

Grand Rapids tourism community brightens local landscape

The local hospitality and tourism industry is uniting to give back and fill flower beds in Grand Rapids Parks

Twenty-seven parks in Grand Rapids have underplanted flower beds, and they have been that way for too long. So the local tourism community is doing something about it in the newly launched “Adopt a Bed” program.

Coordinating the effort is a team from the 100 percent volunteer/give back non-profit Michigan Cares for Tourism (MC4T). Patty Janes, a professor at Grand Valley State University’s Hospitality and Tourism Management (GVSU-HTM) program leads the charge with local partners at Experience Grand Rapids, the Kent County Hospitality Association, Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department, and GVSU. Jointly, they asked local tourism organizations to sponsor the 33 irrigated flower beds in 10 downtown parks beautifying neighborhoods that include Westown Commons Park and Douglas Park, and enhancing resident and visitor experiences to those along the riverfront including Fish Ladder, Canal and Ah-Nab-Awen Parks.

The tourism industry’s response did not surprise Janes.

“MC4T coordinates industry volunteer giving events around Michigan, and the tourism industry not only funds these types of efforts, they volunteer to help ensure projects

happen,” Janes said. “The Grand Rapids community has always been incredibly generous, and we knew they would respond to this need as well”.

Adopt a Bed was created from identifying an issue where Grand Rapids had need, and MC4T and their partners could help.

Joe Sulak, City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation superintendent, added, “We couldn’t do this without community support, and we have been amazed by what the tourism industry has accomplished in our parks already with other projects. I wanted to ensure that existing park beds had year-round interest. However, funding and staff challenges for our 74 parks prevented us from being able to keep the beds attractive at a high level. It is only through partnerships that we can do more.”

A range of tourism businesses both large and small have adopted beds. Amway Hospitality Corporation, DeVos Place and Grand Rapids Art Museum are a few of the large sized tourism organizations supporting the effort; Divani, Eastern Floral, Comfort Inn, Hilton Garden Inn, Hampton Inn, Doubletree and Holiday Inn also are making an impact with smaller-sized staffs.

Employees from these organizations volunteer to plant the flowers during National Tourism Week (May 6-12), and area youth employed as GGreen Stewards will work alongside Grand Rapids park staff to help maintain them all summer. In October, the volunteers will prep the beds for winter and plant bulbs for next spring.

Dan Sippel, West Michigan Tourist Association (WMTA) President and MC4T board member volunteers his time to help coordinate the effort. His team also has adopted a bed. “Volunteering our time to not only plan this initiative but have our team volunteer is what community is all about” Sippel said. “We serve the tourism industry in all of West Michigan and want to give back through MC4T. Grand Rapids is where WMTA was founded over 100 years ago, and we also want to volunteer in our home and community.”

It takes a community of people to make a place the best it can be. Providing and planting three seasons of flowers to the downtown area beautifies the region and helps to create a stronger environment and more diverse ecosystem.

For additional information about Michigan Cares for Tourism, visit www.MichiganCaresforTourism.com or icare@michigancaresfortourism.com



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