

Incourage Impact: Downtown Development

A Report to the Community

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Since 1994, Incourage has had a track record of supporting all communities within south Wood County, with a specific interest in the vibrancy of downtown Wisconsin Rapids as an economic driver. We believe that the central location on the Wisconsin River and representation of the population center within south Wood are both key reasons that coordinated investments of all kinds in downtown Wisconsin Rapids – time, talent and financial – benefit the entire region.

Incourage and our donors support resident engagement, learning and connection toward collective action in all of our work.

Many of the investments that Incourage has made to the downtown area are directly linked to and consistent with Downtown Revitalization Plans approved by the City of Wisconsin Rapids in 1996, 2007 and most recently 2009.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Arts & Heritage Cluster through the Community Progress Initiative

In October 2006, through a partnership with the Ford Foundation, Incourage coordinated, participated in and provided funding for a study tour to rural North Carolina. Thirteen local residents and artists traveled to the western mountains of North Carolina, making twenty stops in three small towns that had dealt with the loss and reduction of manufacturing jobs in the textile and furniture-making industries, as well as the loss of tobacco farms. The group was inspired by this experiential learning opportunity and, upon return to the south Wood County area, formed the Arts & Heritage Cluster. The purpose of the Arts & Heritage Cluster was to look for new economic opportunities to promote our area's rich history of local arts and culture.

Several community art projects can be directly linked to the Arts & Heritage Cluster, including: Grand Banner Project in the downtown, Downtown Historical Murals, the Betty Boop Festival and the Cranberry Blossom Festival. Incourage supported regular monthly meetings from October 2006 – April 2009, by not only providing financial support but administrative support as well.

Site Visit to Knight Foundation Media Learning Seminar and Bradenton/Sarasota

In February 2013, Incourage organized and funded a study tour to Bradenton/Sarasota, Florida and to Miami, Florida to attend John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's "Media Learning Seminar for Communities." At the Knight Foundation event, learning was focused on creating informed and engaged communities as a means of strengthening economies and democracies. Staff and board members of Incourage and Mayor Zach Vruwink learned about Realize Bradenton, a nonprofit organization in Bradenton that brings people together to create a vibrant and prosperous downtown area for residents, visitors and businesses. A healthy arts and culture scene improves a city's livability. The arts are a proven catalyst for economic development, attracting tourists, new residents and businesses. This trip aligned well with and helped to inform the Mayor's riverfront development and beautification planning efforts for downtown Wisconsin Rapids.

ARTS & CULTURE

Wisconsin Rapids Community Theatre

In 2006, Incourage provided Wisconsin Rapids Community Theater (WRCT) with administrative support for a \$1.2 million campaign to support the construction of a 200 seat theatre in the Centralia Center. Incourage processed over 500 gifts as well as tracked 76 pledges for the campaign. Incourage also provided guidance in the area of promotional materials, pledge forms and press releases related to the project. Incourage supported WRCT in securing a \$600,000 matching fund challenge from Gilbert and Jaylee Mead, which was central to the campaign. The Gilbert and Jaylee Mead Community Theatre Challenge provided a dollar-for-dollar match on all pledges received prior to December 31, 2006 and received by December 31, 2008.

Central Wisconsin Cultural Center, Inc.

For more than 20 years, Incourage has supported the Central Wisconsin Cultural Center in downtown Wisconsin Rapids. Investments totaling more than \$270,000 have been made to support the advancement of the organization.

In October 1994, an anonymous donor contributed \$100,000 to establish the Cultural Center Development Fund. Funds were fully expended as designated by the donor to support planning, development and establishment of a cultural center. As part of the process, Incourage's Board of Directors appointed the Cultural Center Steering Committee. The steering committee initiated three studies that were funded through the development fund: a market, economic and use feasibility study conducted by Arts Market of Massachusetts; an architectural study by Kahler/Slater architects of Madison; and a fundraising feasibility assessment. In 1997, the Steering Committee incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization and became the Central Wisconsin Cultural Center.

