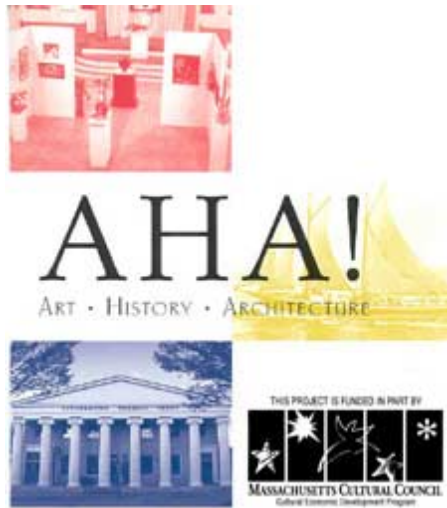


**AHA!**  
**Thursday Nights in the City**  
**Program Evaluation**  
**Final Report**



Prepared by the

**CENTER FOR POLICY ANALYSIS**  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS DARTMOUTH

July 2000

## Executive Summary

In recognition of the arts' significant role in the State's economy, the Arts and Culture Network of the Regional Community Congress and the city of New Bedford have received a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council to promote "cultural economic development." The grant will assist New Bedford in building its cultural assets by sponsoring a monthly Arts and Culture Night called AHA! (Art-History-Architecture). The goal of AHA! is to draw on New Bedford's cultural resources to stimulate additional business activity and to increase downtown employment. The AHA! event is held on the second Thursday of each month. On AHA! nights, fourteen galleries, museums, and cultural institutions in downtown New Bedford are open free to the public to present art, history, and architecture. Invited artisans from the region, exhibition openings, concerts, and special programs greet the public as they travel through the streets of downtown. Many downtown retailers and restaurants have also agreed to extend business hours on AHA! nights.

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's Center for Policy Analysis was retained to measure the cultural economic activity resulting from the AHA! program. The Center for Policy Analysis also evaluated the effectiveness of the AHA! program in meeting defined goals and objectives. Program highlights include:

- A total of \$17,000 of the Massachusetts Cultural Council grant has been spent on AHA! activities. With a total economic impact of \$216,483 approximately thirteen dollars have been generated for every state dollar spent in grant money. Three dollars in total economic impacts have been generated for each dollar in program expenditures, including state, local, and donated funds. These results are significant because there was almost no economic activity in downtown New Bedford on Thursday nights before AHA!. The majority of cultural institutions and businesses were closed during the evening hours, thus nearly all of the economic activity generated on Thursday nights is a result of AHA!
- There have been 10,551 total visitations to the cultural venues and 5,839 visitations to the various retail establishments since AHA! began. Because some venues and businesses have not reported visitation data on a monthly basis, the actual total number of visitations is even higher.
- An average of 124 patrons visit each museum and attraction, while an average of 97 visitors patronize each art related retail, restaurants, and miscellaneous retail businesses each AHA! night.

- Performers, business owners, artists, and other AHA! participants who are not located downtown have commented that AHA! has increased their exposure and sales in other locations. Thus, the economic impact of AHA! has expanded beyond the downtown area.
- Seven new businesses have opened in downtown New Bedford since the start of the AHA! program. Interviews with the proprietors of these businesses indicate that the AHA! night and the burgeoning cultural scene is one of the primary reasons that they elected to open up their business in downtown New Bedford.
- On average, nearly three-quarters (73.2%) of the total visitations to the cultural venues and businesses on AHA! Thursdays has occurred during the program hours of 5:00 to 9:00 PM. This percentage has increased since the AHA! program began in July. The increase may be due to the fact that many of the major downtown attractions such as the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park and the Whaling Museum attract a larger number of daytime visitors in the summer months. The increase may also be due, in part, to the increasing effectiveness of the AHA! program in drawing people to the downtown area.
- Interviews with downtown business owners indicate that most of the patrons in their stores during the AHA! program are customers that they have not seen before. Several business owners have commented that patrons have returned to their stores and restaurants on non-AHA! nights as a result of their initial visit during the AHA! program.
- There have been over ninety artists who have displayed their artwork on AHA! nights from July 1999 through June 2000. These include painters, sculptors, and photographers. The AHA! program has also sponsored over thirty vendors who have provided free samples of their locally grown and manufactured products. Again, these vendors have commented that AHA! has increased their exposure and sales at their locations outside of the downtown New Bedford area.
- Five hundred and thirty-two passengers (532) have used the Catch the Whale shuttle on AHA! nights as of February, 2000. The shuttle links all sites and runs continuously throughout the evening.
- As of March, 1999, there have been eight corporate sponsors of AHA! Two foundations and three government institutions have also provided support to the program.

## 1.00 INTRODUCTION

Massachusetts' exceptional cultural offerings contribute to the competitive strength of the state's economy by serving as a tourist attraction and by creating a high quality of life for citizens. The cultural industry in Massachusetts provides direct employment and income-producing activities to thousands of the state's residents. In 1996, Massachusetts' non-profit cultural organizations had a combined annual economic impact of \$2.6 billion, including expenditures on employment, goods and services, taxes, and facilities. Yet, cultural assets are frequently overlooked in designing state and community economic development strategies.

In recognition of the arts' significant role in the state's economy, the Arts and Culture Network of the Regional Community Congress and the City of New Bedford received a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council to promote "cultural economic development." The grant was made to assist New Bedford in building its cultural assets by sponsoring a monthly Arts and Culture Night called AHA! (Art-History-Architecture). The goal of AHA! is to draw on New Bedford's cultural resources to stimulate additional business activity and to increase downtown employment. For nearly twenty years, downtown New Bedford has been a business district in decline. Like many other industrial cities across the Commonwealth, the area has suffered from the effects of suburbanization: the loss of retail, office, and residential uses to the suburbs. The cycle is characterized by property owners who are unable to properly invest in their property, prospective tenants who are unwilling to locate downtown, and residents who will not visit the district because it lacks shops and a feeling of safety.

