

Cooperation aids city's downtown

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"They work very well with the business community. The city commission's been very cooperative with the special events we do."

HENRY GRAPER, city manager for the city of Plymouth, agrees that the city's downtown is a healthy one.

"We have a few (buildings) that need to be repaired, obviously, but you have that in every town. For the most part, you see a very lovely community."

Cooperation between business and government is essential if a community is to have a viable downtown, the city manager agreed.

"You've got to have a very cohesive attitude toward the downtown. We have a very strong downtown. We have all the elements that are necessary to have a viable downtown."

The city commission has played an important role in the downtown district's success, Graper said.

"It's a very good commission. I give a lot of credit to them. What they've done is adopt the policies for us to operate on."

The Wayne County community has a downtown development authority.

"Basically, it was put together for the development of the parking deck," Graper said, "to take advantage of tax increment financing." That parking facility was built in 1984.

The district established was "essentially the central business district," he said.

"Whatever that value is, anything ranked above and beyond that, automatically goes back to the downtown development authority."

"What you're doing is you're taking advantage of all the taxes created."

PLENTIFUL PARKING is an essential ingredient of a healthy downtown district, Graper and Lorenz agreed.

"It's extremely essential," the city

'I think what we've got is that community spirit. You've got to want to make your downtown a success.'

— Henry Graper
Plymouth city manager

manager said. "Without that, you just can't compete with Twelve Oaks or any of the other malls."

"There's an enormous amount of parking available" in Plymouth, he said. Free parking — for two hours — is available on the streets.

"And then the parking deck is very nominal. It's not as if it's an arm and a neck to get into it."

"For the most part, there's readily available parking here in the town," Lorenz said. It's only on days of special events that parking becomes a problem.

"We are competing against the malls," Lorenz said. "If you don't fight back, it's over with."

"We're not a mall, in that we can't just raise the rent to pay for this," Lorenz said. "They've got all those things that hit towns like Plymouth and Farmington very hard."

Malls have such advantages as plentiful free parking and good-sized budgets for promotions, he said. The presence of a major retailer at a mall, such as Penney's or Hudson's, also makes it tough for downtowns to compete.

"There are some things you can do to fight back. We've got the spirit it takes. People are aware of what it takes now to fight the malls."

Travel to other communities is helpful in learning what it takes to make a successful downtown, Lorenz said.

"You're not going to get all your ideas in your backyard. You have to travel."



BANDY BORST/staff photographer

A centrally located park in Plymouth's downtown district is the site for a variety of community events.

"They've got to go see what other towns are like. Some of the ideas that have come to this town have come from places like Williamsburg, Virginia."

ON A recent trip to Sapporo, Japan, Lorenz observed heated sidewalks, an idea he'd eventually like to bring home. On another recent trip, to Chester, England, he saw second-floor retail operations.

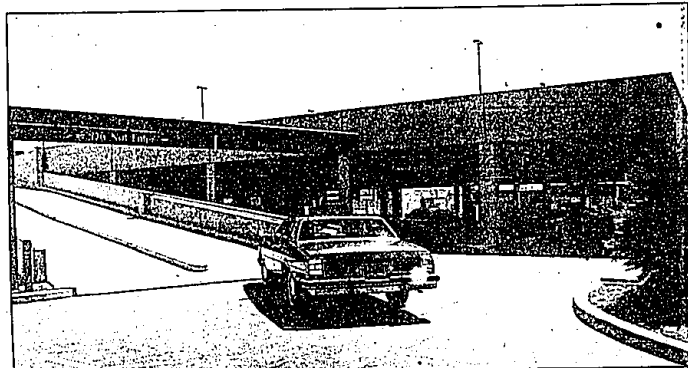
"They did it properly. After seeing it, I could see how you could make it successful."

Closer to home, a number of Michigan communities offer lessons in what to do in keeping a downtown healthy, he said.

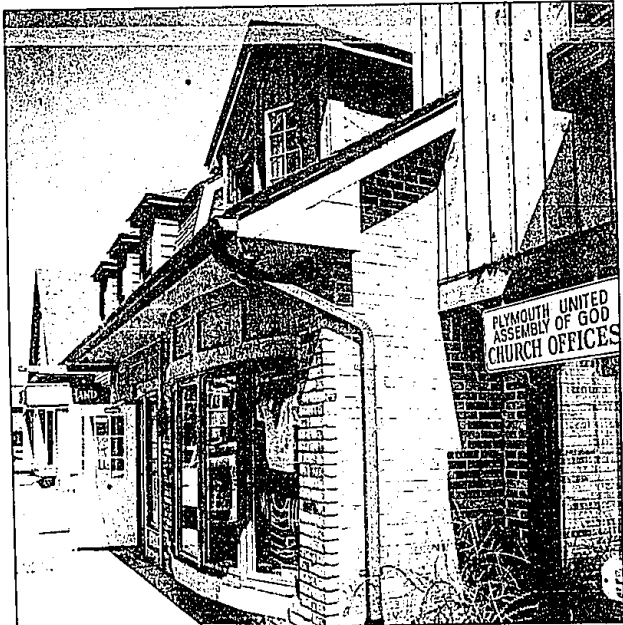
"Northville has really done a fantastic job. It's a neat town," Marshall and Frankenmuth have also done a good job in keeping up their economic health.

"It can be done," Lorenz said. "You just have to have the right elements."

"It's in the community's best interest to have a viable downtown. It's in everybody's interest to shop in their community, too, as much as they can."



A sufficient supply of parking, such as that provided by this parking structure, helps bring shoppers into Plymouth.



Plymouth's downtown district houses a variety of stores and offices.

Promotion effort's part of Plymouth's success

By Julie Brown
staff writer

Many Detroit-area residents have grown accustomed to crossing the Detroit River to dine in Windsor restaurants.

It's not only the good food that brings Detroiters into the Canadian city, of course, the favorable exchange rate also means that U.S. dollars will buy a lot of food and drink in Canada.

At least some of our Canadian neighbors have returned the favor, however. A "par value" exchange program for Canadian dollars was established several years ago in Plymouth.

"It has generated over a million dollars worth of sales in the Plymouth community," said Scott Lorenz, general manager of the Mayflower Bed and Breakfast Hotel.

HE SEES the program's benefits as being long term.

"When the dollar comes back to normal, we feel they will still remember our hotel and our community. It really helped put us on the map."

"The idea is about as old as the hills," said Lorenz, who is also vice president of the local Chamber of Commerce. He read of the idea in a book written approximately 40 years ago.

"It's still very successful, and we have a lot of Canadians coming in." The Canadians who stay at the Mayflower Hotel usually do so on the weekends, he said, and thus don't displace U.S. business travelers.

Promotion efforts in the scenic Wayne County community extend beyond the Canadian exchange program. The local Chamber of Commerce has a promotions committee, with a set amount budgeted each year for that purpose.

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