

2004 Michigan Municipal Achievement Awards

edited by Kim Cekola

Since 1984, the Michigan Municipal League has awarded honors to more than 133 Michigan cities and villages for their outstanding efforts to improve local government. Projects include downtown revitalizations, housing developments, infrastructure improvements, youth programs, nature trails, and a history-making consolidation of three municipalities.

It only takes the fire and determination of one individual to jumpstart a movement – whether it is toward improving services, efficiency, development or education.

Municipalities have also succeeded in collaboration – by forging partnerships with private sector businesses, civic groups, and non-profits, often creating dramatic results. Villages, with small populations, limited resources, and a lot of positive attitude have captured the highest honor, as well as our largest cities vying for the top award by pushing the envelope in what can be accomplished with dwindling resources and lots of creativity.

This year, 41 entries were evaluated, and the proud winners are:

Population Range I: under 5,000

City of East Jordan, Outstanding Achievement, *Main Street Renaissance*

Village of Decatur, Community Partnerships, *Special-Lite Infrastructure Project*

Population Range II: 5,001-25,000

City of Big Rapids, Outstanding Achievement, *Nisbett-Fairman Residence*

City of Birmingham, Superior Innovation, *Quarton Lake Restoration Project*

City of Lapeer, Community Partnerships, *Prairies and Ponds at Oakdale*

Population Range III: 25,001 and above

City of Taylor, Outstanding Achievement, *City of Taylor Brownfield Redevelopment*

City of Saginaw, Superior Innovation, *Establishment of Labor Management Leadership Team*

City of Oak Park, Community Partnerships, *One School, One Bank, One City*

Winners receive

- a personalized plaque to hang in city or village hall
- peer recognition at the awards presentation
- feature article in a fall issue of the *Michigan Municipal Review*
- A digital Achievement Awards logo to use for promotional purposes on newsletters, web sites, calendars, etc., and
- Recognition from an MML representative at a local council meeting

Thanks to our judges

Thanks to our judges for their considerable contribution of time and their commitment to municipal government.

- Myron Frasier, council president, City of Southfield, past MML vice-president
- Beverly Holmes, manager, Village of Newberry
- Kurt Kimball, manager, City of Grand Rapids, past MML board member
- Kate Lawrence, mayor, City of Brighton, past MML president
- James Leidlein, manager, City of Harper Woods, past MML board member
- Richard Lewis, manager, City of Traverse City
- Deborah Owens, clerk, City of Battle Creek
- Timothy Palmer, councilmember, City of Ithaca
- James Wonacott, manager, Village of Blissfield

The 2004 Achievement Awards Winners

Population Range I (5,000 and under)

City of East Jordan (pop 2,507)

Category: Outstanding Achievement

Main Street Renaissance



The entrance to East Jordan's downtown was marred by an empty, decaying 10,000 square foot two-story building and the vacant service station next to it. The DDA acquired the two properties which were marketed for many years with no serious interest. Questions such as "why save those dumps?" were raised. In 2002, a

newspaper article regarding demolition of the buildings brought forward a developer and two possible tenants. The city, in cooperation with the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance informed the interested parties that historic tax credits, Brownfield credits and MEDC as well as DDA financing for public improvements were available. Wright Builders and Charlevoix State Bank formed a partnership to take on this daunting project. The Charlevoix Hospital Rehabilitation Unit and the Chamber of Commerce agreed to be the first tenants.

The completion of the Main Street Center has revitalized not only a building but the whole downtown. Three new businesses have located in the Main Street Center and one across the street. A smaller building, which lay vacant for many years, has been sold and will be rehabilitated using historic tax credits. All of the businesses involved said their participation hinged on the partnership of investors, city, state and federal government with the Main Street Center.

