



NEWS From
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OLD SCHOOL HOUSE DISCOVERY CENTER
OPENS TO PUBLIC DURING HERITAGE FESTIVAL

SEP. 12, 2008 -- Area residents and visitors will have their first opportunity to preview The Old School House Discovery Center renovation during Heritage Festival weekend, Saturday, Sept. 20, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free and Festival Home Tour tickets are not required for admission. Also that day, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the Old School House lawn, a menu-priced picnic lunch will be offered by United Church of Christ in Douglas to benefit the church, along with cookies from Cookies On Call, sharing proceeds with The Old School House.

The Discovery Center renovation, 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 with the proceeds of an initial 12-month fundraising campaign. Now nearly finished, its main floor space soon 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.

For the Sept. 20 open-house, a number of large hanging banners will visually express various activities and programs being planned for the Center, and Historical Society board members will be on hand to answer questions. Students of Douglas Elementary School, who returned the 1891 bell to the Old School House on April 16, are invited to visit and ring the bell during this event.

According to James Schmiechen, Historical Society's Museum Chair and professor of history at Central Michigan University, the new Discovery Center does not replace the Society's highly successful Museum at Mt. Baldhead Park, but 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 says. "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 notes, it also will offer public access to the Society's growing storehouse of old photographs, maps, artworks, books, architectural drawings, newspapers, films and other artifacts.

Also on display during the Festival weekend opening will be preliminary plans for a "Back-In-Time" Pathway envisioned for the 1.16-acre School House grounds (six city lots), which will wind 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.

The lower level, still in rough-construction stage, 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 Historical-Archival-Digital (HAD) Lab, 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 are being converted into 1700 sq.ft. of commercial/ professional rental space to provide income for on-going support of the Discovery Center.

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 19th century school architecture in America.

More information about the Old School House Project is available on-line at 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's budget-based goal of \$1,525,000, 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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