

the review

March/April 2013

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

DETROIT MATTERS

“OUR **GOAL** IS TO
SAVE THE WORLD,
STARTING WITH **DETROIT.**”

—JOHN GEORGE Motor City Blight Busters Founder



NEIGHBORS SAVE
A BELOVED PARK

DETROIT'S SOCIAL
ENTREPRENEURS

LIVING IN DETROIT
(AND LOVING IT)

the review

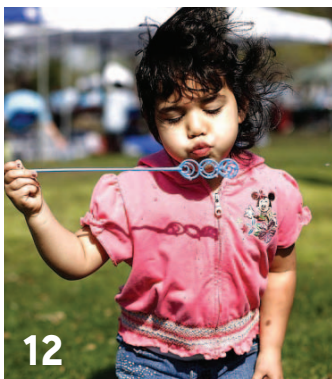
The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

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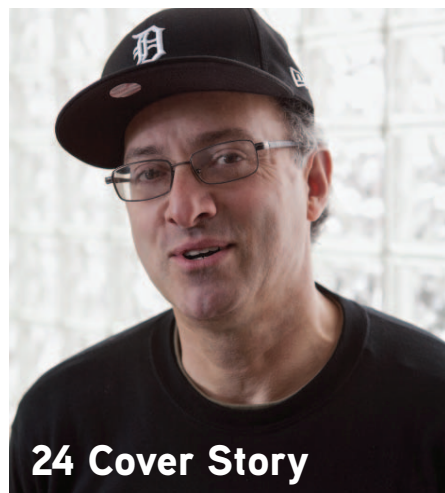
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On the Cover:

John George's organization, Motor City Blight Busters, boards up empty houses primarily in the Old Redford neighborhood of Detroit. What started as a neighborhood safety measure has turned into something much more transformational. See his inspiring story on pages 24-27. Cover photo by Nick Hagen of Nick Hagen Photography.

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Volume 86, Number 2

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 michigan municipal league

Michigan's Beating Heart

Imagine your body without your heart.

Sure, maybe some fancy life support machine could keep your arms, legs, and gut technically alive. But you certainly won't grow and thrive.

So why do so many of us seem to think Michigan can thrive without Detroit?

A generation ago, nobody had to ask why Detroit mattered. Thanks to the automobile and industrial manufacturing, Detroit was master of the universe and Woodward Avenue was the main artery leading straight to the beating heart of the entire American economy. And because Detroit mattered, *Michigan* mattered and thrived—all of us, from every small city at the Ohio border to the tiniest rural village in the western U.P. Detroit's wealth fed us all in countless ways, both directly and indirectly.

Today's global economy has made this a smaller, flatter world, and making stuff is no longer the main business of America. There's a new economy in town: one based on science, technology, engineering and mathematics—and anyone trying to hang on to the old ways has been left behind in the dust. In that brave new world, the old Detroit no longer mattered. New Detroit is still struggling to be born.

Can the nation and world get along without Detroit? Sure they can. But can Michigan?

In order to build a socioeconomic engine that's powerful enough to drive an entire state forward, *size matters*. A major metropolitan area has the square mileage, population density, economic base, cultural legacy, and centralized infrastructure to provide the critical mass needed to ignite and power an entire state's economy. Detroit is the beating heart that's big enough and strong enough to keep Michigan's lifeblood flowing.


A state's major metropolitan area is also its calling card to the rest of the world. It is the magnet that draws people and business, the face on our cultural coin. Our young people don't move en masse to *Illinois*. They move to *Chicago*. The same is true of Portland, Seattle, Austin, and every other iconic cultural mecca.

It doesn't stop there. Once that talent is in a city, the ripple effect moves out in ever-widening circles. They buy houses in the surrounding suburbs to raise their families. They vacation in the surrounding recreational lands. They send their kids to that state's schools and universities. They build businesses and spend money on local goods and services that grow the whole region's economy.

So the question is: how do we make that happen again in Detroit, and thus the entire state of Michigan?

Job creation isn't the problem. Studies show that we don't have enough talent to fill the high-skill jobs Michigan already has. Business Leaders for Michigan, a consortium of the state's largest employers, warns that Michigan's supply of college-educated workers could fall a million short of the number needed to meet existing employers' needs by 2025. And if the talented workforce they need isn't here, those employers won't stay either.

But it isn't enough to just promote higher education—we have to find ways to keep those college graduates once they are ready to launch their lives and careers. This is the priceless wealth we've allowed to trickle and drain away. These talented workers and entrepreneurs can go *anywhere* to make their mark—and study after study shows they are going to the hip, diverse, vibrant urban centers that offer the lifestyle and amenities they crave, and drawing others of their kind right along with them. *Place matters*. And Detroit can be that place.

All through this issue of *The Review* you'll see examples of the people and policies working to make that happen, with the data to back it up. But it won't be enough unless *you*, the vast body of Michigan, care. Help us make Detroit a place that matters, so that Michigan will matter, too. 



Daniel P. Gilmartin
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DETROIT

MATTERS

By Colleen Layton



After a decade of decline, Michigan's economy is finally showing glimmers of recovery. But the state's continued growth and strength depend heavily on the economic success of Detroit and its metropolitan area—home to nearly half of Michigan's populace. Whether we live in a rural community nestled in northern Michigan, a village tucked in the U.P., or a midsize city along the I-75 corridor, Detroit's future will have a significant impact on each and every one of us and the places we call home. Detroit matters to Michigan's economic viability and prosperity.

Metros and Economics

According to Lou Glazer, president and CEO of Michigan Future, Inc., extensive research shows that across the country, when big metropolitan areas suffer so does the rest of the state. Almost all highly prosperous states have big metros with even higher capital income. Glazer goes on to

say, "Economies are regional. States and municipalities are political jurisdictions, they are not economic units. State economies can best be understood as the sum of their regional economies." (*Michigan's Transition to a Knowledge-Based Economy: The Fifth Annual Report*, Michigan Future, Inc.) Multiple regional economies exist throughout Michigan, but metropolitan Detroit is the state's largest regional center of commerce and culture.

Michigan's economy has always been driven by its auto industry—and will continue to be, although in leaner and smarter ways. But the need for a more diversified economy is paramount to restoring Michigan to a healthy, growing economy. Glazer's research illustrates that big metropolitan areas are where knowledge-based industries and college-educated adults have concentrated. They create an environment for creativity and entrepreneurial activity.

A 2011 *USA Today* survey showed that in more than two-thirds of the nation's 51 largest cities, the number of young college graduates grew twice as fast within three miles of the urban center as in the rest of the metropolitan area—up an average 26 percent compared with 13 percent in other parts. In 2000, young adults with a four-year degree were about 61 percent more likely to live in close-in urban neighborhoods than their less-educated counterparts. Now, they are about 94 percent more likely. It is this clustering of talent that leads to innovation, which in turn leads to jobs and economic growth. Although it still has a long way to go, Detroit is seeing this trend as well. Despite a population shrinkage of 25 percent since 2000, the good news is that downtown added 2,000 young, educated residents during this time, up 59 percent (census data by Impresa Inc.).

Great Places = Talent = Jobs = Economic Growth

Transitioning from an industrial-based economy to a knowledge-based economy requires a more educated work force (talent). In a global economy where technology allows people to work anywhere, a CEOs for Cities survey shows that two-thirds of college graduates choose where they want


to live first, then they find a job. This is a transformative approach from a generation ago, when people followed the jobs.

Michigan, with its offering of world-class higher learning institutions, has always been able to attract students from around the globe. Yet, upon graduation, we experience an alarming brain drain, losing almost half of these students to places like Chicago, Denver, Seattle, and Minnea-

polis. Why? These young graduates are seeking places that provide high density living, vibrant and walkable downtowns, arts and entertainment, and transit options. They are not finding those things in Detroit. And research shows that we lose them for good. Anecdotally, we all know young families who have moved back to their hometowns, but that is more the exception than the norm. They tend to settle down and move to the suburbs of the city where they have been living. They now become invested in their new home state, raise families, start and grow jobs, vacation, purchase second homes, etc. We have to figure a way to keep them and attract young new talent. Glazer says, "Unless we get a lot smarter, we're going to get a lot poorer."

What We Can Do

There has been no shortage of articles, documentary films, commentaries, blogs, photos, and opinions on Detroit over the past few years. Two tales of a city are being told—one that still struggles mightily and one that is showing amazing signs of resilience and potential. Despite being the poster child for one of the worst economic declines in the last decade, there is hope and much to learn from Detroit. While honoring its rich past, it is a city on the move. Passionate leaders from business, the nonprofit and philanthropic worlds, entrepreneurs and individuals are coming together to create, innovate, (and sometimes fail), and are already making a difference.

