

Brand Manistee County Leadership Team

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For Immediate Release

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MANISTEE COUNTY LAUNCHES AREA'S FIRST BRANDING INITIATIVE *Leadership Team Seeks Community Input to Help Marketing Efforts*

MANISTEE, Michigan- “Brand Manistee County,” funded in part under a grant from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, is a new marketing initiative aimed at bringing new business, jobs, customers, tourists and families to Manistee County. The initiative will be led by the Brand Manistee County Leadership Team, which includes a diverse group of Manistee County leaders and a nationally-known company that develop brands and branding strategies for communities throughout the United States.

To kick-off the program, the Leadership Team is seeking “gold nuggets” in the form of ideas, opinions and inspirations for this first-of-kind initiative to develop a brand for Manistee County. Residents are encouraged to visit www.brandmanisteecounty.com to provide their input. A community-wide survey will be posted to the site at a later stage in the branding process and a series of one-on-one meetings and focus group meetings will be held over the period July 12-15, 2009 to gain additional information. More information about these forums will be forthcoming.

“By building an effective brand for all of Manistee County, as well as strategies for marketing that brand, we will be connecting the soul of Manistee County with the rest of the world,” said Amy Wojciechowski, Business Division Chair at West Shore Community College and member of the Brand Manistee County Team. “And the rest of the world includes tourists, new businesses, families and others who will make Manistee County their destination.”

The Leadership Team selected the firm North Star Destination Strategies of Nashville, Tennessee to develop the county-wide brand through an open, public process. North Star was selected because their company has a unique focus of community branding, having done similar work in communities of all size throughout the nation.

“Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not around. In other words, your reputation,” explains Don McEachern, CEO of North Star. “People have chosen to move to a city without ever visiting based wholly on the word-of-mouth about it. Branding is what you do to change or refine that message to work for the goals of the community. We are delighted to be working with Manistee County in this capacity.”

Members of the Manistee County Branding Leadership Team include: Judy Ball, Executive Director, Manistee County Convention and Visitor’s Bureau; Amy Berry, Manager of Communications for Mariah Power; Jim Drazo, Chair, Kaleva Planning Commission; Cathy Fairbanks, Executive Assistant, Alliance for Economic Success and small business owner; Cyndy Fuller, Mayor, City of Manistee; Michael Garrow, General Manager Little River Casino Resort; Laura Heintzeman, Executive Director, Manistee County Community Foundation; Ray Schmidt, owner/operator of Schmidt Outfitters; and Amy Wojciechowski, Business Division

Chair at West Shore Community College and Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce Board Member. Tim Ervin is coordinating the project for the Alliance for Economic Success.

“Especially in these challenging economic conditions, there is no better time than now to create a brand identity for Manistee County that can be used to support how we market ourselves,” said Branding Team member Ray Schmidt of Wellston, Michigan. “We need people of all ages as well as every community, business, local government, nonprofit organization and others to become involved in the branding process so that they will benefit from the results: a brand identity that we can all rally around in promotion and selling everything that makes Manistee County special.”

One component of North Star’s research is a comprehensive and customized community-wide online survey which will be available later in the summer. The questionnaire will be crafted to determine the area’s strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities. Everyone is invited and encouraged to participate in this important community-wide initiative. Information from the survey will also be used to update Envision Manistee County, the first county-wide visioning initiative completed in 2006. Many individuals who participated in Envision Manistee County identified county-wide branding as a future priority.

If you are interested in learning more about the upcoming survey or general information about Manistee County’s branding initiative, go to www.brandmanisteecounty.com.

The Brand Manistee County initiative is funded in part by a grant from the U. S. Department of Agriculture and with grants provided by the City of Manistee, Little River Casino, Manistee County Community Foundation, a private donor and others.