

# Dearborn Historical Commission

## Five Year Plan

### Vision

- The Dearborn Historical Museum will provide enriching educational opportunities and meaningful visitor experiences to area residents by telling Dearborn related stories that only the Museum is uniquely positioned to tell. (See Appendix A)
- Encourage and instill in the public a sense of community, a sense of historical values and an appreciation for the stories, structures, artifacts, and people that make Dearborn what it was and what it is today.
- Up to one third of the Museum's operating budget will be provided through our own efforts by the end of this period.

### I. Museum Objectives

- Tell meaningful, memorable, and inspirational stories (see Appendix A) connected to the area through the use of authentic objects and archival material.
  - Present at least twelve exhibits, activities, and events throughout the year. This will include revolving exhibits, educational programs, and events of interest to the public.
  - Promote historical education programs for schoolchildren, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and adult segments of our population.
  - Teach the public about a wide array of Dearborn and area related historical subjects through our monthly lecture series.
  - Present the stories of Dearborn through the written word in the Museum's quarterly publication, *The Dearborn Historian*.
- Oversee the preservation and management of the community's three dimensional historical collections.
- Preserve the three dimensional, textile and written records of the City of Dearborn and its predecessors. The archives are of special concern in that they in many cases are not available in any other location.
- Maintain the existing historical structures including the Detroit Arsenal buildings (Commandant's Quarters and McFadden-Ross House) and the Gardner House. Enhance the

other existing Dearborn Historical Museum structures to provide a better venue for presenting Dearborn's rich history to the public.

## **II. Present Museum Buildings.**

### **1. Advantage of Building Locations: Visibility**

With the demolition of the Quality Inn Motel on Michigan Avenue, the visibility of the McFadden Ross House has been enhanced significantly. Furthermore, the Commandant's Quarters is in a prime location as it sits on Dearborn's main thoroughfare. We can capitalize on these locations by having events and activities on the grounds of both facilities thus gaining exposure for the Museum which will lead to an increase in visitors, memberships, and involvement by the public in Museum programming.

- A good example of this is a program that is being planned to commemorate Flag Day by holding ceremonies on the grounds of the Commandant's Quarters followed by the disposal of old flags at Ford Field.
- Events at the McFadden Ross House similar to the "Dearborn Glows" event sponsored by the University of Michigan-Dearborn will promote foot traffic at the Museum.
- Teddy Bear Picnic
- Rehabilitation of the last existing motel and office building into a state of the art facility will draw more visitors to the Museum for visitation and events as additional exhibit space will provide the public with more access to the rich collection of the Museum.

### **2. Building Descriptions.**

The museum complex consists of structures that are historically significant in their connection to Dearborn. See Appendix B for more detail.

## **III. Description of Products and Services.**

See Appendix C for detail.

## **IV. Market Analysis.**

**1. Audience.** City of Dearborn families and school groups is the focus target audience initially. By positioning ourselves as an educational facility that can help add real value to the lives of families and schools through fun and educational programming, we can build a base audience and then proceed to attract additional visitation.

**2. Partnerships.** The Museum has established a working relationship with The Henry Ford and MotorCities Heritage Area and plans to do so with the Arab American National Museum,

Nankin Mills, the Henry Ford Estate, Henry Ford Community College, University of Michigan-Dearborn, and the State of Michigan. These relationships will benefit the Museum in the following ways:

- Cross promotional assistance
- Professional expertise
- Co-hosting history related events
- Loan items for special exhibits

### **3. Marketing and Promotional Strategy.**

- **Television.** The television program, *Through the Arsenal Gates*, which gives information on the Museum's activities and personnel in the historical community and on people making history in the City, has been reestablished. This program is taped once a month and broadcast numerous times on the local cable station. Viewership data is not available through CDTV but there is evidence the program has already benefited the Museum as the Guild's fundraising publication has seen increased sales and a number of volunteers are now working at the Museum as a direct result. In the future, the Museum is committed to developing a mini-documentary called *The People Who Made Dearborn*. This documentary will make use of film to tell the amazing stories of people who helped Dearborn grow into what it is today.
- **World Wide Web.** The Museum maintains a presence on the City's website and on the Museum Guild of Dearborn's website. There has been weekly contact from the public via the Guild's website regarding archival questions, upcoming events and the purchasing of items from the Museum's gift shop. The Museum's city website had over 1000 visitors in 2012. In the last month of 2012, there were 189 page views by visitors. If that trend continues, 2013 will see more than twice the amount of visitation. The most popular page was the events page. This is an area that needs to be taken advantage of as we move forward in an information age. People are increasingly using their smart phones, laptops, tablets, etc. to learn about places and things to do. The museum needs to publicize its website address on all of its correspondence to drive visitors there. The museum needs to take advantage of social media promotion through sites like Facebook and plans to do so in 2013.

