

# **Thomas Cole National Historic Site Strategic Plan, 2011 and Forward**

Adopted by the Board of Trustees August 13, 2010

## **Introduction**

In the nine years since opening to the public in 2001, the Thomas Cole National Historic Site (TCNHS) has seen rapid growth and change in every aspect of its operation. Starting as an all volunteer committee of an umbrella organization, the Greene County Historical Society, the TCNHS is now owned and operated by an independent non-profit organization with four paid staff and a board of 14 trustees and growing. Attendance to the site has increased more than ten-fold since its inaugural year, and the operating budget is five times the size. The goals of the initial "General Management Plan" for the site, written in partnership with the National Park Service in 2003, have been mostly accomplished. The trustees and staff are excited by a shared vision and the potential new growth of the site and the organization that runs it, and are eager to put their ideas into action. For all of these reasons and more, the board and staff of the TCNHS embarked on a strategic planning process in early 2010.

Through a grant from the Dyson Foundation, the TCNHS worked with consultant Anne Ackerson of Creative Leadership & Management Solutions, and kicked off the initiative with training in March and a retreat in April. Out of the retreat came a core group of goals for the organization in moving forward. In subsequent meetings, a planning committee comprised of board and staff members drafted a vision statement and mission statement for the TCNHS, and wrote strategies for accomplishing each of the overarching goals. Each strategy was fleshed out with specific tasks to be accomplished, and assigned to specific people or committees. Those tasks for which no person or committee was in place became a priority target for the recruitment of new participants and supporters.

The opportunities facing the TCNHS are many: a internationally-known figure and his groundbreaking achievements that are associated with the site; an invigorated board, staff, volunteers and community; a restored scenic campus of historic buildings and grounds surrounded by the magnificent landscapes that inspired the beginning of America's first great art movement; and new operating support from the National Park Service of \$149,000 annually and a new endowment of \$1 million from a private donor that together provide a strong foundation for growth. The challenges include the loss of nearly all original furnishings and artwork that once filled the historic structures and a lack of appropriate program and exhibition space, both of which are addressed in this document.

The strategic plan both addresses immediate needs and lays the groundwork for long-term growth, focusing on the activities that occur within a five-year period. The TCNHS intends to revisit the plan yearly to update and extend activities so that five-years of activities are always in view. In this way the "five year plan" is a rolling document, useful for many more years than five.

## **Vision Statement**

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site will be the leading source for education and scholarship that inspires cultural and environmental awareness of the American landscape and the continuing impact of Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School.

## **Mission Statement**

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site preserves and interprets the home and studios of Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School of painting, the nation's first art movement. Cole's profound influence on America's cultural landscape inspires us to engage broad audiences through educational programs that are relevant today.

## **2011 – 2015 Goals and Strategies**

### **I. Programming:**

**To advance TCNHS as the center of scholarship and information on Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School by providing a range of relevant programs to a broad audience and by pursuing strategic partnerships.**

#### **Strategies**

*Continue to grow TCNHS as the center of scholarship and information on Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School*

*Continue to evolve a dynamic, engaging and holistic visitor experience that underscores Cole's influence on America's cultural landscape and encourages return visits.*

*Continue to grow as a vital cultural and economic community asset.*

### **II. Collections:**

**To lay the groundwork for future loans and acquisitions of Cole art and artifacts in order to build a permanent collection that fully supports the interpretive goals of the site, and to manage and care for it according to accepted standards.**

#### **Strategies**

*Complete the study and furnishing of the main house to fully interpret Cole's life and artistic activity at Cedar Grove, thus enhancing the visitor experience.*

*Lay the groundwork for future loans and acquisitions of Cole art and artifacts.*

### **III. Physical Plant:**

**To research, restore, preserve and develop the site to support the TCNHS vision and mission. To provide protection for the collections and exhibitions, sufficient and appropriate space for administrative and curatorial activities, visitor services, and educational and public programs.**

#### **Strategies**

*Advance ongoing stewardship of the site to ensure its preservation, protection and care.*

*Develop and implement detailed plans for future capital projects.*

### **IV. Organizational Development:**

**To actively plan for organizational growth, TCNHS will provide prudent, forward-thinking management of human and financial resources. TCNHS will expand regional and national awareness to attract new audiences, income and volunteers.**

#### **Strategies**

*Significantly broaden and increase operating, endowment, and capital project resources by prudently managing existing funds and by actively pursuing new funding sources and partnerships.*

*Recruit, stimulate, and reward a creative, motivated, and skilled workforce (paid professional staff, volunteers, and board and committee members) to meet the goals and strategies of this plan.*

*Refine and implement governing and organizational structures to better meet our goals.*

*Expand marketing and promotional activities to garner greater regional and national awareness and to attract new audiences, income and volunteers.*