

## Jesse Besser Museum

### PROPERTY EXPANSION PROPOSAL TO ALPENA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

25 September 2003

#### STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In 2001, the Jesse Besser Museum began a strategic planning process as an opportunity to revisit the museum's mission, vision and values. From this process it will identify key issues facing the museum, put goals and objectives in priority, and devise strategies to guide museum operations in the future.

The process began by recruiting seventeen community leaders to participate as advisors on a Strategic Planning Advisory Team. The team met several times between October 2001 and May 2003 and developed a database upon which decisions about vision, priorities, objectives, strategies and action plans can be based. It focused on developing a vision for the next 10 years, analyzing internal strengths/weaknesses, external opportunities/threats, economic and demographic forecasts, present and future constituencies, present organizational structure of board and staff, the museum's niche and culture in the community, and funding challenges.

The process is still underway, but one significant part of the vision stands above the rest. For the museum to tell the whole story of the history of Northeast Michigan, it must expand its regional history exhibits. This will be accomplished by broadening the scope of the history exhibits already *in situ*, and expanding the historic village behind the museum to teach the importance of early Indians, commercial fishing, lumbering, agriculture, and the daily lives of settlers. This will require an increase in land behind the museum.

In January 2003, the museum learned that Alpena Community College was simultaneously undergoing its own strategic planning process. Therefore, Jon Hopkins wrote to Roger Bauer (copy to Dr. Newport) to inform them of our interest in the property immediately northeast of the museum. Now the Board of Trustees of the Jesse Besser Museum formally petitions the Board of Trustees of Alpena Community College to legally transfer to the museum, at no cost to the museum, approximately eight (8) acres of ACC property for the educational good of the community.

#### THE SPECIFIC LAND PARCEL

Please refer to the attached aerial map with the proposed property highlighted in yellow. The museum is interested in this particular parcel because it is adjacent to present museum property, and it follows the drainage ditch, which provides a natural barrier between ACC and JBM. It also is a mix of primary forest, secondary growth, and cleared land—the variety of which is attractive to the educational purposes for which it will be used.

#### PROPOSED USE OF THE LAND

As a result of the strategic planning process, the Besser Museum plans to relocate some existing structures in the present Village and to bring in other structures to better interpret the history of Northern Michigan. Additional acreage will allow the Village to expand with structures commonly found in an early town area and trails leading into forest and fields where visitors can encounter cabin dwellings, early Native American dwellings, early trapping and logging activities, and the geologic origins of the early cement industry. Specifically, the requested acreage will be used to:

- Create a replica of a Native American food-gathering encampment typical of those known to have existed in the Thunder Bay region. The exhibit will interpret, in a realistic setting, how Native Americans manufactured tools constructed shelters, and utilized natural materials.
- Relocate the homesteader Lousada line cabin and the pioneer McKay Cabin to an authentic forested setting.
- Expand the interpretive area around the 1928 Fish Tug *Katherine V* to incorporate a dock with ice and cleaning structures, net repair and storage facilities, smokehouse, retail and other structures. The Pewabic anchor will be relocated to the site where it can be better protected better against weather deterioration.
- Acquire more structures for the village, such as a blacksmith shop, cooper shop, general store, post office, etc., to more fully interpret rural environments.
- Tell the story of the region's timber industry, which created the foundation for many towns in Northern Michigan. So much early logging equipment is still available--abandoned in the woods. The museum will develop an exhibit to demonstrate the many components of harvesting and bringing timber to market. But this requires space. An important conservation result of this plan is that by building a lumber camp with a cutting ground and a river-banking area along the ditch means that the museum can preserve these artifacts and exhibit them to the public.

- Agriculture is an important part of Northern Michigan's heritage. When the McKay Cabin is relocated to a more natural setting, the museum will establish a "mini" farm with a barn, corral, vegetable and herb gardens, and small fields. The many artifacts still lying in fields throughout the region can be put to use telling the story of early farming. The plethora of early farm equipment would also demonstrate the story of technology—an excellent way to examine the growth of science as a part of modern life.
- The Lousada line cabin will serve the dual purposes of telling the stories of individuals who purchased land to harvest timber and also those who built crude structures from which to hunt and trap. Explaining how trap lines were laid and what fur trappers had to do to ready their harvest for market is best told in an outdoor setting.
- Land transportation was critical to opening Northeastern Michigan to the rest of the state. Using part of the acreage to interpret the importance of early roads and railroads will help complete the story for visitors. Building roads and railroads through the dense timber swamps is an exciting story but it is best told in an outdoor setting.
- Nature and geology trails are obvious uses for the acreage. A nature trail through mature trees, shrubs, and native wildflowers will be developed to teach visitors about the natural resources of Northern Michigan. A geology trail will be constructed to exhibit the rocks and minerals of the region. This also will provide a venue to explain why the region is dotted with quarries and industries that profit from our unique geological resources.

#### **TERMS OF THE PROPOSED TRANSACTION**

The specific land parcel is part of several hundred acres originally deeded by Jesse Besser to the K-14 Alpena Public School System. Jesse Besser was very interested in education, including on the job training as well as formal education in schools and colleges. His vision included the Alpena Community College location complete with a well-defined technical center that was built in the early 1960s. Part of the educational vision of Jesse Besser included the Jesse Besser Museum, developed in 1962. History seems to indicate that Jesse Besser assumed that the museum would always be part of the Alpena School District. It became appropriate that ACC become a separate entity in the late 1970s and it was separated from the K-14 school district by a vote of the people. Upon establishment of ACC as a separate entity, the several hundred acres, originally gifted by Jesse Besser, was deeded to Alpena Community College, including the Jesse Besser Museum. In 1992 it was deemed best for the Museum to be a separate legal entity. The buildings and the land immediately surrounding the Jesse Besser Museum were transferred to the new, private 501(c)(3) organization. When the museum became its own entity, approximately 8.62 acres of land were deeded from ACC to the museum.

The Jesse Besser Museum, to fulfill its educational mission under the guidelines of its strategic plan, needs more land. Jesse Besser had developed a comprehensive vision for the expansion of educational opportunities and had provided considerable acreage for the buildings and program activities. It would seem reasonable to assume that had the museum remained part of the Alpena Community College that, as the Museum developed its program offerings, additional land would have been allocated for such use. We are certain that some expansion of museum activities was envisioned when the museum separated from ACC. However, the current program and future proposed use of property at the museum has expanded. This expansion of program is part of the educational opportunities for residents and visitors to Northeast Michigan.

It is with the assumption that had today's vision of museum expansion been available when the museum was separated from ACC, a larger parcel of property would have been transferred at that time. We, therefore, respectfully request that ACC transfer, at no cost to the Jesse Besser Museum, approximately eight additional acres to the museum for future educational use. This property transfer is a continuation of Jesse Besser's ideas and vision that the land always be used for educational purposes.

#### **PEOPLE PRESENTING THE MUSEUM'S PETITION**

Jim Arbuckle, Board of Trustees  
 Bill Harris, Board of Trustees  
 Jon Hopkins, Board of Trustees  
 Bob Lyngos, Board of Trustees  
 Lucas Pfeiffenberger, Board of Trustees  
 Greg Sundin, Board of Trustees  
 Leona Wisniewski, Board of Trustees  
 Dr. Jan McLean, Executive Director & CEO  
 Dick Wilson, President, Besser Foundation