Get engaged in this conversation and committed on some level to Detroit's success. It's important that we all stay up-to-date and informed of its progress, challenges, successes, failures, etc. Make a visit to Detroit and witness firsthand all that the city has to offer. Become part of the narrative and the solution. Michigan's economy, our livelihoods, and quality of life depend on it. 

Colleen Layton is director of policy development for the League. You may reach her at 734-669-6320 or clayton@mml.org.

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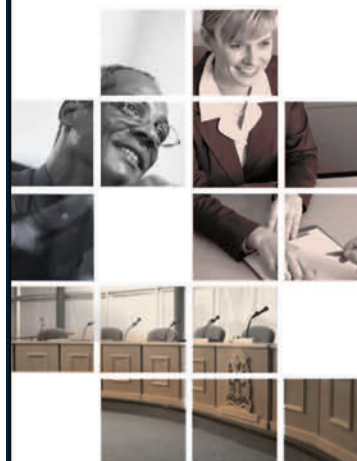
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Living in DETROIT

(and Loving It)



BY KIM CEKOLA

Shopkeepers who know you by name. Children outside playing. Block parties and potlucks. If this isn't your image of a Detroit neighborhood, it's time to reshape your thinking. Read what two Detroit homesteaders had to say about making the city their own.

JEANETTE PIERCE

**32, Director of Community Relations, D:Hive
Residence: The Village Green Apartments,
Downtown**

**Median rental price: \$850 for a
one-bedroom apartment**

Like many hip young urbanites, Jeanette Pierce came downtown in search of an exciting, active lifestyle and a place where she could make a difference among like-minded peers. She found it all—friends, entertainment, home, and job—within easy walking distance.

What do you like best about your neighborhood?

Walkability and vibrancy. My apartment is three blocks from my workplace. I can walk to 13,000 theater seats. Detroit actually has the second largest theater district in the country. I can walk to Tigers, Lions, and Red Wings games in five minutes. I can walk to Campus Martius Park (the fourth best public square in North America), the Riverwalk, and all sorts of festivals.



The social room at the Village Green apartments allows residents to entertain in a spacious, beautiful setting, while the deck offers a panoramic view of the city.

All of the things above are awesome, but my favorite part is that even though I have all of those big city amenities right outside my door, I also know my neighbors and the shopkeepers in my area and there is an amazing sense of community. To sum it up, Detroit is big enough to matter in the world but small enough where you can matter in it...and downtown is where those two ideas meet.

What is the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge is that your life can be affected by large events, whether it is parking problems, tailgaters, street closures, or massive amounts of people. Even if you're not participating in the event, it can still have an impact on your life.



THE KVORIAK FAMILY

**Joe Kvorik, 29, Assistant to the Head of Theatre Management, Wayne State University
Keara Kvorik, 29, Counter Manager, Christian Dior
Sean Michael Kvorik, 1 year 10 months
Residence: Grandmont Rosedale neighborhood
Median housing price: \$80,000**

Joe and Keara Kvorik wanted to raise their son Sean in a neighborhood that functioned as a community. A coworker suggested they check out the annual open house in the Grandmont Rosedale neighborhood.

"We instantly fell in love with the charm of the homes and everyone was incredibly welcoming," said Joe. "We looked at other neighborhoods, but every time we came through North Rosedale Park there was always a group of children running around. It looked exactly like what we were looking for."




“WE INSTANTLY FELL IN LOVE WITH THE CHARM OF THE HOMES...AND EVERY TIME WE CAME THROUGH NORTH ROSEDALE PARK THERE WAS A GROUP OF CHILDREN RUNNING AROUND. IT WAS EXACTLY WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR.”

—JOE KVORIAK

What do you like best about your neighborhood?

The people. They will bend over backwards to maintain their neighborhood because their pride and desire to live here is so strong. You never hear them complain about having to do the extra things. They excel at creating a sense of community. A neighborhood is made of physical houses, streets, and berms; a community is made up of its people. It is rare to walk down our street and not have at least one person come up to say hello. We have block parties. We have potlucks. We try to participate in each other's lives despite the crazy digital and busy world that we live in.

What is the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge of living in Grandmont Rosedale is that it is an incredibly guarded secret. I only knew about the neighborhood because I happened to work alongside the right person at the right time. Myself and other people my age regularly get together to discuss ways we can "recruit" other new families. Most people think that the apartments and lofts in Downtown and Midtown are the only viable options for living in the city. Then when it comes time to settle down and start their families they assume the suburbs are the next step. They aren't aware of the neighborhoods within city limits with beautiful houses that would provide the perfect home for a young family. I also feel a lot of entrepreneurs are missing an opportunity to work within a tight-knit community that would support many different types of local business. I think the Grand River Commercial Corridor could be a really big thing given the time and proper research. 

Kim Cekola is research specialist/editor for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6321 or kcekola@mml.org.





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How CLARK PARK

Became a Community-Run Asset

When the city of Detroit threatened to close Clark Park and its recreation center, a group of neighbors rallied to keep their park open. Over twenty years later, that group of dedicated volunteers has become the Clark Park Coalition, a group that has turned Clark Park into one of the most utilized public spaces in Detroit and the driver behind tens of millions of dollars of area investment. This is the story of how residents and city hall have partnered to create one of Michigan's best examples of grassroots placemaking.

Get the Keys and Keep the Doors Open

In the decade before the Clark Park Coalition, neighbors recognized that a safe and inviting Clark Park was essential to the viability of the neighborhood and formed a Clark Park Committee to improve the park and prevent its further decline. In the early years, the Clark Park Committee was comprised of a handful of committed volunteers. Their initial goals were modest, encouraging residents to use the park again through picnics and



student-led cleanups. When the group heard that the city would be closing the park's recreational center, they immediately approached park staff for keys to the facility. Knowing how hard it would be to reopen a shuttered facility, and what could happen to the structure if abandoned, the group scheduled volunteers to staff the facility and keep the recreation center open.

During those tenuous first weeks, the core group of volunteers rallied support from local business and community leaders. A neighborhood business owner convinced the city to continue to take responsibility for certain maintenance costs, while allowing the neighbors to keep the recreation center open. A local YMCA volunteered to act as fiduciary and coordinated its work-release residents to help with maintenance.

Recruit Volunteers

Clark Park's initial and continued success is tied directly to the team of volunteers that contributed to the organization's administration and programming. Volunteers were recruited based on their prior involvement with particular sports or through their sentimental attachment to the space. Not only were the number and quality of the volunteers critical, but also their length of service with the organization (in many cases since the beginning of the coalition over 20 years ago). Within a few months, the coalition realized it would not be able to operate with a solely volunteer staff and a director was hired, with a neighborhood nonprofit acting as a fiduciary. Additional staff was later added through nonprofit partnerships.

Funding & Organization

After nearly a decade in existence, the coalition realized that using other nonprofits as fiduciaries limited its fundraising and, therefore, its ability to grow. The board performed an audit of its finances and pursued independent nonprofit tax status. The Clark Park Coalition now operates as a 501c3, with a nine member board, made up primarily of neighbors. The board has finance, programming, fund development, and maintenance committees, as well as an ad hoc group for appointing new board members. The 501c3 status has also allowed the organization to obtain CDBG money, as well as corporate and foundation grants. This allowed the hiring of a chief operating officer and a contractual bookkeeper and grant writer. This additional staff has increased capacity, allowing staff to focus on programming and the board to focus on fund development.

Recognize Your Partners

Recognizing their organization's own limitations and the contributions of a partner like the city has been key to successfully operating the park and maintaining relations with the city. The coalition would not have been able to meet the community's programming needs without the city's maintenance assistance, mowing the park's grass, and funding the recreation center's utility costs and some coaching staff. However, the city's




most recent financial crisis has put new momentum into the discussion of formalizing the relationship between the coalition and the city. It is likely to result in a license agreement that will see the coalition grow its responsibilities to include paying utility costs for the park and facilities, while also assuming management duties for use of the facilities.

Twenty Years of Accomplishments

The unique partnership has enabled the coalition to seek out a variety of partners to invest in this city asset. The coalition has worked with Wayne County, MSHDA, White Stripes frontman Jack White, and others to leverage millions of capital improvements in the park, including installation of the only regulation-sized outdoor ice hockey rink in Metro Detroit, and eight new tennis courts. In a given year, the coalition provides over 1,000 children—in one of Detroit's most economically challenged neighborhoods—opportunities to participate in a diverse array of organized sports, including soccer, ice hockey, lacrosse, tennis, golf, baseball, softball, and volleyball. Through the coalition's soccer programs, over 400 kids participate in the most active youth soccer league in the city each year. The coalition provides afterschool tutoring and a wide array of

cultural programming for youth, including storytelling, arts and crafts, and introduction to filmmaking and photography. During summer months, free, daily lunches are provided for over 100 neighborhood youth.

