

## Talking Points for Presentation

### **League's Wellness and Heritage Initiative**

I'm here to tell you about the League of Women Voters' Wellness and Heritage Initiative, which is intended to further the implementation of Vision 2020, sponsored in 2008-10 by the League of Women Voters of Brown County, the Purdue Extension office, the Brown County Partnership and the Brown County Community Foundation.

The League held three community conversations on Wellness and Heritage Tourism in the Fall of 2011. The topics were chosen since they cut across many of the issues raised by the visioning project. During the conversations those participating realized how little we know about our great real estate, about our cultural assets, about our Brown County brand: Peaceful Valley and Arts Community of the Midwest!

This initiative is not a tourism project per se, it is an **economic development strategy with a very specific focus**. It does not preclude other kinds of economic development, but does suggest a framework for exploiting our many assets in a cohesive fashion that opens more opportunities for creative entrepreneurship, attracts a broad range of people to live and play, and ensures protection of those assets for the future. Managing, protecting and promoting the entirety of our heritage, natural, cultural and historic, benefits our citizens and is a selling point for potential new residents and their families.

**What is this initiative?** Heritage tourism is defined as "traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present, drawing on historic, cultural and natural resources." Wellness tourism is defined as "traveling to pursue maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing." These are not only the fastest-growing sectors in the tourism sector today, but are also attractants for millennials and their younger brothers and sisters who are increasingly interested in active, vibrant communities as places to settle. We want to link and use our many and varied assets in nature, the arts, and history so that Brown County is seen internationally as an iconic heritage and wellness locale, with plenty of physical activities, beauty, history, arts, music, theater, great local food and drink, and a story to tell.

**We don't already have this?** Brown County and Nashville have a long list of assets and attractions, but visitors tend to come for one thing, be it walking and shopping along the quaint Nashville streets, hiking or mountain biking in the Park, or spending a weekend at Bill Monroe. Most of them are not very much aware of the rest of what we have here. We have some impressive recent achievements (the History Center, Phase 1 of the Salt Creek Trail, several Deer Run developments, bringing back the Playhouse, the expansion of the Art Gallery) but each was accomplished on its own, kind of in a vacuum. Working together is key! We need to connect the Park, other State properties, the Town of Nashville, TC Steele and our many arts venues. We

need to extend our offerings throughout the county, including Salt Creek and its branches, the many historic sites and, regionally, the SR 46 corridor.

The more we can integrate the entire package, the more we can get people here for longer stays. And the more we can get folks to experience an array of interests and activities, the more they will go home and pass the word about what a great place we have for living, playing and working, and the more our Chamber of Commerce and the School Corporation and big employers nearby can use the Brown County brand to attract and recruit. The CVB does a great job in promoting Brown County as a tourism destination, but we think the County can give the CVB more, much more, to work with!

**Why is the League promoting this initiative?** Several League members were involved in the 2008-2010 Vision 2020 process, especially in the Health and Wellness, Environmental and Community and Economic Development focus groups, and we wanted to aid in implementation. By the way, if you have not read this document and its companion of last year Leading Brown County or haven't read them recently, then I urge you to do so – a lot of really smart people from all sectors came up with great ideas about the needs of the county and some possible resolutions. You might not like every idea, but I guarantee you will find much to support. Vision 2020 and Leading Brown County are great planning and economic development tools. The hand-out I provided includes some of the Value Statements and Outcomes from Vision 2020 that went into the Heritage and Wellness Initiative.

During our 2011 Community Conversations, the need emerged for an inventory of Brown County Assets. In 2013, we sponsored a Kelley Business School team as they prepared a comprehensive Inventory of Brown County Assets, which the Nashville Redevelopment Commission made available as a Free Visitors Guide for Smartphones and Tablets. We held another Community Conversation in June 2014 and three more since July of this year. In all of these, interested stakeholders and experts, including county and town government officials, offered their views on Brown County's heritage of history, the arts and nature, and participants pitched in with their thoughts and ideas on how to better position Brown County as a draw for the widest pools of visitors and permanent residents.

