



Gillespie Group

ASHLEY BRZEZINSKI
SHEDS LIGHT ON
DEVELOPMENT IN
DOWNTOWN LANSING

Photos and Story by Phil Eich,
Storyville Social, as part of the
Michigan Main Street Story
Series

“We believe that good development is thinking about people. That means not just thinking about the people who are going to be living in a development, but also about the people living and working in the area being developed.

For us, that means engaging with people, asking them about what the community wants while also considering things it needs, too. That’s important—we all want cool new things or places to go on the weekends, but good developers also have to ask, ‘What does this community need?’

Filling a community was the motivation behind the Capital City Market Development, and it’s very unique in that it brings together three different tenants.

The first tenant is the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel, which, because of an old grandfather clause, is the first hotel built in Downtown Lansing in over 30 years. People would come to an event in Downtown Lansing—but then need to stay somewhere else outside the area. To really support the area, we need people staying down here to increase the support of the local businesses. Bringing a hotel here filled a need for the community.

Downtown Lansing also needed a grocery store. People needed access to fruits and vegetables, and not just the people we’re bringing into our apartments, but the residents who already own and rent homes here. Capital City Market by Meijer, the second tenant here, came in and filled that need.

Then we have our 40 residential apartments upstairs above the Market. It's one of our smaller residential developments in the area, but it was important to have people living above the market as a way to increase the amount of people living in the area. The Market is, of course, accessible to everyone, but a neat feature is the fact that those living above the Market can access the grocery store simply by walking down through their stairwell. They can just walk downstairs and grab the groceries they need each day, almost like having a supermarket as their kitchen!

This development was originally 21 different parcels of land that we had to patch together. We went door knocking to each one—and we really went door-to-door!—looking to buy each parcel and bring them together and build this building. Once the parcels were acquired, we had to do some environmental remediation because this used to be a site with a gas station and was also by the railroad to transport coal and logs. The ground was contaminated, and it took \$7 million just to clear out the dirt and get it back to where you could start building on it.

We're the developers, but what it really took to get this building here were partnerships, specifically with The Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Lansing Economic Area Partnership, and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

To pull all that off took a lot of community partnerships and partners who not only were willing to invest in the community, but who cared about it, too.

Sure, there were incentives like assistance with cleaning the contaminated ground, but those incentives are stretched over a tax reimbursement: you have to have the money upfront and even after eventually recouping those funds, the financial return on investment is so small, a developer wouldn't make that kind of investment if they didn't have a deeper tie to Lansing.

Pat Gillespie, the President of Gillespie Group, grew up in Lansing, a mile down the road from our home offices. He cares about the community in a deep way because Lansing is his hometown and he wants to see it succeed.

To be honest, the return on investment is extremely minimal for Block 600. So much so, that there's probably no other developer who could or would do this project if they didn't have a hometown tie to this community. Pat genuinely did it because he knew it would change the energy down here and that it would bring amenities like a grocery store to an area that was needed.

And it's succeeding. Initially, people thought it was crazy to build a ballpark here, but today, you see the energy and growth surrounding it. People want to visit or live in Downtown Lansing to experience what it has to offer, and we want to help make it a destination for people similar to how they might think about Grand Rapids or Detroit. Pat has that passion for Lansing to grow into tomorrow.

He always says, 'Remember the people.' Sure, development is a business, but at the end of the day, it should really be asking, 'How can we help build this community?'

—Ashley Brzezinski, Director of Marketing for Gillespie Group



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Michigan Main Street Story Series



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