Over the last two years, at a time when the district has been closing a significant number of buildings, the vibrancy of the park led the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) to invest over \$50 million in a revamped high school and a new middle school immediately adjacent to the park. The park serves as a sort of village square to the revitalizing Hubbard Farms and Mexicantown communities. One can find mothers and seniors exercising throughout the day, children using the playground, and sports teams from the local DPS practicing.

Clark Park is a true testament to the importance of quality public spaces to the viability of a community, and how in a time of declining resources, a group of passionate residents can be an asset for city hall. 

Photos courtesy of the Clark Park Coalition.

Sean Mann is a program coordinator for the League.

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Building a Sense of Community Around Garbage

By Luke Forrest

Recycle Here!



When Recycle Here!, Detroit's grassroots recycling program, started in 2005, its founders had very traditional waste reduction and environmental concerns in mind. "The city of Detroit was, at that time, the largest city in North America with no recycling program," recalls Matthew Naimi, director of operations. Naimi and a small but energetic group of



Matthew Naimi

Wayne State University students were interested in filling that void for the Midtown neighborhood. They started out small, with a dumpster in a bar's parking lot once a month. Naimi quickly realized there was more to it than he expected.

"I was bitten by the bug," he says, of the social interaction and sense of community that came with the program, even in its infancy. "I met more of my neighbors in the first three months of Recycle Here! than I had in eight years of living in the neighborhood," Naimi recounts.

**"Wisdom begins in wonder.
When things are weird, it
disarms people and puts
them on a level playing field."**

Naimi wasn't the only one taking notice. Thanks to Model D Media and other news outlets, the program quickly turned heads around the city. Soon the Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority contacted him, and in 2007, the Authority began funding the program as the city's official recycling center. "Many people thought recycling wouldn't work in Detroit," says Naimi, "but we were proving that wrong. We made it cool to recycle." The program has grown by over 50 percent each year since opening. In 2012, they had 65,000 visits, both at their main facility at 1331 Holden Street and at mobile and neighborhood drop-off stations around the city. Their sister program, Green Living Science, has educated over 50,000 school children and the for-profit arm of the operation, GreenSafe, is now providing cups for the Detroit Lions and had over two million dollars in sales in 2012.

The Holden Street location has become more than a busy recycling center hosting thousands of people each week. It is also now a community gathering place. “We’re building a sense of community around garbage,” Naimi says. He credits much of this to the influence of the art community that was first attracted to the location by affordable studio space. Keith Haring-inspired artist Carl Oxley III, who had a nearby studio, created a cheerful bee mural that became the official logo of Recycle Here! “After that,” Naimi says, “a lightbulb went off in peoples’ heads” and artists converged on the building. Soon after, music was added to the mix, and the Saturday drop-off center became something of a party. “People loved showing up and hearing weird, off-the-wall stuff, like Thai funk or Black Sabbath,” explains Naimi.

“I met more of my neighbors in the first three months of Recycle Here! than I had in eight years of living in the neighborhood.”

In 2011, the property became home to the Lincoln Street Art Park, an outdoor gallery of art created primarily from spray paint and found objects. The park was previously an unkempt, underutilized area, but since the gallery was created it has become a gathering point for the neighborhood. In contrast to what came before, Naimi says, “there has been no illegal dumping or vandalism on the property, and the foot and vehicle traffic on the block has increased.”

In Naimi’s eyes, what has happened at Recycle Here! can happen on some scale in every city, village, township, and county across the state that has a recycling drop-off center. Community leaders often don’t appreciate the potential of community gathering places they already have in operation. He says every community already has the key demographics in place: “I haven’t been to a single community in the world that doesn’t have kids or artists.” In no particular order, here are some of Naimi’s other words of wisdom, drawn from his experiences in Detroit, for local government leaders everywhere:

“Give every citizen the opportunity to do the right thing.” In this case, there was a pent-up unmet demand for an alternative to the landfill or the incinerator for waste disposal.

“Get people excited and get their attention.” Recycle Here! accomplishes this through its now ever-present bee logo and mascot, as well as other eye- and ear-catching art.

“If you dress up the facility, people will take care of it.” Just because it’s a place where waste goes, it doesn’t have to look like it.






Formerly an unkempt, underutilized area, the yard outside the Recycle Here! Building has turned into a mosaic of art installations. The Lincoln Street Art Park is now an outdoor gallery of art created primarily from spray paint and found objects.

“Start with the kids...it’s like putting an agent of change in every house.” Recycle Here! has witnessed a tangible uptick in recycling rates in neighborhoods where their Green Living Science program has educated school children. Children can be more effective at changing behavior than any refrigerator magnet or brochure.

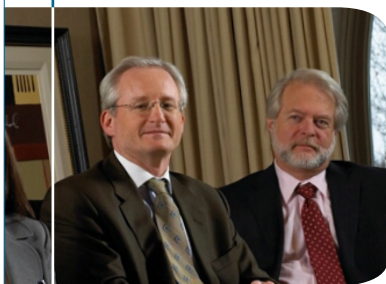
“Focus on behavior change in small increments. Track progress.” Naimi can reel off an impressive list of statistics that represent the program’s growth from its launch in 2005, and that can also be broken down by geographic area of the city.

“Shorten hours of operation, create a concentration of people.” This point may go against the conventional wisdom that an accessible program should be open as many hours as possible, but Naimi feels Recycle Here! could never have generated such success without the limited access it provides, creating the social atmosphere.

“Embrace the traditions of your community.” The program’s Saturday success story builds on the Detroit tradition of family visits to Eastern Market on that day of the week. 

Luke Forrest is a program coordinator for the League. you may reach him at 734-669-6323 or lforrest@mml.org.

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DETROIT'S SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

By Rene Rosencrantz Wheaton

I t's not hard to see the challenges facing Detroit. The city has many problems, but you also don't have to look very long to find positive things happening in the city.

Made up largely of grassroots volunteers, nonprofits, businesses and other organizations, efforts to revitalize Detroit are happening in neighborhoods all over the city.

The methods can be as varied as ideas being shared over a bowl of soup to a \$50,000 contest designed to bring exciting new retail businesses to the city.

Sometimes it has meant taking a perceived negative and turning it into a positive, like taking an abandoned building and turning it into a place to fuel burgeoning businesses and socially minded individuals.

Here's a sampling of some of the organizations working to breathe new life into Detroit.

PONYRIDE

WWW.PONYRIDE.ORG

When the foreclosure crisis hit Detroit, Ponyride, a business and creative incubator for the socially conscious, looked at the problem and attempted to turn it into a positive. "The idea was to take a vacant space in Detroit and do something really dynamic with it," said Kate Bordine, Ponyride's executive director. Because of the foreclosure crisis, Ponyride didn't have to spend a lot on its building and so it is able to pass on the savings to its tenants.

"There is a low barrier of entry for people that have an itch to try something," Bordine said.

Ponyride is host to a variety of socially minded entrepreneurs and artists, including dance studios, a clothing manufacturer and a coffee company. One tenant, the Empowerment Plan, is a nonprofit organization that was once the recipient of a Detroit SOUP grant. The nonprofit organization provides homeless women with jobs. The women help other homeless Detroiters by constructing coats that transform into sleeping bags to help those still living on the streets.

"It's a very open space and that has led to a very collaborative energy," Bordine said. "We've been growing fast and we have a waiting list. We hope to change people's perceptions of Detroit, and when people come and visit us, they leave excited."



Photo by Order & Other



THE GREEN GARAGE

WWW.GREENGARAGEDETROIT.COM

Take an old building; breathe new life into it by transforming it into an example of sustainability that helps show that historic architecture, like Detroit itself, is worth saving.

Tom and Peggy Brennan bought the building that has become the Green Garage, back in December of 2007, after becoming very interested in environmental sustainability. "We were already working at changing our own lifestyle and we were looking for a place that could be a green demonstration center, showcasing the things we'd learned," said Peggy Brennan.

They found the home for their idea in an old Model T showroom that dates back to the 1920s. Besides making the building environmentally conscious, the Brennans wanted to aid job growth. The green-focused business incubator is now home to a range of businesses including a workshop that creates furniture out of sustainable material and a café that provides fresh food to convenience stores and gas stations.

"It's beyond our expectations," Brennan said. "We started with one business in the building and now we have 36 businesses."



"WE HOPE TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF DETROIT AND WHEN PEOPLE COME AND VISIT US, THEY LEAVE EXCITED."

—KATE BORDINE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PONYRIDE

DETROIT SOUP

WWW.DETROITSOUP.COM

Eating, sharing ideas, and spurring on change—all key ingredients that have helped make Detroit SOUP a success.

