

## [Grand Rapids stunned by success of ArtPrize festival](#)



By T.J. Hamilton, The Grand Rapids Press via AP A sculpture of the Loch Ness Monster, one of the entries in this year's ArtPrize competition, sits in the in the Grand River in Grand Rapids, Mich.

GRAND RAPID, Mich. (AP) — A new art festival held this fall in [Grand Rapids](#) was so successful that organizers say they'll do it again next year and maybe even make it an annual event.

The ArtPrize event became an instant hit and appeared to provide at least a temporary boost to local businesses and to Grand Rapids' cachet as an art destination.

The 18-day ArtPrize competition that began Sept. 23 attracted tens of thousands of visitors. Locals were surprised by the throngs of people of all ages who spent hours or even days walking from one venue to another.

Unprepared for the surge in ArtPrize visitors, some restaurants ran out of food and were forced to close early.

"Nobody had any clue this would happen," Doug Small, president of the Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors Bureau, said.

Because the summer travel season was over and no other major events were taking place in the area, he said it's likely many extra hotel guests were also in town because of ArtPrize, Small said.

Paul Isely, economics department chairman at Grand Valley State University, said many businesses in downtown Grand Rapids received a strong "short-term bump" from ArtPrize.

"The energy and the enthusiasm and the intensity of it all will leave behind a broader, more favorable and hopefully more enlightened appreciation of the visual arts in west Michigan," said Joseph Becherer, director of exhibitions and curator of the sculpture program at Frederik [Meijer](#) Gardens & Sculpture Park outside Grand Rapids.

ArtPrize had 1,262 entries — works of every size, shape and medium installed in lobbies, on bridges, in parking lots and even in the Grand River that winds through downtown Grand Rapids.

The ArtPrize winners were chosen [American Idol](#) style by the voting public, who made their picks through the event's website or by sending text messages from cellphones. There were 37,264 voters.

Ran Ortner of Brooklyn, N.Y., won first place with his 19-foot-wide oil painting, *Open Water No. 24*. Tracy Van Duinen of Chicago placed second and won \$100,000; Eric Daigh of Traverse City, Mich., won \$50,000 for third. The remaining seven finalists each received \$7,000.

Ortner loaned his painting to the Grand Rapids Art Museum, where it will remain through January.

Van Duinen created his mosaic mural, *Imagine That!*, on the Grand Rapids Children's Museum, where it will remain permanently. Van Duinen donated the mural to the museum.

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