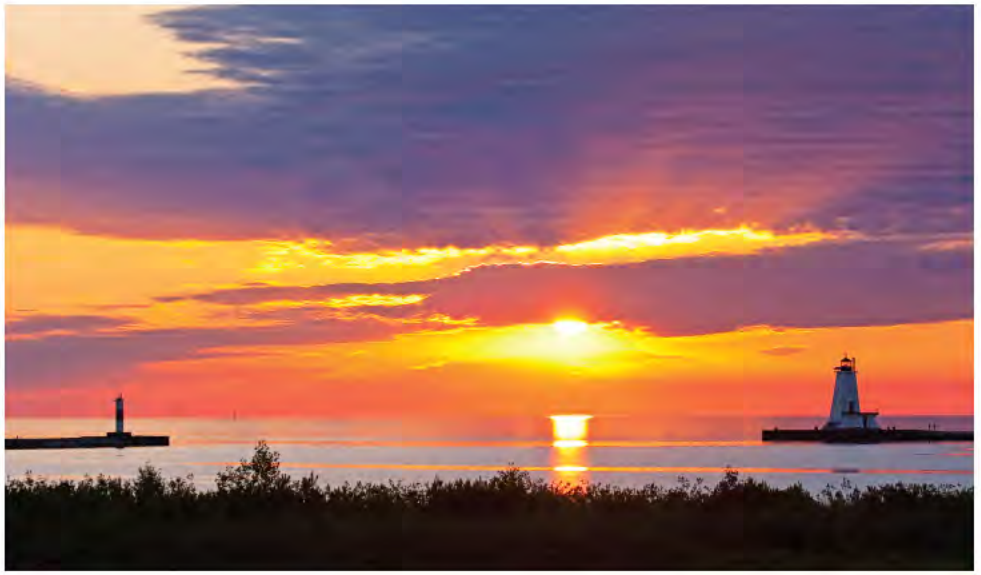
Cultural Economic Development Plan

Fostering Cultural Traditions That Endure

Executive Summary: 2011 - 2016
For Ludington and Mason County, Michigan

The Appeal of Authentic Places

Ludington and Mason County, Michigan are uniquely poised to grow the cultural economy and demonstrate the value of focusing on a destination's unique attributes to increase jobs, tax revenues, visitor satisfaction and spending, 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 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 desire for growth and sustainability.

Opposite Page, Left: September farming; Top Right: Ludington State Park; Bottom Right: Center Stage Theater at West Shore Community College; This Page Above Left: Historic White Pine Village; Center: Ludington North Pier Lighthouse; Right: Scottville Main Street

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.[1]

The area's distinctive heritage and cultural attractions positively complement the county's nature-based activities. 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. The value of this talent pool on a community's health and vitality is quite appealing. To lure this desired group and their contributions to a strong cultural economy, communities often offer promises of enhanced quality of life, affordable housing, and social capital with attractive and authentic places to live, work, and play. [1] Source: Tourism Assessment Report, Daniel J. Stynes, June 2009

Planning for Economic Stability

Education is a major component of the cultural economy. *Above: Western Michigan Old Engine Club, Scottville; Below: Sandcastle Children's Museum, Ludington. Opposite Page Top: Mason County Courthouse; Bottom: Gathering at Friday Night Live, Ludington*

Recognizing the need to diversify and strengthen the existing economic base, a group of dedicated citizens in Mason County organized to explore the opportunities afforded with the cultural economy.

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.

"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

- Inventory
- Engagement
- Analysis, and
- Recommendations.

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. The Task Force scored the current cultural economic climate slightly lower at 5.9, demonstrating agreement on the need for development and marketing activities to advance the cultural economic impact.

Of particular interest is how Ludington and Mason County can achieve a recognized brand based on its cultural identity in the next five years. The process begins with specific strategies to grow and sustain the cultural economy for a more diversified employment base. Our cultural brand will resonate with other areas of the economy, as well. The continuing enrichment of our quality of life will benefit existing and new manufacturers in attracting and retaining skilled employees, talented professionals and retirees with valuable life experiences. A supporting and nurturing environment will draw creative and business entrepreneurs to our county community.

With a critical mass of recognized cultural product and services, Ludington and Mason County 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, as well as seasonal and full-time residents of Mason County.

