

# **the union – aurora**

**- a venue for social change -**



**MLD 683 – Leadership for Social Change and Renewal**

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## **Executive Summary**

Students in East Aurora School District 131 currently have little access and little encouragement to engage in the arts. Meager school funding, lack of accessible extra-curricular programs, and competing societal attitudes and pressures – these have relegated the arts to a place of low value and low priority. “The Lighthouse” is an effort underway to create a Community and Cultural Center that will bring Aurora students a wealth of opportunities in the arts, including classes and activities in music, film, theater, dance, photography, and drawing. In order to cultivate the desire to engage in these forms of artistic expression, students first need to experience exciting, high-quality artistic events. The Union will be an attractive social gathering space and performance venue for live music, film, theater and art, providing a motivational entry point for students to connect to the resources of The Lighthouse. Students will then move from artistic consumers to artistic producers, unleashing the powerful potential of the arts as a catalyst for educational, social, and personal growth.

## **1.0 Background, Purpose, and Focus**

East Aurora is a difficult place to be a student. 68% of students in District 131 are considered low income, and only 59% meet Illinois Learning Standards. With an 82% Hispanic population, 35% of students have limited English (State School Report Card and CityData.com). Schools struggle with the issues of a depressed inner-city; truancy, gangs, drugs, and violence. Considering the language, cultural, and economic barriers, the arts can easily become a low priority. At best, the arts are seen as an optional luxury for those with time and resources. At worst, they are seen as another useless diversion for families who need every bit of help from potential income-earners. Failure to pass referendums and cuts in school funding only contribute to the low value placed on the arts.

“The Lighthouse” is a vision for holistic community development in Aurora. Community Christian Church in Naperville is partnering with developers, fundraisers, Aurora churches and city leaders to purchase and renovate the 60,000 square-foot Masonic Temple in downtown Aurora. This Community and Cultural Center will bring unique economic, educational, personal and spiritual development opportunities to the citizens of East Aurora. A primary focus will be a School for the Arts, offering classes in music, film, theater, dance, photography, drawing, and other forms of visual art. The building boasts two separate theaters that can be used as performance venues (The Union), as well as spaces designed for art galleries and a recording studio. Other ideas for The Lighthouse include a gymnasium, community gift shop, banquet hall and chapel, cyber café, computer lab, counseling center, immigration legal aid center, and business development center.

The purpose of this initiative is to increase involvement in the arts among middle school and high school students in the East Aurora School District 131. The focus will be to launch “The Union” within The Lighthouse as a gathering space where students can connect with exciting expressions of the arts. There are currently very few positive, attractive social gathering spaces for students in Aurora in general, let alone venues focused on the arts. For a city of nearly 150,000 with a large downtown, it is an obvious and significant need.

The Union will host live music that connects culturally to the surrounding demographics, film screenings that both entertain and address issues of social urgency, theater performances that resonate with the joys and struggles of the human experience, and art showcases that reflect the life and values of the community. National guests will legitimize the venue as a place for talented artists, and the broad accessibility to developing local artists will create a sense of community ownership. As students engage in the performances offered at The Union, natural connections will be made to after-school art programs and other offerings through The Lighthouse.

## **2.0 Situation Analysis**

### **2.1 SWOT Analysis**

#### **Strengths:**

- Significant funding and resources through Community Christian Church and related partnerships
- Current leaders are knowledgeable in the arts (existing School for the Arts)
- Current leaders are involved and connected to the community of East Aurora
- The Lighthouse/Aurora is one of four core commitment areas for the church, with 400 people already pledging to support the effort in some way
- Alliances are being built with the City of Aurora, local churches, and School District 131
- Past initiatives of Community Christian Church have succeeded (16 church-plants, ranked #7 in the Top 25 Multiplying Churches list for 2007 by Outreach Magazine)
- The Union has an established brand identity and following as a venue in downtown Naperville, and has relationships with artists, promoters, record labels, news outlets, community groups, social networks

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Uncertain of the future budget for event programming
- Potential cultural and class barriers (many involved in the launch will be white, English-speaking, middle-class, differing from the target market)
- Need key cultural guides from the target market to direct events, artists, and style

#### **Opportunities:**

- The Masonic Temple is a prominent and historic building, available in the center of the target market during a struggling real estate market
- The City of Aurora is encouraging more arts-focused clubs and venues, specifically geared to a younger crowd, to help stimulate economic growth and the social image of the Downtown
- Existing partnerships with the artistic community in Aurora (key leaders who could provide expertise in photography, audio recording, dance instruction, media production, children's music, and theater)
- Cultural art already abounds in a variety of forms – music, tattoos, graffiti

#### **Threats:**

- Students from low-income families (who make up 68% of the target market) may have to place work over social events
- Natural tendency for routine activities like hanging out at the mall, playing video games, experimenting with alcohol and drugs may crowd out attending planned social events
- Lack of transportation may pose a problem for some students

## **2.2 Past Efforts**

This initiative will be built around the framework, branding, and marketing of The Union as it exists as a venue in downtown Naperville. The Union Aurora, however, will differ greatly in cultural style and artists because of the different target market demographics. It will also be important to incorporate ideas from other successful youth-oriented music clubs that have a community outreach and arts focus. Perhaps the most impressive and compatible venue is Rhino's Youth Center in Bloomington, Indiana, an effort of the Harmony Education Center ([www.rhinosyouthcenter.org](http://www.rhinosyouthcenter.org)). As an all-ages music club, Rhino's has partnered with four after-school youth programs in the media arts for nearly 16 years. The Union will seek to model this success in the Aurora community.

