Building a Small Museum's Big Reputation

Julie Rose

West Baton Rouge Museum

What is a big impact?

Small museum with a big impact is:

- Needed by the community;
- Valued by the community;
- Used by the community
- (other ideas…)

West Baton Rouge Museum

West Baton Rouge Museum

Impact means Reputation

MUSEUM
WEST BATON ROUGE MUSEUM

Peel the onion

West Baton Rouge Museum

Self Audit

Location: Port Allen, small and rural

Access: Major interstate, I-10 Bridge

Major Audience: Regional residents 75%, out-of-town 25%

Competition: Larger history museums in the region

Standing: We are 45 years old, none are older

Visitation: 2005: 15,000;

2006: 9,000…..; 2012: 20,000

Brand: Sugar Museum

Structure: Mission, Staff, Volunteers, Collections; Governance, Core documents, etc.

Visitor Surveys (Visitors Count);

"Best kept secret!"

Key Values

The values stated below are reflected in our actions and support our results.

- Regional Pride
- Sense of Place
- Feelings of Ownership and Responsibility
- Meaningful Personal Connections
- Engaging Opportunities
- Memorable Experiences
- Impressive Museum Experiences
- Satisfaction with Every Visit

MUSEUM
West Baton Rouge Museum

Build Your Reputation

- You do something that no other place can do as well.
- You are the first or even second museum people think of when in Baton Rouge.
- The public trusts your history.
- The public expects excellence from your museum.
- The public values your services.

“That Museum”

Organizing Themes:

Our Reputation and How We Earn It

What We Offer to the Public

How We Attract Visitors

MUSEUM West Baton Rouge Museum

Deep Breath

- This time it is not about the money
- It is not about being flashy or cutting edge.
- It is about relationships, which ***will*** build your small museum's reputation.

West Baton Rouge Museum

Categories for Excellence

PUBLIC DIMENSIONS
EXHIBITS
COLLECTIONS
STAFFING
FACILITIES
PROGRAMS
FUNDING
GOVERNANCE

(Gratis AAM Self Study)

MUSEUM
West Baton Rouge Museum

Not a Random Walk

Regular Strategic Planning:

- Outside moderator
- Inclusive: staff, volunteers, governance, community
- Dream big, plan practical; manpower & resources
- Buy in stake holders
- Plan momentum (small successful steps)
- Plan collaborations (cultivating connections)
- Public Relations and Marketing
- Find your niche and do it well

MUSEUM
West Baton Rouge Museum

Build Legs: Reputation

- Niche: Let the community know you are here
- Loyalty: Let the community fall in love with you
- Trust: Convince the community you are trustworthy
- Value: Keep raising the community's expectations

MUSEUM
West Baton Rouge Museum

Building Your Legs!
Be Valued; Be of Value

Relationships: Public Relations

- Raise community's expectations
- Welcoming, friendly, accessible
- Well promoted regular offerings
- Keep exhibits fresh
- Aim to be in press/media once a week (keep count!)
- In a year, plan on a 100 name media list
- Use social media and mean it
- Groupons and Living Social, and co-op ads
- Star quality: Invite local celebrities, historians, experts -presentations
- Logo on everything, jpeg
- Name recognition is important
- Collateral your are proud of! (brochures, business cards, name tags)

MUSEUM
West Baton Rouge Museum

Building your Legs!

What is your niche?

- What do we do that no one else does?
- How is a visit to our museum unique?
- What is our relationship to the community?
- Who makes up our primary audiences?

Then let ‘em know about us!

- Your logo on everything
- Well formatted consistent press releases
- High quality rack card / brochure (collateral piece)
- Business cards for key personnel and volunteers

MUSEUM
West Baton Rouge Museum

Building Your Legs! Loyalty

Falling in Love

- Let's do lunch:
  - One volunteer at a time
    - Make friends one contact at a time
    - Meet your neighbors
    - Talk to local business leaders; common ground
- Be a friend:
  - Offer your site as a resource or event space to schools and civic groups, e.g. school history fair
  - Reward your community for loving you, free event
  - Thank you notes, hand written and often
  - Be a good neighbor, help libraries & museums at their events; offer to promote their events on your website
- Museum matters
  - Go to Chamber of Commerce monthly meetings
  - e.g. View Scouts as groups you support

Building Your Legs! Trustworthy

- Get accredited: StEPs, AAM, etc.;
- Memberships LAM, SEMC, AASLH, AAM (announce associations)
- Express pride in your museum; elevator speech
- Train volunteers, governance, staff often
- Transparency: Inform all stakeholders regular short newsletters, regular staff and volunteer meetings
- Be a joiner: Merchants associations, Lodging Associations, local CVBs, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Scout Boards, etc.
- Apply for grants, big and small. Press releases for successes
- Website, be proud, honest, up-to-date weekly
- Facebook, be social, friendly, up-to-date weekly
- Offer to write articles and editorials for local media

