



Michigan REALTORS®--Placemaking Pioneers--Show How a Little TLC Goes a Long Way—July 2014

"Sometimes people aren't sure if a park bench will make a difference," says Kathie Feldpausch, Senior Vice President of the Michigan Association of REALTORS® (MAR). "Two years in, our 'Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper' placemaking challenge program funded by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® is proving that it's the little things that really *can* make a real difference."

Not just any park bench, anywhere, mind you. The concept of placemaking is a simple but highly deliberate one: it's all about making thoughtful, often very basic, adjustments to an area in order to attract people to spend time in it. The adjustments enhance the area, bringing life to the community. Not surprisingly, the newly desirable location will have a positive affect on nearby property values. "REALTORS® are natural placemakers," says Feldpausch.

Michigan was among the first states to embrace the placemaking movement wholeheartedly, with its REALTORS® at the forefront, and the enthusiastic support of its governor. In 2012, MAR hosted "Michigan Great Places," a placemaking leadership forum run by Project for Public Spaces (PPS), the organization that has pioneered the progressive grassroots concept. Bolstered by a Smart Growth Action Grant from NAR, the state association then challenged one of its local associations, the Greater Lansing Association of REALTORS®, to devise site-specific projects that would have a revitalizing effect on its neighborhoods. Each proposal was sponsored by a REALTOR® member, and nine were awarded grants ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 to make the vision a reality.

This first round of projects to be awarded Michigan's Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper ("LQC") placemaking micro-grants included the restoration of a public fountain and its surrounding space, highlighted by a month of live lunchtime music; the expansion of a farmers market with local performers, children's activities, and hot food vendors; and a set of 20 artistically designed chalkboard signs placed in local yards for one week of every month to publicize meetings of a Downtown Neighborhood Association.

Building on the success of the pilot project, in 2013 MAR expanded the Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper Challenge to eight local associations, one of which received matching funding from its local community foundation. "The fact that Greater Lansing was eager to participate again is a real testament to how well the program works," Feldpausch points out. Once again, the projects that were awarded grants were creative, colorful, thoughtful, and (mostly) very simple. The Flint Association of REALTORS® supported the purchase of a colorful wrap for Genesee County Parks' mobile environmental program truck; the 'mobile garden' travels throughout the county educating people of all ages about gardening, nutrition, physical activity and health. The Jackson Association of REALTORS® invested in the existing Greater Jackson Walkable Trail, by funding signs and the creation of a hand-drawn map by a local artist. The Southwest Michigan Association of REALTORS® enhanced its Memorial Park with a Little Free Library at which people of all ages can take a book or leave a book; a simple, safe, and attractive installation that enables people to connect with each other in a fun and meaningful way.



"Our local associations put a lot of time and effort in to volunteer projects," notes Feldpausch. "What they really like about the Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper grants is that they have a direct link to property value, and get members in to neighborhoods that need them, talking with residents. That's how they gain and maintain their expertise in the first place."

After the first round of LQC grants, MAR refined the process by creating an LQC How-To Guide and Implementation Template so that local associations who have an idea they want to try will not have to re-invent the wheel; it even provides sample ideas for associations that are excited about the concept of placemaking, but need some inspiration. Feldpausch says her goal has been to make it a turn-key operation, as easy as possible for busy staff and members. "The great thing about this grant program is that it enables local communities to make a positive change where they see it is needed, without breaking the bank or over-committing human resources. It allows REALTOR[®] organizations to reach out to other groups, like churches, libraries, and arts organizations, who might not yet recognize how important REALTORS[®] are within a neighborhood. And then, of course, it provides plenty of feel-good earned media potential for our organizations. Local media reporting on the placemaking projects raise positive awareness of REALTORS[®] in the community."

Inspired by MAR's success with its LQC grants, NAR has launched its own Placemaking Initiative, adding placemaking tools to its arsenal of REALTOR[®] Party resources. The NAR Placemaking Guide is available for download at the REALTOR Action Center, and state and local associations may apply for placemaking micro-grants directly from the NAR website.

To learn more about how Michigan REALTORS[®] have created a sense of place one micro-grant at a time, contact Kathie Feldpausch, Senior Vice President of the Michigan Association of REALTORS[®], at kfeldpausch@mirealtors.com or 517.372.8890.



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