



CULTURAL ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

For

**LUDINGTON/MASON COUNTY,
MICHIGAN**

Presented October 2011 by:

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Cultural Economy Development Plan
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1. Overview of Ludington & Mason County

Bordered by Lake Michigan, Mason County boasts an abundance of cultural and natural assets. Named for the first governor of Michigan, Stevens T. Mason, this county has a rich and varied history that spans three centuries. The natural sand dunes, temperate summers, dense forests and rural countryside attracted farmers, summer travelers, adventurers and businessmen. Around 1850, the area came into prominence as the lumber industry grew. James Ludington settled here, named the town, and started a sawmill at the mouth of the Pere Marquette River.

Ludington prospered for the next 40 years, and soon became a transportation hub with the advent of the car ferry system in 1897. More than a century later, Ludington's historic ferry, the Badger, carries on this tradition by transporting people and cars across the lake daily. About the same time as the launch of the car ferry, Epworth Heights was founded as a Methodist Chautauqua-style community on the shores of Lake Michigan. This seasonal community also continues today, with many of the homes passed down through generations of summer residents.

Specialty manufacturing, the medical industry and tourism are the dominant engines for employment and economic development in Mason County today. Agriculture remains a strong base, as well, for this rural county as evidenced in the century farms and orchards that dot the landscape. West Shore Community College also contributes a substantial economic impact – through jobs, education and training, and cultural programs – for the county.

Cultural Economic Development: Background and Opportunity

Recognizing the need to diversify and strengthen the economic base, a group of dedicated citizens organized to explore the opportunities associated with the cultural economy. Defined as “how a community or place uses its cultural assets to cause economic development and cultural prosperity”, the cultural economy fits the destination's vision for growth and sustainability.

Culture in Ludington and Mason County is broadly defined to include:

- All forms of traditional and contemporary arts (sculpture, painting, photography, pottery, performing arts – music, dance, theatre)
- Heritage (history, architecture)
- Place-based activities that are unique to the county (parks, recreation, agriculture, etc.)

*“Many experts have concluded that the world is shaping a new economy featuring a growing emphasis on technology, innovation, entrepreneurial thinking and creative product development – what Richard Florida wrote in his influential book, *The Creative Class*, and Joseph Pine called ‘*The Experience Economy*.’ This new economy, as so defined, bodes well for the future role of culture.”*

- Dr. William Anderson,

Cultural Economic Development: An Economic Force Waiting to be Harnessed, 2011

National Trends

In the past decade, the cultural economy – sometimes included as a subset of the creative economy – has gained traction as a positive, high impact addition to traditional manufacturing and extractive industries. Growth in the number of professionals entering the fields of arts, entertainment and other creative/knowledge-based segments has fueled this attention.

A documented sector of the cultural economy is the arts. According to Americans for the Arts, there are 756,007 businesses in the U.S. involved in the creation or distribution of the arts. These businesses employ 2.99 million people, representing 4% of all companies and almost 3% of all employees, respectively, based on registration through Dun & Bradstreet.¹

The Local Base

As of January 2011, Mason County is home to 56 arts-related businesses that employ 117 people.² These arts-centric businesses play an important role in building and sustaining economic vibrancy. They employ a creative workforce, spend money locally, generate government revenue, and are often an unexpected source of tourism and economic development. The creative industries account for almost 3% of the 2,133 total businesses located in Mason County and about 1% of the 13,182 total people they employ.

Arts-Related Businesses and Employment in Mason County		
(Data current as of January 2011)		
CATEGORIES	BUSINESSES	EMPLOYEES
Arts Schools and Services	4	7
Design and Publishing	13	35
Film, Radio and TV	6	22
Museums and Collections	1	2
Performing Arts	9	18
Visual Arts/Photography	23	33
GRAND TOTAL	56	117

Note: As the source of these data is based solely on businesses that have registered with Dun & Bradstreet, our analyses indicate an under-representation of nonprofit arts organizations and individual artists. Therefore, this Creative Industries report should be considered a conservative estimate. For more information, maps, and to make sure you are included in our Creative Industries research, visit www.AmericansForTheArts.org/sc/CreativeIndustries.

¹ Source: *Americans for the Arts Creative Industries Report, January 2011*

² Source: *Americans for the Arts Creative Industries Report, January 2011 (via Dun & Bradstreet)*

Economic Drivers for Present and Future

The 2006 Mason County Comprehensive Plan³ recognizes the importance of culture, tourism and recreation to the local economy. The report articulates the 21st Century Vision for Mason County in 2025 “to be a county of economic development opportunity; to preserve the scenic, natural and agricultural landscape; to have “alive” city and village centers; to be a county of education and stimulation; to offer recreation as a key quality; and (be a) cooperative county.” A specific goal outlined in this plan is where “Village and City centers have an economic and cultural vitality with strategies to:

- 1) Retain and/or expand civic and cultural facilities close to village and city centers
- 2) Utilize brownfield redevelopment strategies for revitalization
- 3) Encourage zoning ordinances to permit mixed use development
- 4) Encourage preservation of historic structures through maintenance and renovation
- 5) Encourage pedestrian activity through sidewalks and public spaces that have art and other amenities
- 6) Promote participation in community and cultural activities
- 7) Encourage business and institutions to install public art, landscaping, benches and fountains.”

The Appeal of Authentic Places

According to the county’s *Tourism Assessment Report* (Stynes, 2009), tourists spent \$78 million in Mason County in 2006 and represent 6% of sales in the county. Direct and indirect spending by these travelers support 1,200 area jobs and contributes \$25 million in labor income.⁴

One of the primary attractions for visitors to Ludington and Mason County is its natural beauty. Parks are a main attraction for nature lovers and recreationists. Ludington State Park, with its six miles of shoreline, is frequently recognized as one of Michigan’s best and named a favorite by *MidWest Living* in 2010. According to the Ludington Recreation Plan, two other parks also contribute to the appeal of the destination and county’s economy. Ludington’s Waterfront Park offers a band shell for scheduled entertainment and activities; bronze sculptures that depict Ludington’s history provide a great educational experience for visitors and residents; and a popular children’s playground facility. City Park also boasts a band shell, extending the opportunity to provide concerts and outdoor entertainment for the community and visitors.⁵

The area’s distinctive heritage and cultural attractions provide a positive complement to the nature-based activities available for visitors. The current county leadership recognizes that the combination of nature, culture and heritage provide a strong foundation for stimulating Ludington and Mason County’s economic growth and prosperity through tourism, education and employment.

As the cultural economy gains momentum, destinations across the country court young entrepreneurs, educated retirees and creative professionals. Areas readily affirm the value of this talent pool on a community’s health and vitality. Offers of enhanced quality of life, affordable housing, and social capital – bundled with attractive and authentic places to live, work, and play – attract these audiences and contribute to a strong cultural economy.

³ Source: Mason County Comprehensive Plan, 2006 Analysis

⁴ Source: Tourism Assessment Report, Daniel J. Stynes, June 2009

⁵ Source: City of Ludington Recreation Plan, 2010



2. *The Cultural Economic Development Planning Process*

Ludington and Mason County elected to engage in a comprehensive planning process to identify specific opportunities, challenges and issues related to advancing the area's cultural economy. With a foundation of cultural assets, Ludington and Mason County represent a destination poised to grow its cultural economy and diversify employment. A strong summer tourist season, distinctive lumber/maritime/transportation heritage, historic vacation community (Epworth), attractive rural landscape, and dynamic entrepreneurs make the destination an ideal test case for the state of Michigan. Therefore, community leaders in Ludington and Mason County set out to create an initiative for implementing and measuring a cultural development strategy.

