

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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S/D HISTORICAL SOCIETY "REBRANDS" WITH NEW NAME, UPDATED MISSION

FEB 24, 2017 -- Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society celebrates its 31st year with the introduction of a new name: *Saugatuck-Douglas History Center*. It also has refocused its mission statement to better reflect current aspirations and goals: "*To preserve local history, and inspire learning to inform and improve the community.*" These changes are being rolled out across organization publications, signage, web site, and at its two educational locations: the Saugatuck-Douglas History Museum near the base of Mount Baldhead in Saugatuck, and the Old School House in downtown Douglas.

According to SDHC Executive Director Nathan Nietering, "We've become concerned that our 'historical society' name could conjure up the misleading image of an exclusive club with a secret handshake. In reality, it's anything but that."

The organization began in 1986, he explains, when a small group of local-history enthusiasts got together to write down stories of the old days. "It was just an informal network of like-minded people."

"But during the three decades since then," he continues, "we've been blessed with many talented volunteers whose enthusiasm and effort enabled us to grow tremendously and develop free public programming, exhibits and outreach. Community support has enabled us to become the steward of two beautiful facilities for presenting and preserving local history. The 'history center' name much better reflects these sites and the sense of place they provide for residents and visitors alike."

"It also helps to position us as the resource we want to be," Nietering adds. "As such, we constantly look at our communities and seek ways to be an asset. Thanks to a significant project over the past several years to collect architectural survey and real estate records, we now have an extensive archive that homeowners can use for researching who lived in their house or what it looked like in an earlier era. We have published award-winning books about local architecture, our arts community, appropriate restoration techniques, even a historically inspired cookbook. Our library of local family histories and extensive photograph collection are among the best for an organization our size in Michigan."

"An important moment came when we realized that learning about local history shouldn't happen just within the walls of our facilities. In 2016, we worked with the State of Michigan to create two new state historical markers, which add to the fourteen already spread throughout this area. Any day of the year, these markers allow our residents and visitors to learn a bit more about this area's fascinating history."

"We also are working to increase our virtual presence through our web site, Facebook page, and mobile app. The app is available for free download to any Apple or Android device and features self-guided walking tours, a calendar of History Center events, images from our collection, and more. In

addition, we're pursuing more robust partnerships with Saugatuck Public Schools, the Saugatuck-Douglas District Library, and the Saugatuck Center for the Arts."

SDHC now has nearly 700 members, more than 100 of whom actively volunteer their time for a wide variety of local-interest programs, tours and social events. Highlighting this year, a new two-year exhibit titled "Cold War / Hot Towns: Saugatuck-Douglas in the 1950s, 60s and 70s" will open at the History Museum on Memorial Day weekend and run through 2018. It presents the unique opportunity to talk about how national turmoil in that era was mirrored in local events -- events that many people alive today remember. SDHC also will continue celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Douglas Union School (today's Old School House) with a special gala celebration on September 23 and a Family Fun Day on September 24.

As a volunteer-based, not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization with membership open to all, SDHC continues to welcome new members who have an interest in local history or just want to better connect with the unique cultural heritage of the area. Membership activities are enjoyed by long-time and seasonal residents, tourists, and individuals who have recently joined the greater Saugatuck-Douglas community.

For more information about SDHC, its award-winning Pump House Museum, its Old School House, its planned activities, and its many volunteer opportunities, visit www.MySDHistory.org.

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The Historical Society's revised name and mission seek to capture the history and sense of place that help make Saugatuck and Douglas such a special place in Michigan.