



CONNECTING NEIGHBORS

MDOT I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project

WELCOME

June/July 2008

Issue 6

This is the sixth edition of "Connecting Neighbors" the bi-monthly newsletter designed to give you information about the MDOT Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project. Learn about the upcoming 90-day closure of a section of I-96 and go to www.michigan.gov/gateway for alternate route maps and additional project information. Read "A Morning in Mexicantown," go to www.mexicantown.org/directory/html for a list of restaurants and shops, then set out on your own adventure through this, and other fascinating metro Detroit communities. Also, mark your calendar for the opening of the Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center on Friday, August 22.

Section of I-96 Will Close for 90 Days as Gateway Project Keeps Moving Forward

90 days, beginning Monday, July 14, 2008, through mid-October 2008. The closure is a part of the continuing work on the Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project. New alternate routes are being posted; to alleviate traffic congestion, MDOT is opening the northbound Lodge freeway (M-10) ramp to westbound I-94. Even with this new I-96 closure in effect, Mexicantown, downtown and southwest Detroit will continue to be accessible and open for business and events.

To assist motorists, MDOT is distributing updated brochures with maps and directions at area businesses, public buildings, and the Ambassador Bridge toll plaza. Motorists can also download the brochure with maps from the MDOT Gateway Web site at www.michigan.gov/gateway. In addition to these resources, up-to-the-minute traffic information is available from a variety of sources including local news and traffic updates from WWJ 950 AM and other local media outlets. Real-time traffic information can be found at MDOT's traffic information Web site at www.michigan.gov/drive. For directions to specific destinations, try AAA Michigan and online mapping programs.



The La Gloria Bakery staff and the MDOT Gateway Team (lt. to rt.) Devon Pannecouk, George Seif, Mike Palombo, Robert Davis, Andrew Zeigler, Juanita Franco, Paige Williams, Antonio Torres, Greg Johnson, Juan Aguinara, Carlos Rodriguez, Victor Judnic and Brenda Peek. See story on page 2.

No doubt, you've already heard the news: MDOT is closing a one-mile section of I-96 from Rosa Parks Boulevard to the I-94 freeway in southwest Detroit for

"Don't forget, there are other ways to avoid construction tie-ups," said Metro Region Engineer Greg Johnson. "The Michigan Avenue High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane is one of the best alternate routes for commuters driving in from south of Detroit. And given rising gas prices, motorists should give serious consideration to both carpooling by using the HOV lane and commuting via the Gateway Express, the commuter bus service run by SMART and DDOT."

Johnson concluded, "We have been making steady progress over the past four months and the Gateway Project is now more than 40 percent complete. We thank everyone in the community, and our motorists, for their patience. We also salute our engineers, construction crews and the entire Gateway Team for the terrific job that they are doing on this project that is so essential to Michigan's economy."

A Morning in Mexicantown



The LaGloria Bakery, located at 3345 Bagley Avenue on the west side of Detroit's Mexicantown, is right next to the Gateway construction site.

on hand to report the progress of the Gateway Project and La Gloria's liberation. Delicious food was everywhere. My daughter and I each chose fresh breakfast burritos and shared a churros -- a delicacy of fried dough dipped in cinnamon sugar -- for "dessert". (No, no one told us that dessert was part of having breakfast in Mexicantown, but after all this was a celebration!)

It was still early when we left the bakery, so we took a walk, passing interesting stores and several restaurants, including Los Galanos and the Mexicantown restaurant. But it was too early for lunch, so we decided to explore Mexicantown's west side.

Perhaps this time next year, we'll be able to walk from east to west Mexicantown across the new pedestrian bridge that will span the I-96 and I-75 freeways at Bagley. For now, we went back to the car, made the easy drive down Bagley, and parked in the lot in front of the new Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center and Mercado. We stopped for a moment to take in the Gateway construction site, where 15 cranes jut up from the open earth and reach high into the sky. Many aspects of the project were in progress, including the new pedestrian bridge.

After so much eating and observing, it was time for a little shopping. Readers, repeat after me: Mexicantown Mercado = Shop 'til You Drop! "Mercado" means marketplace in Spanish and this modern, glass-enclosed version of a Mexican marketplace houses a series of small shops each filled with wonderful treasures. We purchased hand-poured, soy-based, scent-infused candles at the Mexi-Candle Gift Shop. With at least 25 scents to choose from, I selected lilac; my daughter favored peony-infused candles that smelled just like the flowers growing in our yard. Owner Rodrigo Martinez, who makes the candles at his home near the shop, also showed us handmade dresses from Mexico and work created by local artisans. Moving next door to the Mexicantown



Mercado means "marketplace" in Spanish and the new Mexicantown Mercado, located at 2826 Bagley Avenue, houses a series of small boutiques filled with treasures to purchase.

Every morning -- fall, winter and spring at 7:15 a.m. sharp -- I load my daughter, her sports equipment and several pounds of books into the car for our daily trek to school. It's June and summer, so we are footloose, fancy-free and can take off in any direction we please. On a recent Friday morning, we headed for what was to be a small celebration in Detroit's Mexicantown. We made our way around the huge Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project construction site by carefully following the many posted detour signs. (So many that even a directionally-challenged person like me managed not to get lost!)

We rolled down Bagley Avenue and stopped at the La Gloria Bakery on the east side of Mexicantown. Sweet smells sent us running for the door of this 29 year-old, family-owned business that provides baked goods to neighborhood customers, restaurants and stores throughout southeast Michigan and Ohio. Once inside, we joined bakery owner Juanita Franco and the three bakers who make La Gloria's goodies, along with the MDOT Gateway Team and members of the Detroit media. From February through May 2008, the bakery had been at the very epicenter of Gateway construction. Limited access to the property made getting to the bakery a challenge for both customers and the all-important delivery trucks. On this bright June morning, everyone celebrated improved access to the bakery; cars and trucks were everywhere. Members of the media, some of whom had chronicled the bakery's construction-bound condition, were



La Gloria owner Juanita Franco keeps everything moving as a customer reaches for a fresh breakfast burrito.

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Shop, the first things that caught our eye were the beautiful clay planters and bird feeders, each with a distinctive design. Several purses -- some silk, some leather -- commanded our attention. Shopkeeper Ludy Caballero explained they were the work of Pineda Covalin, two exclusive, world-renowned Mexican designers. The Mexicantown Shop is Michigan's sole purveyor of Pineda Covalin. We were tempted, but instead decided on three hand-wrought metal photo frames, two sun face patio lanterns made of clay and a colorful oil-cloth book bag that my daughter will use in the fall to tote her many tomes. Two other shops that we were anxious to go into, Maya's Jewelry and Felicidades Gift Shop, were still closed during our early morning visit, so we headed for Café Con Leche. There we threw ourselves onto the soft leather chairs and enjoyed perfectly chilled iced tea lattes while people around us surfed the Internet and chatted with friends. It was almost time to end our adventure, but before heading out, we made our "next-time list." With so many places in Mexicantown yet to explore, "WE WILL RETURN!"



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WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?



The biggest news is that the Gateway Project is more than 40 percent complete and ahead of schedule.

The Gateway Project Team hopes to beat the scheduled December 2009 re-opening date. These photos by MDOT photographer Jim LeMay, will give you a close look at the progress that's been made.



Save the Date

**Dedication of the
Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center**

In honor of former Director of the Michigan Department of Transportation Gloria J. Jeff
Friday, August 22, 2008
10:00 a.m.

Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center
2835 Bagley Street, Detroit

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