



BESSER
MUSEUM
for Northeast Michigan

ART • HISTORY • SCIENCE

2024- 2029 Strategic Plan

Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan

Approved by the Besser Museum Board of Trustees – January 23, 2024



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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 2024-2029 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.

2024

- Fast forward two decades: great strides continue to be made to ensure Besser Museum's exhibits and programs remain relevant to contemporary audiences.

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 annually attend 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.

Anishinaabe of Northeast Michigan 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.

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 Holcim 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. This includes being fiscally responsible with funding and financial resources.

Knowledge

Providing educational experiences that promote an understanding and appreciation 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.

Five Year Strategy

Welcome to Besser Museum's Strategic Plan for 2024 to 2029. This document marks a pivotal moment in our journey, serving as both a map and compass for the path ahead. It is the result of extensive collaboration, insightful analysis, and visionary thinking, aimed at steering our organization towards a future defined by growth, resilience, and impact.

At the Besser Museum, we are driven by our mission to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit authentic articles and artifacts. We are also driven by our vision to explore the dynamic story of Northeast Michigan. These core principles are the bedrock upon which our strategic objectives and initiatives are built. They reflect our collective ambition and set the direction for our efforts and investments over the next five years.

The world around us is changing at an unprecedented pace, presenting both challenges and opportunities. In response, we have developed this strategic plan to navigate these dynamic conditions effectively. It outlines how we will leverage our strengths, address our weaknesses, seize new opportunities, and mitigate potential threats. Through this plan, we aim to enhance our capabilities, expand our reach, and deepen our impact on our community.

Our strategy is built around five key areas, each chosen for its potential to drive us towards our desired future. These include:



Collections

- Gain physical and intellectual control of all artifacts entrusted to the Besser Museum Collection inventory fully implemented in Phases by 2028.



Finances

- Ensure financial stability.
- Prepare and implement a development plan for additional funds.



Exhibits and Education

- Employ contemporary museum design and technology.
- Establish programs for the community.



Development and Marketing

- Increase community awareness and support.
- Updated Website.
- Develop additional finance resources through grants and endowment support.



Operations and Facilities

- Add a Reception/Lecture Hall for Community use
- Develop Policies and People
- Update digital planetarium equipment

This strategic plan is a living document, reflecting our commitment to adapt and thrive in a changing world. It demands engagement and dedication from every member of our team, from our board of trustees, leadership, employees, and volunteers. Together, we will review our progress regularly, celebrate our successes, and learn from our experiences.

We embark on this strategic journey with optimism and determination, knowing that it will require hard work, perseverance, and collaboration. But we are confident that, with this plan as our guide, the Besser Museum will achieve its ambitions and emerge stronger, more agile, and more impactful than ever before.

Action Plan Supports the Strategic Plan

For each area, which we describe as pillars, we have an annual operating plan where we outline specific initiatives, resources required, and measurable outcomes, ensuring our plan is both actionable and accountable.

Some of the projects are multi-year initiatives and have been broken up into phases as we approach the objectives each year.

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 main objectives to achieve growth and stability over the next five years.



Collections

Ensure all artifacts entrusted to the Besser Museum are properly preserved, cataloged, and interpreted according to museum best practices.

Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
Improve exterior and interior of facility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete HVAC system-including new sensors as required throughout the building 	May 2024-September 2024	Facility Manager, Local Contractor	Staff time, Local contractors. Funding on hand.
Ensure physical control of artifacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase I -Relocate 30% of the Permanent Collection into the controlled environment. 	June 2024-December 2024	Facility Manager, Collections Manager	Staff time, Volunteers
Ensure intellectual control of artifacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase I- Inventory collections with goal of 30% (Balance in following years) 	June 2024 - ongoing	Collections Manager	Staff time, Volunteers



Finances

Ensure financial stability to protect museum assets, maintain operations, and increase outreach.

Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
Develop Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Membership drive 	October 2024 – November 2024	Executive Director	Staff Time, Special Event funding from donors



Exhibits and Education

Present the interconnected stories of Northeast Michigan's natural resources and cultural heritage using modern museum design and technology.

Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
Complete the new Discover Northeast Michigan History exhibit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to review, approve, and coordinate with Split Rock Studios 	January 2024 – December 2024	Museum Staff and Exhibit Committee	Staff Time, Funding from DNEMH Restricted Fund
Complete construction of the structure for Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage exhibit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Meridian Contracting Reengage Good Design 	January 2024 – December 2024	Museum Staff and GLFH Committee	exhibit designers (Good Design) and funding from DNR Grant



Development and Marketing

Increase community awareness of museum services and opportunities.

Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
Create and implement a development/fundraising strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain a Development Consultant to: Cultivate donors, obtain grants, develop fundraising events, and paid programs 	2024 - ongoing	Executive Director and new Development Consultant	Staff Time Finance Committee
Develop Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Membership drive to increase member by 5% 	January 2024– November 2024	Executive Director	Staff Time, Special Event funding from donors
Improve Social Media Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook and Instagram implementation Schedule Use Google Analytics and Daily Posting Activity to increase throughout the year. 	February 2024 – Ongoing	Museum Assistant	Staff Time, Social Media Platforms



Operations and Facilities

Leadership Development: Attract, train, utilize, and maintain Besser Museum Staff and Ambassador Volunteers

Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
Provide Museum staff with opportunities for professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarize staff with AAM standards. Review and improve policies and procedure manuals. Add additional staff STEPS Certification 	October 2024	Executive Director,	American Association of Museums online resources. Michigan Museum Association online resources and conferences. Professional Development Funds
Formal recognition and award plan for volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send out regular thank you letters to volunteers. Recognize volunteers in newsletters and Facebook. Host volunteer events. 	January 2024, - ongoing	Museum Assistant	Staff Time Appreciation Budget