

New road, streetscape in Union Pier celebrated at ribbon-cutting

BY FRANCESCA SAGALA

The fruits of the collaborative efforts between state, county, township, and local governments and entities were celebrated during a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Townline Avenue at Greenwood Avenue in Union Pier for the Union Pier/Red Arrow Highway Intersection Improvement project Friday, May 28.

Kevin Stack, engineering supervisor at the Berrien County Road Department, said that he believes that there were seven different entities and three consultants that were involved in “getting the project from start to finish – that’s unheard of.”

“When you go around the state and talk about that, you don’t hear of townships being able to contribute, different agencies being able to contribute as much as they did,” he said.

The 1.3-mile corridor’s transformation includes new sidewalks, a 10-foot non-motorized path, and roadway reconstruction that converts Red Arrow Highway from Community Hall to Berrien Street into a three-lane road with a dedicated center left-turn lane. The intersection of Red Arrow Highway and Union Pier Road features streetscape elements, and an activated pedestrian crossing system will aid walkers, runners, and bicyclists traveling east and west across Red Arrow Highway.

The project was made possible by The Pokagon Fund, Chikaming

Township, New Buffalo Township, Berrien County Road Department, and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development funding. It was managed by the Road Department.

Stack said that it was the concerns for safety that ignited the project’s humble beginnings.

“It started off with several

transformation was going to look and gaining input from business owners and the public, began. A year and a half ago, the design process began.

“Over the past year we put about eight and a half million dollars into this corridor alone...\$4.9 million of that was the sewer project (last year’s Galien River Sanitary District Sewer Authority’s sewer project) from here all

He said businesses will be able to reap the benefits from the major improvements.

“I personally want to thank all businesses that are located here, I know it’s been a challenge for the past year and four months...We really wanted you to be successful and we hope this makes you even more successful and the economy drives even more opportunities here in Union Pier,” Bunte said.

New Buffalo Township Supervisor Michelle Heit said that she appreciates the collaboration between the two townships and the Road Department.

Echoing Bunte, she said she also appreciates the businesses and the residents who’ve been patient while everything was “torn up” from the sewer project and the road one.

“We’re so excited we’re finally wrapping this up – and there’s more things to come soon too,” Heit said.

Judith Zabicki, secretary of The Pokagon Fund as well as clerk at New Buffalo Township, who was there representing The Fund with Deborah Hall-Kayler, vice chair of The Fund, said

that the following Pokagon Fund grants were awarded in support of the project: New Buffalo Township received \$75,000 for the Union Pier trailhead that’s still being worked on as well as \$950,000 from for the intersection improvement project, and Chikaming Township received \$100,000 also for the project.



Chikaming Township Supervisor David Bunte and New Buffalo Township Supervisor Michelle Heit cut the ribbon on the project



New Buffalo Township Supervisor Michelle Heit thanks the project's supporters



Ninth District Commissioner Ezra Scott addresses the crowd at the ribbon-cutting



Judith Zabicki and Deborah Hall-Kayler represented The Pokagon Fund at the ribbon-cutting

complaints about pedestrian facilities and traffic movement down here - that spurred a lot of interest with the townships and road department as far as getting safety concerns addressed down here,” he said.

It was three years ago when a “high level scoping,” which involved deciding how the corridor’s

the way up to Cherry Beach and then the rest of it was about three and a half million in the road side,” Stack said.

Chikaming Township Supervisor David Bunte called the finished product an “amazing transformation from where we were a year and a half ago.”

The crowd celebrates the corridor's improvements



Since November 2019, The Pokagon Fund has awarded grants totaling over \$1 million to New Buffalo and Chikaming townships for the project, Zabicki said.

"These Pokagon Fund investments covered many of the expenses that set this road reconstruction project apart from others by providing walkability features and will allow pedestrians and cyclists to safely access the heart of Union Pier - amenities like public restrooms, picnic tables and benches that will enhance the welcoming atmosphere of Harbor Country and adding highly desirable aesthetic features, like lighting, ornamental plantings and street trees that will catch the eye and make Union Pier a place for residents and visitors to enjoy and remember," she said.

Steve Carlisle, project principal from Wightman and Associates, which worked on the project's design, said everyone was pleased with the pedestrian improvements that were made possible through the project.

"It's a lot safer place for people to be - we're able to get traffic through the corridor and it's going to be a great destination for locals and out of towners alike," he said.

Carlisle thanked Kalin Construction, the project's contractor, which also worked on last year's sewer project. He also thanked the townships and the

Berrien County Road Department for allowing Wightman to be a partner on the project.

Carlisle added that he hopes that the improvements will be a "boon" for the businesses moving forward.

"We're really proud of what we've accomplished here today."

Ezra Scott, 9th District commissioner, said that when he first became county commissioner five years ago, he approached the Berrien County Board of Commissioners and what was then the Berrien County Road Commission about trying to get a stoplight installed at the Red Arrow Highway and Townline Avenue and Union Pier Road intersection due to safety concerns.

"This grew out of that because of the need," he said.

"The most important thing that I see about this are these crosswalks... It's a safety issue for me because we have a lot of people who live on the other side of the tracks that walk across to come to the businesses and those are the people that I worry about," Scott added.

The improvement project is only the beginning for enhancing the Red Arrow Highway corridor.

"This is the start of it - from now, on it's just moving forward with different designs up the corridor until we can get a safe roadway for the rest of the county," Stack said.

BUILDER

SERVICE

RETAIL



Come Check Out our Royal Spas

18703 W US Hwy 12, New Buffalo, MI • 269.426.1251

info@pristinepoolspa.com
facebook.com/pristinepoolspa

pristinepoolspa.com
IG: @pristinepoolandspa



685 West Main Street, Benton Harbor, MI 49022 | (269) 983-0325 | passarokahne.com
17656A US Highway 12, New Buffalo, MI 49117 | (269) 469-5297 | Fax: (269) 983-0328

- **Business/Tax Law**
- **Estate Planning**
- **Medicaid & Long-Term Care Planning**
- **Real Estate**
- **Special Needs Planning**
- **Probate and Trust Administration**



Better Banking



Bank



Borrow



Plan

Get started today at
tcunet.com/betterbanking