The Cultural Center Endowment Fund was also established at Incourage in October 1994 with a \$100,000 gift by the same anonymous donor to provide permanent support for a Cultural Center located in or near Wisconsin Rapids. A gift of \$50,000 from the Richard S. Brazeau Family Foundation in the form of a matching opportunity

was added to this Endowment Fund, for a total of \$150,000. Upon the death of the anonymous donor in 2007, the fund was renamed the Earl and Corrine Otto Cultural Center Endowment Fund as she had instructed. Annual distributions from the fund, since inception, total more than \$140,000. Incourage continues to administer this fund, and the Cultural Center still benefits today.

In 2007, the Gilbert and Jaylee Mead Advised Fund, through Incourage, supported a consultant to explore organizational planning and collaboration opportunities between the Arts Council of South Wood County and Central Wisconsin Cultural Center. A shared administrative position between the two organizations was one outcome from the planning efforts.

Over the years, Incourage has supported numerous Artist in Education programs, art exhibits and other programming offered by the Cultural Center as well as support for operating expenses through grants from various donor funds. For specific examples, see *Incourage Impact: Arts & Culture*.

Betty Boop Festival

Incourage invested more than \$25,000 through Community Grant and Donor Advised Funds to support the Arts & Heritage Cluster and the Betty Boop Festival in 2009, 2010, and 2011. In 2009 and 2010, funding paid for a part-time director as well as other administrative expenses for the event. In 2011, funds helped to enhance the festival by increasing public awareness and greater participation of individuals and families from across all socioeconomic levels in greater south Wood County. The grant specifically supported festival activities and events, such as street banners and an exhibit of fine art paintings and drawings by Grim Natwick, a Wisconsin Rapids native who was the top “Betty Boop” animator in 1930. Grant dollars also supported the purchase of computer animation software for a three-week summer school class, where students participated in hands-on animation and cartoon drawing activities; over 60 students participated in the class. Remaining dollars supported awareness efforts.

Cranberry Blossom Festival

In 2007, Incourage supported the newly established Cranberry Blossom Festival with a grant of \$1,000 to purchase “Our Blossoming Community” parade t-shirts. The Festival has become an annual event for the community, celebrating local agriculture and Wisconsin’s #1 fruit crop, the cranberry.

Downtown Murals

The creation of six historical murals was a project of the Downtown Revitalization Cluster Public Art Group. This group of volunteers wanted to see public art on display and the murals project was the first step in bringing outdoor art into downtown. From 2005-2007, Incourage served as the fiscal agent for the Downtown Public Art Fund, where local residents and businesses contributed \$8,625 to support the art murals that have created an art walk throughout the downtown, celebrating the history of our community.

For more information on Incourage investments in Arts & Culture, see *Incourage Impact: Arts & Culture*.

NATURE & RECREATION

Tom Mader Memorial Walking Trail

In 2005, Incourage contributed \$68,000 to the City of Wisconsin Rapids to establish the Tom Mader Memorial Walking Trail. Through gifts from the Thomas J. Mader Estate, generous memorial contributions from friends, co-workers, and family, along with a corporate gift from Stora Enso North America, a new trail was established along the Wisconsin River in downtown Wisconsin Rapids through the former “East Side Pool” area. It was Tom’s desire to give something back to his hometown that would enhance the recreational trail system for the enjoyment of all. Construction of the memorial site took place from March 2005 through September 2006. Incourage partnered with the City and Stora Enso to host a dedication ceremony on September 27, 2005 to unveil and introduce the Mader Memorial Trail to Tom’s family, friends and the community.

