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Chaiman, DeVos Institute of Arts Management

The Great Lakes Center for the Arts

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One of the most rewarding aspects of my work with the DeVos Institute of Arts Management at the University of Maryland is participating in the creation of new arts organizations. I recently traveled to Northern Michigan to work with my clients who are planning to build a new performing arts center there. Northern Michigan is home to some of the most beautiful landscapes in America. I was lucky enough to visit Northern Michigan for the first time when I was a summer camper at the remarkable Interlochen Center for the Arts.

Some 45 years later, the area retains its beauty and its character because it has been so carefully and thoughtfully developed.

While there are many active arts institutions in Northern Michigan, there has not been a year-round arts center that routinely presents the best of the world's professional theater, music and dance artists and arts institutions.

Bay Harbor is an enclave of beautiful homes, fine restaurants and small village shops located centrally between Traverse City, Charlevoix, Petoskey, Bay View, Harbor Springs, Mackinaw City and Mackinac Island -- active communities that would benefit from a major arts venue. A regional cultural plan completed in 1999 suggested that Bay Harbor was the perfect location for a performing arts center.

David V. Johnson, the developer who created Bay Harbor, had a vision for such a center and has assembled a team of architects and designers and theater consultants who are creating a modestly scaled but beautifully crafted center that will have a 500-seat theater as well as auxiliary social and educational spaces.

Now named the Great Lakes Center for the Arts, the institution will present great dance, theater, music of all genres, movies, lectures, symposia and master classes. We plan for each summer weekend to have its own special character -- international programming one weekend, the Best of Michigan on another (which might include appearances by the Detroit Symphony, Michigan Opera Theater or Sufjan Stevens) and a country music festival on a third, for example.

While the majority of the programming will be presented in the summer months, when seasonal travelers swell the number of residents, there will be programming 52 weeks a year. Local performing arts groups will be welcome to make the Center their home, movie theater broadcasts of opera and theater will be presented and a wide array of performing artists will be invited to create new work.

David, his co-chair David Small, and their team have already raised \$15 million towards the \$25 million cost of constructing the Center. We plan to complete this effort by next spring and break ground in May 2016. Additionally, we plan to build an endowment of \$25 million and an active annual fundraising effort as well.

The Great Lakes Center for the Arts will become a major arts hub in this glorious part of our nation. With inspiration from the likes of the Aspen Music Festival and Aspen Institute, the Santa Fe Opera and the Glimmerglass Opera, the Great Lakes Center for the Arts has aspirations to become a significant participant in the national arts ecology.