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Arts nonprofits preserving mission

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Even while cutting back, organizers hopeful of future

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DURHAM -- The past fiscal year slammed a lot of local nonprofit arts

organizations. Despite dire predictions for the year ahead, leaders say they are finding ways to preserve their mission.

The American Dance Festival had to make requests for money after this summer's season. As of August, the festival had raised about \$10,000 for scholarships, and about \$3,800 from an e-mail request for donations, said Jodee Nimerichter, festival co-director.

While the festival gave fewer paid performances this past season -- 36 compared to 47 in 2008, ticket sales were strong, she said. The festival made about \$420,000 this summer in ticket sales, compared to about \$432,000 in 2008, Nimerichter said. She emphasized that ADF has a cash reserve and will survive these tough times. "In those years when you do make a little money, you can put that away for a rainy day. We're incredibly fortunate," she said.

The Durham Arts Council has seen an increase in the number of artists applying to present at its annual CenterFest fundraiser, said Executive Director Sherry L. DeVries. The council has not increased booth fees, in an effort to keep the festival accessible, and added spaces for 10 more artists. The Arts Council also is sending out more mailings and appeals to get more funding.

"I'm very encouraged going into this year," DeVries said. "We've got to be nimble and quick, and I've got the hardest working team I've every seen."

Other arts groups are taking steps to increase revenue in the year ahead. Here is a brief look:

n The Carolina Theatre is working on increasing ticket sales for its season, and is encouraged by the success of the recent N.C. Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, said Connie Campanaro, president and CEO. The theater will continue to add shows for the coming season. "We are extremely dedicated to maintaining stability here," Campanaro said.

n The Durham Art Guild has increased the size of its board, and will work this year to increase corporate sponsorships, and memberships, said Valerie Whitted, president of the Guild board.

n At ChathamArts, Executive Director Molly Matlock sees a silver lining to the economic downturn, because now the organization is better organized. The board has recruited some new members with good fundraising skills, Matlock said. Clydefest, the annual festival which is the organization's main fundraiser, will expand next year to two days.

n The Full Frame Documentary Film Festival still does not know if it will renew its relationship with The New York Times, said Tom Rankin, interim executive director. The festival is exploring a similar relationship with another media company, but nothing is definite, he said. The festival does not plan to cut back venues or films for 2010, and will continue to seek sponsors and donors at all levels.

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