

# h.e.d. Lines

A publication of the Harvard Economic Development Corporation



## Chairman's Column

By HEDC Chairman Roger Lehmann



The crowds that the '4th Fridays' events bring to the Starline gallery are an excellent example of the potential in Downtown Harvard. More than 500 visitors from Chicago, the northwest suburbs and southern Wisconsin were drawn to Front Street on July 22, thanks to the marketing

efforts of event coordinators Nancy Merklings and Teresa Baber.

Many of them traveled by train to get here. Metra's \$7 Weekend Pass is making it easier and more affordable than ever to visit Harvard for special events (the Farmer's Market is another good example) or to explore Ayer Street. The Metra pass offers unlimited rides on both Saturday and Sunday and can be used with the Family Fare program, where children under 11 ride free with paying adults.

The Harvard EDC has always seen the potential to bring residents and visitors downtown and installed wayfinding signs along key routes to lure people to Ayer Street. Our efforts to attract a movie theater, a coffee shop and possibly even a restaurant would provide everyone with more things to do downtown.

The Starline is also an excellent example of how new life can be brought to old buildings. The HEDC applauds the efforts of Starline building owner Orrin Kinney and his team and invites all downtown business and building owners to develop shops, restaurants and attractions that encourage event-goers to stay and shop, eat, or one day even see a movie, downtown.

## Join us!

The HEDC is leading the way in helping Harvard become an even better place to do business.

**Call Executive Director Terry Smith at (815) 943-1036** to find out how you can play a role in Harvard's future.

Affordable memberships exist for companies of all sizes, individuals and civic groups.

**It's always a good time to get involved.**

**Join Today!**

## Harvard EDC Celebrates 10 Years

### Many Successes, Mission Continues

It was early 2001 when a group of local business and community leaders gathered together to discuss Harvard's economic future. Layoffs at the massive Motorola facility on Route 14 had begun and rumors were in the air about a potential plant closing.

City officials and community leaders were concerned that Harvard's future had become too reliant on one big employer.

"We thought it was important to have a number of strong companies in town to provide jobs and to keep the economy going so that the Harvard economy wouldn't be so tied to Motorola's ups and downs," said **Harvard Mayor Jay Nolan**, who worked for Meyer Material in 2001.

"No community wants to be dependent on one large employer, no matter who they are."

Ten charter members each contributed \$5,000 to form the **Harvard Economic Development Corporation (HEDC)** and the City of Harvard provided \$25,000 in matching funds and two representatives to sit on the Board to help get the new group going. Nolan became the HEDC's first chairman and a membership drive began. Nearly 50 business owners and individuals joined the first year.

The strategy turned out to be well timed. In early 2002, Motorola announced that it would lay off 850 additional workers as the next step toward closing the Harvard facility in 2003. The HEDC kicked into gear, developing marketing materials to put Harvard in front of expanding and relocating companies. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity provided grant funds to pay for workforce and recruitment studies and to fund the marketing effort. The Board of Directors, which included local bankers, developers, business and healthcare executives and school and city officials, rolled up their sleeves to get to work.

Over the years, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts were created for Arrowhead Industrial Park and for sections of downtown Harvard and Route 14. A business incubator was built and space leased to small businesses that the HEDC hoped would grow and stay in Harvard. Community signing projects were funded, including an electronic information sign at Five Points.

The Motorola facility did shut down in 2003, but the community kept moving forward. Development at Arrowhead Industrial Park outpaced all projections and

employers including E. H. Wachs, Harvard Factory Automation, Aero Industries, Catty Corp., All World Machinery and The Pound Bakery expanded into new facilities in Harvard. Phase III of Arrowhead opened two years ahead of schedule.

Retail activity also took off. A 150,000 square foot WalMart SuperCenter opened on McGuire Road in 2008. National retailers Advance Auto, Walgreens and Tractor Supply Co. followed on Route 14. The wave of construction and ribbon cuttings continued well into 2009, even as the national economy stumbled.

