

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

THE STAR'S EDITORIAL

Watch out, Edinburgh: Local events are a worthy venture

From fringe to mainstream, arts enrich KC

Earlier this year, the initial word on the Big Five Ideas campaign from the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce officials included the notion of a major Kansas City Arts Festival in the image of the Edinburgh festival.

The hope was that such a festival would begin as a local attraction and build into a regional and ultimately national attraction.

It was a great idea, and we backed it.

Well, it's nice to check things off the city's to-do list, especially before that list is even officially finished. But Kansas Citians, and this city's leaders, should pay attention to the growing and impressive 11-day Kansas City Fringe Festival. It's everything dreamed of in an arts festival, offering visual arts, theater, music, fashion and performance. This festival even has a youth section — young performers with family-friendly acts. Better yet, it's already here and is already on its way to becoming a regional attraction.

Often the best civic growth ideas are organic, germinating from the roots up. And things don't get much more organic than the Fringe Festival. It started in 2005 as an idea held by two groups, the current festival organizers and the Kansas City Public Library. As The Star's Robert Trussell noted, it was a fringe festival started by people who weren't exactly sure what a fringe festival should be.

Now it's packed with interesting and inventive acts. Today alone there are about 80 offerings around town, and the festival runs through Sunday afternoon. It is not Edinburgh, which boasts 2,500 acts a day. But Edinburgh wasn't Edinburgh in the 1940s when it kicked off with eight acts. The term "fringe" comes from the time when original acts were not able to get into what was then the larger Edinburgh Arts Festival, so they set up stages around the outskirts, or on the fringe.

The chamber's instinct to promote the arts is a good one. The Kansas City arts community as a



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Laura Suddeth performed during "Inspiration," part of the Fringe Festival, at the Off Center Theatre in Crown Center.

whole is booming. From the popularity of First Friday galleries tours in the Crossroads District to the soon-to-open Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts to the fantastic new digs of the Kansas City Ballet and the growing regional and national reputation of

the area, our city is becoming known as a center for the arts. First Fridays led the way to second, third and fourth Friday arts openings. It would be a very smart move to capitalize on and boost that image.

While organizers have shown themselves adept at creating a lot

FRINGE FESTIVAL

The KC Fringe Festival continues through Sunday at various venues. Shows cost \$5 to \$10 with the purchase of a \$5 festival button. For show information, go to www.kcfringe.org or call 816-359-9195.

on a small budget, there is certainly room for help in promotion to attract both visitors and acts locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Last year, the festival grew by 68 percent, totaling 14,000 tickets sold. This year it will top 20,000 tickets sold, continuing a very encouraging trend.

The bottom line: The Fringe Festival is here and it is growing. Kansas Citians unfamiliar with it have a few more days to sample its offerings. Give it a try and be able to say in future years that you helped it develop into part of this city's great arts success story.