

Dave Vetta champions Milwaukee's performing arts scene

Pay it Forward

By Lauren Anderson

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Dave Vetta

Milwaukee region advisory board chair

First Business Bank

Nonprofit served: United Performing Arts Fund

Service: Campaign co-chair



Photo: Lila Aryan Photography

At one point, Dave Vetta considered performing arts to be a luxury – a nice thing for a community to have, but not vital.

“Over the last couple of decades, I have learned that it is not a nice-to-have, but a must-have,” he said.

It's with that conviction that Vetta, Milwaukee region advisory board chair at First Business Bank, has dedicated his spare time to working with United Performing Arts Fund, an umbrella nonprofit that raises funds on behalf of southeastern Wisconsin performing arts organizations.

Being away from Milwaukee while living in Columbus, Ohio for 15 years illustrated for Vetta the importance of having a thriving arts scene.

“They did not have a collective organization like UPAF and, as a result, I saw organizations deteriorate and arts funds and causes disappear,” Vetta said. “It wasn’t a healthy environment for the arts.”

When he and his family returned to Milwaukee 12 years ago and saw UPAF’s approach to sustaining the performing arts – with its funds benefiting organizations like Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, First Stage, Skylight Music Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Milwaukee Ballet and Florentine Opera Co. – Vetta knew it was something he needed to support.

After years of working with the organization, Vetta is one of three co-chairs to head up UPAF’s 2018 campaign, soliciting donations from individuals, companies and foundations on behalf of the organization.

Last year’s campaign, which coincided with the organization’s 50th anniversary, brought in more than \$12.2 million. The 2018 campaign goal has not yet been announced.

Two newer areas of focus during this year’s campaign, Vetta said, are raising awareness in Waukesha County of UPAF’s impact and drawing attention to the importance of connecting veterans’ families to the arts.

With UPAF’s outreach programs reaching more than 100,000 children, Vetta also sees it as a worthy cause from a long-term workforce development standpoint. Students who participate in the arts are the kinds of future employees the state needs to retain, he said.

“This is a little bit selfish from a business standpoint, but those kids end up being very creative, motivated, innovative workers,” he said. “They’re capable, they’re confident. They have a lot of versatility. And particularly in Wisconsin, with the need for workforce, the arts can help with that particular need.”

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