A plaque along the trail reads (in part): *Tom was a man who believed in the potential of humans and held interests in diverse ideas including government and politics, arts and culture, as well as nature and healthy communities. He believed the greatest asset any society or community has is the talent and energy of its people.*

Canoe/Kayak Launch installation

As part of the 1996 Downtown Revitalization Plan to promote the downtown area and specifically capitalize on the river, the 2005 Heart of Wisconsin Leadership Class organized the installation of the canoe/kayak launch. Incourage supported their efforts with an investment of \$1,253.54, made possible by Community Grant Funds. Work included removal of an existing river wall, installation of erosion control matting, and shaping of the slope.



BEAUTIFICATION OF THE DOWNTOWN

Holiday Lighting Display

In October 2000, Incourage funded a request from the City of Wisconsin Rapids Christmas Decoration Committee with an investment from a donor advised fund in the amount of \$10,000. At that time, the City traditionally budgeted about \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year for the repair and replacement of Christmas decorations. The Water Works and Lighting Commission had committed funds in 2000 to complete the East side display plan. Although the City had approved the Decoration Committee's plan to expand to the west side river bank, it was not expected that the lighting display would be included in the City budget for several years. The funds were used to establish a winter-fest lighting display on the West Bank of the Wisconsin River. The display includes an "Old Mill" design and is still enjoyed today by residents and visitors during the holiday season.

Downtown Planters

Beginning in 2002, and then from 2004-2007, Incourage supported a Master Gardeners project for planters to help beautify the downtown area. Investments made possible by Community Grant and Donor Advised Funds throughout the years have totaled \$2,285 and funds helped to purchase new planters, materials and plants.

Flag Pole Restoration/Park Development

In January 2006, Incourage funded a request from Elks Lodge #693 in the amount of \$4,000 for flag pole restoration and park development on the corner of 1st Avenue South and West Grand Avenue. The original flagpole was erected in 1941-42 at the onset of WWII by the Elks Lodge. The flagpole was removed in 2004 due to a stress crack. Total project cost was \$10,000; \$6,000 was raised by the Elks Club through their fundraisers. The flagpole stands about 77 feet high and lights illuminate the flag in the park at night. Park development included an extended walking trail around the flagpole, and a renovation of the landscaping around the area. The City of Wisconsin Rapids maintains the property. Construction took place in spring 2007.

Grand Banner Project

In February 2007, Incourage supported a request in the amount of \$3,088 from the Arts & Heritage Cluster for new banners for the City of Wisconsin Rapids. Banners provided a visual corridor to guide visitors and residents to the downtown area. In November 2011, Incourage again supported a request from the City of Wisconsin Rapids in the amount of \$2,560 to provide holiday and flag banners for the downtown area.

Wisconsin Rapids Area Tree Renewal Program

In April 2010, Incourage supported this 2009-2010 Leadership Class project with Community Grant Funds in the amount of \$2,500. This investment supported planting 29 mature trees at various sites in Wisconsin Rapids to replace trees that were dying from disease and old age. A committee from Heart of Wisconsin's Community Leadership Class partnered with the Wisconsin Rapids Kiwanis Club to undertake this project.



"Light the Bridge" Project

Incourage currently serves as the fiscal agent for contributions totaling more than \$15,000 given in support of this forthcoming Community Leadership Class project, which began with the 2012-2013 class. Plans are to light the pillars of the bridge with LED lighting. The lights will be able to change colors via a control panel; this will allow the City to match the lights with the season/holiday. This initiative was originally included as part of the downtown development plan completed in the 1990s.

Flowering of Grand Avenue Project

In April 2014, Incourage supported the startup of the "Flowering of Grand Avenue" initiative with a grant of more than \$2,000 from Community Grant and Donor Advised Funds. Funds purchased basket containers, plants and lamppost brackets to hang the baskets. The project was led by City resident Sue Wesley. Sue, along with others, partnered with the Water Works and Lighting Commission, the City of Wisconsin Rapids' Parks and Recreation and Streets divisions and Mayor Zach Vruwink and his Mayor's Beautification Council. They all worked together to make the program a reality. A total of 38 lampposts in the downtown area had beautiful hanging baskets thanks to the support and sponsorship by businesses, organizations and members of the community. It was truly a joint effort by many people who worked together for the beautification and betterment of our City. The program is being expanded in 2015 to 60 baskets. Incourage purchased one of the baskets for \$150, given in honor of the community's residents.



