



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

Information Contacts:

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Tom Anthrop
(269) 857-1183
anthropjt@verizon.net

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

HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S OLD SCHOOL HOUSE PROJECT
RECEIVES \$22,500 STATE GRANT FOR CONSTRUCTION

SAUGATUCK (MI), SEPT. 21, 2007 -- The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society has received a \$22,500 grant from Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) for interior capital improvements needed in refurbishing the Old School House in Douglas as a unique new Heritage Discovery Center, in collaboration with the area's District Library and Public Schools.

Grant funding, initially applied for and awarded to the City of Douglas on behalf of the Historical Society, was confirmed recently by letter of agreement from MCACA Executive Director John Bracey and formally transferred to the Historical Society in a resolution passed by the Douglas City Council late in August.

The Old School House was purchased by the Historical Society last October, using the proceeds of a successful 12-month fundraising campaign. Its conversion process began in May with selective removal of interior partitions, ceilings, fixtures and built-in furnishings. Work continued through the summer with roughing in of new walls, doorways and elevator shaft, foundation reinforcement, creation of a new lower level rear entry, and topping of the basement floor with new concrete over a vapor barrier. Replacement of exterior concrete walkways, rear porch slab and window wells is underway, with the front entry steps and porch to be reconfigured for universal access with a long ramp for easier walking and wheelchair approach. 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 were 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 1.6-acre grounds surrounding the building, equivalent to six city lots, are planned to include a "back in time" walkway with "village story stops" offering learning opportunities about our area's maritime and agrarian history, architecture and ecology.

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, grounds development 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.

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