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City arts group to launch directory

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EASTHAMPTON - An arts organization will celebrate on Thursday the release of its directory, which members hope will boost the city's economy and bring more attention to area artists.

Easthampton City Arts, which formed in 2005 with the help of several grants, will release its paper directory of participating artists and arts-related business at the Apollo Grill on Pleasant Street.

The directory has been on the group's Web site since earlier this year. But City Arts members hope that the paper version will be more accessible. The group plans to print 3,000 of the directories.

City Grants Coordinator and coordinating committee member Ellen Koteen said that City Arts hopes to send the directories to galleries near and far. Artists can also use them for self-promotion.

"The focus is to attract people to Easthampton to increase the purchase of art products," Koteen said. "It will show the depth, breadth, and talent of artists in Easthampton."

Koteen said that the directory will help other businesses, too. "When more people come to town, other businesses benefit as well," she said.

Grants totaling \$34,500 in 2005 and 2006 paid for the group's Web site, easthamptoncityarts.com, as well as feasibility studies on arts-related events, and a technical assistance class for artists, offered by the Valley Community Development Corp.

The group is now seeking another \$25,000 grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council to continue its work.

Easthampton resident Nancy E. Dorian, who runs her fiber arts and clothing business, Now and Zen, out of her home, said that she liked the idea of having information for area artists in one place.

"I think everything that Easthampton is doing to support the artists is wonderful," she said.

Dorian, who is taking the artist technical assistance courses offered through the Valley CDC, said that the class has "lit a fire" under her. "What it's done for me is helped me to focus," she said. She is now trying to renovate a studio space at Touchstone Farm on West Street.

Kevin Germain, a guitarist who trained at Berklee College of Music, said that the directory will likely be more useful for "physical arts" such as painting, photography and sculpting.

"From a performing arts standpoint, it's still useful to a certain degree, but

there's already a pretty largely established support base for musicians in the Valley," he said. "Most performing artists don't just perform in one area."

Still, Germain said that it is "nice to be plugged in."

The launch party takes place Thursday from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., with free food, music, and an arts-related raffle. Anyone planning to attend is asked to call 529-1406.

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