



Foreword

WE are each on a journey. Our cities are also on a journey ... through time. For the past nine years my journey has allowed me to meet and work with many people, photographing the best new beginnings and greatest losses in over 1700 communities throughout North America. I do this with an eye for progress and failure. I use a camera, sometimes with a wide lens, often with a telephoto to compress goodness and badness. I frame and freeze moments in time; giving pride to a few, embarrassment to way too many. We can all do better, and we know it.

Michigan remains at the top of my list for sought after visits in America. Next to California, Hawaii and Florida I spend more time here than anywhere. While here I record and share my work, inspiration, and pride in its most courageous people. I love Michigan people. I really do. These people are our nation's past, present and future.

Sadly, Michigan is at the same time still plummeting into an ever deeper state of deep, disgusting failings, fatigue and offense. How can the Midwestern state most central to providing our nation its greatest personal mobility and freedom now find many of its cities at the top of dung piles; a still growing list of once elegant, walkable and workable places, now on America's hardest to heal spaces?

Flint, Saginaw, Lansing, Detroit and many other cities have not been healthy for decades. Their downtowns are windswept, dangerous, weedy and litter-strewn full of vacant buildings and despair. These cities are subjects of documentaries no one wants to be in.

It is not just the loss of an industry that has sufficient mobility to move about that is hurting Michigan's national image; it is a long term loss of footing of balance, of inspiration, of control of place making. It is a failure of people to remain committed to doing the hardest of all work, to work together, to preserve, to care, to nurture an entire state once packed with natural wonder.

As a child and fellow mid-westerner, I came to know and love Michigan's small lake towns, its mid-size cities and once or twice, its once great large metropolitan place, an urban center that once stood tall and distinct, a shopping and entertainment Mecca, an inspiration to a nation.

Many of these once elegant places have fallen ... fallen hard, as many American cities have. The journey to these cities is not a roller coaster ride, it is almost a freefall jump off of a cliff. Many people in Michigan now spend much of their time driving through endless landscapes painted with abuse of unlimited land, money and easy rides to the next, more outer ring of growth and irresponsibility; and always with redundant oversized signs shouting "look at me."

I don't need to paint the picture, the image is indelible, and every day, every ride we take to anywhere. By foot the picture is even bleaker.

Michigan is not unique in having over invested in auto freedom and its corresponding fueling of personal and corporate irresponsibility. It is not the first, nor the most wrecked of places for human health, social exchange, and meaningless hours spent trying to escape or flee places we should be investing in, helping build again. There are many equals to monotonous patterns of isolation, fear, wasted, devastated time and land.

Nationwide the statistics are staggering. And they are growing worse. The national

auto addiction is currently set at 72 minutes per day (and growing) in all states, in all regions. With each 10 minutes added to car time per week, volunteerism ... the ability and desire to help others, shrinks 10%.

What is even more grave, as Americans we are told the lack of daily physical activity has led to a condition where our children will be the first in known history not likely to outlive their parents. Once walking to school was as common as the plains. Today, only one child in ten now walks to school. These losses are not the abuse of a single agency, a single city, or a single place. It is a joint failure of one and all. Our national health care costs rose 36% in just the past few years ... and they will continue to grow, astronomically until we regain our ability to live active lives. Our feet have always been the answer. We keep looking for silver bullets. They are never found.

There are no easy fixes. Taxpayers head the list of those looking for cheap ways out. At the same time their personal standards of living are rising, with bigger cars, more country club memberships, more recreational vehicles of all kinds, all while individual and community quality of life is



Photo 2. Madison Heights

This is a photo of Dan Burden and Leslie Kettren taken in August, 2004. Dan and Leslie have been collaborating and pooling resources for nearly ten years now.

falling. Bright, new, courageous, charismatic leadership, what we need most to set a new course ... is even harder to find.

Despite the above statistics, my travels lead me to be our nation's most energetic optimist. From private chats, one on one, with Michigan developers, planners, architects, volunteers ... to precious times spent looking out upon eyes of hundreds of volunteers and leaders listening to keynote presentations I have been fortunate to give, I see a brilliant future for Michigan.

In this important writing, Leslie gives us a thump or two, as well as gentle and not so gentle footsteps and paths to follow. My ten years of Michigan trekking, talking, investigating and chatting with many exceptional people leads me to believe that the same human resource, historic talent, commitment, hard work and genius to invent, popularize and provide a nation its machine for personal mobility, will help us un-pave and resettle a human scale, sociable habitat.

Michigan can again be first. As you will learn in these pages, it won't be easy. We have to not only change our physical environment, but our attitude, or quest. We must get back to doing and paying for those things we value the most. We must reclaim quality of life, not for one, but for all.

We must decide as individuals, as communities where to spend money and

energy. We must decide to stop fooling around with urban spaces, and treat them with our highest regard and respect, to fall in love with urban life again. Our rural lands suffer as we all attempt to claim our own personal tiny corner of it. Again, in this important writing Leslie documents and shares many early seeds, ideas, case studies, notions and a few early triumphs.

In August of 2004, under a program of the Michigan Department of Transportation and Governor Jennifer Granholm's Cool Cities initiative, I had the pleasure of walking a dozen towns for the Governor, and another dozen on my own during days off. These included little places like Portland, Jackson and my wife's birthplace, Ypsilanti ... bright new settlements of waterfronts in Bay City and Traverse City, reclamations spirited by a Latino volunteer of an African-American neighborhoods on Wealthy Street in Detroit, and other diverse places in Grand Rapids.

From my travels, I have a knowledge of urban life achievements few Michiganders have. You have yours too. Work from them. Travel a lot. See, measure, evaluate. Decide for yourself what works and why. Know what fails and testify and share why these places are not good. Know the difference, not only in your mind, in your heart. Together, we will invent a better use of our mobility, our money, and our land. Enjoy the journey.

— Dan Burden
Executive Director
Walkable Communities, Inc.



