



NEWS From
Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society
P.O. Box 617, Douglas, Michigan 49406-0617

Information Contacts:

Page 1 of 2

Tom Anthrop, Task Force Chair
(269) 857-1183
anthropjt@wmol.com

John Peters
(269) 857-2967
jppubrel@aol.com

ALLEGAN COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT
TO ASSIST REFURBISHING THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE

SAUGATUCK, MAY 18, 2007 -- The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society's Old School House Project has been awarded an Allegan County Community Foundation grant for \$1,000 to help cover the cost of upgrading the building's front entrance for universal (handicapped) access. The award was confirmed recently by letter from ACCF Executive Director Theresa M. Bray, congratulating the Society and its Old School House Project for their contributions to Allegan County.

According to Project architect Nicolaas Wilkens, of Fenn's Design Mill, Inc., two main alternatives for this upgrade are being studied for cost-effectiveness -- replacing the existing pair of narrow doors with a single new 36" wide door and sidelights, or adding power-assist to the existing doors. "Right now," he says, "the latter seems more attractive because saving the existing doors not only would help maintain the historical fabric of the building, but also would help the Project qualify for 'Green Building' certification by avoiding the need to make a new door. Very few renovation projects afford the opportunity to serve both of these objectives, so we're inclined to move in that direction whenever possible."

As part of providing universal access, he notes, the front entry steps will be reconfigured as a long ramp for easier walking and wheel-chair approach.

Purchased by the Historical Society last October, using the proceeds of a successful 12-month fundraising campaign, the Old School House in Douglas now begins its conversion into a unique new Discovery Center in collaboration with the area's District Library and Public Schools.

Architectural plans received final approvals in mid-April, and refurbishing work is underway, starting with selective removal of interior partitions, ceilings, fixtures and built-in furnishings. Next comes roughing in new walls, doorways and elevator shaft, topping the basement floor with new concrete over a vapor barrier, pouring new rear entry stairs, rear porch slab and window wells. General Contractor for the project is Fennville design/build firm Darpel & Associates Builders, Inc.

Following "Green Building" principles, materials, fixtures and furnishings removed in the initial stage will be recycled to fullest possible extent -- some returning to this project, some auctioned for use in other buildings and some donated to charitable organizations.

Current plans 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 lower-level 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.

Floor plan drawings, more information about the functions envisioned for the Discovery Center and updates on the renovation are offered on the Historical Society web site www.sdhhistory.com

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.

During refurbishing, fundraising efforts will continue in order to fulfill the Project's budget for renovation, landscaping and operating endowment. 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.

#