

Portager

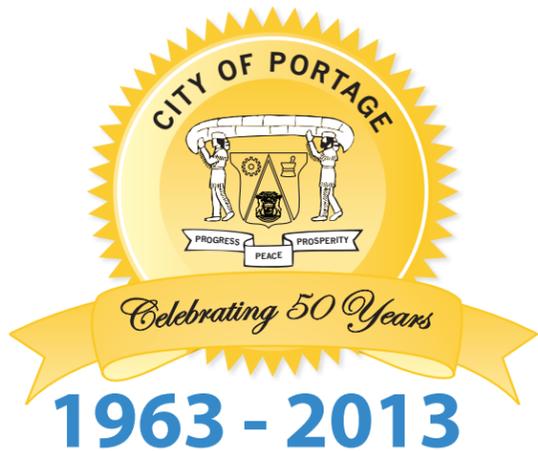
February 2013



7900 South Westnedge Avenue
Portage, Michigan 49002
www.portagemi.gov

50th Anniversary Pop Quiz

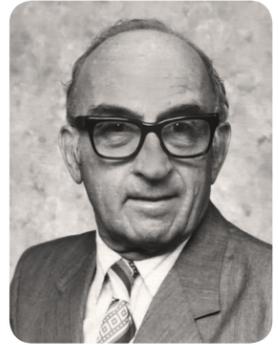
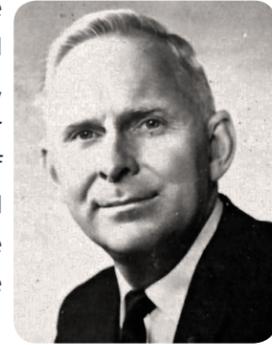
What was the original name of Constitution Boulevard?
(Answer on page 3.)



**50 Years of Progress,
Peace and Prosperity**

City of Portage Celebrates 50 Years!

On February 18, 1963, the residents of Portage Township voted in favor of cityhood and formation of a nine-member charter commission. Over the next nine months, the commission drafted a city charter that among other things would provide for the election of a mayor and six councilmembers, who would appoint a City Manager. This Council / Manager form of government is still used in Portage today. On December 13, 1963, Governor George W. Romney signed the city charter, which was subsequently approved by Portage voters on December 16, 1963. Finally, on December 31, 1963, the first Portage City Council (which was elected on December 16, 1963) was sworn into office, officially establishing the City of Portage. Bernard "Bud" Mein became the city's first Mayor and Paul Flynn was later appointed its first City Manager. Learn more about the 1963 incorporation of the City of Portage and other interesting Portage history by visiting the Heritage Room at the Portage District Library.



Bernard "Bud" Mein, First Mayor Paul Flynn, First City Manager

A Glimpse of Portage - Then and Now

	1963	2013
Population	27,642	46,262
City Street Miles	113 Miles	219 Miles
Single-Family Housing	7,177 Units	15,104 Units
Parks	1 Park, 7 Acres	17 Parks, 845 Acres
Sanitary Sewer	4 Miles	230 Miles
Water Main	25 Miles	246 Miles
Apartments	2 Units	5,128 Units
Assessed Valuation	\$56,866,000	\$2,082,829,500
Fire Service	8 Career Firefighters, 30 Volunteers	28 Career Firefighters, 18 On-Call (Paid)
Police Service	6 Sheriff's Deputies ("Traffic Control")	4 Lieutenants, 6 Sergeants, 5 Detectives and 33 Full-Time / 2 Part-Time Police Officers



The original Township Hall (left), built in 1958 at 7810 Shaver Road was renamed "City Hall" in 1963 and expanded several times over the years. In a report to the City Council in 1976, then City Manager Donald Ziemke reported that "...building and space needs continue to be a problem in City Hall." Then in 1986, Portage voters approved a \$2.5 million bond issue for construction of a 26,000-square-foot building on city-owned land known as the "Triangle" property. In 1989, following nearly one and one-half years of construction, the current City Hall building at 7900 South Westnedge Avenue was completed.



At the far left are Fire Chief Jake Mein, Mayor Tony Lemmer, Councilmember John Schuring, City Manager David Firestone and Firefighter Billy Channels standing in front of Fire Station No. 1 in the mid-1960s. The original fire station was located adjacent to Central Cemetery and near the current Department of Public Services building. The building was constructed in 1941 during the township days and was in use until 1985. The October 1983 Portager said, "this 40-year-old facility is severely undersized, housing only two fire trucks, and poorly located with traffic congestion seriously impeding optimum fire protection services."