Presently, there is an ongoing effort to gain additional exposure through the Dearborn Press & Guide website and Dearborn Patch.

- **City of Dearborn Public Information Office.** The Museum is working closely with the City's Public Information Office to provide and gain publicity for upcoming events and activities. Right now the Museum's events are listed on local Dearborn Cable. We are seeking to be listed on the City's website as one of the city departments and to have our events listed on City newsletters and publications.

- **Oral Presentations.** The Museum presently makes use of our staff and volunteers and commissioners to make presentations to churches and community groups to broaden the public's knowledge of Dearborn's history. Expanding this program is an important part of increasing awareness of and interest in the Museum. Each presentation is an opportunity to encourage people to visit the Museum and to attend upcoming events.
- **Dearborn Historian.** The quarterly publication written and published by the Museum is not only the major communication connection the Museum has with its members, it is a source of historical information and upcoming events. Starting in 2013, we are looking to add paid advertising to this publication. Several major museums including the Smithsonian are presently members for the express purpose of receiving our publication for general knowledge and research.

**5. Funding Strategy.** In addition to the Membership Program, there are additional revenue generating endeavors ongoing that are detailed below.

## **V. Financial Model.**

### **1. Revenue Enhancements.**

- **Membership and Events.** We plan to increase the revenue of the museum through the extension of membership programs and fundraising events sponsored by our fundraising arm, the Museum Guild of Dearborn. Recently, Volume II of Best Dearborn Stories was published and has received tremendous response in terms of sales. The proceeds support the Dearborn Historical Museum.
- **Collections Management.** Through organizing and cataloging the museum's collection and eliminating duplication and items that are not in line with the Museum's Collections Policy, the museum will earn income through the sale of such items. In addition to eliminating redundancy, the goal is to make the collection more reflective of the stories related to Dearborn's history by following the Museum's Collections Policy. (See attached policy) An added benefit is the additional space that will be available for relevant artifacts.
- **Lizzie Ross Endowment Fund/Planned Giving Program.** This program is currently under development by the Dearborn Historical Commission and the Museum Guild of Dearborn. The purpose of the Endowment Fund is to establish a permanent restricted fund to provide adequate financial support for the Museum and its programs. Donations can be made in cash, checks, stocks, bonds and other assets. An added feature is a plan for asking donors to include the Museum in their wills, asking them to bequeath to the Museum 1% of their assets which will be deposited in the Endowment Fund. This is an innovative approach which will bear fruit not only for the distant future but will address our more urgent immediate needs. A brochure detailing the program has been developed and the program will be in place by August 2013.

- **Advertising in Dearborn Historian.** Additional revenue will be sought through the selling of advertising in our quarterly publication.
- **Museum Guild of Dearborn Golf Fundraiser.** All proceeds from this event go to the Museum.

## 2. See Attached 5-Year Plan & Financial Projections

### VI. Management and Organization.

See Appendix D for detail.

**VII. Economic Impact.** We are in the process of making the Museum buildings more accessible to the public which will ultimately result in more business for the west Dearborn commercial area and increased revenue for the Museum. With the redevelopment of the Museum including an enlarged exhibit space to tell Dearborn stories, we envision the Museum becoming a focal point for present and former residents and a boon to the surrounding area. This will be accomplished through the following:

- Expansion of The Museum Guild of Dearborn through the addition of member groups that pay a fee to meet at the Museum.
- Revolving exhibits that attract new and return visitation which in turn will result in donations and revenue from entrance fees.
- Additional programming where each attendee pays a fee for involvement in the program. Examples include: Teddy Bear Picnic, First Ladies Tea, Motor Cities Ghost Busters program, Beer Tasting event.
- Increase in membership funds as people become more aware of the Museum and the value our programs add.

