



**BESSER**  
**MUSEUM**  
*for Northeast Michigan*  

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**ART • HISTORY • SCIENCE**

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# 2024- 2029 Strategic Plan

Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan

Approved by the Besser Museum Board of Trustees – January 23, 2024



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*Founder Jesse Besser with one of his company's first hand-tamp block machines produced in Alpena. A similar machine is on exhibit at the museum.*



## Why We Do What We Do

The Besser Museum aspires to be much more than a collection of artifacts and static exhibits. We realize the museum has the potential to provide life-changing experiences.

The museum celebrates the genius of men and women: their past accomplishments; their present-day endeavors; their future possibilities. The museum encourages social engagement by inspiring visitors to imagine the advancements throughout time; their connection to the past; their contribution to the present; and their impact on the future. The Besser Museum elevates the status of human experience and their relationship to the natural environment.

The goals set forth in the 2024-2029 Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan Strategic Plan have been established to strengthen the overall operations and ensure the vitality of a long-standing institution that exists to serve the public of all ages and abilities in Northeast Michigan.

A well-crafted strategic plan will guide the Besser Museum Board of Trustees, the Executive Director, and all Museum staff as they pursue the mission of being a living and learning museum, which Jesse Besser and the founders envisioned for Northeast Michigan when the museum opened to the public in 1966.

# Our History

## Looking Back

We celebrate the legacy of countless citizens whose lives have been enriched by their experiences at the Besser Museum. The strength of our longevity is attributed to staying true to the founders' vision and mission throughout the course of time.

### 1962

- Alpena manufacturer and philanthropist Jesse Besser sought the advice of Alpena Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Russell Wilson about establishing a public museum for the community.
- Dr. Wilson suggested that if a museum was created it should be “donated to some governmental unit to give permanence to the collections, and tax support for the expense of operation.”
- The Alpena Public Schools Board of Education agreed to accept and operate the museum.
- Mr. Besser, Dr. Wilson, and local historian Mr. Fred Trelfa formed the Alpena Museum Association, Inc., a non-profit corporation and started discussing building plans.
- They all agreed that the museum should be a living and learning museum to enrich the area schools' programs as well as give educational and cultural advantages to the general public.

### 1963

- During the museum's planning and designing phase, the idea of installing a planetarium was proposed to honor Jesse Besser for his generous gift to the community.
- The placement of a sizable Foucault pendulum was included in the building's design.

### 1966

- The museum officially opened as an integral part of the Alpena Community College/Alpena Public School system until 1970.
- The 42,000 square-foot building was named the Jesse Besser Museum.

### 1970

- The Alpena Museum Association began leasing the museum from Alpena Public Schools.
- The Besser Foundation committed to providing funding for operational expenses.

### 1992

- Alpena Community College Trustees transferred ownership of the museum building, historic structures, and grounds to the Jesse Besser Museum.

### 2004

- To better encompass the true scope of the museum, the institution was renamed The Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan.

### 2024

- Fast forward two decades: great strides continue to be made to ensure Besser Museum's exhibits and programs remain relevant to contemporary audiences.

## Today

The Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan carries on our founders' vision to be a *'living and learning' museum ... an active center for the cultural life of the community and the schools ... a museum of art, history, and science ... for public enjoyment and instruction...*



Located in the lakeside city of Alpena, the Besser Museum is a tourist destination on the US 23 Pure Michigan Byway.

The Northeast Michigan geographic region of commonality with which the Museum interacts comprises all the counties situated north of Bay City and east of the US 127/I-75 corridor. Included are Alpena, Alcona, Cheboygan, Iosco, Montmorency, Oscoda, Otsego, and Presque Isle County.

Families and school districts from counties that lie within a hundred-mile radius take advantage of all the museum's cultural resources and educational programs. Large numbers of individuals and groups annually attend our Log Cabin Day and the Fall Harvest/Fossil Fest.

Our uniquely blended, multidisciplinary mission focuses on art, history, and science. We provide a broad overview of Northeast Michigan's natural resources, developing industries, artistic expressions, and cultural heritage. This approach is exclusive to the Besser Museum as visitors will discover when experiencing our wide variety of exhibits and collections.

Throughout the year, the Besser Museum hosts tens of thousands of guests as well as thousands of area K-12 students on school sponsored field trips. Visiting teachers appreciate the educational advantages their students receive from engaging in the museum's numerous hands-on "STEAM" activities that are designed to align with the Michigan State Benchmarks.

