

## Museums Make Communities Happen

- Governments as well as wealthy patrons have supported museums and the arts throughout the ages, recognizing them as hallmarks of a civilized society and necessities for a healthy society. They have invested in museums and other spiritual space – “space not devoted to commerce or dwelling but to the elevation and celebration of the human spirit, the public realm” – because without it, order breaks down at a price that the economic system cannot long sustain.
- Museums have been part of city life since the times of the original *museion* in the ancient city of Alexandria. As planners attempt to bring downtowns back to life or to create a sense of "center" in suburban areas, museums are again filling the role of civic focal point and cultural magnet.
- Museums are public places, serving as landmarks and destinations and giving shape to urban space. Museums are places where people gather informally, places of collective memory and imagination.
- Museums offer a peaceful, relaxing, and even serene experience. Especially in times of personal difficulty or community strife, museums are safe havens of beauty and contemplation that restore the soul. A *New York Times* article published a few days after the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center reported the surge of attendance at the city’s museums. One quote from a Seattle woman at the Met says it: "President Bush talked about evil, so I came here to see this beauty created by so many human beings over so many years. Nobody can erase it or take it away."
- Museums are catalysts for social reform and they build bridges between people. Through museums, diverse people coalesce into a community. Exhibits and programs reach into the history and culture of those who make up our towns and cities, and mold them into a collective consciousness.
- Museums help us to understand who we are as Americans. Museum collections show us the historical context that shapes our present, how art mirrors societal influences, and how we have met the challenge of life in discovery and invention. “This is not an optional business. We are doing something essential for America...we’re driven not by opportunism but the necessity of grounding our culture in its past.”