However, the tide is beginning to turn. In November 1996, Congress established the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park in downtown's Waterfront Historic District. The area has already begun to yield positive results from this designation as cultural institutions reported a 30% increase in tourism in 1998. The New Bedford Whaling Museum has undergone a \$10 million expansion and the former Star Store building is also undergoing renovations and will house the UMass Dartmouth College of Visual and Performing Arts within two years. Compass Bank's headquarters underwent a multi-million dollar expansion and progress continues in the development of the New Bedford Aquarium. Moreover, the City of New Bedford has commenced efforts to revitalize its center through considerable redevelopment activity, infrastructure improvements, and stronger planning.

In light of the tourism expansion, revitalization efforts, and the private investment being made in downtown New Bedford, the AHA! nights can play an important role in attracting visitors and drawing residents to downtown. The AHA! event is held on the second Thursday of each month. On AHA! nights, fourteen galleries, museums, and cultural institutions in downtown New Bedford are open

free to the public to present art, history, and architecture. Invited artisans from the region, exhibition openings, concerts, and special programs greet the public as they travel through the streets of downtown. Many downtown retailers and restaurants have also extended business hours on AHA! nights. Thursday evening was chosen because in the 1950's and 1960's, Thursday evenings were traditionally a focal point of community activity in downtown New Bedford. Department stores, shops, theaters, restaurants, and nightspots were open and economically active. On Thursday evenings, downtown New Bedford was "the place to be."

The participating cultural venues in downtown New Bedford include:

**New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park and Visitors Center.** One of the nation's newest National Park Service areas, the park preserves and interprets America's 19<sup>th</sup>-century whaling and maritime heritage.

**New Bedford Whaling Museum.** The Whaling Museum holds the world's largest collection of art and artifacts related to history of American whaling. It is the most complete maritime and regional history museum on the south coast of Massachusetts.

**Schooner Ernestina Museum.** The base of operations for the "official vessel of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts", the museum exhibits the *Ernestina's* 105-year history as fishing vessel, arctic explorer, and Cape Verdean packet.

**Whale's Tale.** Scrimshaw workshop specializing in ivory and bone carvings, and sculptures of whales, dolphins and whaling related items including a full line of Nantucket lightship baskets.

**Duff Gallery.** Realism, marine art, local coastal and rural scenes, still-lives and prints by artist-in-residence Robert Duff. The gallery also represents artists Ken Davies, Holly Grabill, Andrew G. Moore, Artur Moniz, and Joseph Urbanski.

**UMass Dartmouth College of Visual and Performing Arts.** The former Star Store building is being renovated for performing arts space for programs in artisanry, painting, printmaking, and sculpture. Until completion, the UMD community will be presenting its work in other exhibition spaces on Thursday Nights.

**The Magic Palette.** Features artwork by members of the Bierstadt Art Society, the city's oldest art organization. It also exhibits art and handcrafted items by local and guest artists.

**The Rotch-Jones-Duff House & Garden Museum.** Built in 1834 by a whaling merchant, the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum is one of the finest

surviving examples of Greek Revival architecture. Its historic gardens, terrace and period-furnished rooms offer an ideal setting to experience music and the arts.

**Gallery X.** An artists' cooperative representing an eclectic group of contemporary artists. The gallery promotes area culture by highlighting diverse styles of visual and performing arts, including fine art, photography, sculpture, dance, music, poetry, and theatre.

**Spinner Publications, Inc.** Spinner's award winning books tell the stories of people, neighborhoods, industry and the land. Spinner holds more than 250,000 photographic images.

**New Bedford Free Public Library.** In one of the city's most historically significant buildings, the library showcases the city's collection, which includes fine art, whaling logs, photographs, and genealogy materials.

**The New Bedford Art Museum.** Showcases the work of premier area artists and explores the region's cultural and artistic heritage through a variety of changing exhibitions.

**Crowell's Fine Art and Custom Framing.** Displaying a collection of nineteenth-century American paintings, watercolors and marine graphics.

**ArtWorks! At Dover Street.** Three contemporary galleries of national and regional fine art and artisanry, artists' residency studios, and onsite art demonstrations.

The direct economic beneficiaries of this project are the restaurants, shops, galleries, artisans, performers, cultural institutions, and other businesses in downtown New Bedford. Extended business hours will increase opportunities for employment and sales. The long-term economic beneficiaries of this project are the citizens and institutions of New Bedford, which will benefit from an increase in economic and cultural activity in New Bedford's downtown. Potential strategies for achieving long-term goals include zoning changes to increase housing for artists, and targeted residential and business development programs, as well as opportunities to capitalize on reinvestment in the downtown area through marketing and economic development strategies.

## **2.00 PROGRAM EVALUATION - METHODOLOGY**

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's Center for Policy Analysis was retained to measure the cultural economic activity resulting from the AHA! program. The program's economic impact is being measured with a survey instrument that is completed each month by participating organizations and businesses (see Appendix A). The survey asks participants to provide data on the number of visitors to their establishment and the dollar volume of business sales for each day of the AHA! program. The survey also asks participants to include data on the total visitations and sales for that week.

