

Celebrate Great Lakes – 2005

In the summer of 1989 the Michigan Dept. of Commerce sponsored a unique, vibrant and very successful musical/theatrical show on the history of the Great Lakes that toured 7 Michigan port cities. Its 18-member cast included 7 musicians, 2 dancers, 3 native drummers and 6 actor/story-tellers – 3 of them Michigan historians.

The show was based upon the *Chautaugua* performances from the turn of the last century – touring shows from the 1800s and early 1900s that incorporated history, local singers, dancers, actors and story-tellers into each city's script. Following the spirit of this format, *Celebrate Great Lakes (CGL)*, besides telling the story of the Lakes, also made room for stories about each of the cities and regions where the performances occurred.

Promoted by the MI Dept. of Commerce, *CGL* performed in outdoor settings, attracting audiences of 2-4,000. Audiences came from hundreds of miles away, and historical and environmental groups and crafts-persons followed the show around the state. Company members performed their own shows in local venues, which combined with the show, and its *entourage* made *CGL* a substantial event, when cities used it to full advantage.

It was expensive to mount and its considerable state subsidy was not available in following years. So in spite of its popularity and repeated requests from multiple cities for performances, the show was unable to continue. Now, current events and renewed state interest have facilitated the return of this exciting, and economically and culturally influential show – and original cast members have recreated and improved the show.

The original show featured two acts performed by 6 story tellers backed up by a jazz band, a folk group (*Song of the Lakes*), three native drummers, and a dance team. Act 1 began with the native drummers and the telling of the story of the Lakes' early Native and French history, and then covered the “discoverers” and “voyageurs” who came from Europe; the great expansion of “civilization” and the European immigration after the opening of the Erie Canal; and the era where lumber was Michigan's major industry. The Act was lively, upbeat, filled with music and laughs and a good deal of audience participation in some of the songs. The story of the lumber era as well as several other stories struck a note of irony - demonstrating what we now know about the environmental damage this era engendered - and helped support the show's overall environmental theme. Act 2 also began with the drummers, and then stories and songs by *Song of the Lakes* and the cast about lighthouses and their keepers, and sailing, racing, shipping, fishing and fighting on the Lakes - followed by the story of the era of the great cruise ships that toured the Lakes until the automobile remade Michigan's transportation patterns. The climax of the show told the story of the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald, from the point of view of the captain of the ship trailing behind her – and got the audience emotionally involved with the power and mystery of the Lakes. In the final interlude, *Song of the Lakes* sang “Pearl of America”, the tale of the group's founder, who came to the US from Sweden and made his home and life on Lake Michigan. The entire audience always joined on the choruses.

The new show plans to keep much of the original material, with some adjustments. There will be an increased emphasis on the Lakes' substantial Native and Black history. A Native storyteller will be added to a 3-person drum and dance troop. *Song of the Lakes* will return, but instead of the jazz band, the show will hire storytellers who are also musicians; expanding the show's the musical capacity as well as the diversity and vitality of the show. Included in the budget is the opportunity for guest performers to take part, so each show can also add in local singers or storytellers. *CGL 2005* will also perform against a multimedia backdrop with 3 rear projection screens - displaying photographic pictures and works of art reflecting the stories told and Great Lakes settings.

CGL 2005 also introduces the “Medicine Tent”- housing and formalizing the show's initial, organic *entourage* of artisans, historians and environmental groups. Besides the show and cast members' merchandising, the 20' x 30' *Tent* will also have a host with whom audiences can share ideas for future stories and shows. However, its main function will be to give the historical, environmental and other groups, and traveling artisans and craftspeople a place to distribute, demonstrate or sell their wares. *CGL* will encourage cultural artisans in the Michigan Arts & Humanities Touring Directory to demonstrate, at least in their local areas. In future years, this will develop into the show's own traveling Great Lakes Fair; all for just the cost of a slightly larger tent than otherwise needed for merchandising. This and other activities organized by the site could gather audiences earlier and keep them longer, making it easier for local groups to invest in profitable food/beverage concessions.

In order to fulfill the promise of the original 1989 show, CGL will forward a number of long-term goals.

- CGL will develop an interchangeable “stable” of musician/story tellers, who add local diversity.
- By coordinating with interested state programs, the show can become one of the region’s best tourist attractions; with a unique advantage of benefiting all areas of the state equally.
- The company will also develop a follow-up show with a different theme such as the Great Lakes Environment for the summer of 2006 and beyond, and also a shorter show to tour to schools.
- The 2nd CGL show (2006) will be less about Michigan history to tour other Great Lakes states.
- By 2007, CGL would like to take the ultimate step of touring 24 weeks - late Spring to early Fall - *on a ship* that could house most of the cast, with a deck that could act as a stage when possible.

CGL has a demonstrated history of success. The 1989 show left a strong impression in the minds of its viewers, and drew large audiences to even the smallest cities where it performed. With the assistance of state agencies, sponsors and cities, CGL can contribute to the culture and fiscal stability of the state for many years to come.

There are a number of sponsorship opportunities.

- 1) *The “Medicine Tent”* creates a unique opportunity for sponsors take part in the festival and make direct contact with potential customers while providing for CGL’s long-term financial support. For example, many corporations have a long and storied history with the Great Lakes and could use the “Medicine Tent” to highlight their historical or current Great Lakes enterprises. Sponsors also have the ability to set up their own booths with information about new or upcoming services/products to a targeted market or could use the tent to demonstrate products and/or sign up new customers. CGL reserves the right to only include demonstrations compatible with the show’s goals, but there will be a good deal of latitude.
- 2) The show will have an interactive DVD version for sale at each performance, and available for participating cities to sell throughout the year. Sponsors can a) be included in the packaging, b) have a message imbedded in the DVD, or c) have an offer imbedded into the DVD optional choices.
- 3) MI Economic Development Corp’s Travel Michigan matches cash funds that advertise Michigan events to out of state audiences in Chicago, Wisconsin, Indianapolis/Northern Indiana, Cleveland, Columbus and Toledo. This would, in effect, allow sponsors to double a Midwest regional promotional investment.
- 4) MEDC is also sponsoring an ongoing statewide marketing campaign that will include advertising in Newspapers, Radio, Local and Regional TV (especially cable), interviews on the leading radio stations, local and regional newspaper stories, and posters and brochures that will be distributed through MEDC’s 15 Michigan Welcome Centers. Major sponsors can be identified in all these outlets.
- 5) Statewide Tour Schedule advertising will be purchased in major media and can include major sponsors.
- 6) CGL will have a very heavily used website. The 1989 experience indicates that many who see the show will want to share their own favorite stories. The Medicine Tent, as well as the show on stage, will encourage audiences to either send in stories to include in future performances, or to be kept and catalogued on the website. There will be a section of the website that caters to teachers and students, both for the full CGL show, and to use for pre-show or follow-up classroom discussions, in conjunction with the shorter school version of the show. The website will also be promoted by CGL, MEDC and ALL promotion as the place to go for updated tour schedules and information. This, of course, creates a great number of sponsorship opportunities for update-able advertising and click-on offers, and other web based promotion. CGL will be open to most sponsor promotion and customer contact opportunities.
- 7) Traditional opportunities such as banners, individual city promotions and program inserts also exist.

Sponsorship Levels:

- a) **Up to 3 Presenting Sponsors** (*Your Company Presents Celebrate Great Lakes*) - \$50,000, in all regional promo;
- b) **Up to 5 Lead Sponsors** - \$25,000;
- c) **Supporting Sponsors** - \$10-15,000;
- d) **Regional/Developing Sponsor** - \$5-10,000 (to develop new show, and for a future sponsor to get to know GCL).

Each above level includes different sized acknowledgements and program advertising, will be promoted across the entire Great Lakes Region being addressed, and will have the opportunity for involvement in the Medicine Tent.

CGL is also recruiting e) **Regional Business Sponsors** \$2-5,000 (who may only be promoted in a specific region (e.g Lake Michigan), f) **Local Business Sponsors** \$1-3,000; g) **Family Sponsors** \$100; and h) **Individual Sponsors** \$50.