

Stearns History Museum

Executive Director Prospectus

History lays the groundwork for strong, resilient communities. No place really becomes a community until it is wrapped in human memory: family stories, tribal traditions, civic commemorations. No place is a community until it has awareness of its history. Our connections and commitment to one another are strengthened when we share stories and experiences.

American Association of State and Local History - The Value of History

The Museum

The Stearns County Historical Society was founded in 1936 by a group of citizens who shared an interest in history and a commitment to preserving it. In 1973, the organization began to shape a professional Museum, formally cataloging historical artifacts and documenting local history. Less than a decade later, ground was broken for the current facility. With exhibit galleries, research center, archives, children's playroom, and meeting rooms, the nationally-accredited Stearns History Museum today reaches far beyond the vision of its founders.

The Museum serves the residents of Stearns County, the seventh most populous county in the state, drawing audiences from all over the U.S. and the world. The Museum enables our guests and patrons to discover their own place in the stories of their families, communities, and the nation. Each year, the Museum presents exhibits, programs and activities that educate, entertain, and inspire participants. The Museum facility sits on six acres adjacent to a 100-acre city owned nature park with walking trails, abundant wildlife, and a skateboard park.

Our mission is straightforward. The Museum connects people to the power of history and culture by collecting, preserving, and interpreting its historical and cultural resources. We envision the Stearns History Museum as a place where we honor our diverse histories and together lay the groundwork for creating strong communities and deep understandings of each other and of ourselves.

In 2016, the Museum welcomed 17,799 on-site visitors and hosted nearly 1,500 local students, serving 115,875 total people through on-site programming, off-site programming, social media and research requests. In addition to staff, Museum volunteers logged 1,855 hours of work delivering the Museum's many programs and experiences.

The Museum is governed by an elected, independent 15 person Board of Directors, all of them residents of Stearns County. The Museum is organized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Stearns History Museum is the only county museum in Minnesota, and one of very few county museums in the country, accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. In 2016, we received a five-year reaccreditation.

The Opportunity

As the only accredited county museum in Minnesota, the Stearns History Museum holds a special place and high reputation among museums in the state. With an annual budget of nearly \$950,000, and an endowment totaling \$350,000, the Museum is able to support high quality exhibits and programs, an extraordinary research center, and broad outreach to the surrounding community. We recently completed an outside review that will guide future programming choices. The Museum is managed by an experienced and highly committed professional staff, and directed by an active and committed Board of Directors. Unusual among museums locally and nationally, the Stearns History Museum receives significant and generous annual support from Stearns County. In fiscal year 2017, the Museum received \$595,000 from Stearns County, a total representing 63 percent of its total annual operating revenue. While a strong relationship with Stearns County, and maintenance of county funding is key, major strides in private fundraising is a priority for the Museum and its Executive Director.

In March 2015, the Museum's Board of Directors approved a Strategic Plan. The plan identified several broad objectives:

1. Make the Stearns History Museum a signature cultural resource for county residents and visitors
2. Ensure the Museum's financial strength and stability
3. Review and update governance and management practices
4. Ensure the cultural resources of Stearns County are accessible to all residents
5. Create visitor experiences at the Stearns History Museum that are meaningful, memorable and entertaining. Experiences will engage the community and encourage return visits.

The plan continues to provide the strategic direction for the Museum, guiding programming choices and investments.

The Challenge

Like many non-profit organizations, financial sustainability remains the Museum's most significant challenge. While we deeply value the generous support provided us by the county, we are overly dependent on county resources and must develop new sources of revenue and fund-raised support. Our donor base is small and under-developed and must be more deeply cultivated. In 2016, we received a \$152,000 interest-free loan from the county for a capital project that must be repaid within a decade. While we have no other outstanding debt, that obligation plus the need to grow our operating budget in support of deeper and wider programming creates an imperative for a strong financial and development plan.

Now 33 years old, the Museum facility shows signs of aging. We recently upgraded our heating, ventilation and cooling system (a project partially underwritten by the county loan) to meet contemporary standards for safe management of artifacts. However, several significant issues must be addressed in the near future, including a new fire suppression system and ADA-specified accessibility. We must invest more significantly and systematically in capital improvements.

Though our reputation in the community is strong, our membership is aging. The Executive Director must work with the Board of Directors and the staff to develop a plan to re-imagine and broaden our membership, focusing in particular on families. In addition, the Museum seeks new ways to make and keep the Museum and history relevant to an increasingly diverse population.