

La Grange, Illinois

The Village Spokesman

January / February 2010

A New Decade!

The face of the Village has changed in the last decade. From being called one of the “80 Hottest ‘Hoods” in the United States (Money Magazine, June 2003) to being touted as having the “Best Downtown” in all of suburban Chicago (Chicago Magazine, August, 2009), **La Grange has earned many accolades.** Our residents, business owners, volunteers and elected officials have made extraordinary commitments in support of La Grange’s revitalization efforts over the years, and the Village has prospered. **We salute you all, and thank you for your contributions.**

Our hard-working and talented Village Staff should also be acknowledged. It takes excellent Village management to steer the course for our community. From attracting grant funding to plowing snow, the dedicated employees of this Village are the real engine that drives the success of our community. I hope you will join me in thanking them for their great work.

In this edition of The Village Spokesman, I would like to share with you a **summary of the major activities and accomplishments** of your Village government over the last year.

Please know that if you have any questions, concerns or thoughts you would like to share about Village activities or issues, members of the Village Board would be pleased to hear from you. We welcome you to attend one of our Village Board meetings on the second or fourth Monday of each month. If you are not able to attend, please do not hesitate to contact me or any of your Village Trustees at 708-579-2313 or at eamasperger@villageoflagrange.com.

We look forward to serving your interests in the year ahead.

Very Truly Yours,

Elizabeth M. Asperger
Village President

2009 Highlights

The Village Board continues to identify economic development as a priority, and this past year we pursued many opportunities to sustain our economic growth and momentum.

- The **business climate in La Grange is thriving**. Chicago Magazine highlighted the charm and hometown feel of our downtown, while also recognizing its outstanding mix of traditional and modern stores, boutiques and eateries. The newly renovated La Grange Theater and several other businesses were showcased on WGN-TV in August during their nightly news broadcasts. The Hungry Hound from ABC 7 news visited three of La Grange's newest restaurants last month, and shared rave reviews of not only these eateries, but of our entire community. Even the strength of our financial institutions made the news, as U.S Banker Magazine ranked The First National Bank of La Grange fifth of the top 200 community banks nationwide, by three-year average return on equity.
- In spite of the challenging economic climate, **we welcomed 33 new businesses to La Grange this year**, including 8 new restaurants, 5 retail shops and 3 other food-oriented establishments. We celebrate each of these new businesses in town, and encourage you to continue to support our community by shopping, dining and enjoying all that our commercial districts have to offer.
- The Village and owners of the La Grange Theater established a joint venture for the **renovation of the movie theater**. The Village contributed one million dollars from our TIF fund toward the renovation of this iconic entertainment venue which was built in 1925. In addition to a new lobby, new building systems, bathrooms, accessibility accommodations and a complete renovation of the largest of the four theaters, original art-deco ceiling murals were uncovered and refreshed so that we might enjoy some of the original glory of the theater building.

The La Grange Theater is important to the economic viability of our downtown, bringing nearly 170,000 people to downtown La Grange annually. With a movie ticket price of \$5.50, both residents and visitors to La Grange can enjoy an evening of entertainment in town, whether strolling through our shops or trying one of our many restaurants before or after a movie. If you have not yet visited the renovated theater, please stop in for a look at the work that has been done.

- **A comprehensive evaluation of La Grange's Zoning Code is on-going**, and in the last year we adopted amendments to the C-1 Central Commercial District which updated the lists of permitted and special uses in the downtown area. Our Code is now a better reflection of the desires of the community for business use in the downtown area.

- We continued to work with the YMCA, Park District of La Grange and Atlantic Realty Partners toward realization of the residential living and retail development project approved in April, 2008, for the corner of Ogden Avenue and La Grange Road, abutting Gordon Park – a project that would be the **largest private development in Village history**. This project offered a host of benefits to the La Grange community, including new housing opportunities, significant infrastructure and safety improvements at this intersection, new retail opportunities to compliment and support our existing businesses, significant new property taxes which would benefit our schools and other taxing bodies, and a completely renovated, state-of-the-art Gordon Park.

