

CREATIVE CITY DEVELOPMENTS

The Monument Visibility Study

*What a small-town landmark is actually worth twenty years in,
how fast the opening year fades, and the stretch of the curve
nobody has ever measured.*

101 monuments · **33** states · installed **1881 to 2026**

22 years of national search data · every installation year verified individually

August 2026

creativecommonsdevelopments.com

Visitor Impact Scoring · Monument listing management

THE QUESTION

Every town that puts up a statue is making the same bet. Almost none of them ever check whether it paid.

Something gets built. There is a ribbon, a photograph, and a good week. Then the question nobody asks in the meeting: how long does this last?

We built a roster of 101 small-town monuments across 33 states, verified every installation year one at a time, and pulled twenty-two years of national search data against them. Three things came back, and they are presented here in the order that matters rather than the order we found them.

2,766 SEARCHES FOR "THINGS TO DO IN ALEXANDRIA MN" THAT LANDED ON ONE STATUE IN SIX MONTHS	100 · 90 · 54 A NEW MONUMENT'S FIRST THREE SUMMERS	3 to 38 THE AGE RANGE WITH ALMOST NO DATA AT ALL
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FINDING ONE

A monument stops being a destination and becomes the town's answer

This is the finding that changes what a monument is worth, and it is the one nobody puts on a chart, because every chart of a monument measures the decline.

Big Ole is a twenty-eight foot Viking who came home from the 1965 World's Fair to Alexandria, Minnesota and never left. Over six months of 2026 his listing was surfaced by thousands of searches. The single largest source of them was not his name.

It was **"things to do in Alexandria MN," 2,766 searches in six months.** Big Ole has not been primarily a destination for a long time. He is the town's answer to the question of whether there is anything here.

That answer gets given thousands of times a year, free, to people who have already decided to look the town up. No campaign does that, and no advertising budget buys it.

The monument and the town become one search

Look at what people actually type. For Big Ole, the top related searches across twenty-two years are the monument's name, then **the town's name**, then the two of them together. For the Detroit Lakes trolls it is the town's name at 100, the word "trolls" at 96, and the two combined at 87.

They have fused into a single retrieval handle. People do not remember one without the other, and a town that has one of these has something most towns its size do not: a reason to be recalled at all.

The curve flattens. It does not end.

Lucy the Elephant has stood in Margate City, New Jersey since 1881. She is a hundred and forty-five years old, and across the last two decades her search interest is not falling. It is essentially flat, drifting slightly upward. Cadillac Ranch at fifty-two, Carhenge at thirty-nine and Christ of the Ozarks at sixty are all still registering, year after year, well below their peaks and stubbornly above nothing.

That is an asymptote, not an ending. The launch spike is an event. What it decays into is an attribute, and the attribute does not expire.

Age is an asset, not a liability

Two things in this study only become available with time.

The first is the anniversary. The single largest recovery in the entire dataset was Big Ole's sixtieth, at plus two hundred and fifty percent. A monument installed last year cannot have a sixtieth. Every year a town keeps one, it banks another round number to spend.

The second is accumulation. In Casey, Illinois, a town of about 2,200, one man hung the world's largest wind chime in December 2011 and the search record shows **fifty-one consecutive months of nothing**. The first real signal arrives in 2016, the year after he took the town from three world records to eight. Guinness, USA Today, CBS Sunday Morning and the Associated Press followed. No single object moved Casey. The collection did, five years later. Casey has nonetheless lost population throughout the whole period, which is worth stating plainly rather than skipping past.

The practical reading of all of it is the same. **A monument is not a campaign with a shelf life. It is a fixed asset with a long tail, and the tail is where most of the total value sits**, because it is collected in small amounts every week for decades rather than in one loud summer.