An 11-member Task Force – representing various constituent groups from the county, cities of Scottville and Ludington, private business and non-government organizations – joined together to lead this effort. The Task Force secured national consultants, the Hargrove–Anderson team, to facilitate the planning process. As the first step, the consulting team broadly defined “culture” to include arts, heritage and locally made products.

To ensure local input, invite recommendations for key stakeholders, and identify practical solutions to issues impacting the growth of Mason County's cultural economy, the planning process included seven key components:

1. Inventory of existing cultural resources
2. Survey of Task Force Members to obtain attitudes and opinions about the cultural economy
3. Survey to cultural resource managers to acquire a needs assessment with recommendations to grow and sustain the cultural economy
4. Visual assessment and Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) for existing cultural assets in Mason County (conducted in May and July 2011)
5. Compilation of Best Practices, based on the growth objectives of local stakeholders
6. Series of five training workshops and facilitated discussions in July 2011 to share information and gain insights from local stakeholders in the quest to advance a cultural economy
7. Set of recommendations to realize a strong and sustainable cultural economy

From these components, several priorities surfaced and provided direction for the custom recommendations and strategies outlined in this plan. The Task Force cited “enhance area's brand, marketability” as the *most important reason* for growing the cultural economy. Other *extremely important reasons* include “attract new businesses, entrepreneurs;” “increase visitor length of stay, spending;” and “increasing area employment (See *Appendix A: Task Force Survey Analysis*.)

Arts and culture need to be redefined, not as frills or luxuries, but as essential and useful agents for invigorating and restoring character to our communities.

- Culture Builds Communities, 1995

The cultural community also shared information through surveys and discussion groups on their contributions, needs and also the perceived challenges and opportunities for growing the local

cultural economy. They cited current contributions to the local and cultural economy as employment, tourist spending and supporting local artists.

All stakeholders recognize that there is room for improvement and growth in the cultural economy, with the current cultural economy rated by existing cultural resource managers as a score of 6.6 out of possible 10 points (see *Appendix B: Cultural Resource Survey Analysis*). The Task Force scored the current cultural economic climate slightly lower at 5.9 (see *Appendix A*), demonstrating agreement in the need for development and marketing activities to advance the cultural economic impact.

The consulting team also identified several areas to help grow the cultural economy. During an independent analysis of each cultural attraction or resource, the consultants made specific recommendations to enhance the quality, quantity and consistency of experiences, products and services (See *Appendix C: Cultural Resource Inventory & SWOT Analysis Report*). The collective need for cultural attractions, businesses, and individuals to conduct economic and market research surfaced as an essential strategy to demonstrate their impact and benefits to Mason County. Currently, very few cultural entities track or analyze their sales, target market profiles, economic impact or visitation.



3. *Cultural Identity & Competition*

Ludington and Mason County have begun to gain recognition for their cultural assets. To escalate this awareness, the Task Force acknowledges the importance of showcasing its authenticity and uniqueness to differentiate the destination from the competition. Given that first impressions often impact the customer decision to engage in cultural activities, the consulting team conducted a visual assessment to identify the aesthetic strengths and weaknesses of Mason County. This activity also allowed for an independent review of gateways, cultural attractions and visitor amenities (See *Appendix D: Visual Assessment*).

To identify Ludington and Mason County's most notable attributes, it is helpful to understand the unique selling proposition of other comparable destinations that have received recognition and designations:

- **Mackinac Island** is known nationally for its pedestrian-only access and iconic assets such as the summer cottages and Grand Hotel
- **Manitowac, Wisconsin** features a waterfront Maritime Museum and expansive historic Main Street
- **Muskegon** has an abundant collection of Victorian structures as the foundation for events, lodging and tours
- **Pentwater's** intimate downtown is bordered by an attractive waterfront and marina
- **Saginaw's** Riverfront, Celebration Square and Anderson Enrichment Center contribute to the destination's recognition as a family-friendly and arts city
- The restored mining town of **Galena, Illinois** has been recognized as one of Midwest Living's "100 Best Midwest Small-Town Getaways"
- **Madison, Indiana** was one of the original National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Communities, and has been named a Preserve America Community
- **Paducah, Kentucky** was originally known for its quilt community; now it boasts a vibrant arts community thanks to innovative work-art space initiative.

The Brand Promise & Delivery

Branding a destination centers on three components: the promise of the experience, the realization of the experience, and the customer's reaction to the experience. Sustaining a quality brand requires true, consistent messaging; distinction or a unique position in the marketplace; a relationship based on emotion, connectivity with the target customer; and consistent quality on-site experiences that realize the brand promise.

5 Truths About Branding

REALIZE: The Customer Owns the Brand

RESOLVE: Your Promise is Your Brand

REINVENT: Consumers are in Control

RELATE: Create a Tribe

REQUIRES Focus, connection, harmony, changing the conversation

Source: Russo Group, 2011

This plan articulates how Ludington and Mason County can achieve a recognized brand based on its cultural identity in the next five years. It begins with specific strategies to grow and sustain the cultural economy for a more diversified employment base.

With a critical mass of recognized cultural product and services, the destination can market its unique assets in a competitive way. Partnerships and creative initiatives will leverage resources and target efforts to attract desired audiences and their spending. Beneficiaries include the cultural attractions, artists, businesses, government and residents of Mason County.

4. *Vision & Guiding Principles*

Stakeholders aspire to a grand vision for the county that achieves specific outcomes, benefits all residents, and sustains growth during economic fluctuations. In addition, participants involved in the planning process recognize that the cultural economy provides an inclusive opportunity for growth based on a rich heritage and strong civic engagement.

Vision:

Positively recognized as a cultural haven and distinctive destination, the Ludington & Mason County area preserves and promotes its cultural and natural assets through innovative education and economic development strategies. Due to strong leadership, vibrant cultural and successful business communities, this Michigan destination attracts visitors year round and enjoys positive recognition for its strong arts, agricultural, maritime, and lumber heritage.

Guiding Principles:

- 1. All voices are valued, all work is inclusive; all communication is transparent*
- 2. Focus on authentic, locally-based solutions fostered by collaborations, partnerships*
- 3. Infuse culture in all endeavors; Retain cultural integrity for sustainability*
- 4. Provide high quality, authentic experiences to all customers*
- 5. Although attracting more visitors is desired, the primary beneficiaries of the cultural economy are local residents.*

Keys to success in implementing and sustaining this initiative and expected economic growth include early achievements, leadership, marketing and funding.

Five goals articulate the benefits of realizing growth and sustainability of a cultural economy. Collectively, these goals represent the development, management, enhancement, marketing and measurement required to deliver a quality brand.



Recommended strategies and specific tactics outlined in this plan further demonstrate the viability of growing the cultural economy to achieve these **desired outcomes**:

- Increased employment & career opportunities
- Increased tax revenues
- Increased quality of life for residents
- Increased satisfaction/spending by visitors.

5. Goals, Specific Strategies & Tactics

Goal 1: Proven cultural economic development projects are hailed as models for ingenuity, investment and integrity.

Strategy 1.1: FOCUS ON LOCALLY MADE OBJECTS

Creation, cultivation and sales of locally-made objects increase revenues for the destination and better position the destination for its unique products.

