



Original architectural plan for

# GAYLORD STORY

## *Alpine Village saga underpins chamber of commerce's success*

**T**he 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-

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This Page Courtesy Of

## Shell Western Exploration & Production, Inc.



300 block of West Main Street, 1963.

## *A slow but sure storefront conversion*

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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.

In the 300 block Gordon Everett, who owned the Northern Star shopper's guide located in the middle of the block, was the first person to bring an architectural rendition of Alpine storefronts to the community.

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,



### *300 block of Main focus of planning*

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.

In the same block, the former Hogan's Jewelers and Mooney's Sporting Goods Shop buildings were purchased by new owners and in their place today, stand the Pendleton Shop and the Alphorn Shop.

The Alphorn Shop features a flower box balcony and the alphorns mounted on the front of the building.

Over the next several years, downtown underwent a tremendous transformation from old to new. The Swiss style caught on throughout the central business district. One by one the storefronts were united by the theme.

The Glasser Building at Main and Court streets has dominated the central square for around 50 years. Beth Zorn, an architect from Birmingham, fashioned the current Alpine adaptation with shutters and Edelweiss flowers. Built on the front of the building, a balcony, shake-shingle awning, new flower boxes, new windows and bright colors became bright examples of Alpine touches in the

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## *How downtown Gaylord gradually changed appearance*

This Page Courtesy Of

**First National Bank of Gaylord**

501 West Main Gaylord 732-3502

**Arby's Roast Beef**

609 W. Main Gaylord 732-4943

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## **Retail, industrial, medical, educational threads unite fabric**



**300 block of West Main Street**

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Gaylord Story.

Today, the three-story Phoenix Building next door and the three-story addition to the Glasser Building are central features downtown.

The Phoenix, attractive from both front and rear, replaces two buildings destroyed in a 1984 fire.

While the 100 block developed first, the north side of the 300 block of Main Street was the first focus of planning in the early 1960s.

Photos were taken and compared with architectural renderings. It was this plan that was sold to the chamber of commerce committee.

In the 1970s, the First National Bank of Gaylord renovated a former restaurant building and later expanded it into a two-story Alpine ediface. Across West Main Street, Heritage Federal Savings is another example of the look.

Downtown examples of the transformation in this decade include the Hogan Building at Otsego Avenue and Main Street, unifying three existing Alpine storefronts; and The Village Square, a collection of shops at Main Street and Center Avenue, constructed from two previous buildings which had Swiss makeovers.

Also in the 1980s, Community Federal Credit Union built a Gaylord branch in the 700 block of West Main Street while the Alpine motif saturated shopping plazas and other commercial areas from downtown west to the freeway and beyond.

Government kept pace. The old black city water tower was removed and in its place at a Wisconsin Street location, is the new city water tower proclaiming Gaylord the Alpine Village.

It serves as a billboard for the hundreds of thousands of cars that pass by on the expressway.

The old city hall, located in the Municipal Building on Court Street since 1912, housed the fire department, library, city offices and an auditorium. Thought to be structurally unsound, it was razed in the 1960s and in its place is a parking lot.

Across the street was the old courthouse. Declared structurally unsound as well, it was demolished and in its place came a new Alpine-style structure including both county and city offices.

The main east-west highway is M-32. Until the early 1970s it was a two-lane road that suffered flooding and chuck holes a major part of the year. The State of Michigan, with participation by the community, widened much of the route to four and five lanes and improved the storm water system.

South Otsego Avenue and Old 27 South also was expanded to four lanes from downtown to the I-75 exit north of Otsego Lake.

In the 1980s the Old 27 / West Main route connecting the city's two exits was named Business Loop 75.

West of town on M-32 was the former Teen Chalet nightclub. The building was purchased in the 1970s by the new Diocese of Gaylord, which remodeled the structure into the office building housing headquarters for 21 counties.

When the diocese was formed in 1970, Gaylord became the smallest Roman Catholic cathedral city in the United States. In 1976 the diocese built St. Mary Cathedral.

Physicians were attracted to the community, adding to the staff at Otsego Memorial Hospital and making Otsego County one of the best medically served regions in the state.

Gaylord also is home for Beverly Home Health Care Services (formerly Provincial House), an extended care facility built in 1977. The facility can accommodate some 120 patients. Most of them are senior citizens who can no longer receive only home care.

