

THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE BESSER MUSEUM FOR NORTHEASTERN MICHIGAN, as amended January 15, 2013

PREAMBLE

This document is intended to serve The Besser Museum for Northeastern Michigan (Museum) members, trustees, staff, volunteers and constituents as a roadmap for the continuing journey of the Museum in its growth and fulfillment of its mission. And as with most journeys, it is important to understand not only the ultimate objective, but also the current location, the direction of travel and the resources that will be needed to get there.

That is not to say that maps and goals shouldn't change as needs and opportunities arise that would improve the quality of the Museum and its passage, and indeed this document should be deemed to be dynamic and part of a process by which the Museum plans, changes and grows to continually contribute to the betterment of Northeastern Michigan and its people.

As such, this plan should not only be a recipe for the Museum's progress, but an instrument that invites continuing review and refinement.

History

In 1962, Jesse Besser sought the advice of the Superintendent of Alpena Public Schools, Dr. Russell Wilson, about establishing a museum for the community. The non-profit corporation, Alpena Museum Association, Inc was formed and composed of Jesse Besser, Dr. Russell Wilson, and Fred Trelfa. Dr. Wilson suggested that if a museum was to be created, it should be "donated to some governmental unit to give permanence to the collections, and tax support for the expense of operation." That same year, the Board of Education for Alpena Public Schools agreed to accept and operate the Museum to be "a living and learning museum which would enrich the educational program in area schools as well as give educational and cultural advantages to the general public."

During the planning and design phase of the Museum, the idea of the installation of a planetarium was broached in an effort to honor Jesse Besser and his gift of the Museum to the community. Mr. Besser had been visiting museums in several states and with his, "abiding interest in machinery, was fascinated with the planetariums." At this time, the Foucault Pendulum was also included in the design.

The building was completed in 1966, and named the Jesse Besser Museum. The first Museum Director was hired in 1967. Ill-defined authoritative control over the Museum between the public school administration and the recently established community college administration, which had acquired ownership of the land that the Museum occupies, resulted in early problems. In 1970, the Alpena Museum Association began leasing the Museum from the Alpena School District under a contract delineating the responsibilities of both the Museum and the District. The Besser Foundation primarily funded the four permanent, full-time staff (director, planetarium coordinator, curator, and maintenance worker), maintenance, and programming for the Museum. Four additional full-time staff (Museum educator, Museum aide, bookkeeper/archivist, and

maintenance aide) were supported through the federally funded CETA program of the time. In addition to the aforementioned staff, up to ten additional part-time staff were also employed at the Museum under such federally funded programs as Office of Economic Opportunity, College Work Study, WIN, and Neighborhood Youth.

In 1992, the now established Alpena Community College Trustees transferred ownership of the Museum building, historic structures, and grounds to the Jesse Besser Museum. The name was changed to the Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan in 2004.

Current

Today, the Besser Museum for Northeastern Michigan is a Michigan nonprofit membership corporation stewarded by its own Board of Trustees. It has been granted tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Its original classification as a private foundation was conditionally changed to that of a public charity in 2008. The public charity classification is anticipated to become permanent on July 1, 2013.

The Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan receives no continuing financial support from federal, state, or local governmental entities or millage. Public and private school students that receive docent-led learning experiences during field trips to the Museum pay a discounted group rate of \$2.00 per student per visit, and an additional \$1.00 per student per visit for a planetarium show.

The American Association of Museums has accredited the Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan. The ten-year renewal date has been extended to 2014, at which time the Museum must apply for re-accreditation subject to application fees, review committee expenses, and other preparation costs.

Founders' Vision

From the original documents of incorporation and early minutes, the founders have expressed their visions for the Museum to become an educational, preservation and research institution in the areas of Northeastern Michigan history, science and culture.

