

GallupARTS wants to give local artists a ‘Lift’

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 18 March 2022 05:02



Turn dream projects into a reality

Digital technology has revolutionized many industries over the last few decades, but it tends to favor those who can afford access to the world's digital onramps. The price of entry can be steep, especially in places where Internet access can be spotty or even nonexistent.

GallupARTS wants to be an onramp for local artists, with a newly opened Artist Lift Zone, made possible through local grants. The Zone is a space with a computer, lighting, photo and video equipment, and free WIFI to help artists manage their online presence.

"It's really an open-ended, adaptable space for them to do what they need to do," Rose Eason, executive director of GallupARTS, said. "They can manage their social media from the laptop, they can manage their e-commerce. They can record a demo video, they can record for TikTok."

Most of us are used to doing everything from communicating to taking photos and videos on our phones, but art demands higher quality images.

"We have, in the past, helped artists submit applications for festivals or residency opportunities,

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and we've taken photos of their work because there are certain standards," Eason said. "It takes a lot of effort and time to set it up. It's hard to make sure you have the right kind of images, that they are color-correct and representing the artworks accurately."

The Zone was born last year, when Comcast offered a program to provide Lift Zones – essentially, three years of free high-speed WIFI – at 30 sites around New Mexico.

The goal was to provide "robust, free WIFI in safe spaces for students and adults to get online, participate in distance learning and workforce development trainings, and access critical resources," according to the company announcement.

Gallup scored two Lift Zones, one to GallupARTS and one to the Gallup Boys & Girls Club. Comcast is working with the city and hopes to announce more Lift Zones at city facilities in the near future, Julianne Phares, Comcast New Mexico director of external affairs, said.

Comcast was able to get the Zones up fairly quickly in large cities that already had the necessary infrastructure, but Gallup was in the middle of a larger infrastructure upgrade, so it took until last November to get them going here.

"Comcast completed a full network upgrade to bring additional Internet speed tiers and capacity to all of the homes and businesses we serve in the Gallup area," Phares said.

Before the upgrade, Internet connections in Gallup were 50 Mbps. Now the company offers residential speeds up to 1.2 Gbps. Lift Zones get one-gigabyte connections.

"What we realized we could do with that free WIFI was to supplement the Lift Zone with photography equipment, a laptop, lighting, and video equipment so the artists could come in and take professional quality photographs of their work to use on their Instagram, or to upload to their e-commerce sites," Eason said.

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The photo equipment was already in hand, the bounty of a McKinley County arts grant funded by the CARES Act to help the gallery “better adapt the art program into the virtual realm, given COVID,” Eason said.

The gallery used it to move some of its own programs online, then invited local artists to use the photo gear. Coming in the middle of the pandemic, response was predictably light.

Today’s Zone is a space that’s had a lot of different uses since GallupARTS took over the ART123 Gallery in 2016 from an artists’ cooperative that was moving. At the time, today’s Zone space was subject to an agreement with another nonprofit. That ended in 2020, and after that the gallery used it for classes and workshop space.

“That’s more labor intensive because of the setup and teardown, and it’s also not ideal because we are using paint and other materials so it tends to get a little messier,” Eason said.

The Lift Zone is a timely fit for the space.

“I don’t think the whole e-commerce, virtual/digital realm is going away,” she said. “We want to support artists in using that, leveraging that, and putting themselves out there in that way. It’s a new way of being for all of us.”

The Artist Lift Zone is available by appointment from 4 to 6 pm Tuesday through Friday at ART123 Gallery, 123 W. Coal Ave.

For information call (505) 488-2136 or email assistant@galluparts.com

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