



business pure and simple

press release



**Contact:** Lisa M. Lothringer, MCAT  
Assistant Executive Director  
Van Buren Township DDA  
10151 Belleville Road  
Van Buren Township, MI 48111  
Direct: 734-699-8941  
[llothringer@vanburen-mi.org](mailto:llothringer@vanburen-mi.org)



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## HARRIS PARK SELECTED AS MICHIGAN DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION'S BEST PLACEMAKING PROJECT

**Van Buren Township (November 2020)** – The Michigan Downtown Association recently recognized Harris Park as the 2020 Best Placemaking Project in the state. Placemaking is a people-centered approach to planning, designing and managing of public spaces. Put simply, placemaking involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in a particular space. The data gathered is then used to create or improve a gathering place within a community to invite interaction between people and encourage healthier, more social, and economically viable communities.

Placemaking is not just the act of building or fixing up a space; it is a process that nurtures the creation of vital public destinations – the kind of places where people feel a sense of pride in their communities and where they want to spend time. These high-quality places are active, unique locations that are interesting and visually attractive. They are people-friendly, safe, walkable and bikeable; purposefully designed to make communities more attractive to both businesses and workers who are not just looking for a building or a house – they are looking for a community.

The Harris Park project was a five-year undertaking from property acquisition to completion. The Harris family, one of the first African-American families to settle in Van Buren Township, has positively influenced and helped shape this community for three generations. The Van Buren Township Downtown Development Authority (VBT DDA) made a conscious decision to preserve the legacy of the Harris family and their homestead by creating a public space for people to gather, be active and stay connected.

Harris Park provides a peaceful oasis in the center of the VBT DDA Business District. This urban park features free Wi-Fi, a digital message board, walking path, doggie stations, benches, picnic tables, pavilion, pergola, light bollards with charging stations and a large grassy area. Additionally, the property includes the DDA office and a conference room for business workshops and training sessions.



*Harris Park is a public space for people to gather, be active and stay connected.*



business pure and simple

press release



The VBT DDA made the park available and accessible to all through strategic placement of access points from the neighboring apartment complex and commercial businesses. The VBT DDA Board of Directors believed in the Placemaking concept and the positive impact that this project could make to the entire community. Their vision and foresight proved to be on target, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since early spring of 2020, the park has seen consistent daily usage. Everything from business and chamber events to martial arts and dance classes, pop-up car shows, impromptu concerts, a drive-by baby shower, birthday parties and two weddings.

Founded in 1980, the Michigan Downtown Association (MDA) is a state-wide, non-profit organization and a driving force in the interest and growth of downtowns and communities throughout Michigan. The MDA encourages the development, redevelopment and continuing improvement of Michigan communities and downtowns.

The Placemaking Award was presented on Thursday, November 5, 2020 during the Annual Statewide Michigan Downtowns Conference, which was held virtually November 5-November 6, 2020.

Van Buren Township is conveniently located just off I-94, at the heart of commuter travel patterns. The community and its Belleville Road Shopping Corridor are a convenient stop for travelers on their way to Detroit, Ann Arbor and many places in between. The Van Buren

Township Downtown Development Authority has welcomed a plethora of new restaurants, stores and shops to their growing business district and the organization looks forward to further community enhancements like those made at Harris Park. For more information, contact the Van Buren Township DDA at 734-699-8941 or visit [VanBurenDDA.com](http://VanBurenDDA.com).



*The DDA office includes a conference room for business workshops and training sessions.*

###