Task 1.1.1: Develop and distribute “hang tags” to identify all locally-made objects (including manufactured goods) sold in stores, restaurants and other distribution outlets in the county in 2012. These hang tags help promote the cultural brand of Ludington/Mason County and recognize the quality and diversity of artists and contributors to the cultural economy.

Task 1.1.2: Create and distribute a “Buy Local” brochure to Epworth residents each April beginning in 2012.

Example: HandMade in America

HandMade in America was founded in 1993 by a citizen led organization who gave birth to the idea that linked the making and selling of craft objects to the economic and social renewal of 23 mountain counties in Western North Carolina.



Programs include: a series of guidebooks with driving trails that link craft and agricultural sites and encourage exploration of the region’s assets; a Small Town revitalization program that has resulted in over \$ 53M of investment in the region’s smallest towns; educational programs for kindergarten through life-long learning programs; development of a craft studio incubator at a closed landfill with the methane providing energy for potters and glassblowers; expansion into the markets of architecture and design with the construction of two craft homes, an affordable housing component, and a Handmade showroom for architectural elements and home décor.

During the planning process, it was determined that 67% of craft was sold to visitors, while craftspeople requested that they would like the “market” brought to them allowing them more time to create their work. The planning process identified 400 places in Western North Carolina that were representative of their craft and their heritage: historic craft schools and cooperatives, museums, studios, shops, galleries, historic inns and restaurants serving traditional mountain foods. Of the initial 25,000 copies of the guidebook, *The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina*, sold in the first three years, site participants had an average increase of 24% in income and 73% of trail visitors spent over \$200 on craft purchases. In total, three editions of the guidebook were produced listing an additional 200 sites and selling over 80,000 copies.

Task 1.1.3: Create and market “Badger Bucks” to encourage visitors sailing from Manitowoc to buy locally made items in Ludington and Mason County, beginning in May 2013.

Task 1.1.4: Encourage local museum stores, other attractions and cultural entertainment venues to display, market and sell locally-made items.

Museum Store Statistics:

Average Visitation - 85,000 visitors

Annual Sales - \$200,000 + Up 16.5% since 2006

Source: 2009 Museum Store Association Retail Industry Report

Task 1.1.5: Create a Virtual Marketplace as a cultural on-line inventory of goods and services on the Ludington Area Chamber website in 2014.

Strategy 1.2: DEFINE THE DESTINATION BY SCULPTURE



Sculpture is the defining element for enhancing the destination image and providing a vehicle to tell the stories of the county through programming, education and tourism.

Ludington and Mason County have initiated a competitive selling proposition for the destination with the interpretation of heritage through sculpture. The current Waterfront Sculpture Park in downtown Ludington provides a sound foundation for a quality educational experience that can be expanded throughout the county.

Task 1.2.1: Erect a total of 50 thematic and contemporary sculptures in 50 places, by 2020 – for example: clown in Scottville; lumber totem pole; agriculture in Free Soil, maritime in city park. Target: add five sculptures each year to create an “art and earth” sculpture trail for visitors and residents’ experience. Attract the interest and engagement of local artists during the first phase of creating sculptures.

Example: Socrates Sculpture Park

The Socrates Sculpture Park located in Long Island City serves as an internationally renowned outdoor museum that encourages strong interaction between artists, artworks and the public by offering a wide variety of free public programs.

Projects include: Kite Flight where children build and decorate kites from recycled materials and fly them in the park; Bike Parade invites children to use recycled materials to repair and decorate their bikes for a waterfront parade; the annual Halloween Harvest Festival invites families to make a costume with Sculpture Park artists. Year around artist-led workshops for children, teens and adults provide opportunities to enjoy art-making projects, learn practical skills and span subjects as cultural diversity, science, sustainability and social studies.

www.socratessculpturepark.org

Task 1.2.2: Use thematic sculpture to define three road and/or water access/gateways (Route 10, Route 30, city beach access or Badger embarkation) by 2013; incorporate sculpture into signs (downtown Ludington, Scottville) and to define public areas by 2015.

Task 1.2.3: Engage local residents in the sculpture brand by creating an annual “Forging the Future” program to launch in 2014 – include children’s design competition, welding workshops, display of distressed wood sculpture, adaptive reuse/environmental sculpture, sculpture apprentices, guest artist residencies.

Strategy 1.3: CREATE NEW CULTURAL PRODUCTS & VENUES

Traditional and contemporary expressions of the county’s agriculture, lumber, maritime stories as well as other natural and cultural assets are recognized and celebrated.

Task 1.3.1: Beginning Spring 2012, host Weekly Music Concert Series (by sponsor West Shore Bank) at the Ludington Waterfront Bandstand to showcase local musicians and guest artists as a cultural activity. Target attendance of 250 residents and/or visitors at each performance.

Task 1.3.2: Establish a facility to further interpret the lumber heritage of the area, showcased with wood-carved sculpture and connected with other heritage attractions, artists, galleries and businesses associated with wood, wood products or lumber.

Task 1.3.3: Create the Port of Ludington Maritime Museum in 2013 as a cultural attraction and an anchor for additional waterfront development and marketing, designed to experience with other maritime assets, including the Lighthouses, local Ludington “lake” cuisine, fishing industry interpretation (“fisherman for the day”, “fish cleaning” workshop, etc.), and Coast Guard interpretation for youth.

- Secure a grant from Tourism Cares (www.tourismcares.org) in 2012 to help fund a cultural activity or attraction (for instance, the Port of Ludington Maritime Heritage Museum).

Example: Swamp Gravy



Swamp Gravy, named for a concoction made from fish fry drippings, began as a community project for emotional and economic healing in Colquitt, Georgia. In 1992, the first production was held; it is now repeated twice annually – May and October. *Swamp Gravy*, the state’s official folk life play, attracts 40,000 visitors annually to this rural southwestern town, population 2,000. More than 60 residents volunteer as cast members of this play. The evening performance is collection of vignettes based on local residents’ reminiscences told through original

song, story and dance. The production is staged in a 70-year-old cotton warehouse; the Cotton Hall Theatre seats 284.

Because of the play’s success, the Arts Council and production company have hosted annual how-to workshops via the Swamp Gravy Institute the last five years; have a Youth Theatre; New Life Learning (summer camps and after-school program for kids); and Storytelling Museum. The play contributes at least \$2 million to local economic annually + priceless increase in community

pride. The founders also built 32 low-income housing units, established a revolving loan fund and business incubator as residual outcomes from the play. www.swampgravy.com

Task 1.3.4: Explore creation of an original play to tell the unique stories of Mason County, as performed by West Shore Community College or as part of the Wharton Center/MSU program.

Task 1.3.5: Encourage the establishment of a Cultural Concierge Center in 2014 to anchor the Ludington Center for the Arts with Mason County Library and the Sandcastles Children’s Museum, offering visitors information about cultural activities and events at this “creativity” corner. An iconic sculpture outside defines the space.

Task 1.3.6: In 2015, encourage the opening of ArtPlex, a mixed-use commercial/residential space with craft studios, artist flats and boutique hotel, in downtown Ludington on the south side of Ludington Avenue where the former bowling alley is located.

Task 1.3.7: Encourage all cultural organizations to develop at least one new product, program or upgrade visitor services to attract and retain host audiences by 2015.

Strategy 1.4: SHOWCASE CULTURE IN AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

Showcasing authentic assets in all entertainment, recreation and programming educates and enhances residents and visitors appreciation of the destination’s agriculture, maritime, and lumber heritage.

