

Hard work has brought progress to Benton Harbor

By JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM

When I visit Benton Harbor on Tuesday, just over five years after the civil disturbance of 2003, I will see firsthand the power of commitment – both the commitment of the community to transforming itself and the commitment of my administration to being a full partner in that transformation. Despite the events of the summer of 2003, the hard work of many has led to progressive change in Benton Harbor.

In June 2003, shortly after the civil disturbance, I appointed a task force co-chaired by the Rev. James Atterberry and Greg Roberts, director of my Office of Community and Faith Based Initiatives, and comprised of local and state officials as well as community activists, that became known as the Citizens for Progressive Change. For three months, the group met weekly to develop recommendations to address the serious social, educational and economic problems facing the city. When the task force presented its report to me, I pledged that it would not sit on a shelf collecting dust, and I am pleased to report that it has not.

The CPC has provided ongoing leadership in moving the community and its citizens forward. The group received a grant from the Michigan Department of Community Health to operate Inspiration House, a transitional home for women who were victims of domestic violence and/or who struggle with substance abuse problems. The CPC also operates after-school programs, funded by the departments of Education and Human Services, for elementary and middle school students.

Although much remains to be done, Benton Harbor is in a far better position today than just five years ago due to a shared vision the community has created for the future. Over the past five years, much of the support that my administration has provided Benton Harbor was based on recommendations of the task force. Some of that support has come through our designation of Benton Harbor as a City of Promise, an initiative that aims to spark development and reduce poverty in cities that are experiencing devastating conditions due to the loss of the good-paying manufacturing jobs that once anchored these communities.

We have supported the community's effort to move forward in a variety of ways. For example, in the past five years, the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) has supported a summer youth program, providing summer employment for approximately 250 youths each summer. A new, year-round program beginning in September and sup-



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ported by the DLEG and MichiganWorks! will include summer employment next year as well. The department also funded a pre-apprenticeship training program for 100 students, which prepared them for new construction jobs that are or will be available for various housing projects, including Harbortown, HOPE VI, Brunson Hill and Harbor Shores.

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) provided over \$21 million of tax credits to support the city's \$19 million federal HOPE VI application to demolish all of the outdated public housing and replace it with new units, including single-family homes. MSHDA also provided funding for four new houses to replace those that were lost to fire in the 2003 civil disturbance and funding to assist the community to renovate existing homes as well. The MSHDA also partnered with Habitat for Humanity to provide support for the Jimmy Carter Work Project to build 21 homes in a week.

The Michigan Department of Transportation also has committed funding to complete new streetscapes and infrastructure improvements along Main Street and in the Arts District to help support the attraction of new jobs and investment into the community.

Perhaps no single project has received more attention or stands to transform Benton Harbor more than Harbor Shores, which the community has identified as its signature project. For that reason, my administration is providing support for this effort through environmental studies by the departments of Environmental Quality or Natural Resources and infrastructure projects by the Michigan Department of Transportation. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation has been involved every step of the way, offering brownfield tools and working directly with city officials on designing ways to attract new employers to the community, including minority-owned firms like Ace Metals.

My goal is to make the state of Michigan the strong and committed partner Benton Harbor needs to transform itself into a place of growth and opportunity. I am looking forward to my visit to see firsthand the progress that has been made and continues to be made in Benton Harbor.

Jennifer Granholm is the governor of Michigan.