



2023 Annual Report

Message from Executive Director:

Thomas Underwood



As I have previously shared, I have a lifelong connection to the North Topeka area, and as of this writing I am well into my sixth year as executive director for the NOTO organization. Time has flown by and much has changed in six short years!

A few months ago, I was meeting with a key stakeholder of the NOTO organization and in conversation I provided a brief review of the many accomplishments over the past six years. At the end of our meeting, I was asked to write it all down.

Sure! It's easy for me to share about NOTO. But as I started writing I discovered the task was actually pretty daunting. It is easy to talk about the big things like Redbud Park, but there is so much more. I

did not want to leave anything, or anyone, out. What I thought would be a couple of pages ended up being much longer! I think I was able to provide context regarding our efforts, our successes, and even our failures.

I shared the report with the stakeholder, and I also shared it with the NOTO board and staff. I hope it helped to better inform them of the journey we've been on together, and hopefully influence our perspective for the future.

Foundations of the NOTO Organization

Organizational foundations are those things that are core to its being and essential for growth and development. The foundations of the NOTO organization are its vision, mission, and core values. These are prominently exhibited at the NOTO Arts Center and the web page and are frequently referenced in reports and communications. These are important to the organization as they frame our goals, define our activities, and provide context for ethical decisions.

Working with Lisa LaRue Baker and the Dopika project this past year, we realized that another important statement needed to be included. The NOTO board worked to craft a land acknowledgement statement which is placed alongside the other referenced statements.

Vision Statement

Become the region's premier arts and entertainment destination.

Mission Statement

The NOTO Arts and Entertainment District cultivates art and experiences that inspire opportunity, enhance economic vitality, and improve the overall quality of life throughout Topeka and the surrounding area.

Core Values

Leadership	Our actions support holistic purpose to enhance the social and economic development of the district and community.
Integrity	We value the open, honest, and regular exchange of information and ideas. Others can count on us to be honest in our transactions, dependable in our commitments, transparent in our decisions, and accountable to our mission.
Stewardship	We strive to be responsible in our utilization of human and financial resources.
Adaptability	We strive to be flexible to meet the ever-changing needs of individuals and environments; to embrace the constant of change as an opportunity for growth.
Inclusion	We seek to create a welcoming community that embraces unique perspectives, and value all who have a stake in the district.
Authenticity	We value the dynamism of a district characterized by art, craftsmanship, and history; we are eclectic, unique, distinctive.

Land Acknowledgement Statement

The NOTO Arts and Entertainment District organization acknowledges that the land on which the District exists carries the rich history and connections of the Indigenous peoples who have stewarded this land throughout the ages. We recognize that NOTO rests within the traditional territory of the Kaw, Osage, and other Indigenous nations. We pay our respects to the elders, past and present, and extend our gratitude for their enduring care and custodianship of this land. We recognize the ongoing presence and resilience of Native peoples in this region and acknowledge the need to engage in ongoing efforts towards reconciliation and understanding of our relationships with the land and its original inhabitants.

May this land acknowledgment serve as a starting point for honoring Native American peoples and their contributions, both past and present. We commit ourselves to listen, learn, and work towards fostering a future of mutual respect, collaboration, and justice in our interactions.

2023 Board Members

The NOTO organization is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of professionals and volunteers from the community and business owners from the district. Board members for 2023 include:

Caleb Asher
Sprout Creative

Matt McGivern (Chair)
Senne Company

Jon Bohlander (Past Chair)
Wheel Barrel / NOTO Resident

Cole Mosier
NOTO Resident / Kansas Gas Service

Pedro Concepcion (Chair Elect)
Wheel Barrel / Onyx

Kathy Pflaum
Plumm Fibers Design Stu. / Washburn Univ.

