

Fife Lake will draw on past to highlight town

Historic walk plays up village's lumber history

By VICTOR SKINNER
Record-Eagle/Douglas Tesner

FIFE LAKE — Noreen Broering believes Fife Lake can build a future with its past. And a recently established historic walk through downtown Fife Lake is one way the village president plans to highlight the community's lumber town heritage. "People don't know we exist here. They think we are the BP gas station on U.S. 131," Broering said. "We want to make this a destination point to learn about the history of an authentic northern Michigan town that dates back to the big lumbering days." Volunteers Thursday installed 27 different display plaques in front of many of the village's buildings, businesses and

historical sites to give visitors and local residents a sense of the community at the turn of the century.

"This was a good location for sawmills because of the lake and the nearby railroads. There was also an ice plant here where they used to cut ice out of the lake and ship it south," said Fel Brunett, curator for the Fife Lake Historical Museum. "I think it is just fantastic to see how things have changed."

The Fife Lake Historic Walk, which runs along downtown State and Merritt streets from Pierce Street to Lakeview Park, was a cooperative effort between the village, the Fife Lake Area Historical Society and local businesses and volunteers. The village, named after William Fife in 1872, is depicted through pictures taken and collected by local historian Willis Brower between 1890 and 1920. **The metal stands for the plaques were donated by Fife Lake's Hayes Manufacturing Inc., Broering said. "None of this would have been possible without Hayes," Broering said. "They are just such great benefactors for the community."**

Brian Czarnecki, of Ada, has a cabin on Pickerel Lake in Kalkaska County and often comes to Fife Lake to shop with his wife and two daughters. "I think there is a lot of history that people are just not aware of," Czarnecki said. "I think it is great that they are able to have the history behind these buildings on display. I think it will give people more pride in their community."

Broering and Brunett said they plan to enhance the quaint village's historic hometown feel with future exhibits at the old Fife Lake volunteer fire barn and recently purchased one-room school house.

The schoolhouse will double as a welcome center and starting point for the historic walk and the fire barn, which dates back to the 1880s, will display original uniforms and fire equipment including a 1930s fire truck.

"This is phase one and it's mostly in the downtown area," Broering said. "I am hoping through this effort we will continue to preserve these historic landmarks. We have to do some fundraising now and we hope to double the number of display plaques over the next few years." Ann Arbor resident Mike Birgy has a cabin on Fife Lake and has been coming to the town since he was a child. He said it's interesting to see the village put displays up about the history his father would tell him about when he was young.

"If anyone around here doesn't know their history, it's definitely a good thing," he said. "You know your family's history and your community's history is probably just as important."



The LaBar House's historical marker.



The LaBar House is just one of the buildings in Fife Lake to have a historical marker in front of it, like the one above.