

Special

Report

Michigan State
Chamber of Commerce

NATURAL RESOURCES

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GAYLORD TODAY

GAYLORD, MICHIGAN

A STORY OF WISE RESOURCE USE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Past -- Ten years ago Gaylord, Michigan exhibited all the signs of a community "on the skids." The main street was drab and unattractive with fifteen or more vacant stores. The courthouse, schools and post office looked the same as they had a generation ago, except now they were showing their age. Perhaps most important, Gaylord's youth was not satisfied to live in a "declining area." They were moving to urban centers in southern Michigan to seek jobs and eventually raise their families far from their birthplace.

Geographically, this northern Michigan town is located in the center of a highly desirable recreational region. However, outside of providing services to a few private hunting clubs and summer tourists, the community never fully developed its recreational potential.

Natural Resources -- Snow may well be considered Gaylord's greatest natural resource. With a mean annual snowfall for the period of 1931-1960 of 121 inches, the area ranks among the snowiest locations in the Lower Peninsula. The "white gold" is even more valuable because for 60 days each winter, the ground is covered with 11 inches or more of "natural snow" - perfect conditions for the ski enthusiasts.

The community is located only a few miles north of Otsego State Park and I-75 passes through the west end of town. Otsego County also has abundant wildlife, including the major portion of Michigan's re-established elk herd and many miles of high quality trout streams.

Early Plans -- In 1958 the Gaylord Industrial Development Corporation was formed by 100 businessmen. The assets of the non-profit organization was over \$100,000. Several tracts of land suitable for industrial sites were purchased. Various committees were appointed to bring together all information and data which could be used to attract industrial leaders into the community. A diversity of industry, commerce and recreational enterprises was sought.

First Success -- It was not until 1963 when the U.S. Plywood Corporation announced plans to build its 5-1/2 million dollar Novoply Plant did the efforts of the development group really pay off. This modern facility is now in production. Taxes, labor and raw material expenditures amount to over \$1.7 million annually. Warren C. Smith, Vice Chairman for District II of the State Chamber, is U.S. Plywood's Division Manager at this plant. It was through Mr. Smith's efforts that Pontresina, Switzerland, has now been designated as a sister city to Gaylord.

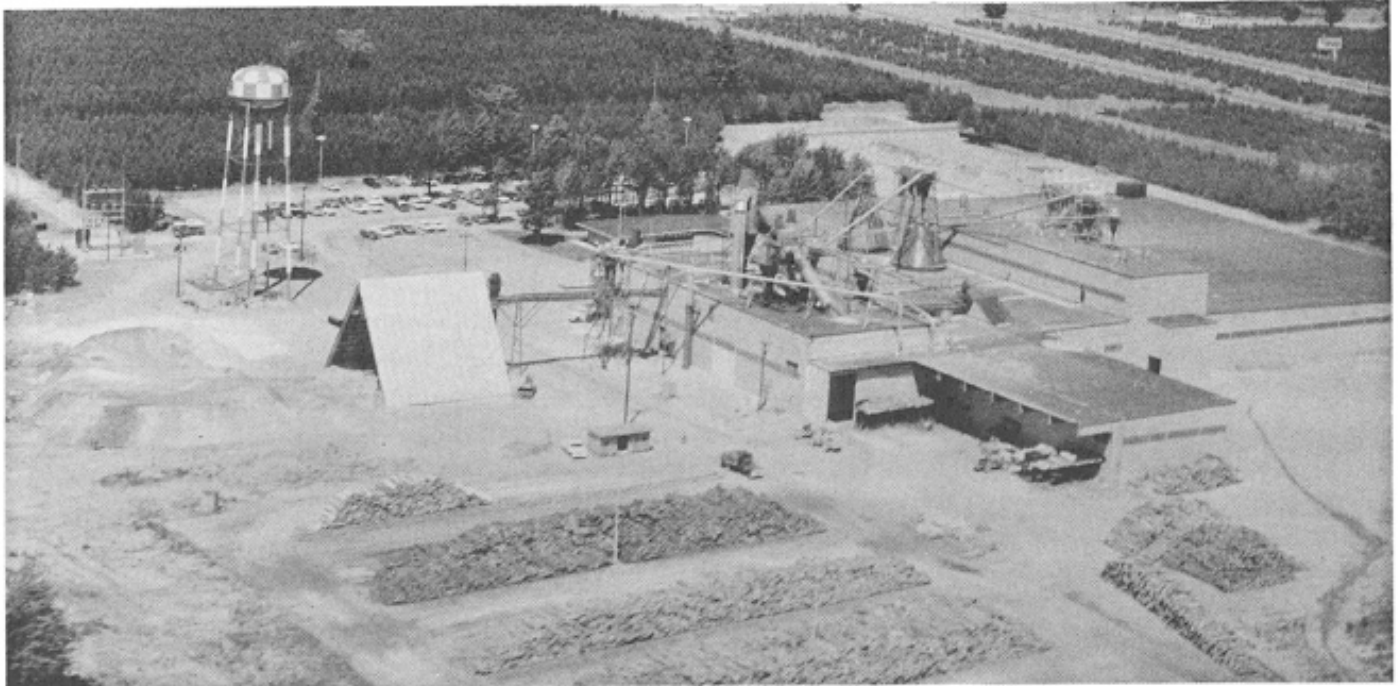
At the same time that the Gaylord's industrial base was being developed, a new program was under way to provide both the tourist and resident population with a new image for the community. Gaylord needed to create something about itself which would be considered unique. It needed to establish a star attraction which would draw the tourist off the highway and into the center of town. In like manner, it needed to develop the esthetic value of the community to a point where "home-towners" would be proud of Gaylord and "newcomers" feel they had made the right choice in selecting employment here.