Survey forms were also provided to program participants to provide baseline data for the period July 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999. Initially, changes in economic activity due to the AHA! Night were to be measured by comparing visitation and sales activity of the baseline period to data from the same day and week of the current period. However, it has been difficult to obtain baseline sales and visitation data. Most of the organizations and businesses participating in the program do not have the resources to maintain detailed records and there is not enough historical data to provide a reliable baseline to comparatively measure the level of economic activity resulting from the AHA! program. As a result, the data collected for the current period (July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000) will be used as the baseline to make future comparisons in economic activity.

The Center estimated the current total annual economic impact of the AHA! program using the Implan econometrics modeling system. This report also provides a process evaluation of the AHA! program to gauge its success in meeting defined goals and objectives. Program goals and objectives include:

### **Goal 1:**

To draw on the diverse cultural resources of New Bedford to stimulate business activity and increase employment in downtown.

### **Objective 1:**

To re-establish Thursday night as "the night to come to downtown New Bedford" by holding special events on the second Thursday of each month.

### **Objective 2:**

To improve the image of downtown New Bedford as a vibrant, welcoming, active place rich in cultural resources.

### **Objective 3:**

Increase patronage (both visitation and fiscal support) of the community's cultural assets throughout the year.

### **3.00 PROGRAM EVALUATION**

**3.10 Objective 1: To re-establish Thursday night as “the night to come to downtown New Bedford” by holding special events on the second Thursday of each month.**

#### **3.11 Strategies/Methods**

**1. Originating cultural venues expand their hours and offer free, coordinated, special programming.**

All fourteen cultural venues involved in the AHA! project have expanded their hours on the second Thursday of each month. These venues offer a variety of free programming that includes walking tours of downtown, art workshops, artist demonstrations, poetry readings, and concerts. A more detailed list of the activities offered can be found in the press releases included in Appendix B.

**2. Develop and implement a marketing plan for Thursday nights which includes brochure, press releases, calendar of events, buttons and banners, t-shirts, websites, and advertising to establish a cohesive image for Thursday night.**

The AHA! marketing plan employs several strategies. Information about AHA! is available on the Web. The website’s address is [www.ci.new-bedford.ma.us/aha!.htm](http://www.ci.new-bedford.ma.us/aha!.htm). The site contains a general description of the AHA! program as well as a calendar of events and directions to downtown New Bedford. A calendar of events has also been posted on the City of New Bedford’s website.

AHA! T-shirts are for sale in several of the cultural venues. Buttons are also available at several venues for a small donation. AHA! banners have been provided to each cultural venue and are on display in these buildings. Advertising has been placed in magazines and newspapers. For example, press releases for each AHA! event are printed in the New Bedford Standard-Times and the Dartmouth-Westport Chronicle. Advertising has also been placed in Art New England magazine, Arts Around Boston, and the Providence Phoenix. Additionally, Arts Media Magazine included a story about the AHA! program in their June issue. The Paul Revere sign overlooking Interstate 195 also flashes information about the AHA! program to passing motorists. AHA! has also produced a promotional full-color insert that was placed in 40,000 issues of the New Bedford Standard-Times.

A survey conducted by the UMass Dartmouth Center for Business Research concluded that respondents who had attended an AHA! event heard about the program through a variety of sources; 38.8% from a newspaper, 31.3% from a friend, 7.5% from the AHA! brochure, 2.5% from the Internet, 2.5% from a co-worker, and 17.5% from other sources.

**3. Organize restaurants, businesses, and cultural venues to participate and/or expand services.**

There are twenty-four cultural organizations and businesses involved in the AHA! program (see Table 1). For the purposes of measuring AHA!'s economic impact, these businesses are defined by their standard industrial classification. All cultural venues have agreed to remain open on the second Thursday of each month from 5:00 to 9:00 PM. The majority of the businesses have also remained open on AHA! nights, though a few did not open during the colder winter months. These businesses have reopened on AHA! nights as the weather has gotten warmer.

**Table 1  
Participating Organizations and Businesses**

<b>SIC 58 Eating &amp; Drinking Establishments</b>	<b>SIC 59 Art Related &amp; Misc. Retail</b>	<b>SIC 84 Cultural Organizations</b>
Candleworks	Ambiance Design	Ernestina Museum
Freestones	Big Paws/Little Paws	Gallery X
Java Bean	Crowell's	John Magnan Studio
Java Jungle	Duff Gallery	New Bedford Free Public Library
	Duval's Antiques and Jewelry	New Bedford Whaling Museum
	Good Earth Gift Emporium	New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park Visitors Center
	Magic Palette/Bierdstadt Art Society	Rotch-Jones-Duff House Garden & Museum
	Saltmarshes	ArtWorks! At Dover St.
	Spinner Publications	New Bedford Art Museum and Store
	Whale's Tale	
	Wics and Balms	

### **SIC 58 Eating and Drinking Places**

This group includes retail establishments selling prepared foods and drinks for consumption on premises; and also lunch counters and refreshment stands selling prepared foods and drinks for immediate consumption.

### **SIC 59 Miscellaneous Retail**

This group includes retail establishments that fall into the following categories: drug stores, liquor stores, used merchandise stores, and miscellaneous shopping goods stores.

### **SIC 84 Museums and Attractions**

This group includes museums, art galleries, arboreta, and botanical and zoological gardens. These establishments are often of historical, educational, or cultural interest.

