



One of the potential rehabilitation projects Kathleen Eriksen's new company is working on is this building in Morenci. A \$70,000 grant application has been sent to the state to complete the project. SUBMITTED

RESTORING THE GLORY

Eriksen returns to Michigan to live out dream



"Believe it or not, the clouds, the rain, the snow, I missed those things. Sunny and 70 wears on you after a while."

Karen Lynn Todd

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Kathleen Eriksen left her mark working for downtown communities the past decade in Battle Creek, Jackson and then in Ventura, Calif., for a couple of years.

But now she's back in Michigan from the West Coast, and she's breathing life into area downtown cities, and now she's working on her own terms.

Eriksen was Battle Creek Unlimited's Downtown Development Authority director from 2003 to 2009, when she left for a job doing the same thing in Ventura, Calif.

She lived in the sunshine for about two years, but for several reasons decided to move back to Michigan.

"It was absolutely beautiful, and there were wonderful people and I worked for great people," Eriksen said. "But through the course of the two years I was there I never really stopped missing my family and friends. Sometimes it takes being away from something to fully appreciate what you have."

Eriksen said she returned to Michigan, too, because she missed the four seasons.

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For more details about Eriksen Development Co. LLC go to its website eriksendevelopment.com

the snow, I missed those things," she said. "Sunny and 70 wears on you after a while."

So, after some soul searching, Eriksen decided to return to Michigan, although she didn't have in mind exactly what she planned to do with her career.

"I had always thought about starting my own business, but I didn't have a clear picture of what it would look like," she said.

She accepted the position as Chief of Marketing and Outreach for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in Lansing and after a year and a half there, she resigned to pursue her entrepreneurial venture, creating the Eriksen Development Co. LLC.

It's a full-service downtown development consulting firm in Lansing which mainly focuses on building restoration and downtown development, Eriksen said.

Eriksen's firm currently holds contracts with the cities of Morenci, Portland

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and Hudson. She said other potential contracts are in the works.

In Morenci, her firm won a contract to help city officials obtain a grant for rehabilitating its downtown.

In Hudson, Eriksen is doing marketing work and her firm is under consideration to facilitate a rehabilitation project of 32 rental units, she said.

She explains Hudson as a tiny downtown but with about three blocks of historic structures that have the potential for rehabilitation.

"This could have a significant impact and completely turn this city around," Eriksen said. "And that's what is so exciting is that these downtown development projects have such an impact revitalizing downtowns. When you renovate it has tremendous impact not only immediately but in the long term.

Eriksen said she hasn't always been interested in downtown development. But she caught the fever early on in life, when her brother, Val, asked her to partner with him in a couple developments in downtown Jackson.

The two of them ran two restaurants and a coffee shop during the late 1980s and early 1990s, during a time when many of the downtown Jackson buildings were boarded up. Eriksen was a teenager just out of high

school, but was eager to learn and she said Val was the best coach.

"My brother is an amazing person, and I have so much respect for him," she said about their ventures that turned into a family business because her parents assisted, too. "Everything I learned about business I learned from him."

She said she remembers taking the boards off of a building and then putting in plumbing work and then a ventilation system.

"That's literally bringing a building back to life," Eriksen said. "And when you do that enough times, it brings a downtown back to life."

According to former Battle Creek Mayor John Godfrey, who was in office when Eriksen was hired, she was responsible for breathing some life into downtown Battle Creek.

Some of the city's downtown events including Spring and Fall into the Arts, the Outdoor Movie Series and Vibe@5 Concert Series all began under her directorship.

In addition, Eriksen formed the city's Downtown Partnership and acted as chief developer and project manager for the \$5.5 million Riverfront Condominium Development.

"Kathleen was one of three candidates for the downtown development job and was clearly, in my estimate, the dominant candidate at the time," Godfrey said of Eriksen,

who he has kept in contact with over the years. "She embraced the job. She went out immediately to get funds to infuse money into the downtown to move it forward."

Godfrey said Eriksen's latter years were less productive than her earlier years because she ran into roadblocks. He believes that's why she ended her tenure here in Battle Creek.

"Kathleen did a really good job, but she was fighting some forces within the community," he said. "I don't know the structures of the forces, but ultimately she left the job because she was encumbered by situations beyond her control to allow her to do her job."

Godfrey continued: "She brought a lot of good in her early years," he said of her ability to obtain grants that the city used for rehabilitating structures, among other ventures. "She was extremely easy to work with, and I always took her word as bond."

At home in Lansing now, Eriksen said she gets a chance to visit her mother Lillian often in their hometown of Jackson, something she longed for when she was on the West Coast.

"When I was in California, knowing my mom was getting older, I really wanted to share my life with her," Eriksen said of her mom, who will turn 89 this fall. "So now when I drive to Morenci or Hudson I always use that as an excuse to see her."