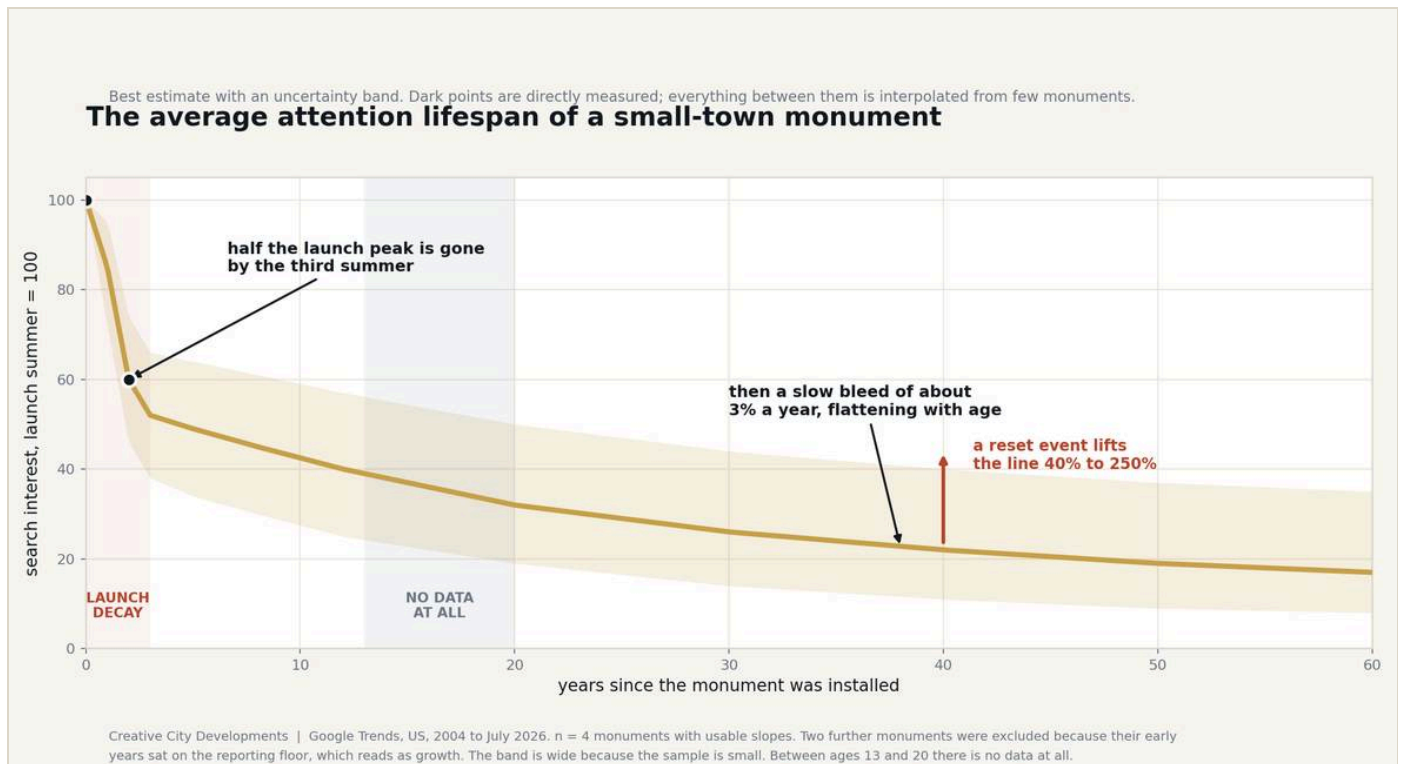
The honest limit. The flattening is measured on four monuments, one of them a hundred and forty-five years old, which is not a typical case. The search-behaviour evidence is strong but descriptive: it shows the monument and the town are searched together, not that the monument caused the town to be searched. Separating those two is exactly what the pooled data described on page 7 would allow.

FINDING TWO

Getting there takes about three summers, and the fall is steeper than towns expect

Only one monument in the entire public record is both new enough and searched hard enough to show a complete launch and decay: five wooden trolls unveiled in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota in June 2024. Measured as each summer against the summer they opened, the shape is **100, then 90, then 54**.

A spike two months after unveiling. A collapse to nine percent of peak by December, which is seasonality rather than decay. A near-full recovery the second July. Then a forty percent fall in the third summer.



Best estimate with an uncertainty band. Dark points are directly measured; everything between them is interpolated from very few monuments. The band is wide because the sample is small.

After the launch decay comes a slow bleed of roughly three percent a year that flattens with age. A monument at forty is drawing about a fifth of its opening summer, and holding there.

Read this curve as a silhouette, not a measurement. The front comes from a single 2024 installation. The back comes from four well-known outliers. Between ages thirteen and twenty there is no usable data at all. That gap is the reason this document exists.

FINDING THREE

Decay is not destiny, but only some interventions work

Six documented attention-reset events sit inside the observation window. Four moved the needle. Two did nothing, and the two failures are the instructive ones.

MONUMENT	EVENT	BEFORE	AFTER	CHANGE
Big Ole, Alexandria MN	60th anniversary	17.2	60.2	+250%
Alexa's Elixir, Detroit Lakes MN	National magazine listing	20.1	38.8	+93%
Lucy the Elephant, Margate NJ	\$2.4M restoration	15.3	25.0	+63%
Christ of the Ozarks, Eureka Springs AR	50th plus restoration	18.9	26.8	+42%
Cadillac Ranch, Amarillo TX	50th anniversary	30.2	25.0	-17%
Carhenge, Alliance NE	Visitor centre opened	13.0	13.9	+7%

The four that worked each gave people something newly different to look at, brought third-party validation, or built a town-wide campaign around a round number. The two that failed were a birthday with no visible change to the object, and a building placed next to a monument rather than a change to the monument itself.

