


the review

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Hudsonville Terra

2017

Success Grows Far Beyond Unique Building Transformation

By Lisa Donovan

“The Terra Square project already means so much to our community... The award itself is a cherry on a lot of whipped cream.”

Square CEA WINNER!



Terra Square Farmers Market. Photo courtesy of Michelle Fare, City of Hudsonville.



Chef Nicholas Rusticus puts his culinary expertise to work at Terra Square's Sonder Eatery. Photo courtesy of Nicholas Rusticus.



COMMUNITY Excellence Awards

Shiny new cars and eager salesmen filled Hudsonville's Hartman Chevrolet throughout the 1950s and 60s. But when the dealership

closed, the years began to take their toll on the building. Not content with that outcome, city officials set about transforming the site into Terra Square, Hudsonville's freshest, multi-purpose community venue. That forward-thinking conversion propelled Hudsonville into the top spot in the Michigan Municipal League's 2017 Community Excellence Awards competition!

"The Terra Square project already means so much to our community. We have a farmers market, a restaurant, a reception hall, and a place for businesses to launch activities, so it's already had a major impact on the city," said Hudsonville Mayor Mark Northrup. "The award itself is a cherry on a lot of whipped cream."

Sowing the Seeds

Just like the crops growing in this "Salad Bowl City," bringing Terra Square to light required a lot of time and effort. In fact, the seeds for the project were planted as far back as 2005. That's when Hudsonville partnered with Ottawa County on the Urban Smart Growth Demonstration Project, designed to show that quality design and smart placemaking could help cities like Hudsonville attract and retain residents.

Over the next 10 years, the city sought input from residents and business on a variety of other initiatives, including an Architectural Design Elements Portfolio, Downtown Master Plan, and Downtown Zoning Ordinance. The culmination was 2015's award-winning Imagine Hudsonville 2030 Plan. The plan sets out four overarching goals for the city to strive for by

the year 2030: be a city that's more distinctive, more livable, more vibrant, and more connected. The city is committed to making those goals part of residents' everyday thinking about the community's future.

"Those are our buzz words," said City Manager Patrick Waterman. "We use them all the time when we refer to projects we're working on. We say 'That's a connected project or this idea will make us more vibrant.'"

Top of the List

To begin implementing the Imagine Hudsonville 2030 Plan, the city established several quality of life enhancement projects, including Terra Square, a "woonerf" (European-themed living street) along Harvey Street, beautification of Chicago Drive and Service Road, and the extension of a non-motorized pathway connection under Chicago Drive.

Terra Square got top billing after an Imagine Hudsonville community survey showed a strong desire for a permanent farmers market. Primary funding for the project came from a \$4.6 million bond, strategically issued to avoid any increase in the overall tax millage rate. But in typical Hudsonville fashion, they got the community involved in the funding, as well. A local fundraising effort generated over \$180,000 in donations from residents, local businesses, service organizations, local foundations, and regional employers.

"It gave us community buy-in. People wanted to have a stake in this project," said Waterman. "It also allowed us to finish the building with higher quality amenities than we had originally planned."

The community's support was evident on opening day—June 3, 2017—when more than 2,700 people showed up for the ribbon cutting!



Evolving Project

Creating a farmers market was the original intent for Terra Square, but it has evolved to include a farm-to-table restaurant, co-working space, and event space. The farmers market has already met with great success, with the number of vendors doubling in the past year. Andrea and Steve Moorman of Moorman Family Farms, are pleased to be among those vendors. They bring products such as beans, tomatoes, squash, and corn to the market, and supply crops to Sonder Eatery, the on-site restaurant.

"It's very consistent. We have people who come every week," said Andrea. "We grow everything organically and we've reached a huge audience in Hudsonville that really likes that. Based on what we did this year, we're expanding our products and CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) members next year."

At Sonder Eatery, Chef Nicholas Rusticus features products from a variety of local farms in his dishes. "It's a very welcoming, comforting, chef-driven, locally inspired eatery," said Rusticus, who trained in the Culinary Arts program at The Art Institute of Phoenix. "My hometown is putting all the time and energy and investment into the farmers market and a co-working space that you usually see in big cities. I wanted to be part of that and really grow my business in the next 5-10 years."

The co-working space has also been a big hit. For \$100 per month, members have 24/7 access to features such as high-speed Internet and a conference room/work room as well as a printer/copier/fax. The initial 10 memberships sold quickly, and more people are on the waiting list.

"The space is phenomenal," said member Christian Converse, a senior catalog developer for OFS Brands who used to work from home. "And I love the fact that I get to connect with other people. A few are in the furniture manufacturing business like I am, so I feel like I am part of the community more."


As for the event space, you only have to glance at the reservations calendar to know it's popular. It's already booked for every Saturday for the next year!

Reaping the Rewards

Terra Square's success can be measured in a number of ways. Users are clearly pleased based on positive comments and the continual hum of activity in the building. That success has several spill-over effects for the city. The first comes from Terra Square's multi-use design. From the farmers market to the restaurant and the co-working and event spaces, each element generates a revenue stream for the city and increased exposure for the other elements. In fact, Terra Square has already exceeded expectations in that regard.

"The goal was for the building to be self-sustaining," said Waterman. "We thought that would take three years, but we're already predicting it will be self-sustaining in its first year."

And perhaps the biggest benefit is coming in the form of increased private investment interest in the city's downtown. Hudsonville Winery/Pike 51 Brewery decided to relocate and build a full-scale restaurant and brew pub/winery just a block from Terra Square. A private developer is planning to build a mixed-use, two-story building adjacent to Terra Square. Pizza Ranch underwent a \$1.5 million remodel, and other nearby businesses are improving their properties. And the city now gets frequent calls from people interested in growing their business or investing in downtown Hudsonville.

"This is our new norm, our new identity. I routinely get asked what's going on at Terra Square," said Northrup. "It brings home what a good plan with a lot of community input, effort, and marketing can do. This is the fruits of all that labor." 

Lisa Donovan is the communications specialist and editor for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6318 or ldonovan@mml.org.