



Everything Michigan

ArtPrize 2011 drew more than 322,000 visits and had a \$15.4 million economic impact, study says

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By **Jeffrey Kaczmarczyk | MLive Media/Grand Rapids**

GRAND RAPIDS -- **ArtPrize 2011** drew more than 322,000 visits, generated \$10.1 million in new spending and had a net economic impact of \$15.4 million during the 19-day exhibition held this past fall.

That's the conclusion of the study released today by Anderson Economic Group, commissioned by **Experience Grand Rapids**.

The third exhibition and competition, created in 2009 by social media entrepreneur Rick DeVos, drew an average of 17,000 visitors per day from Sept. 21 to Oct. 9, mostly from West Michigan.

Visitors spent an average of \$500,000 per day - more than the total of \$484,000 awarded in cash prizes.

"It's a pretty impressive event, and one of the main drivers is that it's free to the public," said Scott Watkins, a senior consultant with the firm based in East Lansing. "That leaves visitors free to spend their money at local businesses."

Among the findings:

- Over 213,000 spectators attended,



Enlarge

Rex Larsen | The Grand Rapids Press

Mia Tavonatti, the 2011 ArtPrize 1st place winner, for "Crucifixion," reacts after receiving her award during the

averaging 1.5 days each.

- Over 73 percent of visitors were from outside the City of Grand Rapids. Some 31 percent traveled from outside of Kent and Ottawa counties and over 5 percent from outside of Michigan.

- Net spending per spectator averaged \$30.50 per day for a total of nearly \$9.8 million and a total economic impact of \$13.6 million from spectators alone.

- The total net economic impact - all new economic activity directly or indirectly caused by ArtPrize - is estimated at \$15.4 million, generating 204 jobs resulting in over \$4.6 million in new earnings for local households.

The event generated more than \$10.1 million in new spending by all participants, including the 1,582 artists from 36 countries and 42 states. Some 350 artists from outside the Grand Rapids area reported staying an average of four days in the area.

The non-profit **ArtPrize** organization itself added an additional \$1.9 million in local spending for goods and services related to event operation, such as additional public safety, while raising some \$1.8 million from more than 150 sponsors.

"It does show that ArtPrize really can engage a community, and it shows that a city can do this with a great idea," said ArtPrize executive director Catherine Creamer

Two rounds of voting over two weeks chose 10 artists to share in \$449,000 in prize money with the first prize of \$250,000 going to artist **Mia Tavonatti of Santa Ana, Calif., for her stained-glass mosaic, "The Crucifixion."**

Watkins described ArtPrize as a "sticky event" for its repeat visits, averaging 1.5 days per person.

"That's a lot of time to spend in any one activity in this day and age," Watkins said. "They're spending more of what you can consider an 'intimate time' in downtown Grand Rapids - more than going into a specific museum for two or three hours and not really engaging in the community.

"That kind of impact drives the total economic impact of the event," he said.

In March, an **economic impact study of ArtPrize 2010** by students at Grand Valley State University, under economics professor Paul Sicilian, determined that event generated \$5.5 million in direct spending from nonlocal visitors and \$7 million to \$7.5 million in all. That study, which estimated ArtPrize 2010 generated 400,000 visitor days, also used a survey but had less hard data available.

In looking at ArtPrize 2011, **Anderson Economic Group** used such precise data as the 23,082 registered voters and 10,089 metro bus passes purchased, coupled with 2,068 replies to an online survey and 291 in-person interviews during the event to reach its conclusions in a 37-page report.

ceremony at DeVos Performance Hall. (Rex Larsen | The Grand Rapids Press)

ArtPrize 2011 awards ceremony gallery (27 photos)

The AEG study found almost 70 percent of spectators said their trip to Grand Rapids was primarily due to ArtPrize, and 98 percent indicated they were just as likely or more likely to visit Grand Rapids again.

"That's significant way beyond these numbers," said Janet Korn, vice president for marketing for Experience Grand Rapids, the convention and visitor's bureau that commissioned the study.

"When we have to promote Grand Rapids to the nation, it's a city they haven't heard about," she said. "ArtPrize, because it's new and different, has the ability to attract people's attention because it's so new and different."

"It's probably a game changer for this place as a destination," Korn said.

Interestingly, the study found only about 18 percent of spectators voted in the competition.

"To vote, you have to be relatively engaged," Watkins said. "A lot of people just come out to enjoy the art."

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