MUSEUM WEST BATON ROUGE MUSEUM

Order Matters

Meaningful exhibits & services

Thoughtful tours and programs

Clean, accessible, and pleasant spaces

Up to date website

Regular hours

Public kept well informed

KEY: Build Relationships

- Teachers (institute, advisory board)
- Businesses (offer space for events, part at local fair, parades)
- Library, local theater, museums
- Government agencies (booths at events, parades)
- Clubs (offer speakers for meetings)

MUSEUM West Baton Rouge Museum

A N.I.C.E.R. Museum

A: accurate

N: Nice

I: Informative

C: Consistent

E: Earnest

R: Relevant

West Baton Rouge Museum

Reputation
Small is what we are and we do “it” well!

Valued
Niche
Relevant
Loyalty
Excellence
Reliable

MUSEUM
West Baton Rouge Museum

Clean up smiling!

West Baton Rouge Museum

Keep it clean, keep smiling!

MUSEUM
West
Baton
Rouge
Museum

Massillon Museum

Small Museums, Big Impact!

AASLH – September 19, 2013

Alexandra Nicholis Coon

ancoon@massillonmuseum.org

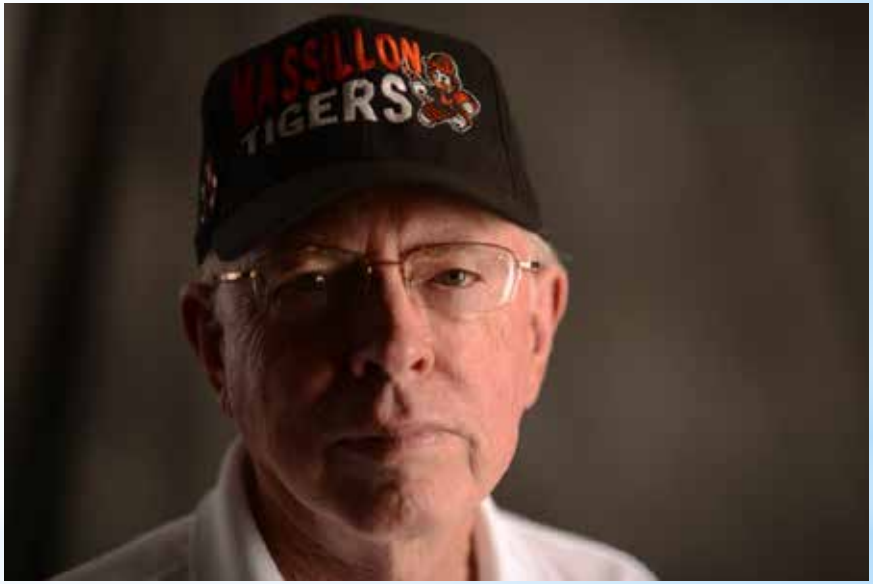
- Founded in 1933
- Art and History collections
- Annual operating budget $750,000
- Located in the heart of downtown Massillon
- 70% of funding generated by a city property tax

J.B. SCHRADER

Embrace and celebrate what's important to your community

Tiger-Stripe Ice Cream Night, Massillon Museum (2012)

Kent State University student photographing Massillon Tiger Football Booster for *Supporting our Champions* exhibition (2012)



Gene Boerner (1936-2013), Massillon Tiger Booster

Tiger Legacy grand opening

(November 2012)

Community engagement through nontraditional events

Elected officials supporting MassMu at the Annual Island Party

Top: State Senator Scott Oelslager pictured at far right

Bottom: Massillon Mayor Kathy Catazaro-Perry at far right

New perspective through the eyes of guest curators

Another Look at the New Look (2012)

Guest-curated by Steven Rosengard

DOES ANYONE
STILL WEAR A HAT?

PHOTOS

Staff visibility within the community

SCARED SCRIPTLESS

Canton's only professional improv comedy troupe

Warhol-inspired portrait of Lillian Gish on Massillon Museum lawn by artist/Museum staff member Scot Phillips (2013)

Recycled street signs painted in style of Andy Warhol to champion local historical figures

It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.

– Alan Cohen

Thank you!

