

## **NEWS FROM SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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### **CELEBRITY WAITERS TO HIGHLIGHT JANUARY 16 PARTY BENEFITING OLD SCHOOL HOUSE DISCOVERY CENTER**

SAUGATUCK (MI), JAN. 4, 2008 -- A "celebrity waiter" party at Everyday People Café on Wednesday, January 16 will feature a team of prominent local citizens serving up hearty hors d'oeuvres and cash-bar drinks, 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, from 6:00pm to 8:00pm, also includes the "old-timey" music of Nobody's Darlin' string band plus a raffle and live auction. The restaurant is located at 11 Center Street in Douglas.

Volunteering as waiters are: Bill Hess, new Saugatuck City Councilman; Cindy Peterson, local artist and Green Market founder; Saugatuck Mayor Tony Vettori; and Tim Wood, Superintendent, Saugatuck Public Schools. Donating entertainment to benefit the Old School House Project, the Grand Rapids based all-girl Nobody's Darlin' conjures up the essence of a simpler time before electric instruments and pyrotechnics, with a repertoire of Bluegrass, Country and Gospel they sum up as "lots of songs about drinkin', dyin' and Jesus".

Among the prizes to be auctioned are a weekend for six at a lakeside cottage near Traverse City, a pontoon-boat ride and floating picnic for six along the Kalamazoo River, and a hearty home-cooked soup-and-cornbread lunch for six in a historical Douglas carriage house.

Admission is by ticket only, as the restaurant is donating its entire facility exclusively to this event. Tickets are available in advance from the volunteer waiters or from Judi Vanderbeck at (269) 857-2682. Ticket price of \$66 -- reflecting the Old School House's opening year of 1866 -- approximately covers the event's cost of food plus a \$50 donation to the Old School House Project, which will be supplemented by wait-staff tip donations. Each ticket also automatically enters its holder in a door-prize raffle of a dinner for two at Everyday People Café.

Purchased by the Historical Society in October of 2006, using the results of an initial 12-month fundraising campaign, the Old School House in Douglas is being refurbished for rededication as a unique new Discovery Center in collaboration with the area's District Library and Public Schools, targeting completion this coming summer. Having raised approximately \$1,055,000 toward the Project's \$1,525,000 budget for renovation, landscaping and operating endowment, the Society has entered its final phase of fundraising with approximately \$470,000 still needed.

### **Construction Moving Along**

Refurbishing began last May and has progressed through this winter to its current stage of installing new mechanicals -- plumbing, electrical circuitry, HVAC ductwork and fire-suppression system. Following "green construction" principles, materials removed earlier will be reused to the fullest possible extent. The work is coordinated by architect/design group Fenn's Design Mill, Inc. in Douglas and general contractor Darpel & Associates Builders, Inc. of Fennville. For information and a photo-diary of renovation work, visit the Society's redesigned web site [www.sdhistoricalociety.org](http://www.sdhistoricalociety.org).

Interior plans give priority to finishing the second floor as commercial/professional rental office space to establish an income stream for operating expenses. The main floor Discovery Center will include a welcome center/bookstore, public reading and genealogy room, display prep and exhibition spaces, plus an administrative office. Last in line for completion is the basement space, which will house the Society's Technical Center, now ensconced in Dutcher Lodge in Douglas, and Archive Storage now at the Tech Center and other area locations.

The surrounding property -- 1.16 acres equating to six city lots -- is being planned for a "Back-In-Time Pathway" leading visitors to five "village story stops" relating our area's ecological, agrarian, maritime, educational and architectural heritage. Planners also are considering 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.

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 19<sup>th</sup> century school architecture in America. The structure served as a public school 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.

In this final stage of fundraising, the Historical Society urges more area businesses and residents to contribute toward the 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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