

Statement for SCFD Rex Morgan Award

Floyd Ciruli

November 30, 2010

I want to thank Jim Harrington and the Board of the SCFD for their steady behind the scenes leadership of this District. It is indeed a public trust to be responsible for \$37 million in public funds and for 22 years all the boards have done a masterful job.

A hand for these boards.

The SCFD has also been well served by its executive directors:

Jane Hansberry
Mary Ellen Williams
Peg Long

Thank them for their efficient and effective service.

I am very proud to be considered among my fellow honorees. In the four election campaigns that I have directed, there was never a shortage of volunteers who would man our headquarters, join a parade, don a polar bear costume or plant a yard sign. The success of this District reflects the shared sense of responsibility, commitment and initiative exemplified by the people on this stage and throughout our community.

Twenty-five Years Ago

Twenty-five years ago, a group of trustees and their friends began to think critically about the financial survival of the leading cultural institutions in the community. The cultural organizations had experienced a loss of crucial state funds and suffered significant cutbacks in municipal support. That group was energized by the namesake of this award, Rex Morgan.

What they and Rex accomplished is the essence of American civic entrepreneurship. An interest to help their favorite institutions become an enlightened interest to aid the cultural organizations throughout the community. Their innovation became a sustainable program to spread cultural access across the metro area.

Little did we realize in 1988 prior to the first election, which won with 74 percent of the vote throughout the region, that we were embarking on what 25 years later would be referred to nationally as the “creative city,” or more correctly, the “creative region.”

Creative Region

We know now the real glue that provides attachment to a place– that is, a satisfaction with a community – the sense it’s moving in the right direction – and an ability to mobilize people for civic action is not just basic services and bricks and mortar.

The glue that holds us together is a mixture of:

- A community that welcomes people; offers them a night life, arts and culture;
- A community that is open to diverse people, ideas and styles;
- A community with an aesthetic, that is, having some overall beauty (we are, of course, blessed with our natural environment), but that also cares about good design, preservation and its history; and
- A community that provides life-long learning and cultural education.

Those are key elements that contribute to our quality of life, and each one is enhanced by our cultural life, directly supported by the funding of the SCFD.

What started in private conversations and efforts in 1985 has a quarter century later become a public dialogue and shared experience of arts and culture that enriches us individually, collectively and empowers our region.

While the recession is as profound here as in other parts of the country, Denver and the region remain among the most attractive areas in the country to live.

Good Policy and Good Politics

As I have described the District to cultural and civic leaders around the country, I like to say that SCFD is based on good cultural policy, good public policy and good politics.

For example, we know our main cultural institutions are the Smithsonian of Colorado and must be maintained. We know that all our cultural institutions provide services that can't be fully compensated by visitors and audiences – we need and desire a public funding component.

Yet, good cultural policy recommends public funding should not stifle creativity or be a disincentive to audience-driven programming.

In terms of public policy, it is best that funding is not discretionary, but fixed. In hard times, cultural funding is often first to be cut. We know that the decision-making reflecting local preferences from citizen boards as the county cultural councils function is good public policy.

And finally, the District was designed to practice good politics by meeting the expectations of regional leaders and audiences for accessibility, quality and diversity. Annual reviews, formulas and the periodic renewal elections have truly focused our minds and made the District an exemplar for the entire country.

The Future

I believe the SCFD is now a part of the fabric of our community. It will stay with us. Obviously, we must nurture it; we must protect it. But, tonight we celebrate it.

Thanks to all of you for making the SCFD a reality and for so enriching the cultural life of our community. And, thank you for this recognition. It is a great honor.