



ROGERS CITY MAIN STREET IS
HELPING TO REDEFINE A 150
YEAR OLD NORTHERN
MICHIGAN LIMESTONE MINING
COMMUNITY

DOWNTOWN ROGERS CITY

Narrative by Alex Harimoto, Rogers City Main Street Director, and Scott McLennan, Mayor of Rogers City, and Phil Eich, Storyville Social, as part of the Michigan Main Street Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

A Community in Transition

"Rogers City was incorporated in 1872, meaning we just celebrated our sesquicentennial of 150 years. A lot has changed in that amount of time; we started out in lumbering, as many communities up here did. When they started removing trees, they found a tremendous amount of high-grade limestone near the surface, so around 1912, a quarrying operation began producing limestone. That brings us to today, where we have the largest open pit limestone quarry in the world. When lumbering and quarrying took off, many Italians, Germans and Polish folks moved over here by the masses, and that's what really started our community of Rogers City.

Today, it's a community in transition, there's no question about that. The limestone quarry provided a lot of really great jobs and opportunities here; we had many blue collar and upper blue collar jobs, but then mechanization happened. Because of that, around 1970, we began a gradual but steady decline of citizens because the workforce just wasn't there. We went from approximately 5,000 people down to the current estimate of approximately 3,000 people that we have today. Over 50 years, we lost 2,000 people which may not sound like a lot to some communities, but it was almost half our

population.

We determined we needed to switch gears and figure out a way to rebuild our community. We are now focusing on what I believe is our greatest asset: our natural resources and the beauty of this area. We have a tremendous shoreline, probably the largest municipal shoreline that is all publicly owned in the state.

It's a shoreline with an incredible sunrise and you'll see tons of pictures online. People are lined up down there in the morning. Then in the evening, because of how our shoreline is designed, everyone travels out to what we call Seagull Point to watch the sunset.

What community has both a great sunrise and sunset?

The Nautical Festival is our big annual event, bringing in thousands of people to Rogers City. It's a very fun time! We put up a huge tent down at the marina parking lot, bring in awesome bands, and we even have polka night for those who love a little Polish flair.

We're really bringing a lot of folks in because of our marina, so we're focusing on that particular area. The band shell, which is right there on top of the marina, brings in all kinds of bands throughout the summer every Thursday and Friday night, so it gets used a lot. With the ability to pull a boat into a slip, and then stay on your boat and participate in all the things that are going on, we're seeing a lot more people coming into town."

– Scott McLennan, Mayor of Rogers City

The Power of Local

"Growing up, my grandma had a cottage up in the North Woods of Canada, so every summer, I'd go up there and really grew to love the area. I love the snow in the winter, and I love the summers with the calm water. So, when I graduated college, I wanted to find a job in a place that was similar. I looked all throughout Northern Michigan while trying to find a job that fit relatively close to what I studied in college. Then I found Rogers City was looking for a Main Street director, and that's what



"We are now focusing on what I believe is our greatest asset: our natural resources and the beauty of this area. We have a tremendous shoreline, probably the largest municipal shoreline that is all publicly owned in the state."



ROGERS CITY
MAIN
STREET

Four Points. Four Seasons.

brought me here.

Prior to taking this position, I worked as a legislative aide for a state representative; I found that state politics wasn't quite what I wanted to get into, so I decided to make the change into local politics. If you're working on the phones for a state representative, you're typically only getting negative calls like 'Why aren't you doing anything?' But working locally, I pass people on the street and they say, 'Hey, I just read this article that you wrote and I think it's really wonderful what's happening in this town.' I like the people I get to work with and the projects that I get to work on. At the local level, you get to see the results of what you do and people's satisfaction with the end results, and that's more satisfying for me.

A big part of what we're trying to do in the downtown area is getting a lot of the dilapidated buildings fixed up. We've been partnering with Revitalize and different programs within the SBDC to get these projects moving. I'm sure everybody knows the cost of construction has skyrocketed, and that's been a challenge, but it's been great working with them so far. We've got seven

buildings in the downtown area trying to get their projects moving so we have space for new businesses, new upper floor housing, and more to help move the city forward. Within the Main Street program itself, we have some buildings that date back to the 1920s that are currently not being utilized, and the preservation of that history is important. We'd love to see them used once again so that they can brighten up our downtown, whether it's a storefront, restaurant, or housing.

When we talk about the future of Rogers City, people say that we don't want to be the next Traverse City or the next Petoskey; they want to keep our Rogers City identity. A big part of our goal is to remain true to our roots, our nautical history, and our Polish and German history. They want to see a more vibrant downtown with new businesses and more tourism, while remaining prideful of our community."

— Alex Harimoto, Rogers City Main Street Director

"Within the Main Street program itself, we have some buildings that date back to the 1920s that are currently not being utilized, and the preservation of that history is important. We'd love to see them used once again so that they can brighten up our downtown."



Michigan Main Streets and Redevelopment Ready Communities

“Something critical to moving Rogers City forward is building a strong foundation. In 2021, we worked very hard to become Michigan's 50th Redevelopment Ready Community, and later that same year in 2021, we were designated as the state's 25th Michigan Main Street community. That puts us in a field of only eight communities in the state of Michigan that have both designations.

