

Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan
Executive Director Report for Board of Trustees Meeting
December 2021- January 2022

SEASON OF LIGHT FESTIVITES:

1. The Season of Light exhibit was extremely appreciated by museum visitors. We hosted approximately 1,454 visitors, along with 136 members attending the Gala.
2. The Membership Holiday Raffle and Members Only Gala campaign was successful. We had several new memberships, and several increase their membership level. Overall, we gained 69 new memberships and increased our membership revenue by \$4,040. Revenue in 2020 for Nov/Dec was \$4,385. Revenue in 2021 for Nov/Dec was \$8,425.
 - a. Members greatly appreciated the members only gala and raffle event.
 - b. The raffles raised an additional \$1,399.
3. There were 21 Christmas trees in the Community Tree gallery this year.
4. The museum's Facebook posts received a lot of attention. One post reached over 7000. The other Season of Light posts reached anywhere from 400 to 900 on average. I created a post for all 20 trees during the run of the exhibit.
5. The planetarium played Santa's Secret Star and The Star of Bethlehem. We hosted a lot of visitors to the planetarium. December 30th was especially busy with 84 people attending a show throughout the day.
6. The exhibit ended January 6th. The teardown, that normally takes up to two weeks went down within 3 days thanks to a good plan for tear down, all the volunteer help, and having Nate on staff this year to help with the project.

STAFF: Staff changes

1. Education Coordinator, Amanda Kucharek left her position at the museum on December 3rd. I covered the field trips that were booked for December.
2. Considering our future staffing needs:
 - a. I am considering hiring an assistant/understudy for the Collections department. Collections Manager, Sarah Honeycutt is doing a fantastic job in this position. Her long-term goals have her stepping away from the museum in a year or two. It would be in the best interest of this institution to have someone training under Sarah to prepare for this major transition.
 - b. I am considering making the Planetarium Coordinator position the head of the Education department. This position could contribute some worktime to museum curriculum development across the disciplines of art, history, and science. This position would possibly work with a part-time Education Coordinator, or possibly a seasonal-part-time employee. This would also provide room in the budget for more pay for a Planetarium Coordinator. Johnathan could step into some of the role under my direction and working alongside in some areas. However, a more feasible long-range plan would be to hire an educator with a strong astronomy/science background and/or general education degree who can be trained to run the planetarium equipment
3. The part-time facility assistant, Nate Teachout is doing a fantastic job and making Matt's life much easier. Matt can accomplish many more tasks around the museum. Nate was also a big help to the volunteer crew building the dock for the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage exhibit. Hiring a part-time assistant is extremely beneficial for the facility.

HVAC Project: Matt has compiled a comprehensive report on this project.

- To date, Woods and Johnson have almost completed the installation of the new chiller unit. The plumbing is done. There is a pump that has not been delivered yet, they will install it as soon as it arrives. The electrical is wired all the way from the main breaker to the chiller, but it will not be turned on and the breakers will be locked until the pump arrives and everything is installed. The dehumidifier is being hooked up and is not yet finished.
- Control Solutions is working to get all the controls working. Matt has flagged some issues and is working with the company to make sure everything is up and working properly.

MUSEUM EXTERIOR:

Besser Foundation approved the \$194,00 Capital Improvement grant submitted in December. The request included the bids from Meridian and Moran Iron Works along with photos of the exterior of the museum. The quote from Meridian for the exterior repairs is \$164,000. The quote from Moran Iron Works for the back patio art installations and matching deck railing is \$30,000.

1. Matt and I met with Todd Britton from Meridian to discuss the projects that will start in this spring. The three building improvement projects include:
 - a. Removing the lower-level windows and window-wells.
 - b. Fixing the exterior columns and flowerbeds.
 - c. Fixing the front approach and handicap ramp and rail.
2. Moran Iron Works is working on a moquette of the sculptures for the back patio art project. Once done it will be presented to the museum for further discussion.
3. Moran Iron Works is also working on the designs for a new rail system across the back patio that will have built in seating.

GREAT LAKES FISHERIES HERITAGE EXHIBIT:

- **Chinook:**
 - The DNR Invasive Species Grant was submitted for the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Exhibit. We should receive word on the grant by March.
- **Film Project:** Gary Goren started working with the committee on the LaBlance family video. We hope to continue editing work on that project throughout the winter.

Planetarium:

- No word yet on the grant Gary Goren submitted for pursuing the Planet/History Walk.
- **Pendulum:** Many calls have been placed trying to find someone who knows how to fix our pendulum. Johnathan put a request on his professional planetarium chat group for a name of someone who can repair planetariums. Many stated that these individuals are getting hard to find and others are saying they are having issues with their pendulum too and seeking help.
- We are trying to make contacts with someone who can fix our pendulum.

ARTIFACT COLLECTIONS: Sarah Honeycutt continues to excel in the position of Collections Manager working with volunteers and staff many of the major projects continue to be achieved in this department. Sarah and I will start reviewing the accreditation file to make sure we are addressing all the hitting all the goals in our progress report and prepare for our update report due in 3/1/2024.

NEW PROPOSAL FOR THE USE OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN GALLERY SPACE:

After much consideration of what would be the best use of the museum's resources, space, and finances, I propose the current Native American gallery remodel aim to achieve a higher goal of being a comprehensive historical overview of the Thunder Bay region spanning from the beginning of time to present.

The multi-themed historical exhibit would align with the museum's mission to inspire curiosity, foster community pride, and cultivating personal legacy. By creating a stimulating, immersive, interactive exhibit chronicling major time periods starting with the "Big Bang" that created our universe to the present day, we would be aligning with the vision set for our institution. As stated in the museum's strategic plan, 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.

This exhibit space will captivate the imaginations of all visitors as they are presented concepts of our connected world, and their place in it. Using this large amount of gallery space for a unique history experience will also serve to connect visitors to other exhibits throughout the museum and locations throughout our community. Each themed section will be an entire exhibit in its own, yet a connective string, or continuum of the journey through time and space.

Imagine if you can, a large blank space where walls strategically designed by professional architects will lead you through hallways and rooms where you find yourself surrounded by stimulating exhibits you can interact with while learning about the history of Thunder Bay. This space would be kid friendly with exhibit modulars designed to be pushed, opened, light-up, make noises, etc. Each area will direct visitors to other exhibits within the museum that connects to the theme, and to locations throughout our community they can visit to enhance or extend their experience.

The museum would work with other local groups who could provide information and ideas. These collaborations will also prove beneficial for group's mission. The museum would also partner with ACC, APS, retired teachers, Alpena Library, and locals who specialize in each themed area and can contribute to this unique representation of our community.

Below is a rough draft of the outline of each section and how it will connect people to more opportunities for experiencing what is outside of the exhibit.

The first exhibit area will start with the Universe. A panel that talks about the Big Bang Theory – Let There Be Light – An explosion of energy scattered particles of matter into the vast nothingness. This matter makes up everything in the universe. The universe continues to expand and change. There are X number of known solar systems in the universe. We live in an arm of

the Milky Way galaxy. Inside the Milky Way are billions of Stars. The Sun is at the center of our solar system. Visit the planetarium sky theater inside the Besser Museum to learn more about our universe, solar system, constellations and more. Northeast Michigan has several areas designated as dark sky preserves: Rockport Recreational State Park, Negwegon State Park, Thompson Harbor State Park, Headlands International Dark Sky Park. Viewing astronomical features at anyone of these locations is breathtaking if the weather cooperates.

The second exhibit area will focus on the formation of Earth – The Third Rock from the Sun. The Earth is dynamic. The only planet in the known universe to sustain a plethora of life forms, thanks to the abundance of water, oxygen, and sunlight. Once a large landmass near the equator called Pangea, the current Earth has been shaped through the shifting of the continental plates and other environment activities, such as volcanoes, earthquakes, wind, rain, ice, meteors, mass extinctions. Earth's abundant natural resources, both renewable and nonrenewable, can be found in the Earth's crust, soil, bedrock, etc. which is comprised of minerals and rocks that are mined and used in major industries, fossil fuels are used for energy, trees and other vegetation, water, wind, solar, etc. This area will touch on the geological timeline and direct visitors to check out the Devonian fossil park and other areas of interest, such as Rockport, and the sinkholes around Leer/Lachine area and Onaway.

The third area will focus on the formation of the Great Lakes – There were five major Ice Ages that shaped the Great Lakes and other natural land formations, Sleeping Bear Dunes, Manning Hill, glacier striations, etc. This area will give details about the characteristics of the five great lakes and the native species that inhabited the great lakes. Visitors will be directed to visit the Great Lakes Fisheries Exhibit and the lower-level fish exhibit. This area will touch on the Amberly Ridge information, the hundreds of sunken shipwrecks, and direct people to visit TBNMS

The fourth area will focus on the formation of the inland waterways, Thunder Bay River, and watershed. Before the dams, Thunder Bay River People was loud, fast flowing – white water rapids. The river was teeming with life, including the sturgeon. This section will highlight the natural flora and fauna of this area. Visitors will be directed to visit the Wildlife/Fish exhibit in the lower level.

The fifth area of the exhibit will focus on the first peoples - Native American Tribes: this space will be an expanded exhibit with artifacts, replicas, and photos, etc. This will include the families and histories up to present. The museum will work from the exhibit plans already in place for the Anishinaabe exhibit.

The sixth exhibit area will focus on the first European contact – Fur Traders (1600s)
The museum will utilize the donated private collection to tell this part of the story.

The seventh area will highlight the focus on the history of America, the Declaration of Independence, and the Treaties: 1700 to 1800s. Information will introduce the history of boarding schools, land transfers, reservations, Michigan Tribes, and their past and current locations. This area will direct visitors to visit other museums, such as Ziiibwing Center, Ottawa Cultural Museum, Mackinaw State Park.

The eighth area will focus on the timber boom and development of this region. We will incorporate the artifacts and interpretation we have on exhibit. The exhibit will also touch on other business such as the tanners and paper mills that utilized the timber. The exhibit will also touch on where the timber from this region timber was shipped to and what it was used for, i.e., masts for sailboats, railroad ties, building the mid-west.

The ninth area will focus on the development of Alpena and the early industries: Lumbering, Fishing, Limestone, etc. The idea is to create a pathway into the **Avenue of Shops** that could loop back into the history gallery. Visitors will also be direction to visit the Fishing Exhibit and Fossil Park, and Village outside.

The tenth area will focus on the farming families in the region. We have photos in our collections along with lots of farming equipment. The area will talk about the crops the farmers tried to grow and which ones were successful. This area will also touch on the dairy farms in the area. We have artifacts from local dairies.

The eleventh exhibit area will be an introduction to many of Alpena's industries from 1900s – to present, such as Fletcher Paper Co., Alpena Motor Company, Besser Co., DPI, Panel Processing, Thunder Bay Manufacturing, W.G. Benjy Manufacturing, Omni, and others. The last area will give an overview of Alpena's status (then and now): population, industry, sites of interest, etc. This area will also highlight the history of some of Alpena's amenities, such as the college, school system, hospital, etc.