PLACE

The Revitalization of Midtown

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—SUE MOSEY President of Midtown Detroit, Inc.

C O N F E R E N C E

HIGHLIGHTS

BEING BOLD IN BARODA

K E E P I N G H A R B O R SPRINGS SPECIAL

May/June 2012
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Placemaking and Economic Development

Summer is just around the corner. If you’re like me, you’re eagerly anticipating spending more time outdoors, walking or riding your bike to a neighborhood ice cream store, dining outdoors, or taking the family to a music event in the park. These are the types of experiences and places that define community, make it unique, and give us a sense of belonging. This is what we call having a “sense of place.”

The League has always been about investing in our communities. But our narrative has changed. Over the past decade, we have seen a huge shift from an industrial economy to a new economy that requires a more educated workforce. With almost half of college graduates leaving our state, and two-thirds of those moving without jobs, this changes the way we need to think about our communities and regions.

So as you begin to enjoy the onset of summer, look around your community and ask yourself what makes you proud to live there, what places and activities impact your daily life, and what you can do to make it even better!

Executive Director’s Message

Daniel P. Gilmartin

The Economics of Place

The Michigan Municipal League believes that our communities are at the core of our state’s economic turnaround, and that “place” is the huge economic driver. In 2011, the League published The Economics of Place: The Value of Building Communities Around People, which further details what Michigan must do to create the types of places people want to live, work, play, and raise families. The book, available at Amazon.com and economicsofplace.com, was unveiled at the League’s Convention in October during a news conference that featured Governor Rick Snyder. It’s time to start talking about the importance of place as the economic development strategy that will create a positive, dynamic future for Michigan.
What Is **PLACE?**

Place is a cultural exploration. Place can be a small thing with a big impact.

**Place is more than just a location. It is people, involvement, and community.**

Place matters. If we had said those two words a few years ago, most would’ve had no idea what we were talking about. Today, the terms “place” and “placemaking” are part of the everyday vernacular.

**Entrepreneurship**

In the new economy, we need to focus on growing jobs in our communities by ones and twos for long-term sustainability.

**Diversity/Multiculturalism**

Our global economy is fueled by the talent and ingenuity of people from around the world. Welcoming those from different backgrounds can result in a whole new level of innovation.

**Messaging & Technology**

Technology allows people to connect and collaborate like never before. Communities have a powerful opportunity to engage with their citizenry and beyond.

**Transit**

People are choosing to live, play, and work in communities that embrace all modes of transportation—walking, biking, and public transit.

**Education (K-16)**

Our educational institutions are key to growing a knowledge-based state. Leveraging these institutional resources is critical.

Research shows that placemaking matters more than ever. At the League, our purpose is to help local officials identify, develop, and implement strategies that will grow and strengthen Michigan’s communities in the coming decades. We have broken all of it down into the following placemaking assets:

**Physical Design & Walkability**

Whether your community is big or small, it is important to create a physical fabric that promotes social connections where people can live, work, and play.

**Green Initiatives**

"Thinking green" is a critical asset of any viable community. It impacts natural resources, quality of life, and the financial bottom line.

**Cultural Economic Development (CED)**

Arts and culture should be a part of any long-term economic development strategy. CED plays a big role in developing and preserving a community’s identity and uniqueness.

How neighborhoods, communities, regions, and states deal with these issues is limited only by their willingness to pioneer solutions for implementation. Swapping entrenched sacred cows for innovative strategies, creating new methods for delivering traditional government services, and fostering effective community engagement should be the measuring stick for which we all live by.

A vision to behold... water flowing from Lake Huron under the Blue Water Bridge into the St. Clair River by Thomas Edison Park. Whether you walk along the riverfront, drive on the parkway, bike, rollerskate, or gaze at the many freighters, sailboats, and cruisers, you will never find a more beautiful and serene view. This is one of my favorite places. It keeps my husband and I in Port Huron. It is also where my husband proposed to me.

Pauline Repp, Mayor, Port Huron

My favorite main street spot is a wonderful juxtaposition of charming, old store fronts and modern office buildings. My favorite parks range from a pocket lot on a neighborhood corner to a renowned arboretum to a premier baseball complex. Each one of these spots has a special identity, a feeling, a character that makes me want to come back—often!

Susan Baldwin, Mayor, Battle Creek

**League Trustees response to “What is your favorite place, and why?”**

**Ricci Bandkau, Mayor, Brighton**

Lakes have always been my favorite places. I grew up near Lake Michigan and now live near Lake Huron. There is nothing better than watching the sunset or the sunrise over the lake. Summer picnics with campfires, volleyball, boating, swimming—people are happier near water.

Deb Greene, Mayor Pro Tem, Rogers City

My favorite place is Sunday Lake. It has a day-use facility with a park, tennis courts, little league field, and campground nearby. Additionally, a lighted walking trail surrounds the lake, providing a beautiful experience for residents and visitors.

Dick Bolten, Mayor, Wakefield

One spot has a special place in my heart—the Armory Arts Village. Originally a state penitentiary, it was renovated into an artist colony. Jackson won the League’s Community Excellence Award Cup in 2008 for this project. My wife and I had our wedding reception there. Art displays served as decorations, and tours were conducted for our guests.

**Want more? Read “Building Place: The Key to Healthy, Sustainable Communities,” by Dan Burden, from the League making book. Burden is an international authority on livable and sustainable communities, healthy streets, traffic calming, and bicycle and pedestrian programs.**
Old Town’s committed volunteers, tireless grassroots leaders, and an interesting mix of businesses, entertainment, and cultural events have helped Old Town Lansing thrive despite the challenging economy.

By Louise Grandwohl

As you enter the small community known as Old Town Lansing, you cannot help but get wrapped up in the timeless scenery, historic architecture, and artistic flair that dwell within the streets. But Lansing’s Old Town goes beyond sights and sounds—it’s the people, the relationships, the hospitality, and the dedication of residents that has made Old Town flourish. The neighborhood’s story is filled with hope, determination, sadness, and success. It is what has crafted Old Town into the unique destination it is today.

URBAN PIONEERS
Built in the mid-to-late nineteenth century as Lansing’s original downtown, Old Town fell into a period of neglect and abandonment starting in the 1960s. Yet within this dismal period, dedicated people, including the late Robert Busby, decided that the decay of Old Town was unacceptable. Busby and others took matters into their own hands. For the last 30 years, these “urban pioneers” have been working hard to revitalize Old Town to make it a better place to live, work, and shop.