Bryan Falk
Falk Architects

Zac Pohlenz
Clayton Wealth Partners

Miriam Krehbiel
Topeka Rescue Mission

Adam Rosdahl
Norsemen Brewing Co

Kay Grey (Treasurer)
Community Member

Marty Schlossman
Federal Home Loan Bank

Claudia Larkin (Secretary)
Community Member

Debbie Schwartz
Kaw Valley Bank

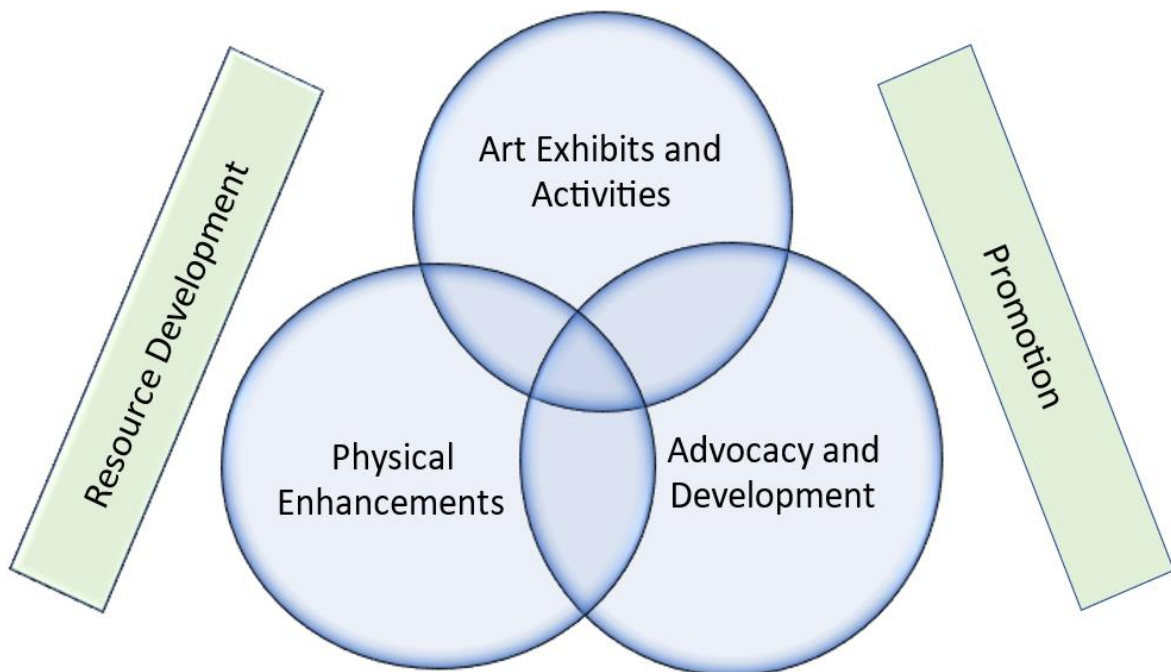
Gwen McClain
Studio 831

Andrew Tague
Goodell, Stratton, Edmonds, & Palmer LLP

Introduction

It is sometimes hard for people to grasp the breadth of the NOTO organization and all it does. We are arts-centric, but our work is more holistic and comprehensive. Just as art is multi-dimensional, so too is the NOTO organization. We are more than an art organization; we are also an economic development organization and a district enhancement organization. Further, we are a tourism organization in that we promote the brand of NOTO to draw visitors from across the community, the region, and beyond.

The 2022 Annual Report referenced a strategic planning process in which, among other things, we secured consensus of the NOTO organization's core functions – sometimes referred to as pillars. These functions are not siloed; they are overlapping and mutually connected. The following graphic illustrates the relationship between these functions. The three overlapping circles of art, physical enhancements, and advocacy and development illustrate the interaction of these three functions. These are positioned between the functions of promotion and resource development.



These functions will frame this report with an overall description of key accomplishments for 2023, along with a sharing of goals for 2024.

Art Exhibits and Activities

Art is what NOTO is known for. It was the impetus for the start of NOTO; it is what makes NOTO unique; it is what brings visitors from around the world. The NOTO organization strives to coordinate programs and experiences that are unique, inclusive, and engaging.

