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Escanaba and Owosso Downtowns Added to the National Register of Historic Places

LANSING, Mich. — Downtown historic districts in Escanaba and Owosso are among the most recent listings to the National Register of Historic Places, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) announced today.

“The recognition of downtown historic districts is an important step in preserving a sense of place in our communities,” said State Historic Preservation Officer Brian Conway. “Listing in the national register -- the nation’s list of historic sites worthy of preservation -- enables the owners of income-producing properties to apply for Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits for the rehabilitation of their buildings, thereby encouraging investment in vacant and underused buildings.”

The SHPO, part of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), hired consultants to prepare nominations for the central business districts of three communities to support statewide downtown revitalization programs, including Escanaba, Owosso and Alma.

The SHPO selected Escanaba because of the local interest generated in historic rehabilitation by the successful conversion of the Richter Brewery into apartments known as the Lofts on Ludington. As a result of Owosso’s participation in the Michigan Main Street program, the city received design services and has begun several major façade improvements downtown. Work has begun in Alma on adapting the Wright Opera House as student housing, and additional buildings are under consideration for redevelopment. Alma’s downtown was listed in the National Register of Historic Places several months ago.

The Owosso Downtown Historic District is roughly bounded by the Shiawassee River and Water, Comstock, Park and Mason streets. The district contains more than 100 buildings, dating primarily from the 1850s to the 1960s. The area has served as Owosso’s central business district since the community’s establishment in the 1830s and remains today a key business center for the city even though the usual commercial strips have developed on the city’s outskirts. The district contains such key historic landmarks as the City Hall, old high school building, the Capitol Theater/Lebowsky Center, and the former National Guard Armory, along with churches, social and fraternal hall buildings, and buildings which have housed much of the downtown’s commercial activity over the years. The district’s commercial buildings range in style from vernacular Greek Revival and Italianate to Neoclassical and International style. A particularly distinctive feature, and one that separates downtown Owosso from many other small city downtowns around Michigan, is its concentration of late Victorian buildings displaying intricate brickwork.

The Escanaba Central Historic District stretches for more than a mile along Ludington Street, roughly including its 200-1800 blocks from the House of Ludington near the foot of the street all

the way to the former Stegath Lumber and Richter Brewery complexes. It encompasses the city's historic central business district and parts of adjacent blocks containing the county courthouse complex, historic junior high school, the former city hall and public library, and church buildings. The district's 185 buildings date mostly from the early 1880s to the mid-1960s and include four churches, three theater buildings, the former post office, fraternal and social hall buildings, as well as commercial buildings that housed hotels, banks, department stores, restaurants, saloons, stores and offices. The district has more than a dozen buildings employing Lake Superior red sandstone, Neoclassical former bank buildings, late Victorian commercial blocks and Period Revival and Moderne movie theaters, and later representatives of International and Mid-Century Modern influences.

Other Michigan sites listed in this round:

The Genesee Street School, 835 W. Genesee St., Lansing. Lansing architect Edwyn A. Bowd designed the Neoclassical school building constructed in 1912 in an early 20th-century neighborhood northwest of downtown Lansing. The building is quite similar to the Shiawassee Street School in Corunna, also designed by Bowd. The school closed at the end of the 1984 school year and was used by a number of nonprofits, including the Black Child and Family Institute, which leased the building from the school district from 1986 to 2012. The building is now owned by Zero Day, a nonprofit devoted to providing job training and housing for veterans.

Sparks-Anderson House, 7653 West Main St., Oshtemo, Kalamazoo County

The Greek Revival-style Sparks-Anderson House dates from 1852, the early years of Oshtemo Township settlement. Once one of many Greek Revival residences in the township, the house is now one of only a few remaining with its historic features intact. The property is owned by Kalamazoo College, which also owns the former farmland once associated with the house. The property is now known as the Lillian Anderson Arboretum.

Historic sites are nominated to the national register by the State Historic Preservation Review Board, which considers nominations to the register three times per year. On behalf of the review board, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) forwards nominations to the keeper of the National Register, National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, for listing. Michigan has more than 1,600 listings in the National Register of Historic Places, including some 250 districts comprising more than 20,000 properties.

The SHPO coordinates the National Register Program in Michigan. For information on the National Register of Historic Places and other programs of the State Historic Preservation Office, visit www.michigan.gov/shpo or call (517) 373-1630.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is financed in part by a grant from the National Park Service, Department of Interior. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of the Interior. The Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on its federally funded assistance programs. If you believe you've been discriminated against please contact the Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C. St. NW, Washington DC 20240.

The State Historic Preservation Office is part of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), which provides financial and technical assistance through public and private partnerships to create and preserve decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents and to engage in community economic development activities to revitalize urban and rural communities.

*MSHDA's loans and operating expenses are financed through the sale of tax-exempt and taxable bonds as well as notes to private investors, not from state tax revenues. Proceeds are loaned at below-market interest rates to developers of rental housing, and help fund mortgages and home improvement loans.

MSHDA also administers several federal housing programs. For more information, visit www.michigan.gov/mshda.

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