OHIO HISTORY

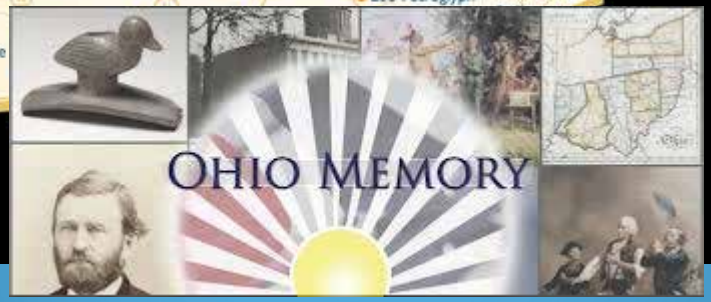
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Small Museums, Big Impact!

AASLH – September 19, 2013

Jason Crabill
jcrabill@ohiohistory.org

Who We Are



OHIO HISTORY
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Who We Are

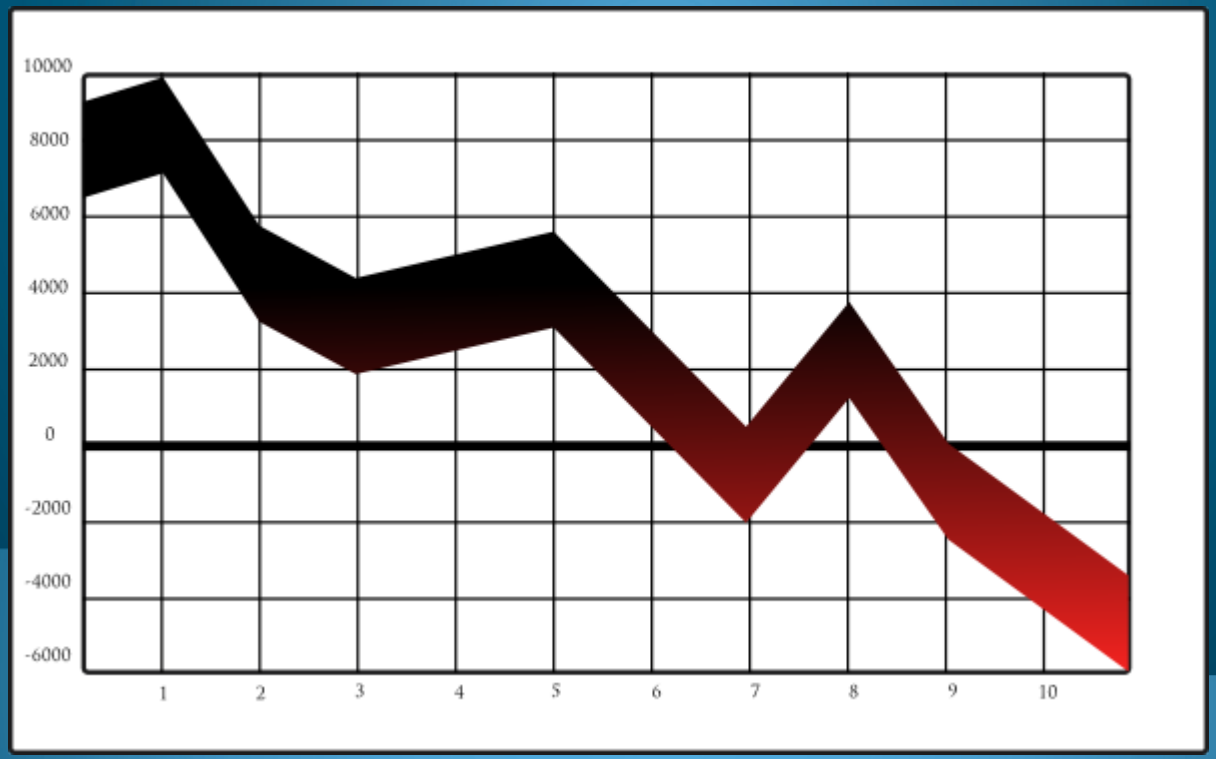
Adena Mansion & Gardens
National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center
Armstrong Air & Space Museum
Big Bottom
Buckeye Furnace
Buffington Island
Campus Martius
Cedar Bog
Cooke House
Custer Monument
Davis Memorial
Fallen Timbers
Flint Ridge
Fort Amanda
Fort Ancient
Fort Hill
Fort Jefferson
Fort Laurens
Fort Meigs
Fort Recovery
Glacial Grooves
Grant Birthplace
Grant Boyhood Home
Grant Schoolhouse
Hanby House
Harding Home
Harding Tomb
Harriet Beecher Stowe House
Harrison Tomb
Hayes Presidential Center
Indian Mill
Inscription Rock
Johnston Farm & Indian Agency
Leo Petroglyph
Lockington Locks
Logan Elm
McCook House
McCook Monument
Miamisburg Mound
Museum of Ceramics
National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center
National Road/Zane Grey Museum
Newark Earthworks
---Great Circle Earthworks
---Octagon Earthworks
---Wright Earthworks
Ohio History Center
Ohio River Museum
Ohio Village
Our House
Paul Laurence Dunbar House
Quaker Meeting House
Rankin House
Schoenbrunn Village
Seip Mound
Serpent Mound
Shaker Historical Museum
Shrum Mound/Campbell Hill
Story Mound
Tallmadge Church
Wahkeena Preserve
Youngstown Historical Center
Zoar Village