Art Exhibits

The NOTO Arts Center is a recognized venue for the art exhibits and is a popular attraction for visitors. In 2023, over 5,000 people visited the Arts Center. While most visitors are local, the guest book logged visitors from as far away as California, Maryland, Florida, Texas, and even New Zealand.

The most prominent area in the Arts Center for art is the award-winning *Morris Art Gallery* which featured seven distinct exhibits this year. A small exhibit area called *Art in the Vestibule* features NOTO connected artists and the *Redbud Community Room* has served as a location for special exhibits, such one from Quincy Elementary School and two from Topeka High School.



The *NOTO Master Artist* program honors an artist for their contribution to the arts, NOTO, and the community. Barbara Waterman-Peters was selected for this inaugural program and has works featured in a dedicated area of the Redbud Community Room.

In November, we celebrated the opening of the *Avant Garde Underground*, a venue for artists with studios, a classroom, and an artist commons area. While still very new, it offers yet another venue for art exhibits.

Public Visual Art

There are over fifty murals and sculptures in the district. Information about the public works can be found via the *NOTO Art-Health Walk*, an initiative dedicated this past September that will enhance visitor engagement with public visual art in NOTO. This interactive experience will allow visitors to learn about a piece of art and get health information. Stormont Vail Health and Blue Cross Blue Shield Kansas are sponsors of this initiative. The project also received grant funding from the Kansas Creative Arts Industries Commission, as well as in-kind support from Sprout Creative and Create Uplift.



Three public visual art exhibits were installed this year.

- **Serenity Project** – Spearheaded by John Hunter, the Serenity Project structure is a tribute to the hard work, ingenuity and dedication of the incredible people who came together to create this unique, arts-centric destination in historic North Topeka.
- **Three Sisters of NOTO Mural** – The concept of this work was brought to us by Lisa LaRue Baker as part of the Dopika project. The mural is based on the Native American story that speaks to the companion planting garden which forms an ecosystem of three plants: corn, beans, squash. The topic is of particular relevance to the NOTO area as it also serves as a specific tribute to the three sisters Julia, Josephine, Victoria Gonville who were the owners of three of the “Half-Breed” Reserves awarded to Kaw individuals which is now NOTO.
- **Grassroots Crosswalk Mural** - Located at the intersection of Kansas and Laurent, the mural design and implementation was led by Staci Ogle. The crosswalk design includes the NOTO colors and waves, and a variety of Kansas grasses were included to represent that the NOTO Arts and Entertainment District was a grass-roots effort from the beginning. Various NOTO Artists and community members came together on an October weekend to paint the project. This is the first crosswalk project for the City of Topeka.



Performance Art and Events



The NOTO organization offered twelve distinct musical or theater performances, mostly at Redbud Park. Most of these are free to the community; only two events were ticketed. In addition, we coordinated many free district events, such as Arts-tember and Winter Celebrations, which held activities throughout the area and spanned over multiple weeks.

Goals for 2024

The NOTO Arts Center is regularly recognized as a premier venue for the exhibition of art. While we value and wish to maintain the facility as a place that welcomes art from all, from regionally recognized artists to young emerging artists who attend the local elementary school, we also want it to be a venue for national traveling exhibits. The organization has been approached about hosting a significant traveling exhibit late 2024.

With the establishment of the Avant Garde Underground, the NOTO Arts Center has much greater capacity to be a venue for the exhibit of art and to offer art activities and classes. A goal for 2024 is to reach maximum capacity of artists participating in the Artist Cooperative, to fill the walls of the Avant Garde Underground with their works, and to have regular offerings of classes and activities.

NOTO is the prominent place in Topeka for public art. Our goal is to continue efforts that are already underway to provide the locations and resources to have additional public art. We will continue to work for the development of Veterans Park which will eventually be the location for a plethora of murals and sculptures. We have also identified three significant locations for murals, hopefully for installation in 2024.