Today, the city is served by three modern fire stations: Shown here (left) is Central Fire Station No. 1 (7830 Shaver Road), built in 1985 on property that was once owned by Bud Mein, the first Mayor of Portage. Station No. 2 (6101 Oakland Drive) was constructed in 1976 and Station No. 3 (8503 Sprinkle Road) opened in 1994.

"A modern 13-room brick building will be the seat of government for the new City of Portage. It'll be large enough to give the city a comfortable start."

Kalamazoo Gazette referring to the 1958 Portage Township Hall - December 29, 1963

This converted residential home at 7802 Shaver Road served as the first Portage police station from 1965 to 1970, when a new "Police / Court" building was built at 7810 Shaver Road. Police operations took over the old City Hall building in 1989 and the building was renamed the "Police Annex."

In 2005, facility improvements were made to the Police / Court building and the Police Annex (portions of which dated back to 1958) including demolition of the oldest part of the structure and connection of the two buildings. The new Police Division facility (far right) houses a state-of-the-art communications center and was designed for adaptability to address future service / staff adjustments as needed.



Parks Play Important Role in Portage History

In the City of Portage, cultivation of parkland and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors has always been an important goal for Portage city leaders. At its inception in 1963, the city had one seven-acre park. Today, the city boasts 17 individual park properties spanning 845 acres.

Six neighborhood parks offer play opportunities for young families and serve as gathering spots for a game of tennis, basketball or even roller hockey. The city's two lake-side parks - Ramona Park and Lakeview Park - provide opportunities for fishing, beach-going, picnicking and a multitude of sports activities. Ramona and Lakeview are also frequently used for family reunions and other social gatherings. South Westnedge Park, which has long been known as the premier softball complex for the region, is also home to the area's only concrete "street plaza" style skatepark. Bishop's Bog Preserve and West Lake Nature Preserve are dedicated to nature preservation and

furnished with walking and hiking paths for nature viewing. The newest addition to the Portage Parks inventory, Eliason Nature Reserve, will also serve in this capacity. Millennium Park, with its large reflecting pond, is transformed in winter to a popular ice skating rink in the heart of the shopping district. Two of the newest Portage Parks - Veteran's Memorial Park and Liberty Park - provide the opportunity to reflect and pay respect to those who serve our country. Central Park, once named Portage Park, is the site of the Overlander Bandshell, which is named in honor of former Mayor Donald E. Overlander. The Overlander Bandshell has been home to a great many performances as part of the city's annual Summer Entertainment Series.

Often referred to as the "Crown Jewel" of the Portage park system, Portage Creek Bicentennial Park (PCBP) was the official city project to honor the nation's 200th birthday. Spanning over 200 acres, PCBP is a linear park that runs

between the City Centre and the northern city limits at Kilgore Road and is connected by a three and one-half mile multi-use trail. In total, PCBP has over eight miles of hiking and biking trails with several opportunities to view scenic Portage Creek. PCBP is also home to the Celery Flats Historical Area.

While not an official park, the Portage Bikeway was established in 1989. Today, nearly 60 miles of bikeway connect neighborhoods, shopping areas, city parks, schools, businesses and other points of interest. The Portage Bikeway is made up of off-road trails or pathways and paved shoulder lanes.

The vastness of the Portage park system is evidence of the importance of these amenities to city leaders and Portagers alike. Visit www.portagemi.gov > Departments > Parks and Recreation to view detailed information about Portage Parks.

Significant Park Developments: 1963 to 2013

- 1968 Lakeview Park on Austin Lake opens
- 1969 Haverhill Park and Lexington Green Park development authorized
Grand Opening held for Ramona Park on Long Lake
- 1971 "Landfill Park" renamed South Westnedge Park and rededicated
- 1975 City purchases Westfield Park from Portage Public Schools
Schrier Park opens on Osterhout Road
- 1979 City purchases 80-acre site for development of West Lake Nature Preserve
- 1980 Portage Creek Bicentennial Park opens
- 1984 Jansma and Dekkinga land donation for Bishop's Bog received
- 1985 South Westnedge Park ballfields expanded
- 1988 Celery Flats Interpretive Center opens
Portage Community Bandshell dedication in Central Park
- 1989 West Lake Nature Preserve opens
- 1990 District #8 One-Room Schoolhouse relocated to Celery Flats
Portage Grain Elevator relocated to Celery Flats
Oakland Drive Park opens
- 1991 Portage Creek Livery opens at Celery Flats
- 1992 Hayloft Theatre relocated to Celery Flats
- 1994 Stuart Manor relocated to Celery Flats