Established three years ago, Detroit SOUP is a gathering of people who pay for a meal of soup and bread, then they listen to four presentations on art or community projects seeking funding. Guests then vote on their favorite project, and it is awarded the proceeds from the night.

Amy Kaherl, the director of Detroit SOUP, thinks the idea has taken off because it taps into a very basic human desire to commune together over food. “I think sharing a meal, especially a meal of soup, crosses boundaries of ethnicities and faiths,” Kaherl said.

What started as a small gathering of about 40 people has grown to encompass more than 200 participants at most gatherings, and has provided funding for more than 30 projects.

“The projects have really run the gamut,” Kaherl said. “A lot of times the money from SOUP has been an important step for them, giving them their startup funding.”

The idea for Detroit SOUP came from a similar group in Chicago called InCUBATE, and Kaherl said the idea has continued to spread to other communities.

“It is definitely an idea that can be started in other cities,” she said. “It is a lot of work, but it’s a simple idea.”

**DETROIT
SOUP**



Photo by Charlie Kelly




HATCH DETROIT

WWW.HATCHDETROIT.COM

Bringing retail to the city is the goal of Hatch Detroit, which hosts a yearly contest that awards a perspective retail entrepreneur with a \$50,000 grand prize. After the initial submissions are whittled down to 35 by an advisory board, the public votes on what entrepreneur they’d like to see receive the money. In 2011, the recipient was the men’s store Hugh, and last year’s winner was La FERIA, a Spanish tapas restaurant. More than 40,000 votes were cast in the final round of last year’s contest.

While Hatch Detroit will continue with the contest, they are adding another branch to their work.

“We have a project geared to support existing business,” said Hatch Detroit Executive Director Vittoria Katanski. “We’ll be working in six different neighborhoods and doing enhancements like new lighting and facelifts for existing businesses. Our goal is to show how small improvements can make a difference in a retail establishment.”

Hatch Detroit is partnering with the Detroit Lions in the Living for the City Initiative that will focus on the neighborhoods of University Commons, Southwest Detroit, the Villages, Jefferson East, Grandmont/Rosedale and the North End. The neighborhoods were selected because Hatch Detroit considers them vital to the revitalization of Detroit. 



*Rene Rosencrantz Wheaton is a freelance writer.
You may contact her at 810-444-3827.*

DETROIT



BELLE ISLE

the nation's largest island park within a city, was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, landscape architect of New York's Central Park.

DETROIT IS HOME OF
THE NATION'S FIRST
URBAN FREEWAY, THE
DAVISON, COMPLETED IN

1942

Detroit is known for one of the richest collections of late 19th-century, ethnic-based churches in the country.



The Detroit
Jazz Festival is
the largest free
jazz festival in
the world.

The attraction of greater downtown to young, well-educated professionals is real. A 2010 study found that of the nearly 18,000 residents in greater downtown who were aged 25-34, 51.9 percent had bachelor's degrees or higher. Of the 12,500 18-24-year-olds living in the area, 22.9 percent had bachelor's degrees or higher. Those percentages are more than double the state average.



factoids

Clean Downtown, a Downtown Detroit Partnership program, provides litter and graffiti control, the continuous cleaning and sweeping of **39 MILES OF SIDEWALK**, landscape maintenance of parks and green space covering the equivalent of **15 FOOTBALL FIELDS**, and supports events, which attract millions of people to downtown. It picks up **2.5 TONS OF TRASH DAILY**.

Detroit's
Cultural Center
is home to the
Detroit Institute
of Arts, and its
collection is
among the
top six in the
United States.



Detroit is among the largest theater districts in the country with over 13,000 theater seats. Major Broadway productions, top headliner entertainers, opera, dance, symphony, and other performing arts light up marquees.

Detroit Tigers
roared to become
the American
League Baseball
champs again
in 2011.



Companies are moving employees downtown in record numbers and are encouraging them to live in Detroit. The Detroit Medical Center, Henry Ford Health System, and Wayne State University created a “Live Midtown” program for their employees. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, Compuware Corporation, DTE Energy, Quicken Loans Inc., and Strategic Staffing Solutions launched a five-year “Live Downtown” program. Both programs provide cash incentives to employees who choose to move downtown.



Detroit’s Corktown, Greektown and Mexicantown districts offer up a menu of authentic foods and spirits. That’s just part of downtown Detroit’s more than 100 restaurants, bars, and clubs.



CAMPUS MARTIUS PARK was voted “Best Outdoor Hangout Place” in the D by Detroit Metromix. It was also one of Top 10 Great Public Spaces for 2010 by the American Planning Association. APA singled out the renovated Campus Martius Park for its role in helping attract nearly \$750 million in new investment to Detroit, as well as for the first-class public space.

Detroit is leading all other areas in growth in demand for technology professionals from a year ago. Dice Senior VP Tom Silver says: “Detroit tops the list with more than 800 available tech positions on any given day—that’s double the number posted last year.” Strategic Staffing Solutions has added 100 IT contract employees and GalaxE Solutions moved its headquarters from New Jersey to downtown Detroit in 2010.



The world’s first auto traffic tunnel between two nations—the Detroit/Windsor Tunnel, opened in 1928 beneath the Detroit River.



Detroit was the first city in the nation to assign individual telephone numbers in 1879.

THE WORLD’S FIRST CONCRETE ROAD WAS BUILT IN DETROIT IN

1901



Detroit shares an international waterway with Windsor, Ontario, Canada. And Canada is south of Detroit.



BLIGHT BU



What started off as one man's mission to take back his neighborhood has grown into a crusade. Fed up with one too many nights filled with gunfire in his Old Redford neighborhood, John George found himself faced with a decision.

"I had a young son and a daughter on the way and my first thought was to pack up and move," George said. "It felt like a form of child abuse to let my children grow up around that."



STERS

SENDING OUT A DETROIT RIPPLE

By Rene Rosencrantz Wheaton

Instead of reaching for moving boxes, George decided to reach for a hammer, nails, and some plywood, to board up an abandoned home that was attracting drug dealers and the like to his neighborhood.

"When the drug dealers came back and couldn't get in, they left," he said.

Shortly after that John George founded Motor City Blight Busters and it has grown into quite a phenomenon in the 22 years since. Motor City Blight Busters, along with its community partners, lay claim to more than 100,000 volunteers who have logged enough hours to paint 684 homes, secure 379 abandoned buildings, rehab 176 houses, and build 114 new homes.

And while rehabbing and blight abatement has remained an important tenet of the organization, their efforts have been broadened, but the goal has stayed the same—to revitalize Detroit.

Angel's Night

Blight Busters volunteers have been very active in Angel's Night patrols, helping to turn the tide of arson and mayhem that was associated with what was formerly known as "Devil's Night."

"Words are powerful things and the children are listening, and that's why we call it Angel's Night," George said. "It's about patrolling, protecting, and celebrating all the positive things that are going on in the city."

Blight Busters has been behind a lot of positive efforts in the Motor City, including the renovation of the Masonic Temple into a resource and community center. Now known as the Redford Resource Center, the facility has given the organization the chance to help students learn skills in the building trades and culinary arts.

George said Blight Busters also helps bridge gaps between groups. Each year the organization hosts suburban teens to the city to volunteer on projects in the inner city.

"Our goal is to save the world, starting with Detroit," George said. "These projects help give people a sense of ownership, opportunity, and hope."





In December, MTV came in to chronicle Blight Busters as the crew and a contingent of adult and high school volunteers boarded and cleaned up two abandoned houses across from a high school. John George gathered the volunteers, gave an inspiring speech identifying the effort as “sending out a Detroit ripple of love,” and had the group lining up for tools and cleaning within 10 minutes.

The Artist Village

The area around the Redford Community Center, known as the Artist Village, has also begun to bridge gaps. It draws people from all walks of life. “There is jazz and poetry drawing a young urban crowd, and the Redford Theater continues to draw an older, suburban crowd,” he said. “The Java House, the coffee house in the Village, is where the work meets. It’s really quite a phenomenon. Sometimes I pinch myself when I see how things are working out.”

Once destined to become lost to drugs and crime, George said the Old Redford Neighborhood is really coming into its own with a weekly chess club, garden program, and growing art community.

Motor City Blight Busters is always

looking for collaborators and is currently partnering with Fertile Ground Collective and Replanting Roots in launching Farm City Detroit, an urban farm and community resource that will span two city blocks.

“I may have started Blight Busters, but there is a deep bench of talent that has contributed to the success that is happening here,” he said.



Neighborhood Economic Growth

New businesses are moving into the area like a new Meijer store, along with dozens of smaller businesses like Sweet Potato Sensations, a bakery that specializes in baked goods and even ice cream that has sweet potato as a base.