In 1996, Old Town Lansing was one of six sites chosen to participate in the Neighborhood Main Street Initiative (NMSI) demonstration project. The initiative represented a coalition between two national organizations active in community rehabilitation: the Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the National Main Street Center. The Old Town Lansing project was designed to encourage the economic redevelopment of the neighborhood business districts utilizing the skills and experience of both organizations in neighborhood and commercial revitalization. Notably, the Old Town Main Street program is one of the only NMSI project sites not residing within an already established community development corporation.

MAIN STREET APPROACH
Today, the Old Town Main Street program is referred to as the Old Town Commercial Association (OTCA). OTCA is a nonprofit organization focusing on community development, economic revitalization, and follows the Main Street Four-Point Approach®. This is a proven methodology for historic preservation-based economic development that was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation 30 years ago. It is used in more than 2,000 communities throughout the U.S.

Since the program’s installation, Old Town’s crime rates have fallen to the lowest in the city; building vacancy has dropped from 90 percent to less than 10 percent, and Old Town is now home to some of the finest art and entertainment venues in mid-Michigan. As a result, Old Town has become one of the highest concentrations of arts and creative service businesses in the state. In 2006, Old Town was named a Michigan Main Street program area under Governor Granholm’s Cool Cities Initiative and continues to operate under Main Street’s Four-Point Approach.

In 2011, The National Trust for Historic Preservation announced OTCA as the winner of the 2011 Great American Main Street Awards®. Recognized as a leader following the Main Street Four-Point Approach®, embracing sound historic preservation ethics, and building strategic partnerships, Old Town Main Street was honored at the Main Street Awards Ceremony during the National Main Streets Conference in Des Moines, Iowa.

MAIN STREET COMMITTEE SYSTEM
Old Town utilizes the Main Street Four-Point Approach® philosophy through its committees to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort. Old Town’s promotions committee focuses on marketing Old Town’s unique characteristics to residents, visitors, investors, and business owners. The committee also develops a positive, promotional strategy through advertising, retail activities, special events and marketing campaigns to encourage commercial activity and investment in the area. In 2011, OTCA had record-high festival attendance, doubling from the previous season. The festivals and promotions are not only a draw to visitors, but bring the entire neighborhood and community together. Every volunteer, vendor, sponsor, and resident leader plays a key part in making Old Town events come to fruition.

The organization committee focuses on involving all of the community’s stakeholders to work toward a common goal and...
driving the volunteer-based Old Town program. The organization committee coordinates the events which help fund the OTCA—the force behind the revitalization of the Old Town district.

Old Town’s design committee focuses on enhancing Old Town’s physical environment by capitalizing on its best assets including historic buildings, and creating an inviting atmosphere through attractive window displays, parking areas, building improvements, streetscapes, and landscaping. The design committee also focuses on instilling good maintenance practices in the historic commercial district, enhancing the physical appearance of Old Town through the rehabilitation of historic buildings, encouragement of appropriate new construction, and development of sensitive design management systems and the integration of long-term planning.

Old Town’s economic restructuring committee focuses on strengthening the Old Town community’s existing economic base while also expanding and diversifying it. By helping existing businesses expand and recruiting new businesses to respond to today’s market, this committee helps convert unused spaces into productive properties and sharpens the competitiveness of business enterprises.

The Residents of Old Town Group is made up of residents, property owners, and local police officers interested in working to remedy issues that directly affect Old Town residents with solutions such as the neighborhood watch, farmers market, and community garden. OTCA is the only Main Street program in the state that maintains a residents committee.

Together with partners Michigan Institute for Contemporary Art, the city of Lansing, Downtown Lansing Inc., the Lansing Economic Development Corporation, the Turner-Dodge House and others, Old Town has become a thriving environment of art, festivals, boutiques, and creative businesses and residents dedicated to the revitalization of this historic district.

To explore Old Town, visit iloveoldtown.org.

Louise Gradwohl is the executive director of Old Town Commercial Association. You may reach her at 517-485-4283 or louise@oldtownmainstreet.org.

Want more?
In March 2011, eight business leaders from Harbor Springs attended the Placemaking Summit hosted by the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments in Traverse City featuring Fred Kent, president of the Project for Public Spaces. The Summit turned out to be a game changer for Harbor Springs as it launched a very active Placemaking Committee. Harbor Springs has been a destination for visitors and permanent and seasonal residents for decades. In recent years, the downturn in the economy combined with lifestyle changes in seasonal and tourist populations have led many business owners in Harbor Springs to look for innovative ways to create a more vibrant downtown and surrounding community.

Keep Harbor Springs Special

“Those of us who went to the Placemaking Summit are all business owners, community leaders, and residents,” said Kathryn Breighner, co-chairperson of the Harbor Springs Placemaking Committee. “We wanted to learn about new ideas for downtown communities and came away with excitement about how special Harbor Springs is and what we can do to make it an even better place. During the past year, we came to see placemaking as more than a business-creating concept, but as a way of furthering Harbor Springs as a place that is special for everyone who lives or visits here.”

The Harbor Springs Placemaking Committee is not connected directly to any organization. Representatives from the city, the Harbor Springs Area Chamber of Commerce, and HARBOR, Inc. (a regional planning organization) are ex-officio members of the committee. The committee meets monthly with this mission: to inspire both residents and visitors to identify the area as home, and to foster a sense of pride and responsibility by facilitating communication and opportunities with the community.

Defining Placemaking

With many in the community not understanding what placemaking is, the committee defines it as a multi-faceted approach related to planning design and management of public spaces; listening to those who work, live, and play in that space; creating a common vision; capitalizing on community assets, inspirations and potential; and creating good public spaces promoting health and happiness.

“In May 2011, we hosted a full house at a community forum held in the Harbor Springs City Hall for a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) issues identification session,” said Jody Ewbank, co-chair of the Placemaking Committee. “A month later we held another session to present the top three topics and outline the many organizations in Harbor Springs that are working on these topics.”
The DDA Resurfaces

As a result of the interest that the placemaking process brought to Harbor Springs, the long dormant Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was revitalized in the summer of 2011. "The DDA had not met since 2003," said Tom Richards, Harbor Springs city manager. "The DDA now meets regularly and is working on three projects: gathering updated economic indicator reports for our community, writing a new DDA plan, and overseeing possible changes on our waterfront, with the goal of creating a more flexible, multi-purpose gathering space for use by the general public and for community events."

"With the DDA back in action and focused on our downtown, the Placemaking Committee’s role will be to keep placemaking concepts in the forefront as the DDA considers projects," said Breighner who also is vice chairperson of the DDA. With the city reviewing the master plan in 2012, the committee will work to keep placemaking integral to the plan.

