



Economic
Development and
Growing the
Economy



Profiles of Best Practices

Fall Art Tour

Community, County

Sauk County

Area of Project Impact

Sauk County

Population Affected

55,225

Situation

Sauk County is located within Wisconsin's southwestern rural region and is home to Devils Lake State Park, the International Crane Foundation, and the Circus World Museum, as well as numerous recreational opportunities. Tourism plays a vital role in Sauk County. Summer is the biggest tourist season but fall is also seen as a potentially important time of year.

Economic Development Strategies

There are a number of rural artists living in the area who recognized that their dispersed studio locations created a challenge to reaching out to the public. Nevertheless, given the importance of tourism to the economy of Sauk County, they agreed to focus on capturing outside dollars through tourism. The Fall Art Tour took advantage of their various artists' studio locations tucked away in the scenic hills in and around Baraboo, Spring Green, Dodgeville, and Mineral Point.

Implementation

The Fall Art Tour began when local artists from the communities came together to discuss creative ways to improve their businesses. Their goals were to improve their own businesses by attracting people from the immediate region and to draw visitors from further away.

Initially, three women from each of the collaborating communities of Baraboo, Mineral Point and Spring Green formed a core group to plan the event. They invited other local artists from the area to participate in this collaborative effort. At first, artists were reluctant to be on the tour since they were uncertain about what their involvement would entail.

The first Fall Art Tour took place in 1994. This three-day self-guided tour of artists' studios provided the opportunity for visitors to explore the art communities of Mineral Point, Spring Green, Dodgeville and Baraboo. Artisans included painters, sculptors, potters, weavers, jewelers, woodworkers, and mixed-media artists. This event offered visitors a glimpse of the restored breweries, one-room schoolhouses and historic storefronts where some of Wisconsin's finest artists work.

The communities offered distinct challenges to the organizers. Specifically, sites in Baraboo were much more spread out than those in the other communities which are much smaller. In Mineral Point, all of the artists' studios were located downtown while the distances were not as great between locations in Spring Green and Dodgeville. A detailed map provided in the brochure helped to bridge the differences between the communities.

In order to promote the event to the public, participating artists distribute information about the Fall Art Tour at regional art fairs. The event was also advertised on public radio and press kits were mailed out every year in the

spring. Over the years, the Tour has received favorable write-ups in a number of national and regional magazines and trade journals.

Over the years, the Tour has also involved local businesses. Dining and lodging establishments were asked to contribute to the advertising costs. In exchange, the businesses were recommended on the brochure and website. The organizers have received feedback from businesses about the rewards of this initiative; their sales increase every year when visitors arrive for the tour. In the last year, stickers were handed out to participants so that local business people could identify them as affiliated with the Fall Art Tour. This demonstrated that the Fall Art Tour drew people to the community who patronized local businesses.

As a result of this initiative, the network of artists worked together to help fellow small business people. In addition, the Tour has had an impact on the culture of the area. For example, in the last few years, local community members began to describe Baraboo as an arts community. The project received recognition from the Baraboo Chamber of Commerce in 2001 when it was selected to receive the Annual Tourism Award.

Partners and Leadership

The project was a cooperative effort by local artists from nearby communities. Over the years, the Chamber of Commerce from each of the towns has provided support and acknowledged the contribution of the Fall Art Tour to the region. Local businesses have benefited from their proximity to the tour.

Outcomes

In 2003, the Fall Art Tour celebrated its 10th anniversary. The tour has grown to include 13 studios from each community which involves a total of 43 artists. The organizers copyrighted the name the Fall Art Tour. The initial core group continued to meet as the Fall Art Tour expanded and provided a stable base for the initiative. Now they have established a tax deductible organization with a Board of Directors that is instrumental in applying for grants.

The Dodgeville Area Chamber of Commerce, Baraboo Area Chamber of Commerce, Mineral Point Chamber of Commerce and Spring Green Area Chamber of Commerce support this initiative by distributing Tour brochures and making a financial contribution. More recently, sponsorship from local businesses has become more visible. One of the major hotels suggested that they put together a package for Fall Art Tour visitors that included coupons for local businesses, local wine, cheese and Baraboo candy.

Now, the tour is so in demand that artists wishing to be part of the Fall Art Tour have to be put on a waiting list. Mineral Point artists have mentioned that they receive as much as twenty percent of their annual income from this event. In fact, other communities in Wisconsin and neighboring states have followed this model in the last few years and established their own art tours. These include La Crosse, Madison and Bluff County in Minnesota.

Favorable Reviews

"It's big-city quality combined with small-town atmosphere." – Chicago Sun Times

"Bringing together a combined tour of artists with Wisconsin fall color was a stroke of genius." – Madison Magazine

"What makes the event special is the artists' generosity – half the fun is in getting to view the private environments in which each artist does his or her respective thing..." – Wisconsin Trails Magazine

"Meet the artist and shop for a masterpiece." – Midwest Living

"The Fall Art Tour reveals one of Dairyland's richest harvests – a veritable bumper crop of galleries and studios sandwiched between family farms or just off small town main streets in southern Wisconsin."

Wisconsin Trails Magazine

"Owning art can mean so much more when you've had the chance to make a personal connection with the artist."

Mary Engelbreit's *Home Companion*

Contact

Nancy Jo Dillman
Cornerstone Gallery
101 Fourth Street
Baraboo, WI 53913
(608) 356-7805
sales@cornerstone-gallery.com
www.fallarttour.com