## **4. Recruit regional visual and performing artists and vendors and place them in venues throughout downtown.**

Many regional visual and performing artists and vendors have participated in the AHA! program. While some were paid to perform, others were not paid by AHA! but instead used the opportunity to sell their artwork or to promote their business. These individuals are provided space in the cultural venues. For example, artists are provided space in the art galleries where they display and sell their work. Various forms of art are presented, including paintings, sculptured glass, stained glass, sculpture, and ceramics. There have been over ninety artists who have displayed their artwork on AHA! nights from July 1999 through June 2000.

Performing artists are also provided space in the venues. Over seventy-five performers and speakers have performed on AHA! nights from July 1999 through June 2000.

Examples of performing artists and speakers include:

- Rod Reed and Sunsteel, a Boston-based band playing calypso, reggae, and Afro-Cuban music
- Teatro Gumbo Limbo – a reading of “The Ventriloquist’s Wife.”
- Creative Arts Consort – musical performance
- Ayako Rooney - Kamishibai Theater
- Notescape.cod – musical performance

- Silver Branch – traditional European music and songs
- John Silver and the Cape Cod Dixiland Stompers – Dixiland music
- Miracle Fish Puppets
- The Grove of the Yew – local woman story tellers
- Festival Theater Singers
- Falmouth Mostly Men’s Chorus

The theme of the November AHA! was *The Bounty of the Southcoast*. Several local individuals provided free samples of their locally grown and created foods. The impact of AHA! has extended beyond downtown as some of these participants have had customers come to their establishments after tasting their products at the AHA! event. Those who participated in the November AHA! event include:

- Barrows Tea Company - Tea importer and tea products manufacturer
- Bittersweet Café - Restaurant
- Chef Kerry Downey Romiello – Chef/Author
- Deb Barnes - Patisserie (special order cakes and desserts)
- Great Hill Dairy - Blue Cheese manufacturer
- Riverhouse Grille – Restaurant

**5. Provide free shuttle bus service and free parking.**

The Southeastern Regional Transportation Authority provides a free “Catch the Whale” shuttle for AHA! visitors. The shuttle links all sites and runs continuously throughout the evening. New Bedford Preservation Society members ride the shuttle to provide information to visitors. Five hundred and thirty-two (532) passengers have used the Catch the Whale shuttle on AHA! nights. Free parking for visitors is also available at the Custom House Square. In exit surveys conducted by the UMass Dartmouth Center for Business Research, 16.5% of respondents indicated that they had used the Catch the Whale shuttle. Many respondents said that they would have been more likely to use the Shuttle if they had known about the service.

**3.12 Intended Result**

**1. Additional jobs downtown, additional earnings**

**A. Implan Econometric Modeling System**

Economic impacts measure the importance of an economic activity primarily in terms of the employment and personal (labor) income generated by that

activity. Economic impacts consist of direct impacts, indirect impacts, and induced impacts. *Direct impacts* are the economic activities that take place directly on-site. In the case of AHA!, examples of direct impacts include art sales, miscellaneous retail sales, and restaurant sales that occur in the downtown area. Thus, direct impacts are an immediate consequence of art-related economic activity.

*Indirect impacts* derive primarily from off-site economic activities that are attributable to the AHA! project. These economic activities occur mainly as a result of *non-payroll local expenditures* by the project. Local expenditures include a range of operating expenses such as printing, maintenance, and transportation. Indirect impacts differ from direct impacts insofar as they originate entirely off-site, although the indirect impacts would not have occurred in the absence of the AHA! project. *Induced impacts* are the multiplier effects of the direct and indirect impacts created by successive rounds of spending by employees and proprietors. *Total impacts* are the sum of the direct, indirect, and induced impacts.

The indirect and induced economic impacts of the AHA! program are specified using IMPLAN (IMpact Analysis for PLANing), which is an econometric modeling system developed by applied economists at the University of Minnesota and the U.S. Forest Service. The IMPLAN modeling system has been in use since 1979 and is currently used by over 500 private consulting firms, university research centers, and government agencies. The IMPLAN modeling system uses input-output analysis to construct quantitative models of trade flow relationships between businesses and between businesses and final consumers. From this data, one can examine the effects of a change in one or several economic activities to predict its effect on a specific state, regional, or local economy (impact analysis).

IMPLAN's Regional Economic Accounts and the Social Accounting Matrices are used to construct local, county, or state-level multipliers specific to a target economic area. Multipliers describe the response of an economy to a change in demand or production. The multipliers allow economic impact analysis to move from a descriptive input-outputs model to a predictive model. Each industry that produces goods or services generates demand for other goods and services and this demand is multiplied through a particular economy until it dissipates through "leakage" to economies outside the specified area. Thus, multipliers calculate the response of the targeted economic area to a change in demand or production.

## **B. Retail Sales Data**

The reporting of sales data by participating organizations and businesses has been inconsistent. There are several reasons that explain the inconsistency of sales data:

- Several businesses and cultural venues are not reporting sales figures. Some of the smaller businesses are not reporting data because sales have been negligible during AHA! hours.
- Some businesses have not participated in the AHA! program during the winter.
- There are individual or unaffiliated vendors who have small stands or tables. Sales figures for some of these vendors have not been reported.
- Visitations on AHA! night may result in sales at other times as visitors return to purchase items later in the week (delayed effect sales).

A sales estimate was developed to fill in the gaps where sales data was not reported. This estimate was derived by calculating reported AHA! sales as a percentage of the total annual sales for businesses in each SIC code that reported complete data. This percentage was then multiplied by the total annual sales for each business where sales data was not reported or reported inconsistently<sup>1</sup>. Total annual sales data was obtained from the MarketPlace by Imarket, Inc. database. The database is a collection of industry data from various industry data suppliers such as Dun & Bradstreet.

