

The Gazette

Project would spotlight southern Colorado arts

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Colorado Springs is known for many things, from our beautiful natural surroundings to our rich history. Yet few people outside our community know about the art and culture our area has to offer. This soon may change with an extraordinary work of art that will forever transform the way people view southern Colorado.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who brought us such famous art as The Gates in New York City's Central Park and Wrapped Reichstag in Berlin, have chosen our region as the location for their next work of art, and what a work it will be! Known as Over The River, this project entails suspending nearly six miles of silver-colored fabric over the Arkansas River. Situated in eight separate locations between Salida and Cañon City, these translucent fabric panels will be displayed for two weeks, likely during the summer of 2012.

While the work will be visible to all from Highway 50, one of the reasons the artists selected the Arkansas River is because it is highly accessible by raft, canoe and kayak. From the river below, boaters will get a particularly unique view of this artwork, as the fabric will reflect the colors of the landscape and sky.

There are, of course, significant economic benefits to be gained as a result of this artwork. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's previous projects have drawn multitudes of visitors, and Over The River will be no exception. During its two-week exhibition, Over The River is expected to attract hundreds of thousands of viewers. Business owners and tax coffers in Colorado Springs — as the largest nearby city — may enjoy a significant boost. Furthermore, Over The River is to be funded entirely by the artists, as Christo and Jeanne-Claude do not accept sponsorships, public subsidies or grants of any kind.

But I most look forward to the way in which this project could enhance our state's growing cultural prominence and change how people view southern Colorado. Hosting a work of this magnitude will help draw attention to other features that make our community such a wonderful place — especially arts amenities such as the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, the Sangre de Cristo Arts Center, the Smokebrush Foundation for the Arts, Colorado College's Edith Kinney Gaylord Cornerstone Arts Center and more. Additionally, our region as a whole would gain a far greater appreciation for the arts as a result of Over The River.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude are working to get the necessary approvals to move forward with their plans. They have even requested an Environmental Impact Statement for the project in order to ensure that the impacts are minimal and the artwork causes as little disruption as possible. The BLM will begin this process in the near future, and I encourage everyone to get involved and submit input on Over The River.

I hope Colorado Springs and surrounding communities will lend support to Christo and Jeanne-Claude as they work to create Over The River. It is a privilege to have the chance to host this project.



Celeste is the president of Colorado College, president of the Colorado Springs Downtown Partnership and co-chair of Imagine Downtown.