Among the many businesses is Ray-Ann’s Wardrobe, a women’s clothing boutique owned, in part by Ann-Marie George, John George’s daughter.

“It’s interesting because I started this because of my children and now they are grown and very much involved. My son, John Williams George, who was two when this all started, is now a senior Blight Busters crew leader, leading demolitions and cleanup work,” George said.



Facing his 55th birthday in June, George said his role in Motor City Blight Busters will likely slow a little and it is a powerful thing to see his family and numerous volunteers ensuring his work will continue.

"It has definitely been a life changing experience," George said. "I always knew I was supposed to do something different and unique with my life. I just want to save this city. I invite everyone to give and allow everyone to get. The more you give the more you get."

Volunteerism Is Contagious


The work and attitude of Blight Busters is contagious and it continues to grow. "Twelve years ago, we had six students from the University of Michigan come to volunteer here. The next year it was 30, the next 50, and that led to a yearly project that brings 1,500 volunteers to Detroit to work on sites simultaneously throughout the city," George said.



"We like to invite people down to take a look and usually they are very touched about the spirit of cooperation they find here."

While George admits there are still many challenges facing the city he has called home for almost 55 years, he is hopeful about the road ahead.

"People like to pile on to Detroit, but we're not as bad as people think," he said. "We like to invite people down to take a look and usually they are very touched about the spirit of cooperation they find here."

People are touched and often come back as volunteers. "We have volunteers from inside the city and from outside the city," he said. "We welcome all people of good will, because people of good will can always find common ground. It's our responsibility to create those bridges." 

Rene Rosencrantz Wheaton is a freelance writer. You may contact her at 810-444-3827.

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CAPITAL CONFERENCE

April 9-10, 2013 • Lansing, Michigan

Are more changes ahead for the Economic Vitality Incentive Program? How will your business community be affected by pending legislation on liquor licensing? What exactly *is* an Innovation District, and how could it work as a redevelopment model in your community?

Capital Conference is the source for answers on all the state and federal issues that impact local communities, and the best place to network and make your voice heard on matters of public policy. Don't lose *your* place in Lansing. We're saving you a seat at the League's 2013 Capital Conference.

Legislative Reception

Wednesday, April 10, 4:30-6:30 pm

This reception is an exceptional opportunity to network with senators, representatives, key legislative staff members, and other top state officials and hear their perspectives on state issues in a relaxed setting. Sponsored by the Michigan Association of Mayors.

Register at cc.mml.org

ENT TOOLS 101
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DISTRICT
LIQUOR
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CAUSE & EFFECT
DEVELOP
COMMUNITY
CAPITOL
GROWTH

Conference Sessions Include

EVIP and Beyond

The Economic Vitality Incentive Program is in its second year. Learn how EVIP's second year is faring, as well as any changes anticipated as the Legislature discusses the 2014 budget.

Breaking the Code: A Key to Understanding New Liquor Control Rules

The recent interpretative changes made by the Michigan Liquor Control Commission have caused a flurry of activity among local municipalities. This is your opportunity to hear about all the new interpretations of the code affecting municipalities and to ask questions related to those changes.

The Michigan Vacant Property Campaign — What It Means for Your Community

Several state and national organizations have come together to create the Michigan Vacant Property Campaign to help communities use ordinances, code enforcement and other creative local strategies to address the recent increase of vacant properties. Participants will learn about the program, how they can be involved, and what assistance is available.

Economic Development Tools 101

Having a vibrant, unique community where people want to live and work is something every local leader is striving to achieve. Come hear about some of the economic development tools that can aid in achieving this goal.

The Lobbyist 2.0

The Legislature is constantly changing and taking on new issues. How can you keep up with it all? Join members of the League's lobbying staff as we discuss the ins and outs of understanding the Michigan Legislature.

Getting Tough on Transportation

Transportation continues to be at the top of the League's priority list. Join a discussion about options for transportation funding, multi-modal transportation, and the importance of transportation in placemaking.



AGENDA AT-A-GLANCE

Tuesday, April 9, 2013

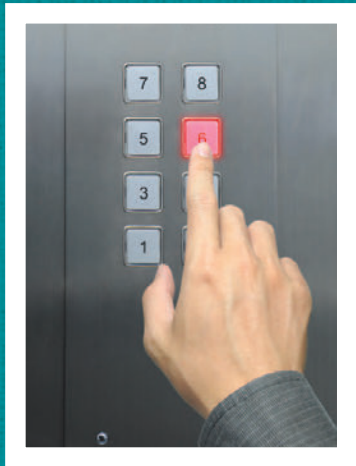
| | |
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| 9:00 am-12:00 pm | Pre-Conference Workshops |
| 9:00 am-4:30 pm | MAMA Municipal Law Program |
| 10:00 am-1:00 pm | Board of Trustees Meeting & Lunch |
| 12:00-6:00 pm | Registration Open |
| 1:15-2:15 pm | Governance Committee Meeting |
| 2:30-3:30 pm | Capital Conference Welcome |
| 3:45-5:15 pm | Regional Roundtables |
| 5:30-6:30 pm | EOA Board Meeting |
| 5:30-7:30 pm | MML Liability & Property Pool Capital Conference Kick-Off Party |

Wednesday, April 10, 2013

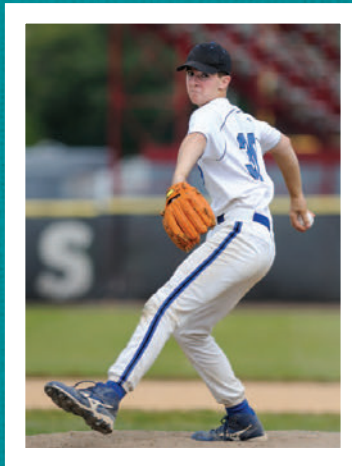
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|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 7:30 am-4:00 pm | Registration Open |
| 7:30 am-3:15 pm | Annual Expo: Connect, Get Inspired! |
| 7:30-8:30 am | Continental Breakfast in Exhibit Hall |
| | MWIMG Eggs & Issues Breakfast |
| 8:30-9:45 am | General Session |
| 9:45-10:15 am | Networking Break |
| 10:15-11:30 am | Concurrent Sessions |
| 11:30 am-1:00 pm | Awards Luncheon |
| 1:00-1:30 pm | Networking Break in the Expo Hall |
| | MBC-LEO Annual Meeting |
| 1:30-2:45 pm | Concurrent Sessions |
| 2:45-3:15 pm | Networking Break in Expo Hall |
| 3:15-4:30 pm | General Session |
| 4:30-6:30 pm | Legislative Reception |

Register at cc.mml.org

2013 Community Excellence Awards



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Elevator

Pitch

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Enter the 2013 CEAs by attending your Regional Roundtable at the Capital Conference on April 9 in Lansing. Be prepared to give a five-minute "elevator pitch" style

presentation to your peers in your region. Voting takes place on-site—the Regional winner will be announced on the 9th. The seven Regional winners will compete for the Cup at the Annual Convention in September in Detroit.

CEA VITALS

- Regional Roundtable
- April 9
- Lansing
- 5 minute elevator pitch

League Annual Convention
September 18-20, 2013, Detroit
7 Winners Vie for the Cup

Go to mml.org to enter

CULTIVATING Change in City Government

By Helen Broughton

Fiscal emergency. Corruption. Murder rate. With the turn of the calendar year, more daunting, damaging press about Detroit was revealed to Michiganders. From a distance, that may be all that one can see.

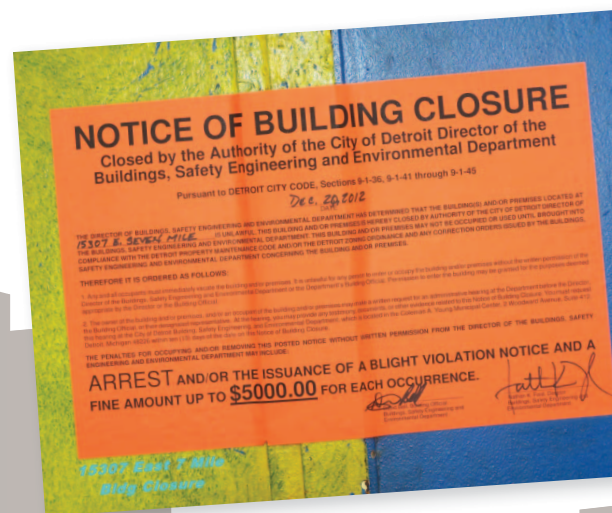
At the turn of the 20th century, four-time well-loved mayor of Detroit, Hazen Pingree, battled municipal corruption and abysmal roads while spearheading a potato patch urban gardening program to combat a citizen food crisis. It is a century and a decade later, yet that could read as today's headline.