The magazine listing did not raise the peak. That monument's second summer peaked **lower** than its first. What it did was widen the season, nearly doubling the annual average, because people came in April and October. For a town with rooms and tables to fill, a longer shoulder season is worth more than a taller July.

Six events is a hypothesis, not a finding. It is a testable one, and testing it properly is the first thing more participants would make possible.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU

We have taken this as far as public data can go. The rest needs towns.

This is a direct request for help, so it is worth being plain about why, what we are asking for, and what you get out of it.

Why the public data runs out

National search tools have a volume floor, and most small towns live beneath it. Of roughly forty monuments we pulled twenty-two years of history for, **seven produced any usable signal and one had good coverage**. A giant pelican has stood in Pelican Rapids, Minnesota since 1957 and returns zero in all 271 months.

In six months of 2026, **12,095 people looked at that pelican's listing**. The national record says it does not exist. Its own listing says twelve thousand people looked at it. Both are true, and the instrument is the problem.

Listing performance data does not have that floor. It reports, month by month, how many searches surfaced a place, how many people looked, how many asked for directions and how many clicked through, and it does that for a town of 2,586 exactly as well as for a city. Which is why we are asking for it rather than trying harder with search trends.

What we are asking for

- 1 The listing performance export for your monument, covering as many years as the account holds. It is a download from the dashboard and takes a couple of minutes.
- 2 The monument's installation year.
- 3 The dates of any resets: relocations, restorations, rebuilds, anniversaries, awards, viral moments.

What becomes knowable, and at what scale

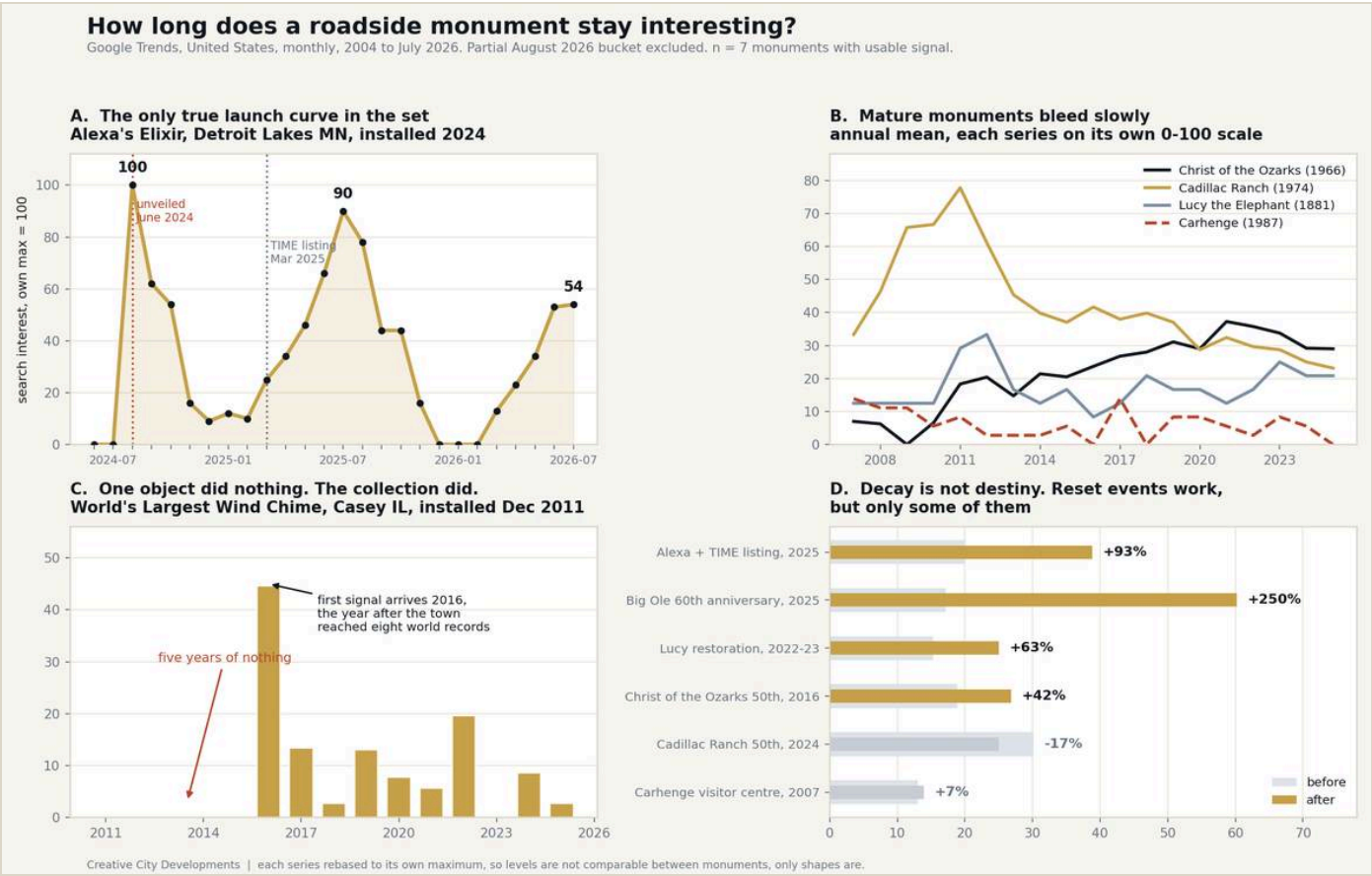
This is the part worth reading closely, because almost none of it is answerable by one town alone, and all of it is answerable by a group.

