



SPARTA

CHAMBER • DDA • EVENTS

2020 Annual Report

Festivals, Events & Activities of the Chamber|DDA|Events Office
Submitted by Elizabeth Morse, Chamber/DDA Chamber Director
Submitted January 15, 2021

2020 Year End



We helped small business owners apply and receive over \$619,000 in grant funds



Created safe projects and sights that brought smiles to the faces of our community the whole year



Awarded over \$9,000 in Sparta Bucks to participants who won prizes & participated in shopping local



2020

Introduction

The year of the pandemic with COVID-19 obviously put a huge damper on many exciting and vibrant activities planned to execute in 2020. However, like all industries, the Chamber, DDA, and Events pivoted what hospitality items were possible and launched several new endeavors for the community. The Chamber, DDA, and Events boards worked together to launch new strategies from the office including Sparta Bucks (local currency), a Shop. Eat. Enjoy Sparta! Campaign, and visual improvements to the public spaces of the community.

Mission of the Sparta Chamber of Commerce:

Promoting Local Business Development Through Community Interaction.

The Mission of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) as established by Public Act 197 of 1975 is:

- To correct and prevent deterioration in the established DDA district
- To encourage historic preservation
- To acquire and dispose of interests in real and personal property
- To create and implement development plans in the district
- And to promote the economic growth of the district

The Mission of the Sparta Community Works Non-Profit 501c3 board (Events):

To support and advance the community of the Village of Sparta, Michigan, through community engagement, event hosting, and other fundraising, dedicated to the creation and support of a positive community feel, appearance, and impression, by lessening the burdens of government, building and or maintaining public buildings, monuments, and works, and otherwise combating community deterioration in and around Sparta.

The operations of the Chamber|DDA|Events department moved from the Village Office to the renovated 194 E. Division DeLange Harness Shop office in July 2018. The department operates under the umbrella brand called Sparta TODAY, and each entity independently contributes to the brand through their assets.



Board of Directors

As of January 1, 2021

Sparta Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

Tom Cheslek, President
Hessel-Cheslek Funeral Home

Kelly Potes, Vice President
ChoiceOne Bank

Mike Lamb
Coldwell Banker

Kirk Jacobsen
Jacobsen Floral & Greenhouse

Pete Bush
Sparta School Superintendent

Robert Whalen
Sparta Village President

Rex Baker
Baker Investments LLC

Robert Shangle
LiveStatue

Doc George Freeland
Freeland Chiropractic

Sparta Area Chamber of Commerce (2021)

Amber Marks
Dance with Me

Anne Pfeffer
Northwest Optometry

Carrie Olson
ChoiceOne Bank

Dana Quick
Edward Jones Investments

Jordan Kowalkowski
Compass Credit Union

Konrad Raclawski
ChoiceOne Bank

Maryanne Wright
Wrightway Appraisal

Robert Shangle
LiveStatue

Tom Cheslek
Hessel-Cheslek Funeral Home

Tom Penland
Tom's Hometown Bakery

Sparta Events (Sparta Community Works) 501c3

Maryanne Wright
Wrightway Appraisal

Dana Quick
Edward Jones Investments

Brenda Braybrook
McDonalds

Anne Pfeffer
Northwest Optometry

Tom Cheslek
Hessel-Cheslek Funeral Home

STAFF

Elizabeth Morse
DDA/Chamber Director

Natalie Davenport
DDA & Chamber Assistant



The DeLange Harness Shop

Through the effort of several donations of products, services, and labor to the project, the interior of the 194 E. Division St. Building called the DeLange Harness Shop, was completed in early July 2018. The new operations opened the doors during the height of event season, but the impact of having front doors open on main street was immediate as it became an information hub during the events. The exterior improvements to the office building were approved at the regular April 2018 DDA meeting to meet the historical appearance of the building from the late 1800's and include a history of the building on the exterior which took place in 2019.

Building Operations

In 2018, staff worked to create the new building operations policy and procedures, noting that this office will run like other economic development offices and has reviewed those types of structures to implement and include in our plan. The plan was adopted in October 2018 and included items such as personal cell phone use, hours to work, earned time off, and other relevant items in an office which operates as a downtown economic development driver, events coordination location, and Chamber member marketing office.



Harvest Moon, 1996



Reorganization 501c3 Events: Sparta Community Works

The "Events" organization operated financially independent of the Sparta Chamber in 2018 and the operation officially started January 1, 2019 with a separate Events board that consists of up to 2 DDA appointed members, 2 Chamber appointed board members, and 2 festival representatives which currently include Town & Country Days and Apple Fest, and one member of the community at large. The entity board members operate and oversee the activities of the events held through the department, and are able to keep the mission and goals of each event in check with the mission of the DDA and the Chamber.

Capital Improvement

In 2020, capital improvement projects included the expansion of the parklet along Nash Creek into the Sparta Town Square installation, a retail incubator hub to encourage small startup retail business growth in Sparta. Through grant acquisition from the Sparta Community Foundation, the DDA was able to purchase furniture for public use in the Sparta Town Square.

Through a new partnership of the DDA with the Baker Investments LLC, the Sparta Town Square came to life in late 2020 with the installation of 4 Retail Incubator shipping containers, decking, outdoor seating, and adjacent grass park area for picnic tables and fire pits to encourage lingering. The space also created a new venue for special events and festivities that will be in the hub of downtown businesses.



Parklet

In 2018 the DDA installed a new “Parklet” that took planned improvement concepts from the 2016 Arches Master Plan and integrated the placemaking concept of a pop-up park that overlooks Nash Creek along the Balyeat Pedestrian Bridge. The Parklet was a trial to activate the space. By creating the space as a temporary pop up space summer and fall, the DDA invested less than \$5,000 to test the improvement. The parklet amenities were simple and included bistro lighting, outdoor seating, shade umbrellas, a painted floor area in the parking lot to define the space.