NOTO is recognized for its public entertainment in terms of performances at Redbud Park and district events. Established programs are again planned for 2024 with a goal of increased community participation. We also have plans to increase collaborations with other community organizations to offer additional community events.

Physical Enhancements

The goal for this area is to facilitate improvements that embrace public art, accommodate visitors, and serve businesses and residents. The major goals identified in the 2022 annual report were a shade structure of the west side of the Redbud Park Pavilion and the completion of renovations of the NOTO Arts Center basement.

We were not able to secure the funds for shade structure, but we did complete the Avant Garde Underground and had a dedication for the area in November. This accomplishment is significant in that it lays the foundation for greater access to art and more robust programming.

Another enhancement that did not get the deserved attention was the refurbishment of the Teeter Courtyard located on the south side of the NOTO Arts Center. Created by Shelly Bedsaul in 2019, Staci Ogle and her crew of young helpers maintained the work by refreshing the design with new paint.



Goals for 2024

The goal to offer protective covering for performers at Redbud Park remains. Alternative shade options are being considered and a funding request to the Topeka Community Foundation for partial funding has been submitted.

With its greater recognition and use as an arts and celebrations venue, there are additional enhancement goals for the NOTO Arts Center. The halogen lights in the Morris Art Gallery are antiquated and need to be replaced with gallery-style LED lights. Additional lighting is also needed in the vestibule and Redbud Community Room since these areas are increasingly used for art exhibits. Another needed renovation is a cabinet with sink area in the Redbud Community Room.

Veterans Park was previously referenced as a site for public art. The vision for Veterans Park is far more comprehensive than simply a venue for public art; the vision for the park also includes traditional park accommodations such as a playground and game court. We will continue to work with the City of Topeka, Shawnee County Parks and Recreation, and the Historic North Topeka East Neighborhood Improvement Association to realize this goal.

Another enhancement that has been a goal for some time is the intersection of Kansas and Gordon. For years we have lobbied to improve the safety of the intersection for both pedestrians and vehicles. This spring the City will undertake major renovations of the intersection.

JEDO funds were awarded to NOTO in 2018 to make various improvements to the district. The most significant of these was the development of Redbud Park, but it also included the lighting of the NOTO archway at Kanas and Gordon and the establishment of banners throughout the area. The archway lighting and the area banners need repair, renovations, or replacement. We plan to use Business Improvement District funds to remedy these problems.

District Advocacy/Community Development

Efforts in this area serve to facilitate development of NOTO as a thriving arts and entertainment district, and as a desirable destination to visit, work and live. This includes encouraging tourism, economic development, and working to address public policy issues that will enhance NOTO's capacity and address disruptive conditions. The accomplishments listed in the prior sections did not just happen. These were years in the making and involved a lot of behind the scenes work with the City, County, Greater Topeka Partnership, and others.

Advocacy requires perseverance and a willingness to push for equitable resources and services for NOTO. One of goals identified in NOTO strategic planning in 2022 was for the NOTO organization to position itself as an influencer in those areas that affect the NOTO district. We continue to be active in the North Topeka Business Association and were asked to serve on the Riverfront Advisory Council. We continue to seek opportunities to be involved in organizations related to tourism and the arts.

Three areas of development opportunities realized this past year include the NOTO Business Improvement District (BID), NOTO Redevelopment Incentive Grant, and Common Consumption.

NOTO Business Improvement District

The NOTO Business Improvement District (BID) took effect at the beginning of the year. It was approved by the Topeka Governing Body after having received staunch support by NOTO businesses. The BID is an assessment to businesses based on business type and physical size of the building. Funds collected from the BID are used for maintenance, safety and security, beautification, and marketing. Funds were limited this first year and the only things funded were weekly trash service of public trash receptacles, basic snow removal service of public sidewalks, and materials for painting the crosswalk at Kansas and Laurent. Businesses established in NOTO prior to 2008 may opt out of the assessment.