### 1. Projections.

- See Attached 5-Year Plan & Financial Projections.
- Copies of architectural plans are available for review.

### VIII. Schedule.

**1. Collection Inventory.** We have begun an inventory of the collection. During the first year, the goal is to eliminate duplication and evaluate the collections one piece at a time. Through this process (see 5-Year Plan for timeline), we wish to evaluate and make a decision on objects that have never been accessioned based on the Museum's collections policy. An additional goal is to deaccession those items which do not correspond to the Museum's collections policy and hence the Museum's mission. Items that have already been accessioned or items that are to be

accessioned will be entered into the Past Perfect software program which is specifically designed and developed for museums.

See Appendix E for detail on this process.

**2. Grant Application.** We are currently in the process of applying for a \$150,000 grant to assist us in the collection management process.

**3. Building Renovation.** In year two, the goal is to get the proposed building renovations underway and ready for use by year three. We are presently researching and applying for grants to help us in this endeavor.

**IX. Business Risks.** The major risk associated with a lack of funding is the very real possibility that the Museum will close. The loss of our heritage, the stories related to Dearborn, and an appreciation for where we have been will leave us a much diminished people in the end.

## **Appendix A: Dearborn Stories**

While Dearborn is the hometown of Henry Ford and he is a huge part of our history, there are other interesting facets to the area that should be told. The Henry Ford tells the story of American ingenuity, resourcefulness, and innovation. The following themes are stories that the Dearborn Historical Museum is uniquely positioned to tell:

- The story of the nomadic Native American peoples that hunted and stayed for short periods of time near the Rouge River.
- The story of early settlers and what it was like to arrive via the St. Lawrence seaway, the Erie Canal, Lake Erie, the Detroit River, the Rouge River and carve out an existence in the “wilderness” that we know today as Dearborn.
- The story of the Detroit Arsenal at Dearbornville, why and how it was built here, what it attracted to the area and what it was like to live at and around the Arsenal.
- The story of the rich military history of the citizens who have served in wars throughout the history of the United States.
- The story of Henry Ford as a boy. What was it like for him to grow up in the area and how did his experience forge him into the person he came to be and an individual that would change the world.
- The story of immigration. From the French, Scotch-Irish, Italian, Polish and Arabic peoples, what was attractive about this area and what was it like to come to a new land, settle, and create a new life.
- The story of Ford Motor Company and how it has changed Dearborn and placed it on the map. What would Dearborn be like if Ford Motor Company was not headquartered here?
- The story of the personalities that have worked, lived, and served the City of Dearborn. From founding fathers to political figures, there are numerous lives that have affected this area and helped make it what it is today.

## **Appendix B: Building Descriptions**

**1. The Commandant's Quarters.** A Federal style architectural structure, this was one of eleven buildings that was part of the Detroit Arsenal and was built in Dearbornville in 1833. It is Dearborn's oldest building still standing in its original location.

**2. The McFadden-Ross House.** The south side of the house was originally the powder magazine of the Detroit Arsenal and was completed in 1839. In 1882, the Nathaniel Ross family purchased the structure and converted it into a farmhouse in 1883.

**3. The Richard Gardner House.** A small frame building dating back to 1831, this structure is the oldest residence in the City of Dearborn.



## **Appendix C: Description of Products and Services**

**1. Collections.** The museum has, in its collections, items owned, used or produced by a Dearbornite, depiction of a Dearborn subject, or associated with Dearborn buildings, events, and businesses. The collection also includes items associated with the greater Dearborn area as well as Michigan-based military units. The museum houses artifacts associated with Native American cultures that had a connection with the greater Dearborn region.

### **2. Core Exhibits.**

**a. Commandant's Quarters.** Artifacts reflect the living of a military commandant during the Civil War period. In addition, there is an exhibit reflecting the history of the building from the time it was built until it became a museum in 1950. The structure also houses a remarkable piece of history: a flag carried by Color Sergeant Thomas Henry Sheppard of the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Calvary. Sheppard carried the flag throughout the entire Civil War and even kept it on his person through stints at Libby Prison and Andersonville. The flag was donated to the Museum by Sheppard himself and it has been restored and is proudly displayed.

