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West Michigan Pike Dedication Ceremony Set for Friday, April 30 in New Buffalo

(NEW BUFFALO, Mich) – For nearly 100 years, the West Michigan Pike has served auto tourists along the Lake Michigan shoreline from the state line in Berrien County, nearly 450 miles north to Mackinaw City. To commemorate this historic route, an official state historical marker will be dedicated at 11:00 a.m., Lions Park in New Buffalo.

“The West Michigan Pike historical marker is one of five erected as part of our project to learn the history and identify historic sites along this historic roadway,” stated State Historic Preservation Officer Brian Conway, who will be at the dedication ceremony.

“In 1911 a group of civic leaders took it upon themselves to create a regional initiative that would turn Southwest Michigan’s economy around after lumbering left the area. They adopted the idea of creating a resort industry and built the area’s first highway, the West Michigan Pike, to bring auto tourists from Chicago and other Midwestern cities to Michigan’s beach towns. Their efforts used the best of what the region has to offer—its beautiful scenery, delicious fruit, and rural lifestyle—to bring together a wide range of people from different ethnic and social backgrounds creating a rich diversity of experience. It is still a good model to follow as we look forward to reinventing the region’s economy for the twenty-first century. “

The New Buffalo marker gives an overview of the West Michigan Pike’s history and will read:

At the turn of the twentieth century, deep ruts and sand made West Michigan roads nearly impassable. In 1911, the West Michigan Lakeshore Highway Association was founded to promote the construction of the first improved highway along Lake Michigan in order to bring auto tourists from Chicago to Michigan to support the new resort industry that grew up when logging ended in the region. Completed in 1922, the West Michigan Pike extended from the Indiana state line to Mackinaw City. It was designated one of the first state trunk lines (M-11) in 1917, as part of the Dixie Highway in 1923, and incorporated into the nations’ first federal highway system as US-31 in 1926. Straightened and realigned over the years, it is also known as the Red Arrow and the Blue Star Memorial Highways.

In 2006, the Michigan Historical Center began collaborating with Michigan Beachtowns™ in an effort to boost tourism along Michigan’s western shoreline. What resulted was the West Michigan Roadmap Project – funded in part by a federal Preserve America grant – established to identify tourism-related sites along the West Michigan shoreline from New Buffalo to Ludington.

The historic West Michigan Pike serves as the focal point for the project and is the foundation for an official “Michigan Heritage Route” that is being developed by the MBA and the Michigan Department of Transportation. If approved, the West Michigan Pike will become the longest of the state’s 15 historic routes. The project is endorsed by the Berrien County Board of Commissioners and more than 50 local governments and counties between the two cities.

Funded by the Michigan Historical Marker Fund and Michigan Beachtowns™, the marker in New Buffalo is the latest to be erected in Southwest Michigan as part of the West Michigan Roadmap project. Two other markers will be erected this summer, one for Scenic Drive and Muskegon State Park and the other for Jewish Summer Resorts in South Haven. Two were erected last year, at Winsor McKay in Spring Lake and the other at John Gurney Park in Hart.

Michigan Beachtowns™ is a partnership of nine visitor bureaus from Harbor Country to Ludington. The group works together on various promotional and marketing initiatives including those offered through Travel Michigan's Pure Michigan branding campaign.

The Harbor Country Convention & Visitors Bureau was established in 1990 as the Harbor Country Lodging Association in accordance with the state of Michigan's Community Convention or Tourism Marketing Act 59 of 1984.

The mission of the organization is "to promote its members and the assessment district as a major destination for tourism and conventions in southwest Michigan." The assessment district encompasses the Townships of New Buffalo, Three Oaks, and Chikaming, the city of New Buffalo, the Village of Three Oaks and the Village of Michiana, Michigan.

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