

The Gaylord Story — a never-ending saga

The transformation of Gaylord into Michigan's Alpine Village did not occur overnight.

Its development parallels the history of Alpenfest, though the roots of the adoption of the Alpine motif go back more than 50 years.

The tale is told in "The Gaylord Story," a slide film presentation that has been shown in hundreds of communities in the midwest.

Since it was made in 1967, the story has been updated, detailing progress in industry, business, housing and other areas.

It has been presented at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, and an estimated 50,000 people have seen it over the years.

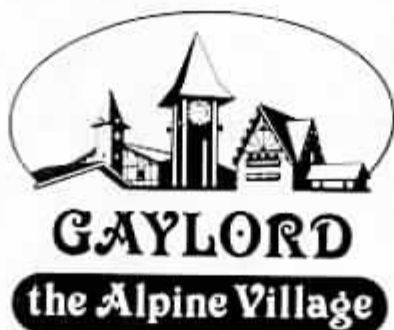
Since the early 1960s, Gaylord has developed into a community with a balanced economic base of tourism, recreation, agriculture, oil and gas, manufacturing, warehouse distribution and more.

Gaylord is a regional center with a sectional center post office and Diocese of Gaylord headquarters. The Roman Catholic diocese serves all of northern lower Michigan. Gaylord is the county seat of Otsego County.

Many governmental service units are also located in Gaylord, but the city's most distinguishing characteristic is its identity as the Alpine Village.

The Gaylord Story really starts with the home of the Gaylord / Otsego County Chamber of Commerce. Erected in 1969 and expanded in 1988, it's a replica of the County - City Building, which was completed in 1968.

The chamber headquarters replaced a log structure. The construction was made possible by public subscription, which paid in



full the total cost of the structure. The building now houses the 1911 Gaylord car, which can be viewed day or night through a large window.

To tell the Gaylord Story is to tell about the renaissance of a small community in northern Michigan. Gaylord is 60 miles south of the straits of Mackinac.

The city has benefited from the freeway, I-75, that starts in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario and ends in Naples, FL. It's a major super-highway that has been an important factor in the economic base.

A colorful Alpine Village welcome sign on Old 27 south of the city limits marks the 45th Parallel, halfway between the Equator and the North Pole.

The line suggests a meeting point, and that is what Gaylord is today — a crossroads community in the geographic center of Michigan. More than a renaissance of stone and mortar, the Gaylord Story is the story of civic pride and spirit in northern Michigan.

Where did the idea of an Alpine Village come from?

Beginnings go back to 1938 and the fashionable Otsego Ski Club at the eastern limits of Gaylord.

The late Don McLouth, president and owner of the club that includes 1,300 acres of land, form-

ed a complex of buildings — all in Swiss Chalet architecture.

McLouth tried then to encourage the community to adopt to this same kind of style, but the time was not right — not until 1963 when the idea was resurrected by a chamber of commerce committee.

Today, the main lodge at Hidden Valley Resort / Otsego Ski Club features an A-Frame with exposed beams, cut fieldstone and blue colors. It overlooks the Sturgeon River Valley, neighboring watersheds for the Pigeon and Black rivers.

Indeed, Gaylord is the high water mark for northern Michigan, the divide of watersheds going in all directions. The AuSable and Manistee rivers also have beginnings in Otsego County and head off to Lakes Huron and Michigan, respectively.

Adopting the Alpine idea, the chamber of commerce developed a plan to convert the central business district slowly but surely to a consistent motif in the style of a Swiss Village.

One complex of downtown buildings on the south side of the 100 block of West Main Street provided the start. There were eight store buildings, five of which were vacant.

They were purchased by the old Gaylord State Bank, all of them razed and in their place the present banking structure for Old Kent Bank of Gaylord was built.

The first building is of cut fieldstone, in the gentle slope of an A-frame. The second is a three-story office building with a clock tower, featuring flower boxes, balconies and stucco finish.

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