- 1995 Celery Flats Amphitheatre constructed
- 1995 Portage Community Bandshell renamed Donald E. Overlander Bandshell
- 1997 Bishop's Bog Preserve opens
- 1999 Portage Creek Bicentennial Park Trail expanded from Milham Avenue to I-94
- 2000 Romance Road Pedestrian Overpass dedicated
Portage Creek Bicentennial Park Trail extension to Kilgore Road opens
The Ice Rink at Millennium Park opens for inaugural season
Shaver Road Bikeway opens
- 2001 Millennium Trail - part of the Consolidated Drain Project - is completed
- 2002 Fishing Pier constructed at Lakeview Park, along with new trails and park amenities
- 2003 Portage Creek Bicentennial Park Trailhead completed
Harbor's West Park opens
- 2004 Liberty Park completed
- 2005 Northwest Portage Bikeway, Phase I opens
South Westnedge Skate Park opens
Veteran's Memorial Park dedicated
- 2008 Ramona Park Fishing Pier constructed and new, accessible playground dedicated
- 2010 Northwest Portage Bikeway, Phase II opens
- 2011 Eliason Nature Reserve property donated to city in memory of David J. Eliason



Portage Industrial Economy Still Vibrant

The article to the right, originally published by the Kalamazoo Gazette on December 29, 1963 as Portage entered cityhood, reflected on several industrial firms operating in Portage at the time. Today, more than 70 improved industrial properties in Portage are home to upwards of 50 separate industrial companies. Industrial property values comprise over 23% of the city's tax base and provide thousands of jobs within the community. Today's top five industrial firms in Portage (shown below) employ more than 5,000 workers.

Company	No. of Employees
Pfizer, Inc. (formerly Upjohn Co.)	2,100
Stryker	2,028
Summit Polymers	550
Mann+Hummel	260
Bower's Manufacturing	240

More Than 20 Industries in Portage Hundreds Working in Its Plants

Several Branches of Kalamazoo Firms

The post-war building program launched by the Upjohn Co. when it built its multi-million-dollar plant on Portage Road did more than signal the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the world-famous pharmaceutical firm.

Few people, if any, will doubt that Upjohn Co. "put Portage on the map" and the community has experienced not only a rapid growth in population but a steady industrial development.

Today, more than 20 industries are operating within the community.

One of the older firms operating in Portage is the former Kalamazoo Block and Pipe Co. which was absorbed into the U.S. Concrete Pipe Co. of Cleveland, Oh., in 1960.

Founded in 1938, the plant operation now employs a labor force of 33 in-plant workers and eight supervisory personnel.

The KVP Sutherland Paper Co. of Kalamazoo maintains a plant on E. Milham Road where the firm's Specialties Division turns out paper cups, plates, trays and other consumer products.

Completed in 1954, the sprawling facility requires a work force of between 450 and 600 skilled semi-skilled paperworkers with an annual payroll estimated at almost \$2-million.

ANOTHER Kalamazoo-based firm which maintains plant and warehouse facilities in Portage is the internationally-known Shakespeare Co.

The warehouse was built in 1960 at a cost of \$500,000. Covering more than 64,000 square feet at Milham Avenue south of the Kalamazoo Municipal Airport, it was built to replace three existing warehouses in Kalamazoo.

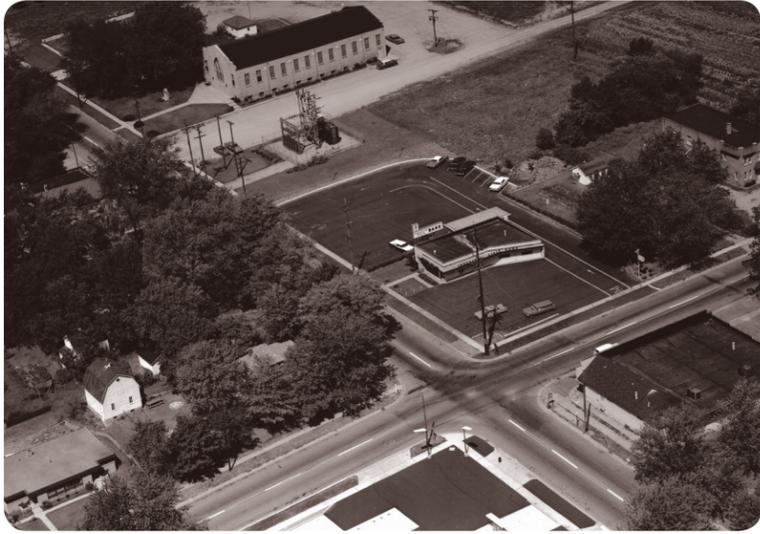
The plant, somewhat smaller than the warehouse, was built in 1949 and is where Shakespeare carries on much of the manufacture of its fibreglass golf club.