NOTO Redevelopment Incentive Grant

The NOTO Redevelopment Incentive Grant is a City funded initiative managed by the NOTO organization. Downtown Topeka has benefited from this funding for quite some time. After considerable advocacy for NOTO to also receive funding, in September 2023 the City Governing Body authorized \$50,000 for 2024. At the same time, the City Manager authorized an additional \$50,000 for 2023. By end of the year, these funds were authorized for nine projects in the NOTO district.

Common Consumption

The NOTO organization advocated for consideration of common consumption legislation through outreach to legislative representatives, testimony at the house hearing, and meetings with the City Attorney and NOTO businesses. Common Consumption legislation was passed, and the City recently approved a resolution with application in Downtown and NOTO.

Goals for 2024

An overarching goal in this area is to continue to challenge the status quo regarding resources and services; to remind policy makers and community influencers of NOTO's value to Topeka, Shawnee County, and the region.

For the Business Improvement District, the City will be sending BID assessment notices early in the year. In 2023, the NOTO organization and the Bid Committee actively communicated the importance of the BID to area businesses, but despite these efforts, payment of this City assessment was sluggish and, in far too many cases, simply ignored. As new businesses come into the district the BID will be considered a normal part of doing business. Further, businesses must be in financial good standing, which includes payment of BID assessment, to be eligible for the Redevelopment Incentive Grant. A goal for 2024 is for the City to play a more active role in securing business obligations and to secure higher rates of participation.

While the NOTO Redevelopment Incentive Grant mostly reflects that of Downtown Topeka, we structured the process of awards differently in that the applications are competitive, and funds are distributed bi-annually. A goal for 2024 will be to assess the processes and adjust as necessary to better serve the needs of the applicants and the district.

There are many details to work through regarding common consumption. The NOTO organization will work with the City and NOTO businesses to ensure successful implementation.

Finally, we will continue to advocate that the NOTO organization should have a greater presence and participation with community organizations involved in areas pertinent to NOTO.

Promotion

Promotion is about telling the story of NOTO in a manner that is inclusive and holistic. The marketing budget for 2023 was \$35,000 of which \$15,000 was earmarked for the **NOTO Art Health Walk**. The additional funds were used for marketing through television, radio, digital content placement, print publications, social media, and website development. We have continued our efforts to including marketing content in Hispanic written and verbal form.

NOTO has a contractual relationship with WIBW television for promotion of events and NOTO Brand, this includes regular presence on WIBW Red Couch, ads on WIBW website, and monthly

commercial airtime. In addition, the NOTO weather camera continues to play a vital role in promotion through WIBW's platforms.



WIBW's market area is generally Northeast Kansas, which is where most of NOTO's visitors come. But as previously noted, we also attract visitors well beyond. According to the Americans for the Arts, 68% of tourism is driven by art, culture, and history. In partnership with Visit Topeka and Create Uplift, NOTO received a grant from the Kansas Department of Tourism to create three video ads for distribution at six communities two to four hours away. Work has already begun on this project though most of the work and the

final product will be completed in 2024.

Representatives of the NOTO organization and other NOTO guests participated in forty-two media interviews this past year. As a regular feature on the WIBW Red Couch program, NOTO staff were guests on the program twenty-three times. The other nineteen were on KSNT, Fox43 News, and Alpha Media Radio.



Social media was a significant promotion outlet with about 500 Facebook social media posts. Facebook increased to 16,500 "followers" and 14,300 "likes." Instagram followers increased from 1,860 to 2,320.

Email marketing consisted of bi-weekly communications to a general interest list, targeted emails to Friends of NOTO, and occasional targeted emails to special groups such as media or artists. General interest emails have an open rate of about 73%. Friends of NOTO email open rate is about 80%. Overall, email contacts increased from 1,560 to 2,050.

The NOTO web page is a prominent place for promotion as visitors are directed to the web page from various other platforms. Significant updates to the page were made in 2022 and continue to be updated through a contract with Create Uplift.

