Group focuses on 8 Mile image

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
STAFF WRITER

In their ongoing effort to spur positive outcomes along Eight Mile Road, members of the Eight Mile Boulevard Association (EMBA) plan to concentrate on outward appearances.

"There seems to be a sense among the board that it's time we make as much of a visual impact as possible," said Jonathan Grant of Farmington Hills, EMBA board chairman.

The organization has expended significant energy and funding on economic development, crime prevention and public awareness. The time to tackle the corridor's surface problems has arrived, said Grant, a Farmington Hills city councilman.

The association, which is comprised of business owners, neighborhood groups, local government leaders and representatives from the Michigan Department of Transportation, reflects an ongoing, collaborative effort to improve the Eight Mile area. Representing 13 communities and the counties of Oakland, Wayne and Macomb, the EMBA last week held its fourth annual meeting and a silent auction in Detroit.

Historically, Eight Mile has been viewed as a divisive boundary and an area of high crime and economic hard times.

Last year, the EMBA amended its by-laws to allow board members from the private sector. Consequently, eight community business leaders have joined the board. "We've had excellent response, and some really qualified members of the business community are on our board and they've taken an active role," said Grant.

For sale: *Auctioneer Kay Brady (left) details a coat modeled by Jonathan Grant as Sharlan Douglas, EMBA executive director, looks on.*

Through community projects, awareness campaigns, association membership and fund-raising, the EMBA seeks to remedy such problems, promoting positive social, public and economic development.

Last year's primary achievement was formation of a business advisory council and the subsequent strengthening of the EMBA's relationship with corridor businesses, said Grant. "We've put a lot of effort into bridging the public-private partnership . . . During the coming year, I think we'll be working hard at strengthening that relationship."

Other achievements include the "Clean Team" kickoff, the organization's cleaning event for local businesses. Last summer's anti-prostitution sweeps and a study of the corridor's bus stops were also successes, according to EMBA executive director Sharlan Douglas.

As a result of the study, the EMBA was able to determine that only about 45 of the road's 200 bus stops bear designative signs. This year bus shelters and signs will be placed at the locations.

The roadway's medians will also receive a makeover. The EMBA plans to put about 24 gardens and 18 signs in the road's medians.

"Our immediate concern is to get some visible signs (of improvement) out there," said Ronald Reelant, one of the EMBA's new board members and operations manager of Waste Management of Michigan in Southfield. "I'm glad to have a voting voice," he said as a board member representing the business community.

With approximately 1,800 businesses of all sizes along Eight Mile, it's crucial the board have a business perspective, said Chris Gribbs, a regional manager for Detroit Edison who also recently joined the board.

The effect of bringing in business people should be a spiral one, added Gribbs. "When you *get a nucleus of people involved* you start to see some improvements. As result of that, other people, other business people — and residents — will want to get involved."

Grant views the dynamic similarly, but emphasizes the economics behind attracting local business leaders. "The reality of the situation is that the dollars that are going to be required over the life of this program aren't going to be available just from community government . . . we're going to need their financial support to pull this off."

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