Senior citizen housing is provided at the Alpine Alten Zimmer apartments on Grandview

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### ***Institutions, government cooperate***

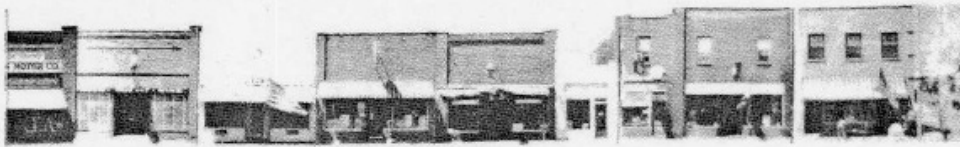
This Page Courtesy Of

**Best Western Gaylord/Raindancer**

137 West Street 732-7541

**Gaylord Lumber**

344 West Main 732-4904



as it looked in early 1960s.



Today, the 300 block shows a face that has been changed and updated over 25 years.

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Boulevard, with 46 units built in 1981 and expanded to a total of 70 in 1985.

Local education gained major recognition when Gaylord High School, Gaylord Middle School and St. Mary Elementary School won state and national honors for the Alpine Village in the 1980s.

The Alpine theme also has expanded beyond the main commercial district. North of town, the Wickes Corporation built a new lumber yard as a distribution center serving all of northern Michigan. The firm also wanted to be part

of the Alpine motif and remodeled soon after they built the first building. Wickes then adopted this design for its outlets across the nation.

The Gaylord Story also reaches into agribusinesses of many types, such as planting Christmas trees, potato farms, and a major livestock auction.

The strength of forestry in the area led to the landing of a U.S. Plywood plant in 1965. The main office of the N-4 particle board plant was constructed in that year, with the Alpine motif. That seemed appropriate, because the firm originally manufactured particle

board in the US under a Swiss patent.

U.S. Plywood Corp. merged with Champion International in the 1970s and now is part of Georgia-Pacific. The N-4 was replaced by the current N-6 plant, covering over 500,000 square feet of space.

The Gaylord Air Industrial Park has come about in the past two decades because of the Gaylord Industrial Development Corporation. The park, also employing the Alpine theme south of Otsego County Airport, helped create around 3,000 new jobs from 1975

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### *Alpine motif — a statement in symbols, area spirit*

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**Georgia-Pacific**

Gaylord

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Pre-Alpine days for the 200 block of West Main St. were captured in this photo, taken probably in the 1950s.

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to 1980 alone.

Gaylord is the home of the Glen's Market independent chain of grocery and family centers. The Glen's flagship store in Gaylord this decade unveiled major renovation and expansion. The new central tower is depicted in the official Alpine Village logo.

Many Gaylord area churches have employed the Alpine motif in their buildings, such as St. Andrew Episcopal Church, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Evangelical Free Church, Trinity

Lutheran Church, First United Methodist Church, Assembly of God, Peace Lutheran Church, Community Church, Gaylord Baptist Church, Michaywe' United Presbyterian Church, Grace Baptist Church, and others spanning many denominations.

Businesses, industries, schools, houses, and churches are all part of the continuing growth of the Alpine spirit in Gaylord, but community leaders believe even more can be done. The renaissance is not complete.

When all is told, the Alpine motif is a statement in symbols.

The symbols are advanced by Gaylord's 24-year sister city relationship with Pontresina, Switzerland. A Pontresina group honored their American counterpart by dedicating an Alpine mountain stone on the County-City Building lawn in 1989.

Flower boxes on Main Street, the County-City Building with its clock tower — all are signs of the spirit of the citizens who live here who joined together in a common cause to improve the quality of life

That is what produced the Gaylord Story...a story that keeps growing.

## *Swiss sister city friendship grows*

This Page Courtesy Of

**Otsego County Abstract Co.**

120 East Main Gaylord 732-5765

**Alpine Hardware**

Alpine Plaza Gaylord 732-4041



Glasser's before, and Glasser's after the Alpine theme hit the downtown area. Also shown in today's scene (below) is the three-

story Phoenix Building, which rose from the ashes of a 1984 downtown fire. Also shown are the Alphorn Sports Shop (left of

Phoenix), Pendleton Shop, and three-story Old Kent Bank of Gaylord professional building at far left.



This Page Courtesy Of  
 Old State Gas & Oil Corp.      V.G. Converse Co., Inc.



Where once this conglomeration of stores stood on West Main Street, today stands what was Gaylord State Bank (below, 1964). Since 1981, it's been Old Kent Bank of Gaylord.



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This Page Courtesy Of

## Peacock Designs Sportswear Screenprinters

5122 Clubhouse Trail Gaylord 732-9409

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