Placemaking is not intended to simply bring visitors to communities, but to create and maintain special places for people to live and work. "Harbor Springs has a different business and residential climate than many Michigan communities because we have both year-round and seasonal residents," said Breighner. "It is important for all who call Harbor Springs home to be a part of the placemaking conversation. There are some who do not like the idea of any change. It is a constant challenge to remind people that placemaking is not about changing the character of Harbor Springs, but about focusing on our strengths while we create and sustain public spaces that build our community while strengthening what is already special using placemaking principals as our guide."

"The buzz that took place because of our public gatherings helped spur decisions for two new restaurants in Harbor Springs," said Ewbank. "Placemaking efforts have also begun in Petoskey to host a Placemaking Summit in May at North Central Michigan College."

"In the past year, hundreds of people have been included in community conversations about the future of Harbor Springs. One of our responsibilities is to connect ideas with people that want to make them happen. The Placemaking Committee’s role is not to complete projects or take stands on issues, but to connect people with projects that further placemaking principals. For example, one of the early wishes by the community was for better broadband service. HARBOR, Inc. has been actively working on that project, so we connected others wanting to work on this project with HARBOR, Inc."

"At some point in time when placemaking principles are fully embraced in Harbor Springs, we might be less visible than now," said Breighner. "But until then, we have a lot of work to do."

Kathryn Breighner is the publisher of Concierge Publications and co-chairperson of the Harbor Springs Placemaking Committee.

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Personal Property Tax (PPT) Hot Topic at Capital Conference
League President Karen Majewski, addressing over 400 municipal leaders, said “Our most pressing issue revolves around the effort to reform personal property tax.” The League is leading a “Replace Don’t Erase” campaign to get guaranteed funding replacement should PPT be eliminated.

Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett (p 16 upper left) described how place-making helped his city reinvent itself—using a voter approved sales tax (a penny on the dollar) to redevelop the river front and refurbish and build new schools. The Conference also featured sessions on brownfield tax credits, transportation, the environment, health care, labor, and EVIP.
Welcome to Baroda, a community with country charm. Not long ago, the friendly country charm was threatened with the closing of Bill’s Tap, a regionally known gathering place and the hometown eatery of the ‘townies.’

“The Tap’s closing had a major impact on the community, more so on the attitude and promise of a successful future held by local residents,” according to Village President Bob Getz.

Since the early 1970s, the Tap, with its reputation for superior dining, drew customers from southwest Michigan, northern Indiana, and Chicago notables—including governors, judges, and TV personalities. Baroda was known as “the place to dine” while providing the economic lifeblood for other downtown businesses.

Without the Tap, prospects for downtown development were glum. Even with a carefully prepared Downtown Development Authority (DDA) development plan calling for streetscape and building façade improvements, little interest was shown by private businesses until late summer 2009 when Founder’s Winery opened.

“We knew we needed to do something, something that would spark private sector interest. Our DDA had saved almost $300,000 for streetscape and road improvements. Baroda was ready to take some bold action,” notes Getz.

The Round Barn Brewery opened on March 6, 2010, filling a vacant 10,000-square-foot building just down the road from village hall. Beer production will begin in July, and a brew pub and restaurant are in the works for 2013.

The seven winners will now move on to the final round for the statewide winner at the League’s Annual Convention on Mackinac Island, October 3-5.

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Baroda’s Development Strategy

In its first bold move, the village council sought funds from MDOT for three road improvement projects: improving the two entrances into downtown and streetscaping of a downtown intersection. In Phase 2, the village is seeking funding to make streetscape improvements in front of all commercial downtown businesses. Getz notes, “While public investment gives notice the village is ready to do something, we knew that streetscape improvements alone would not revitalize the downtown. We wanted to make another ‘bold move’—something to stimulate private sector business investment.”

The village first focused on the use of Commercial Rehabilitation and Economic Growth (RBEG), a program sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that invests $10 million each year in Michigan communities. The fund is designed to help communities in the state with the greatest need. The award of an RBEG in February 2010 offered Baroda a chance to set up a revolving loan program (RLF). The $50,000 loan was for an “interest-free” revolving loan program, and when the loan was paid back, it became available to another business. The $50,000 loan was paid back within the first year. According to Lisa Epple, Area Specialist of the USDA-Rural Development, “Baroda is a good example of how a community that is applying for this program can use the loan.”

RBEG Makes Private Business Investment Happen

Enter the Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG), a grant established to improve the downtown through road improvements, streetscapes, public art, and reimagining the Baroda Tap & Grille. According to Lisa Epple, who is Area Specialist of the USDA-Rural Development, “an RBEG provides funding for rural communities to lend, typically at reduced rates and flexible terms to create new business investment and jobs. Upon repayment of the initial loans to the local community, the loan is returned to the community to establish a long-term lending program to keep growing small businesses.”

The award of an RBEG in February 2010 offered Baroda a chance to set up a revolving loan program (RLF). The $50,000 of RBEG funds supplemented with $16,000 of village CDBG funds reserved for downtown development seemed the “right tool at the right time,” according to Getz.

Baroda Tap & Grille

The Baroda Burger is on the menu; a new hometown delight” notes Jim Demski. Who purchased Cliff’s Tap from the former owner. Demski, using a commercial loan and a $55,000 Baroda RLF loan to replace the roof and add windows to the building, opened on May 30, 2010. “We cleaned up the appearance of the first building in our downtown,” Getz says with pride. “Baroda Tap and Grille not only serves good food but is a symbol of the rebirth of the downtown.”

Founder’s Winery

Aptly named Founder’s Winery, owner Len Olson can be characterized as a “founder” of the southwestern Michigan wine tasting experience of today. After a career spanning several decades, Olson is back to his roots—over 40 years ago he started a career of consecutively organizing and opening various decades, Olson is back to his roots—over 40 years ago he started a career of consecutively organizing and opening various wineries, including one of the first wineries in the Baroda area.

Olson, with his son Gunner, saw an opportunity to locate a new winery in the heart of southwestern Michigan’s wine country. They set up in an empty portion of the Baroda City Mills building, partially occupied warehouse across the street from the new Baroda Tap & Grille.

“Opening a winery tasting room in a rented old concrete block warehouse building is a big decision. We put our money first into equipment and renovating the warehouse space into a tasting room. Our goal is to do a $15,000 façade makeover, dependent on the receipt of additional commercial financing and our first year’s profits,” notes Olson. He approached the Baroda RLF for assistance. Getz notes, “We are going to help renovate a second building this year with an $11,000 loan to Founder’s Winery to reface and create a welcome entrance façade—basically repurposing the old warehouse into a commercial use property.”

On March 6, council welcomed the village’s newest business—the Round Barn Brewery which will fill a vacant 10,000-square foot building just down the road from village hall. “This is wonderful news for Baroda,” Council President Bob Getz said, beaming.

Getz and the village council have a vision of Baroda—different than what you see today. Getz says, “Come back in a year—you’ll be standing in line to get into the Baroda Tap & Grille so you might as well walk over to Founder’s Winery and sample some of southwestern Michigan’s fine wines. You’ll be passing a few other new businesses by then—maybe another winery and eatery and a few specialty shops on your walk-about. You might even be a participant in a farm-to-table feast.”

The reinvention of Baroda is picking up steam—the village premiered a promotional video, “Baroda...Home of Casual Country Charm” on January 15, 2012. The Small Town Rural Development Conference is using it as part of its conference proceedings. The Village President Getz presented the reinvention of Baroda at the LaPorte Indiana Leadership Council small community conference on April 14, 2012.

Chuck Eckenslether (AICP Retired) is an advisor to McKenna Associates. He teaches economic development at Purdue North Central, Westville, Indiana and also serves on the faculty of the Lowell Stahl Center for Commercial Real Estate Studies at Lewis University, Oakbrook, Illinois. You may contact him at 219-861-2077 or pctecken@comcast.net.
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**THE REVIEW**

MAY/JUNE 2012
Comerica Park, the Spirit of Detroit, and the Ren Cen—Detroit has its share of easily identified landmarks, but what of its neighborhoods? Do they get recognized?

People are starting to take notice of Midtown Detroit. Years of work to revitalize and brand the area has started to pay dividends.

“In the early 1990s the neighborhood really started redeveloping,” said Susan Mosey, president of Midtown Detroit, Inc. “There was more housing and more institutional investments taking place but no one had a good sense of the district’s identity.”

In 2000, efforts began in earnest to give the area of Detroit, which has such prominent residents as the Detroit Medical Center (DMC), Wayne State University and the Detroit Art Institute, a name.

Getting those institutions, along with other area stakeholders, on board with the Midtown moniker was an important step in the process. “Early on we basically had no budget, but it was important to get all those different elements on board,” Mosey said. “People from the big anchor institutions to the small entrepreneurs all played a part.”

BRANDING MIDTOWN

The branding has gotten much more sophisticated since those early days and now includes a new logo that captures the spirit of the Midtown. Strategic marketing and communications efforts are now being made to increase traffic, revenue flow, promote the area, and increase development and investment to the area by increasing Midtown’s geographic profile.

Some of the area’s assets are pretty easy to recognize—higher education, cutting-edge medicine and the arts—but others can be fleshed out more for the public through the branding campaign.

Being in Midtown Detroit puts you within walking distance of 10 theaters, 9 museums, over 40 restaurants, 12 galleries, and boutique shopping.

BUILDING A WEB PRESENCE

Mosey said Midtown Detroit, Inc. will soon be launching a new website, complete with mobile apps, that will help highlight the growing list of assets—Henry Ford Health Center, Tech Town, and New Center Council—the area has to offer.

There continues to be a lot of players in the Midtown Detroit revitalization efforts. In fact, Midtown Detroit, Inc., which was preceded by the University Cultural Center Association, is comprised of more than 100 stakeholders. The budget has gotten larger since those early days too, with more than $1.8 billion in investments in the area since 2000.

MIDTOWN LOOP GREENWAY

One of the big investments has been the creation of Midtown Loop Greenway, a greenway trail that will follow existing street patterns along Kirby Street, John R. Street, Canfield Street and Cass Avenue, and connect the campuses of Wayne State and the Detroit Medical Center.

The Green Alley, formerly one of Midtown’s worst segments of alley, is now a greenway for pedestrians and bicyclists. The area has been attracting a young demographic that expect walkability and alternative modes of transportation.

By Rene Rosencrantz Wheaton

Detroit, pop. 713,777

MIDTOWN DETROIT

Neighborhood Placemaking

The Green Alley, formerly one of Midtown’s worst segments of alley, is now a greenway for pedestrians and bicyclists. The area has been attracting a young demographic that expect walkability and alternative modes of transportation.
Want more? Read “Detroit: The Democratic City,” by Phillip Cooley, from the League placemaking book. Cooley is a part owner of Slows Bar B Q and a General Contractor with O’Connor Development. He serves on the board of the Greening of Detroit, Roosevelt Park Conservancy, Center for Community Based Enterprise, and co-chairs the Mayor’s Advisory Task Force for the DetroitWorks project.

“It’s an ambitious project with plans for 1.8 miles worth of trails and LED pedestrian lighting, native plantings, seating, public art, and dog stations,” Mosey said. “The first phase of the Green Loop, near the Detroit Art Institute, has been completed, and work on the second phase will incorporate the area near the new Whole Foods Market, at John R and Mack. Plans are to have Whole Foods Market open in the spring of 2013.

The project fits in with the sustainability efforts that have been done. I’ve definitely noticed more pedestrian traffic.”

GREEN ALLEY
Another project that fits with those ideals is the Green Alley, which was a project created in partnership with Green Garage, a nonprofit organization that is focused on building skills, jobs, services, and products with green goals. The project took one of the district’s worst segments of alley and turned it into a greenway for pedestrians and bicyclists.

“It is a demonstration project that uses sustainable products like old brick pavers and induction lighting,” Mosey said. “It’s a prototype for what we want to do with other alleys in our neighborhoods.”

The area has been attracting a young demographic that expects to have walkability and alternative modes of transportation.

“Making the area usable for pedestrians and bikers is a key fundamental in attracting people to the corridor,” Mosey said. “So far, people have been responding to the work that has been done. I’ve definitely noticed more pedestrian traffic.”

LIVE MIDTOWN
As if that wasn’t enough, the Midtown area also has an incentive program called Live Midtown, which offers financial funds to people who choose to live in the Midtown area and who work at the DMC, Henry Ford Health System, or Wayne State. While Midtown Detroit has a wealth of assets, Mosey admits it has its fair share of difficulties, including crime, both real and perceived, to overcome. “We have a lot of security efforts in place,” said Mosey. “We are lucky enough to have the Wayne State police force within two minutes of anywhere in Midtown.”

Midtown Detroit, Inc. also has grant programs that will provide businesses with security upgrades like cameras, lighting, and alarm systems.

“Wayne State police will also come and do an audit of a business’s security needs,” she said.

Government grants and institutional investments have been invaluable to the Midtown area, but the people of the community have been the lifeblood of the revitalization efforts. “We’ve had a tremendous response from people,” Mosey said. “There’s a lot of diversity here. There are newcomers that want to create connections to help with the rebuidling of Detroit, and there are people who have been here a long time that are welcoming the opportunity to get involved. It’s really great to have an engaged community that cares about what’s happening.”

For more information on Midtown Detroit, Inc.’s many initiatives, visit their website at detroitmidtown.com. For more on the Live Midtown program visit livemidtown.org.

Rene Rosencrantz Wheaton is a freelance writer. You may contact her at 810-444-3827.
ARTown Celebrates 
Three Years of Successful Collaboration

By Mary Ellen Jones

Northeast Michigan is on the road to becoming an arts and cultural destination along US 23. In three years, 75 individual artists, councils, galleries, historical societies, theaters, museums, dance studios, musicians, writers, lecture series, libraries, and concert series have been identified. What started as a small, informal committee of individuals interested in a grassroots promotion of arts and culture blossomed into Michigan Arts and Culture Northeast (MACNE), a 501c6 nonprofit corporation with a $20,000 grant from Michigan Municipal League and the city of Alpena.

Our celebration included Dr. Julie Avery, recently retired curator of Rural Life and Culture at the MSU Museum, returning to the region to lead a second roundtable discussion on where we started, what we’ve achieved, and how to drive economic development through arts and culture. Avery commented, “Most counties don’t have this richness of diversity in the arts. It is a huge asset.” Suggestions toward future collaboration include: engaging more youth in the arts, branding the region when it comes to the arts, creating an arts festival similar to ArtPrize in Grand Rapids; “colorizing” or eliminating blighted areas in our communities with visible art installations; educating the public on the importance of the arts and its’ long-lasting value; and expanding and improving the MACNE website.

Overview

If you hear “arts and culture” and Alpena or Northeast Michigan doesn’t come to mind, think again! Arts, culture, and history have an enduring presence in Northeast Michigan, and MACNE-ARTown Michigan is evidence of that. This nonprofit corporation is led by Besser Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Sparked by the Michigan Municipal League’s Center for 21st Century Communities (21C3) pilot project (see page 30), the city of Alpena became a formal partner in MACNE, which also includes 44+ other organizations and individual artists from around the region. Through their powerful collaboration they are accomplishing what one group could not do alone.

Passport to the Arts

MACNE’s flagship project is an actual passport that serves as a comprehensive regional arts/culture calendar for nearly 200 events/activities in the summer season. The kick-off event began with a progressive dinner and entertainment with patrons visiting all four nonprofits. For the public—the passport program is a contest: 10 stamps of attendance are required to be eligible for a grand prize to an arts and cultural destination (NY in 2009, Mackinac Island in 2010, and ArtPrize in 2011). For our partners—the passport program is an opportunity to market events collectively, to create excitement around a summer program for the public, and to collaborate with other arts and culture businesses, individuals, and venues. Partners join for a fee of $100 and receive cross-promotional posters, brochures, and press releases all branded with the ARTown logo. Partnerships with our local media gave us a weekly presence with The Alpena News’ “Where Art Thou” contest, numerous articles on our events and MACNE in general. Alpena 52’s online events calendar highlighted our weekly events and devoted an entire magazine to Passport.

ARTown Website

Our website is a communication hub for myriad arts, culture, humanities, and history organizations in the region, and a mechanism to collectively promote programs and events. The Alpena County Public Library gifted us the initial design of our website, and the League grant enabled us to set aside a fund to update and maintain it. In 2010, MACNE contracted with a local web designer to ‘go green’ and allow our partners to register, pay, and upload their events directly into an online passport calendar. Our goal is to have our partners take ownership of the website and become true collaborative partners. The calendar is fluid—it can be corrected, and events may be added or canceled. Some of the issues we faced with the paper passport were schedule changes—once we published the passport, we were done for the season. Now, with an electronic calendar, the passport becomes a year-round, downloadable document for the public to customize as needed for a day, a week, or month-long trip to the region.

The Artrail Roadmap

The Artrail Roadmap is a locally designed and printed regional roadmap and reference guide highlighting 44 arts, culture, natural resources, historical sites and related attractions along the US 23 corridor from Standish to Mackinaw City. This beautiful, stylized laminated map was created for tourists. Visitors can pick it up at all 14 Michigan Welcome Centers, and Regional Chambers and Convention and Visitor Bureaus across the state. Our goal is to show visitors there are clusters of arts and cultural sites along US 23.

ARTown projects include a variety of hands-on creative and cultural experiences—currently there are four screns (art and photography printed on all-weather fabric for enormous outdoor displays) of historic photographs installed on the Royal Knight Theater building. ARTown is a nonprofit corporation founded by four independent nonprofit arts, culture, and history-oriented organizations. It promotes collaboration while highlighting and marketing the area’s art, culture, history, and heritage.
Community Expressions

Community Expressions is a variety of hands-on creative and cultural experiences for the community including the installation of building scrims (art and photography is printed on all weather fabric for enormous outdoor displays). Currently there are four scrims of old historic photographs of downtown Alpena installed on the Royal Knight Theater building. MACNE also sponsored and announced the winner of a public contest to produce an additional building wrap covering a blank wall of a downtown building. This beautiful chalk pastel rendering of artist Brooke Stevens’ vibrant downtown is rich in the arts. Her winning drawing will be installed in the spring.

MACNE did not re-invent the wheel. All of these diverse arts and cultural assets have been in the community for years. We simply joined forces, came up with a solid plan to collaborate on a shared project, and promoted these assets for our local community and beyond. These projects, including the Passport program, can be easily duplicated in your community.

Go to artownmichigan.org or pick up an ARTrail Roadmap and next time you’re on the east side, take the slow route along our beautiful coastline and experience the arts and cultural gems that make up US 23.

Mary Ellen Jones serves on the MACNE Board. You may reach her at mejonmv@gmail.com.

ABOUT 21C3

The Michigan Municipal League identified eight essential assets that make communities vibrant places in the 21st century. Research shows that physical design & walkability, green initiatives, cultural economic development, entrepreneurship, multiculturalism, messaging & technology, transit, and education are essential to a community’s livelihood.

PILOT PROJECTS

Experts agree that investing in communities is one of the most critical elements of any long-term economic development strategy. We believe this is especially true in Michigan, and that “place” matters more than ever.

To prove it, we began our pilot project series. Five pilot communities—Alpena, Lapeer, Lathrup Village, Sault Ste. Marie, and Ypsilanti—have put theory into action to demonstrate the impact of these principles and their applicability regardless of size or location. Through their demonstration projects, communities across the state will better understand how to leverage a unique sense of place in a community to enhance quality of life and attract the people and businesses that will fuel the 21st century economy.

Michigan Municipal Law

EDITED BY
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A drum beats steadily while a male voice is humbly raised in acknowledgment of man’s relationship with earth and all living creatures. The words acknowledge how the past influences today and how today will influence tomorrow. To characterize this as a prayer ceremony does not adequately define this Native American tradition. It is a request for a blessing upon an event and the people gathered there. What is surprising and delightful is that I have not sought out this experience—it was graciously gifted to the Michigan Port Collaborative meeting attendees in Sault Ste. Marie. It has provided me with a new view of the city as a place of inspiration and growth. Sault Ste. Marie and the surrounding area. Pavlat is the cultural repatriation specialist for the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians and has worked in the position for 12 years. (Repatriation, by the way, means to return something cultural to its origins.) Pavlat tells me that Native American culture gains recognition. He suggests beginning by recognizing the heritage of the past and the history within your community. American history, he gently points out, did not begin in 1492. Anishinaabe History goes back thousands of years, not hundreds of years. As Ceci diplomatically advises me, the 4th of July—"our" nation’s Independence Day—is not much of a celebratory occasion for Native Americans. And on New Year’s Eve, the Sault Tribe holds a Powwow as an alternative option, as alcohol has not been a good thing for his people. I admit I may not have thought that far ahead before extending an invitation. But Ceci also counsels, “Do not be afraid to ask. Ignorance should not hold the negative connotation it has today. It is an opportunity to learn.” For example, on Beaver Island is an ancient medicine wheel and several satellites aligned to the stars and where the sun rises. Celebratory times for Native Americans include the summer solstice and the equinox. Find out celebratory times for the subcultures within your community and honor them. Whichever cultural groups you identify in your community, we encourage you to take leadership in this area. Talk about small steps, big impact! This is one everyone can do at virtually no cost. My two young sons are from India. Namaskar! This means “my spirit welcomes and respects the spirit within you.” What a great place to start. And Gchi-Miigwech—Ojibwe for Great Thanks—in any language, are sure to follow.

In conclusion, city or village leadership should reach out first. Invite various ethnic groups to participate in planned events and celebrations in your community. But be thoughtful. As Ceci diplomatically advises me, the 4th of July—“our” nation’s Independence Day—is not much of a celebratory occasion for Native Americans. And on New Year’s Eve, the Sault Tribe holds a Powwow as an alternative option, as alcohol has not been a good thing for his people. I admit I may not have thought that far ahead before extending an invitation. But Ceci also counsels, “Do not be afraid to ask. Ignorance should not hold the negative connotation it has today. It is an opportunity to learn.” For example, on Beaver Island is an ancient medicine wheel and several satellites aligned to the stars and where the sun rises. Celebratory times for Native Americans include the summer solstice and the equinox. Find out celebratory times for the subcultures within your community and honor them. Whichever cultural groups you identify in your community, we encourage you to take leadership in this area. Talk about small steps, big impact! This is one everyone can do at virtually no cost. My two young sons are from India. Namaskar! This means “my spirit welcomes and respects the spirit within you.” What a great place to start. And Gchi-Miigwech—Ojibwe for Great Thanks—in any language, are sure to follow. Great Thanks—in any language, are sure to follow. We can help you keep the doors open, improve service and save money.
When local businesswoman Amy Atwater opened her business in downtown Lawton, she noticed how stark and barren the wall between her building and village hall looked. She approached the village council with an idea to improve the south side of village hall with a mural. Intrigued, the council asked Atwater to garner additional community interest. She returned with local artist Sandee Willis and muralist Linda Valentino-Walker, who provided sketches and proposals. The village president referred the idea to the public works committee for further action.

The committee began meeting to discuss various options. First was an expansion of the committee to include fire department representatives, community representatives, and local people interested in the history and heritage of Lawton. The committee relied on people we like to call our “consultants”—such as local historians and the director of the Paw Paw Area Art Association who gave us ideas and concepts for murals.

Community Support
The committee discussed the possibility of applying for a state grant for the project, but instead determined that we had the resources, people, and will to create and complete the mural right here in our community. The committee held a community input meeting to determine the special, unique characteristics of the village that could be portrayed in a mural. The outcome was a list of 12 major events, buildings, and historical scenes that celebrated our heritage. It was also decided not to paint directly on the wall but to enlist the assistance of local artists, which would then be hung on the south wall.

A call was sent out through the art association and the Lawton Free Reader (a local monthly paper) and local artists stepped forward to participate in this community event. Eventually 11 artists were chosen to paint 12 panels.

The Panels
The panels, a description of the contents, and the artists are:

1. Houpert Winery Fire
   Artist George Graf
   The Houpert Winery was built in 1903 as the Lawton Vineyard Co. It burned down in 1940. During the fire, wine from burst casks and bottles flowed into the creek and was pumped back onto the fire. The Lawton Fire Department had one Model A Ford truck pumper at the time.

2. Honee Bear Canning
   Artist Sandee Willis
   The Honee Bear Canning Company, founded in 1946, is the world’s largest canner of asparagus. The Packer Family has its origins in Lawton with a store on Main Street. The store marketed hides and fresh produce, among other things.

3. Adams Hardware
   Artist Vicki Downs
   Adams Hardware was founded in 1860, and celebrated 150 years in business in 2010.

4. Hauling Grapes and Town Hall
   Artist Anne Shaver
   The red brick town hall was built in the 1890s and used as an opera house as well as for official town business. It had hardwood floors for dancing, a stage for performances, a spectator’s balcony, and a bell tower for emergency communication.

5. The Depot
   Artist Susan Appleby
   The depot was built in 1846 and was called Paw Paw Station because of a connecting railway with the village of Paw Paw. It served Lawton with passenger and freight for over 100 years. It now belongs to the American Legion. At one time, there was enough travel traffic to support the three Hotel Goldings.

6. Eaton Manufacturing and Welch’s
   Artist Ashlea Bed
   The Eaton Manufacturing Building was originally the J. Hungerford Smith Grape Juice Company. Eaton took over in 1951 and employed up to 175 workers. Eaton closed in the mid-1960s. Welch Grape Juice Company took over the Wilson Grape Juice Company plant in 1979 and is currently the world’s largest processor of grape juice products.

7. Main Street looking north
   Artist Jody Borowiak
   Main Street changed many times since the early 1900s and at various times included hardware, dry goods, grocery, piano, furniture, and drug stores, banks, a Ford dealership, tobacco shops, jewelers, a news stand, barbershop, restaurants, florists, a newspaper, and numerous other establishments.