The Alpine City -- A proposal for adopting an Alpine motif was enthusiastically received. A meeting which featured "Panels of Experts" in the fields of construction, architecture, insurance, taxation, finance, merchandising and community planning was held. A report from the Planning Committee showed that 51 of 57 businesses interviewed showed definite interest in the proposal.

The first renovation, removal of eight buildings and construction of a new bank, took place in 1964. Each year has brought many new store fronts and buildings which capitalize upon the use of native stone, exposed beam ceilings and attractive landscaping. An indication of outstanding cooperation is that three national retail outlets with company-wide standard architectural design followed the Alpine theme.

As is so often the case...success is contagious. Now Gaylord has attracted other industries, including national warehouses, a new auto sales agency, and several new restaurants. A new 80 room Holiday Inn with meeting facilities will soon be completed.

Gaylord Today -- The 15 vacant stores have disappeared. A new Alpine Teen Center has been built for youth who now enjoy their hometown. In addition, new churches, hospital care facilities, and even the new Otsego County Courthouse and Post Office feature the Alpine architecture.



U.S. PLYWOOD - NOVOPLY PLANT

A rapid run-down of changes shows that 49 establishments have been built new, re-modeled or have adopted the Alpine motif. This represents an investment of 2-1/2 million dollars in private financing and individual enterprise. Property values for many businesses have doubled. Employment is running at an all-time high. The merchants created a special assessment district and shared with the city in paying for a 222 car off-street parking facility.

During 1967 Michigan Week, Gaylord, as a result of state-wide competition, received the Community Pride Award.

A week-long Alpine Festival is held each July. Over 1,000 Gaylord citizens dress in Alpine costumes for the occasion. A visit to the community during festival time is like stepping into the "old country."

Gaylord's population has increased from 2500 in 1958 to 3200 at present. During 1968, 94 new families have moved into Gaylord. Young people from all of Michigan and other states, after receiving their education and some work experience, are now attracted to Gaylord. However, if efforts are successful in developing a new technical school for this area; young men and women will not have to go elsewhere for their education.

Through the efforts of the Otsego County Chamber of Commerce, a slide set has been developed which shows all aspects of the Gaylord story. Up to the end of 1968, this set has been shown in 73 communities throughout the United States.

In Conclusion -- Gaylord's community development program is a success story. The imagination and perserverance of its residents has seen to that. It is a story of how effective local and county government can be utilized fully when backed up by a conscientious citizenry. There was a challenge - it has been met and each year new innovations and improvements will be made.



Photo Courtesy of Michigan Tourist Council

But, from Gaylord, all of Michigan can learn a lesson. **Citizen action is important.** At the State Chamber we have noticed an increased interest in citizen action committees in the past year. As we assisted in local, chamber-sponsored meetings regarding the passage of the Clean Water and Recreation Bond Programs this fall, we observed this interest. Local leadership groups were formed to insure the passage of these important proposals. As a result, Ingham County now has an Action Committee for Clean Water and Recreation. Key leaders in Clinton and Eaton counties soon will organize such programs.

The State Chamber, through its Departments of Public Affairs, Human Resources, Natural Resources, World Trade and Legislation, will be happy to work with local chambers and key community leaders to develop Community Action Programs. Gaylord's success story is just one of many -- but the job is never done -- what have you and your community done to provide for future Success Stories?