

# First Impressions

## Assessing Tourism Excellence

October 2016



***HELPING A COMMUNITY DISCOVER THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES  
THROUGH THE EYES OF A FIRST TIME VISITOR***

MSU Extension Tourism Team  
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# Agenda

- Introductions
- Overview
  - MSU Extension
  - First Impressions Assessment
- Assessment (QR-code)
- Standish
  - Report
  - Survey Results
- Questions/Comments



## MSU Extension

- Greening Michigan Institute
- Agriculture and Agribusiness Institute
- Children and Youth Institute
- Health and Nutrition Institute



# MSU Extension Greening Michigan Institute

*To foster the development of sustainable communities that contribute to the economic, social and environmental health and well-being of its people for generations to come.*



- Community Food Systems
- Entrepreneurship and Capacity Building (CEC)
- Finance & Homeownership
- Government/Public Policy
- Land Use
- Leadership
- Natural Resource Management
- **Tourism**

## **Greening Michigan Tourism Team**

*Andy Northrop, Brandon Schroeder, Bonnie Wichtner-Zoia, Diane Wilson and Garrett Ziegler*

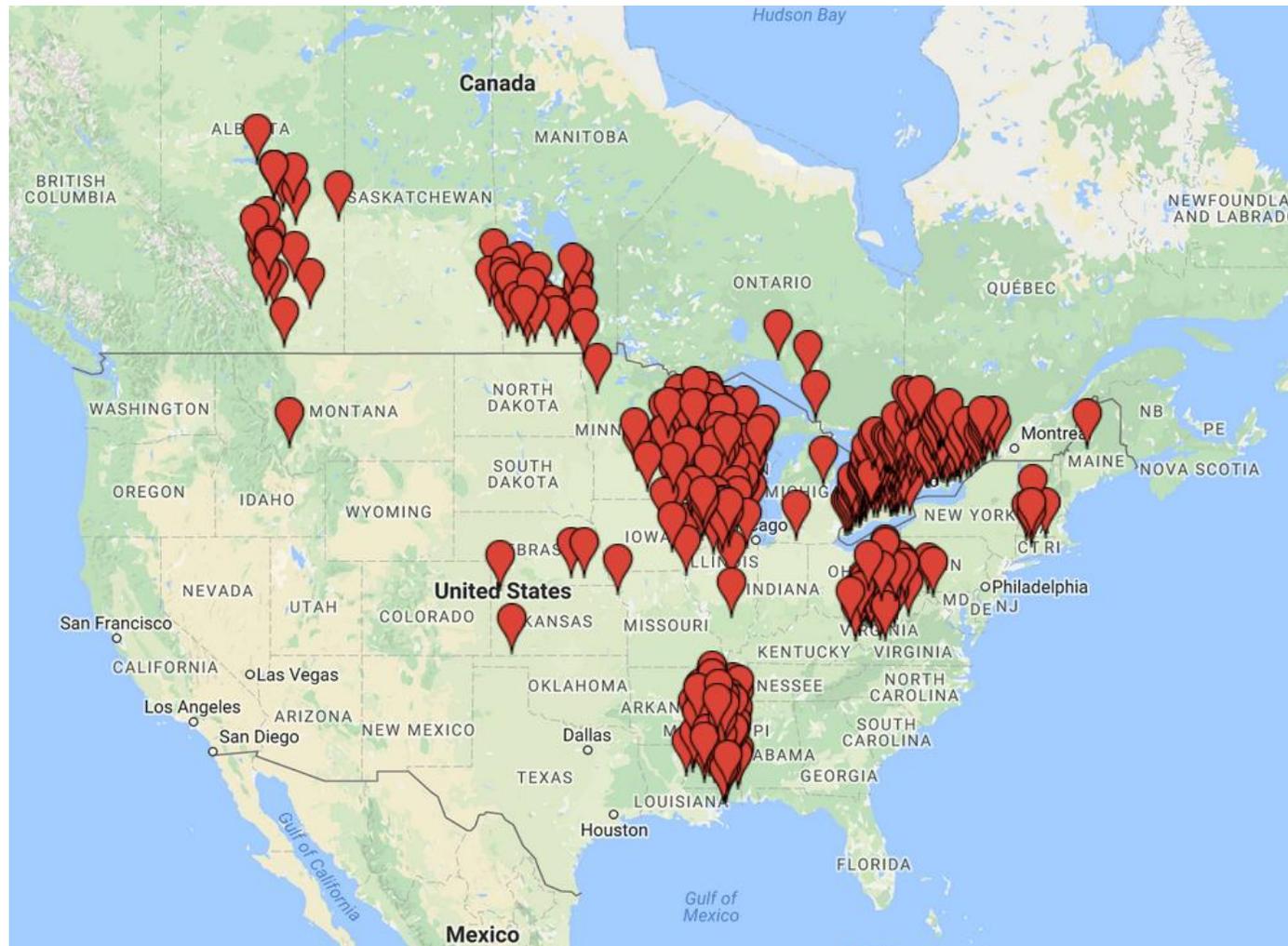
# What is First Impressions?



