By the time this column goes to press, the results of Scott County's referendum for the proposed River Renaissance project will not yet be decided. I can only hope that Scott County voters at least go to the polls on this important issue. If sensibility rules, the vote will be "yes." If not, then how sad for this entire community. I wish I had a nickel for all the residents who live in or near the Quad Cities but not in Scott County, who said they wished they could vote for the project. They all recognized how much it would do for the entire community, not just Davenport.

There are so many demands on private sector donations for projects of all kinds throughout the Quad Cities, especially now. To expect the private sector to make up the $25 million we will lose from the state and county if we vote against the referendum is somewhat unreasonable when you consider the competition for private funding throughout the Quad Cities. The River Renaissance project alone already includes a substantial majority of private funding. The private sector funding pie is only so big.

There are countless organizations, services, and projects that depend heavily, if not solely, on private funding from the community. For every dollar we lose from the state, the private sector must make up those dollars or such projects, services, and organizations go away. Most of us contribute to many different organizations, churches, annual and special projects as they occur. From church donations to giving to social services organizations (homeless shelters, health facilities, children's care, to name a few) and public programming (public radio, schools, libraries, law enforcement, to name a few) to patronizing museums, arts centers, and parks to contributing to disaster funds to supporting political factions. The list goes on.

In the final analysis, River Renaissance reflects a trajectory of possible growth for Scott County by establishing the kind of dynamic base of amenities essential to attracting companies with high-paying jobs. It is a numbers game. In order to compete, we need to provide a quality of life for residents who live and work here. The more we invest in our own amenities, schools, infrastructure, affordable housing, and economy, the more we have to offer companies without having to heavily subsidize them with tax breaks and TIFs.

Great Mask Auction Better Than Ever!

The fifth annual Great Mask Auction was one of the finest thematic events ever. MidCoast Fine Arts hosts this exceptional fund-raiser every year to raise money for artists and for its organization. One hundred percent of the proceeds from the artwork sold at the event goes to the artists. This is a rare concept, but it works, especially because most of the artists donate some portion of the sale price to MidCoast. Local and regional artists create works around the theme of masks. There were more than fifty works of art, ranging from paintings of masks to masks made of metal to photographs of masks to stained glass in the form of a lamp with a mask theme. It is a creative and whimsical evening, complete with a costume competition. The participants come up with hilarious and terrifically accurate costumes (my favorite was Queen Amidala), and the audience judges their favorites with applause and laughter. The auctioneer does a sensational job of squeezing every last nickel out of bidders in a spirit of fund-raising that makes it a pleasure to give. The Blue Cat Brew Pub caters the event and the food is terrific. Not only is it more on the gourmet side of fare, it is dangerously delicious, making it perfect for a

Halloween celebration. The event is held at the Villa de Chantal, my old haunting grounds as a child because I attended school there for many years. MidCoast decorates this magnificent old building with all the charm of a decrepit tomb inhabited by ghouls and gore. It is visually stunning as only a collaboration of artists can be. Every year it gets bigger, better, funnier, and hopefully more prosperous for MidCoast and area artists. MidCoast's mission of putting art where the people are is one of the noblest and most meaningful efforts in terms of the promotion, facilitation, and ongoing support of the arts, especially at the local level. Congratulations to everyone who helped make it such a successful and fun evening.

Living-Wage Expert to Speak

Robert Pollin a professor at the University of Massachusetts, and co-author of the book *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy*
, will make two presentations to the community this week: at a public awareness rally from 5:30 to 7 p.m. on Wednesday, October 24, at Laborers Local #309 Union Hall (2835 7th Avenue in Rock Island) and at 10:30, Thursday, October 25, at Augustana College's Centennial Hall. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend.