



NEWS From
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DAMAGED-TREE REMOVAL AND WOOD USES
PLANNED FOR OLD SCHOOL HOUSE GROUNDS

Thirteen dead or dying trees are slated for removal from grounds around The Old School House in Douglas, according to Mike Economos, Landscape Committee chair for the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society's Old School House Project. In keeping with the Project's pursuit of LEED (green building) certification, he adds, trunks and other sections of the largest removed trees will be reutilized.

Selected portions will go to local sculptor Marcia Perry for transformation into works of art for return to the School House in its new life as a Heritage Discovery Center. Smaller trees marked for removal will be evaluated for potential conversion into benches for use in the Discovery Center or keepsake items to be sold for Project fundraising. Selected saplings and ground plants will be saved for relocation on the property in accordance with landscaping development plans.

The work will be done sometime during the next few weeks, depending on rainfall and ground conditions needed to support mechanical equipment.

Perry describes her work as reflecting her love of trees and desire to give them a second life as art rather than see them wasted. "I try to delve into the hearts of trees to reveal their inner beauty," she explains. Working intuitively using reductive process, she extracts primarily figurative and abstract forms that often evoke a spiritual response. Examples of Perry's work can be seen at her Ark Gallery and Sculpture Studio, 6248 Blue Star Highway.

Economos, a Michigan State University Extension Master Gardener Volunteer who oversees the riverside gardens around the Historical Society Museum at Mt. Baldhead Park, says the trees marked for removal were designated by Vic Forester, ASCA (American Society of Consulting Arborists), of West Michigan Tree Services, Grand Rapids, after an inspection tour of the grounds last autumn. Two trees along the west property boundary joined the list more recently due to root damage resulting from excavation done for new construction on adjacent land. Removing them now, Economos adds, will avoid the danger, damage and remedial costs of natural tree falls or pre-emptive removals after the grounds are developed.

After the marked trees and underbrush are cleared away, the grounds will be re-contoured as needed for best absorption of rainfall and School House roof runoff collected by a new underground drainage system recently installed to carry that runoff to the back (north) end of the property. The final landscaping plan will be designed around the resulting topography and the remaining healthy trees.

The new Discovery Center is envisioned as a community resource where children and adults alike can explore the area's genealogy, history, culture, ecology and architecture through recreational activities, educational programs, special events and access to the Society's growing archive of local artifacts, photos, records and newspapers. Most of its surrounding 1.16-acre grounds -- the equivalent of six city lots -- is planned as a "back-in-time" pathway with diverse plantings and "story stops" telling about important aspects of local environment and history. With these attractions, the Center also is expected to enhance the area's destination appeal in the growing heritage tourism industry.

Listed on both the Michigan and National Registers of Historic Places, The Old School House is one of the oldest multi-classroom school buildings in Michigan and considered one of the finest examples of 19th century school architecture in America. The structure served its educational purpose until 1957 and has many alumni among current area residents. Since 1962 it had been owned and carefully maintained as a four-unit apartment building by the family of Ms. Nancy J. Budd, now a resident of Holland.

More information about the Old School House Project is available on-line at the Society's newly redesigned web site www.sdhistoricalsociety.org, including floor plans and a photo diary of work done to date.

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