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Visit Canton and ArtsinStark Poised to Launch New Grants Program

Stark County, Ohio – Visit Canton, the Stark County Convention & Visitors' Bureau, plans to enter a cooperative agreement with ArtsinStark to commit 1% of the Stark County lodging tax allocated for the operation of the convention and visitors' bureau to grant assistance for arts initiatives and events consistent with the promotion of travel and tourism to Stark County. The agreement is set to take effect next week, following a vote of approval by the Board of Commissioners of Stark County. The cooperative agreement between the three parties would be in effect through December 31, 2027.

Cultural tourism marketing is an initiative specifically identified in both Visit Canton and ArtsinStark's strategic plans. In 2012, ArtsinStark's CEO, Robb Hankins, included in ArtsinStark's 20/20 Vision a strategic initiative to identify a dedicated source of funds to market the "arts explosion" happening in Stark County. In 2015, Visit Canton's strategic plan included a specific focus on promoting arts and cultural tourism. The two organizations entered into their first grant partnership in August 2015 when Visit Canton provided \$20,000 in funds for ArtsinStark to award grants under the "Live Music Downtown" initiative.

Based on current, average lodging tax collection, the 1% allocated to the new cooperative grant program is estimated to be \$550,000 annually. Grants will be made available to arts initiatives and events in four categories; Major Events, Arts Support, ArtsinStark Marketing and Event Support, and Community Partnership Grants.

Major Events funding is intended for events with the likelihood to attract a significant number of visitors from the region, state and beyond, and would be available to ArtsinStark and their approved Major Arts Organizations, or other arts organizations in Stark County mutually agreed upon by Visit Canton and ArtsinStark. Major Events applications would be reviewed and approved by majority of a committee consisting of two ArtsinStark appointees and three Visit Canton appointees. The blockbuster art exhibit KIMONO hosted at the Canton Museum of Art in 2009, is one example of the type of initiatives that could be approved for Major Events funding.

"In 2009 we helped the Canton Museum of Art market its blockbuster show KIMONO," says ArtsinStark CEO Robb Hankins, "When KIMONO attracted 100,000 people and generated \$6 million of economic impact, we realized we needed monies for more opportunities like this."

Arts Support funding is intended for use by ArtsinStark's Major Arts Organizations for the purpose of traditional marketing and event support based on the merit of the

application to bring new visitors from outside of Stark County. The process to apply for Arts Support grants would be added to ArtsinStark's existing rigorous, annual process for approving Major Arts Organization grantees. The President of Visit Canton, Allyson Bussey, would join the panel for the ArtsinStark Major Arts Organization grant process and approve funds awarded for Arts Support grants.

"We are finishing up a \$6 million capital campaign, but only have \$8,000 a year for marketing. This will be a total game changer." Said Alex Nicholis Coon, CEO at Massillon Museum.

ArtsinStark Marketing and Event Support funding is intended for use directly by ArtsinStark for the purpose of traditional marketing and event support based on the merit of the application to bring new visitors from outside of Stark County. ArtsinStark will submit a marketing and event support proposal to Visit Canton for grant approval. Anticipated asks include grant monies to expand marketing efforts outside of Stark County for ArtsinStark's events such as First Fridays.

At least 15% of the grant dollars will be made available through **Community Partnership Grants**. Community Partnership Grants will award up to \$10,000 to each approved marketing or event initiative. The initiatives must encompass authentic historic and cultural places and attractions, traditions, history, music or art. The Community Partnership Grants are not eligible to ArtsinStark or their Major Arts Organizations. According to Visit Canton CEO Allyson Bussey, "The Community Partnership Grants are intended to support our broad Stark County tourism industry, and to support industry partners working together to create collaborative cultural tourism events and marketing campaigns."

The cooperative agreement identifies several requirements for oversight of the grant program. Visit Canton maintains fiscal control and direction over use of the lodging tax to ensure its use is consistent with statutory purposes for lodging tax. All approved funds will flow directly from Visit Canton to the approved grant applicants. Each approved initiative is required to complete a comprehensive final evaluation, and twice per calendar year ArtsinStark will cooperate with Visit Canton to prepare and present to the Board of Stark County Commissioners on approved initiatives and evidence of Stark County's return on investment. During the term of the agreement the ArtsinStark board of directors will include at least one Visit Canton appointee. In addition to the approval process for each grant category, grant awards over \$50,000 will also require approval by Visit Canton's Board of Directors. The agreement also includes a clause for termination with due cause, such as a failure to fulfill the obligations of the agreement.

The Board of Stark County Commissioners will conduct the vote to approve the cooperative agreement at their meeting next week.

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