Task 1.4.1: Beginning in 2013, tap cultural assets and attractions to extend current season experiences or offer special discounts (incentives) to enhance visitation in September, October and May plus increase Thursday/Monday visitation by 10% annually.

Example: Lincoln City, Oregon

Along Oregon’s 360 miles of coast, every community is using the arts to take the beach experience beyond sand, surf and scenery. Lincoln City draws from its past to create new ways to showcase its contemporary culture.

The “Finders Keepers” project began in 1999 to expand glass arts in the area as an economic development act. Lincoln City CVB signed on as the initial sponsor and the city commissioned 8-12 artists to handcraft signed and numbered glass floats (resembling the glass globes that Japanese fishermen used to float their nets). Volunteers hide more than 2,000 floats above the high tide line and below the beach embankment.



Finders take their discovery to the Lincoln City Visitor and Convention Bureau where they are given a certificate of authenticity and a biographical sketch of the artist. Certain floats carry numbers that are also good for a night’s lodging, “dinner and a show” or a complete weekend

package, with lodging, meals, food, shopping gift certificate and an opportunity to blow a unique float at a local glass studio.

Task 1.4.2: Capitalize on the Wharton Center's (Michigan State University) designation of this area as one of its hubs to enhance cultural programming.

Task 1.4.3: Establish three organized, specific length walking/driving tours (as downloadable itineraries) to help guide visitors along routes that share the cultural stories and assets of Mason County as unique experiences in 2014.

- Establish a walking tour of the National Register Historic District in downtown Ludington as a way to interpret the county's (lumber, maritime) heritage and recognize the area's distinctive architecture.

Strategy 1.5: DEVELOP AGRI-TOURISM PROGRAM

Establish a unique visitor experience for Mason County through its agricultural operations, interacting with the people who own and manage the land, and enjoying/purchasing products made from locally grown crops or natural resources.

Ensure that existing agritourism products are integrated into cultural activities and programs to add value and enhance experience. Leverage farm events and activities to extend stay, enhance spending of visitors traveling to the area for other purposes.

Task 1.5.1: In 2012, complete agricultural asset inventory and determine interest in development of agri-tourism experiences. Provide training in the development of interesting and profitable site experiences to include access, safety, education and entertainment activities.

Task 1.5.2: Create three seasonal agri-itineraries in 2012 that establish site criteria, selection of sites and agricultural/cultural experiences. Emphasize visitor activities as "pick your own" with cooking demonstrations during summer and fall and Christmas tree purchases with decorations made by local artisans during the winter.

Task 1.5.3: Expand "Barns and Byways" program into a self-guided auto tour of Mason County's outstanding farms and local food sources including seasonal itineraries and Art and Garden packages through print and internet guides in 2013-2014.

Task 1.5.4: Add cultural components to enhance the agri-experience as artist demonstrations on farm sites; sale of local objects made from farm and natural resources; music performances in the barn or farm site and culinary demonstrations using local produce in 2012-2014.

Example: The Pizza Farm

In order to help children understand where food comes from, a farming association in Modesto, California established a pizza farm for school tours. A plot of land shaped in a circle was divided into sections resembling slices of pizza. Each slice was planted in a food used in pizza as a plot of tomatoes, peppers, onions, artichokes and wheat. During a school visit a cow is placed in a plot/slice as a representative of cheese. Using workbooks, children tour the site to learn how

vegetables and wheat are grown and how cheese is produced. At the close of the session, they create and bake their own pizza slice with locally grown vegetables and enjoy their pizza snack before leaving the farm.

Task 1.5.5: In partnership with White Pine Village, Old Engine Club, Amber Ranch and interested farms develop youth educational experiences for visitors and local families. Create “Be a Farmer for a Day” experiences; “pick your own” orchards and berry farms; visits and seasonal experiences at pumpkin patches and Christmas Tree farms including Amber Ranch for a visit with Santa’s “reindeer” in 2015.

Task 1.5.6: In partnership with Agricultural Extension, USDA and local growers associations, develop and publish a local food guide that features tailgate and farmer markets, U-Pick Farms, grocers, fruit orchards and farms, farm stores, farms to visit, bakers, vineyard and restaurants featuring local foods. Publish and distribute to urban and regional markets in 2013-14.

Task 1.5.7: Develop a Quilt Trail using a series of hand-painted designs on wooden blocks to be placed on barns, public and private buildings throughout Mason County that form a self-guided auto trail for visitors and residents. Planning for the Quilt Trails and Tour Guide begin in 2013 with installation of the first quilt patterns in 2014.

The Economics of a Quilt Trail

The Quilt Trails of three counties in Western North Carolina have created its own economic contributions to the region’s economy in addition to beauty and creativity. Currently 200 quilt blocks have been painted and installed on barns, private businesses and public buildings.



These 200 quilt block purchases and product sales have added \$147,000 to the local economy. Of that amount, \$90,000 has gone to the local artists and tradesmen for creating the quilt patterns and installation of the blocks on building facades. The remaining money was spent on supplies, marketing materials, and development of a line of products that promote the quilt squares.

A series of trail guides for individual counties and a regional guide are sold at Chambers of Commerce and tourism centers. Workbooks and puzzles have been created for children and scarves, pins, note cards and calendars are created on an annual basis. The most popular sales item to date is dog collars imprinted with quilt patterns of their owners, family or neighbors.

The Quilt Trails can be found in 30 states and several provinces in Canada. A book about the compelling stories and histories of these patterns is currently being written and will be released in the spring of 2012. This publication is projected to continue drawing attention to one of the nation’s most popular forms of public art.



Goal 2: Strong leadership, investment and innovative education foster successful cultural and business communities.

Strategy 2.1: CREATE STRUCTURE TO ORGANIZE, MANAGE IMPLEMENTATION

A Cultural Economic Coalition – comprised of a representative group of county leaders and cultural stakeholders – convenes quarterly to oversee implementation of strategic plan.

Task 2.1.1: Continue the leadership role of the Task Force as a County-wide Cultural Economic Coalition, expanded – if appropriate – in late 2011/early 2012 to ensure representation from each strategic planning stakeholder group (young entrepreneurs, craft-based businesses, agriculture, cultural resources, Mason County communities, business, and tourism). The Task Force, with its leadership role in implementing the plan, needs a sponsoring local organization.

Task 2.1.2: Establish a “Cultural Coordinator” position to oversee implementation of strategies and tasks to expand and measure the impact of the cultural economy.

Task 2.1.3: By December 2012, assign specific assignments and form committees to advance the implementation of the strategic plan, enhance the engagement of and outreach to the cultural community, expand the growth of cultural offerings, and manage the cultural integrity of products and services.

Task 2.1.4: In 2013, secure a Memorandum of Understanding among partner agencies engaged in the Cultural Economic Coalition to demonstrate a cohesive collaboration to advance the cultural economy and the implementation of this plan.

Strategy 2.2: INITIATE COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Fostering a transparent, timely and consistent communication system for cultural resource managers, artists, educators and other stakeholders ensures full participation of and provides benefit to the cultural community.

Task 2.2.1: By March 2012, update current inventory of cultural organizations and stakeholders into a comprehensive list of resources and their contact information, profile, programs and other relevant data for use in marketing, development and management. Maintain and share information annually.

