

Mayor's Inaugural and Recognition of Portland's Growing Creative Economy

December 12, 2005

Welcoming Remarks -- Mayor Cohen

I want to apologize for interrupting your socializing and welcome everyone here this evening. As I look out across this room, I see old friends, neighbors, co-workers, dedicated city staff, community leaders, and many members of our creative economy. I also want to welcome Congressman Tom Allen and the delegation from our sister city of Archangel, Russia, who are here with us today. Thank you all for coming, and thank you for your support and dedication to this great city.

We have a very brief program set up for this evening, and then we can get back to socializing.

We will hear from John Rohman, chair of Maine's Creative Economy Council.
We will hear a song performed by my son's 4th grade class at
Lyseth Elementary School
And we will hear a piece presented by a group of musicians from the PSO

However, before we get into the program, a few words of thanks are in order because this event did not happen by accident, but was the result of the efforts of a tremendous team of people, including:

Jim and Jilian Britt of gBritt;
Jan Beitzer of Portland Downtown District;
Donna McNeil and Alden Wilson of the Maine Arts Commission; and

Liz Darling, Peter Dewitt, and Linda Pinard from the City of Portland.

I also want to thank the many local businesses who contributed to today's event either financially or in-kind, and this includes:

My law firm, Verrill Dana, LLP
Verizon Communications
Northern Utilities
ES/Richard Boulos
National Distributors
David Dow catering
University of Southern Maine
Portland Symphony Orchestra
Lucky Tangerine Designs

There is also a long list of local restaurants and businesses who contributed to the wonderful array of food here tonite:

Zarra's Monumental Coffee House;
Browne Trading Co.;
Henry VIII,
Big Sky Bakery;
Add More Thyme;
Bull Feeney's;
Barber Foods;
The Kitchen;
O'Naturals; and
I hope I did not leave anyone out!

Finally, thanks to Maine College of Art and the Institute for Contemporary Art for making this wonderful space available; thanks to the many individuals who made financial contributions to this event; and of course, a special thanks to parents Irv and Jacki, my wife Joan, and my children Spencer and Devon. This was truly a team effort, a party "by Portland, for Portland." Your contributions also will to help arts education in Portland through the Portland Education Partnership.

Lyseth Students Perform “Portland, Portland, That’s My Hometown.”

Before we continue with the Program, I would first like to call forward Paul McDowell’s 4th grade class at Lyseth Elementary School who, under the leadership of longtime music teacher Mr. Fenlason, will perform the song “Portland, Portland, That’s My Hometown.” And if you don’t know this song, you soon will as it will be featured on a series of public service announcements promoting the Portland Public Schools.

Introduction to Arts and Culture in Portland -- Mayor Cohen

Turning now to the program, last week during my inaugural address I talked about what a great place Portland is, and why it is we live here. One important component of Portland’s quality of life is our arts and cultural community. In Portland, there most definitely is a “there, there.”

My introduction to the arts in Portland came early in life. As an elementary school student in Portland, I started guitar lessons at Woodfords Corner and I attended most of the PSO’s 50th anniversary season with my mother. Later I took guitar lessons on a loft on Exchange Street across the street from Portland’s then new art cinema -- The Movies. As a graduating high school senior, I was honored to attend the grand opening of the Portland Museum of Art -- and still enjoy this amazing facility. And in my adult life I had the honor of serving as a vice

president on the board of the PSO while my wife served on the board of the Portland Stage Company. Before kids, my wife and I actually maintained seasons tickets to the PSO, PSC, and the Mad Horse Theater. We were exhausted, but culturally enriched!

These were the things that were important to us about living in Portland, and without these things, we might very well not be in Portland.

But we are far from alone. Our arts and cultural community is part of this city's fabric, and why many of us live here -- or want to move here.

But in Portland, arts mean business. New York and Chicago, and other great cities have figured this out. So have we. When Exchange Street and later Congress Street was down on its luck, our arts and cultural community helped pave the way to revitalize these areas. Now the arts community is helping to pave the way to revitalize Bayside and areas of our waterfront. Two years ago, arts and museum jobs were measured as the 6th fastest growing sector of Maine's economy, and cultural tourism is on the rise in Maine. Portland has been a leader in this area.

Arts and culture also contribute to jobs elsewhere in Portland's economy, including jewelry design, furniture design, the recording industry, and knowledge-based industries like bio-technology. These are jobs that could locate anywhere, but they choose to locate in Portland because it is a culturally rich community with a critical mass of well-educated people -- and we have our growing universities and strong public schools to thank for that.

All of this economic activity is known as the “Creative Economy”-- defined as jobs that are “creative” -- and in Portland it is here, and it is growing. I am pleased that the State of Maine has increasingly recognized the importance of our Creative Economy, and to demonstrate this support -- and our partnership with the State -- we are fortunate to have with us today John Rohman, Chair of the Governor’s Creative Economy Council. John is an architect -- a creative economy job -- as well as a former mayor of Bangor. In a moment, John will speak to us about Maine’s Creative Economy and the efforts of the Administration in this regard.

Portland Symphony Orchestra

But before John comes up, let us first hear a piece performed by a group of highly talented musicians from our own Portland Symphony Orchestra.

John Rohman speaks

Now, I would like to ask John Rohman to come forward and say a few words.

Concluding remarks -- Mayor Cohen

It has certainly been my pleasure to be a part of today’s ceremony, to recognize the many institutions in Portland who contribute to this city’s energy,

vitality, and economic future. I would encourage you to stop by the many displays throughout the event. These are some of the people who make Portland a great place to live, and who are paving the way for Portland's continued success.

But having recognized our Creative Economy, where do we go from here? We have done a good job as a city, but there are more opportunities for growth and challenges to be met.

Affordable housing is one challenge. As rents rise, it gets harder and harder for artists to live and work in Portland. The development of the former Sacred Heart School in Parkside as affordable artists live-work space is part of our effort to address this challenge. Our broader commitment to affordable housing is also part of this commitment.

Public art is another way in which the city can, and does, contribute to cultural vitality. Every year the city puts aside ½ % of its capital budget for public art, and a committee of committed volunteers uses this seed money to leverage other contributions that lead to public art that improves our landscape. Boothby Square is a great example, and so is the new "functional art" that is the bus shelter just down the street.

Portland can also do more to "**Connect the dots**" between artists, creative businesses, and resources within the City of Portland. The city offers **gap financing** through the Downtown Portland Corporation, and the City's **Resource Hub** helps connect creative economy businesses with other business development

organizations. Finally, our city needs to continue, and perhaps grow, our commitment to outside cultural agencies such as the Portland Arts and Cultural Agency -- or PACA -- which help bring together many arts groups and businesses to grow opportunities in our city.

Along these same lines, we can also work to identify and promote “clusters,” like Portland’s world class jewelry designers and furniture manufacturers. By better understanding our assets, we can work to promote these businesses effectively on a regional and national level.

Finally, the city can be the “glue” that helps hold together the many local groups who are independently looking at Portland’s Creative Economy. To ensure that all of us are working together and effectively, I will work with our Planning & Development Department, and state officials, to plan a “creative economy summit” for Portland so that we can best determine -- as a community -- what our needs are in this area, and how to move forward.

So, as we take this opportunity to celebrate Portland and its creative economy, let me say once again what a great city Portland is, and it continues to be my honor to serve as mayor of this city.

I wish you all a good night, and please enjoy the rest of your evening.

