

Edmund C. Bovey Award
Art Gallery of Ontario, Baillie Court
Thursday, October 29, 2009

When I succeeded Jim as President of the AGO and we were embarking on a monstrous capital campaign, Jim gave me a succinct briefing on the state of the Gallery: "Two years ago we stood at the edge of an abyss, since then we have taken a giant step forward."

Now to the Bovey. Like Greg Norman, "I owe a lot to my parents, especially my mother and father." In any event, I accept this marvellous Award with great pleasure and even greater humility for I am very conscious that there are numerous dedicated and effective supporters of the arts, many in this audience, whose claim to the Edmund C. Bovey Award is at least as deserving as mine. I am fortunate that Shawn St. Michael and Erin Prendergast of the Art Gallery of Ontario, determined to test their mettle by seeing if they could secure this Award for someone of modest accomplishments. I was awed as they unleashed their campaign with military precision. For those with a historical bent, it was somewhat reminiscent of Guderian's Panzer thrust through Belgium and France, or perhaps Patton's romp through southern Europe.

Albeit, deserving or not, I now have the bully pulpit and intend to use it. But I preface my comments with the observation that bitter experience has taught me that people are much more receptive to my ideas if I attribute them to Bill Gates and accordingly, I shamelessly do so. I have been a fervent supporter of the arts for three reasons, any one of which warrants that fervour.

First, the arts provide sheer aesthetic pleasure stretching the senses and the mind, and exemplifying the ultimate in human endeavour.

Secondly, the arts, utilized in education, enhance the learning experience as amply demonstrated by the success of the Royal Conservatory of Music's Learning Through the Arts programme, and thirdly, the greater the role of the arts in a community, the more effective that community is in attracting and retaining the most talented, very much Richard Florida's, "spikey city" phenomenon. While "sheer aesthetic pleasure" more than justifies support of the arts, I want to posit the practical economic case for "Business in the Arts". We are fortunate to live in this country with an abundance of natural resources, an unmatched natural environment, a quality of life second to none, a medical system which, although imperfect, covers all Canadians and ensures a longer average life than our wealthier southern neighbour, perhaps, the world's most accepting society of diversity and an environment in which political parties may still engage in rational debate.

But I am concerned that the recovery which appears to be underway will lead to complacency as we ride the wave of escalating commodity prices and neglect our abysmal record in productivity. Without improvements in productivity, we shall struggle to raise our standard of living which, in turn, is key to sustaining let alone improving our quality of life, indeed, to having choices as to the quality of life we as Canadians desire.

The arts through their impact on our ability to learn and our ability to attract and retain the most talented are critical to achieving our productivity goals and that is the practical reason for business involvement in the arts.

As you know, the Bovey Award carries with it \$20,000 which I may donate to the arts institution of my choice. Both I and the TELUS Foundation are matching the Award and accordingly I am able to designate \$60,000 to the Art Gallery of Ontario to create a new access program for children from schools in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods. Over the next 18 months more than 6,000 children who otherwise would not have the means to attend the Art Gallery of Ontario, will receive a free visit and education program conducted by AGO staff.

Conscious that blessed are the brief for they will be invited back, I thank you.