**b. McFadden-Ross House.** In the basement, artifacts such as farming and building implements reflect the early immigration into the area. Other artifacts reflect items needed to live and work in early Dearborn when it was a farming community. The upper level of the building is the repository for the historical archives.

**c. The Gardner House.** This house is a permanent exhibit and reflects a typical farm life of the 1830s and 1840s.

**3. Educational Programs.** The Museum hosts an historical program every year for second graders from the Dearborn Public School System. The program is based on the educational criteria generated by the State of Michigan Department of Education. The program gives the students an understanding of how the state was settled and developed in the 1800s—showing how the roads were built, forests cleared, farms planted and the necessity of gathering, storing and preserving food in order to be self-sufficient.

The Museum's services are also being sought by Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and senior citizen programs.

**4. Museum Memberships.** The Museum offers an annual membership program. Presently, there are around 525 members in six different donor categories ranging from \$25 to \$500 per year. Membership renewals are sent out annually. Applications are also available at the Museum and through the website.

**5. Hours and Days of Operation.** The Museum is open from 9 until 5 on Tuesday and Wednesday and from 9 until noon on Thursday. The hours are expanded in the summer to include Thursday afternoon and Friday.

**6. Online Access.** The Museum maintains a presence on the City's website at [www.cityofdearborn.org/city-departments/historical-museum](http://www.cityofdearborn.org/city-departments/historical-museum). The Museum also makes use of the Museum Guild of Dearborn's website, [www.thedhm.com](http://www.thedhm.com).

**7. Event Management.** In this new era of austerity, most events will have to be managed by volunteers. Staff members will work with volunteers to ensure successful programs. The Museum will seek to make use of volunteer chairpersons and committees to bring about successful ventures, both educational and entertaining. Examples include the Teddy Bear Picnic, Garden Party, and Sports Hall of Fame Day.

**8. Museum Store.** The Museum Store is being managed by the Museum Guild of Dearborn and is constantly restocked. Items are for sale over the counter and at the Museum Guild of Dearborn's website. Items include books, mugs, bags, T-shirts and much more. The proceeds are part of the Guild's support of the Museum.

## **Appendix D: Management and Organization**

**1. Governance.** The Dearborn Historical Commission advises the Curator. The Curator oversees and gives direction to the staff. The Museum operates under the City Charter and ordinances.

**2. Management.** The Curator is responsible for the effective operation of the Museum and its staff.

**3. Staff.** Currently there are two part time paid staff members. However, there are a number of volunteers who are assigned tasks that would normally be performed by permanent employees.

## **Appendix E: Collections Phase Process**

**Collections Phase** – The Museum has around 75,000 three dimensional objects many of which have never been accessioned and cataloged. The initial thrust, which has already begun, will be to examine every item in the storage areas to determine what has been accessioned and needs to be accessioned.

Information about each item will be logged on an inventory sheet and the item will be photographed. If an item has not been accessioned, a decision will be made as to whether an object fits the Museum's mission and collections policy. If there is not a fit, an object will be disposed of via City of Dearborn disposal policy. This process will open up valuable storage space for items that fit the guidelines of the Museum's collection policy and it will also provide much needed revenue for the Museum. If a non-accessioned item does meet the requirements of the collections policy, the information will be given to a volunteer registrar or staff member in order to assign the item an accession number and to record all of the known information about the item into the Past Perfect system.

If an item already has an accession number, the existing hard copy accession books will be used to look up the item. This information will be recorded into the Past Perfect system by a volunteer registrar or staff member. Objects can be flagged for potential deaccessioning at this point if an item does not fit into the Museum's mission or collections policy.

As items are examined and logged, they will be placed in a set location which will be recorded and eventually entered into the Past Perfect system. This will be of great benefit to the Museum as staff will now know what items are housed in the collections and where those items are located.

Considering the Museum's collection of 75,000 objects, if 20 minutes were spent with each item (which is conservative), the time spent on the process above would be around 25,000 man-hours. With the museum's small staff and volunteers working on this project, it is estimated that this process will take from 3 to 5 years to complete. In the end, the outcome of this worthwhile project will be a housing of collections that is more in line with the Museum's mission and Collections Policy, a source of revenue for the Museum, an increase in the amount of valuable storage space, and an organized collection which is more usable to the staff and hence the people of Dearborn.