

1 **Suzette Surkamer**

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3 **London: I am talking with Suzie Surkamer. She is the Executive Director of**
4 **the South Carolina Arts Commission.**

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6 **Surkamer:** Thank you for having me today.
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8 **London: What is your vision for the state of South Carolina?**
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10 **Surkamer:** My vision for the state of South Carolina is a prosperous state that
11 has a wide variety of jobs and opportunities for people that is based on the
12 strengths of the past, where we are currently and always working on the future.
13 But within that, being conscious about our communities, our citizens and our
14 quality of life.
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16 **London: Where does the South Carolina Arts Commission and arts in**
17 **general fit into that vision?**
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19 **Surkamer:** I think the arts have an incredible role to play in the future of our
20 state, in the economy, and also in people and their lives. The arts are vital in our
21 communities. Many of our communities want to expand what they do in the arts
22 and make the community a better place to be and to live and where people want
23 to live. The arts have been growing in our state for many, many years, but I think
24 we are on the brink of an even brighter side of the arts where it plays a role in
25 many more aspects of the state than people normally think.
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27 **London: You mention the connection between the economy and the arts.**
28 **Can you expand on that?**
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30 **Surkamer:** Certainly. The arts industry in South Carolina is quite large. In fact,
31 the arts industry employs over 30,000 people in our state. It has an economic
32 impact of \$2.2 billion dollars and returns an incredible amount of money to the
33 state in taxes on arts activities. It is a major industry in our state. That is one way
34 it plays to the economy. In addition, we also have the role to play in that the
35 state wants companies to locate here and when companies locate somewhere
36 they certainly want a good education system and we have a very strong arts
37 education system in our state within the school system. In addition, the people
38 that come frequently, mostly, especially people in the creative class, what their
39 community looks like and what there is to do in that community is very important.
40 The arts play an ever-growing significant role in that.
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42 **London: You mentioned the creative class and that is something we**
43 **frequently hear of in Richard Florida's work as well as what we see in most**
44 **prosperous areas of South Carolina. Can you expand on why art is so**
45 **important in the community?**
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1 **Surkamer:** Well, art provides a sense of place, plays a big role in that. It
2 provides a link to what that community is, an artist's interpretation of that
3 community. All of that helps people feel good about their community, want to be
4 in that community and want to participate in that community. The arts help in
5 providing opportunities for people to be able to participate in the arts and people
6 that participate in the arts are usually also very engaged in other civic activities.
7 So what a community wants are for people to live, work, play and be involved in
8 their community. The arts really help with that, as well as providing an outlet for
9 people as far as producing art. Whether it's as a professional or as an amateur,
10 participating in the arts as a volunteer, as an audience, participant, etc.

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12 **London: We talked about arts in the prosperous communities, the**
13 **prosperous part of South Carolina but another part of South Carolina that**
14 **is not so well off, that is in need of artists, the creative class and**
15 **prosperity. Is there any way that the Arts Commission is involved in these**
16 **rural communities?**

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18 **Surkamer:** Well, it's interesting because the Arts Commission was started by
19 legislation in 1967. It did various activities and programs for quite a few years.
20 In 1980, we surveyed the state to find out what they wanted in the arts and from
21 the State Arts Commission and what came out was that the rural areas of our
22 state wanted their arts also. Sure, they wanted to drive occasionally an hour to
23 go to something but in general, on a day-to-day basis they wanted the arts in
24 their community. So the Arts Commission really started focusing on how to
25 involve the rural communities in the arts. So actually, when you drive around our
26 state now, people just aren't aware of this, but there are arts activities
27 everywhere throughout our state. We work in all 46 counties, not just in the
28 urban areas. Our staff spends a lot of time in the rural areas. A lot of artists
29 prefer to live in the rural areas. Not all, by any means, but a lot of them. And I
30 think that some of the smaller communities have understood how to use artists
31 as a very creative aspect of their community and involved in community planning
32 also. They bring a special vision and a special perspective on how to make
33 things work in small towns that may not have a lot of resources financially or
34 even as far as infrastructure.

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36 **London: Frequently, rural communities provide inspiration for works of**
37 **art.**

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39 **Surkamer:** Yes. Yes they do.