Village of Decatur (pop 1,838)

Category: Community Partnerships

Special-lite Infrastructure Project



In 2002, the Village of Decatur was surprised to learn that Special-Lite, Inc. was considering relocating to another community. The plant employs 131 people, and is one of the ten largest employers in Van Buren County. As the only manufacturing firm in the area, community leaders were extremely interested in keeping Special-Lite in the community. After meetings with Special-Lite officials, it was determined that the company needed additional land for expansion, road improvements, and municipal water and sewer utilities. Total infrastructure cost for this expansion was estimated at \$2,210,000. Special-Lite was willing to commit to hiring 35 employees over the course of three years and over three million dollars in private investment, which allowed the village to apply for a grant from the MEDC. For the necessary road and storm sewer improvements, the village applied for a \$550,000 grant from MDOT; and then created a LDFA to assist with the balance of the project. When the dust settled,

the Village of Decatur had undertaken a project which was believed to be insurmountable because of revenue sharing cutbacks and other financial restraints and ended up with a \$2.2 million project with nearly \$1.9 million funded by federal and state grants.

Population Range II (5,001-25,000)

City of Big Rapids (pop 10,849)

Category: Outstanding Achievement

Nisbett-Fairman Residence



Built in the 1880s, the Nisbett and Fairman Buildings are the two most prominent buildings in downtown Big Rapids, and the only two buildings in Mecosta County on the National Register of Historic Places. After going through a series of owners, community leaders created a task force to address the continual state of decline of the buildings and the negative impact on the economic climate downtown.

When there was no interest from the private sector in redeveloping the buildings, the task force turned to the Big Rapids Housing Commission. Under the direction of the Housing Commission, Hollander Development Corporation, Michigan State Housing Development Authority and Great Lakes Capital Fund teamed together to develop the project and secure a complex financing package.

The Housing Commission purchased the buildings and developed the upper floors into mixed income senior housing while preserving the commercial space on the main level. Eighty percent of the apartments have affordable rents (60 percent at or below the median income) and twenty percent are rented at the market rate. Each apartment enjoys the restored grandeur of 19th Century Italianate architecture combined with 21st century amenities. The result is 47 new apartments for seniors and two historically restored treasures that have become an asset to the community and revitalization of the downtown.

City of Lapeer (pop 9,072)

Category: Community Partnerships

Prairies & Ponds at Oakdale



Prairies and Ponds at Oakdale is an example of numerous organizations working together to preserve a beautiful piece of Lapeer's landscape and help educate youth by providing an outdoor classroom. The city partnered with local organizations to provide both financial resources and technical expertise. Ducks Unlimited provided technical assistance for habitat restoration and \$30,000 for wetland construction. Pheasants Forever provided technical assistance for upland habitat restoration and some financial assis-

tance. The Lapeer Foundation committed \$103,000 to the effort. The Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) provided \$10,000 for trail construction and teaching stations, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife identified the plant and animal species native to the Lapeer area. A limestone walking path was installed as a way to traverse the park and provide children with an “up close” view of the subjects they are studying. Interpretive signage was installed to offer all visitors educational information and points of interest. A pavilion was constructed by students from the Intermediate School District to provide protection from the elements when necessary.

The number of school-aged children that have visited the site has far exceeded the city’s expectations. Since the project’s inception, several local schools have incorporated Prairies & Ponds into their science curriculum.

City of Birmingham (pop 19,291)

Category: Superior Innovation
Quarton Lake Restoration Project



The deposit of sediment over the past 30 years led to the impairment of water quality in Quarton Lake, a 13.2 acre impoundment of the Rouge River, located in the City of Birmingham. Quarton Lake serves as a key natural feature in the city’s urban setting with a park perimeter well suited for recreation opportunities. Shoreline erosion affected the aesthetics of the surrounding park and residential areas. Since 1990, turbidity levels and water quality have continued to deteriorate and aquatic growth is minimal. The community was not only interested in improving the water quality of the lake, but also the aesthetics. Public access for fishing and ice skating and other recreational opportunities were also a main concern. The city’s consultant assisted in obtaining Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project grant funding to facilitate lake restoration efforts, and assisted in complex coordination with the MDEQ and MDNR to gain acceptance of the project. A comprehensive restoration plan was developed that included lake dredging, carp removal, game fish stocking, shoreline stabilization,

habitat enhancement, wetland plantings and public education. Many first-time applications were used, including coir logs, geo-tubes and material re-use, in this holistic restoration approach.

