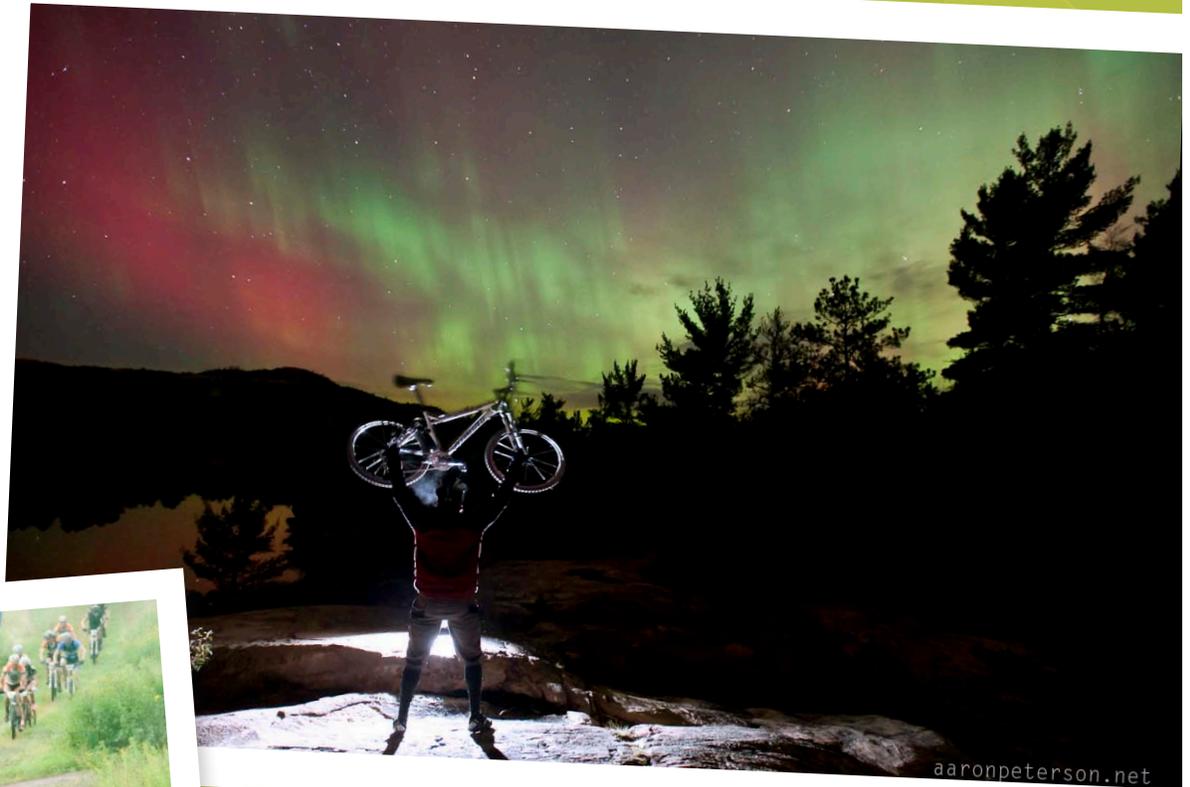


Michigan Municipal League

Noquemanon Trails Network



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Better Communities. Better Michigan.



PROJECT DETAILS:

NAME:

Noquemanon Trails Network

LOCATION:

Marquette, Michigan

DATE:

2001-present

CATEGORIES:

Recreation
Branding
Green Initiatives
Sustainability
Economic Development

THE GIST:

The Noquemanon Trails Network (NTN) was enhanced to cater to off-road bicyclists, expanding the recreational tourism brand of the area and establishing the city of Marquette as a national destination for cyclists—yielding impressive economic results for the private sector.

Noquemanon Trails Network

PROJECT SCOPE:

The Noquemanon Trails Network has developed 40 miles of off-road cycling trails with a goal for 100 by 2020.

The Challenge:

How do you leverage a recreational facility to turn your city into a national recreational tourism destination?

Overview:

The terrain and extreme seasons of Marquette lend it to four-season silent sports activity, which has historically been part of the local culture. The Noquemanon Trails Network (NTN) is a 501c3 that emerged from an unofficial volunteer group concerned with maintaining trails when state resources became untenable about 10 years ago. At the same time, the city of Marquette was actively repositioning itself from a former industrial community to a premiere recreational tourism destination. In this pursuit, the city purchased 2,243 acres in the city and contiguous townships, enabling expansion of NTN's silent sports trail system within city boundaries and beyond. Unanimously approved by city officials, the acquisition was dubbed the "Louisiana Purchase" for its future economic importance.