Many business owners also indicated that while there was a lot of activity in their stores during AHA! hours, many people did not purchase items that evening and instead returned at other times to make their purchases. To account for these “delayed effect sales,” the total estimated sales figure was multiplied by ten percent.

## **C. Economic Impacts**

Total program expenditures for AHA! from July, 1999 to June, 2000 are \$34,905 (see Table 2). This figure includes project related expenditures by state and local agencies including the Massachusetts Cultural Council but does not

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, using sales data provided on the survey forms, it is estimated that 2.0% of total annual sales for those businesses that reported data each month is generated on AHA! nights. This percentage was then multiplied by the total annual sales obtained from the MarketPlace by Imarket, Inc. database for a business that did not provide sales data. From this calculation an estimate of AHA! sales for that business can be determined. The MarketPlace by Imarket, Inc. database did not contain sales data for all the participating businesses, thus the total estimated sales might still be lower than actual amounts.

include in-kind contributions of \$34,412. Total estimated retail sales for AHA! are \$105,807. Because the reporting of sales data is inconsistent and many organizations and businesses did not provide sales data, total sales during AHA! hours is likely higher. The total direct impact of AHA!, which includes program expenditures and retail sales, is \$140,712.

**Table 2**  
**Total Direct Economic Impacts from AHA!**

<b>Business Type</b>	<b>Total AHA! Sales</b>
<b>Program Expenditures</b>	
Non-Profit Organizations	\$9,758
Transportation	\$780
Marketing & Advertising	\$17,211
Other Project Expenses (Programming)	\$7,156
Subtotal:	<b>\$34,905.00</b>
<b>Retail Sales</b>	
Museums and Attractions	\$12,744
Art Related & Misc. Retail	\$28,302
Eating and Drinking Places	\$64,761
Subtotal:	<b>\$105,807.00</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$140,712.00</b>

Using the IMPLAN model, it is estimated that AHA! has created a total economic impact of \$216,483 and has created an additional 4.7 jobs in the downtown area (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Total Economic and Employment Impacts from AHA!**

	Direct	Indirect	Induced	Total
Economic Impact	\$133,598	\$34,671	\$48,214	\$216,483
Employment Impact	3.5	0.4	0.7	4.7

A total of \$17,000 of the Massachusetts Cultural Council grant has been spent on AHA! activities. With a total economic impact of \$216,483 approximately thirteen dollars have been generated for every state dollar spent in grant money. Three dollars in total economic impacts have been generated

for each dollar in program expenditures, including state, local, and donated funds. These results are significant because there was almost no economic activity in downtown New Bedford on Thursday nights before AHA!. The majority of cultural institutions and businesses were closed during the evening hours, thus nearly all of the economic activity generated on Thursday nights is a result of AHA!

Also, performers, business owners, artists, and other AHA! participants who are not located downtown have commented that AHA! has increased their exposure and sales in other locations. Thus, the economic impact of AHA! has expanded beyond the downtown area.

## **2. Retail sales**

### **A. By Business Type**

Total retail sales for AHA! are \$105,807 (see Table 4). As noted above, the reporting of sales data has been inconsistent and the actual total sales figure is likely higher. The figures below have been inflated by ten percent to account for delayed effect sales.

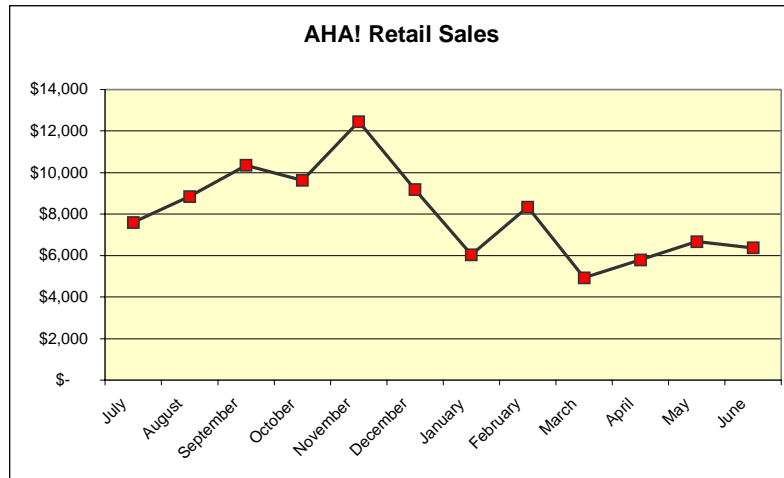
**Table 4**

Business Type	Total AHA! Sales
Museums and Attractions	\$12,744
Art Related & Misc. Retail	\$28,302
Eating and Drinking Places	\$64,761
Total	\$105,807.00

### **B. Retail Sales By Month**

Overall, the volume of sales during AHA! hours (5:00 to 9:00 PM) has declined since its peak in the fall (see Figure 1). Much of the decline is due to the fact that some businesses have not been reporting sales data as consistently as when the program began in July. Sales were highest in November, which is mainly the result of a painting that was sold at an art venue. The sales decline in January is due to a storm that forced many of the cultural venues and businesses to close. Sales data includes sales from both the cultural venues and retail establishments such as restaurants and retail stores.

**Figure 1**



As noted earlier, many business owners have commented that their businesses have experienced significant patron traffic on AHA! nights, though not all customers are buying during AHA! Owners feel that a number of visitors are returning at other times to make purchases and thus the sales data that these businesses provide does not entirely reflect their total sales as a result of AHA! Many visitors are also informing their friends and family members about the downtown venues and businesses and these people are in turn making purchases on non-AHA! days. Restaurants also indicate that they are doing a high volume of business on AHA! nights, especially after the event ends at 9:00 PM. A survey conducted by the Center for Business Research of UMass Dartmouth concluded that 33.8% of respondents made a purchase during the AHA! program.