A Cultural Compass: Charting a New Course

To articulate the importance of cultural assets to Ludington and Mason County, the Task Force created a new vision and principles to guide the cultural economic development. The 2016 Vision is:

> *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*

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.*

Five Goals

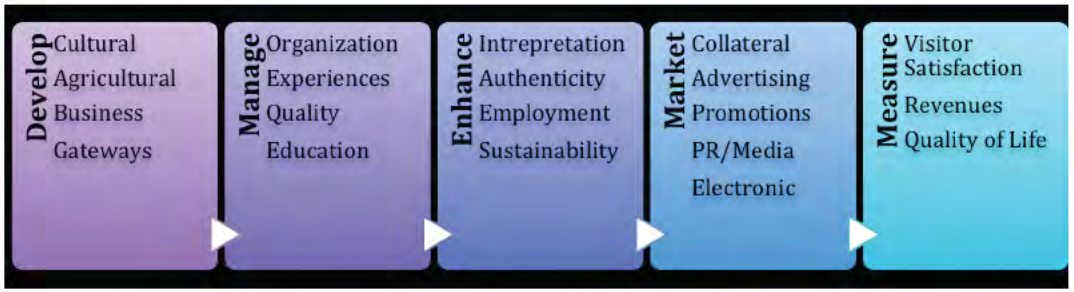
DEVELOPMENT Goal 1: Proven cultural economic development projects are hailed as models for ingenuity, investment and integrity.

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

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

MARKETING 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.

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



Cultural Assets abound in Mason County. *Opposite page, Far Left: Big Sable Point Lighthouse; Top Right: Barn in winter; Bottom Center: Cartier Mansion B&B, Ludington; Bottom Right: Historic White Pine Village. Above Left: Waterfront Sculpture Park & Playground, Ludington; Clown Band Concert at Historic White Pine Village; Center: Great Blue Heron; Right and Far Right: Fall Colors.*

Leading for the Future

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.

A strategic marketing plan suggests three phases of implementation. Initially, marketing existing cultural assets and activities in all of the county's marketing programs – collateral materials, public and media relations, advertising and promotions – can help stimulate growth in visitation and purchasing of locally made items. Integrating cultural elements in all business, tourism and economic development activities will help inform and sell prospective audiences on the unique assets of Mason County. Engaging regional audiences (such as Epworth Heights' residents and drive markets) with new cultural experiences can increase repeat visitation.

Opposite page, Far Left: Bicycling in autumn; Top: Horse Show, Western Michigan Fairgrounds; Bottom: Topside view, Big Sable Point Lighthouse. Far Left: Map of Waterfront Park, Ludington; Left: Watching boats at Sunset.

Cultural Travelers

Older · Affluent · Educated

- Frequent traveler: 5 leisure trips vs. 3.98 for general travelers
- Spend more: $994 vs. $611
- Want to engage with locals; "do" something
- 78% of all U.S. leisure travelers = 118.3 million adults annually
- Will travel farther to get the experience
- Spend more money on cultural and heritage activities

Source: Mandala Research 2009

As a cultural brand is established as a deliverable commodity and consistent experience, Ludington and Mason County can aggressively market the promised brand to targeted industries and travelers. Niche tourism markets such as cultural heritage, adventure and educational travel are the best match for Ludington and Mason County's product mix. A strong cultural brand can help convert visitors – especially young creative entrepreneurs and retirees – into engaged year-round residents.

Once the brand is attracting the quantity and quality of desired customers for its cultural products, Ludington and Mason County can expand its promotional activities to maintain market share, engage in and leverage regional partnerships, and also foster recognition for its cultural excellence. Delivering the brand promise is an ongoing effort that is critical to maintain our unique attributes for the enjoyment and economic vitality of current and future generations.

A Collaborative Effort

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Ludington and Mason County, Michigan
2011-2016 Cultural Economic Development Plan

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Front Cover: Clown Band Parade; Historic SS Badger. Back Cover: Aerial View of Ludington State Park. Special thanks to local photographers for their contributions of images: Heather Landis (Scottville Main Street); Buffy Nagle (Sandcastles Children's Museum); Jeff Kiessel (Old Engine Club, Horse Arena); Thomas Hawley (West Shore Community College); all other images: Todd & Brad Reed Photography.

HARGROVE INTERNATIONAL, INC.

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