

The Power of Exhibitions and Fairs to educate, promote economic development and enhance civic pride.

CELEBRATIONS.

Cities of all sizes have festivals, book fairs, sporting events and founder's day parades. The big city "once in a lifetime" events are the most obvious and most memorable: The Columbian Exhibition of 1893, also known as the Chicago World Fair; the Great Central Fair of 1864; and, Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in England. These events changed the world; small city events can change the course of history for smaller communities.

The larger events offer lessons for smaller communities based on their publicity, the reputation that comes from repetition and their authenticity. These events, small and large, celebrate some authentic attribute of the community. They draw in residents to enjoy the day[s] and feel some pride about their community.

Every small city and town has something to celebrate: an historic event, the birthday of a famous resident or a recurring natural phenomena. If there is not an indigenous celebratory event or person, grab one from the regional, state or national scene.

Find something to celebrate in a public way. State fairs serve this purpose, especially in places with strong agricultural interests. Annual sporting events like a bar-b-que cook-off draws a crowd and serves up great food. A rivalry football game or community Memorial Day picnic fills the bill. Small cities and towns always have something fun and interesting to celebrate. You just have to find it.

MAKE IT A BIG DEAL.

The point is to find an event that draws the interest and participation of the town's families and businesses. Special groups may be the leaders and organizers, such as a Greek Festival that draws people from the entire town; the food and dancing are usually great. Parks, town squares and community centers provide the venues.

The Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance is the flagship of Pebble Beach Automotive Week. Begun in 1950.

<https://pebblebeachconcours.net/>



LINK: <https://www.miamibookfair.com/>

For 17 days and nights each spring, **Spoletto Festival USA** fills Charleston, South Carolina's historic theaters, churches, and outdoor spaces with performances by renowned artists as well as emerging performers in opera; theater; dance; and chamber, symphonic, choral, and jazz music.

Now approaching its 45th season, Spoletto Festival USA is internationally recognized as America's premier performing arts festival.

LINK: <https://spoletousa.org/>

FIND OR BUILD A PLACE TO FOCUS THE EVENT.

If there is no proper physical space or venue for a citywide celebration, creating such a space can become a community project that provides value for a special event and for general use throughout the year. Local celebrations create the possibility to build civic pride and community spirit.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY.

Once events are established and become regular features associated with the town, the events take on a life of their own; they attract people from outside the city. Car shows, book fairs, music festivals, art shows, historic tours, founder's day celebrations and events of all kinds litter the calendars of cities and towns across America.

Find a reason to celebrate, build an authentic base and plan for success. Charleston, Miami and Pebble Beach had to start somewhere; they are attractive destinations to start with, but they had to establish an authentic purpose and build a reputation. International events draw millions of people. In the 19th century, Chicago and Philadelphia were important cities that used world fairs to enhance their reputation as centers of innovation and economic vitality.

EDUCATION.

Exhibits, displays and lectures that come with exhibitions and fairs are often illuminating and inspiring to children and adults. Many life stories of successful people are founded on their early exposure to some interesting person or subject that happened at a local technical exhibit, book fair or graduation ceremony. Partnerships with local schools and colleges offer multiple benefits: entertainment, access to expertise, connection of "town and gown" and creation of some learning opportunities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

Businesses need to be associated with successful towns. Investors look for strong local economies. Employees and owners need interesting environments for their work. Active communities that draw intellectual, economic and cultural events, people and demonstrations to their town invite businesses to remain in town or relocate to it from elsewhere.

CIVIC PRIDE AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT.

Community leaders set the stage, create the momentum and authenticate the events that become traditions. Local events, once established become part of community life. Volunteers appear every year. Visitors from out of town make an annual trek to enjoy traditional festivals or exhibitions. Businesses participate to show commitment to the town. New residents find participation as a way to become part of the community.

SMALL CITIES AND TOWNS.

Large cities have used fairs and exhibitions to enhance their reputations and economies for decades. Small communities with more limited goals and resources can use this same technique to build their economy and their cultural assets. Plan for success. Authenticity is important. Base building is important. Community belief in the mission is important. Ultimately, when the event attracts a regional audience, infrastructure will be important: how do people arrive? where do they park? where can they spend the night? what about food and beverage? do regulations and services support the event while protecting the town?

FIND SOMEONE WHO CARES; MAKE A PLAN.

Celebrate the town; provide new learning opportunities, promote economic development and build civic pride.

1. Find something to celebrate.
2. Find a group of people interested in either the event or creating a community event that establishes or reinforces the city's identity.
3. Establish an organizing committee.
4. Create a finance plan that identifies sources of funding and a budget.
5. Find or create a place for the main event even if activities occur throughout the city.
6. Solicit support from the host city, the business community, service clubs and the general public.
7. Get to work; do something beautiful; have fun.

