



NEWS From
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HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S OLD SCHOOL HOUSE PROJECT
STARTS SECOND PHASE OF DISCOVERY CENTER RENOVATION

SAUGATUCK (MI), OCT. 22, 2007 -- The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society has entered "Phase Two" of its plan for refurbishing the Old School House in Douglas as a unique new Heritage Discovery Center, along with creation of a "blue-ribbon" Advisory Committee to spearhead the drive aimed at completion by mid-2008. Also part of Phase Two efforts, the project has established a Garden Planning Committee to visualize and guide development of the 1.16-acre grounds surrounding the building as an outdoor extension of the Discovery Center.

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.

Since last October, when the Historical Society purchased the building, Phase One focused on removing the interior walls, ceilings and mechanicals that were put in place in the early 1960s when the structure was reopened as a four-unit apartment building about five years after ceasing to serve as a school. With new partitions installed per Discovery Center floor plans, attention shifted to strengthening and capping the foundation, opening a new rear basement entry, resurfacing the basement's concrete floor and removing exterior porch slabs and walks.

Phase Two initially targets roughing in basement walls and ceilings, adding fire-retardant coatings to supporting steelwork, replacing exterior concrete and the rear-deck stairway, insulating and enclosing the attic space and exterior walls in preparation for winter weather, plus installing new plumbing, electrical, HVAC and fire-suppression mechanicals. Architect/design group for the project is Fenn's Design Mill, Inc., Douglas; general contractor is Darpel & Associates Builders, Inc., Fennville.

Later, current planning gives priority to installing a central elevator and finishing the second floor as commercial/professional rental office space. This will generate an income stream to help offset 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 (basement) space, which will house the Society's Technical Center and Archive Storage, now quartered in Dutcher Lodge in Douglas.

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

Critical to keeping Phase Two on schedule is the project's ongoing fund-raising effort being organized by the new Advisory Committee, comprising Jon Helmrich, Ann Horton, Joe Michaels, Joyce Petter, Suzy Richardson and Dawn Schumann, under Honorary Chairpersons Douglas Mayor Matt Balmer, Senator Patty Birkholz, former Old School House owner Nancy Budd, Old School House alumnus Howard Schultz and Saugatuck Mayor Tony Vettori. Having raised to-date more than \$1 million, the Historical Society's Old School House team calculates the total funding goal at \$1,525,000, updated to cover unforeseen renovation requirements, outdoor development and an operating endowment intended to make the Discovery Center self-sufficient.

Outdoor development being planned by the new Garden Planning Committee, chaired by Saugatuck Museum's Master Gardener Mike Economos, tentatively envision a "back in time" walkway punctuated with "village story stops" offering learning opportunities about our area's maritime and agrarian history, architecture and ecology. These stops are expected to include Saugatuck's rare iron-hulled Civil War-era Francis Lifeboat, a working plot highlighting our area's fragile ecology and historic flora, and a display examining the 19th century design/construction techniques embodied in the Old School House.

Conceived in collaboration with the area's District Library and Public Schools, 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 pictorial updates on the renovation are offered on the Historical Society web site www.sdhistory.com

With approximately \$500,000 remaining to be raised, 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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