# Our Highlights

## Art

**Fine Art Collection** Exhibits rotate through an extensive collection of fine art from local, regional, national, and world-renowned artists. Included are works from Dali, Cezanne, Renoir, Picasso, Warhol, Rivera, Chihuly, Clewell, and others.

## History

**Avenue of Shops** An assemblage of ten historic shop fronts representing downtown Alpena in the 1890s.

**Historic Village** Five original, independently standing outdoor structures from Alpena County. Each building is over 100 years old and available for educational and private events.

**Jesse Besser and the Besser Company Exhibit** Artifacts and signage showcasing the past, present, and future of the Besser Company, honoring the business of the museum's founder and namesake.

**1911 Alpena Flyer Vehicle and Alpena Motor Car Company Display** An exhibit highlighting one of the influential companies in Alpena history. We host the only known Alpena Flyer vehicle in existence.

**Anishinaabe of Northeast Michigan Exhibit** A significant collection of artifacts representing prehistoric and historic Native American influences on Northern Michigan.

**Great Lakes Fisheries and Heritage Exhibit** Two watercraft from Michigan's past, the *Chinook*, a retired DNR Great Lakes research vessel, and the *Katherine V*, a 1928 wooden gill-net commercial fishing tug, convey the challenges of maintaining a sustainable fishery. This unique exhibit is part of the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Consortium and the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Trail.

## Science

**Digitized Sky Theater** The planetarium, equipped with cutting-edge technology, seats fifty-two people. Visitors experience a wide range of presentations from local night skies to a virtual tour of the Sistine Chapel.

**Natural Wildlife Exhibit** An impressive assortment of mounted wildlife found in Michigan and around the world, a Great Lakes Fish Exhibit, and an extensive Herbarium. Additional nature exposure through our Nature Trail continually being developed on campus.

**Fossil Park** Once covered by an ancient shallow ocean, Northeast Michigan is now a treasure trove of Devonian Period fossils. Visitors will be able to discover and keep fossils found in the crushed Devonian fossil material generously donated by Holcim Alpena Plant and Specification Stone Products, while also learning how limestone is used in the making of cement.

# What's Important to Us

## **Vision**

Our vision is a community that can explore the dynamic story of Northeast Michigan's interconnected natural resources and cultural heritage through the ability to navigate the past, illuminate the present, and imagine the future.

## **Mission**

Our mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit authentic articles and artifacts of art, history, and science to inspire curiosity for all ages, foster community pride, and cultivate personal legacy.

## **Values**

### **Stewardship**

Believing that history, art, and science collections have the power to educate, inspire, and transform individuals of all ages while embracing the responsibility to plan and manage the resources accordingly.

### **Knowledge**

Providing educational experiences that promote an understanding and appreciation of art, history, and science.

### **Community**

Contributing to the region by engaging and providing access to all while demonstrating and fostering community pride.

### **Legacy**

Maintaining the founder's legacy to be a living and learning museum, honoring the community's history and achievements.

### **Professionalism**

Adhering to the museum industry standards with utmost competence, courtesy, and discretion.

# What's Next

The Besser Museum creates unique experiences through permanent and rotating exhibits, educational programming, and special events that appeal and connect to diverse audiences of all ages, abilities, and interests. These exclusive experiences promote an understanding and appreciation for the natural and cultural heritage of Northeast Michigan.

As we move forward, it's important that we stay focused on specific goals to help us realize our mission and vision. Below are the five goals we will achieve from 2024 - 2029.



**Goal 1**  
Artifact Preservation



**Goal 2**  
Financial Stabilitiy



**Goal 3**  
Exhibit Development



**Goal 4**  
Marketing Museum



**Goal 5**  
Leadership Development





## Goal 1: Artifact Preservation:

Ensure all artifacts entrusted to the Besser Museum are properly preserved, cataloged, and interpreted.

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Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
1.a. Improve exterior and interior of facility.	1. Work with architects. 2. Obtain bids for exterior and interior improvements. 3. Improve HVAC system	2024 - Ongoing	Executive Director, Facility Manager, Board of Trustee Members	Staff time, Board members, Museum endowment funds, grants, local contractors.
1.b. Ensure physical control of artifacts.	1. Reallocate space inside the museum to increase artifact storage. 2. Purchase storage materials including boxes and space saving shelving.	Project started in 2020 and is ongoing	Facility Manager, Collections Manager, Executive Director	Staff time, Board members, Museum endowment funds, grants, local contractors.
1.c. Ensure intellectual control of artifacts.	1. Utilize PastPerfect web edition with added public access. 2. Utilize forms when accessioning and deaccessioning objects 3. Inventory collections	2024 - ongoing	Collections Manager, Executive Director	Staff time, Board members, Museum endowment funds, grants, local contractors.
1.d. Ensure a clean and safe environment.	1. Execute daily cleaning routines. 3. Regular exterminator inspections.	2024 - ongoing	Facility Manager, Collections Manager, Executive Director	Staff time, Board members, Museum endowment funds, grants, local contractors.



