

PRESS RELEASE

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Beachtowns Association Reveals Heritage Route Plans

Michigan's Beachtowns Inc., an association of nine lakeshore convention & visitors bureaus announced today that plans to certify US Route 31 as a heritage route, are well underway. Working in conjunction with the Michigan Historical Center, a division of the Department of History, Arts, and Libraries, the group obtained a \$160,000 Preserve America Grant plus a \$50,000 matching grant from the Michigan Council of the Arts and Cultural Affairs, to meet Federal and State guidelines to fulfill qualifications for participation in Michigan's Heritage Route Program.

The Heritage Route Corridor under consideration will extend from the Indiana border to Ludington along the Lake Michigan shoreline. The route also known as Blue Star Highway or the West Michigan Pike was built between 1911 and 1922. It was the first continuous, improved road between Chicago and Mackinaw City and opened West Michigan to automobile tourism. According to Beachtowns organizers, historic route designation does not "make" anything happen but "allows" things to happen by qualifying the area to tap into Federal and State grant opportunities such as transportation enhancement grants, private foundations, Michigan transportation funds and potentially scenic by-ways grants. Heritage Trail designation does not add any layers of government, presents no additional liability issues or land use issues; however, it has great potential to attract and keep visitors coming to the area. The State's Heritage Trail Program aims to find "linear" destinations that become global destinations by setting mutual goals and collaborating with neighboring communities.

The certification process takes approximately three years. The Beachtowns Organization has already completed a substantial portion of that process and is currently applying for a Corridor Management Planning Grant through the Michigan Department of Transportation for 2009. Next steps include meetings with all municipalities along the route to secure resolutions affirming local government support for the concept of the Heritage Route. The Beachtowns corridor management team will also work with a variety of organizations and governmental groups to develop a corridor map identifying assets along the route that should be promoted and liabilities that should be improved or enhanced through private/public partnerships or through grant resources.

The Beachtowns Association formed in 2001 to promote nine southwest Michigan lakeshore communities as a major regional tourist destination. In partnership with the State of Michigan Beachtowns has launched spring and fall advertising campaigns in Chicago, Indianapolis and Michigan at a combined cost of just over \$1.5 million dollars. The group initiated a public relations effort in cooperation with PBS throughout the Midwest that netted the organization close to \$36 million dollars worth of free publicity in 2006. The Heritage Trail project will create additional promotional opportunities and draw attention to the areas cultural and historic assets.

For further information contact the Visitors & Convention Bureau in your area:

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