Obviously, since Pingree's day, the city has quadrupled in size and slowly receded to its current state. While some flee the city, stubbornly sticking on has become a fashionable point of pride for others. The administration, funded by foundations, has crafted an ambitious but attainable framework for the future city. And, thankfully, there are plenty of individuals, organizations and associations who have self-nominated to counter negative perceptions of the city and to solidify the fabric of this historic town.

Detroit is learning to be a city of baby steps to overcome its own chronic hampering and hobbling. The word I find most applicable is recovery—recovery of the twelve-step, start from ground zero, powerless over the past, one day at a time variety. Recovery that requires courage, humility, and cumulative small actions, and promises a much better future.

In November 2012, I was hired for a grant-funded position in Detroit's Buildings, Safety Engineering & Environmental Department (BSEED). Through the Woodward Corridor Initiative (funded by the Living Cities Integration Initiative), I joined Brian Ellison as a business advocate working on systems change, streamlining, and communications to support business and real estate investment.

Faced with mounting fiscal challenges and complex problems, what can one city department do to dig in and move forward, and to do so in concert with its community? Although they may not yet be visible to the broader public, I can see the signs of spring following this winter of financial and ethical crisis. Like a seed sprouting under the soil, cultivators of change in the city administration are facilitating movement at a core level.





Detroit is digging in, one department at a time, to move the city forward. "Our objective is to bring every business...into full compliance with the law," states Mayor Dave Bing.

DIET FOR A DEPARTMENT

The BSEED safeguards public health, safety, and welfare by enforcing construction, property maintenance, environmental compliance, and zoning codes. Since 2010, under multiple directors, the department has been making systemic changes.

By challenging obsolete processes, streamlining regulations, focusing staff resources and implementing strategies that support transparent government, the department is working to create a new normal and construct an untarnished foundation on which to build consumer trust and positive attitudes.

Along with increasing revenues, identification of cost savings opportunities is critical in light of the current economic state of the city. For example, BSEED Director Nathan K. Ford signed a memorandum of understanding with the State of Michigan Archives that allows the state to store city construction plans and records in Lansing. With the burden of storage rental costs alleviated, \$20,000 per year for 18,700 square feet of storage is crossed off of the city's expense column.

Purging records and freeing up office space will allow the recently merged Department of Environmental Affairs and the Business License Center to be

relocated on the fourth floor of the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, home to BSEED, for an additional rent reduction estimated at \$130,000 per year.

STREAMLINING THE STATUS QUO

In an organization with average employee tenure of 20-plus years, it is not surprising to have an uphill battle with "the way we have always done it." To begin scrutiny of staff processes, Director Ford asked his 11 division chiefs to document standard operating procedures (SOP).

Those SOPs are now under review by Deputy Director Raymond Scott to identify obsolete requirements and devise potential efficiencies. While preserving institutional knowledge, the documentation also lays groundwork for succession planning. "When it is time for me to go," asserts Scott, "I want the department to be on cruise control."

Even simple changes, such as inspectors starting a work day in the field at their first stop, have reduced costs for parking and made time for an additional one to three inspections per day for each inspector. Armed with current technologies—cell phones with GPS and laptops for mobile data input—navigation is easier and errors are reduced.

THE BATTLE FOR GOOD BUSINESS

The challenges of enforcing city code are shared by many city departments. In order to get a grip on chronic violators, Director Ford convened a Code Enforcement Taskforce. Including representatives from the city, county and state, the taskforce meets every two weeks to review problem commercial properties and to schedule actions.


Detroit is learning to be a city of baby steps to overcome its own chronic hampering and hobbling.

"Our objective is to bring every business in Detroit into full compliance with the law," Detroit Mayor Dave Bing said. "Proper permitting and ordinance compliance is essential to operating a business in our city." Enforcement of city standards for business operations will ensure the safety of buildings in Detroit, as well as the welfare of owners, employees, and customers.



Supervising Building Inspector Glen Davis is part of a renewed effort to enforce city codes and make the city safer for business owners, employees, and customers.

If the owner or any other individual breaches the sealed entrance of the businesses, they are subject to a \$500 per day fine and/or imprisonment.

"We are sending a message that if you are in the city, you need to follow the law," says Ford. "We want the world to know the city of Detroit is doing business differently and that we are implementing programs to improve the business climate and quality of life in Detroit." 

Helen Broughton is a business advocate II in the buildings, safety engineering & environmental department for the city of Detroit. You may reach her at 313-628-2459 or broughtonh@detroitmi.gov.

To further that objective, BSEED and the Detroit police and fire departments are padlocking the entryways of illegal businesses in Detroit. Fifteen hundred businesses that are operating contrary to the established legal use of their property will be closed by "Operation Compliance."



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TURNING OLD TIRES INTO DOORMATS

While Turning Lives Around



By William Mathewson

Last summer I did volunteer work with Cass Community Social Services (CCSS) and saw first-hand the positive difference CCSS is making in the lives of a great many people. CCSS is a Detroit organization with an impressive track record in fighting poverty and creating opportunity. Growing from the Cass Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, established in the 1880s, the congregation brought crops in from rural farms during the Great Depression to provide food for those in need. This community service never stopped, and currently over 1 million meals a year are served.

During the late 1960s, when developmentally disabled adults were being deinstitutionalized from state hospitals, Cass began providing evening socialization and later daytime activities to teach basic life skills. Now 100 developmentally disabled adults participate each weekday in these activities. More recently, CCSS expanded its client base to include the homeless and disadvantaged populations. In 2002, CCSS was established as a separate 501(c) (3) organization, and in just one decade its footprint has become substantial, centered on Woodrow Wilson Street near the Boston Edison area on Detroit's near northwest side. Starting with a Crittenton Hospital building (the Scott Building), which CCSS converted to house two residential programs and its administrative offices, CCSS now has five other buildings for transitional and permanent housing. Most recently, CCSS broke ground in October for the rehabilitation of the Antisdel Apartments. It is the organization's largest undertaking to date, and when finished will contain 41 one-bedroom apartments in a LEED-certified building.




Green Industries

In the midst of providing food, housing, and health care services, CCSS is also focused on providing employment opportunities for many of its clients. These employment programs provide meaningful work experience, some remuneration, and most importantly self-esteem for developmentally disabled individuals and others. They also generate some revenue for CCSS to fund additional services. Beginning in 2007, a warehouse across from the Scott Building has been used for a CCSS program called "Green Industries." Green industries refers to 1) CCSS's process of taking illegally dumped tires and converting them to mud mats which are then sold throughout the region, and 2) its Secure Document Destruction service where paper and cardboard are shredded and recycled. There are even several donated stationary bikes that clients use to put electricity on the grid which helps offset the electric costs of the operations.



Document Destruction Service

Near the end of my time at CCSS, representatives of GP Harmon Recycling met with CCSS Executive Director Rev. Faith Fowler and Ed Hingelberg, manager of warehouse operations (and Plymouth city commissioner), to discuss the purchase of the bales of shredded paper. The meeting and inspection of the bales was successful! CCSS is now producing bales totaling 20 tons that GP Harmon purchases and transports to Wisconsin—the funds from which will be used for expanding the Green industries program and other CCSS services.

Now that CCSS has an established customer, it is able to expand its Secure Document Destruction Services. Municipalities, law firms, and businesses might wish to explore this cost effective—and socially responsible—alternative. Extensive security measures have been established, including camera surveillance, alarms, and small shred size. Additionally, a unique attribute of the CCSS service is that while the adults with developmental disabilities are offered an employment opportunity that is rare for their skill level, the very fact that they cannot read actually is part of the security measures. To become involved in CCSS activities or for more information about Secure Document Destruction, please contact Reverend Faith Fowler at 313-883-2277 x201 or ffowler@casscommunity.org and visit the website at www.casscommunity.org. 

William Mathewson is general counsel for the League. You may contact him at 734-662-3246 or bmathewson@mml.org.

You've Won! —Now What?



By Elizabeth Shaw



Can I respond if a citizen asks a question during the public comment portion of the council meeting?

Seems simple enough, right? But when you don't have the answers firmly in hand, questions like these can turn public service into a minefield of best intentions gone bad.

These questions sparked lively dialogue among attendees at the League's Newly Elected Officials Training, held in December at the League Capital Office.

"I've found over the years that the best learning for municipal officials happens in a collegiate atmosphere of sharing and discussion," said League

General Counsel Bill Mathewson, who headed up the session. "Step one, from our point of view, is just being here."

First-time Nashville Councilmember Marcia Scramlin said the class was "an eye-opening experience. Until now, the only time I'd ever been involved with local government was when I had to go to city hall for an issue with a parking permit." Scramlin was appointed to an open seat last June and elected to her first term in November. "I wasn't even aware of things like the Open Meetings Act. But if you don't know about it and don't follow the rules, there are consequences. You could even be sued."