### **3. Business start-ups**

Seven new businesses have opened in downtown New Bedford since the start of the AHA! program. These include Java Jungle, Big Paws-Little Paws, Good Earth Gift Emporium, Ambiance Design, Arthur Moniz Gallery, Artisans Cooperative Gallery, and the Essence Grill. Interviews with the proprietors of these businesses indicate that the AHA! night and the burgeoning cultural scene is one of the reasons that they elected to open their business in downtown New Bedford.

### **4. Businesses with expanded hours**

Most of the businesses in the downtown area have expanded their hours on AHA! nights, though none of the participating businesses have regularly

expanded their hours on other days or nights. However, two businesses indicated that they open during all special events in the downtown area (e.g. Summerfest, WHALE Holiday Shops, First Night) and several other businesses have indicated that they are thinking about expanding business hours.

## **5. Number of artists and vendors selling**

There have been over ninety artists who have displayed their artwork on AHA! nights from July 1999 through June 2000. These include painters, sculptors, and photographers. The AHA! program has also sponsored over thirty vendors who have provided free samples of their locally grown and manufactured products. Again, these vendors have commented that AHA! has increased their exposure and sales at their locations outside of the downtown New Bedford area.

### **3.20 Objective 2: To improve the image of downtown New Bedford as a vibrant, welcoming, active place rich in cultural resources.**

#### **3.21 Strategies/Methods:**

##### **1. AHA! Night and related promotion**

The goal of AHA! is to draw on New Bedford's cultural resources to stimulate additional business activity, increase downtown employment, and to improve the downtown area's public image. There are fourteen cultural venues participating in the AHA! program. The venues offer a variety of free programming that includes walking tours of downtown, art workshops, artist demonstrations, poetry readings, concerts, and themed art exhibits. Each AHA! night has a different theme. For example, the theme for the February AHA! night was *Carnivale and Black History Month*. Events included a Mardi Gras parade, a walking tour of the Underground Railroad, and exhibits of artwork from African-American artists (see Appendix B for more detail).

#### **AHA! Themes include:**

##### **July 8<sup>th</sup>**

Exhibit openings, concerts, play readings, and other events. Local musicians and artists will be featured in the garden park of the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park Visitors Center. A jazz performance will take place at the Whaling Museum and new art exhibits will be on display at several galleries.

### **August 12<sup>th</sup> Fifties Night**

Featuring live music, dancing, hula hoops, vintage cars, and more. Poetry readings, blacksmith demonstration, exhibit openings, concerts, play readings, and other events.

### **September 9<sup>th</sup>**

Exhibit openings, concerts, walking tours, play readings, and other events. Opening of “ArtWorks! 2000, Real Life/Real Art” – an open juried exhibition featuring photography, painting, and sculpture. *Lincoln Park Remembered*, a half-hour video produced by Spinner Publications will be presented at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

### **October 14<sup>th</sup> The Arts Unmasked**

In celebration of Halloween, watch artists transform pumpkins into sculptural works, view masks from around the world and create your own mask, and listen to seasonal stories.

### **November 11<sup>th</sup> The Bounty of the Southcoast**

In celebration of the autumn harvest, each venue will offer tastes of locally grown and locally created foods as well as cooking demonstrations and displays of handcrafted tableware.

### **December 9<sup>th</sup> Family Fun and Holiday Shopping**

Along with participating cultural venues, downtown shops and restaurants will remain open. Free hayrides will be offered as well as a holiday sing-a-long and hot chocolate and cookies. Children and pets can have pictures taken with Santa. Listen to seasonal stories, make holiday ornaments, and hear solstice music.

### **January 13<sup>th</sup> Find Out What’s New in New Bedford**

New Bedford, designated as a *Millennium City*, celebrates the New Year with a look at what’s *new* in New Bedford’s shops and cultural institutions featuring new exhibit openings (new and emerging artists), concerts (new and experimental music), lectures (new developments in New Bedford), readings (new books), and other special programs.

**February 10th Carnival and Black History Month**

A dual theme featuring a Mardi Gras style celebration with a Dixieland jazz band and parade as well as exhibits of artwork by African-American artists and a tour of New Bedford's Underground Railroad.

**March 9th Fables and Folktales**

In conjunction with the New Bedford Symphony premier of a new work based on a Russian folktale (March 30<sup>th</sup>), this month's AHA will feature narrative arts including ballet, storytelling, children's book illustrations and ballads.

**April 13th The Environment**

In celebration of Earth Day, this AHA will feature historical landscaping art made from recycled materials, tours of the City's architectural gems ("the built environment"), an exhibit of nature photography and more.

**May 11th Maritime Art, Music, and Architecture**

As a kick-off for the Whaling Museum's annual Maritime Heritage Celebration (May 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>) the May AHA will feature sea chanteys, a walking tour that explores the downtown of the whaling era, maritime artwork and more.

**June 8<sup>th</sup> Flower Power!**

Everything from the Victorian flower gardens of the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum to the art of the 60s and more.