Unfortunately, the approved project has been stalled due to litigation filed against the Park District of La Grange seeking to prohibit the Park District from selling the park land that is included in the proposed development. We await the resolution of the pending litigation.

- The Village Board **adopted amendments to the La Grange Liquor Code** to better reflect the changing needs of businesses, the growing popularity of the downtown, and market place changes related to the sale and service of alcoholic liquor. The amendments provide for new license classes such as a Bring-Your-Own (BYOB) license for restaurants and certain retail establishments. Other amendments were made to update and modernize current best practices for regulating liquor, such as provisions for retail establishments that are hosting charitable events.
- We examined and will continue to evaluate a **Business District proposal** and other strategies to assist the Village in marketing and promoting our businesses and to provide a mechanism to offer façade loans to businesses throughout the Village.
- Adding to the Village's diverse mix of building options, the **Peck Building** located on the southeast corner of Sixth and Harris Avenues **was completely renovated** and is currently leasing for medical/professional office space.
- Earlier than originally planned, we terminated the **Village's TIF District, which was established in 1986, and delivered \$5.1M in surplus TIF funds** to area taxing bodies. La Grange's TIF District was the primary economic engine which spurred the revitalization of our central business district.

The TIF program began with investments in the Village's streetscape (sidewalks, brick pavers, trees and street furniture), and evolved to include: a façade loan program for TIF District businesses; the acquisition, environmental remediation and redevelopment of several large parcels of land; and a \$1.3M contribution to Cossitt School for exterior

improvements. The condominium building at 14 S. Ashland, all of the buildings and businesses which line LaGrange Road between Ogden and Hillgrove Avenues (Corner Bakery to Borders and Baja Fresh to Walgreens), the 78-unit Beacon Place condominium building, and the Village Hall parking structure and fountain plaza area were all TIF projects. The Village's participation in the renovation of the La Grange Theater was our final TIF project.

The success of our TIF has been highly touted. We are grateful to our residents and the other taxing bodies in the Village for their support of the TIF plan. The vision, planning and courage to support these efforts have paid great dividends to the entire Village.

Providing for Public Safety is a core Village government function. Evaluating and improving public safety initiatives, including traffic management and pedestrian safety, continue to be high priorities for the Village Board.

- Following a tragic pedestrian traffic accident at 8th Avenue and 47th Street in May 2009, Village leaders facilitated a community meeting to discuss and **better understand neighborhood concerns and perceived pedestrian safety issues along the 47th Street corridor**. As a result, sidewalks and curb ramps on 47th Street from Sixth Avenue to Tenth Avenue were realigned. In addition, parallel bar crosswalks were installed on cross streets on both sides of 47th Street, and pavement markings at the signalized intersection of 47th Street and Edgewood Avenue were enhanced.

A new pedestrian crossing on 47th Street at 9th Avenue has been established. In addition to advanced warning signage and pavement markings, the new crossing includes pedestrian activated post-mounted beacons and in-pavement flashers to alert motorists of pedestrian activity at this location. The enhancements to these pedestrian crossings are part of the Village's strategy of evaluating and improving pedestrian safety throughout the Village. We appreciate your input and feedback regarding these enhancements.

We would like to recognize and convey our appreciation to State Representatives Michael Zalewski and Jim Durkin for their assistance with all IDOT approvals which were necessary for the improvements along 47th Street, which is a State route.

- A **pedestrian signal upgrade project** was also completed last summer. New pedestrian numerical countdown timers and symbol displays have been installed at nine signalized intersections throughout the Village, and these intersections were also improved with new LED modules to increase visibility of the signals. Traffic calming devices, such as speed monitors

and warning signage, were also employed throughout the Village. Special truck enforcement details continued on La Grange Road and Ogden Avenue.

