

Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan
Executive Director Report for Board of Trustees Meeting
May – June 2020 End of the Year Overview

COVID-19:

Shutdown: Working from Home

- March 13th the Besser Museum closed. Staff was instructed to work from home.
 - The E.D. and Facility Manager worked at the museum as needed.
 - Planetarium Coordinator and Education Coordinator created and posted social media content throughout the COVID-19 shutdown.
 - Guest Service Specialist provided administrative assistance from home and returned to the museum when Governor deemed office workers could return to do work that could not be performed at home.

Grant Funding

- Besser Museum received the following COVID Relief Funding.
 - \$42,700 from the Paycheck Protection Program on April 20th. This loan through mBank covers employee payroll, benefits, and utilities. An application must be submitted at the end of 24 weeks for the loan to be considered a forgiveness grant.
 - \$5,000 from Michigan Humanities H.O.P.E. part of the CARES act.
 - \$2,500 from MCACA Emergency Relief grant through the NEA.
 - The Besser Museum estimated a possible \$53,000 revenue loss from March through September due to COVID.

Reopening

- Governor Whitmer deemed museums safe to open on June 8th. The Besser Museum opens to the public Friday, June 19th.
 - A 4-stage reopening plan was drafted in accordance with CDC guidelines.
 - Steps were taken to provide face masks, hand sanitizer station, social distancing signs, safety guidelines and good hygiene guidelines for staff and visitors.
 - New cleaning protocols were established to disinfected high touched surfaces.
 - New visitor schedule and protocols were established and advertised.
 - New volunteer protocols were established.
 - Staff training was conducted.
 - Administration will continually monitor CDC recommendations and guidelines and will adjust museum policies and protocols accordingly.

MANY ACTIVITIES, EXHIBITS, EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS WERE HELD FROM JULY 2019 THROUGH MARCH 2020 BEFORE CLOSING.

ATTENDANCE FROM JULY – MARCH WAS RECORDED TO BE JUST OVER 10,000 VISITORS. WE MISSED OUT ON THE ANNUAL FIELDTRIP VISITS.

ONGOING PROJECTS

FACILITY:

- **R.S. Scott Facility Study**

- In 2018, the Besser Museum contracted with R.S. Scott to conduct a facility study. The study evolved into looking at both the exterior and interior needs and provide recommendation to maintain and/or improve the museums structure and storage capacity. This was in response to the AAM Accreditation Report.
- December 2019, R.S. Scott submitted their Facility Report to the Board of Trustees. The plan presents 7 priorities that total approximately 1.5 million. Each priority hinges on each other to accomplish the overall goal.
- Decisions on how best to proceed with the facility renovation plan, along with a funding plan, needs to be developed.

HISTORIC VILLAGE:

- **Log Cabin**

- Besser Museum raised \$15,000 during the 2019 Giving Tuesday Campaign for the preservation of the Historic Village buildings.
- May 21, 2020, architect, Richard Neumann (recommended by John Porter from the Mackinac State Parks) conducted a study of the McKay Log Cabin and provided a Physical Condition Assessment and recommendations for renovations.
- A \$25,000 grant application was submitted to Alpena County Youth and Rec.
- A \$10,000 grant application was submitted to Alpena County Older Persons
- A \$5,000 grant application was submitted to CFNEM.
- A \$10,000 cash match (funds from Giving Tuesday) was committed in the grants.
- Alpena County Grants will not be award until December 2020 to be used in 2021.
- Signage for the outside of all the buildings is being developed.

GREAT LAKES FISHERIES HERITAGE EXHIBIT:

- **Chinook**

- We are still waiting to hear from Besser Company if, or when they can build the cradles. We are not sure what they will charge, or if they will build the cradles as an in-kind donation.
- This past year the exhibit site for the Chinook was prepared, excavated, retaining walls built, and a concrete pad poured to hold the cradles and boat. Plans to create a walkway from the Katherine V exhibit to the Chinook are being discussed.
- Jim Johnson has been cataloging the artifacts (equipment) that was used on the Chinook.
- Jim is also documenting the history of, and the research conducted on the boat.
- Information about the Chinook is posted on the museum's website.
- Funding is being discussed. Grant applications were unsuccessful.