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41 **London: The Arts Commission is involved in a number of areas. It is not**
42 **only the visual arts.**

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44 **Surkamer:** No, it is not just visual arts. We are involved in all of the art forms,
45 visual, performing, music, dance, theater. We're involved in literary arts, design

1 arts and media arts in a significant way. This goes across all art forms, but a
2 major effort for many, many years in arts education in our state.

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4 **London: We have talked about your vision and the expansive activity of**
5 **the Arts Commission. Talk about the issues that need to be addressed to**
6 **continue to support the arts, artists, artists and the future of our**
7 **communities.**

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9 **Surkamer:** A few issues come to mind. One certainly is education, not just
10 related to the arts, but also related to keeping our state competitive in the country
11 and in this global economy. Education is an issue that I think needs to continue
12 to be addressed every year, year after year. Within that, arts education.
13 Because arts education helps with educating students to be creative, imaginative
14 and able to synthesize information and able to be good thinkers. That is what
15 our education system needs to do today in order to keep us competitive. In
16 general, that's what the education system needs to do. The arts do that
17 extremely well. You can also use the arts with all the subject areas so that
18 people who are interested in math or science can also have a broader
19 background and be able to bring more to that job as an engineer than just the
20 technical aspect. That is an ever-growing important aspect of educating our
21 students no matter what career option they want to go to. They have to be able
22 to think and to synthesize and that's what the arts do. So education is one issue
23 that the state needs to continue to address.

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25 Infrastructure is another issue. We have to continually maintain the roads. Also
26 within infrastructure, we have to think about the infrastructure of the arts. You
27 can't have performances without buildings usually. Now granted some
28 performances are open-air performances but a lot of them do take place indoors.
29 So, every so often we need to put money into the infrastructure: rehabbing a
30 building, building a new building, an addition to a building, buying equipment.
31 Every so often arts organizations provide a small amount of money to help them
32 upgrade their computers because that's hard money for an arts organization to
33 find. So we provide an incentive. The state, in general, needs to think about
34 infrastructure as well as including the arts in that infrastructure. Those are two
35 areas that we need to address within our growing economy and where the state
36 is going.

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38 **London: Do you believe the next generation of South Carolinians will be**
39 **able to compete in the global economy?**

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41 **Surkamer:** I think that the next generation will be able to compete if we are
42 successful in educating them in a way that they need to be educated to compete.
43 As we move, from as Daniel Pink says, from the information age to the
44 conceptual age, we've got to be able to teach people to think that way. I don't
45 think you can educate a student to do that without involving the arts.

1 **London: To get to that level, what are the responsibilities of our leaders**
2 **regarding future generations of South Carolinians?**

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4 **Surkamer:** I think that we have got to put more emphasis on planning for the
5 future in our state. You see a whole variety of good things going on in the state.
6 There is something in this region of the state or something in that particular
7 locale. What I think that we need to look at more seriously is some type of way
8 that government, state government, local government, county government as
9 well as private industry, talks more together on a statewide level and looks at the
10 future. So one of the things that we can do is to really call together the key
11 leaders in government and industry to really talk about that and plan for the
12 future rather than just this area planning and that area planning and private
13 industry talking about this. I think that we need to have much more joint
14 discussion.

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16 **London: Any particular items that you want to bring up that you are**
17 **particularly passionate about?**

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19 **Surkamer:** Well one of the things that you talk about in a global economy is how
20 do you keep your local community. Actually, I think in order to compete in a
21 global economy, it is what happens in the local community that enables you to
22 compete. So in that particular situation, your sense of place and your link to the
23 traditions of your local community is what people want and therefore then they
24 can compete. That's one comment I would like to make.

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26 **Surkamer:** The second is that in looking at the future of South Carolina, an area
27 that I think is critically important is the work that happens community by
28 community in designing their town and their city and their county. We need to
29 put more emphasis on what we at the Arts Commission would call the design of
30 their community. What does that main street look like? We need to have a much
31 more conscious effort in designing what that community is going to look like and
32 so that people love their community and never want to leave.

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34 **London: Who should make those decisions?**

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36 **Surkamer:** I think there are many people that can have input on it. I think it
37 ultimately comes down to the local community. The city officials and the people
38 that elect them.

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40 **London: People that know the culture, history and pride.**

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42 **Surkamer:** Yes.

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