The W-L Molding Co. at 8212 Shaver is a Portage-based operation with additional manufacturing facilities in Meridian, Miss. and St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada.

First begun as a one-man part-time basement business in 1945, the firm has grown in size and production until it now employs 180 people and produces more than 3,000 different precision mechanical molded plastic parts.

ROTO FINISH CO. has been a Portage-based operation since 1949. The firm manufactures metal finishing products and employs between 40 and 50 workers at its plant at 3700 E. Milham.

Among other industries located in Portage are Unifab Corp., 5260 Lovers Lane, which handles custom sheet metal fabrication and manufactures animal cages for research. Weber Specialties Co., 8338 Shaver, a Portage located tool and die making firm since 1947. Peterson Spring Corp. of America, located at 9031 Shaver.



This is the intersection of South Westnedge Avenue and Centre Street in 1967 looking from southwest to northeast. First Reformed Church, which still stands at this location, is near the top of the photo, with Industrial State Bank (now Comerica Bank) and Wolber's Shopping Center (now Muffler Man) located at the intersection. WIRS radio station (hidden by the trees) was located across the street, where City Hall stands today.



Industrial State Bank at 7937 South Westnedge Avenue.



First Reformed Church in 1961 at 7905 South Westnedge Avenue.

50th Anniversary Pop Quiz

Q. What was the original name of Constitution Boulevard?

A. Harvard Drive.

To celebrate the bicentennial of the nation's constitution, students at Portage Northern High School asked the City Council to change the name of Harvard Drive to Constitution Boulevard. In May 1987, the Council unanimously adopted the name change.



First Federal Savings & Loan, shown here in 1961, was situated on the east side of South Westnedge Avenue half way between Centre Avenue and Shaver Road. The empty field behind the building is where the Portage District Library and the Portage Senior Center now stand.



This photograph from the early 1970s shows the narrow strip of land between Austin Lake and West Lake. The still-operating West Lake Drive-in can be seen in the lower right-hand corner, with what was then known as Jason's Cove restaurant to the left. Across the street is H&B Market and to the left across the parking lot is the building that houses Nelson's Hardware.



Cities Service was housed in the building on the southwest corner of South Westnedge Avenue and Milham Road. Shown here in the early 1960s, the building is now occupied by Fannie Mae Candies.



To the left is Kroger Grocery Store in 1961. The store was located in the Southland Shopping Center, along with Top Value Enterprises, Federal Department Store, Lee's Sporting Goods, Nobil Shoes, Purcell's Ladies Apparel, Martinizing Cleaners, Kalamazoo Savings and Loan Association, George's Appliance Company, S. S. Kresge Company Department Store, Trim Hardware, Blair David Incorporated, Cunningham Drug Store, Industrial State Bank, Walter E. Ring Jeweler, Jim Block Barbershop, Marcie's Beauty Salon, Derk's Restaurant, Compere Fabrics and Harding's Friendly Market.

Harding's Friendly Market, located where ABC Warehouse, Maurice's and Old Navy are today, was replaced in 1975 with Family Foods and in 1990 with D&W. D&W relocated in 1997, ending almost 40 years of grocery service at this location. The photo at the right is an employee group photo taken in 1975.



Cool Farm Dairy (shown here in 1959) was located on Lovers Lane just south of Kilgore Road.



In a 1965 view of Portage Road just south of I-94, Bill Knapps restaurant and the Expressway Mobil service station are shown.



An aerial view of the Upjohn Co. in 1958.



The Sutherland Paper Company constructed the building at 701 East Milham Road (left). The building changed hands several times, being owned by Brown Company, Georgia Pacific and Upjohn Pharmaceuticals/Pfizer, Inc. Today the building is occupied by Abraxis, a records and information management provider.

W-L Molding Company (right top) is pictured in the early 1960s. The firm, operating since 1945, is one of the oldest Portage manufacturers.

The photograph at the right was taken looking south from the I-94 overpass at South Westnedge Avenue in 1969. On the right are the Holiday Motel, the Gateway/Schieber's Shell Station and the Southgate Motel. In the distance you can see that Westnedge, at the Milham Road intersection, is only two lanes.

These photos are courtesy of the John Todd Collection which can be found on the Portage District Library website (www.pdl.lib.mi.us).



Tidbits in Time

The Portager Newsletter, which began publication in June of 1975, reflects the growth of Portage through the years. The following *Tidbits in Time* are reprinted from past Portager editions.

