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Contact: Emily Miller

Phone: 985.892.3216 ext. 23

E-mail: emily@sttammanycommerce.org

With theaters, dining, galleries and festivals, St. Tammany Parish has become home to many types of artists and art-lovers. In order to support and celebrate this growing industry that enhances our lifestyle and fuels our economy, last year our chamber formed the Cultural Economy committee.

The committee has become a joint endeavor of the east and west chambers and is chaired by **Susan Brunner** of **Brunner Galleries**. Its mission is to facilitate growth, development and increased awareness of the cultural economy and its impact by focusing on coalition building, public policy, business support, outreach and arts education.

The Cultural Economy committee has several exciting ventures in the works this year. A cooperative endeavor agreement between the two chambers, on behalf of the committee, and the St. Tammany Parish Commission on Cultural Affairs is underway. The agreement will allow the chambers to apply for a grant from the parish, which they would then offer to individual artists who are members of either chamber. Artists who apply for the grant must have a clear purpose for which they are seeking the funds. Part of the grant could also engage professional chamber members to offer services to the recipients in developing business strategies, financing and legal issues.

The committee is also closely monitoring the advancement of Cultural Product Districts, a designation recently authorized by the state legislature which allows tax free sale of cultural products and works of art within special districts meeting certain criteria. So far, Lacombe is the first municipality to achieve the designation in St. Tammany Parish. The committee is encouraging others to follow suit.

In order to promote all creative businesses and their contributions to our community, the Cultural Economy committee has established “Cultural Economy Awareness” week, now an annual event by proclamation of Parish President Kevin Davis, to take place August 18-22. Events will include a keynote luncheon featuring an official representative of the state department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, and sponsored by the St. Tammany Parish Tourist Commission. The luncheon will take place on August 20 followed by a Cultural Extravaganza presented by the East Chamber that evening.

To find out more about the Cultural Economy committee, look for their booth among the 120 exhibitors at our 2008 EXPO on May 7, the region’s largest business trade show, which is set from 11 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. at the Castine Center. You can also visit www.sttammanycommerce.org for more information on any of our committees or events.

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