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## UMass Report: AHA! Has Major Economic Impact on Downtown New Bedford

AHA! (Art, History & Architecture)'s free 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday Arts and Culture Nights have had a major economic impact on downtown New Bedford, pumping over half a million dollars into the local economy, according to an evaluation just released by the UMass Dartmouth Center for Policy Analysis (CPA).

“This study demonstrates again that arts and culture play a vital role in helping communities stimulate economic activity and revitalize their downtowns,” said Anita Walker, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. “New Bedford’s legislative delegation, Mayor Lang, and all of the AHA! partners, supporters and volunteers can take pride in knowing their efforts to create a more vibrant, healthier community are paying off.”

The UMass CPA was retained by AHA! to complete the economic impact analysis and program evaluation, which is now available at the UMass website, <http://www.umassd.edu/cfpa/>. The Massachusetts Cultural Council John and Abigail Adams Arts Program for Cultural and Economic Development, which awarded grants to AHA! in 2007 and 2008, requires that funded programs document their performance in terms of economic impact and program implementation.

David Borges, Assistant Director at the Center for Policy Analysis explained, "AHA! is a great example of how the arts and culture industry can play an important role in economic development. What also sets AHA! apart from many organizations is that they have clearly defined goals that provide a basis for measuring the success of the organization."

The AHA! Project is the only creative economy project in downtown New Bedford that has documented and analyzed economic impacts over time. CPA also conducted monthly visitor surveys that measure where the AHA! audience comes from, what kinds of activities they participate in, how much they spend in restaurants and shops and the quality of the visitor experience. Highlights from the report show that:

- The total economic impact of AHA! for 2007 was \$527,765. These impacts include the creation of 6.7 full time jobs, primarily at retailers, food and drinking establishments, and museums and historical sites.
- Almost nine dollars have been generated for every state dollar spent in grant money on AHA! Nights.
- The estimated total economic impact of AHA! has increased 96.8% from 2000 to 2008 (inflation-adjusted dollars) primarily due to higher attendance at AHA! events, an

increase in the number of AHA! partners (from 14 to 50) and an increase in the in-kind contributions from AHA! partners.

- 66.9% of the attendees at AHA! Nights patronized one of New Bedford's downtown restaurants during the event; 55.2% planned to shop downtown.

**About the AHA! (Art-History-Architecture) Project:**

AHA! was formed in July 1999 as a collaborative non-profit partnership to establish downtown New Bedford as the regional hub for arts and culture.

The AHA! partnership is comprised of 50 downtown venues that include the city's National Historical Park, its downtown museums, The University's Star Store, restaurants, cafes, galleries, artist studios, and several churches. AHA! has been a centerpiece of the Mass Cultural Council's work to stimulate income and foster fruitful partnerships between arts institutions, businesses, and local governments. This longevity of support reflects the strength of the project's initiatives that collectively showcase New Bedford's invigorated downtown culture.

AHA! hosts the monthly downtown celebrations, as well as events under the City Celebrates! banner. AHA! also pilots cultural economic development initiatives through private and public partnerships. The project operates with a volunteer Steering Committee and a wealth of in-kind programming provided its partner venues. AHA! is a project of the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts, a public charity serving thousands of people who share a common concern – improving the quality of life in Southeastern Massachusetts.

Find out more about AHA! at [www.ahanewbedford.org](http://www.ahanewbedford.org)

**About the Massachusetts Cultural Council:** The MCC is a state agency committed to building a central place for arts and culture in the everyday lives of communities across the Commonwealth. It pursues this mission through a combination of grants, services, and advocacy for cultural organizations, schools, communities, and artists. MCC receives an annual appropriation from the state Legislature and funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and other sources. Find out more about the MCC at: [www.massculturalcouncil.org](http://www.massculturalcouncil.org)