DOWNTOWN EVENTS

4th of July Fireworks in downtown Wisconsin Rapids

The Wisconsin Rapids' 4th of July fireworks celebration is a community tradition that area residents have enjoyed for decades. It is especially important for the young people of our community, as a social event bringing people downtown on the riverfront. In early 2006, Wisconsin Rapids cut \$22,000 in funding for its 4th of July fireworks show from the City's budget. As a result, Incourage organized and continues to lead the Teen Fireworks Committee, an initiative created to help youth develop leadership skills and reach out to area municipalities, businesses, organizations and individuals for their support.



With the community's support, the Teen Fireworks Committee has been responsible for the past ten July 4th fireworks celebrations. Since 2006, 46 teens have been part of the committee, raising a total of more than \$200,000. The Teen Fireworks Committee is made up of teens from four area high schools: Assumption, Lincoln, Nekoosa and Port Edwards. Each year 14 teens from the local area contribute about 10 hours each, to ensure a collaborative community fireworks celebration for the 4th of July.

In the early years, by making presentations to all municipals and asking for support, teens gained valuable experience in understanding local governmental systems. This initiative also raised awareness for area municipalities to share proportionately in the cost of this event, as the entire region benefits.

The first year that teens asked area municipalities, nine municipalities contributed \$7,140. Over the past nine years, five municipalities have continued contributing: Biron, Grand Rapids, Nekoosa, Wisconsin Rapids and Vesper. Teens have also reached out to hundreds of businesses and individuals who generously contributed then and continue supporting the fireworks today.

Farmers' Market

In October 2000, Incourage provided a grant in the amount of \$2,428 to establish the Farmers' Market in downtown and provide vouchers to WIC participants. The grant also leveraged dollars available through a federal government program by providing a 30% local match. WIC is a nutrition education program for low-income families. Its purpose is to promote and maintain nutritional health and well-being. In addition to nutrition counseling, WIC participants receive checks to buy specific healthy foods. At that time, south Wood County participants accounted for two-thirds of the County's WIC participants. Incourage provided additional support in 2001 in the amount of \$2,448 and again in 2010 in the amount of \$3,850 for a total of \$8,726.

Grand Affair

In 2001, Incourage provided a start-up grant in the amount of \$1,000 to support the Grand Affair and then again in 2007 to support trolley rides with a grant of \$200. The event was designed to celebrate the autumn season and all its beauty along the Wisconsin River. Over the years, the festival has featured boat tours along the Wisconsin River, music, trolley car rides, locally grown food and farm market produce, artists from the area showcasing their art and much, much more. Last year marked the 16th year for this event.

Souper Snow Sculpture Spectacular event

Incourage supported this 2005 Community Leadership Class project with Community Grant Funds in the amount of \$1,000. This grant provided money for Leadership participants to spearhead the first annual Wisconsin Rapids Snow Sculpture Spectacular on February 4, 2006 which began at Veterans Memorial Park and today takes place in the Centralia Center parking lot. Snow sculptures come to life from a 6-foot-square block of snow, created by individuals within our own community. January 2015 marked the 10th annual event that is now organized by and supports the South Wood County Humane Society. It is a fun event for all ages.

Cinema Under the Stars

In 2006, Incourage supported the Heart of Wisconsin Community Leadership Class with a Community Grant in the amount of \$321 for "Downtown Classic Cinema Under the Stars," an outdoor movie night for the community on the streets of our downtown. Movie rental expenses have primarily been funded by Wisconsin Rapids businesses, with Incourage providing another grant in 2013 for \$300. Incourage has provided oversight and administration of the funds contributed in support of the event through the Downtown Revitalization Fund. The event is led by a small group of community volunteers and celebrated its 11th anniversary in 2016.

