

## *From the Planners' Bookshelf...*

### **THE GUGGENHEIM EFFECT**

#### **Small City and Town Museums: Great Opportunities for Community Volunteers.**

Every town has a history, a founding story; most towns have some unique, authentic feature that can be used to celebrate the town. Museums educate and entertain residents and attract visitors for the same reason. Local museums are great sources of civic pride; they also require governance boards which offer terrific opportunities for community participation in building and operating an important public asset.

#### **The Currency of Museums: The Guggenheim Effect.**

CharacterTowns.org presented *Economic Development Assets, Specialty Museums and Libraries* in the December 10<sup>th</sup> edition on the economic and social importance of libraries and museums and their potential power to transform main streets and downtowns in small cities. To add emphasis to this discussion, museums that have recently been announced emphasize the popularity and usefulness of organizing a museum that celebrates and educates an authentic and unique feature of the community. A series of articles presents a wide variety of purposeful museums. Recent announcements include:

- “ ‘We do not speak. We let the cultural relics speak!’ declare the ambiguously worded signs around China’s most interesting museum: The Jianchuan Museum Cluster, a sprawling, astonishing memorial to China’s 20<sup>th</sup> century” from *The Economist*, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018.
- The Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium... “is a magnificently bizarre hybrid” ... “that cannot help but ooze colonial triumphalism, despite recent protestations of egalitarian diversity.” From *The Economist*, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018.
- “At the Museum of Ice Cream, patrons can ride in an ice cream sandwich swing, swim in a pool of plastic ice cream sprinkles and seesaw on a giant ice cream scoop” from *Bloomberg Pursuits*, August 20, 2018. As a pop-up attraction, it is more playground than museum, “the most visible end of a growing movement that’s blurring the line between shopping and entertainment”...and education.
- The Humboldt Forum is a massive new museum in Berlin, a museum complex with displays from around the world, but also providing space for exhibitions, performances and public debates from *The World* in 2019, *The Economist*.

#### **The Importance of Museums to Small Cities and Towns.**

Small cities and towns can capitalize on “The Guggenheim Effect”. Local history is a tremendous draw and many towns have a wonderful place, staffed by volunteers who tell an interesting story. In towns from Bilbao to Apopka, museums draw people to be educated, entertained and enlightened about ice cream in San Francisco, pinballs in Fernandina Beach FL and Myrtle Beach SC, cardboard boats in New Richmond OH and the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum in Key West.

Every town has some authentic and unique feature be it the town’s founding story, a local business of interest, an agricultural product like the potato, cardboard boats or a famous hometown person, even if they just “slept here”. The key is to find something of interest that can be tied to community pride, to attract community participation and to education residents and attract visitors. **The Guggenheim Effect is real, but not the exclusive purview of big cities; it can happen in any town of any size.**