Goals for 2024

A major goal for 2024 is the completion and implementation of video ads for broader regional distribution.

We will continue our efforts to provide bilingual information on the website, social media platforms, and printed posters in an effort to gain more participation from those underserved communities.

Previously referenced in the section Physical Enhancements, the many banners that were installed on the bridges and throughout the North Topeka area need repair, replacement, or removal. The banners help promote the brand of NOTO. Also referenced previously is the potential for three significant locations for new murals. These locations offer more than a surface, they are strategic locations that would also serve as a welcome to the district.

Resource Development

Resource development requires a multi-faceted approach for economic sustainability and human development. Economic sustainability refers to our efforts to generate revenue to cover programming and operations. Human development refers to the support and development of NOTO staff, the board, and volunteers.

Economic Sustainability

Revenue for the NOTO organization comes from grants, donations, and sponsorships. In 2023 the organization received support, both cash and in-kind, from over sixty organizations. While we very much value and appreciate large financial contributions from foundations, corporations, or grants, we also appreciate that a contribution from a small business may be a significant sacrifice. For some organizations, their investment in NOTO involved contributions throughout the year. For example, there are many organizations that sponsor events throughout the year.

It is important to note that the NOTO organization has several areas or funds in which donors can specify their contributions:

- **General Support** – General donations, which include Friends of NOTO memberships, are unrestricted and may be used to support the organization, as necessary.
- **Endowment** – The NOTO endowment fund was established in 2022 with the Topeka Community Foundation as an investment for NOTO's future. All revenue generated by the Redbud Festival - NOTO in Bloom event is dedicated to the endowment fund.
- **Heidi Linne Norris Trejo Art Fund** – This fund is earmarked for the arts in NOTO. The season of Arts-tember is dedicated to raising money for this cause.
- **Sponsorships** – Sponsorships provide financial support for district events, such as Redbud Festival or Summer Concert Series, programs, such as the NOTO Art Health Walk, or facilities. Sponsors benefit from name recognition and advertising for their support.

The following organizations supported the NOTO organization at some level in 2023:

785 Arts LLC	Midwest Coating
Ace Plumbing	Norsemen Brewing Company
Arco-Strathman	NOTO Escapes
Arts Connect	Oldcastle Infrastructure
Brad Noller American Family Insurance	Onyx Salon & Wellness Cafe
Barrel House Liquor	Performance Tire
Bernina	Phoenix Finds NOTO
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas	Polo Custom Products
Bob's Janitorial	Prairie Band Casino & Resort
Briar Payne Meade Insurance	Redbud Foundation
Bryden Foundation	Reser's Fine Foods
Capitol Federal Savings	Round Table Bookstore
Clayton Wealth Partners	Security Benefit
Cohort Digital	Senne Construction
Core First Bank & Trust	Schmidtlein Excavating Inc
Cumulus Magic 107.7	Silver Lake Bank
Decades Garage	Skinner's Garden Store
Donaldson's Jewelers	Sprout Creative
Evergy	Stormont Vail Health
FHL Bank	Studio 831
Fire Me Up Ceramics	Toot Sweet
Gayle Burns Realty Professionals	Topeka Electric Motor
The Glass Station	Topeka Community Foundation
Goodell, Stratton, Edmonds & Palmer LLP	Topeka Landscape
Greater Topeka Partnership	Topeka Rescue Mission
Historic North Topeka East NIA	Totem Technologies
John Baker Studio	Umbrella
Kansas One Gas	Vaughn Pediatric Dentistry
Kansas Tourism	Visit Topeka
Kaw River Rustics	Walmart
Kaw Valley Bank	The Wheel Barrel
Kiwanis Club Topeka	WIBW-TV 19
Matryoshka Tattoo	

We met or exceeded goals in most fundraising areas. The strongest area of growth was sponsorships, which was about 35% higher than the set goals. Sponsorships provide financial support for district events, such as Redbud Festival or Summer Concert Series, programs, such as the NOTO Art Health Walk, or facilities. Sponsors benefit from name recognition and advertising for their support. Considering our relatively brief history of seeking sponsorships, our success in securing sponsorships is remarkable. We attribute this success to the value businesses place on being a part of NOTO and supporting our free community events, and the advertising recognition we give to sponsors.

