

PRESS & GUIDE

OPINION: An often overlooked gem - East Downtown Dearborn

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Immediately after my March 25, Press & Guide editorial page column, "East Dearborn Is Underrated," I received a large number of e-mails from East Dearborn residents and business owners. The majority were pleased to read East Dearborn was finally getting the respect it deserves.

met with Michael Boettcher, executive director of the East Dearborn Downtown Development Authority soon after that article.

Boettcher belongs to the American Institute of Certified Planners (or AICP), which is the American Planning Association's professional institute and the results of his expertise can be viewed all over Dearborn's east downtown business district.

While there are vacant suites, as there are in any downtown today, East Downtown Dearborn is a beautiful business district. Visitors will find new sidewalks, landscaping, tucked-in on-street parking spaces and more.

Business owners there wisely decided to keep paying the special assessment district fund and due to their foresight, east downtown has free customer parking.

Boettcher and I visited the M&M CafÈ across from City Hall, owned by Maurice and Elaine Ltief. The food and service was incredible, and M&M CafÈ is a restaurant I highly recommend to anyone looking for great food and service at reasonable prices.

I also spoke with Ron Amen, director of the Arab American National Museum, across from City Hall. Many people do not realize its affiliation with the Smithsonian. It is also the first museum in the world devoted to Arab-American history and culture. What it offers Dearborn, and America, is incredible and can clear up many misconceptions pertaining to our wonderful Middle Eastern neighbors. Visit the museum's Web site at <http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/> to find out more.

Some long-time, east downtown family businesses are now next generation, like Lile's Ham Sandwich Shop, probably the best sandwich shop around. Lile's still sits, where it has sat for decades, on Michigan Avenue. Son, Harry Lile, now is owner-operator. Al Roker visited in 2008 and back on the set of the "Today Show" in New York, he said, "I had the best ham sandwich in my life in Dearborn, Mich."

Second generation, John and Lawrence Toma, own and operate The Palace Liquor Food Market on Schaefer south of City Hall, which is one huge 4000 square-foot neighborhood market. They offer many groceries that are hard to find in most neighborhood markets, as well as with many brands of liquors, wines and beers.

The Palace also offers money orders and money grams. As far as neighborhood markets, this is definitely "the palace" of markets.

Alcamo's Market has been on Schaefer south of City Hall since approximately the 1950s.

I remember visiting Alcamo's in the 1950-70s with my Italian grandmothers, who would only buy from Alcamo's when they had an Italian recipe to make.

Alcamo's Italian food and prime meats are simply the best.

Bo Chen seems to be taking over from his parents at Red Star Chinese on Michigan Avenue, west of Schaefer, and offers the best Chinese food one can eat in Metro Detroit.

Mark Swiatkowski runs the Stanley Agency Inc. on Michigan Avenue, west of Schaefer, and can fulfill all your insurance needs.

These are only a few of the many businesses that have been around for decades in East Downtown Dearborn.

We should show appreciation for all these wonderful business owners have contributed to Dearborn for decades.

If you cannot find what you are looking for in your area the probability is high that you will find it in east downtown.

If you have not visited lately, you most likely will want to become regular patrons of these wonderful businesses, as many have.