

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

The birth of the Cultural Trust

Sponsored content by Jen Lewis-Snyder, president and CEO, The Cultural Trust

It didn't happen overnight — but like Festival of Trees, The Quad Cities Cultural Trust started with a bold idea.

By the early 2000s, Festival of Trees had already proven something remarkable: Joy could fund a movement. It built an engine of creativity that filled hotels, streets and hearts — but it was seasonal, powered by volunteers and fueled by goodwill alone.

Behind the scenes, civic leaders and cultural champions were asking harder questions:

- What happens when the volunteers retire?
- What sustains the arts between festivals?
- Who protects the legacy after the glitter settles?

The answer came in 2007 when the Bechtel Trusts, the Hubbell-Waterman Foundation and the John Deere Foundation came together to form The Quad Cities Cultural Trust — a permanent, privately funded endowment created to make sure the arts and cultural organizations that define this region could thrive, regardless of the economy or leadership cycle.

From its first meeting, The Cultural Trust positioned itself as a partner, not a parent. It didn't direct the work — it powered it. It turned seasonal collaboration into sustainable investment, transforming generosity into infrastructure.

That investment changed everything. Festival of Trees had shown what could happen when creativity and community met in one room. Its success — and the economic lift it created for Quad City Arts — became the model for other cultural mainstays: Winter Lights at the Quad City Botanical Center, Riverfront Pops with the Quad City Symphony Orchestra, Alternating Currents' Family Zone at Common Chord, Evanescent Field at the Figge Art Museum and the newly opened Vault at the Putnam Museum. Each proved that art, music and culture don't just entertain; they sustain.

Those institutions — now known as The Cultural Trust's Legacy Partners — are the region's cultural backbone.

Together, they represent the best of who we are and what we make possible when we create together. Through The Cultural Trust's permanent corpus, more than \$20 million in unrestricted funding has been distributed to date. That's not charity — that's strategy. And when for every \$1 invested, \$20 is returned, no amount will ever be enough.

The Cultural Trust is now recognized as one of the only privately funded, privately maintained cultural investment trusts in the United States. Its independence allows it to think differently, act boldly and protect the region's creative economy for generations.

The Cultural Trust wasn't born to replace Festival of Trees — it was built to extend its spirit. The same spirit that filled the RiverCenter with laughter now fuels a year-round rhythm of concerts, exhibitions and experiences that define life in the Quad Cities.



As Tyson Danner, executive director of Common Chord, describes it: “You may have seen a tuning fork before — a branching piece of metal precisely tuned to a specific pitch. Strike it and it sounds a single tone. That's all it does, at least on its own. But through sympathetic resonance, that tone vibrates the air around it — and when another tuning fork nearby picks up those vibrations, it begins to sing too.”

That's exactly what The Cultural Trust was built to do — create resonance. When one partner thrives, the others vibrate with it. Together, they create harmony that carries far beyond the room where the first note was struck.

And its footprint continues to expand, thanks to the Adler-Schermer Foundation, which joined the ranks of bold visionaries in 2021, allowing The Cultural Trust to support not only its Legacy Partners but also diverse programming at the Adler Theatre.

So, if you've ever attended Festival of Trees, sang along at Riverfront Pops, walked through Winter Lights, attended the Regional Show Choir Competition at the Adler or watched a child discover their first spark of creativity — you've already felt the trust's work in motion.

Because culture here isn't a side project. It's a shared investment, a living system and the proudest proof that when art and generosity meet, entire cities come alive. Because culture matters here — and it always will.

Coming tomorrow: 10 traits of a Culture Champion

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