RESIDENT-CENTERED ENGAGEMENT

"Influencing the Culture of a Community – How the Arts Play a Role"

In August 2004, Incourage hosted a conversation between south Wood County arts organizations' boards and staffs and Dr. Jaylee Mead, NASA scientist, noted philanthropist and 2010 Ambassador for the Arts. Jaylee was the spouse of former resident and Incourage board member Dr. Gilbert Mead, who was Stanton Mead's son.

As a resident and leader in Washington D.C. area, Jaylee chaired or served on the boards of the Washington Theatre Awards Society, Carnegie Institution for Science, the National Children's Museum and many others, Jaylee drew from her experiences to: share examples of current partnerships in the Washington D.C. arts community, cite investments in arts as a pathway to economic growth, discuss tips for successful grant applications and how they might be applied to our local arts organizations and convey her deep belief that the arts enhance and bring joy to everyday life.

Senior Resource Center

In 2003, a vacant former Wal-Mart building on the banks of the Wisconsin River was renovated to become a Senior Resource Center.

Incourage's role in this project can be most accurately described as "catalyst and connector."



Incourage was not the initiator of the project or the decision maker – yet we provided a very valuable service. Recognizing the great need for a Senior Resource Center, Incourage garnered the already existing support, enthusiasm and effort regarding the Senior Resource Center and provided leadership to advance the project. By bringing all interested parties together – prospective tenant organizations, senior citizens, Wood County representatives, City of Wisconsin Rapids representatives and interested residents/donors – Incourage was able to facilitate communication amongst participants with regard to the cost, location and plan to realize a new Senior Resource Center. This information allowed all parties involved to make the decisions necessary to move the project forward.

In addition to facilitating stakeholder engagement, connections and learning, Incourage’s support for the project included:

- Awarding a total of \$20,000 in grants over two years from Incourage’s Community Grant Funds to support a Project Coordinator position and related fundraising/planning expenses;
- Establishing an endowment fund within Incourage to provide a vehicle whereby future operational and maintenance expenses of the facility could be offset with private support;
- Establishing the “Senior Resource Center Capital Campaign Fund” at Incourage to provide necessary administrative support for campaign organizers. Contributions exceeded \$900,000 from more than 800 individuals and businesses;
- Administering a \$250,000 matching gift opportunity offered by the Terrance and Judith Paul Family to support the new facility.

The Senior Resource Center project is an example of public/private partnership, collaboration and civic involvement, and Incourage was very pleased to support its realization. It represents an authentic community project – supported, governed and used by residents from throughout our area. This facility serves as a model to other communities of what can be done when public and private sectors collaborate for the common good.

Downtown Cluster

This group of business owners, artists and interested residents formed in 2004 as a result of the Community Progress Initiative. Still today, Incourage administers the Downtown Revitalization Fund that supports downtown improvement projects. The group successfully petitioned the City of Wisconsin Rapids to enact four-way stops at the Grand Avenue intersections in the downtown for a trial. The four-way stops at the intersections are still in use. The Cluster also spearheaded the Downtown Murals project that you see around the downtown area today.

Tribune Building Project

The Tribune Building Project (tribunebuilding.org) began in December 2012 when Incourage purchased the historic riverfront property along the Wisconsin River with the intent that residents would decide its future use. From the beginning, this was about more than the building. It is a demonstration of a resident-centered process toward realizing Incourage’s vision of a community that works well for all people. This work builds upon more than a decade of Incourage’s investment in culture change, beginning with re-establishing trust and confidence among residents.