New Mini Computer Improves City Services

Portage has begun to use a new mini-computer to take better care of its needs as a growing city. This computer is an IBM System 32 which was installed on March 23, 1976 and began functioning on April 1. The new computer is already doing utility billing and payroll functions for the city and has the capacity to do more. As soon as the systems are initiated and working properly, the new mini-computer will handle voter-registration, tax billing and general ledger accounting.

Reprinted from the June 1976 Portager

City Supports 1984 FlowerFest

As a way of recognizing the valuable economic contribution of its many bedding plant firms, the City of Portage is helping sponsor the first annual FlowerFest. This unique four-day summer celebration showcasing the largest bedding plant industry in the country is scheduled for July 18-21. The FlowerFest will consist of many special events, including several activities to be hosted by Portage. Of particular note, Portage's Library Lane in the City Center area will be lined with a colorful bed of flowers, which will be planted and maintained by the city.

Reprinted from the April 1984 Portager

Triangle Purchase Pushed by Council Majority

The concept of creating a Civic Center in Portage was given a boost recently when the City Council, by a 4-3 vote, directed negotiations to begin purchase of three of the five remaining privately owned properties located in the Westnedge-Shaver-Centre triangle. All three are located on South Westnedge Avenue. An appraisal has determined that the value of these three properties is approximately \$139,400, and the City Council decided to offer to purchase the properties for that price. A counter offer has been received from Mr. Rinderer for two of the properties and negotiations are continuing. At present, Portage owns 80% of the total land within the triangle. The city originally began the purchasing program to obtain right-of-way for the relocation of the Westnedge-Shaver intersection, remove many blighted structures and provide potential locations for future city development.

Reprinted from the September 1979 Portager

Water Tower to Enhance System

A new addition to the Portage "skyline" appeared on July 22, 1992. That morning, employees of Landmark Structures, Inc. began the task of hoisting a 150 ton steel bowl to the top of the 90 feet tall reinforced concrete pedestal already in place. Approximately four hours later, the bowl was at the top and welders began the task of securing the bowl in place. The steel plate roof of the 1.5 million gallon water tank was then welded on.

Work is continuing on the project, including final painting, internal piping and site restoration. Of the improvements remaining to be completed, the most noticeable will be the addition of the word "Portage" on the bowl in ten-foot-tall, blue letters. Construction is on schedule and the tank is expected to be completed late this fall. The new water tower will enhance the water system, further stabilizing water pressure and adding to fire fighting capabilities.

Reprinted from the July/August 1992 Portager Referring to the Pineview Water Storage Facility

Portage Celebrating 50 Years – Come Join the Fun!

- ◆ The inaugural **Winter Blast Half Marathon and 5k** was held on Sunday, February 17, 2013 in cooperation with Kalamazoo Area Runners.
- ◆ An exciting twist to the City Council entry in the annual **VFW Memorial Day parade** is planned.
- ◆ A special **50th Anniversary Concert** will be presented during the summer of 2013. Watch for details in upcoming Portager newsletters and on the city's website.
- ◆ In 2011 through a generous donation from Linda Eliason in honor of her late husband, David J. Eliason, the City of Portage acquired a 123-acre parcel east of Shaver Road. The property is a combination of uplands and wetlands that are part of the Bishop's Bog complex, which is registered with the Nature Conservancy and classified as a "relict bog." An official groundbreaking event for Phase I development of the **Eliason Nature Reserve** is planned in July 2013.
- ◆ Visit City Hall to view a year-long display of Portage historical documents, photographs and memorabilia.



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First City Council – These eight men were elected on December 16, 1963 as the first City Council. From left to right, Jack Bartley, John J. Schuring, Okko Brouwer, Anthony Lemmer, Mayor Bernard Mein, Carroll Staffen and Clair Branc. Also pictured is Municipal Judge Kenneth Fricke.

Portage City Council

Portage City Council meetings are held on Tuesday evenings at Portage City Hall (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) in Council Chambers at 7:30 p.m. and are open to the public.

The City Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. Citizens are encouraged to contact the City Administration with concerns or complaints about city services by calling Complaint Resolution at (269) 329-4404 or by visiting www.portagemi.gov > Report It!



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Televised City Meetings

All City of Portage City Council, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals meetings can be viewed live on channel 98. AT&T U-Verse customers can access the City of Portage government meetings on channel 99 and then follow the prompts to access the various meetings.

March

7	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
11	7:00 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
12	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
21	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
26	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting

April

4	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
8	7:00 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
9	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
18	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
23	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting