



BESSER
MUSEUM
for Northeast Michigan

ART • HISTORY • SCIENCE

2023- 2026 Strategic Plan

Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan

Approved by the Besser Museum Board of Trustees – August 15, 2023



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Founder Jesse Besser with one of his company's first hand-tamp block machines produced in Alpena. A similar machine is on exhibit at the museum.



Why We Do What We Do

The Besser Museum aspires to be much more than a collection of artifacts and static exhibits. We realize the museum has the potential to provide life-changing experiences.

The museum celebrates the genius of men and women: their past accomplishments; their present-day endeavors; their future possibilities. The museum encourages social engagement by inspiring visitors to imagine the advancements throughout time; their connection to the past; their contribution to the present; and their impact on the future. The Besser Museum elevates the status of human experience and their relationship to the natural environment.

The goals set forth in the 2017-2021 Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan Strategic Plan have been established to strengthen the overall operations and ensure the vitality of a long-standing institution that exists to serve the public of all ages and abilities in Northeast Michigan.

A well-crafted strategic plan will guide the Besser Museum Board of Trustees, the Executive Director, and all Museum staff as they pursue the mission of being a living and learning museum, which Jesse Besser and the founders envisioned for Northeast Michigan when the museum opened to the public in 1966.

Our History

Looking Back

We celebrate the legacy of countless citizens whose lives have been enriched by their experiences at the Besser Museum. The strength of our longevity is attributed to staying true to the founders' vision and mission throughout the course of time.

1962

- Alpena manufacturer and philanthropist Jesse Besser sought the advice of Alpena Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Russell Wilson about establishing a public museum for the community.
- Dr. Wilson suggested that if a museum was created it should be “donated to some governmental unit to give permanence to the collections, and tax support for the expense of operation.”
- The Alpena Public Schools Board of Education agreed to accept and operate the museum.
- Mr. Besser, Dr. Wilson, and local historian Mr. Fred Trelfa formed the Alpena Museum Association, Inc., a non-profit corporation and started discussing building plans.
- They all agreed that the museum should be a living and learning museum to enrich the area schools' programs as well as give educational and cultural advantages to the general public.

1963

- During the museum's planning and designing phase, the idea of installing a planetarium was proposed to honor Jesse Besser for his generous gift to the community.
- The placement of a sizable Foucault pendulum was included in the building's design.

1966

- The museum officially opened as an integral part of the Alpena Community College/Alpena Public School system until 1970.
- The 42,000 square-foot building was named the Jesse Besser Museum.

1970

- The Alpena Museum Association began leasing the museum from Alpena Public Schools.
- The Besser Foundation committed to providing funding for operational expenses.

1992

- Alpena Community College Trustees transferred ownership of the museum building, historic structures, and grounds to the Jesse Besser Museum.

2004

- To better encompass the true scope of the museum, the institution was renamed The Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan.

Today

The Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan carries on our founders' vision to be a *'living and learning' museum ... an active center for the cultural life of the community and the schools ... a museum of art, history, and science ... for public enjoyment and instruction...*



Located in the lakeside city of Alpena, the Besser Museum is a tourist destination on the US 23 Pure Michigan Byway.

The Northeast Michigan geographic region of commonality with which the Museum interacts comprises all the counties situated north of Bay City and east of the US 127/I-75 corridor. Included are Alpena, Alcona, Cheboygan, Iosco, Montmorency, Oscoda, Otsego, and Presque Isle County.

Families and school districts from counties that lie within a hundred-mile radius take advantage of all the museum's cultural resources and educational programs. Large numbers of individuals and groups attended our Log Cabin Day and the Fall Harvest/Fossil Fest.

Our uniquely blended, multidisciplinary mission focuses on art, history, and science. We provide a broad overview of Northeast Michigan's natural resources, developing industries, artistic expressions, and cultural heritage. This approach is exclusive to the Besser Museum as visitors will discover when experiencing our wide variety of exhibits and collections.

Throughout the year, the Besser Museum hosts tens of thousands of guests as well as thousands of area K-12 students on school sponsored field trips. Visiting teachers appreciate the educational advantages their students receive from engaging in the museum's numerous hands-on "STEAM" activities that are designed to align with the Michigan State Benchmarks.

Our Highlights

Art

Fine Art Collection Exhibits rotate through an extensive collection of fine art from local, regional, national, and world-renowned artists. Included are works from Dali, Cezanne, Renoir, Picasso, Warhol, Rivera, Chihuly, Clewell, and others.

History

Avenue of Shops An assemblage of ten historic shop fronts representing downtown Alpena in the 1890s.

Historic Village Five original, independently standing outdoor structures from Alpena County. Each building is over 100 years old and available for educational and private events.

Jesse Besser and the Besser Company Exhibit Artifacts and signage showcasing the past, present, and future of the Besser Company, honoring the business of the museum's founder and namesake.

1911 Alpena Flyer Vehicle and Alpena Motor Car Company Display An exhibit highlighting one of the influential companies in Alpena history. We host the only known Alpena Flyer vehicle in existence.

People of the Lakes and Forest Exhibit A significant collection of artifacts representing prehistoric and historic Native American influences on Northern Michigan.

Great Lakes Fisheries and Heritage Exhibit Two watercraft from Michigan's past, the *Chinook*, a retired DNR Great Lakes research vessel, and the *Katherine V*, a 1928 wooden gill-net commercial fishing tug, convey the challenges of maintaining a sustainable fishery. This unique exhibit is part of the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Consortium and the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Trail.

Science

Digitized Sky Theater The planetarium, equipped with cutting-edge technology, seats fifty-two people. Visitors experience a wide range of presentations from local night skies to a virtual tour of the Sistine Chapel.

Natural Wildlife Exhibit An impressive assortment of mounted wildlife found in Michigan and around the world, a Great Lakes Fish Exhibit, and an extensive Herbarium. Additional nature exposure through our Nature Trail continually being developed on campus.

Lafarge Fossil Park Once covered by an ancient shallow ocean, Northeast Michigan is now a treasure trove of Devonian Period fossils. Visitors will be able to discover and keep fossils found in the crushed Devonian fossil material generously donated by Lafarge Alpena Plant and Specification Stone Products, while also learning how limestone is used in the making of cement.

What's Important to Us

Vision

Our vision is a community that can explore the dynamic story of Northeast Michigan's interconnected natural resources and cultural heritage through the ability to navigate the past, illuminate the present, and imagine the future.

Mission

Our mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit authentic articles and artifacts of art, history, and science to inspire curiosity for all ages, foster community pride, and cultivate personal legacy.

Values

Stewardship

Believing that history, art, and science collections have the power to educate, inspire, and transform individuals of all ages while embracing the responsibility to plan and manage the resources accordingly.

Knowledge

Providing educational experiences that promote an understanding and appreciate of art, history, and science.

Community

Contributing to the region by engaging and providing access to all while demonstrating and fostering community pride.

Legacy

Maintaining the founder's legacy to be a living and learning museum, honoring the community's history and achievements.

Professionalism

Adhering to the museum industry standards with utmost competence, courtesy, and discretion.

What's Next

The Besser Museum creates unique experiences through permanent and rotating exhibits, educational programming, and special events that appeal and connect to diverse audiences of all ages, abilities, and interests. These exclusive experiences promote an understanding and appreciation for the natural and cultural heritage of Northeast Michigan.

As we move forward, it's important that we stay focused on specific goals to help us realize our mission and vision. Below are the six goals we will achieve from 2017-2021.



Goal 1

Foster an appreciation for art, history, and science



Goal 2

Engage all ages, abilities, and interests of the public



Goal 3

Present the interconnected stories of Northeast Michigan



Goal 4

Increase community awareness of museum services



Goal 5

Attract, train, utilize, and maintain Museum Volunteers and Staff



Goal 6

Ensure financial stability to protect museum's assets



Goal 1: Foster an appreciation for art, history, and science.

Goal 1: Foster an appreciation for art, history, and science

Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
1.a Establish and maintain a welcoming museum environment that encourages engagement with art, history, and science.	Develop an easy exit survey (paper and/or electronic) for visitors with a goal of 80% returns and 80% satisfaction.	July 2023 - Ongoing	All museum staff, Besser Museum Board of Trustee Members	Staff time, Board members, American Association of Museums online resources
1.b Develop a three-year rotating exhibit schedule with a suite of complimentary educational programs and special events	Publish three-year rotating exhibit and event schedule on the website and in museum. Target at least one educational program and event each month.	July 2023 - Ongoing	Executive Director, Collections Manager, Education Coordinator	Staff time
1.c Create virtual tours that are available through online and mobile platforms	Create and publish at least three virtual tours available on website.	Completed by 2025	Education Coordinator	Staff time



Goal 2: Engage all ages, abilities, and interests of the public.

Goal 2: Engage all ages, abilities, and interests of the public				
Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
2.a Ensure Museum exhibits provide a culturally enriching experience that inspires curiosity, fosters community pride, and cultivates personal connection and legacy.	Hold an annual community roundtable to get feedback and help in goalsetting.	July 2023 - Ongoing	All Museum Staff, board appointed ad-hoc committees	Staff time, special project endowments and grants
2.b Ensure facilities and grounds are accessible to all visitors, workers, and volunteers.	Schedule an ADA compliance evaluation.	July 2023 - Ongoing	Facility Manager, Executive Director	Staff time, grant funding, endowments
2.c Gather and analyze feedback concerning museum experience from visitors and stakeholders to better provide desired public programming and improve museum visits.	Compile and analyze exit surveys and share it monthly with trustees.	July 2023 - Ongoing	Guest Service Specialist, Museum Assist, Executive Director	Staff time, Board members, American Association of Museum professional resources, Ambassador Volunteers
2.d Design Museum exhibits and educational experiences to be conducive and inclusive to all visitors utilizing AAM best practices.	Have consultants and staff be sure that AAM best practices are being utilized.	Completed by June 2026	All museum staff	Consultants, staff time, endowments



Goal 3: Present the interconnected stories of Northeast Michigan.

Goal 3: Present the interconnected stories of Northeast Michigan’s natural resources and cultural heritage.				
Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
3.b Develop strategic plans for each permanent exhibit that addresses all the necessary components of good exhibit design (Historical Village, Native American Gallery, Avenue of Shops, Katherine V, Chinook, Planetarium, Wildlife Gallery)	Develop plans and post on website	Completed by June 2025	Executive Director, Collections Manager, Facility Manager, Board appointed ad-hoc committees	Staff time, consultants, Professional exhibit designers
3.a Develop a strategic plan for writing and designing interpretative exhibit labels that will result in a comprehensive and cohesive storyline throughout the museum permanent exhibits connecting Northeast Michigan’s natural resources and cultural heritage.	Develop plans and post on website	Completed by June 2025	Executive Director, Collections Manager, Facility Manager, Board appointed ad-hoc committees	Staff time, consultants, Professional exhibit designers



Goal 4: Increase community awareness of museum services.

Goal 4: Increase community awareness of museum services			
Objective	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
4.a Draft and execute marketing plan and budget; identify media resources available and costs associated with marketing in Northeast Michigan.	July 2023 - Ongoing	Guest Service Specialist, Museum Assist, Executive Director	Staff time
4.b Create cohesive brand and image of museum across all media and promotional materials	Completed by July 2026	Executive Director	Staff time, Professional Marketing agency
4.c Develop mature online presence through website and social media platforms	July 2023 - Ongoing	Executive Director, Museum Assistant	Staff time



Goal 5: Attract, train, utilize, and maintain Museum Volunteers and Staff

Goal 5: Attract, train, utilize, and maintain Besser Museum Ambassadors Volunteers			
Objective	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
5.a Develop and execute a recruiting plan that utilizes community networks to attract and train museum volunteers.	Completed by January 2024	Executive Director Board of Trustees Museum Staff	Staff time Board of Trustees Time
5.c Create recognition and award programs to express gratitude and maintain volunteer engagement.	July 2023 - Ongoing	Department leaders, Guest Service Specialists, Executive Director	Staff time
5.d. Provide Museum staff with opportunities for professional development and ongoing training, which includes opportunities for staff to attend museum conferences and workshops.	July 2023 – Ongoing	Executive Director Board of Trustees Museum Staff	Professional Development Budget, Staff time



Goal 6: Ensure financial stability to protect museum assets.

Goal 6: Ensure financial stability to protect museum assets			
Objective	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
6.a Create 5-year financial plan that addresses immediate, regular, and long-term needs for entire museum campus.	Completed by June 2024	Board of Trustees, Finance Committee, Facility Committee, Executive Director,	Staff time, consultants
6.b Create and implement a development/fundraising strategy to secure financial stability for ongoing operations and special projects	Completed by June 2024	Board of Trustees, Finance Committee, Executive Director	Staff Time CFNEM
6.c Employ AAM standards in all storage areas to ensure the proper care and preservation of museum facility and collection of artifacts.	July 2023 - Ongoing	Facility Manager, Collections & Exhibits Manager, Museum staff	Staff time
6.d Execute daily routines to ensure a clean and safe environment for museum staff, volunteers, guests, and museum collections.	July 2023 - Ongoing	Facility Manager, Volunteer Ambassadors, Guest Services Specialists	Staff time

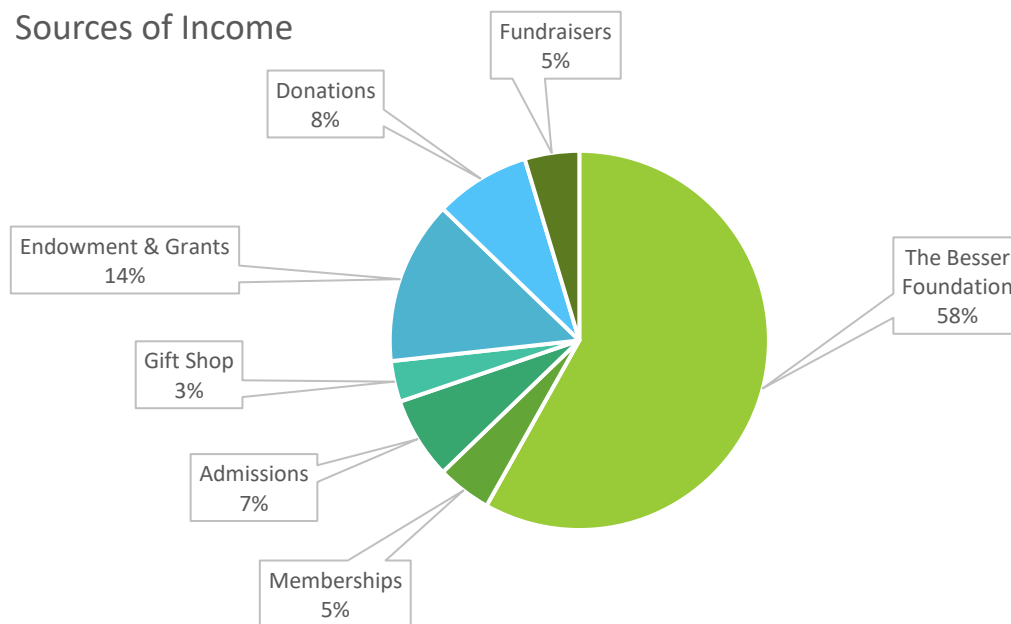
Funding the Future

The Besser Museum is a 501 (c) (3), non-profit, membership corporation stewarded by its own Board of Trustees. The museum receives no continuing financial support from federal, state, or local governmental entities or millage.

The annual operating budget for the Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan is approximately \$430,000.

Operational support is generated through admission fees, membership dues, donations, awarded grants, and fundraising efforts. The Besser Foundation also continues to provide operational support honoring Jesse Besser's original intent *for the museum to become an active center for the cultural life of the community and the schools.*

Sources of Income





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www.BesserMuseum.org

491 Johnson
Street
Alpena, MI
49707