While the city invested in strategic land purchases, NTN took up the challenge of major trail development as well as maintenance. NTN proceeded with the goals of erosion control, preservation, and an excellent trail experience for all



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skill levels, multiple generations and all user types. With this investment, mountain bike (Single Track) use exploded, and Marquette is now a national year-round silent sports destination. The city invested in connecting trails to the downtown. The city, Downtown Development Authority and Convention and Visitors Bureau all play a role in promoting this brand and attracting visitors. NTN's focus is changing from infrastructure development to events, many of which are coordinated with the city's downtown interests. The city will soon develop high-end condominium units in the popular Heartwood area providing immediate trail access for residents, and additional tax base for the community.

Accomplishments:

- Increased annual hotel sales primarily through two major recreational events by 25,000 rooms from 2009-2012. A conservative estimate of an additional \$150 contributed to the local economy per room sold equals nearly \$3.8 million, not including spending estimates of local/regional participants and spectators.
- Created the stimulus, through development of downtown trail access, for more than \$40 million in private investment and provided the impetus for more than \$12 million in other public projects. New businesses include two brew pubs representing \$750,000 of investment and 14 employees, seven restaurants representing \$2 million of investment and 80 employees, as well as other new and expanded shops and businesses. The taxable value of downtown properties is up 83%, with new downtown residential increasing 200% (townhouse, condo and second-story residential).
- Doubled the number of major trail event participants annually and created year-round recreation destination by welcoming and investing in Single Track (mountain bike) users.
- Attracted Single-Track users from across the Midwest and Canada throughout the season (not just for events), as evidenced by license plates at trailheads.
- Launched annual Noquemanon Ski Marathon, which is part of the American Ski Marathon Series and is an FIS (International Ski Federation) points race. The race draws Olympic competitors, has reached its maximum capacity of 1,400 participants, and is enjoyed by countless spectators. 600 volunteers work the event which includes: marathon and half-marathon, 12 K, youth races, snow shoeing, skijor, snow-biking and sit ski events. Annual NTN skiers and snowshoers are estimated at 28,000.
- Launched Ore to Shore Mountain Bike Epic, drawing 2,387 participants in 2012, attracting national cycling team participation and creating additional exposure for Marquette as a premiere cycling destination. 400 volunteers work the event, which included 48-mile, 28-mile, and 10-mile races with various youth events. The Ore to Shore cycling route incorporates downtown Marquette.
- Launched first Fat Tire (snow bike) Winter Event as part of Ski Marathon events in 2013.
- Utilized the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) to train Marquette stakeholders in becoming an IMBA-recognized destination. In this pursuit, NTN hired a master trail builder to create trails for all skill levels that also include erosion control, engineered to coexist with the environment. Once IMBA-recognition is achieved, NTN will receive national exposure to 35,000 IMBA members and retailers.



- Inspired DDA/city to plan ambitious recreational events downtown:
 - The new 2012 summer Bike Jam combined NTN Single Track trail events with downtown bike events, appealing to all skill levels, bike types and families.
 - The new 2013 winter Rail Jam is a downtown event for snowboard competitors-promoted in conjunction with the UP 200 Sled Dog event (an Iditarod qualifying race).
- Inspired DDA/city to brand for recreational tourists: high profile bike racks in downtown create a welcoming bike culture and promote Marquette's many other recreational tourism attractions such as hockey, music, freighter-watching, etc.
- Inspired Marquette General Hospital and other major employers to use the NTN system as a quality of life recruitment tool.
- Attracted major players in bike industry to test-ride new bike lines on NTN trails.
- Attracted skjors-skiers pulled by dogs (or horses).
- Attracted sit skiers (adaptive skiing for the physically challenged).
- Recognized widespread popularity of canine companions and designated canine-friendly trails.
- Separated trail users by activity (to degree possible) to maximize trail experience for all.

Funding:

Private donations, memberships and events

Organization:

The Noquemanon Trails Network (NTN) is a 501c3 dedicated to developing, maintaining, signing and mapping a non-motorized land and water trail network throughout Marquette and Alger Counties in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The network—used for hiking, running, off-road biking, horseback riding, skiing, snowshoeing, canoeing and kayaking—is vital to Marquette's success as a premiere destination for recreational tourism.

Participants:

NTN has a 17-member board of volunteers, representing all user interests. Several members of the board are both trail users and local business owners with a vested interest in the success of the trails and promotion of the area as a recreational tourism destination. NTN has one full time director and hires some part-time trail builders and maintenance workers, although most maintenance is accomplished through volunteer worker bees.

Actions Taken:

An abundance of natural and social capital is what makes this endeavor successful. The energy and desire of sports enthusiasts, coupled with community pride makes for great volunteers.

