Michigan Municipal League

Fabulous Fridays
**PROJECT SCOPE:**

Fabulous Fridays is a weekly event throughout the summer that celebrates the city’s culture and heritage by hosting different themed events.

**Accomplishments:**

- Brought business leaders together to collectively imagine and create ongoing cultural events to activate their downtown.
- Has boosted downtown businesses annually by 10 to 15 percent.
- Attended by thousands, it has become a catalyst for spurring other events.
- Has created an opportunity for spontaneous social interactions and reconnections through walkability.
- Has drawn artists from all around the region giving them an opportunity to perform, display and sell their artwork, and network with other artists.
- Served as the impetus for several property owners to rehabilitate and preserve historic buildings in the community.
- Based on street interviews, residents expressed a sense of pride for their community.
- Has increased its attendance numbers each year.
- Served as a springboard for a Saturday farmer’s market which will double in booths this year and include arts and crafts for the first time.

**PROJECT DETAILS:**

**NAME:**
Fabulous Fridays
West Branch, Michigan

**DATE:**
2008-Present

**CATEGORIES:**
Arts & Culture
Community Organizing/Building
Entrepreneurship

**INSPIRATION:**
West Branch business owners knew that they had the makings of a great city, but they wanted to encourage more people to visit downtown where they could shop, dine, attend events and mingle with their friends and family.

**THE GIST:**
To create a more vibrant downtown, a group of West Branch business owners, led by Peter Fabbri, owner of the Silver Lining shop, worked with local officials and residents to create “Fabulous Fridays.” They created a weekly destination and cultural event, revitalizing the streets of downtown after hours throughout the summer months.
Organization:
The Downtown Promotions Committee, a group of business leaders and residents, holds a weekly breakfast meeting to stay connected throughout the year and plan events that have now gone beyond Fabulous Fridays. It developed and maintains an excellent working relationship with city officials. One of their big events, as part of Fabulous Fridays, is the Motor Cross, which requires a designated full street closure. One member of the committee acts as the liaison to the council and brings requests, such as a street closure, to the council for approval.

Budget/Equipment: Total annual budget: $3,000
The Downtown Development Authority allocates $3000 for Fabulous Fridays. This money is spent on printing costs for advertising flyers and printing and mailing costs for promotional mailings that are widely distributed.

No equipment is required. If individual business owners want to provide any seating, etc. outside of their storefronts, they can choose to do so.

Participants
Downtown business owners, led by Peter Fabbri, co-owner of Silver Linings; city of West Branch

Actions Taken:
1) IDENTIFY NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITY:
   Every community has characteristics and elements to celebrate which sets it apart from other communities. Brainstorm on ideas that celebrate its heritage, its people, products, landscape, etc. Ask what will give that community its own unique identity.

2) FOLLOW THE RULES:
   Talk with your city officials and planning department to make sure that you are in compliance with your local ordinances and any other regulations required.
3) SOLICIT NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIES:
It’s important to get buy-in right up front and educated the community on why investing in downtowns is so important.

4) MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE AND FUN:
Make sure that there is something for everyone and the experiences are rich and layered for all ages.

5) PROMOTE GOOD PHYSICAL DESIGN:
Create a physical space that allows people to sit and interact with those they don’t know. This will encourage spontaneous conversations and “get-to-know-your-neighbor” opportunities.

6) IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT THE ACTUAL EVENT:
It’s about creating a welcoming place where people will visit, eat, and shop at other times of the week. Fabulous Fridays draws people from all over the region that have never set foot in West Branch before. Be flexible and open to other activities that can spawn from the original intent.

Lessons Learned:
- Identify the leaders and stakeholders in your community.
- Educate the community on why investing in downtowns is so important.
- Reach out and develop public/private partnerships.
- Engage the community. Get buy-in from surrounding neighbors and businesses. Demonstrate how increased people traffic benefits everyone.
- Identify what defines your community (heritage, people, products, etc.) and celebrate it!
- Identify potential funding sources for long-term sustainability.
- Maintain a good interface with all businesses, even with those that don’t see a direct value in what you are trying to accomplish.
- Contact the appropriate governing bodies upfront to make sure that everyone is on the same page.
- Don’t be afraid to try something new. Stay flexible.
- Without a more walkable downtown, i.e. safe pedestrian crossings, narrower main road, calming of traffic, more enhancements, it will be very difficult for businesses to be successful year round. Events can be a powerful impetus for some real change. The city has begun to work with MDOT to consider different options in making their downtown more pedestrian friendly.
- Use social media - Twitter and Facebook – to market your business and engage the community.

Documents:
For more information, contact: Peter Fabbri, Owner, Silver Lining;
Visit: http://www.westbranchevents.com/Fabulous-Fridays.html
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Fabulous-Fridays/133080580098308
The Center for 21st Century Communities

Building 21st century communities
Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is place. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at mml.org.

Who we are...
The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

What we know...
Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? Place, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

What we offer...
Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a “one-stop-shop” for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.