The three theme areas they visioned were:

- What Happens- History- One of the Museum's Founders, Dr. Russell Wilson describes, "Probably the major interest of our Museum will be the historical collections, which should reflect the story of the developments and achievements of the community. The natural history collections should epitomize the geology and geography, and the natural environment and resources of the region."
- How it Happens- Science- Exploration of Northeast Michigan enterprise including agricultural, engineering and industrial innovations, as well as natural sciences, technological sciences, and social sciences relevant to the region.

How People Interpret It- Art- The Museum Board of Directors stated in the first collections policy of 1970, "Fine art(s) illustrative of the aesthetic interests and accomplishments of citizens in the region."

Museum Community Area

The Northeast Michigan geographic region of commonality with which the Museum interacts and serves comprises some fourteen counties situated north of Bay City and east of

the US-127/I-75 highway corridor. The primary service area for the Museum includes the Counties of Alpena, Presque Isle, Montmorency and Alcona.

Mission

The Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan is shall be a community resource that serves to inspire curiosity, foster community pride, and cultivate personal legacy. The Museum shall through discovery, preservation, education and stewardship be an institution dedicated to serving the public of all ages and abilities in the art, history, and science of Northeast Michigan.

Values

- Legacy- maintaining the Founders' intent to be a "living and learning museum...which should reflect the story of the developments and achievements of the community, epitomize the geology, geography, and the natural resources of the region."
- Knowledge- providing visitors with engaging and motivating experiences that inspire curiosity
- Community- contributing to the region by being accessible to ALL while demonstrating and fostering pride in community
- Professionalism- adhering to museum industry standards, and performing with utmost competence, skill, courtesy, and discretion

Institutional Goals

- Preserve and interpret collections with the highest standards of museum practice
- Provide a welcoming environment that stimulates engaging and meaningful visitor experiences
- Attract and serve a diversity of audiences
 - ! Research the history of the region's settlement and industries and prepare appropriate exhibits to tell their story.
 - ! Enhance the appreciation and expression of fine arts through education and the exhibition of outstanding works of art, with an emphasis on Northeast Michigan artists and collections.
 - ! Promote natural science education through exhibits depicting the ecology, geology, flora and fauna of Northeast Michigan and Lake Huron, and continue to enhance astronomy programs provided by the planetarium.
 - ! Develop relationships and communication with businesses, institutions and organizations throughout the region, and where appropriate form partnerships on projects and exhibits which further the goals of the Museum.
 - ! Develop and implement strategies to enhance the long-term financial stability of the Museum.
 - ! Operate the Museum in accordance with the program standards promulgated by the American Association of Museums.

Specific Goals and Implementation Strategies

- Improve care, quality, and accessibility of collections
 - Consolidate and digitize all collection files into one area and in a more organized manner (each item tagged with an accession number that corresponds with the proper paperwork specifying an accurate storage location) such as to allow for easier, faster, and less damaging search of inventory to supplement exhibits, education objectives, and special event themes.
 - Establish and adhere to an accession & deaccession policy
 - Amend Temporary Custody & Pre-Qualification forms to clarify what “donation” means, and
 - Establish and adhere to an institutional item intake, request/loan and reshelving procedure
 - Improve storage conditions each according to their need (paper, fabric, furnishings, etc)
 - Establish email account for Collections Curator as there is an increased quantity & quality of correspondence

- Develop Temporary & Permanent Exhibit design strategy
 - Exhibit & interpretation criteria for consistent messaging, branding, and goal attainment
 - Exhibit should tell a story with a clear beginning (introduction), middle, and end (“take home messages”) and always with the context of time period, location and interaction with other Northeast Michigan activities clearly identified.
 - How does it: appeal to target audience? Extend visitor experience inspire curiosity, foster community pride, and cultivate independent legacy.
 - Exhibit should have interpretation, preferably multi-sensory.
 - Advance planning in temporary exhibits
 - Greater supplementation with collection artifacts
 - Focus topics/theme relevant to broad audiences
 - Improve/update existing permanent exhibits
 - More in depth research on collection items that better integrates a multitude of disciplinary interests relevant to the contemporary audience of Northeast Michigan and out-of-town visitors
 - Native American exhibit - More context of time periods, locations and sequences should be provided. As one of the premier collections in the world, it must be presented that way. It must also appeal to the regional student groups who use it as a supplement to curriculum lessons for mandated learning standards.

