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Arts Council readies for GOP budget battle

The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts is busy arming itself with facts and figures to fend off an attack by Republican members of the General Assembly who have said the agency is run inefficiently. The party wants to dismantle the council to save money.

The Republican charges surfaced a couple of weeks ago, when the GOP released its own version of next year's state budget, one that would trim $8.8 million from Governor Garrahy's spending plan and reduce income and gasoline taxes. Among the list of cost-cutting measures was the elimination of the arts council for a savings of $359,616.

The arts council was singled out, said Senate Minority Leader Lila M. Sapinsley, when a Rhode Island College economist hired by the GOP found figures indicating that out of the agency's $210,000 budget, roughly $37,000 went for personnel costs. "When he saw that," said Senator Sapinsley, "a red flag went up."

Understandably, the GOP's position has drawn fire from arts supporters who see it as the work of anti-cultural Philistines. But Senator Sapinsley said that is not the case.

"It's not that the Republicans feel the arts aren't important," Senator Sapinsley said the other day, "it's just that we want to make sure the state's arts dollars are spent on the arts, not a bureaucracy."

Senator Sapinsley concedes, though, that the GOP may have goofed when it thought that it could eliminate the state's $350,000 contribution to the council, that is, the personnel costs, and keep the $400,000 that the agency gets from the federal government, primarily the National Endowment for the Arts. The endowment, you see, requires the state to match the federal grant.

Promoting local artists

Two Providence businessmen have come up with an innovative way to promote the work of local printmakers and photographers.

Barnett and Barry Fain, co-owners of Fain's Carpets, have set up a company called BETA to underwrite the production costs of printing portfolios. The firm also markets the work. The way it's set up now, several portfolios are donated to museums, a method that serves both as a tax-writeoff and as a way of giving artists visibility as well as credibility, and the remaining portfolios are sold to collectors. The profits are split 50-50 with the artists, and BETA's earnings are then recycled into marketing the work of other artists.

The company's first client is Sal Mancini, the Providence photographer known for his pictures of the small Italian town of Itri.

Excavations to be topic

Christopher Donnan, director of the Museum of Cultural History in Los Angeles, will be at Brown University's Grant Recital Hall Wednesday, where he will discuss two recent excavations in North Coastal Peru, site of the ancient King Naylamp. The excavations, which Donnan supervised, uncovered elaborately decorated palaces, pyramids, tombs and a remarkable polychrome mural.

Donnan's talk is at 8 p.m., and it's the first of the Jane P. Dwyer Memorial lectures, a series honoring the late Brown anthropologist who was director of the school's Haffenreffer Museum.