## **3.0 Target Market Profile**

There are roughly 10,600 students in East Aurora District 131, with about 5,500 of them being teenagers ([www.d131.org](http://www.d131.org)). This presents a sizable, yet localized general target market.

The specific target market will be:

- East Aurora teenagers in District 131 involved in school arts programs

Other target markets will be:

- East Aurora teenagers in District 131 involved in community arts programs
- East Aurora teenagers in District 131 involved in unofficial arts activities
- East Aurora teenagers in District 131 not involved in any arts activities

## **4.0 Marketing Objectives and Goals**

### **4.1 Objectives**

The Union will seek to:

- Connect students with a community, social, or faith-based network of people (school club, community group, church youth group) who will develop meaningful relationships and encourage attendance at The Union. (behavior objective)
- Raise awareness that The Union is a performance venue for music, film, art, and theater designed for students in the Aurora community. Also, to know the specific location, time, cost, performers, type of audience that will attend. (knowledge objectives)
- Develop the belief that The Union is "for me", and that it is a fun and safe place for them to experience exciting events and social interaction. (belief objective)

Later phase objectives will be to connect students who attend The Union with after-school art programs, but the initial behavior objective is simply getting students connected to the atmosphere, people, and events.

## **4.2 Goals**

Based on these objectives, we will strive to meet the following goals within the first year of launching The Union within The Lighthouse:

1. Attract 25% of East Aurora high school students (625) and 15% of East Aurora middle school students (450) to at least one event at The Union during the first year.
2. Host 2 events per month that feature a performance by a person or group within the target market (local band, school performance, etc).
3. Fill the 250 seat theater to capacity for 25% of events.
4. Through marketing efforts, make 50% of target market aware of The Union's location and purpose.

Later Phase Goals:

5. Motivate 10% of Union event attendees to participate in art-focused classes that are held at The Lighthouse.
6. Through school district partnerships, increase by 10% the number of students involved in existing arts programs in district 131.

## **5.0 Barriers, Benefits, Competition**

### **5.1 Barriers**

Some barriers for students attending events at The Union will be connected to economic factors. Since there will typically be an admission cost (though many discount and incentive programs will be implemented), many of the 68% of low-income students might not feel that it is accessible to them. Also, because of financial, time, and familial constraints, some students might have trouble getting transportation to the event. In addition, the cultural influences of parents (fear of who will be there), and peers (fear of who won't be there) may play a role.

### **5.2 Benefits**

Students in East Aurora need and want a positive, encouraging, safe place to hang out. They need a place that is designed for them, welcomes them, and gives them a sense of belonging and ownership. They need a healthy way to express their hidden creative abilities. All of these benefits will attract students to The Union, in addition to the exciting opportunity to experience culturally relevant music, film, and art. Secondary benefits will be positive role models, increased self-esteem, and the chance for students to be involved in something bigger than themselves.

### **5.3 Competition**

Since The Union is an event-based activity that will take place mostly on weekend evenings, students will need to give up or replace other "free-time" social activities or family responsibilities. These could include hanging out at the mall, on the street, work, sports, the internet, video games, gangs, or drugs.

## Behavior Change Models

The most important factors for the success of The Union will be:

- Belief that the advantages of The Union outweigh the disadvantages (more fun than the competition)
- Perception of social (normative) pressure to attend The Union (other peers are going)
- Consistency with the student's self-image (The Union reflects my "style")

In addition, we want to cultivate these four beliefs to help predict behavior change:

Perceived susceptibility: I'm invited to/welcome at The Union ("The Union is for me")

Perceived severity: If I don't go to The Union I'll be bored and miss out on the excitement

Perceived response efficacy: The Union is a great place to see performances and hang out with friends

Perceived self-efficacy: I can make attending events at the Union a priority in my schedule

## 6.0 Positioning Statement

"We want teenagers in East Aurora District 131 to see attending events at The Union as an exciting social opportunity and as more important and beneficial than aimlessly hanging out in the mall, the streets, or the arcade." (benefit-focused)

## 7.0 Marketing Mix

### 7.1 Product Platform

**Core Product:** East Aurora student's involvement in the arts

**Actual Product:** Exciting live performances in a social gathering space

**Augmented Product:** The Union as a physical event venue (secondary augmented products will be the art classes offered at The Lighthouse)