[VIDEO](#)

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8nFWNv\\_HWsPWGdleVJIWXIFeXc/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8nFWNv_HWsPWGdleVJIWXIFeXc/view)

# First Impression Assessments



Online at  
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zzhHqWZPOgBk.kXLLEKLGPj2w>

Email  
[laura.brown@uconn.edu](mailto:laura.brown@uconn.edu) to update your communities to the map

**Michigan's first...  
First Impressions  
communities:**





The First Impressions Program aims to help communities learn about **existing strengths and weaknesses** as seen through the eyes of the first-time visitor.



To inform and guide public action by providing information that increases awareness of a community's assets and challenges.

# Process

- Community application (Leadership team)
- Plan & coordinate (MSUE & leadership team)
- Assessment
  - Pre-assessment
  - Assessment (pictures too!)
  - Post-assessment/Qualtrics
- Compile & evaluate data
- Public presentation
- Written report
- Community action
- Six-month check-Up





# Port Huron Downtown Business Assessment



# Port Huron Downtown Business Discussion

- What did you experience?
- Why does it matter?
- Now what?
  - QR code
  - Web Address
  - Closed Friday – deliver to Port Huron Chamber



# Standish Sample Report

## Pre-Assessment

- Online research for 1.5 - 2 hours
- Used Smart Phone, Tablet and Laptop
- Social Media
- Searched for:
  - Things to Do
  - Places to Go
  - Events
  - The Authentic or Unusual



## Pre-visit Assessment

### Most Helpful Tourism Sites

- **Standish Depot** – a lot of tourism information and useful links
- **Pure Michigan** – listed relevant tourist attractions and information
- **Facebook** – provided listings of eateries, some outdoor/outfitting options and hotels
- **Enchanted Forest** – provided a list with direct links of things to do



# Standish Sample Report

## Initial Impressions



### I-75

Very pleasant. Farm character. Became a bit patchy with businesses and residential, but nicer as entered Standish. Arrival at US-23 was not very welcoming.



### US -23

Older rural town. Bigger than I thought. North of town welcoming, less so as I progressed. Some attractive areas – especially residential. Traffic moved very quickly through town.



### M-13

Lots of billboards, retail and fast food businesses. Old storefronts, with many vacant. Traffic flow was busy and moving quickly through the city limits.



## Downtown



- Flags and banners on display
- Friendly people
- Connectivity
- Public restrooms and waste receptacles
- Parking
- Felt safe
- Depot welcoming
- Some nice older buildings



- Limited signage to indicate other tourist sites besides depot
- Lack of walker/biker signs or accessibility
- Traffic moves quickly
- Not cohesive



# Standish Sample Report

## Suggestions



- **Improve signage**
  - Encourage people to stop
  - Create a welcome environment
  - Update worn signs
- **Coordination among downtown businesses**
  - Develop list of things to do
  - Ensure all businesses are aware of and promoting things to do in Standish (what & why)
- **Make connections for new tourism opportunities (one or two hour experience?)**
  - Campgrounds, industries, farms
  - Walking or driving tour (Mississippi example)
  - Health/fitness (SlowRoll or Urban obstacle course)

- **Establish an identity**
  - Half-way stop
  - Authentic & unusual experiences
  - Determine audience (s)
- **Educate and involve community**

  - Be a Tourist in your own Community
  - Promote natural resources of area
  - Art (Grayling)
  - Create a game – “Discover our Community”
  - Geocaching on the Sunrise Side
  - Encourage and support entrepreneurship
- **Crosswalks and pedestrian crossings**

- **Bike lanes and racks downtown**
- **Stronger web-presence/social media**
  - Example: Promo video/Youtube



# Evaluations

- I feel this program can help MI communities interested in developing tourism in their communities (100% agreed or strongly agreed)
- My awareness of community assets increased as a result of participating in this program (88% agreed or strongly agreed)
- My knowledge of how to maximize assets increased as a result of participating in this program (76% agreed or strongly agreed)
- I envision myself or my community using the information shared to advance tourism in my community (94% agreed or strongly agreed)

# Testimonials

- *Made me aware of what specific items need to be addressed.*
- *Many opportunities identified for quick success.*
- *It brought attention to assets we ‘forgot’ we had!*
- *A third party look at the community was enlightening in many aspects – gave me ideas to think about and explore!*
- *It was surprising to hear our residential areas were assets!*
- *Fresh eyes give credibility to assessments – the residential neighborhood comments were interesting!*
- *Appreciated the snapshots of areas that need improvement.*
- *A look through fresh eyes.*

# Questions and/or Comments?

## Evaluation



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*Thank you!*