- **Geology** exhibit
 - Gather and display information about the glacial movement and how that impacted the current topography of Michigan, including the formation of the Great Lakes, the pudding stones, the glacial scrapings, the exposure of the limestone, the formation of the limestone and salt strata.
 - Research and develop the **Forest & Lumbering** Exhibit in the Natural Wildlife Gallery and the outdoor components. (Planting different species in the backyard.)
 - Different species of trees native to Northeast Michigan.
 - Lumbering history: Then and Now
 - **Agriculture/horticulture** exhibit
 - **Lakes & Fisheries** exhibit
 - Reintroduce "Jesse Besser...Spirit of Innovation" room
- Develop and implement education earned revenue & community service programs
 - Learning objective & benchmark supported curriculum themes
 - Family programs like Free Family Fund Days, Log Cabin Day, Fall Harvest, etc.
 - Explore adult programming around art, history & science that does not compete with but compliments other organizations offerings. Collaborate with Lifelong Learners, Arts Council, NOAA, Genealogical Society, Library programs, etc. on themes around events, exhibits, programming, celebrations, etc.
- Increase visibility
 - Install destination street signage that is consistent with the DDA signs to keep the "Alpena Brand" visible & consistent [along: Bi-path, from NOAA, to NOAA from the US 23, etc.)
 - Compose email group list to send information about upcoming and current events, exhibits, special events, etc. (ie., Thunder Bay Resort, NOAA, bus tour companies at ACVB?, other hotels, Chamber of Commerce, Alpena News, Library, etc.
 - Create a presence at NOAA to capitalize on their stated 85,000 visitors per year. Create a photo opportunity that clearly displays the Besser Museum logo (Ordinary bike; platform at mural; wildlife and/or historic figure "insert faces" ; museum "portrait", etc)
 - Craft consistent image, branding, and messaging applied to advertising opportunities like news, radio, rack cards, brochures, etc.
 - Represent at other regional events & festivals with pre-packaged signage, giveaways, attention grabbers, and the like that remind people who we are, what we offer, how to get here, perks of membership, etc.
- " Submit press releases to all newspapers and broadcast stations in Northeast Michigan for all Museum special events and exhibits.

- Increase multi-media connections & virtual visitation **and continuously update and improve the Museum Website**
- Improve **the accessibility and** utility of outbuildings
- Highlight and enhance the planetarium visitor experience
- Expand auxiliary earned revenue activities
 - Create facility rental rates & policy
 - Create sponsorship/underwriter policy and incentives packages.
 - " Develop and implement strategies to enhance gift shop revenues.
- Improve efficiency of buildings & grounds obligations

! Develop and Implement Plans to Enhance Museum Revenues and Resources

- Develop and promote planned giving policy & awareness
 - Bequests (cash, stocks, annuities, real estate, etc)
 - Life-income programs
 - Life insurance policy benefactor
 - Increase budget for program materials, advertising, etc
- Evaluate
 - Measure attendance
 - Measure memberships, corporate memberships
 - Conduct audience surveys & focus groups to inquire about: facilities & grounds; exhibits; programs; planetarium; customer service; collections; public relations, etc.
- Increase ability to attract, utilize, and keep "Besser Museum Ambassadors" volunteers in an efficient & effective manner
 - Need Volunteer "job descriptions", form, benefits policy (programs for free?, t-shirt "uniforms"?, recognition policy,
 - Need live person to:
 - "interview" volunteers based on information filled out in the form and match them to a "position", be a contact for concerns, and their "pep agent"
 - Train volunteers on specific tasks (i.e. volunteers working with school groups need specific activities outlined [perhaps a script] and well-defined purpose for the field trip [perhaps a video example for different cognitive levels to make it worth teachers while to visit])