1) BUILD FOUNDATION OF COMMUNITY PRIDE/CELEBRATE SUCCESS:

The city's adherence to a long-term master plan to reinvent itself from an industrial-based to a recreation/tourism-based community through steady implementation and publicized successes, fostered community pride and created an enthusiastic resident fan base.

2) NURTURE SOCIAL CAPITAL/RECRUIT THE ACTIVE

As a recreation destination with a university and major health industry, Marquette has physically active residents who tend to be high-energy and socially connected via their sports networks. Combined with a foundation of community pride, this provides Marquette with effective, reliable volunteer groups and a strong donor base. The city further fosters this culture with numerous citizen boards and committees.

3) CONNECT THE PIECES AND COMPLEMENT, RATHER THAN COMPETE:

Marquette's reinvention began as a tourism destination, but simultaneously the city seized opportunities to actively promote and develop its recreation options, providing more pieces of a greater experience. Also, as NTN developed, it chose to complement (rather than compete with) the Keweenaw Peninsula's elite mountain biking destination by positioning itself as a destination for all skill levels—creating a regional destination from one area.

4) SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP:

As NTN developed Single Track, it sought expert guidance from the International Mountain Biking Association on becoming an IMBA destination—developing to appeal to all skill levels, including youth, and hiring a master trail builder to engineer erosion control to coexist with the environment.



5) BUILD ON SUCCESS:

Don't expect instant success, but recognize potential. Try new things and shake it up to see what works (or doesn't). The annual Ski Marathon, limited to 1,400 participants, grew from the original Red Earth Loppert which drew a few hundred skiers. The Ski Marathon now offers a Fat Tire event in recognition of the growing cyclist base, and inspired the first annual 2013 Rail Jam (snowboard competition). The Ore-to-Shore bike event, which draws more than 2,300 participants, inspired the 2012 first annual Bike Jam which will be built upon in 2013.

6) BE AUTHENTIC:

The natural assets and terrain lent itself as the perfect backdrop for careful development as a recreation destination for silent sports. A long history of outdoor sports was further cultivated and students from Northern Michigan University, as well as local business owners, introduce new and creative activities, such as skijoring—keeping the excitement high. Other communities may have different recreational assets to develop. Grow what you know.

7) COLLECT THE DATA:

Marketing decisions are based on participant data regarding local, out-of-area, out-of-state or international participants. The CVB reports steady annual growth in hotel rooms sold from 2008-2012, now up more than 25,000 rooms annually. Further, a conservative estimate of \$150 spent on the local economy per room sold, yields a \$4 million increase from 2009. These figures do not reflect regional participants and spectators.

8) ADJUST THE LENS:

As NTN's trails developed and popularity grew, NTN's focus changed from being primarily an infrastructure-based organization to an events-based organization. Events are used as significant fundraisers to complement donor and membership dollars—while simultaneously creating buzz and feeding the media, serving to further market and promote the trails.

9) **BAM!**

The original trail users were primarily local and singularly focused on recreation, never dreaming that what they created would have such a stunning impact on both the image and the economy of an entire city. Fortunately, the city, DDA, and CVB all recognized NTN's growing contribution to the health of the community and are able to collaborate on events and capitalize on this enormous asset.

Lessons Learned:

- **Growing Pains:**
Accept these as healthy; the alternative is stagnation or decline. Deliberately plan to manage change. NTN experienced significant controversy over how much of NTN resources from a loyal skier base to devote to Single Track. At this point, it's a full embrace.
- **Recognize Opportunity:**
Seize the day, but work diligently to manage outcomes by getting the right people at the table working in an atmosphere of respect, while fostering cooperation and minimizing emotion. The pursuit of opportunity sometimes results in others being stepped on, so minimize the pain.
- **Breaking Up Is Hard to Do:**
At some point, a parting of the ways may be unavoidable. For example, the Superiorland Cross Country Ski Club separated itself from NTN in 2011 to focus on their niche of youth programming. As much as possible, hold original interests harmless and move forward, remaining open to a new type of relationship with former partners.
- **Partner Smart:**
In Marquette, recreational development was the goal of the users, prior to its economic impact. Other communities may partner effectively from the beginning with economic impact as the primary goal, recognizing authentic recreation development as a means to achieving this.

Expert:

Nicole Dewald, NTN Operations Coordinator www.noquetrails.org

Similar Projects:

Copper Harbor Trails Club in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula caters primarily to the elite rider skill level <http://www.copperharbortrails.org/>

Supporting Documents:

NTN website: <http://www.noquetrails.org>

NTN videos: <http://www.noquetrails.org/singletrack/video>

2013 Noquemanon Ski Marathon: <http://www.noquemanon.com>

IMBA: <http://www.imba.com/membership/destinations>

The Center for 21st Century Communities

Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan's future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place*. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at mml.org.

Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan's future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place*, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a "one-stop-shop" for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.



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