8. Grape Pickers
   Artist Jody Tucker
   Originally grapes were handpicked by local residents. Pay was by the basket for lug. The first grapes were planted in Lawton shortly after the Civil War and were sold and packed for the fresh market. With the turn of the century, grape juice and wine became the market of choice. Lawton was a pioneer in commercial grape production and processing in the state.

9. St. Paul’s and First Baptist
   Artist Donnie Smith
   St. Paul’s Methodist Church was built in 1863. The Lawton Baptist Church worshiped in a variety of buildings with its current structure being built in 1901 after losing its 1870 structure to fire.

10. Lawton Post Office
    Artist Vicki Zaworski
    The Lawton Post Office was established in 1851 by Col. Andrew Longstreet, Postmaster. The first rural carrier was Thomas Mayhard whose family later owned the town’s general store.

11. Lawton Village School circa 1907
    Artist Dan Smith
    The first village schoolhouse was built in 1870, and graduated its first class in 1873. It burned in 1912 and was rebuilt in 1915 and currently serves as one of four district buildings. The village schools were supported by numerous one room rural schools which were finally consolidated in the ’50s and ’60s.

12. Mark’s Field & Lawton Golf Course
    Artist George Graf
    Mark’s Field was a private 9-hole runway airfield with numerous individual plane hangers. It served as the host of numerous fly-ins and was the site of the county fair in the late ’50s. It was converted to a golf course in the early ’70s.
The committee determined that we had the resources, people, and will to create and complete the mural right here in our community.

Go-To People

This community is blessed with a wonderful location, beautiful vistas, and warm, generous people. As always in a project like this, there are a few who become the go-to people—those you can count on to provide help when asked. Tim Washburn and Bruce Marks helped with the selection of the historic photos, provision of the photos for the artists’ use, and the community planning event. They even went to Kalamazoo County to pick up the panels and provided a place for us to apply the gesso coat.

Sandee Willis was always available to help, from painting on gesso (thanks Vicki Downs for showing us how it is done!), attending all the meetings, enlisting artists in the cause, and helping to raise money by going from business to business with me. And then we found George Graff! A newbie to the area, George has done so much to make this project a success—he came up with the concept for the frames, constructed them, applied the finish coat to all the panels (in his garage), brought them back, then hung them. If you want a go-to guy for a project, ask George!

The murals were unveiled on Memorial Day 2011, during the annual community barbecue lunch.


Judith Peterson serves on the Lawton village council. You may reach her at JdthPet@aol.com.
The Michigan Association of Mayors (MAM) is the official nonpartisan organization of Michigan’s chief elected officials. Representing 109 Michigan communities, MAM works to assist the chief elected officials of cities and villages; advance the various interests and operations of communities represented by its members and all Michigan communities; promote cooperation among communities statewide; and advocate local interests at the state and federal level.

Mayor’s Role in MAM
MAM members speak with a unified voice on organizational policies and goals and contribute to the development of policy by attending the annual business meeting. MAM policies and programs are developed and guided by the board of directors. During the annual business meeting, MAM members recommend policy positions, and are given the opportunity to discuss and then vote on each policy resolution; each community represented casts one vote. The policy positions adopted at the annual meeting collectively represent the views of MAM and are distributed to the Michigan State Legislature and MAM membership. In addition to the ongoing work of the board of directors, mayors and village presidents are invited and encouraged to participate in advocacy activities at the capitol and other organized events.

Events
MAM hosts its business meeting each fall in conjunction with the Michigan Municipal League Annual Convention, as well as an annual summer workshop and capitol reception. Aside from the capitol reception in Lansing, events are hosted in a different Michigan community each year and additional meetings and events are organized by the MAM board of directors.

Professional Development
MAM offers the Advocate of the Year Award to recognize mayors and village presidents for excellence in their profession. The award is presented once a year to a peer-nominated individual, who, during the course of his/her career, made outstanding contributions to local government.

Policy Development
Through affiliation with the Michigan Municipal League, MAM advocates policy positions that reflect the interests of Michigan communities.

Awards & Recognition
MAM offers the Advocate of the Year Award to recognize mayors and village presidents for excellence in their profession. The award is presented once a year to a peer-nominated individual, who, during the course of his/her career, made outstanding contributions to local government.

MAM Listserv
This email-networking tool enables MAM members to communicate and collaborate with the entire association. Membership is limited to members of the MAM.

Mayors’ Exchange
MAM’s Exchange Day, created by MAM in celebration of Michigan Week (mid-May), is an opportunity for members to explore and celebrate other Michigan communities.

Capitol Reception
Each spring, MAM members gather at the capitol for a lunch reception with their state legislators to discuss issues vital to Michigan’s communities. The reception increases the visibility of participating members and assists them with building and maintaining key relationships.

Summer Workshop
Learn from experts in related fields, understand the latest local government research, and prepare for the future of the public service profession by participating in the MAM Summer Workshop. This inspiring two-day event has taken on a variety of issues in communities across the state. The 2012 workshop will be held in Traverse City on August 8-10.

2011, Port Huron—Placemaking: Creating a Catalyst for Change
Municipal leaders are leading the way in reinventing their communities to survive and thrive in the 21st century. At the 2011 summer workshop attendees got an inside look at successful 21c3 projects, and learned how to grow their own local entrepreneurs, develop green initiatives, and repurpose commercial industrial strips. Attendees also saw how civic engagement can help reach those goals faster and easier.
Are a city and its employees liable for the death of a person killed by guy wire strung across the sidewalk?

**FACTS:**

On May 24, 2006, at 11:00 pm, John Crnkovich died of head and neck trauma after striking a guy wire strung from a utility pole across a sidewalk and anchored on the opposite side of the sidewalk. The sidewalk was part of a sidewalk construction project in the city of Royal Oak. At the time of the accident, Crnkovich was riding a motorized scooter, without lights or a helmet, and had a blood alcohol level of 0.13. The personal representative of his estate sued DTE, the city, the city engineers involved in the design and oversight of the project, and the construction company installing the sidewalk.

The sidewalk improvement project began in 2005. Throughout construction, there were numerous discussions about the existence of DTE’s guy wire and the need for DTE to move it. Ultimately, the city instructed the construction company to asphalt that portion of the sidewalk until the guy wire could be removed. Barricades and flags were used to warn of the guy wire; but over the course of the year, they were repeatedly moved by people using the sidewalk.