- We endured a spree of residential burglaries this past year. As a result of aggressive citizen reporting and our strong police and investigative responses, the incidence of residential burglaries in La Grange has subsided dramatically. **Community policing is a partnership between residents and our police department.** Your actions led to securing our community, and we thank you for your continued cooperation.
- The La Grange Fire and Police Departments partnered with Aging Well, a subsidiary of the senior center in La Grange, to establish a **new lock box program**, ideal for senior citizens or residents with special needs requirements who cannot easily get to the door. If you would like more information, please contact the La Grange Fire Department.
- As a 130 year-old community, the importance of maintaining our infrastructure has long been a Village Board priority.
- This year we made substantial progress on the **Bluff Avenue Improvement Project**, which is a \$6.7 million, multi-year project that will be constructed in three stages. Stage I was completed last summer and included the reconstruction of Bluff Avenue from Burlington Avenue to Cossitt Avenue. The street reconstruction consisted of a new asphalt surface, curb and gutter, sidewalks, parkways, and water and sewer upgrades where required.

Stage II of this project began in the fall of 2009 and consists of the construction of a new sewer from Cossitt Avenue to Maple Avenue to Bluff Avenue. The sewer will provide the drainage necessary for Stage III of the project and is the first phase of the larger Maple Avenue Relief Sewer (“MARS”) initiative. The outlet sewer will connect the Bluff Avenue corridor to the deep tunnel connection at Cossitt and East Avenues.

Stage III of the project will consist of the reconstruction of Bluff Avenue from Cossitt Avenue to 47th Street, and it is planned to begin this Spring.

- The **Central Business District Street Resurfacing Project** was completed last summer. This project involved the resurfacing of Burlington Avenue from Kensington to La Grange Road; Calendar Avenue from Ashland to La Grange Road; Harris Avenue from Ashland to 6th Avenue; and Ashland Avenue from Harris to Burlington. This project also included spot curb repair, restoration of brick paver crosswalks and intermittent sidewalk repairs.

- We completed plans for considerable **infrastructure improvements in the West End Business District** in 2010. Using federal stimulus funds, Burlington Avenue will be resurfaced from Kensington to Brainard Avenue.
- We began working with consultant Legat Architects to plan for the **overall restoration of the Stone Avenue Train Station**. A sensitive and historic renovation is planned, with the goal of protecting this valuable community asset and providing updated amenities in and around the station area. Due to the cost of the renovation effort, the project will likely be done in several phases over two or more years. An additional goal of the project is to improve the public green space surrounding the station, so that it can be used for community events and festivals. METRA has been engaged in reconstructing the platforms at the Stone Avenue train station, and it is anticipated that all platform work will be completed this Spring.

The Village Board is committed to maintaining a strong financial position, long recognized as the foundation of our success and ability to achieve our goals as a Village.

- In 2009, we continued to take a **conservative approach to budgeting and spending tax dollars**. We plan for the future using a five-year operating and capital improvements budget, and we maintain strong reserves so that we can be prepared for the unexpected.
- **The Village received the Government Finance Officers (GFOA) “Distinguished Budget Presentation Award” for our FY 2009-10 budget** document. This is our fifteenth consecutive year of earning this award, which assesses how well the Village budget serves as a policy document, a financial plan, an operations guide and a communications device. This is a significant accomplishment, as La Grange is one of only 1,166 entities from the United States and Canada who are being presented with this prestigious award this year. As a frame of reference, there are over 6,000 units of government in Illinois alone. The Village also received the “Certificate of Achievement for Comprehensive Annual Financial Reporting” from the GFOA for the fourteenth consecutive year.

Additional Accolades

- In 2009, the Village of **La Grange received a total of \$3,423,000 in grant funds**. These funds were awarded primarily for infrastructure improvements and law enforcement programs. The Village would like to thank (retired) Congressman William O. Lipinski and Congressman Daniel Lipinski for their support of our grant request for the parking structure.
- The Village was selected for **Honorable Mention by Arts Alliance Illinois for its 2009 Presidents' Arts Friendly Community Award**. Arts Alliance Illinois recognized La Grange as a model for how municipalities can work with artists, arts organizations and volunteers to improve the quality of life of their residents. Our application touted recent improvements such as the downtown fountain plaza area and restoration of the La Grange Theater, as well as the numerous arts-focused events in La Grange, such as the West End Art Fair, Arts and Crafts Show, annual summer street sculpture and art exhibit, charity events like the Empty Bowls celebration, and our high school student art show. These events help to enrich our community in countless ways. Thank you to all who supported these important events throughout the year.