



*NEWS From*  
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### OLD SCHOOL HOUSE DISCOVERY CENTER HOSTS "SNEAK PEEK" FOR MAJOR DONORS

AUG. 15, 2008 -- The Old School House bell rang out from its original belfry for the first time since 1957 last Thursday evening, as the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society gave approximately 150 major donors a thankful "sneak peek" at the progress their vision and generosity has made possible in turning this historically significant Douglas icon into a new Heritage Discovery Center.

This project, conceived in collaboration with the community's District Library and Public Schools, was set in motion on November 2, 2006, when the Historical Society purchased the building and began renovation with the proceeds of an initial 12-month fundraising campaign. To-date, more than 400 donations have accomplished much of the project's budget-based goal of \$1,525,000, with only about \$350,000 remaining to be raised.

Chief among the major donors honored at the Thursday event, and invited to pull the bell rope, was the building's former owner, Holland's Nancy J. Budd, whose family had faithfully maintained it as a residential apartment building since 1962. She offered it to the Society at a "gift" price that reflected a significant personal contribution. Individual major donors, both private and corporate, have since built upon Budd's contribution in amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$120,000, sparked by a \$425,000 matching grant from Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation. The project also has received grant support from Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA), Allegan County Community Foundation (ACCF) and Preserve America Historic Preservation Fund.

In brief welcoming remarks, Society President Kathy Sturm noted that while our community has already lost too many significant historical sites, "The Old School House is still here, thanks to all of you." She also delighted the audience singing her parody of Doris Day's classic hit "Que Sera, Sera", having lyrics rewritten to thank donors with "look what we have done", the chorus of which prompted a spontaneous group sing-along.

Speaking next, James Schmiechen, professor of history at Central Michigan University and the Historical Society's Museum Chair, emphasized that the new Discovery Center does not replace the Society's highly successful Museum at Mt. Baldhead Park, rather it adds another totally different element to the area's educational infrastructure. "Our intent here is to give people of all ages a place to discover and invent new ways to connect with our area's past, and make our history come alive and meaningful," Schmiechen said. "We want it to become a creative resource for things like exhibits by schoolkids and adults, genealogical study, publishing books, historical reenactments and tours, or adult study groups." To that end, he pointed out, it also will offer a point of public access for the Society's growing storehouse of old photographs, maps, artworks, books, architectural drawings, newspapers, films and other artifacts, along with the District Library's Michigan history collection.

Task Force spokesperson Jeff Wilcox, again thanked the major donors and acknowledged many substantial cost-saving "in-kind" donations of materials, equipment, skills and professional services from area businesses and contractors, noting that their names will be gratefully recorded on a permanent "donor wall" display in the main entry area, still being designed. He also spoke of numerous choices made to save or maximize available money, and reported that the renovation has been following "Green Building" principles in pursuit of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certification when completed. The main floor Discovery Center, he told the donors, will open to the public on September 20.

Guests enjoyed hors d'oeuvres catered by Mermaid Bar & Grille and cocktails during a walk-through look at the nearly finished main level, which will house a Welcome Center for visitor orientation to our community and the Center's resources, a Discovery Room for access to the Historical Society's extensive collections and local genealogy research plus local/state history materials from the District Library, and an Exhibition Room for scheduled exhibits, with a "Creation Station" where anyone can create and present public displays using their own private collections and memorabilia. A number of large hanging banners visually expressed various activities and programs being planned for the Center, and more than a dozen Society committee members wearing "Ask Me" nametags mingled with the visitors to answer questions.

Although an all-new "floating" stairway to upper and lower levels is in place, those areas of the building are still in mid-stages of renovation and were not accessible for this event. The lower level will provide a safe, climate-controlled Archive Room for the Society's collection of historical materials now being stored in four different area locations. It also will house the Society's "Tech Center", which prepares historical materials for electronic storage and on-line sharing, plus a studio for oral history interviews and a "Skills Learning Center" where people can gain skills and experience in archiving, digital imaging, historic research and building surveys, and museum management.

Upper level rooms comprise a total of 1700 sq.ft. to be offered as commercial/ professional rental space to provide an income stream for on-going support of the Discovery Center.

Outside, the 1.16-acre School House grounds (six city lots) will feature a "Back-In-Time Pathway" winding through the site offering six "learning stations" with explanatory plaques. Trees, planted areas and displays will support learning about our area's environment and ecology, its maritime and agrarian history, and its architectural heritage.

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 19<sup>th</sup> century school architecture in America.

More information about the Old School House Project is available on-line at [www.sdhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.sdhistoricalsociety.org), including floor plans and a photo diary of work done to date.

With approximately \$350,000 still needed to fully fund the Project, the Historical Society urges more area businesses and residents to contribute toward the earliest possible completion of this distinctive community asset. Contributions may be sent to The School House Project, Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society, PO Box 617, Douglas, MI 49406.

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