

Dyster challenges council to match arts funding

February 27, 2013 - 3:15 PM

By Charlie Specht

Buffalo News

Call it the latest round of the battle to fund the arts in Niagara Falls.

Mayor Paul A. Dyster this morning called on the city council to accept a \$15,000 "challenge" grant made earlier this month by the John R. Oishei Foundation.

The grant, if matched by the city council, would go to fund the Niagara Arts & Cultural Center, which features dozens of artists and musicians that teach classes in the former Niagara Falls High School on Pine Avenue.

The council majority of Glenn Choolokian, Robert Anderson and Sam Fruscione **cut the funding** -- which was part of the 2013 adopted budget -- earlier this month, saying the city needs to save money in the midst of a fiscal crisis.

Oishei Foundation president Robert Gioia pleaded with the council last week to restore the funding. The councilmen **rejected his offer** but Dyster now says the council "needs to go on the record with this decision, whether they reverse their choice or not."

He and Gioia noted the foundation has given more than \$10 million to the Niagara Falls community in recent years, as detailed **in this report**.

The council will vote to reject or accept the grant at its regular 7 p.m. meeting Monday at Council Chambers, City Hall, 745 Main St. Council members may comment on the request at the 4 p.m. work session as well.

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