

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results of a research project aimed at understanding how First Fridays and the art scene in Calumet contribute to community development. The project inventoried community assets and assessed how First Fridays contribute to these assets using participation observation, interviews, and surveys of First Fridays participants.

The research team surveyed 368 visitors to eight art spaces on First Fridays in February, March, and April of 2013. Counting the same people more than once at different art spaces and in different months, we observed a total of 1,077 total visits over the period. The average age of survey respondents was 48 years, significantly older than the general population. About a third came from Calumet/Laurium/Lake Linden. About one quarter of those surveyed indicated they “almost always” attend First Fridays, while 27% indicated this was their first time visiting.



Study results indicate that First Fridays and the art scene are making broad contributions to community assets in Calumet. The program has potential to spur a “spiraling up” process of holistic community development. A critical mass of people attend First Fridays and are interested in engaging in the art scene and related community development in Calumet, as evidenced by the number of visitors we observed and the 123 individuals who provided their email addresses to learn more. By organizing and working toward a shared vision, the arts community in Calumet could take advantage of additional opportunities to stimulate productive community change.



The art scene is contributing to a general shift in the way the natural world is valued toward more spiritual, recreational, and aesthetic values and a more environmentally conservation oriented perspective.

Artists thrive within and build upon the rich cultural legacy in Calumet. First Fridays are contributing to a general re-shaping of community identity toward a vibrant, cultural and historical destination and beginning to build a can-do, pro-change attitude in the community where local residents control their own community destiny. Still, the art scene suffers from focusing on competition as much as collaboration, and it may not be well integrated into the broader community’s perception of itself.



First Fridays builds human capital by teaching techniques and trainings and providing some jobs, but leadership is scarce and the program may be missing opportunities to develop new community leaders.

Social relationships are one of the most important things that First Fridays participants value, and the development of social capital is perhaps the most key contribution of First Fridays. However, we find that social capital associated with First Fridays remains somewhat narrow with many of the same similar people who visit the same art spaces each month and interact with one another. These relationships are important, but First Fridays may be missing opportunities to establish new relationships among multiple groups and to integrate younger people and families.



First Fridays help to provide artists and residents who value art and culture with a political voice that may have been silent in the past, but this voice isn't particularly well coordinated and remains eclectic rather than unified.

Artists and art spaces have been instrumental in restoring and preserving Calumet's historical buildings, and they have invested significant financial capital into the community through private funds, attracting grants, and bringing in tourist dollars. Still, the amount of money generated through sales during First Fridays isn't reaching its full potential.

Based on these findings, the team suggests that First Fridays and the art community in Calumet could build on current successes by engaging in a visioning process whereby community members work together to define a vision and goals for the First Fridays program. The process could help to coordinate advertising efforts, build and solidify social relationships, coordinate with external agencies (such as Main Street Calumet, Michigan Tech, or Finlandia), develop leadership, establish a political voice in the community and beyond, and attract more and more diverse visitors. The community may find that Calumet community members, artists and art space proprietors would benefit from forming a formal Calumet Arts organization that would serve to organize these efforts and coordinate with external groups.

As a research group, it is not our intention to tell the community what to do. Our role is to provide an unbiased account of the relationships between First Fridays and community development. We hope the results of this project will stimulate dialogue within the community.

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