



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **MANISTEE COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU AWARDED \$72,500 USDA GRANT TO EXPAND POPULAR MANISTEE HISTORIC SITES TOURS PROGRAM**

*Expansion to Include Ottawa Indians' Local History, Founders Walk, 20+ Additional Sites, Route Signage and Updated Guidebook*

MANISTEE, Mich. – *Sept. 13, 2021* – Manistee County has one of the finest collections of historical buildings in Michigan – showcased in the [Manistee Historic Sites Tours](#) highlighting more than 100 sites through eight themed tours. The Manistee County Visitors Bureau (MCVB) can now expand this popular attraction thanks to a \$72,500 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development.

Combined with other funding sources that bring the project total to \$150,000, the funds will support a significant program expansion – most importantly, inclusion of the Ottawa Indians' history in Manistee County through narratives and added historic sites such as the Cultural Corridor at Little River Casino Resort. Other program enhancements include the addition of 20-plus historic sites, a Founders Walk, route signage, and an updated printed guidebook and online content at [visitmanisteecounty.com](http://visitmanisteecounty.com).

“Manistee County’s historical assets are a key tourist draw to the region, and this award allows us to expand this popular program to include not only new sites and resources, but our region’s long and storied heritage of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, which we are excited to share with locals and visitors alike,” said Tim Riley, chair of the MCVB board.

#### **Program Expansion Elements**

Spearheaded by the MCVB with collaboration from the Manistee County Historical Society, the Manistee Historic Sites Tours is the county’s most comprehensive tourism project in history. The \$150,000 expansion will take place over the next 12 to 24 months with assistance from local public and private groups such as the Manistee County Historical Society, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians (LRBOI) and Rightside Design Group.

While specific details of the program expansion will be determined over the coming months, main elements will include:

- **Inclusion of LRBOI history** – With assistance from the LRBOI Historic Preservation Office, Little River Casino Resort and multi-generational families, the Manistee Historic Sites Tours will include sites of historical significance to the LRBOI and its origins plus sites still used today to celebrate its history; documentation and inclusion of the LRBOI Cultural Corridor at Little River Casino Resort; and inclusion of LRBOI tribal elders on the Founders Walk (*see next item*).
- **Development of a Founders Walk** – This new walking tour with accompanying information plaques will highlight the founders of Manistee County – both modern founders from the 1880s and indigenous leaders from the LRBOI – explaining the history and origins of the people who created the area while linking historic sites to those responsible for their existence. While the location is still being finalized, it is planned to be west of the Riverwalk at Douglas Park/First Street Beach.

- **Signage with QR codes** – Signage will be added in high-traffic tour locations to maximize program exposure along the routes, featuring QR codes offering visitors access to digital content (photos and video) and a weather-tight holder for printed guidebooks.
- **Additional 20+ historic sites** – More than 20 historic references were identified to be added to the Historic Sites Tours, including private homes, destination sites like the Udell Rollways and Udell Lookout Tower, downtown sites like the Old Lyric Theatre site and Manistee National Bank, as well as neighborhoods like Maxwell Town and Filer City. The Manistee County Historical Society also gathered never-before-published photographs of some of the original sites that will be added to tour resources.
- **Revised, all-inclusive guidebook and online information** – One of the most requested pieces of literature provided by the MCVB, the Manistee Historic Sites Tours guidebook, will be redesigned and expanded to include information about the new site additions, the Founders Walk and LRBOI sites of significance, produced in a detailed guidebook. The front of the book will contain a comprehensive story about the original, indigenous people of Manistee County. The MCVB also will update online content at VisitManisteeCounty.com.

“The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians applauds this effort to provide an accurate representation of our storied past and continuing involvement on behalf of the tribe in the life of Western Michigan,” said Ogema (Chief) Larry Romanelli. “We live in a beautiful area and look forward to sharing our story with visitors.”

### **Manistee Historic Sites Tours Background**

The idea for the Manistee Historic Sites Tours was borne out of visitor data following the 2013 tourism season showing that nearly half of all inquiries to the MCVB’s website ([visitmanisteecounty.com](http://visitmanisteecounty.com)) were about the region’s historical sites. The MCVB developed a pilot project in 2014, creating three videos and a booklet of a handful of key sites in the area.

Following an overwhelming response in the first six months, the MCVB applied for and was awarded a \$50,000 grant from USDA Rural Development in 2015 – the highest level awarded in its annual grant cycle and the first national grant for the MCVB – to create the [Manistee Historic Sites Tours](#). The MCVB partnered with the Manistee County Historical Society, who identified more than 100 sites across the county with historical significance, and organized them into eight themed tours – with 15 sites on the National Register of Historic Places (including more than 50 in downtown Manistee). The 25 most prominent sites feature a video voiced over by Manistee native and television/film actor Toni Trucks, with other sites visually represented through photos. The eight themed tours include [Churches](#), [Downtown /Commercial District](#), [Destination Sites](#), [East Homes](#), [West Homes](#), [Industrial Sites](#), [Museums](#) and [Riverwalk Sites](#).

While the Manistee Historic Sites Tours opened in 2016, the project was officially dedicated in 2018 with the assistance of Toni Trucks. Since the launch, Visit Manistee County’s website tracked more than 100,000 page views of its Historic Sites Tour content and more than 20,000 unique video views, with more than 650 hours of videos watched. The MCVB also has distributed 15,000 Manistee Historic Sites Tour guidebooks since the program launched.

### **About the Manistee County Visitors Bureau**

*Incorporated in 1997, the Manistee County Visitors Bureau (MCVB) is the official destination marketing organization promoting Manistee County to grow the local travel economy. The visitors bureau is a member of the West Michigan Tourist Association, Michigan Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus, Michigan Restaurant & Lodging Association, Tourism Industry Coalition of Michigan and Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce. Learn more at [VisitManisteeCounty.com](http://VisitManisteeCounty.com) and on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter at @ManisteePureMichigan.*

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