Task 2.2.2: By March 2012, develop a searchable database of cultural resources, cultural entrepreneurs, and other cultural community members to use as the foundation for communication, development, marketing, and research. Update annually. For instance, Custer has quilters at Pig Patch Farm; Scottsville uses vacant store for sale of crafts at Christmas; quilters meet weekly at Senior Center and have quilt show during the Harvest Festival.

Task 2.2.3: By March 2012, create an evergreen calendar of cultural events and entertainment offerings, with corresponding contact information and activity description, for use in marketing and scheduling.

Strategy 2.3: ESTABLISH BENCHMARKS FOR CULTURAL EXCELLENCE

Documented guidelines for developing, managing and marketing cultural resources allow for long-term sustainable growth at a level of excellence that garners national recognition.

Task 2.3.1: Convene government agencies/representatives to establish policies and procedures for new design and development guidelines that incorporate a countywide cultural-based philosophy in 2012. Continue countywide coordination and collaboration for enforcement and adherence in development.

- Historic Preservation guidelines: compliance with Secretary of Interior standards for restoration, preservation, exterior maintenance, enhancements, compatible infill
- New Construction guidelines: height, setbacks, density, use of materials, integration of cultural elements
- Beautification/conservation guidelines: native foliage choice, plantings, maintenance; easements and other policies to protect and enhance the aesthetic character of Ludington and Mason County
- Bicycle and pedestrian paths: construction, maintenance and expansion of livability guidelines to foster a safe recreation-based lifestyle.

Task 2.3.2: Convene government agencies/representatives to establish policies and implement procedures for developing and maintaining culturally sensitive sign ordinances in Mason County in 2012. Continue countywide coordination and collaboration to ensure enforcement and integrity of signage.

- Signage height and density guidelines: ensure the aesthetic character of Ludington and Mason County, especially in high-traffic areas; DOT compliance for Scenic Byways (in anticipation of potential designation)
- Design guidelines for signage: recommendations to foster cultural identity: address use of neon, exterior frame and composite; DOT compliance
- Wayfinding Guidelines: policies for placement, content and appearance of instructional, directional information signage
- Interpretation guidelines: policies to erect, maintain exterior signs, murals, and kiosks.

Task 2.3.3: Convene government agencies/representatives to establish policies and implement procedures that protect the quality and authenticity of cultural resources, products and atmosphere of Mason County in 2012. Continue countywide coordination and collaboration to maintain the integrity of the county's cultural brand.

- Gateways: Unify and beautify the aesthetic appeal and cultural identity of gateways to and within Mason County through attractive signage, sculpture, and landscaping
- Public Art: policies and guidelines for erecting and placing public art throughout the county. Address composite, location, supporting signage and maintenance.

Example: Lancaster County's Heritage Designation Program

In 1994, the Lancaster County Planning Commission (Pennsylvania, USA) introduced the nation's first heritage designation program to officially recognize the authentic cultural, historic and natural assets in the county. Today, the program is a network of 120 + heritage resources that meet guidelines for authenticity (demonstrating a link to the county's heritage), interpretation (sharing the "story" of that heritage with the public) and visitor readiness (having high standards of appearance and operation).



Resource designation is available in four categories: 1) Attractions: sites, lodging, dining; 2) Activities: events, tours; 3) Craftsmanship: Heritage crafts,

Living Treasures; and 4) Places: Communities, Landscapes, Byways. In 15 years, the program has grown to designate 63 heritage sites, 19 historic lodging establishments, 14 heritage dining locations, 13 heritage craft businesses, 10 heritage tour companies, 10 heritage events and one heritage industry.

The program has recently expanded its program by partnering with York County to provide a seamless cross-border designation. Signature publications developed by the Lancaster County Planning Commission include the Program Manual for Heritage Partners, "Telling Our Stories" Interpretation Manual for Heritage Partners, and the Graphics Style Guide for Heritage Partners (outlining instructions and usage for the logo and certification seal.)

Strategy 2.4: ESTABLISH EDUCATION & TRAINING PROGRAMS

Expanding the capacity of citizens, local businesses and cultural community permits growth in development, management and sustainability. Life-long learning attracts retirees to the area, enhancing the intellectual and social capital of the area.

Task 2.4.1: Host a "Cultural Business Boot Camp" quarterly, beginning Fall 2012, to enhance the professional and technical skills of artists, cultural resource managers and creative entrepreneurs. Offered in partnership by the West Shore Community College and Ludington Area Center for the Arts, the quarterly workshops bring in local business experts (accountants, lawyers, graphic designers) to share their knowledge and practical instruction.

Task 2.4.2: Beginning 2013, organize Citizen's Awareness Campaign focusing on four concepts for four audiences:

- October (Arts & Humanities Month) – “Youth Discovery Days”, an event to educate fourth graders about their traditional and contemporary history and culture.
- May (National Tourism Week) – “Resident Rendezvous,” a weeklong event offered to residents of Mason County to encourage enjoyment of local attractions, restaurants, tour programs and activities, and lodging. “Meet the Locals” encourages residents to understand their role in hosting visitors and the opportunity to enrich cultural experiences and understanding.
- A general “Myth Busting” campaign to expand local and visitor knowledge about the importance of the cultural economy:
 - “25 Things You Didn’t Know About the Cultural Economy” is a list released quarterly as an e-mail blast to elected officials, integrated into a PPT for use at civic clubs and other distribution outlets for key stakeholders.
 - Create a “Bridging the Cultural (Communication/Generation) Gap” presentation to showcase cultural events/innovation in three time periods (1950, 1980, 2010) and relate the past to the present.
 - Education program about the value of craft, to help residents and visitors understand the importance of supporting local artists and the time/process/investment required to create handmade objects (linked to the “hang tag” and “buy local” campaigns in Strategy 1.)

Example: Discovery Day

Asheville-Buncombe Discovery, a non-profit, dedicated to the revitalization of Asheville, North Carolina realized that the sustainability of their efforts was predicated on forwarding it to their children. Discovery Day was a month- long activity that culminated in a one-day tour of downtown as part of the 4th grade North Carolina history curriculum. Teams of teachers developed a curriculum guide to be used in classrooms for one month prior to Discovery Day.

Workbooks were provided to each child with local history games and activities. The Preservation Society provided a walking tour of historic and cultural sites. Activities included theater and musical performances with all children singing and dancing at the conclusion of the day. Opening ceremonies included a class roll call of banners created to represent Asheville’s history.

Each year, a large public art project was created and placed in a public building/space until the following year. A balloon launch closed the event with handwritten postcards and a reward for the longest return. A follow-up essay contest had students writing about what they learned and imagined as the future for their town.

Task 2.4.3: Attract young entrepreneurs and individuals seeking career shifts to Mason County with the offer of local workforce development training, micro-investment incentives, and affordable housing.

Example: Cool Community Colleges – Creative Approaches to Economic Development

Bellingham Technical College (BTC) in Washington brought art into an unlikely place--- the college’s welding program. Making art produced more skilled welders, taught teamwork, opened the door to new economic opportunities and focused the attention of local employers on design.

The initiative began with a welded sculpture competition among the 120 students, called the “Junkyards War”. Students sell the pieces at silent auction--- some have sold for thousands of dollars. Its 2005 competition drew competitors from technical colleges in Denmark and Scotland. The college is now part of a larger community effort that includes the local university’s industrial design and art and sculpture programs, other BTC manufacturing programs, and local development and tourism agencies.

