

NEWS FROM SAUGATUCK/DOUGLAS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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CELEBRITY WAITERS HIGHLIGHT CLEARBROOK DINNER, TIPS TO BENEFIT OLD SCHOOL HOUSE RENOVATION

SAUGATUCK (MI), MAY 7, 2007 -- A "celebrity waiter" dinner in the Grill Room at Clearbrook Golf Club on Wednesday, May 16, will feature seven prominent local citizens waiting on tables, each doing everything they can to inspire generous tips to pass along as donations for the Saugatuck/Douglas Historical Society's Old School House Project. The event offers seatings from 5:00pm to 8:30pm, with cocktails and dining at normal menu prices; for reservations, call (269) 857-2000 ext 113. The restaurant is located at 6494 Clearbrook Drive, off Blue Star Highway along the north edge of Saugatuck.

Offering their services for this event are: Judy Anthrop, Douglas artist and historical preservationist; Matt Balmer, Douglas mayor and owner/chef of Everyday Peoples Cafe; Anne Gudith, co-owner of Water Street Gallery; Michael Holmes, local jazz musician; Sue McIlwaine, co-owner of Sherwood Forest Bed & Breakfast; Ray Riker, co-owner of Kirby House Bed & Breakfast; and Tim Wood, Superintendent, Saugatuck Public Schools.

Purchased by the Historical Society last October, using the results of an initial 12-month fundraising campaign, the Old School House in Douglas will be refurbished and rededicated as a unique new Discovery Center in collaboration with the area's District Library and Public Schools. Fundraising efforts continue in order to fulfill the Project's budget for renovation and operating endowment.

Architectural plans received final approvals in mid-April, and refurbishing work is expected to start by mid-May with gutting the interior, then roughing in new walls, doorways and elevator shaft, pouring new concrete for basement floor, new rear entry stairs, rear porch slab and window wells. Following "green construction" principles, materials removed earlier will be reused to fullest possible extent. The work will be done by Fennville design/build firm Darpel & Associates Builders, Inc.

Plans now give next give priority to finishing the second floor as commercial/professional rental office space. This will establish an income stream to help cover operating expenses while work proceeds on the main floor Discovery Center, creating its welcome center/bookstore, public reading and genealogy room, display prep and exhibition spaces, and administrative office. Last in line for completion is the basement space, which will house the Society's Technical Center and Archive Storage, now ensconced in Dutcher Lodge in Douglas.

The Discovery Center is envisioned as 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.

Listed on both the Michigan and National Registers of Historic Places, The Old School House (Douglas-Union School, 130 Center Street, Douglas) 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 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.

With approximately \$500,000 remaining to be raised -- largely reflecting added costs for second-floor conversion, landscaping and increased operating cost projections -- 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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