

SPECIAL AWARD



The 2007
Michigan Main Street
Volunteer of the Year
Robert Busby

Robert Perry Busby was a beloved and respected community leader and businessman. Robert was more than a pioneer, more than a visionary – he was an invigorating presence in North Lansing before it earned the cache of Old Town. Beginning in the 70s, he began his singular journey to bring arts to the area. In total, he bought and rehabilitated five buildings on Turner Street at a time when almost all of the buildings were boarded up.

His first art space was a gallery called Two Doors Down – a vibrant place for poets, musicians and artists. This gallery was the precursor to the Old Town Business and Art Development Association over which he presided for many years. As Old Town grew, more and more people came to the area to set up shop, renovate lofts and fulfill the Old Town vision. Robert Busby's quiet yet forceful presence was nearly always felt and he soon earned the unofficial title of "Mayor of Old Town."

By the time Robert opened the Creole Gallery in 1998 things were beginning to really happen in Old Town. The area was one of the first to earn a Main Street designation and the funds to go with it. The fledgling business owners and other fans of Old Town learned quickly that they would have to work together to coordinate activities that would make the area and the Old Town Commercial Association self-sufficient. Robert was always there to offer guidance, greet a stranger or help out someone less fortunate.

Sadly, in February 2007, Robert was the victim of a senseless act of violence. A drifter to whom Robert had offered work and helped out took Robert's life. The whole of Lansing and the Old Town community were rocked by this terrible act and unfathomable loss.

Today, while the loss is still palpable, the community has continued to draw together, completing another successful Old Town Jazz Festival and earning national recognition through the IKEA Main Street Makeover Contest – gaining the most votes among competitors from all over the country. And, best of all, new businesses continue to open in Old Town, events are well attended, and volunteers are plentiful and tireless. It is almost as if Robert is still here with us.

His influence on the community and the volunteers who carry on his legend will keep his spirit and memory alive – that is why the Volunteer of the Year Award will be hereafter known as the Robert Busby Volunteer of the Year Award.