- **Katherine V**
 - Tuffy continues to work on the exhibit adding props and interpretation.
 - Retaining walls were installed around the Katherine V shed so the walls don't cave in.
 - This past year the shed for the Kahlenberg Engine was built. Tuffy added mannequins inside the engine shed.
 - Zach Irving recorded the LeBlance fishing family, however, due to the COVID shutdown, the production of the short video has not been completed yet.
 - Funding for ongoing projects is being discussed.

ANISHINAABE EXHIBIT REVITALIZATION PROJECT (Native American Gallery)

- The Cook Family provided a total of \$45,000 endowment held at CFNEM for this project.
- Good Design was hired to provide a draft of a concept plan of the exhibit space.
- Genealogist, Matt McCormick was hired to do research on the indigenous families that lived in and around Northeast Michigan.
- Consultants, Charlee Brissette and Calvin Hartwig, members of the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians, were hired to review McCormick's research and create exhibit themes and narratives. They are currently working under a contract that ends December 2020. This contract may be extended due to COVID shutdown.
- Anne Belanger, who will continue to serve on the ad-hoc committee after stepping down from the Board of Trustees. Hannah Hazewinkel, local 3rd grade teacher is also serving on the committee and working with the consultants.

FINE ART

- **Modular Walls**
 - Besser Foundation approved using money from their \$25,000 Anniversary gift to purchase modular walls for the Wilson Gallery. Information from EmagiSpace was presented to the Board of Trustees.
 - Volunteer, Vicki Wright retired as an art museum curator for over 30 years and lives in Presque Isle. Vicki will help curator rotating art exhibits with the Besser Museums fine art collection for the new Wilson Gallery space.
 - Plans to create traveling exhibits that can be rented to other museums has not been developed yet but is something the Board is still interested in pursuing.
 - Work of local artists is exhibited: Juried Art, Winter Blues, NEMAG, etc.

ARTIFACT COLLECTIONS:

- **Collection Storage Areas**
 - This year, what was the wildlife exhibit gallery was renovated to be used for Temporary Custody donations and the collection committee workroom.
 - We have also been working with R.S. Scott to design a plan for better storage areas for the museum's collections.
- **PastPerfect Data Software**
 - Volunteers have almost completed uploading all the handwritten accession logs into the new PastPerfect database. The Accession logs are done, and the cataloging will be completed shortly. Progress was hindered by COVID.
- **Temporary Custody donations**
 - Before COVID shutdown, volunteers were working 2 to 3 days a week to organize all the Temporary Custody donations that were backlogged from 2010/11. There were also several Found in Collection objects that were identified in this process.
 - The Collection Committee was meeting once a week making determinations on whether to accept or reject the donated object. Decisions on over 100 TC donations were made. Many of the items were either returned to donor or disposed of with donor permission. The objects that were kept will be formally accessioned into the museum's collections.
 - There is still a lot of work to do in this area, but progress is being made.
 - We have been working with museum professional, Laura Quackenbush on these projects. The COVID shutdown hindered the progress we were making. We hope to resume these projects shortly.
 - During the COVID shutdown, volunteer Judy Dawley started writing articles about some of the objects held in our collections. A few of these articles were published in the Alpena News.
- **Inventory**
 - Soon, the Collections Committee and Volunteers will be devising a plan to inventory and do condition reports on the objects in the collections.
 - Laura Quackenbush will provide consultation for this project also.
 - We hope to have an intern or possibly hire a new Collections Manager that will work with Volunteers to accomplish this task.

STRATEGIC PLAN

- **Strategic Planning Workshop, January 18, 2020**
 - Board Retreat was held to develop the next 5-year Strategic Plan on January 18th. Museum professional Ron Bloomfield from CMU facilitated this workshop and provided a report afterwards. The Board is waiting to meet in person to discuss the report and update the Strategic Plan.