



Joel VanSlambrouck is Michigan Downtown Conference's Volunteer of the Year

By Jon Szerlag
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PORTLAND, Mich. — Being a part of several committees and volunteering whenever he can, Joel VanSlambrouck finds the time to help the City of Portland, and was rewarded at the Michigan Downtown Conference held in Bay City Monday and Tuesday.

"Whenever we have an event — the block party, Ocktober Fest, Portland Pay Day — Joel is the first one there to set-up, and the last one to leave after everything is done," said Portland's Downtown Development Authority Director and Mainstreet Manager Patrick Reagan. "Joel is always interested in learning more about the main street approach and downtown revitalization."

VanSlambrouck received the Robert Busby Volunteer of the Year award, and was chosen from thousands of volunteers statewide.

"It feels great, it's a great honor to be mentioned in something like that," said VanSlambrouck about receiving the award. "It takes a lot of people who are highly motivated, and determined team members in our Main Street Program to make it grow."

VanSlambrouck is not only a council member, but is also the Main Street Program and the Finance Committee's chairperson, and on the board for the Downtown Development Authority and Economic Development Corp.

"I thank my wife for being so understanding for allowing me to go to all the different meetings," said VanSlambrouck. "There is a lot of energy spent for our city, but that is very rewarding as well — watching it grow, the quality for life in the downtown area and throughout the city, it's a very rewarding thing and what continues to motivate me is seeing the accomplishments."

VanSlambrouck said that every volunteer in Portland is deserving of this award.

"They are the ones that made a big difference in the program while I am being the chair of the board," said VanSlambrouck. "I am just very fortunate to be surrounded by volunteers who focus on the same goals and make things happen."

The award that VanSlambrouck received is named after Robert Busby, who was an integral part of Old Town Lansing's revitalization, and was a dedicated volunteer who passed away.

"They used him as their model, and wow, out of hundreds and hundreds of people they picked me," said VanSlambrouck. "That is humbling."

The Michigan Downtown Conference focuses on things that downtown and main street organizations can do to revitalize the area. The organization holds sessions throughout the year so volunteers and others can hear from experts, and gain ideas.

"(VanSlambrouck) has always been willing to roll up his sleeves to do the hard work, or stand up and make the tough decisions that are required with positive change in the downtown," said Michigan Main Street Center Manager Laura Krizov. "I believe Joel's leadership and dedication to the downtown, along with that of many volunteers, is one of the biggest reasons for the local main street program's success."

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