Sparta Town Square

In 2019, the Events held a Bash on the Nash event on a Friday evenings featuring live music and entertainments for an adult evening out in downtown Sparta. The additions to the space were well received with the addition of temporary picnic table seating added for these pop up events, a bonfire with roasting marshmallows, and food vendors.

In April 2019, a project was pitched to expand the parklet into a retail incubator space to connect with the new infill development, called Sparta Town Square, that would expand the parklet area into a retail incubator that will have small, affordable spaces for retailers to start up without the extensive overhead costs of leasing a traditional bricks and mortar building. The project was awarded a Small Town Rural Development Pitch Competition for an idea that would make a large impact downtown Sparta for economic development, taking 3rd place out of 42 communities.



In 2020, the Sparta Town Square project partnered with a local property development company, Baker Investments LLC, to execute the project. The incubator structures and landscaping elements including decking were purchased and installed by the developer while the grounds and festivities onsite are managed by the DDA department.

The project was successful in physically creating new places for small, startup retail businesses to develop, and it has transformed the way we invite business to grow in Sparta, and provide assistance to those businesses to develop with the intent for successful retail businesses to grow into the bricks and mortar locations permanently. The program has provided a new unique opportunity to meet the needs of small, startup retail-based businesses to set up and operate in downtown Sparta with short term leases (low risk) and low overhead.



223 E Division, previously known as the Alt Oil Property

The DDA entered into an agreement in 2020 with the property developer Baker Investments LLC to redevelop the 223 E. Division Property into a two story infill construction project with residential on top and retail or office on bottom. The key to the agreement is to involve the MEDC on additional funding opportunities through the Community Revitalization Program fund and to create a project that meets the goal of infill development for downtown Sparta.

Sparta Bucks: Local Currency

In 2020, Sparta Chamber started the Sparta Bucks local currency program as an element of the Shop Local Campaign: Shop, Eat, Enjoy Sparta! That began in response to COVID-19. The Sparta Bucks are a turn key program through Conpoto and used as local community currency for gifting, purchasing to keep dollars local (vs. an amazon or other non-local gift card), and for convenience for shoppers to buy one generic shopping local that can be used at several independently owned places. There is no cost for the business to sign up to accept this program currency and the current redemption rate is 100% (no transaction fee). A 3% transaction fee will apply at some point in the future (to cover the cost of the transaction rate the Chamber incurs), but a date to begin this hasn't been set. More than likely the transaction fee will begin after COVID limitations are lifted if possible.

The Sparta Chamber/DDA/Events have been able to utilize the Sparta Bucks as a generic platform for social media interactions (give aways), for prize awards, and for incentives (promotions for people who Shop Local). To date, we have distributed over \$9,000 in Sparta Bucks from our Shop Eat Enjoy campaign (as prizes), and worked very well to solicit the "shop local" communication with the public.



CONCERTS IN ROGERS PARK (EVENTS)

The 2020 Summer Concert series featured only a few musical performances due to the crowd restrictions of COVID-19.

TOWN & COUNTRY DAYS (EVENTS)

Sparta's 2019 Town and Country Days celebration left a smile on everyone's face, while 2020 only allowed for a Tractor Brigade to drive by the neighborhoods of Sparta. The effort of the Events committee to salute what would have been the week of the annual event with 25 tractors driving through town was very bittersweet.



MICHIGAN APPLE FEST (EVENTS)

The traditional Michigan Apple Fest was not possible due to COVID-19 gathering restrictions, but downtown Sparta hosted separate apple related fun including taste testing of various Michigan apples, Shop Eat Enjoy outdoor entertainments that did not gather people, and visual representations such as the round hay bale art displays through town.



SHOP SPARTA / CHRISTMAS (EVENTS)

In 2019 the Shop Sparta Christmas Event on the Friday before thanksgiving downtown Sparta was packed with people! This year, we were forced to light the Christmas tree via facebook video to not gather people together due to the COVID-19 restrictions. All activity during the holiday season focused efforts on shopping local by infusing energy into Small Business Saturday efforts, Black Friday shopping, a countdown to Christmas stamp card, and Sparta Bucks giveaways.



The DeLange Harness Shop hosted the Sparta Sports Boosters in the front shop, to sell retail Sparta wear items throughout the holiday season.

Christmas downtown décor and lighting is budgeted and expended through the DDA, and event and special décor related expenses are managed through the Events budget. In 2020, we increased lights in Candy Cane Lane and added a new Santa workshop in the parking lot to infuse interest close to the Christmas Tree in lieu of the Santa visits which were restricted due to COVID-19.

SPARTA TODAY NEWSPAPER (CHAMBER)

Chamber & Sparta Schools have partnered to send to entire Sparta School District by mail. The mailing cost is \$2400 per edition, printing 5 editions per year. Sparta Schools pays to print the pages they use, and covers half of the mailing charges. This has been the primary communication tool from our department to the public other than social media. The Chamber general fund has taken the burden of the expense of the publication and has dedicated its Integrity Business rebate (approximately \$2500 per year) to offset the General Fund expense.

SPARTA DDA PROPERTY REINVESTMENT GRANTS

The DDA awarded two grants for exterior property improvements in 2020, to the following:

- 203 E. Division exterior improvements for \$5,000
- 201 E. Division for rear restroom ramp improvements \$5,000

The budget set for 2021 is \$5,000 for Reinvestment Grants.