



OPINION COLUMN

Museums, libraries, art galleries hubs of economic rejuvenation

Cultural input critical to regional planning



By George Jacob, Museum Matters
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While the County of Grande Prairie has taken decisive strides in recent years in investing in a museum and sports complex, among others that enhance the quality of life, the City of Grande Prairie has also stepped up its efforts towards fostering diversity, inclusivity, tourism, education, cultural events and encouraging retention of talent, that is, in fact, the bedrock of building sustainable communities and economic diversification. These are indeed welcome developments with both long-term impact and short-term visibility and viability.

Often developing economies tend to focus on city planning in terms of downtown business development, infrastructure, hospitals, schools and utilities. What usually gets left behind on the priority list is the soft power and potential of socio-cultural assets - discovered and undiscovered. Studies show that museums, libraries and cultural institutions are the hubs of economic rejuvenation in cities struggling to establish an identity and foster sustainable investment.

Examples from around the world from Baltimore to Bilbao abound where creation of museums, art galleries, cultural districts and architectural icons and stylized urban development, have galvanized and transformed cities as economic engines of engaged communities, beyond the mere functional.

Public policy makers must understand the potential of cultural institutions and museums in order to engage them in the planning process. These institutions are vital to branding the Peace region as a destination and a preferred venue for potential investment directly connected to the quality of life. The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum has a vital stake in this conversation in its legacy role of spearheading palaeo research, engaging school districts, attracting tourist traffic, and local communities with stellar programs, exhibitions, events, outreach activities, publications, travelling exhibits, lectures, documentary screenings, scientific conferences and workshops.

One doesn't have to look far for references. CreateAustin is a 10-year Cultural Master Plan for the City of Austin that lays down the need for cultivating a cultural vision tying it with purpose driven investment. Austin recognizes that creative industries and activities are not only essential keys to quality of life, they are good for Austin's economy. The creative community accounts for \$2.2 billion in annual economic activity, over 44,000 permanent jobs, and contributes upwards of \$48 million in city tax revenue.

The Tour of Alberta being hosted by the City and the County here on Sept. 2-3, 2015 is indeed a bold step in the right direction that directly brings millions of viewers and contributes millions to the local and regional economy, apart from making history.

The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum plans to hold a soft opening in conjunction with the Tour of Alberta as it loops past Wembley on its Stage 2 leg. Taking advantage of international media, athletes, trainers and large spectator crowds, would only be logical to showcase a world-class asset making it both fortuitous and timely.

Grande Prairie is home to many visionaries and unsung voices of talent, blessed with technological foresight and creative imagination. Many from the region have made exemplary contributions to the world of music, art, theatre, literature, film, invention, research, business, community service, philanthropy, medicine, oil exploration and academics.

The history of a city is seldom recorded in its buildings, bricks and mortar, but is immortalized in its visionary voices that inspired a generation and transformed the next.

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