Scramlin said it was crucial that Nashville sent all five of its newly

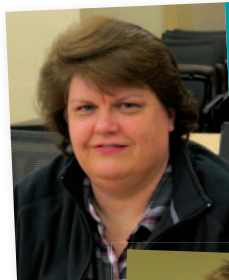
Newly elected Parma Councilmember Mickey Carothers had two very good reasons to run for office in November: twin girls due in January.

"I ran to try to help shape the future for me and my family," said Carothers. "I think being only 33 years old, I have a lot to offer Parma. I will try to bridge the gap between the younger and older generations. I will express my desire to make Parma a growing and thriving community."

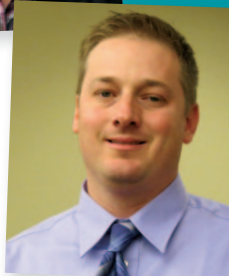
Every newly elected official has been where Mickey Carothers is right now. You're finally in the driver's seat, eager to start your first term in office and ready to move forward with new visions and plans for the year ahead.

And then the questions begin...

When is the right time to discuss a motion on the table? Is it ever appropriate to talk to the city/village attorney on my own?



MARCIA SCRAMLIN: "I'll definitely sign up for more training in the future. With only two people who've been on our council longer than I have, I'm sure I'll have more questions I can't get answered any other way."



MICKEY CAROTHERS: "The training was helpful in gaining a better overall understanding of the Open Meetings Act. I am thankful for the League and the available training and resources they make available to officials. (It) has made my transition into public office very rewarding."

elected officials to training.

"We had several older members who resigned and three just got on. One other started just a little earlier than I did. I ended up being the president pro tem with only four months experience," said Scramlin. "If I ever have to run a meeting, I need to know everything I need to know."

Dimondale Village Trustee Linda Luginbill said she enjoyed the panel discussion the most. "I thought what each of them had to say was interesting. The mayor of Mason seemed to be very experienced, although his job is nothing like my new position as a very small village trustee," said Luginbill. "It gave me a better vision for what may be expected of me as a village trustee."

Carothers agreed. "I am new to the whole political scene, so attending the academy was very beneficial. The



LINDA LUGINBILL:

"What drew me to the session was the title: You've Won!—Now What? Those were exactly my words when I won!"


budget topics were a great learning experience," said Carothers. "I gained a better understanding of how important we as elected officials are to helping the members of our community."

Elk Rapids trustee John Matthews said he gained valuable knowledge on everything from how to submit resolutions to the creation of new ordinances. Would he recommend it to others? Absolutely. "Serving in public office is different than any other kind of job. You can't just assume you



JOHN MATTHEWS:

"Thanks for providing high-quality education and keeping us informed on critical issues at the state level."

know how to do it because you've attended meetings or been on a board," said Matthews. 

Elizabeth Shaw is communications coordinator for the League. You may reach her at 734-669-6318 or eshaw@mml.org.



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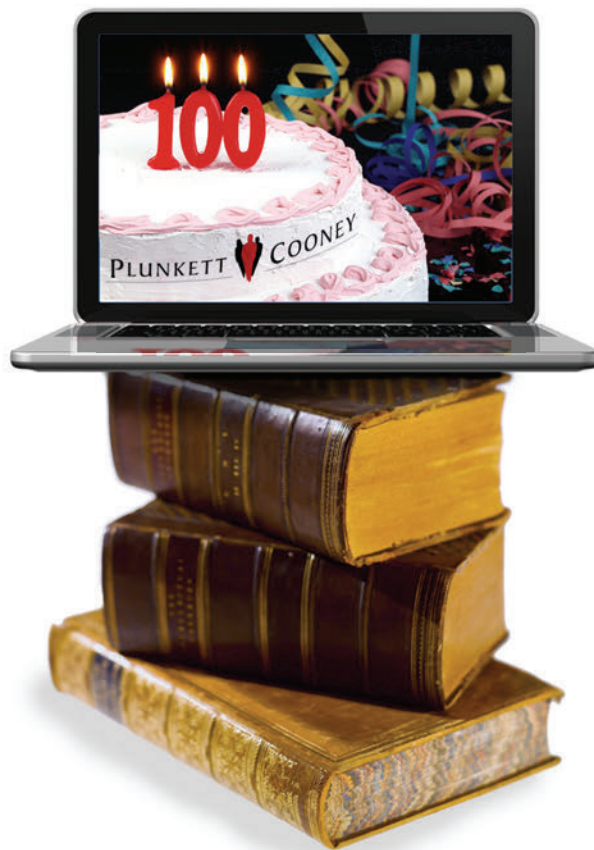
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By Caroline Weber Kennedy

Detroit Finds Ally in U.P. Legislator Tom Casperson

Senator Tom Casperson, (R-Escanaba) found himself on an unconventional day-long tour of Detroit. As chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, Senator Casperson was approached by Senators Bert Johnson (D-Detroit) and Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor) to co-sponsor a package of Regional Transit Authority (RTA) bills creating a rapid-transit bus system for Detroit.

Casperson looked first at the practical/functional side of the issue. “Without knowing the politics of the matter or where the Administration stood, I knew I needed a pragmatic way to get up to speed on the issue,” he recalls. So Casperson, along with two staffers, planned a day in Detroit, taking the two existing systems DDOT (Detroit Department of Transportation) which services the city, and SMART (Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation) which services the perimeter and feeds DDOT. They began at 8 am, simulating a “day-in-the-life” of the public transportation user.

“There’s so much negative dialog about Detroit and we need to stop that in the Legislature, in Michigan.”

senator was the last stop of the day—a cold 45-minute wait with no shelter. “We were about to give up,” Casperson says, “and I kept thinking about this young woman we had seen on the bus with two small children. And I thought ‘they can’t wait like this without shelter.’”


Subsequently, Casperson was an RTA supporter, and found it was also a top priority of the Administration. In the spring, the Senate Transportation Committee held a standing-room-only public hearing on the issue in Detroit. The conclusion: RTA needed to happen. As the 24th attempt in 30 years, proponents had their work cut out for them.

How It Worked Out

Southeast Michigan is the last of the 41 largest metropolitan regions in the nation to create an RTA. The RTA is set up as a diamond-shaped corridor; buses affect traffic signals to allow for expedited passage, getting people quickly where they need to go. Shelters are part of the system and RTA will be working with locals to coordinate. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said the RTA must be in place before development of the M-1 Woodward Avenue light rail line can qualify for \$25 million in federal funding.

Casperson says an efficient system can potentially pay for itself and the public investment will pay off as an economic development tool. Both Roger Penske (CEO, Penske Automotive) and Mark Reuss (President, General Motors North America) are willing to invest private money because they see it’s necessary to help grow Detroit back to a healthy metropolitan area.

“I couldn’t believe the city, how beautiful it is.”

Casperson recalled more of his day in Detroit with passion—a passion for the city itself. “It’s a beautiful city and so many people don’t know it,” he says. “There’s so much negative dialog about Detroit and we need to stop that in the Legislature, in Michigan. People need to go there and see.” 

“We tried to do everything a resident would.”

“The buses were full, which is great,” Casperson says, “but it took forever to get anywhere. All day long, it was difficult to get around and not really functional. So, we started talking to people on the bus. Once they found out who we were, people engaged.” Casperson noted that people contributed in meaningful ways by respectfully, but candidly, sharing their experiences. The one that had the greatest impact on the



Caroline Weber Kennedy is manager of field operations for the League. You may contact her at 906-428-0100 or ckenedy@mmml.org.

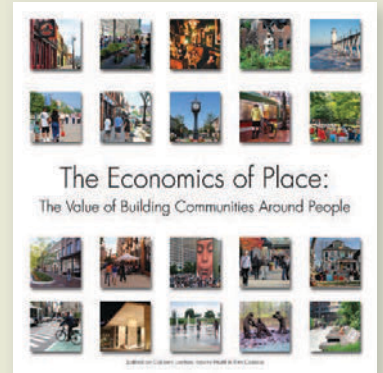


The League is proud to announce that it won seven international MarCom Awards for marketing and communications.

The highest honor, platinum, went to our book, *The Economics of Place: The Value of Building Communities Around People*.

We also won four gold awards for the following League programs and publications: for our Prosperity Agenda Radio Show on News/Talk 760 WJR, the May/June 2012 issue of *The Review* magazine on placemaking, and two advertisements by the League's Insurance and Property Pool, "Belly Up" and "Head in the Sand." In addition, the League received two Honorable Mention commendations for *The Review* magazine "Placemaking" cover (March/April 2012) and *The Review* Field Report by Caroline Kennedy titled "Lofts on Ludington" (July/August 2012) about the redevelopment of an historical building in Escanaba using "new urbanism" design concepts.