Telephone surveys were conducted by the UMass Dartmouth Center for Business Research to assess the attitudes of visitors who attended the AHA! program. Results of the survey indicate that a large majority of respondents enjoyed the AHA! night and felt safe in the downtown area. For each AHA! event, the number of people in downtown New Bedford on AHA! nights is considerable, especially since there is little activity in downtown New Bedford on non-AHA! nights. The myriad of cultural and program offerings enhances the City's heritage to those who would normally not visit the area or are not aware of the vast cultural resources that exist in the downtown area. In doing so, downtown becomes a place where people feel more comfortable in visiting on days or nights when the AHA! program is not running. Several business owners have commented that patrons have returned to their stores and restaurants on non-AHA! nights as a result of their initial visit during the AHA! program.

## **2. Local and regional press that helps to improve the image of downtown**

Local and regional articles highlighting the AHA! nights have been written in several newspapers and magazines (see press clippings book for more detail). Articles have been written in the following newspapers and magazines:

- American Craft Magazine
- Arts Around Boston
- Arts Media Magazine
- Boston Globe
- Dartmouth-Westport Chronicle
- Fall River Herald News
- New Bedford Standard-Times
- Providence Journal Bulletin
- Southcoast Insider

## **3. Represent AHA! in a range of coalitions and events**

AHA! has been represented in a number of coalitions and events. For example, AHA! was present at Downtown New Bedford, Inc.'s annual fundraising event. The theme of the night was Arts and Culture in New Bedford. AHA! staff set up a table that provided event-goers with information about the AHA! program and the various cultural venues in the downtown area.

Additionally, the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, in conjunction with the AHA! partners, used a grant from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism to sponsor a "Cultural Open House." The goal of the partnership is to attract visitors from outside the Southcoast area and to develop New Bedford as a cultural destination. The program is explained in more detail later in the report.

## **4. Promote events through schools, libraries, etc.**

The New Bedford Free Public Library is a participating cultural venue. Artwork created by New Bedford public school children has been on display in the downtown area. AHA! is also planning to produce a bookmark that will be given out at area libraries to promote the event.

### **3.22 Intended Result**

#### **1. New data about image**

Telephone surveys were conducted by the UMass Dartmouth Center for Business Research to assess the attitudes of visitors who attended the AHA! program (see Appendix C). A total of eighty-one telephone surveys were conducted. The survey respondents had primarily attended the February AHA! night. Results of the survey indicate that a large majority of respondents enjoyed the AHA! night and felt safe in the downtown area. For example:

- Nearly ninety percent of respondents (88.5%) thought that the organization of the AHA! night was excellent or good.
- When asked how they enjoyed the AHA! night, more than half (55.6%) of respondents thought that the event was excellent and 37.0% thought it was good. Only 7.4% thought that the event was fair and no respondents indicated that the event was poor.
- More than two-thirds of respondents (67.5%) felt very safe while walking downtown during the AHA! night while only 6.3% felt somewhat unsafe or very unsafe.
- More than half of respondents (53.8%) indicate that they would definitely come back to AHA! night, while 23.8% indicate that they would probably come back.

The results of the survey indicate that the majority of visitors in downtown New Bedford are enjoying the AHA! event. Again, the number of people in downtown New Bedford on AHA! nights is considerable, especially since there is little activity in downtown New Bedford on non-AHA! nights. The programs offered by the cultural institutions in downtown New Bedford enhance the image of the downtown area, especially to individuals who normally do not visit the area.

#### **2. New collaboratives and initiatives**

There was very little coordination among the cultural venues in downtown New Bedford before the AHA! program. Most of the cultural events that took place were sponsored by an individual organization and with little cooperation that linked the downtown's cultural resources. The AHA! program has promoted greater collaboration among the venues, which has enhanced the quality of programs and services provided by all the participants. Examples of

collaboration among the cultural venues include a book signing by Spinner Publications that was sponsored by ArtWorks! At the New Bedford Whaling Museum, Spinner Publications presented *Lincoln Park Remembered*, a video that the organization produced. ArtWorks! also sponsored a lecture about basket weaving at the Free public Library. Artist Robert Duff has also exhibited his work at the Ernestina Museum and artist John Magnan has performed at ArtWorks! The New Bedford Whaling National Historic Park Visitors Center and the New Bedford Whaling Museum have also collaborated on several projects.

Additionally, the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, in conjunction with the AHA! partners, received funds from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism to sponsor a “Cultural Open House.” As part of the proposal, AHA! partners agreed to keep their doors open over the May 20-21 weekend and honor symphony tickets as free admittance into the fare based attractions. The Orchestra performed at the historic Zeiterion Theater in the evening. The goal of the partnership is to attract visitors from outside the Southcoast area and to develop New Bedford as a cultural destination. The majority of the grant was used to pay for advertising in newspapers outside of the region. The advertisement offered readers an opportunity to send for more information about the Cultural Open House as well as the AHA! program.

The AHA! Committee has also collaborated with many of downtown New Bedford’s cultural venues to advertise in the Art Now Gallery Guide, a publication that is a resource for those who patronize various galleries in the New England/Metro New York area. The guide has a circulation of 100,000. The advertisement for the New Bedford AHA! is listed in the Massachusetts and New York/New Jersey Metro Region editions of the Guide. Funding to advertise in the Guide has come totally from private funds, including money from several New Bedford art galleries. The advertisement included a map of downtown New Bedford and highlighted its various cultural resources.

**3.30 Objective 3: Increase patronage (both visitation and fiscal support) of the community’s cultural assets throughout the year.**

**3.31 Strategies/Methods**

**1. Coordinated advertising, programming, and image of cultural institutions and businesses.**

Advertising that promotes the AHA! event has been taken out in several magazines and newspapers. These include press releases for each AHA! event that are printed in the New Bedford Standard-Times. Advertising has also been

placed in Art New England magazine, Art Now Gallery Guide, Arts Around Boston, the Providence Phoenix, the Massachusetts Getaway Guide, and the Southeastern Massachusetts Traveler. The Paul Revere sign overlooking Interstate 195 also provides information about the AHA! program to passing motorists. Information about AHA! is available on the Web. The website's address is [www.ci.new-bedford.ma.us/aha!.htm](http://www.ci.new-bedford.ma.us/aha!.htm). The Bristol County Visitor's and Convention Bureau has funded a portion of the advertising.