Source: Stuart Rosenfeld, Cool Community Colleges, 2011

Task 2.4.4: Develop a life-long learning program to attract new residents, especially retirees seeking new environments of education, recreation, culture and community engagement.

Example: North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement, Asheville

The North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement is dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, leadership, community service, and research. Started in 1988, the goal is “to enable our members to “thrive” in life’s second half.” The Center has an array of programs in the arts and humanities, the natural world, civic engagement, retirement location planning, intergenerational co-learning, and research on trends in the reinvention of retirement.

The Center is a member-staff led organization of 1800 members that operates as a public-private entity with 2/3’s of the budget from private fees and 1/3 state supported on the campus of UNC- Asheville. Programs include a college for seniors with classes/workshops ranging from Chaucer to computers, foreign affairs to opera or yoga to history.

A creative retirement weekend is held annually to interest people in locating to the region. Community education followed by volunteering is on-going and The Institute for the Future of Retirement provides research, trends and data at a national level.

www.ncccr.com

Goal 3: Authentic experiences showcasing strong arts, agricultural, maritime, and lumber heritage benefit from preservation, enhancement and investment.

To appeal as and deliver a unique experience, the compilation of attractions and activities must:

- Stand out
- Be memorable
- Connect emotionally with the customer
- Motivate interest
- Be consistent
- Be worth a return visit

Therefore, it is recommended for Ludington and Mason County to cast a critical look at the current cultural assets and determine the most unique set of activities to protect, develop, enhance and invest in for sustainability. Focusing on these authentic experiences will, hopefully, result in greater recognition for their contribution to the cultural economy.

Strategy 3.1: INTERPRET FOR 21st CENTURY LEARNING STYLES

Using new media, technology and other tools to inform and educate audiences about the cultural and natural assets of the county allows for greater opportunity to attract all generations of both residents and visitors.

Task 3.1.1: Identify, research and interpret the story of five local heroes or characters associated, respectively, with lumber, maritime, business/industry, conservation and culture as a unique way to present information to media, tour operators, visitors in 2012.



Task 3.1.2: Encourage the Mason County Library to organize student groups focusing on travel literature as the basis for reading clubs and summer programs in 2013. Use the Internet program, www.googlelittrips.org, as an educational tool. Market this activity as a family friendly, rainy day adventure or Epworth seasonal program.

Task 3.1.3: Create a Smart Phone Application to showcase the county's cultural experiences and educational programs, especially activities linking multiple sites or activities appropriate for online information access. Initiate the technological advancement with a general "Cultural Ludington Area" application highlighting arts, entertainment, heritage and educational activities in the county in 2013. Promote via CVB and participating sites.

Task 3.1.4: Design and deliver Thematic Exhibits to link multiple attractions and activities into interactive experiences. Ensure that exhibits use technology to encourage multiple audiences, enhance the content delivery and update static presentations into dynamic and compelling theatre. The proposed Maritime Museum (to open in 2013) offers a great opportunity to establish the standard of interpretive excellence and link to other attractions (such as the Sable Point Lighthouses) and integrate the experience as part of a countywide thematic program.

Task 3.1.5: Upload five Thematic Itineraries on area/attraction websites and distribute as e-mails to media and tour operators as a way to demonstrate the cultural capacity in Mason County and expand access to information via technology in 2014.

Task 3.1.6: Introduce and implement “Story Signs” as a custom wayfinding program in 2015 that uses cultural elements and beautification to weave together pieces of the Ludington/Mason County story(s) like a puzzle. Find all “story signs” to learn the whole story; also map the signs to create a geocaching program. Story signs can be found on a building, be part of a sculpture, directional sign or interpretive marker. (Note: This strategy may be integrated into or a focus for the expanded sculpture trail.)

Strategy 3.2: ENHANCE CULTURAL EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT OFFERINGS

Expanding the quantity, quality and diversity of activities at various venues around Mason County will encourage residents and visitors to engage in cultural experiences.

Task 3.2.1: Encourage local hosts of business travelers, recruiters and other visitors to the region to organize events, evening receptions, and other activities at cultural venues, hire local artists for entertainment or seek other ways to showcase the cultural community in 2013.

Task 3.2.2: Cross-market recreation, cultural and heritage activities to increase length of stay spent by visitors in 2014.

Task 3.2.3: Expand evening entertainment options available at local museums, attractions and recreational facilities to increase overnight visitation by 2014.

Top Activities of Cultural Heritage Travelers:

1. Visiting historic sites (66%)
2. Participating in historical re-enactments (64%)
3. Visiting art museums/galleries (54%)
4. Attending an art/craft fair or festival (45%)
5. Attending a professional performance (44%)
6. Visiting state/national parks (41%)
7. Shopping in museum stores (32%)
8. Exploring urban neighborhoods (30%)

Source: Mandala Research 2009



6. Marketing Cultural Ludington & Mason County

Goal 4: Ludington Area achieves positive recognition as a cultural haven by marketing as a distinctive year-round destination. Visitor spending and public/private partnerships sustain Mason County's cultural economy.

A key benefit of developing and delivering experiences based on cultural assets is the increased opportunity to market and brand a destination for appreciative visitors. Some targeted audiences value cultural heritage; they seek out destinations that offer unique and authentic experiences, rewarding these places through spending and recognition.

As a rural, coastal destination, Ludington and Mason County must leverage resources – both human and financial – to market competitively and consistently the area's distinctive experiences. Therefore, in addition to implementing traditional on-line and off-line marketing strategies, building partnerships and collaborations is a key strategy for sustainable marketing.

Three phases are suggested to help define the sequence of marketing activities and to achieve the desired results in expanded partnerships, enhanced visitation, positive awareness, and increased recognition.

PHASE 1:

Market Existing Cultural Experiences to Increase Visitation & Employment

Showcasing cultural assets and activities in all of the county's marketing programs – collateral materials, public and media relations, advertising and promotions – can accomplish appropriate growth in visitation and purchasing during targeted periods.

“If you don't believe in your product, or if you're not consistent and regular in the way you promote it, the odds of succeeding go way down. The primary function of the marketing plan is to ensure that you have the resources and the wherewithal to do what it takes to make your product work.”

- Jay Levinson

Strategy 4.1: LEVERAGE CULTURAL RESOURCES TO FUND AND ORGANIZE COLLABORATIONS

Establishing partnerships to meet criteria and participate in Travel Michigan and all Pure Michigan programs – advertising, promotions and on-line marketing activities – expands opportunities to showcase Ludington area's cultural economy.

The continuing enrichment of the area's quality of life will benefit existing and new industries in attracting and retaining skilled employees and talent, retirees with valuable life experiences, and a supporting and nurturing environment will draw creative and business entrepreneurs to Mason County.

Tactic 4.1.1: Encourage more robust partnerships between the cultural community and the Convention & Visitor Bureau, the Chamber of Commerce, the Growth Alliance, the Scottville Main Street Association and other key organizations to design programs and foster cross-marketing among members.

Tactic 4.1.2: Annual funding for marketing will require a pooling of resources from multiple stakeholders to meet the required thresholds of investment to qualify as a Travel Michigan Partner and take advantage of the brand equity of Pure Michigan.

Strategy 4.2: ENHANCE CULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN ALL ELECTRONIC MARKETING

Improving the cultural amenities of the Ludington area on the Internet provides greater access and awareness to global audiences. With 80% of all travelers using Internet websites, search engines and email to find, place and book travel⁶, destinations must consider this the front-line tool to reach target audiences.