"We are truly honored to receive international recognition for the marketing




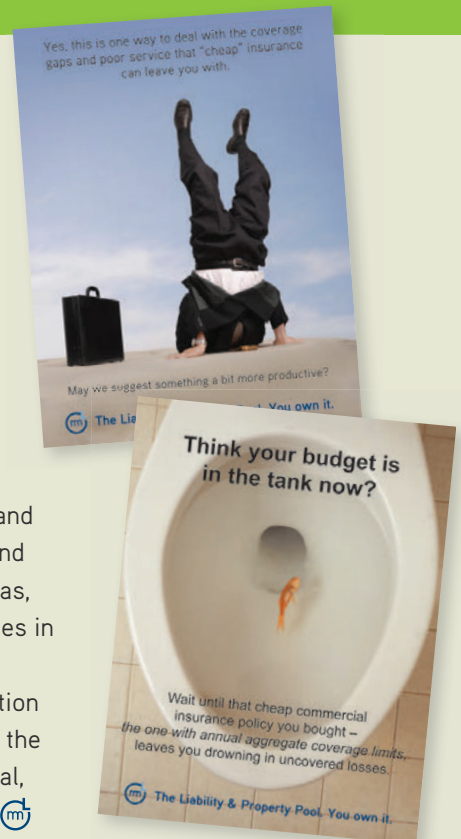
MARCOM AWARDS



and communications work we do every day to further the mission of the League and our communities," said Daniel Gilmartin, CEO and Executive Director of the Michigan Municipal League. "We're particularly pleased that our book, *The Economics of Place*, was honored. The success of this book in spreading the importance of the placemaking concept has exceeded our wildest expectations."

The MarCom Awards is administered and judged by the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals out of Dallas, Texas. There were more than 6,000 entries in the 2012 competition.

MarCom Awards is a creative competition for any individual or company involved in the concept, writing and design of print, visual, audio, and web materials and programs. 



Jurisdiction of appeal from drain code assessment

FACTS:

In 2009, Pittsfield Charter Township created a special assessment district to finance its obligations for a drainage district project. Under the project, the Washtenaw County drain commissioner reconstructed a section of a stormwater drain that forced overflow waters to pool on residential properties south of the assessment district. The drain commissioner apportioned \$1.7 million to the township which paid its obligation, in part, from its general fund and the remainder by assessment against property owners in the assessment district.

Ashley Ann Arbor, LLC, (Ashley), one of the property owners, objected to the special assessment at a public hearing held by the township. The hearing notice advised property owners that they had a right to file a written appeal with the Michigan Tax Tribunal (MTT) within 30 days of confirmation of the special assessment roll. The roll was confirmed on March 24, 2009.

Within 30 days of confirmation of the special assessment roll, Ashley filed a petition in the MTT challenging its inclusion, for various reasons, in the assessment district. The matter was set for a hearing in the MTT for the September 2011 Prehearing General Call. In December 2010, Ashley filed a complaint in the Washtenaw County Circuit Court raising the same challenges. In addition, Ashley filed a motion in the MTT to transfer the matter to the circuit court. The MTT granted Ashley's motion on the basis that the special assessment was made under the drain code and, as a consequence, the MTT lacked jurisdiction to hear the matter.

Ashley then filed a motion for summary disposition in the circuit court. The township argued, first of all, that the assessment was imposed under the public improvements act (PIA) for which appeals are made to the MTT. According to the township, the court lacked jurisdiction and should dismiss the issues pending in the court. The township alternatively argued that if the special assessment was made under the drain code for which appeals are made to the circuit court, Ashley nonetheless failed to timely file an appeal with the circuit court within 30 days of March 24, 2009.

Ashley agreed that the PIA authorizes the township to levy a special assessment for the township to make a public improvement. In this case, however, Ashley argued that the

improvement was made by the county drain commissioner. Ashley also argued that there is no statutory authority under the PIA to make drain improvements.

The circuit court summarily dismissed Ashley's claims. Ashley appealed to the Michigan Court of Appeals.

QUESTION # 1:

Does the MTT have authority to hear an appeal of a special assessment imposed under the drain code?

Answer according to the Court of Appeals:

No. The court based its decision on a review of the Tax Tribunal Act. MCL 205.731(a) of the Act provides that the MTT has exclusive jurisdiction over proceedings "under the property tax laws of this state." Despite a ruling in 1984 by the Michigan Supreme Court in *Eyde v Lansing Charter Twp* that upheld a property owner's challenge in the MTT to a special assessment levied by a township which arose from the drain code, the court reasoned that the subsequent enactment of 1992 PA 175 which included language that the property laws of the state did not include the drain code dictated a different result.

QUESTION # 2:

Did Ashley's filing in the MTT toll the statute of limitations with respect to the requirement to file an appeal with a court of competent jurisdiction within 30 days?

Answer according to the Court of Appeals:

Yes. The court reasoned that under the facts of the case the statute of limitations was tolled when the appeal was filed with the MTT. The court further held that, equitably, the period of time was tolled based on prior uncertainty of the law and the advice of the township to file the appeal with the MTT.

Ashley Ann Arbor, LLC v Pittsfield Charter Township, No. 304904 (Dec. 27, 2012)

This column highlights a recent judicial decision or Michigan Municipal League Legal Defense Fund case that impacts municipalities. The information in this column should not be considered a legal opinion or to constitute legal advice.



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Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) states that all persons, except those incarcerated in state or local correctional facilities, are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and public employees. MCL 15.231 *et seq.*

Q: What triggers a public body's requirement to respond to a FOIA request?

A: A person has a right to inspect, copy, or receive copies of a public record, unless the record is exempt from disclosure. The person is required to make a written request to the public body's FOIA coordinator. The request must describe the public record sufficiently to enable it to be found.

Q: Who should respond to the request?

A: An employee of a public body who receives a request for a public record shall promptly forward that request to the FOIA coordinator. The act requires a public body to designate a FOIA coordinator.

Q: How long should the public body keep requests?

A: The FOIA coordinator shall keep a copy of all written requests for public records for at least one year. The FOIA coordinator shall be responsible for accepting and processing requests for the public body's public records.

Q: May a person inspect the records of a public body?

A: A public body must furnish a person a reasonable opportunity to inspect and examine its public records and shall furnish reasonable facilities for making memorandum from its records during usual business hours.

Q: Does a public body have an obligation to protect its records?

A: A public body shall protect public records from loss, unauthorized alteration, mutilation, or destruction.

Q: Is a public body required to make a summary or prepare a record if requested?

A: A public body is not required to make a compilation, summary or report of information. Nor is it required to create a new public record.

Q: May a person request future public records?

A: Yes. A person may subscribe for up to six months to future public records which are created on a regular basis.

Q: When and how should a public body respond to a request?

A: Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the person making the request, a public body by its FOIA coordinator shall respond to a request for a public record within five business days after the public body receives the request by doing one of the following:

- Granting the request.
- Denying the request by written notice.
(A failure to respond is considered a denial.)
- Granting the request in part and issuing a written notice to the requesting person denying the request in part.
- Issuing a notice extending for not more than ten business days the period during which the public body shall respond to the request. Only one extension may be made per request.

League Resources:

The following resources are available at www.mml.org:

One Pager *Plus* Fact Sheets

FOIA General Questions

FOIA Policy and Definitions

FOIA Responding to Requests

FOIA Statutory Exemptions

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Handbook for Municipal Officials

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The desirability of a community is directly related to its ability to provide resources and activities to keep people healthy, active, and connected to each other. An important consideration in a community's overall quality of life is its park and recreation facilities. The Port Huron Recreation Department has been serving the Blue Water Area with recreation opportunities for many years. Several years ago, when budgets got very tight, the city implemented a non-resident rate at double the cost to offset what residents were paying through taxes. The recreation department piloted a new and unique program partnering with Fort Gratiot Township in 2010. This past year, Port Huron Township, Burtchville Township, and Clyde Township joined to provide a cooperative system that would allow township residents to participate in city recreation programs at resident rates with the townships providing the cost difference in exchange. The program helps the city increase revenue for the recreation department while helping outlying areas to offer full recreational opportunities and services for their residents. The new cooperative effort spreads recreation programs over 73 square miles and opens the door for other partnerships in the region.

"What we've done, thanks to the cooperation of the townships, is a great example of collaborating to keep recreation affordable in your community and for surrounding communities," said Parks and Recreation Director Nancy Winzer. "We're very excited to be able to partner with the townships for the betterment of the whole community."

At Port Huron Recreation, we work towards providing quality recreation for everyone. We are so grateful for this new partnership and it would not have been possible without the help of Kristy Jones at Fort Gratiot helping to initiate this project, and all the townships taking a chance to do a great thing for their residents.