

Measuring Museum Performance: *A Saskatchewan Snapshot*

by Marie E. Powell

Museums monitor and report on their budgets regularly, but a museum's real value isn't measured in dollars and cents. We asked a number of Saskatchewan museums how they measure their impact on the community, and found that they look at three key areas: community support, attendance, and partnerships.

Community Support Counts

Community support is a major performance measure for museums, shown through volunteers and memberships.

For example, Regina's MacKenzie Art Gallery counts on about 130 people in its volunteer group, says executive director Jeremy Morgan. Its 1,400 members include 800 individual memberships plus families and other classes, and the majority come from Regina.

"Volunteerism is a really good measure of the commitment from a community and how much they value what you do for the community," agrees Humboldt and District Museum curator Jennifer Hoesgen.

Humboldt has about 125 volunteers giving 2,500 volunteer hours each year. The number of new volunteers and the ability of the museum to attract volunteers are strong indicators of the museum's performance, she says.

As well, when Humboldt City Council allowed the museum to expand to a second building, the Museum Foundation proved its support by raising funds within the community for it.

For most museums, community donations show support. The Humboldt & District Museum & Gallery, for instance, houses about 16,000 pieces. This year the Sisters of St. Elizabeth Convent, celebrating its 100th anniversary, donated pieces "that really told their story," Hoesgen adds. "These donations show the level of public trust."

Duck Lake Regional Interpretive Centre serves the area 27 km west and 10 km east and south of Duck Lake. Celine Perillat relies on a group of about 40 volunteers. For Duck Lake, another indicator of the town's support comes from in-kind assistance such as snow cleaning or grass cutting.

"I understand the need for community, because the community at the end of the day is what will keep facilities open," she says.

Attendance: Quantity and Quality

Museums provide quality programming to engage communities, and no matter the size or budget, museum directors look to attendance as the first indicator of impact.

For example, with a \$2.1 million annual budget, the MacKenzie anticipates 80,000 people attending including 61,000 at gallery exhibits and 20,000 at school or outreach activities. Morgan calls these sustainability indicators "the canary in the mine."

The Humboldt and District Museum receives most of its \$250,000 from the city of Humboldt (pop 6,500), and counts on attendance of 7,000 annually. With a \$500,000 annual budget, Joan Maier of the

Humboldt and
District Museum's
Jennifer Hoesgen



“ People stepped forward and helped us out... It makes you realize that the community is supporting you. ”



Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery counts on 30,000 a year in attendance.

Duck Lake has a \$113,000-120,000 annual budget, attracting about 5,000 people annually from across Saskatchewan and elsewhere for a view from its 90-ft observation tower. Unlike the other museums, the Interpretive Centre charges an admission, and is about 75 percent self-sufficient through fundraising.

It's important to know how many people attended, but museums also want to know what they loved – and didn't love – about the experience, using written survey forms and oral responses. For instance, the MacKenzie has staff administer feedback surveys in person at some exhibitions, to help evaluate the success of its programming.

At Duck Lake, Perillat keeps written survey forms available, but she also approaches people to ask them for one-on-one feedback.

“You want to make sure that whatever you're putting together is going to be on-track and appreciated,” Perillat adds. “Especially in small town Saskatchewan, you can have all the forms and formulas you want, but really it boils down to whether or not people appreciate the event or the topic or whatever function that you're holding.”

Programs and Partnerships

A museum's impact can also be measured by the willingness of community groups and others to partner on new or ongoing programs. For example, the Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery partners with the Hunger in Moose Jaw group to develop the Chair-ity auction and fundraiser, with chairs designed by local artists. Similarly, Humboldt partnered with the Newcomers Centre for an Arts and Culture Days event.

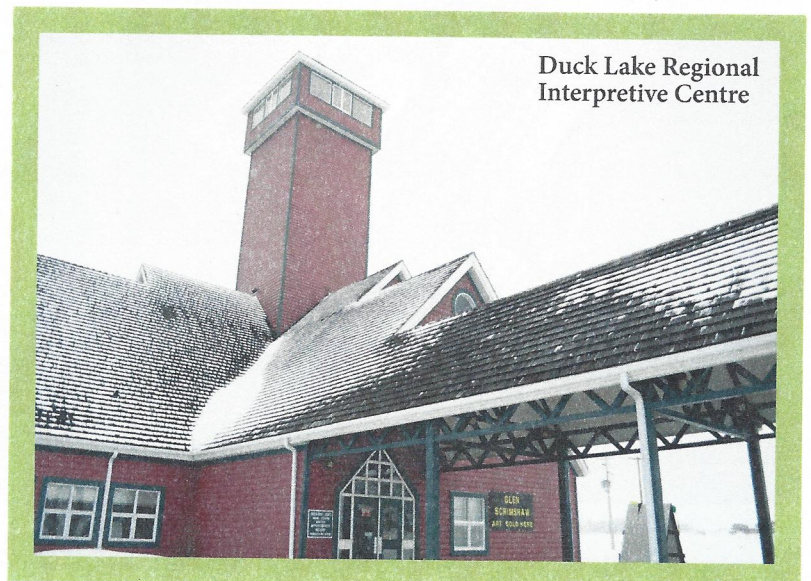
With eight gallery spaces and other areas for programming, the MacKenzie brings in larger, expensive exhibitions such as Daphne Odjig or

Andy Warhol from major centres. These require a state-of-the-art gallery with temperature and humidity control, installation and take-down expertise, and extra security and marketing. As well, the MacKenzie seeks sponsorships with corporate or individual partners as much as two years before the show season.

“The ability to bring shows in means that we have the capacity, and we're trusted by these larger partners,” Morgan says.

Joan Maier of the Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery says some community partnerships are more direct, as she discovered when a regular funding source fell through for art classes for a group of intellectually challenged students.

“When the community found out, people stepped forward and helped us out.” For instance, the South Hill Community Centre gave \$500, and a taxi driver from Bobcat's Taxi drove students to the class without charging. “It makes you realize that the community is supporting you,” Maier adds.



Duck Lake Regional Interpretive Centre

Sustainability Means Engagement

Many museums serve many roles in their community. Perillat says sustainability is her goal, because Duck Lake is a tourist attraction.

“Our goal here is to boost attendance, because the more attendance we have, the more we can make, and help pay our expenses,” she adds.

The cost of running a gallery now without some kind of public support is prohibitive, Morgan agrees. Sustainability means a blend of public and private support, including grants, donors, sponsors, gallery shop funds (\$27,000 this year), memberships, fundraising, workshops, and rentals. “It’s a challenge,” he adds.

Most museums rely on private and public funding as well as a battery of volunteers. Ongoing operating costs and wages require municipal, Saskatchewan Lotteries, Canada Council, or Saskatchewan Arts Board funding, adds Maier.

“There are some things that we are never going to be able to measure completely,” Hoesgen says. “I think it comes down to public service.”

MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina

Annual Budget – About \$2.1 million

Employees – 22 permanent employees (one half-time) plus 15-20 regular casual employees

Attendance - About 80,000 visitors annually; 61,000 in gallery, and 20,000 school and outreach programs off-site

Volunteers – About 130 volunteers giving about 3400 volunteer hours

Memberships – 1400 including 800 individual memberships plus families etc.

Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery

Annual Budget – \$0.5- million annually

Employees – Eight people and additional summer students

Attendance – 30,000 annually

Volunteers – About 120 volunteers giving about 2360 volunteer hours

Memberships – About 120

Humboldt and District Museum

Annual budget - About \$250,000

Employees – Four – three full time, one part time, plus summer students

Attendance – About 7000 annually

Area/district – City of Humboldt (pop 6500) and Humboldt historic district

Volunteers – About 125 volunteers giving 2500 volunteer hours

Duck Lake Regional Interpretive Centre

Annual budget - \$113,000-120,000

Employees – One full time, one part time, and summer students

Attendance – About 5000 annually

Area/district – About 27 km West and 10 km east and south

Volunteers – About 40 volunteers