Task 4.2.1: Improve Search Engine Optimization (SEO) identified through ranking of content in web pages by enhancing key words and links that include "culture" and other relative terms by June 2012.

Task 4.2.2: Create a social media strategy (Facebook, Twitter) to cultivate a cultural community of at least 2,000 followers per on-line medium by December 2012. Also post at least one video per year of Ludington's cultural assets/attractions on youtube.com to create viral opportunity for recognition/publicity.

Task 4.2.3: Explore the opportunity to participate in the Travel Michigan Pay-per-Click program as a measurable marketing tool by December 2013.

Pay-per-Click Partnership Program

The Travel Michigan Pay-per-Click (PPC) Partnership program's goal is to promote and increase web traffic to partners' Web sites and michigan.org. The program's objective is to achieve the most traffic to michigan.org and then send them to partners' web sites at the lowest cost per click. Specific details on the pages are determined by the key words/phrases purchased and the goals of the partner. Travel Michigan will match the partner dollar for dollar. Program guidelines are available at <http://ref.michigan.org/mtr/ppc>

⁶ Source: US Travel Association, 2010

Strategy 4.3: TARGET ADVERTISING TO INCREASE VISITATION TO SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES, EVENTS

Targeted media buys allow Ludington and Mason County to engage specific audiences in measurable calls to action. Whether advertising via traditional media (radio, print, television or cable), Internet, or through program/event sponsorships, advertising can provide a unique sales opportunity for travel activities.

Task 4.3.1: Secure annual funding to conduct a regional advertising campaign to encourage attendance or sell admissions/packages to cultural events and activities (Mid-West Living, Detroit Free Press, Michigan magazine) plus a radio media package to prompt drive market for special short-haul activities.

Pure Michigan In-state Marketing Partnership Program

The Pure Michigan Instate Marketing Partnership program is intended to keep Michigan residents in-state, extend stays and further promote destinations by leveraging Travel Michigan and industry marketing dollars. The program's key markets are Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Flint, Saginaw/Bay City, Battle Creek/Kalamazoo and Traverse City. The program consists of 60-second radio spots and other companion media created by Travel Michigan utilizing the Pure Michigan brand. Partners can buy the Detroit market separately, the out state Michigan markets individually or as a group, or combine the two for one statewide program. This is a dollar for dollar match program. Travel Michigan's partnership guidelines are available at <http://www.michigan.org/mtr/marketing/>

Strategy 4.4: USE PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A COST-EFFECTIVE MARKETING VEHICLE

Destinations often use public relations as a pro-active communications tool to raise awareness and generate positive publicity. A well-crafted, integrated public relations campaign about Ludington's Cultural Economy can build community awareness, generate media coverage, and serve as a myth-buster related to specific issues or misconceptions.

Task 4.4.1: Expand current countywide public relations, especially those activities designed to elevate the awareness of Ludington & Mason County Area to outside opinion leaders, to include a focus on culture and reference to the cultural economy.



Task 4.4.2: The area CVB, Chambers of Commerce, other non-governmental organizations, as well as government agencies, should include information on or about the cultural economy in press releases, talking points to media and as potential story ideas (where appropriate).

- Collect and maintain a national list of journalists/ media outlets specializing in culture, economic development and/or tourism for distributing announcements regarding the cultural economy.

Strategy 4.5: CREATE AND CONDUCT EFFECTIVE PROMOTIONS TO INCREASE SALES

The best promotions are time-sensitive, measurable activities calling for a specific action or providing a value for purchase. Travel promotions often focus on attracting shoulder- or off-season travelers with incentives or special events. Alternatively, promotions may be offered to cultivate or increase awareness by a particular audience. Packages combine various tourism components together to promote a specific experience or seasonal program.

Components of Successful Packages:

- Typically one price with a number of components.
- Must include at least one overnight, but may include any combination of components, including lodging, sightseeing, attractions, entertainment, meals, car rental, and transportation
- Generally, taxes, surcharges and incidentals are not included
- Covers a specific period of time.
- Price must be equal to or lower than the total cost of the same goods and services if purchased separately.
- Terms and conditions of the tour contract specify exactly what is covered by the quoted price.
- May also feature "value added" incentives, which are free or discounted options to make the package more attractive.

Task 4.5.1: Annually, integrate cultural activities into promotional materials generated by the Chamber, Mason County Growth Alliance, CVB and other economic development entities to facilitate recognition and enhance outreach for cultural economy.

Task 4.5.2: In partnership with the B&B Association create two Art and Garden packages in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 to include historic home tours, photography in the garden, site visits to nurseries and orchards and local food dining experiences.

Task 4.5.3: Create one or more Culinary Packages, coupling restaurant dining with agricultural elements (such as farmers' markets, canning or cooking demonstrations) and overnight accommodations to offer a distinctive immersion learning experience in 2014 for purchase by 100 total visitors.

Example: “Sparks and Fire” Weekend Package

HandMade in America, a non-profit organization serving craft artisans in Western North Carolina, partnered with tourism organizations, artists, farmers and B&B Associations to develop a series of 3 day weekend packages that brought visitors into working studios and farms for authentic educational experiences. Accommodations were secured through the B&B Associations.

The Sparks and Fire Weekend Itinerary – Tryon and Saluda, North Carolina

- Arrival on Thursday evening with dinner at The Purple Onion restaurant with live music
- Friday morning, visit Kathleen Carson’s Pottery Studio in Tryon to learn how to design and make a clay goblet followed by lunch at The Wildflower Bakery
- Friday afternoon, visit the Studio Forge of Bill Crowell to learn how to design and forge a 2 bottle wine rack. Dinner that evening is at The Saluda Grade Café featuring local food.
- Saturday visit the Rock House Vineyards & Winery for a tour of the vineyards and wine tasting. Conclude the day with dinner at The Orchard Inn in Saluda while enjoying a panoramic view of the Blue Ridge Mountains.
- Three weeks later, two wine goblets and a two bottle wine rack accompanied by two bottles of Rock House Vineyard wine arrive at your door step as a reminder of your “Sparks and Fire” weekend.

Strategy 4.6: INTEGRATE CULTURE INTO ALL COLLATERAL MATERIALS

Brochures, map, newsletters, mobile applications, and other collateral materials offer the destination the opportunity to share information about Ludington and Mason County’s cultural community and economy. Utilizing design guidelines, consistent message and logo communicates the brand promise. Highlighting cultural assets and resources on all printed, electronic and visual tools ensures that customers understand the plethora of culturally based assets and experiences available in the destination.

“Make it simple. Make it memorable. Make it inviting to look at. Make it fun to read.”

- Leo Burnett

Task 4.6.1: By March 2012, create logo to express the anticipated cultural identity for the destination, with a defining element referencing sculpture and water. Develop and distribute usage and placement guidelines to stakeholders. Use on all marketing materials and destination collateral.

Task 4.6.2: Ensure that all collateral materials printed by the county, cities or paid for with public funds include the destination’s culture.

- Broadly define culture so that all elements are valued, cultivated and showcased – Photography, Music, Drama, Painting, Pottery, Metal, Wood, Performing and Visual Arts – beginning in 2012 (or as reprinted) on all county-sponsored or CVB print and on-line brochures, advertising and media materials.
- Integrate cultural activities or assets into exhibition materials (pop-up displays, exhibits, etc.) for use at trade shows to increase awareness.

