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For Immediate Release

Crain's 40 under 40 includes Sheppard-Decius

Downtown Ferndale's Executive Director Named A Rising Star

Ferndale, MI – The Ferndale Downtown Development Authority Board of Directors is proud to announce the naming of its Executive Director Cristina Sheppard-Decius to Crain's Detroit Business prestigious "40 Under 40" list. The 2009 Class of rising stars was released in the publication's October 5 edition.

"Cristina's accomplishments are reflected in the strength of our downtown district. Her efforts have produced record-setting results today and have built confidence for the future of Downtown Ferndale," said Veronica Lujic, Chairperson of the Ferndale DDA. "She has earned this honor."

Sheppard-Decius, 38, took over the reigns of the Ferndale DDA in January of 2000, when the vacancy rate was a daunting 30% and its image was tarnished by a rundown streetscape and a lackluster business community. Under her leadership, an expanded downtown district boasts more than 400 businesses, a 5% vacancy rate, more than 160 building façade improvements, an attractive and well-tended streetscape and an astounding reinvestment figure of \$23 million since 2008. Sheppard-Decius also brought in \$1 million in grants to help revitalize the district.

"I built upon the idea that Downtown Ferndale may be a little rough around the edges, but we are proud of our community and we have the drive for change," said the Executive Director of her early days with the city. "Our organization is now in the next phase of growth and strengthening our grass roots involvement as a unified team is important. We can make momentous change when we work together."

Undaunted by the challenges of the national and local economies, Sheppard-Decius continues to move Downtown Ferndale forward with ingenuity and a plan to grow niche, office and residential markets. "When we emerge out of this national recession, we will be one of the leaders," she says.

Sheppard-Decius arrived in Ferndale with a background of fundraising and public relations and added to her expertise by becoming a Certified Main Street Manager via the National Main Street Center. Under her watch, the downtown district consistently earns national accreditation as a Main Street community, at the same time it gains recognition as the region's most urban suburb offering a unique shopping experience and a vibrant nightlife.

In addition to her work in Downtown Ferndale, Sheppard-Decius also serves on the board of the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce and the Woodward Avenue Action Association; co-chairs the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) East Michigan Alliance; is a member of the Michigan Downtown Association, the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, ICSC, Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau and Tourism Destination Districts.

Cristina Sheppard-Decius will be officially inducted into the 19th class of Crain's 40 under 40 on Thursday, October 29 at Big Rock/The Reserve in Birmingham. For event tickets, please call 313-446-0030.

For additional information on Cristina Sheppard-Decius or the Ferndale DDA, please call 248-546-1632.

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