceled its sponsorship pledges.

"They would rather cut behind-the-scenes costs rather than programs to the public," said Maud Lyon, executive director of the Cultural Alliance. "They're doing their strategic planning, and they're making hard choices and looking at what they have to do."

The rules on the Web site are simple: offer something, then you can take something.

## How they barter

Take this latest string of giving as an example: The Henry Ford in Dearborn recently offered up on the Web site its in-house team of graphic designers, who had some time available, to help with an image makeover.

"When we were inventorying ... we looked at some of the areas we had expertise in," said Carol Kendra, chief marketing officer for The Henry Ford. "I know there's a lot of organizations that do not have access to these resources."

The offer was snatched up by the Birmingham Bloomfield Arts Center. It put the team to work on a new logo, poster and ads for its annual summer arts festival, renamed "Art Birmingham." The work would have cost at least \$10,000 had they hired someone.

"We could not have been able to do this," said Cynthia Mills, vice president of programs at the center, which has so far maintained funding levels but is bracing for a likely dip next year. "Their donation to us is huge," Mills said, adding, "We're hoping it will bring another generation in" to the festival.

The center, in turn, posted on the sharing site one-time use of its mailing list, made up of more than 2,500 members, donors and students -- an offer deemed priceless in the arts arena. The Macomb Center for Performing Arts used it earlier this year, sending out mailers to an upcoming string performance. The list was never disclosed; the Birmingham Bloomfield center forwarded the notices through its mail house.

Some observers say there's a quality of life issue in keeping such programs afloat.

The arts are a key component in attracting and retaining a young, educated workforce in any region, said Lou Glazer, president of Michigan Future Inc.

"It's an important ingredient in a strategy to attract and retain talent," he said. "Part of the quality of place they're looking for is the arts. That's the simple story."

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Ballet Renaissance founder Brianna Furnish, left, helps Jordan Stephens, 12, in a ballet class at the Detroit Opera House, which is sharing resources with other cultural groups to save money. (Brandy Baker / The Detroit News)



Radoslaw Kokoszka, co-director of Ballet Renaissance, works through a series of dance movements with ballet students. They share space at the Detroit Opera House in Detroit to save money. (Brandy Baker / The Detroit News)



Radoslaw Kokoszka, right, moves Coleman Ward's, 12, head into position. Ward is interested in studying musical theater. (Brandy Baker / The Detroit News)