Population Range III (25,001 and above)

City of Taylor (pop 65,868)

Category: Outstanding Achievement

City of Taylor Brownfield Redevelopment



The City of Taylor’s philosophy is “quality public investment stimulates quality private investment.” The city created a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority to promote economic growth through the redevelopment of blighted, environmentally distressed and/or functionally obsolete properties. On a project-by-project basis, the 13-member Brownfield Authority and the city adopt project plans that provide site-specific benefits to sites that qualify under state or federal law. The bene-

Why should you enter next year?

Here’s what some of our past winners have to say about the Michigan Municipal League Achievement Awards:

“This project was a result of numerous community members and we are blessed to be receiving an award of recognition,” said David Jaroch, Ubly village president. In 2003 the village won an Achievement Award in the Superior Delivery of Service category for “Infrastructure Improvements”.

“I’m extremely grateful. It demonstrates the hard work of our officials that make Gaylord a unique and distinctive place. The pavilion is becoming one of the area’s premier entertainment venues,” said Gaylord City Manager Joseph Duff on winning the 2003 Superior Innovation Achievement Award for Pavilion on Court.

“...I am particularly proud of the work our elected officials and staff have done and congratulate them for this well earned recognition,” said then Jackson City Manger Warren Renando, when the city won a 2003 Achievement Award for “Consumers Energy Corporate Headquarters-Public/Private Partnership in Jackson.”

fits include: tax increment capture to be used for site investigation, remediation, demolition, infrastructure and a single-business tax credit for up to ten percent of the project's investment less land cost.

To date, the city has approved 24 brownfield plans, reclaiming 362 acres of land. A burnt-out auto parts manufacturer was replaced by a Kroger supermarket and a Big Lots store that generated \$12.5 million in private investment, created 150 jobs, and redeveloped 7.9 acres of underutilized land. A former petroleum tank and an abandoned lumber yard have been removed. A former landfill has been cleaned up. A blighted vacant party store will become a new commerce center.

The city's brownfield investment of \$12.8 million has resulted in an estimated private investment of nearly \$287 million in residential and commercial opportunities, hundreds of jobs, and an improved reputation and growth for the city's tax base.

City of Oak Park (pop 29,793)
Category: Community Partnerships
One School, One Bank, One City



The One School, One Bank, One City program was created to enhance high school business programs, foster entrepreneurs within the city and create corporate career opportunities through partnerships. Under the leadership of Standard Federal Bank, an in-bank program was created where students learn about banking and business as well as the importance of client service. High school seniors are selected to participate in a co-op program and are given the opportunity to work as a Teller from 20-25 hours per week. In addition to employment, the students attend informative sessions on the bank's internal processes of small business banking, retail banking and training, human resources, and diversity training. Students gain valuable training in how to create a resume, what to expect in a job interview as well as workplace ethics and expectations. The program also includes a number of career oriented site visits with external partners where students learn about career opportunities and educational requirements within each organization. In addition, students are assigned a bank mentor, and participate in the Detroit Children's

Center's Mentor Program as high school mentors. The goals are to increase college enrollment and mentorship. The One School, One Bank, One City program has quickly become a model program and has left an indelible mark on the communities and students involved.

City of Saginaw (pop 61,799)
Category: Superior Innovation
Establishment of Labor Management Leadership Team



The City of Saginaw, in the midst of downsizing and financial difficulties, needed to find new ways to conduct city business. Tension was building between employees, unions and management. City management suggested a Labor Management Leadership Team (LMLT) with a mix of employees in management, technical support, frontline workers, and union officials.

Changing how the city does business by restructuring and reorganizing from within has had a major effect on cost savings and revenue. There are renewed efforts in collecting income and property tax and parking tickets. The employees are beginning to realize that all departments have a responsibility to work for the city as a whole.

The LMLT also presents opportunities for employees to work in the community. Over 50 employees worked together to paint, rake and clean two neighborhood school playgrounds, and collected a truckload of food for the Eastside Soup Kitchen.

LMLT encourages employees to work on citywide teams to solve problems and issues that may not even relate to their everyday responsibilities. They are an information network, filtering information up to department heads and out to the community. LMLT is an invaluable in-house consulting team which is quickly becoming a part of the permanent structure of the organization of the city. ♦

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