In 2008, the City of Harvard completed a major streetscape project in downtown Harvard and today the HEDC is actively recruiting retailers and a movie theater developer to keep Ayer Street alive with residents and visitors.

"Harvard has fared better than a lot of its neighbors," noted **HEDC Chairman Roger Lehmann** of The Harvard State Bank. "Thanks to the efforts of the HEDC and the City of Harvard, we had good momentum going into what became a very bad economy. Plans that were made in 2007 and 2008 carried us through much of 2009."

"We kept our car dealerships, which a lot of communities didn't, and we are still seeing local companies investing and expanding in town," he noted.

Ten years later, much of the HEDC's charter Board of Directors remains in place and the mission continues. The former Motorola campus has changed ownership twice, but remains vacant in the still-challenging economy. Retail growth needs to be re-ignited along McGuire Road and Route 14. Industrial development continues, but has slowed to a fraction of its former pace, due to the economy.

**Arrowhead Industrial Park developer and HEDC Board Member Mark Stricker** hopes that new projects in the park — The Pound Bakery just finished its fourth expansion in 15 years — signal the return of renewed confidence and activity.

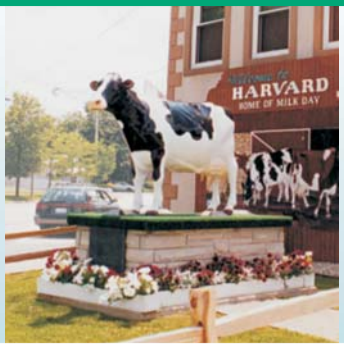
"Everything that we have been working on over the past few years has been done to prepare Harvard for returning growth," he said. "The HEDC has always been about working to make things happen, instead of sitting around waiting for them to happen."



## Ready to Roll ...

**Harvard Chevrolet Buick GMC** boasts a new exterior and expanded showroom space. An open house is being planned for later this summer.

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## Eyes Turn To Gateway... As Land Conservancy Plans Gateway Park

The intersection where Routes 14 and 23 come together on the south end of town is considered by many to be the 'gateway' to Harvard. In 2005, the HEDC built a Welcome to Harvard monument sign on the northbound side of the road into town.

Although the sign and the landscaping around it are well maintained, the rest of the area isn't as welcoming. Blockbuster Video left town when the residential housing market slowed, leaving yet another vacant building on the east side of the highway.

The HEDC and the City are turning their attention to the potential development of Harvard's 'gateway area'.

A 4.5 acre parcel with more than 800 feet of highway frontage on the east side of Route 14 offers good potential for a Road Ranger or Thornton's-type travel center or other high visibility, high-traffic business. The Walmart SuperCenter is visible north of the site and McGuire Road is sure to lure other retailers as the economy rebuilds. Good traffic counts make the area desirable to developers.

"Everyone passes by on their way in and out of town and to and from Wisconsin," property owner **Mark Stricker** said. "The gateway area is pretty much Harvard's front door and, just like at home, our front door needs to look good."



The **Land Conservancy of McHenry County** plans to purchase a 15-acre parcel at the intersection of Route 14, Route 23 and Heritage Lane and create a natural park that it will eventually deed to the City of Harvard.

According to **Land Conservancy Executive Director Lisa Haderlein**, the organization has reached an agreement with the current owner of the parcel to close on the property in early 2012. The parcel is located outside of the city limits, but will be annexed in when the City of Harvard takes possession.

An effort to raise funds for the effort will begin this month. The group plans to raise \$100,000 to pay for acquiring the land, cleaning it up, restoring the natural areas and adding walking trails. An endowment will also be created to fund

the ongoing maintenance of the park, so that it never becomes a burden to the city.

"We're accepting pledges to support the project," Haderlein said. "Our goal is to pay it off and finish the restoration within three years and then turn the park over to the city." A conservation easement will ensure that the park remains in its natural state.