**2. Create a diversified base of support that includes new business support, foundation support, and government support at all levels.**

As noted earlier, seven new businesses have opened in downtown New Bedford since AHA! began. AHA! was an important factor in these businesses opening in the downtown area their owners are have pledged their support to the event.

AHA! has also received grant and financial support from a number of public and private sources. The Massachusetts Cultural Council has provided \$13,600 as of June, 2000. Five Local Cultural Councils (LCC) have provided grant awards for AHA! The LCC's receive their funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Because of the regional nature of the AHA! project, New Bedford was able to apply to these local LCC's for funding. A total of \$4,300 was obtained from the LCC's of Acushnet, Dartmouth, New Bedford, Mattapoisett, and Rochester. Other public grants have been provided by the Bristol County Convention and Visitor's Bureau, the National Park Service, and the City of New Bedford. Two foundations have also provided financial assistance. These include the Island Foundation and the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts.

Numerous private sector entities have also contributed to AHA! The Bowl-for-Art fundraiser was held in March and raised more than \$10,000 for AHA! Corporate sponsors of the event included Thomas G. Davis, Bill Whelan of the New Bedford Aquarium Corporation, Freestone's City Grille, the New Bedford Standard Times, Compass Bank, First Federal Savings Bank of America, and Domino's pizza.

### **3.32 Intended Result**

#### **1. 10 businesses, 4 foundations, 4 government institutions provide financial support**

As of March, 1999, there have been eight corporate sponsors of AHA! Two foundations and three government institutions have also provided support to the program.

#### **2. Fifty percent of participating businesses will have increased annual visitation.**

Increases in annual visitation can not be measured because historical visitation data is not available. Visitor data that is currently being collected will be used as a baseline for future year comparisons.

There are several factors that make measuring the current number of visitors difficult. First, the reporting of visitation data is inconsistent because some of the cultural venues and businesses are not reporting data on a monthly basis. Additionally, there is likely some double counting, that is, visitors are patronizing more than one venue, thus determining the total number of visitors to AHA! night can not be determined. Additionally, some visitors may simply be meandering through the downtown area without actually entering the venues.

However, the average number of visitors and total visitations on AHA! nights can be calculated. An average of 124 patrons visit each museum and attraction, while an average of 97 visitors patronize each art related retail, restaurants, and miscellaneous retail businesses each AHA! night. There have been 10,551 total visitations to the cultural venues and 5,839 visitations to the various retail establishments since the AHA! began. Because some venues and businesses have not reported visitation data on a monthly basis, the total and average number of visitations is even higher. This is especially true of area restaurants, which have indicated anecdotally that business is brisk on AHA! nights, especially after the event ends at 9:00 PM. There are also special events that take place outside of the venues that attract large numbers of individuals. For example, the New Bedford Historical Society's Underground Railroad Walking Tour attracted over 100 people.

On average, nearly three-quarters (72.7%) of the total visitations to the cultural venues and businesses on AHA! Thursdays have occurred during the program hours of 5:00 to 9:00 PM. This percentage has increased since the AHA! program began in July (see Figure 2). The increase may be due to the fact that

many of the major downtown attractions such as the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park and the Whaling Museum attract a larger number of daytime visitors during the summer months. The increase may also be due, in part, to the increasing effectiveness of the AHA! program in drawing people to the downtown area. The dip in January was due to a storm that forced many of the venues and businesses to close.

**Figure 2**

**Error! Not a valid link.**

Nearly all of the businesses and cultural venues in downtown New Bedford are closed during the evening. Thus, the majority of visitors who come to downtown New Bedford on AHA! nights can be directly attributed to the AHA! program. However, it can not accurately be determined how many Thursday night visitations are a result of a substitution effect, that is, visitors are simply changing the times they visit downtown (i.e. visiting at night rather than during the day) or if the AHA! program is attracting visitors who would not ordinarily come to downtown New Bedford. However, interviews with downtown business owners indicate that most of the people in their stores during the AHA! program are customers that they have not seen before.

**3. Fifty percent of participating venues will have increased annual sales.**

This result can not be measured because historical sales data is not available. The current visitor data being collected will be used as a baseline for future year comparisons.

## Appendix A

### AHA! Economic Impact Survey

**This data is being collected to document the cultural economic impact of AHA! to the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which has provided funds for its sponsorship. If you have questions, please call the UMass Dartmouth Center for Policy Analysis at 999-8943.**

Date of AHA! Night: May 11, 2000

Name of Business/Venue \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Visitors/Customers for the Thursday AHA! Day (Entire Day)

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of Visitors/Customers for the Thursday AHA! Day (5:00-9:00 PM)

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of Visitors/Customers for the week ending Saturday May 13, 2000 \_\_\_\_\_

If your business/venue includes sales, what was your total sales

figure for the Thursday AHA! Day (Entire Day)? \_\_\_\_\_

If your business/venue includes sales, what was your total sales

figure for the Thursday AHA! Day (5:00-9:00 PM)?

\_\_\_\_\_

Sales for the week ending Saturday May 13, 2000 \_\_\_\_\_

Note: This information is to be used for statistical purposes and will be kept confidential.