With respect to the city and its employees, the issue of governmental immunity is applicable. One exception to governmental immunity is the highway exception which provides that a “governmental agency having jurisdiction over a highway shall maintain the highway in reasonable repair so that it is reasonably safe and convenient for public travel.” The statute includes a sidewalk within the definition of highway but specifically excludes a utility pole. The Michigan Supreme Court has ruled that in order to show that a governmental agency has failed to maintain a highway in reasonable repair requires a plaintiff to demonstrate that a “defect” exists in the highway. The city argued that the sidewalk itself was not defective.

Governmental immunity applies to a governmental employee if the employee was acting within the scope of employment, the agency was engaged in a governmental function, and the employee’s conduct did not amount to gross negligence that is the proximate cause of the injury.

**QUESTION 1:**

Is a guy wire strung across the sidewalk a “defect” exposing the city to liability and to a jury trial?

**Answer according to the trial court:**

Yes. The claim against the city was not barred by governmental immunity and the matter could be heard by a jury.

**Answer according to the Court of Appeals:**

Yes. Though utility poles are specifically excluded from the definition of highway, the anchor and guy wire in this case were actually part of the sidewalk. According to the court, the city had a duty to rectify the defect after it decided to pave the sidewalk, incorporating the anchor and guy wire into the sidewalk.

**Answer according to the Michigan Supreme Court:**

No. There was no defect in the sidewalk as contemplated by the language of the statute. As such, the city was governmentally immune.

**QUESTION 2:**

Did the actions of the city engineers rise to such a level that a jury could determine if they were grossly negligent and that their actions were the proximate cause of Crnkovich’s injuries?

**Answer according to the trial court:**

Yes. The claims against the employees were not barred by governmental immunity.

**Answer according to the Court of Appeals:**

Yes. The claims against the employees were not barred by governmental immunity and a jury could decide those issues.

**Answer according to the Michigan Supreme Court:**

No. The Court relied upon the dissenting opinion in the Court of Appeals’ decision. The dissent stated that even though a jury might conclude that the employees were grossly negligent, their conduct could not be construed as “the proximate cause of the injury or damage.”

LaMaeu v Estate of Crnkovich, No. 140559-60 (2011).

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Municipal Q&A

Michigan’s Fireworks Safety Act and its Impact on Municipalities

Q: What are the changes to the fireworks laws?
A: The Michigan Fireworks Safety Act became effective on January 1, 2012. The new statute makes the sale, use, and possession of “consumer fireworks” legal. Consumer fireworks are fireworks that are designed to produce visible and/or audible effects by combustion, such as firecrackers, Roman candles, and bottle rockets. The seller of consumer fireworks must annually obtain a consumer fireworks certificate issued by the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs and pay the required fee—$1,000 for each retail location that is a permanent building or $600 for each retail location that is not a permanent building. This consumer fireworks certificate must be obtained by April 1 each year in which consumer fireworks are to be sold. The statute also creates a Fireworks Safety Fee, to be collected on all retail sales and forwarded to fireworks safety fund, which will be used for firefighter training, grants to local units and other uses to carry out the Act. The statute also imposes criminal sanctions and civil fines for violating the Act. Additionally, the Act requires retail locations to have fire suppression systems, a valid federal taxpayer identification number, and insurance coverage of not less than $10,000,000 during periods of fireworks sales.

Q: What are the most significant impacts to my municipality under the new Act?
A: Municipalities may not enact or enforce an ordinance, code, or regulation pertaining to or in any manner regulating the sale, display, storage, transportation, or distribution of fireworks regulated under the Act. However, municipalities are permitted to enact ordinances regulating the ignition, discharge, and use of consumer fireworks. Additionally, municipalities are not permitted to regulate the use of consumer fireworks on the day preceding, the day of, or the day after a national holiday. While municipalities are not permitted to regulate the use of consumer fireworks on the day preceding, the day of, or the day after a national holiday, local noise ordinances may still be enforceable regardless of the day. An individual may not use consumer fireworks or low-impact fireworks (ground and hand held sparkling devices) while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance. A minor may not purchase consumer fireworks.

Q: Will the use of fireworks be permitted on private property without approval by the municipality?
A: This depends on the type of fireworks being used and when they are used. Display fireworks are large fireworks devices that are explosive materials intended for use in fireworks displays and designed to produce visible and audible effects by combustions, deflagration, or detonation. Their use requires an approval process by the local unit of government, which includes meeting insurance and operator competency standards. This part of the law has not changed. The use of consumer fireworks on private property is permitted so long as the use is not in violation with any other section of the Act and locally enacted ordinances. However, persons are prohibited from using consumer fireworks on public property, school property, church property, or the property of another person without that organization’s or person’s express permission. The Act does not specifically address whether a city or village could prohibit the use of consumer fireworks in a public park on a national holiday.

If your municipality has adopted a fireworks ordinance under the guidelines of this new Act, please email it to kcekola@mml.org and the League will post it on its website at mml.org.

Municipal Q & A guest contributors:
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West Branch is known as the city with a smile as depicted on the water tower alongside the northern Michigan stretches of I-75. The smiles extend well into the roots of this rural agricultural community, reaching back to its logging days over a century ago. Steeped in history and a colorful past, the area supports a considerable increase in summer population as visitors seek a variety of recreational activities in the area lakes, streams, hills, and forests. Other amenities like golfing at five area golf courses, an outlet center, and dining and shopping in the turn of the century Victorian Downtown, increase the list of activities for the entire family.

It is the sense of the past, when the farmers and townspeople came together on Friday evenings, that inspired Fabulous Fridays, themed events held each Friday evening throughout the summer. Now in its fifth year, the organizers of Fabulous Fridays are ramping up for another record breaking season. Hailed as a hallmark of the community, these events range in themes like Gone Country, Big Boys and Their Toys, singing competitions, and a tribute to local heroes with an event called Heroes in Uniform. Last season a Supermoto motorcycle race held on the downtown streets brought in racers from all over the country and more than three thousand spectators!

Organized by the West Branch Area Retail Merchants Association, with assistance from the city and many local organizations, Fabulous Fridays brings vibrancy to the downtown area since all the events are held on the streets and within the downtown businesses. Over the last four seasons and 54 events, more than 22,000 people have attended and participated in the multitude of activities.

Whether you are visiting or passing through West Branch, we are certain that the community will welcome you and our enthusiasm will impress you! Join us this summer where all Fridays are Fabulous!

For downtown events, see WestBranchEvents.com. For area events, visit wbacc.com and the city’s website at westbranch.com.

Want to see your community featured here? Go to mml.org to find out more about the Community Excellence Awards.