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GAMSA is 1st for Oakland County ***Downtown Ferndale Wins National Award***

Ferndale, MI - Downtown Ferndale gained new national recognition Tuesday, May 4 when it was named winner of the Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA) at the National Main Street Conference in Oklahoma City.

Recognized for its extended revitalization effort and unwavering determination to create a sustainable business district, the Ferndale Downtown Development Authority is the first Main Street Oakland County program participant to bring home the GAMSA and the third in the state to be so honored since the award began in 1995.*

Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm praised the Ferndale DDA leadership, its volunteers and its community partners in her letter supporting the district's GAMSA winning effort. "Downtown Ferndale is a beacon of hope in this challenging economy and is a prime example for cities across Michigan desiring to revitalize their own downtowns," she wrote.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who initiated the Main Street Oakland County program 10 years ago, also issued a letter of support. "Through the leadership of the Ferndale DDA, its volunteers and community partners, Downtown Ferndale has transformed into a strong, creative, economic center in our county, unrivaled by others in Michigan and nationwide."

GAMSA judges particularly cited Downtown Ferndale's remarkable statistics including \$35 million in reinvestment over the last nine years and its turnaround vacancy rate, from 30% ten years ago to 6% today. Also noted was the DDA's unwavering commitment to the National Trust's trademark Main Street Approach to economic redevelopment and its utilization of the program to save a downtown once considered destitute.

"The Ferndale Downtown Development Authority's story is about not quitting when everyone has," said Doug Loescher, Director of the National Trust Main Street Center. "From the quirky twist that it has put on its event to its commitment to sustainability projects...it is a true national model for revitalization."

In Downtown Ferndale, proud stakeholders weighed in on winning the GAMSA.

Ferndale Mayor Craig Covey proudly noted that the national recognition confirms what “those here already know - that Ferndale is the coolest place around. We have shown that we have a new way of doing things and that new way works. By bringing together key elements such as walkability, diversity, eco-friendliness, the City and the DDA, together have built a downtown that people are proud to invest in – emotionally and financially.”

Ferndale DDA Chairperson Veronica Lujic added, “The GAMSA validates years of sticking to a program, through thick and thin, to get to the end game. Downtown Ferndale is a vastly different and much improved place than it was 10 years ago. More good news is that we are not done yet, we have the plans in place to keep up the momentum.”

Although Downtown Ferndale’s transformation is not a single issue story, a large part of it does hinge on one key change cited by GAMSA judges and reiterated by the DDA’s past chair Jeff Nahan.

“It really began back in ‘98 with the vision of narrowing Nine Mile Road and slowing traffic down so our Main Street could be a pedestrian-friendly, groovin’ kind of place,” he said, also noting “Our success and this award reflects a decade of work by countless volunteers.”

The Ferndale DDA was instituted in 1980 and became a nationally accredited Main Street program after acceptance in the Main Street Oakland County program in 2001. For the past 10 years, the DDA has been overseen by its Executive Director Cristina Sheppard-Decius, a certified main street manager, whose achievements in Ferndale distinguished her as one among Crain’s “40 Under 40” in 2009. With her implementation of the trademark Main Street Four Point Approach, the director was able to populate committees with the kind of hard working volunteers the program requires and GAMSA judges like to see because of the results they produce.

“Our volunteers have had a huge impact on Downtown Ferndale and are integral to our success story,” said Sheppard-Decius. “They are hard working, visionary and dedicated. We would not have received this great honor without their continued support and determination to keep moving ahead.

“There is a special synergy in Downtown Ferndale – our key stakeholders, investors, businesses and consumers all have a sense of ownership as stewards of the downtown. They love their downtown and it is that bond that spurs their relentless hard work to make it a better place.”

Current Ferndale DDA Volunteer Board of Directors are: Chairwoman Lujic, Vice-chairman Tom Pearlman, Secretary Steve Selvaggio, Treasurer Jerome Raska, Michael Hennes, Stacey Tobar, John McQuiggin, Jacki Smith, Henry Johnson, Amy Roll, Brian Kramer and Mayor Covey. In addition to the board, approximately 40-50 volunteers serve on a variety of committees, implementing new initiatives, fund raising or just pitching in, as needed. The DDA staff includes Sheppard-Decius, Communications & Marketing Manager Chris Hughes and Office Manager Cindy Willcock.

The Ferndale DDA is comprised of approximately 400 businesses, located in 3.9 linear miles extending from the Woodward & Nine Mile intersection. Its offices are located at 149 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale, MI 48220. For more information on the DDA please visit www.downtownferndale.com or call 248-546-1632.

*1999 – Bay City/1997 - Holland

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The DDA staff and several key volunteers will be in Oklahoma City to participate in the national conference and receive the award. For additional comments please use the following phone numbers:

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