OHIO HISTORY
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2006…

- Strategic planning led us to develop a 10 year plan designed to develop management partnerships with local groups

2008…



OHIO HISTORY

OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2008…

- Many state historical societies around the country reacted to the crisis by closing down sites
- OHS received a 42% reduction of State funds
- We had a choice to make:

1. Close down sites (mothball)
   - Maintain grounds, security, utilities

2. Maintain operations
   - Expedite 10 year plan

OHIO HISTORY
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Decision…

- Try to maintain operations by finding management partners in communities.

Guiding Principles/Outcomes

- Keep the site open and accessible.
- Share expenses to mitigate Site impact on budget.
- Community engagement

OHIO HISTORY
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

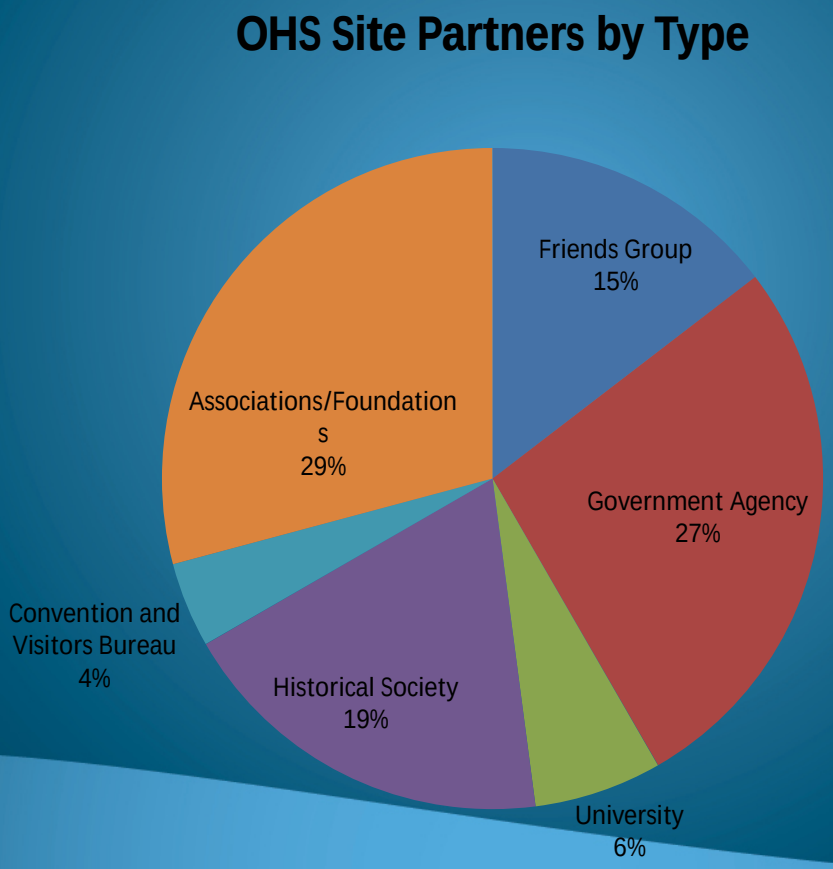
Outcome…

- Every site remained open
- 90% of sites were in partnership within three years (100% in four years)
- Strengthened community involvement through collaboration

OHIO HISTORY
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

How We Did It…

- Partner organizations spanned the breadth of groups in the community



OHIO HISTORY
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

How We Did It…

- Partner organizations spanned the breadth of groups in the community
- Bringing staff along
- Structured the Management agreements for Win-Win opportunities
  - Building organizational capacity
  - Identifying creative ways to collaborate
- Made room for flexibility and growth

OHIO HISTORY

OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Benefits of Collaboration

- Provides a base of users who are invested in the project
- Content experts focus on content
- Ownership breeds accountability
- New ideas = better product
- Raise profile of your organization
- Opportunities for resource sharing
- Increasing local engagement
  - Using local vendors
  - Site Summit

OHIO HISTORY
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Building Organizational Capacity through Collaboration

- Think strategically about what both organizations need
- Start small, be creative
- Write it down (formal contract?)
- Be willing to share completely
- Google's "Don't be evil" philosophy
- Know when to say no

OHIO HISTORY

OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Thank you!!

OHIO HISTORY

OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Questions?

Jason Crabill
jcrabill@ohiohistory.org
@crabillj