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Cultural Alliance of Nevada members (from left) Pam Alvey, Juddy Harris and Tia Flores stand next to Carson City Arts and Culture Coordinator Mark Salinas and Las Vegas artist Zet Gold during a "post party" following Arts Advocacy Day.
PHOTO/JERI CHADWELL

Fine points

Arts Advocacy Day

March 15 was Arts Advocacy Day at the Nevada Legislature—an annual event that brings students, teachers and professionals from the state's arts organizations together to meet with lobbyists and legislators.

Before the Senate and Assembly convened in their respective halls that morning, a group called the Note-Ables performed—playing classic rock tunes like "Stuck in the Middle with You" by Stealers Wheel. The bandmates, who play some 40 gigs a year, are all people with disabilities.

"A big part of their mission as a group is to be advocates for disability awareness—because we tend to think that people with disabilities, people who are homeless, people on the margins of society aren't creative and don't have anything to offer to the arts," said Manal Toppozada, the executive director and founder of Note-Able Music Therapy Services, a nonprofit that sprang up around the performing group.

Since the organization's members have a stake in issues ranging from health care and disability services to the arts, they're always aware of what's going on when the Legislature is in session. Lobbyist Tom Clark, who called arts advocacy the "treasure" among the work he does for industries ranging from renewable energy to mining, said the group's performance that day was crucial in creating an impression with legislators—and in brightening the mood in the capitol.

"It has been depressing in this building for the last couple of weeks," Clark said. "Resignations of majority leaders, a resignation yesterday of another legislator. It's got this 'ick' feeling to it. Today, because of what these guys pulled off, it brought a smile to a lot of people's faces."

They'll remember that, Clark said, when it comes time for making decisions

on arts funding. Arts Advocacy Day is a decades-old tradition. This was the second year it was hosted by Cultural Alliance Nevada (CAN), whose representatives were there alongside nearly 200 other participants, including more than 100 students and their teachers. They chat with legislators and lobbyists about topics ranging from funding for K-12 arts education and private organizations, to how to use the arts to attract big companies like Tesla and Apple.

According to Clark, these companies' "employees are saying, 'Where does my daughter go for ballet? Where can I go for an art class? What kinds of classes are going to be offered in my school?'"

The group also promotes the addition of an "A" for arts in models of education, which usually focus on science, technology, engineering and math—the "STEM" approach. CAN Executive Director Tia Flores thinks making the arts a core component of education is crucial.

"It's how you approach the problem," she said. "It's how you approach that project-based learning. And it's not just focusing on the outcome of it but, you know, that inquisitive, creative mind, that problem solving mind."

CAN and Clark also advocate for funding for the Nevada Arts Council, a division of the Nevada Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, which works to promote arts in the state. Flores explained that funding for the Arts Council comes from the National Endowment for the Arts and is matched in Nevada's governor's budget.

"A big part of the reason we advocate is that art is everywhere—and we have to remind people how it got there. Who was the artist? How did this get built? What is the impact that it's having on everybody. ... Art is everywhere, and we just take it for granted."

Learn more about Cultural Alliance Nevada here:
culturalalliancenv.org.