Michigan Municipal League

Mason County Sculpture Trail
PROJECT SCOPE:
Located along Lake Michigan’s stunning coastline, Ludington’s waterfront has become home to inspiring sculptures which celebrate the city’s rich cultural heritage of a bygone mill and lumbering era. Building on this cultural gem, work is well underway to extend the sculpture opportunity to four other communities in Mason County, which will create an expanded cultural regional experience for the visitor and include a total of 25 sculptures. The goal is to become a cultural destination.

Accomplishments:
- What originally started out as a sculpture park on the shores of Lake Michigan in Ludington has now expanded as a regional sculpture trail which includes Scottville, Custer, Freesoil, and Fountain.
- Recognizing the importance of a regional cultural economic development strategy, an 11-member task force called the Cultural Economic Development Plan Task Force, joined together to realize its potential as a cultural hub and recognize the benefits of a strong cultural economy. The sculpture park is part of a broader plan to create several cultural trails and create a more cohesive and unified cultural experience.
- Visited by thousands of tourists every year, it has become a catalyst for multiple downtown events.

Mason County Sculpture Trail

PROJECT DETAILS:

NAME:
Mason County Sculpture Trail
Ludington, Michigan

DATE:
2002-present

CATEGORIES:
Arts & Culture
Community Organizing/Building
Cultural Tourism
Entrepreneurship
Public Spaces
Regionalism

INSPIRATION:
What started out as one person’s dream and vision over 10 years ago has become a catalyst for change not only for the city of Ludington, but for the region as well.

THE GIST:
An expanse of green space stretches along the harbor of Ludington, ripe for something to happen. Turning the open space into a cultural attraction has created a real destination by the water.
Plans are underway to launch the usage of audio/video/QR Code to create a richer more interactive experience for the visitor.

The Task Force is embracing several other project initiatives such as downtown revitalization, attracting creative entrepreneurs, and supporting local products.

Budget:
- Individuals and businesses have purchased the various sculptures ranging from $5,000 to $20,000.
- Grant proposals are currently being distributed to solicit funds for the expansion of the sculptures regionally.
- The sculpture park is maintained by the city. Annual amount for upkeep is less than $10,000.

Organization/Participants:
The driving force behind the regional sculpture trail is the Cultural Economic Development Task Force led by Bill Anderson, retiree and resident of Ludington. It represents various constituent groups from the county, cities of Scottville, Ludington, private business and non-governmental organizations. Their goal is to use the region’s cultural assets to drive economic change.

Actions Taken:
1) **IDENTIFY YOUR NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES.**
Every community has unique characteristics and elements to celebrate which sets it apart from other communities. This can include its heritage, the people, products, landscape, etc.

2) **GET BUY-IN RIGHT UP FRONT AND EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY**
on why the cultural experience is so important economically and how it contributes to the quality of life. They should understand that it is not just about the art, and that there are physical and emotional components to the visitor experience as well.

3) **TALK WITH YOUR LOCAL OFFICIALS AND PLANNING DEPARTMENT**
to make sure that they are on board and willing to help facilitate the process.

4) **ONGOING COMMUNICATION TO THE RESIDENTS IS ESSENTIAL.**
Every other month, Ludington publishes and distributes an electronic newspaper that informs, presents strategies, and provides progress reports on all cultural arts projects in the region.

Lessons Learned:
- Identify the leaders and stakeholders in your community to not only support your vision but become potential sources of funding.
- Educate the community upfront on why investing in cultural arts is a key component to economic growth, create a quality of life, and contribute to the emotional attachment one feels to their community.
- Travelling around the state, country, and world can often lead to ideas for your own community.
Reach out and develop public/private partnerships.

Identify what defines your community (heritage, people, products, etc.) and celebrate it through cultural events.

Identify potential funding sources, i.e. individual and business donations; grant funding.

The community needs to be serious about the visitor experience by engaging and integrating them on an emotional and physical level.

Put a plan in place to measure economic impact where possible, i.e. increase in tourists, home values, increase in sales; new businesses.

Work with the appropriate governing bodies upfront to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

Use social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to market your cultural assets and engage the community.

Documents:
Cultural Data Project:
www.creativestatemi.org
Mason County Economic Development Plan

Visit:
www.visitludington.com/stories/the_sculptures_of_ludingtons_waterfront_park
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.