### 7.2 Price

Admission cost will vary depending on the event (between \$3-\$20). Depending on the operating budget and funding, it may be possible to bring in high-level performances without needing to recoup all of the costs through ticket prices. But it will be very important to keep a high "value" on the events (as reflected by the ticket prices, especially for those outside the target market), while offering a significant amount of discounts (such as w/school ID), incentives ("Union dollars" to reward academic involvement/achievement), and other special promotions aimed at the target market (group passes for teams, classes, youth groups, school bands). Other monetary benefits (door prizes, fundraising opportunities) and non-monetary benefits (leadership roles, personalizing aspects of the venue) will be utilized to promote loyalty.

Three pricing objectives for The Union will be to:

- Recover costs (rely on funding and grants in addition to revenue to offset costs)
- Maximize the number of target adopters (use all creative means to get students there)
- Maintain social equity (make attendance as accessible as possible to low-income students, without creating a social/cultural stigma)

### **7.3 Place**

The Union events will be located within The Lighthouse at 104 S. Lincoln in downtown Aurora. Specifically, most events will take place in the 250-seat theater. This building will also be the place for art classes which students will be invited to participate in.

Promotional placement will be in areas where the target market spends time (homes, schools, churches), specifically in areas considered to be competition (the mall, businesses, streets). For example, performers/artists coming to The Union could be invited to talk or perform at a school assembly earlier in the day, and promotional flyers could be handed out at the mall that afternoon.

### **7.4 Promotion**

The existing look and feel of The Union brand (logo, colors, font) will remain, while changing the tagline to reflect the general excitement of the live performance (“LIVE”). A small dose of mass media will be used for high-profile events (local radio, television, newspapers), but selective and personal media channels will be the core mediums. Distribution of flyers, club cards and posters by key members of the target market will bolster street credibility. In street team fashion they will blanket the schools, businesses, and neighborhoods where the target market hangs out. Similarly, online methods (MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, podcasts, blogs, instant messaging, email) will be used to create promotional messages and social networking groups that will spread the word. More personally, key members of the target market will be chosen to go out into the community to speak to groups of people and invite them to The Union. This will allow promotion of The Union to infiltrate school groups, sports teams, arts communities, church groups, and other undefined social circles.

### **8.0 Evaluation Plan**

*Purpose and Audience for Monitoring and Evaluation:* Surveys will be conducted throughout the first year for the purpose of monitoring the effectiveness and success of The Union. Students in the target market will be polled as well as teachers, parents, and youth mentors. The same audiences will be surveyed at the end of the first year to evaluate which goals and objectives were met.

*Output measures:* Quantifiable measures will be taken to chart the number of events hosted, the number of unique attendees, number of repeat attendees, and the specific demographics of these attendees (age, race, school, etc). Number of posters/flyers distributed will be measured, as well as the overall reach and frequency of students in the target market exposed to the marketing efforts for The Union. Online methods also allow us to chart the number and activity of members in online communities.

*Outcome measures:* Responses to outputs such as an increased awareness of The Union, increased number of students in art classes or artistic activities, and levels of participation by community partners will all be assessed.

*How and when to measure:* Surveys will be conducted in between each season (fall/winter/spring/summer) to determine effectiveness of events and marketing. Some surveys will be done in person (at events, in schools) and others will be taken online (Facebook, MySpace), in addition to interviews for anecdotal information.

**9.0 Budget**

This basic budget assumes that The Lighthouse covers all building and utility fees, and other non-event based expenses:

Initial venue installation costs (sound/lighting/staging):	\$35,000
Yearly staff salary (1 full-time, 1 half-time):	\$65,000
Event/Programming fees (weekly events, local and national guests):	\$84,000
Revenue from ticket sales (50% recoup rate)	-\$42,000
Marketing and Advertising:	\$3,000
Monitoring and Evaluation:	\$1,000
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First Year Budget:	\$146,000
Anticipated Yearly Budget:	\$113,000

**10.0 Implementation Plan**

Key Activities	Responsibility/Lead	Timing	Budget
Purchase and Renovate Masonic Temple	Community Christian Church and partners	1-2 years	7-10 Million
Hire 1 full-time and 1 part-time Union staff	Community Christian Church and partners	6 months prior to building opening	\$65,000/year
Purchase and install sound/lighting/staging	Union staff and local volunteers	6 months prior to building opening	\$35,000
Plan and promote first year of events at The Union	Union staff and local volunteers	6 months prior to building opening through first year	\$84,000
Build partnerships and launch art classes at The Lighthouse	Community Christian Church and partners	Ongoing	TBD

**Phase 1** – Develop The Union as a viable event venue for students in District 131

**Phase 2** - Connect students who attend The Union to the art programs offered at The Lighthouse





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