

## Take a Good Look Around

Written by Todd McGreevy  
Tuesday, 03 April 2001 18:00

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Is anyone else getting tired of the world-according-to-the-armchair-quarterbacks-at-the-Quad-City-Times? Case in point: "Keeping Score in the Quality of Life," published on Sunday, March 25. Drawing on "the observations of hundreds of Quad Citians, scores of reports, and visits to other similarly sized U. S. cities," the *QC Times* graded our community's quality of life in subject areas such as Jobs, Transportation, Health Care, Climate, and more.

The most disturbing (and revealing) evaluation was under the subject area of "Recreation & the Arts," grading the Quad Cities at a C+. At first glance, I was dismayed by the obviously misguided and inaccurate grading of a C+. This area has an abundance of arts and recreation, on both sides of the river and in many forms for all ages. But then one has to consider this letter grading system is based on the survey responses from *Quad City Times* readers. And if the majority of those readers see the arts and recreation in the Quad Cities as barely above average, then those readers have only the *Quad City Times*

to thank for providing barely above average coverage of this area's huge offering of arts and recreation.

However, beyond the empirical survey of grades cast by readers is the consistently short-sighted and misleading analysis by *QC Times* reporters and editors. Take for example the headline "Projects Would Help Fill Arts Void." What arts void? Citing the proposed Figge Arts Center, IMAX theatre, and the downtown Davenport music corridor, the article states, "Without those projects, access to a wide variety of arts is limited to a handful of venues." A handful of venues? Perhaps it's this type of mainstream thinking that continually relies on the "silver bullet" model of big-scale projects that will put us on the map – really show we are a big city on the river – that keeps us from actually celebrating the collective strength of the large and diverse list of equity the Quad Cities enjoys.

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Consider the following “handful of venues” for arts and recreation: Augustana College Art Gallery, Davenport Museum of Art, Galvin Fine Arts Center, MidCoast Fine Arts galleries (at seven different locations), Quad City ArtsCenter, Family Museum of Arts & Science, The Putnam Museum of Natural Science & History, The Mark, RiverCenter/Adler Theatre, Circa 21, Playcrafters Barn Theatre, QC Music Guild, LeClaire Park Bandshell, The Rock Island Arts & Entertainment District, The Quad City Botanical Center, and soon the Quad City International Airport. Then there are the organizations not mentioned above that provide arts and recreation at various venues such as the Quad City Symphony Orchestra, The Mississippi Valley Blues Society, The Quad Cities Jazz Society, The Bix Biederbecke Memorial Society, The Genesis Guild, and The Quad Cities Ballet Company. This does not include the various active music, drama, and arts programs at St. Ambrose University, Marycrest International University, Blackhawk College, and Augustana College. Nor do these “handful of venues” include the numerous commercial arts and music businesses in the Quad Cities such as the Rock Island Brewing Company, Glass Impact and Fowler Studios, Akiko Koiso Gallery, Dot’s Pots, Meyers Art Gallery, Evergreen Artworks, O’Meara’s, Blackthorn, and too many others to name here. Prove to me the Quad Cities does not have a “wide variety of arts.”

This laundry list doesn’t even attempt to outline the wealth of sports (both spectator and participant) and outdoor recreation (both land- and water-based) this area has to offer year-round.

I guess it’s all about perspective. And the *Times* is relying on the perspective of editors who are new to this market. New perspectives are healthy and needed, but the laziness of such a showing warrants no applause. The opening sentence of the section on the arts cites the Welcome Center in LeClaire, Iowa, but fails to mention that the facility boasts a fine arts gallery that won an award for arts and tourism from the state. Certainly if the

*QC Times*

measures all Quad Citians based on the grades submitted by their own readership, Quad Citians are, as the article states, “in the dark ... for cultural things to do.” And yes, oftentimes many don’t know “what we have in our own backyard.” But instead of making false and misleading statements that we have an “arts void” and a “handful of venues,” why not peer over your own computer monitors and inform the community of the huge wealth of art and recreation available here? Even doing an informal survey of your own employees at the

*Times*

will reveal talented musicians, artists, and actors who’d be happy to provide you a cheat sheet or some direction. Certainly more accurate than the pathetic “from the hip” disservice such analysis does for this community’s ability to compete as a top tier Midwestern destination for living, working, and playing.

The quality of a community’s daily newspaper is part of what makes up an area’s overall quality of life. Perhaps the *Times* should cease analyzing and critiquing from on high about what “we all need” to do and quit trying to shape “how we think about our collective quality of life.” Certainly quit relying on editors who have come in from out of the market to “keep score” on our quality of life. Create a better, more accurate and more connected newspaper, and the rest of the community will take care of themselves. A good place to start would be practicing a bit of what they preached in Editor John Humenik’s intro to the Quality of Life Index: “We all

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need to get out more and take a good look around.”

Please do.