Facility rentals and vendor market leases are a source of revenue. In 2023 there were eleven leases of the Redbud Park Pavilion and four of the Arts Center. About \$3,500 revenue was generated from vendor market leases.

A Legacy Giving Program was initiated this year. While NOTO is still in its infancy, there have been many who have supported our efforts over the years. The program provides a structure for those who wish to consider support for NOTO as part of their lasting legacy. The program is managed by the Topeka Community Foundation.

Human Resources and Development

The expanded needs of the organization required an expansion of staff roles. The position of Resource Development and Finance Coordinator was created to provide fundraising support and to provide fiscal management that had previously been provided by external contract. While the fundraising responsibilities are extremely important, the fiscal management and oversight has been invaluable. We also expanded the half-time Administrative Assistant to a full-time Administrative and Program Support position. In addition to guest relations, this position provides program and administrative support for professional staff.

Fostering the continuous development of a high-capacity organization, there has been dedicated and concerted efforts to provide consultation, professional support, and learning opportunities to both staff and board. In addition to regular professional development meetings with professional staff, opportunities for seminars and conferences have been provided. Every board meeting included board development.

Goals for 2024

Two significant naming sponsorship commitments were made towards the end of the year, but as they will not take effect until 2024, they are mentioned here as goals. Federal Home Loan Bank Topeka committed \$25,000 over the next five years to sponsor the NOTO Arts Center Redbud Community Room. Clayton Wealth Partners committed \$15,000 over the next five years to sponsors the newly dedicated Avant Garde Underground. A goal for 2024 is to pursue additional naming sponsorships at the Avant Garde Underground as well as the Redbud Park Pavilion.

The importance of event sponsorship cannot be overstated. Without these we simply cannot provide the many free community events we offer throughout the year. While we have done well with securing sponsorships and, as mentioned previously, have many organizations that sponsor every year, many of them for several events, it is still very much an event by event, year by year situation. Just as we have had the fortune for a multi-year commitment for facility naming by Federal Home Loan Bank and Clayton Wealth Partners, and a multi-year commitment for program sponsorship from Stormont Vail Health and Blue Cross Blue Shield, we seek a multi-year event sponsorship, especially from the presenting and major sponsors. Aside from the goal

for multi-year commitments, we also strive for an overall increase. We have set a goal of an overall increase of 40% from our overall 2023 sponsorship goal.

Donations were a bit flat this past year, though Friends of NOTO memberships increased significantly. With participation and support from the NOTO board and other Friends of NOTO, we believe the Friends of NOTO membership can continue to grow. A goal for this next year is to increase the total number of memberships (from all levels) from the current 249 to 300.

With the completion of the Avant Garde Underground at the NOTO Arts Center, we have a new source of revenue. The Avant Garde Underground includes two large studios for lease. We will also be initiating the NOTO Artist Cooperative, a membership program for artists where they can use the space for individual work, collaborations, and teaching. We expect the Avant Garde Underground will generate about \$15,000 new revenue.

Summary

2023 was a challenging year for the NOTO organization. We expected to do more, and we did, but we also knew that our potential for securing the financial resources to support our plans would be precarious. Well established supporters let us know that economic conditions would limit their capacity to support the organization as they had in the past.

We have made significant strides in the past six years. NOTO is the pride of the community and a major attraction to visitors. Our efforts have contributed to enhanced social and economic vitality of the neighborhood, the Topeka community, and the region. In this brief period of time, NOTO has become an important, if not indispensable, aspect of the community.

We expect 2024 will also be challenging, but we also know that the more NOTO demonstrates its value to the community, the more the community will lend its support.