## Goal 2: Financial Stability:

Ensure financial stability to protect museum assets.

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Objective	Activities and Measurements	Timeline	Responsible	Resources
2.a. Ensure the organization is fiscally sound and fiscally responsible.	Create an annual operational budget that is reviewed and approved by the Board.	ongoing	Executive Director, Collections Manager, Museum Staff	Staff time Finance Committee Museum Accountant Museum Donors
2.b Create and implement a development/ fundraising strategy.	1. Cultivate donors. 2. Apply for more grants. 3. Develop fundraising events and paid programs. 4. Membership drives.	Project started in 2020 and is ongoing	Board of Trustees Executive Director	Staff time Board of Trustees Community stakeholders Community Foundation of Northeast Michigan



### Goal 3: Exhibit Development: Present the interconnected stories of Northeast Michigan.

<b>Goal 3: Exhibit Development: Present the interconnected stories of Northeast Michigan’s natural resources and cultural heritage.</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activities and Measurements</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Resources</b>
3.a. Design Museum exhibits and educational experiences to be conducive and inclusive to all visitors utilizing AAM best practices.	Have consultants and staff be sure that AAM best practices are being utilized.	Currently Ongoing	Museum Staff and Board of Trustees	AAM resources, consultants, local educators, exhibit designers (SRS) staff time,
3.b. Develop strategic plans for each permanent exhibit that addresses all the necessary components of good exhibit design	1. Assess current exhibits. 2. Draft content outline 3. Hire exhibit designers.	Completed by June 2025	Museum Staff	exhibit designers (SRS and Good Design)
3.c. Develop a plan for writing and designing interpretative exhibit labels to create comprehensive and cohesive storyline	1. Assess current labels. 2. Draft outline for labels. 3. Hire exhibit designers.	Completed by June 2025	Museum Staff	Staff time, consultants, professional exhibit designers (SRS)
3.d. Ensure Museum exhibits provide a culturally enriching experience that inspires curiosity, fosters community pride, and cultivates personal connection and legacy.	Gather input from community stakeholders, local historians, and educators.	2025 - ongoing	All Museum Staff, board appointed ad-hoc committees	Staff time, special project endowments and grants
3.e. Create virtual tours that are available through online and mobile platforms	Create and publish at least three virtual tours and make available on website.	2025 - ongoing	Executive Director, Collections Manager, Education Cord.	Staff Time



### Goal 4: Market Museum: Increase community awareness of museum services.

<b>Goal 4: Market Museum: Increase community awareness of museum services</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activities and Measurements</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Resources</b>
4.a Draft and execute marketing plan and marketing budget.	1. Identify media resources in Northeast Michigan. 2. Schedule promotions and regular advertising.	2024 - Ongoing	Executive Director, Collections Manager, Museum Staff, Volunteers	Staff time Local media sources Marketing budget
4.c Develop mature online presence through cohesive brand on website and social media platforms	1. Obtain professional marketing consultant/web designer to redesign and manage museum website and social platforms.	2024 - Ongoing	Executive Director, Board of Trustees	Staff time, Board members, Museum endowment funds, grants, local contractors.



**Goal 5: Leadership Development:**  
**Attract, train, utilize, and maintain Museum Staff and Volunteers**

**Goal 5: Leadership Development: Attract, train, utilize, and maintain Besser Museum Ambassadors Volunteers**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activities and Measurements</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Resources</b>
5.a Provide Museum staff with opportunities for professional development.	Familiarize staff and volunteers with AAM standards.	2024 - ongoing	Executive Director, Collections Manager, Museum Staff	American Association of Museums online resources. Michigan Museum Association online resources and conferences. Chamber of Commerce resources/meetings.
5.b attract and train museum volunteers.	Develop and execute a recruiting plan that utilizes community networks to	2024 - ongoing	Executive Director, Facility Manager, Board of Trustee Members	Staff time, Board members, Museum endowment funds, grants, local contractors.
5.c. Create recognition and award programs to express gratitude and maintain volunteer engagement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Send out regular thank you letters to volunteers.</li> <li>2. Recognize volunteers in newsletters and Facebook.</li> <li>3. Host volunteer events.</li> </ol>	2024 - ongoing	Museum Staff Board of Trustees	Staff Time Appreciation Budget