



NEWS From
Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society
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HISTORICAL SOCIETY PLANS SUMMER FUNDRAISERS
TO START REFURBISHING THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE

SAUGATUCK, FEB. 26, 2007 -- Having accomplished its plan to purchase The Old School House in Douglas late last year, the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society targets the coming spring and summer for fundraising events in support of Phase 2 -- refurbishing the building as a unique new Discovery Center in collaboration with the area's District Library and Public Schools.

Phase 2 plans focus initially on converting the first floor and basement into Discovery Center facilities, archival storage and offices for the Society's growing Technology Center. This activity will begin with finalizing the architectural details at Fenns Design Mill in Douglas as soon as fundraising efforts achieve their total goal. In the interim, rental of two second-floor residential apartments will continue, with proceeds benefiting building operating costs.

The Old School House campaign began late in 2005 with a total fundraising goal of \$1,110,000 needed to support refurbishing work and endowment for on-going operation in addition to purchase. Underpinned by a Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation matching grant for up to \$425,000, the campaign has to-date raised another \$560,000 in donations and pledges from several hundred local residents and businesses, including a recent grant from Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) earmarking \$35,000 for renovation. With approximately \$125,000 still to be raised, the Society plans a number of events starting with the following:

Wednesday, May 16 -- A "celebrity waiter" dinner, 5:30 to 9:00pm in The Grill Room at Saugatuck's Clearbrook Golf Club: cocktails and dining at normal menu prices, but with prominent local figures serving as waiters, each doing everything they can to earn generous tips to pass along as donations to the Old School House. For information, contact Jim Gowran in Saugatuck (269) 857-2904

Saturday, June 30 -- A public auction estate sale at The Old Schoolhouse, from 10am to whenever, offering home furnishings and antiques bequeathed to the Society for that purpose by Goldie Kleinheksel upon her death in 2006. Goldie, who lived her entire life in a small farmhouse on 140th Avenue in Fillmore Township, was a third-generation descendent of the first family to settle in what would become Overisel, around 1850. A devotee of local history, she was among the charter members who began the Saugatuck/Douglas Historical Society in 1986 and among the first volunteers to staff the Society's Museum when it was organized in 1994.

The Society also invites additional donations of home furnishings, antiques, oddities & whatnot for offering at the auction. Donors may contact Vic Bella at (269) 857-3600 in Saugatuck to coordinate.

Additional summer activities still in the planning stage will be announced as plans firm up.

Discovery Center plans envision a community resource where children and adults alike can explore the area's history, culture, ecology and architecture through recreational activities, educational programs, special events and access to a unique archive of local artifacts, photos, records and newspapers. As such, the Center also is expected to enhance the area's destination appeal in the growing heritage tourism industry.

Property surrounding the Old School House includes the equivalent of six city lots within its 186' x 263' perimeter. Tentative plans for these grounds include a Historic Garden Learning Center

reflecting indigenous trees and plants prominent in our area's past, an open-air exhibition space, and perhaps a pavilion displaying a rare 26-ft. metal-hulled Francis Lifeboat, ca. 1860, once stationed at the Saugatuck Light House and recently restored by Society members.

Listed on both the Michigan and National Registers of Historic Places, The Old School House (Douglas-Union School) 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. A prominent historic landmark in Douglas since 1867, on Center Street across from the Library, it served as a public school until 1957 and has many alumni among current area residents. It had been owned and carefully maintained as a four-unit apartment building since 1962 by the family of Ms. Nancy J. Budd, now a resident of Holland.

In order to gain the earliest possible start on development of this distinctive community asset, the Society urges all area businesses and residents to contribute. Those contributing \$1,000 or more will be recognized on a permanent display in The Old School House. Contributions may be sent to The School House Project, Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society, PO Box 617, Douglas, MI 49406.

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