Some of the items that have come out of our discussions in the last three months include:

-- Connection is key: we need more and better connection and networking between and among artists, venues, local government, local business, the Park, locales (ie, Brown County, Bloomington and Columbus). Each facet of our heritage (natural beauty, the Parks and Forests, Bicycling trails, several riding and ziplining locals, over 70 historic buildings in Nashville alone with many more in the county, the History Center, our art galleries, visual arts, music, theater, traditional crafts, story-telling) has something to offer a variety of audiences -- and we can reach more visitors and future residents if the various attractions in and around Brown County achieve some synergy that draws customers into deeper engagement with the area.

-- No matter what kind of economic development we contemplate, Brown County infrastructure is a weak spot. High-speed internet, water, sewer services and adequate starter and middle-income housing are all vulnerabilities that must be addressed with creativity and imagination. Bringing more tourist money into the county will bring income and new tax money into county coffers to address these problem areas, and will allow additional; and appropriate development

-- The Hoosier Mountain Bike Association is a real example of what can be achieved. Along with local volunteers, they have built trails in the Park that are known world-wide. Because of their efforts, Brown County recently achieved Ride Center status, one of 31 in the world, at the level of Bronze. We will be reevaluated in 4 years – to retain that status or to move up to Silver. To do the latter, we must improve -- not the trails in the Park so much as all the corollary offerings – practice areas, links to other trails in the region, restaurants, fun for the family, bicycle-friendly lodging, etc. These are mostly millennials and passionate fans of what they do, with discretionary income and a hunger for authentic experiences. We need to help them with DNR's plan to charge them an extra fee to use their trails! Community Conversation participants, led by Nashville RDC's Rick Kelley, are arranging a meeting with Eric Koch to work on this.

-- the Arts in the Park project, a National Historic designation for BCSP, and the educational possibilities inherent in the two art galleries plus the History Center are also big opportunities to exploit, and the first two offer Bicentennial ideas. As with any economic development strategy, we must ask ourselves, economic development for whom? Artists themselves need to make a living, and using their talents not only for direct sale or entertainment but also in service and engagement (therapy, education, etc) offers a good way to do that. The arts are a huge piece of why Brown County is and will continue to be so attractive – arts across the board are our heritage, and they reflect the richness of the nature around us. ArtsRoad 46 might be a way, if approached with renewed energy, to achieve some regional synergy, but many feel it should be expanded from the arts to a Heritage Trail. Note, the ArtsRoad 46 website is [www.visitbloomington.com/artsroad/](http://www.visitbloomington.com/artsroad/), hosted by the Bloomington tourism website, although there is a link to and from the CVB's website [www.browncounty.com](http://www.browncounty.com)

-- Some additional project ideas: a big classical music event (link to Jacobs School of Music), a story-telling event, putting up Hohenberger photos of our many historical sites and buildings in those places, thus continuing the story for a modern audience. In this regard, we have a treasure trove of pictures and stories in the History Center Archives.

-- Our heritage of arts, natural beauty, outdoor activities, history and wellness is a real attraction to active folks with families if they know about us. We need to work to ensure the big employers in Columbus, Bloomington, even Indianapolis see us as a draw for potential employees, and thus see that they have a stake in our success. This mix of arts and wellness is also a positive for retirees - embrace our status as a NORC (naturally occurring retirement community).

-- We need imagination and creativity on the part of local government, as to how they can participate and support this development direction (not precluding other strategies). We need to develop and properly use our magnificent real property, and our rich cultural and historic assets. Groups who are working on these exist, but elected and appointed officials must become more involved. A rap on Brown County is the lack of strategic planning – for economic development, for best deployment of scarce financial resources, for zoning and property development

**Why are we briefing the Redevelopment Commission? (Please note, that this paragraph will be adjusted according to where we are making this presentation)** This is an economic development project, and the RDC is the closest thing we have in the county to an economic development commission. It is only through a vibrant government-private partnership, with county-town cooperation and perhaps full integration on the economic development front, that Brown County can energize its economic future. We hope and believe that as you listened to some of the ideas and concerns that have come up on the Community Conversations, you saw places where local government can and should move the ball forward. And we hope that that you see this project as a useful framework for building at least part of your strategy –**you are building a strategy, aren't you?**

Thanks for your attention.