Through a resident-centered process that has engaged more than 2,000 residents to date, the Tribune’s design reflects resident priorities and capitalizes on community assets. It will serve as a “community accelerator” – accelerating economic growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, learning, creativity and connections for community benefit. Designed as the City’s first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified building, the Tribune will host:



Enterprises	Community Spaces
Microbrewery	Welcome center
Cafe with rooftop lounge	Conference / meeting rooms
Culinary kitchen	Game room & play area
Recreational rental shop	Art studio with classroom
Creative workshop / makerspace	Social space & gallery
Gift shop for local goods	Outdoor plaza

At its core, the Tribune is a social enterprise focused on cultivating a participatory and entrepreneurial culture, while also providing the requisite technical training and financial investment needed to grow the community’s human capital. Through an environment that supports learning and builds community networks, the Tribune will build on this momentum to foster creativity, new thinking, and the ability to take risks and “fail forward” – essential attributes of a community that is open to change and shaping a local, inclusive, sustainable economy.

Parking Lot Investment

In January 2015, Incourage and the City articulated a partnership through a development agreement as it relates to the renovation and redevelopment of the Tribune Building property, the sale of the Market Square parking lot, and the development of other City property adjacent to the parking lot. As part of the development agreement, Incourage committed to:

- Guarantee a minimum assessed value for property tax purposes of \$856,000, to ensure that the City receives support through property tax revenue;
- Provide up to \$150,000 to help support improvements to the outside of the Centralia Center, to create a more appealing and useful connection between the downtown properties;
- Maintain the parking lot for building users and other downtown parking needs.

Redevelopment of Tribune will benefit City’s tax base

Through its redevelopment, the Tribune will increase the property tax base in the downtown TID (Tax Incremental District) at least \$475,000. The building is currently assessed at \$379,300 and as part of the Development Agreement with the City, Incourage has agreed to a minimum assessed value for property tax purposes of \$856,000. This base may increase depending on how much of the building is deemed taxable, which will be assessed at the time it becomes operational.

Bringing Together our Downtown Neighbors

Incourage brought downtown businesses together in March 2015 to meet and share the progress that has been made on the Tribune Building Project. Incourage staff shared details of the residents’ involvement and the decision-making process that has led to the end use of this space. Twenty-two individuals representing several businesses from the downtown area gathered to learn more about the Project and how they might get involved. Those in attendance also shared their interest in and commitment to continuing discussions on community development in the downtown area.

SUPPORT & ALIGNMENT

Downtown Revitalization Plans

Plans for the Tribune Building redevelopment have also aligned with the previous downtown planning efforts. Incourage has been an active partner with the City, supporting Downtown Revitalization Plans since the first one was developed in 1996 as is evidenced in this summary document. The 2007 *Ahead of the Current: Downtown Revitalization Plan*, commissioned by the City of Wisconsin Rapids to support the recently established Downtown TIF (Tax Increment Financing) District, highlights the Tribune Building and surrounding property, labeled by city planners as “Market Square,” (p. 82) as a priority development area. Specifically, the city confirms a need for downtown open space for festivals, activities, and recreation including a central location for downtown events (p.

16, 108). The building is described by the West Grand Avenue District Project as a good candidate for reuse as a community-oriented space (p. 14, 16, 107, 108). The redevelopment opportunity for open space between the existing Centralia Center and the Tribune Building is also noted (p. 14). The 2007 plan recommends the need for increased collaboration between city and community stakeholders (p. 93), as well as the need for a “showcase” redevelopment project (p. 78, 83).

The City of Wisconsin Rapids Planning Commission updated the Downtown Revitalization Plan in 2009 to focus redevelopment on one of the community’s largest assets – the Wisconsin River. The 2009 Downtown Waterfront Plan built on the articulated priorities of the 2007 Downtown Revitalization Plan. Enhancing pedestrian connectivity, walkability, and visual appeal of the downtown area (p. 4) was a major focus area of the updated plan and was reinforced as vital through learning from the Incurage-sponsored *Realize Bradenton Tour* (2013). It also reaffirmed the Tribune Building property as an area of great potential for redevelopment as a central gathering space for the City (p. 38, 48, 53). “Green” building and planning techniques (p. 38) were also emphasized. This plan aimed to unify both sides of the river to strengthen the downtown’s position as a focal point and destination for the community and the region (p. 4).