Harvard resident Haderlein was inspired by the city's streetscape project. "We saw what they did with downtown Harvard, using TIF money to invest and improve the community and make it more attractive," she noted. "That sends a message and sets a tone for a community."

"The parcel was chosen because it contains the only part of Rush Creek that still has all of the twists and turns that our streams had historically before they were 'improved' to make the water flow straight," she noted.

The parcel is also located very close to the new Richard D. Crosby Elementary School, which will make it possible for students to visit the park regularly to see how the habitat changes with the seasons and learn about forest and creek management.

The park's location at the entrance to town, across from the Welcome to Harvard monument sign, also seemed like a natural, said Haderlein. "The sign has a big golden oak tree on it that says 'Success Comes Naturally Here'," she noted. "It makes it all seem as if it was meant to be."

Learn more about the Gateway Park project at the Land Conservancy website at [www.conservemc.org](http://www.conservemc.org) or contact Haderlein at (815) 337-9502 for details on how to make a pledge.

## Mayor's Column

By Mayor Jay Nolan



The City of Harvard participated in a visioning workshop in June that was hosted by the Harvard EDC at Plum Tree National. Local business owners were also on hand to help draft goals for the organization's next strategic plan, which will be completed in September.

There was a lot of discussion on Harvard's strengths, challenges and opportunities. We talked about the potential that the vacant parcel on Front Street and the recently cleared lots on Ayer Street offer to bring new types of businesses to downtown Harvard.

The group acknowledged that there is not much that can be done to push the current owners of the former Motorola property to put that facility back into use or to sell it to someone who will. What the HEDC *can* do is continue building on what it has done so well for more than a decade now: promote Harvard as a great place to grow a business.

Every time a local business expands or a new employer comes to town, our community grows stronger. Congratulations to the Harvard EDC for working to make Harvard stronger since 2001. The City of Harvard is proud to have been your partner, from the start.

## Full Speed Ahead for Starline

The historic Starline building has been rezoned to allow it to develop into what appears to be a promising banquet, gallery and entertainment venue.

A petition to rezone portions of the property containing the 13,000 square foot former manufacturing facility on West Front Street from M-1 (Manufacturing) and R-3 (Residential) to B-2 (Central Business District), was approved by the Harvard City Council in May, with a variation to allow for a banquet hall, artist studios, live-in artist studios and retail sales.

Owner **Orrin Kinney** is putting the finishing touches on building improvements. Landscaping and paving bricks are being added to areas surrounding the building. The factory's former boiler room has become a glass-ceiling atrium.

The Starline has proven to be a popular venue, hosting weddings, dinners, gallery shows and, most recently, its monthly '4th Friday' events, which lured more than 500 people to the facility and its grand gallery space on July 22.

"Each 4th Friday is much more than an art show," noted **Teresa Baber**, who oversees the event with fellow photographer **Nancy Merklng**. "It's an event wrapped around an art show." Admission is \$5 and includes live music, studio tours and refreshments.

The duo are also coordinating leasing, event and development activities for the facility and hope to attract a restaurant or coffee shop to the site to accommodate the growing number of visitors that are coming to Harvard to visit the Starline.

The Starline's new website includes photos and details on the gallery, artist studios and event facilities. You can see it all at [www.starlinefactory.org](http://www.starlinefactory.org).

Contact Merklng at (815) 347-8535 or Baber at (815) 355-1608 for information on holding an event or leasing available studio space at the Starline.

## Working For Harvard

Call us with your comments and suggestions:  
**Harvard Economic Development Corp.**  
**(815) 943-1036**

**Other Local Contacts:**

**Mayor Jay Nolan/City Hall**  
**(815) 943-6468**

**State Senator Pamela Althoff**  
**(815) 455-6330**

**State Representative Jack Franks**  
**(815) 334-0063**

**Harvard Chamber of Commerce**  
**(815) 943-4404**



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