SCALE	WHAT IT MAKES MEASURABLE
One town, alone	Your own detour rate, your own seasonality, and your own funnel leaks. Useful, but with nothing to compare against, a number on its own tells you very little.
About 20 towns	The middle of the curve, ages three to thirty-eight, for the first time. A real half-life for a monument rather than an interpolation. Detour-rate benchmarks by town size, so a town finally knows whether its own number is good. Honest seasonality curves by region, meaning which months a monument actually works and which months a campaign is wasted on it.
About 40 towns	Everything above, separated from noise. What a reset event is actually worth in direction requests rather than search share. Whether a second monument adds visitors or splits them. Which discovery path converts: people searching the monument by name, versus "things to do in [town]", versus "attractions". How the mix shifts as a monument ages. Whether a monument measurably lifts the town's other listings, which is the identity question in Finding One turned into a number.

What you get back, whatever we find

Every participating town receives its own analysis regardless of what the study concludes, and regardless of whether the findings are flattering. That includes your detour rate, meaning the share of people who saw the listing and asked for directions, your position against every other participant, and the specific points where your own funnel leaks.

The whole thing costs a town **one export and about thirty minutes**. If it turns out the honest answer is that monuments matter less than towns hope, we will publish that. The point is that at the moment nobody knows either way.



The underlying series behind this study. One clean launch curve, four mature outliers levelling off, one town where a single object generated nothing for five years until a collection formed around it, and a set of reset events that partially reversed the decline.

METHOD AND LIMITS

Roster. 101 monuments across 33 states, deliberately spread across install eras from 1881 to 2026, prioritising towns under 25,000 people. Every installation year was verified individually against Roadside America, the Historical Marker Database, Atlas Obscura, artist catalogues, city and destination-marketing sites, state tourism offices and local press. Wikipedia was not used as a source anywhere in this study. Where sources conflicted, both years are recorded in the dataset with the resolution and its reason. Populations are American Community Survey 2024 estimates.

Search data. Google Trends, United States, monthly, all categories, web search, 2004 to August 2026. The partial August 2026 bucket is excluded from every series and calculation; it is a known artifact that makes values appear in columns that are zero for the preceding 271 months. Each series is rebased to its own maximum, so levels are not comparable between monuments, only shapes are. Trends normalises every query set to its largest term, so series pulled in separate batches cannot be compared without a shared anchor.

Terms discarded for contamination. Several search terms were found to be measuring something else entirely and were removed: a fair mascot that returns a trailer manufacturer, a troll whose name returns lawn fertiliser, another that returns a footwear brand and a retired athlete, a third that returns a rifle-barrel maker, and a memorial statue that returns the Statue of Liberty and a superhero film. Contamination was identified by reading the related-searches export for each term and discarding any whose top related searches were off-subject.

Slopes. Decay rates are log-linear regressions of the annual mean against monument age. Two monuments were excluded from the composite curve because their early years sat on the reporting floor, which makes later visibility read as growth rather than growth being real. One further monument was excluded because it decays from a one-off press spike rather than from a launch. One figure that initially looked like a 332 percent gain was dropped entirely once it became clear it was an artifact of a censored baseline.

Listings. Monuments of this kind are carried on Google as places under the tourist attraction and historical landmark categories, which is where the performance data in this study comes from. We make no representation about what any individual town will or will not be able to claim or manage for its own monument; that varies and should be checked case by case.

Sample size. Between one and four monuments underpin every point on the decay curve. Every percentage in this document should be read as directional. We have tried throughout to state what is measured, what is interpolated and what is guessed, and to mark the difference.

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Visitor Impact Scoring and monument listing management for small towns.

To take part, or to have your monument checked against the roster at no cost, write to matthew@windrosedigital.com.