Task 4.6.3: By Spring 2012, create new cultural asset map for visitors to help identify and locate existing cultural, agricultural, heritage, and other attractions throughout the county. Distribute via site locations/retail businesses and restaurants, B&Bs, CVB welcome center, hotel lobby rack displays, Epworth community center. Provide additional copies to the CVB and Greater Mason County Growth Alliance for insertion into information packets for media, tour operators, business recruitment, etc.

Example: Appalachian MapGuides

The 13 member of the Appalachian Regional Commission have collaborated on three mapguides to inform visitors about cultural and heritage sites, attractions, dining and accommodations and provide a corresponding website, www.visitappalachia.org for more information. The most recent guide focused the Civil War and was inserted into *American Heritage* magazine.



PHASE 2:

Market the Promised Cultural Brand

Strategy 4.7: MARKET CULTURE TO NICHE AUDIENCES

Targeting niche markets for shoulder and off-season experiences, or for the engagement of additional cultural activities during the current peak season, increases revenue generation and potential for repeat visitation.

Task 4.7.1: Research niche market segments and outline specific materials and promotional information to attract and host target audiences; grow annually, beginning in 2013 by 10%:

- Roads Scholars, a division of Elder Hostel (www.roadscholar.org);
- Educational Travel Community (www.travelearning.com);
- Adventure Travel & Tourism Association (www.adventuretravel.biz);
- SAVE market – Scientific, Academic, Volunteer and Experiential Audiences – via Save Travel Alliance (www.save-travel.org)
- Voluntourism (www.voluntourism.org)

Task 4.7.2: By 2013, design and distribute up to four local itineraries featuring special cultural programs to market as group tour experiences for these niche audiences. (Note: these itineraries may be the same offered to independent travelers, created as part of the product development goal.)

The Allure of Cultural Heritage Travelers

Older • More Affluent • Educated • Often Married

- Frequent traveler – 5.01 leisure trips vs. 3.98
- Spend more – \$994 vs. \$611
- 78% of all U.S. leisure travelers = 118.3 million adults annually
- Prefer leisure travel that is educational
- Spend more money on cultural and heritage activities
- Want to engage with locals; “do” something
- Will travel farther to get the experience
- Value On-line information for trip planning, consumer feedback

Source: Mandala Research 2009

PHASE 3:

Expand Reach of Cultural Brand to Maintain Market Share

Strategy 4.8: CULTIVATE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Thematic trails and clustered activities can increase capacity and achieve the critical mass required to extend length of stay and enhance spending by visitors. Regional partnerships offered greater potential to create multi-day, multi-destination itineraries that leverage resources and attract non-traditional partners for sustainable programs. Often, these collaborations can produce a greater return on investment.

Pure Michigan Out-of-State Marketing Partnership Program

The Out-of-State Partnership program extends the limited marketing reach of the Michigan travel industry and Travel Michigan by leveraging marketing dollars to promote Michigan. The program's key awareness target markets are Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Dayton, Columbus, St. Louis and Southern Ontario. Feeder markets are Toledo, Green Bay/Appleton, South Bend and Fort Wayne. Based on a financial commitment from Travel Michigan and potential partner(s), a specific strategic promotional campaign is jointly created utilizing television, radio, digital and print advertising, web site and online promotion, public relations and social media efforts. This is a dollar for dollar matching fund program.

Strategy 4.9: SEEK DESIGNATION AND AWARDS FOR CULTURAL RECOGNITION

The success of Mason County's cultural economy is a model for the state and the nation. As such, recognition, awards, accolades and special designations further enhance the destination's leadership position garnered from growth in the area's cultural economy and prosperity.

Task 4.9.1: Secure designation as one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “Dozen Distinctive Destinations” in 2013.

2011



*Example: Paducah, Kentucky
Named Dozen Distinctive Destinations “Fan Favorite” in*

Task 4.9.2: Meet the “America’s Top Small Art Towns” criteria so Ludington can be featured in the next edition of the publication in 2014.



7. Documenting the Cultural Economic Impact

Goal 5: Establish objective measurement mechanisms to track and document the outcomes attributed to the cultural economy

Strategy 5.1: SECURE THE BASELINE TO DEFINE MARKET & SPENDING

Understanding and defining the current cultural customers is paramount to future measurement.

Task 5.1.1: Contract with Michigan State University in Winter 2011-12 to design the platform and delivery system for measuring impact of the cultural economy annually in Mason County, with launch of data collection set for Spring 2012.

Task 5.1.2: Work with CVB to enhance current market research data collected from cultural resources to understand visitor motivation, profile and satisfaction; ideas for enhancing or expanding tourism product; and yield management.

Task 5.1.3: Analyze market research cultivated from Pure Michigan data, promotions and analytics.

Task 5.1.4: Provide training to cultural resource managers, artists and other members of the cultural economy beginning in Winter 2012 to ensure their knowledge and understanding of the importance of tracking and providing data for analysis on a consistent basis. Offer assistance in completing documents required to contribute data for the cultural economy impact analysis.

Strategy 5.2: DOCUMENT & ANALYZE GROWTH OF CULTURAL ECONOMY

Devising a consistent system of data collection and reporting enables cultural institutions and businesses to monitor trends, define customer satisfaction, determine areas for improvement, and identify opportunities.

Task 5.2.1: Beginning summer 2012, introduce quarterly on-line survey instrument for cultural resource managers to input data on outcomes (jobs, receipts, attendance, visitor spending.)

Task 5.2.2: With assistance from MSU, design an exit survey instrument and train volunteers to secure qualitative and quantitative data from visitors regarding on-site experiences after at least four major events annually (such as First Friday, concerts in the park or at the Big Sable Point Lighthouse, Heritage Days in Scottville, and other “controlled access” events.) Optimally, research will collect:

- Attendance/visitation stats
- Local vs. out-of-town attendance (zip codes)

- Ratio of groups & students
- Behavior patterns of audiences
- Comparison with other nature-based and recreational activities.

Analysis of information will allow cultural resources to better understand the impact of tourism, gaps and opportunities for collaborations.

Strategy 5.3: REPORT FINDINGS ANNUALLY

Synthesizing and reporting information allows the destination to communicate and champion the ABCs (activities, benefits, components) of the area's cultural economy locally, state, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Task 5.3.1: Produce annual "state of the cultural economy" report as the model for measurement of Mason County's cultural economic vitality. Distribute report annually to national, international media – Harvard Business Review, Chronicle of Philanthropy, Forbes, Michigan Business magazines, etc.)



8. Conclusion

Ludington and Mason County are uniquely poised to grow the cultural economy and demonstrate the value of focusing on a destination's unique attributes to increase jobs, revenues, and quality of life for residents. As the strategies outlined in this plan are implemented, the county can realize its potential as a cultural hub and articulate the benefits of a strong cultural economy.

The county is fortunate to have strong local leadership, committed to a quality standard of excellence and dedicated to providing the human capital required in this plan. Funding and collaboration is paramount to implementation, but the fortitude of the cultural community – supported by government, business, and residents – will ensure successful realization of the vision. To launch this initiative, a one-year action plan has been created with prioritized activities and assignments.

Appreciation is extended to all the stakeholders contributing their time and resources during the strategic planning process. Special thanks to the 11 dedicated members of the Task Force for their generous and thoughtful contributions this past year. The quality and depth of this plan reflects a passion for place, a hope for the future, and a persistent focus on authenticity as a foundation for sustainable growth.

Task Force Members

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