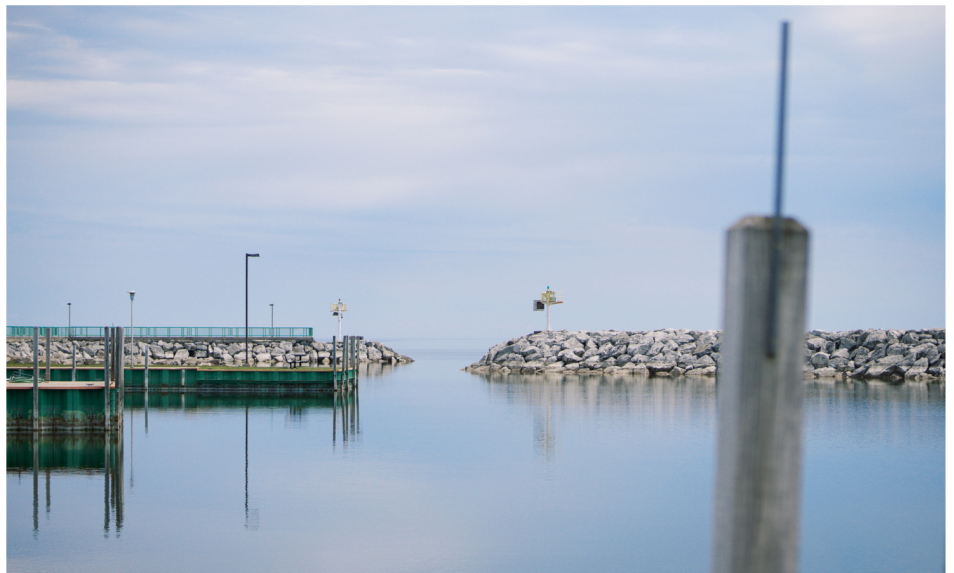
But it's not about the designations; it's about building the foundation that will allow us to develop, to grow, and to prosper. The addition of Alex Harimoto as our Main Street director has been awesome. He is a real key component to this, because we didn't have anyone focused on the marketing and promotion of Rogers City. We have a city manager and a mayor, but there was no one for promotion, so Alex is our first.

Joining the Michigan Main Street program really started from when I owned a home in Boyne City, one of the original Michigan Main Street communities. I know my friends back there will take this correctly, but I remember the days when Boyne City was just a little town and pretty sleepy. When I bought my home over there, I was just amazed at the transformation that had occurred. One day, I was chatting with their city manager and asked him, ‘What happened here? What took place?’ and he said, ‘I'm not going to answer that. Instead, this Friday, I want you to come to a Team Boyne meeting.’

I showed up to their Team Boyne City meeting. He said, ‘This is Scott from Rogers City. He's on their City Council. Would you answer a question for Scott, because he's asked me what made Boyne City the city that it is today?’

In unison, everyone in the group said, ‘Michigan Main Street.’

That got me thinking that with Michigan Main Street, a turnaround like theirs could happen in Rogers City. I came back and talked with a lot of people here. I think one of the big items in communities is communication. People don't like surprises,



“In 2021, we worked very hard to become Michigan's 50th Redevelopment Ready Community, and later that same year in 2021, we were designated as the state's 25th Michigan Main Street community. That puts us in a field of only eight communities in the state of Michigan that have both designations.”

so you have to start out by talking with lots of people and saying, 'What would you like to see in your community? Here's a pathway that might potentially work. Would you like to know more about it?' You start talking early on and that's what we did, having gatherings or fireside chats. We used the local theater and had a community forum where we started talking about Michigan Main Street and what it could potentially do for us. Sure, there were some skeptics; we'd have to hire our own Main Street director and that was going to cost us some money.

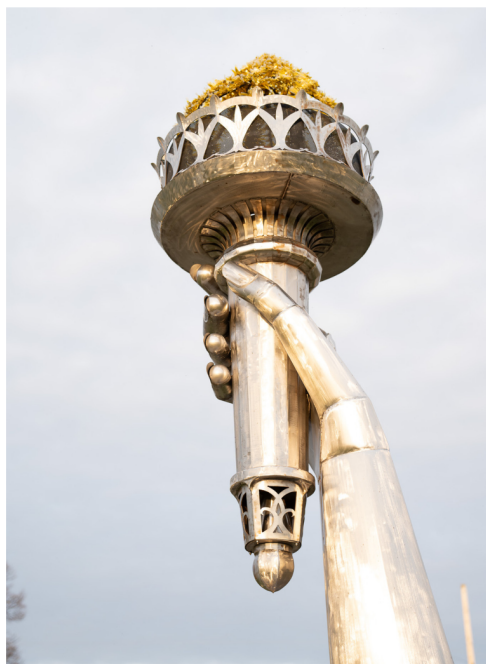
But we kept asking the community, 'Do you want this? If you do, you have to pony up.' And boy, did they ever: we had over \$210,000 pledged towards our Main Street program in the first year. Amazing for a town of less than 3,000 people!

Along with the Main Street program, we have community partners and we tap into all of them until they're just tired of hearing from us. The MEDC has been wonderful to work with. Lindsay Miller is our local Community Assistance Team rep, and she has been fantastic to work with. They're helping us all the time. We also work with groups like Huron Pines, an environmental group out of Gaylord. They spend a lot of time with us, making sure that we are cleaning up our stormwater runoff and things of that nature. We are moving forward and the results are becoming very evident.

— Scott McLennan, Mayor of Rogers City

Forward Momentum

"What I would love to see in the future of



"Change is inevitable; it's going to occur even if we do nothing. But if you take change and guide it in a positive direction, what a difference can be made in a community!"

Rogers City is a community where my children and grandchildren can say, 'We want to live in and be a part of Rogers City.' Three of my four children have moved back to Rogers City. One is working remotely, one is working at the bank, and one working with an electric company. They were able to move back, but there are so many more people who might love to stay or come back, but we don't have quite the community that allows that for them just yet, but we will get there. We will!

Change is difficult, for all of us. It just is. Even positive change can be perceived as problematic, like 'What are you doing with our community?' But change is inevitable; it's going to occur even if we do nothing.

But if you take that change and guide it in a positive direction, what a difference can be made in a community!"

— Scott McLennan, Mayor of Rogers City





Michigan Main Street Story Series



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION