

By Paul Westermeyer

January 02, 2016 2:49PM

## City officials reflect on year, what's ahead

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As the City of Pontiac enters a new year, big things are on the horizon for the community — and it's worth reflecting on that which has already come. On Thursday, Pontiac's Tourism Director Ellie Alexander and City Administrator Bob Karls discussed the past and the future of the city's development.

While Alexander said she didn't have a lot of new projects in the works for this year, she said that her goal would be to promote projects begun in 2015 in order to benefit Pontiac tourism.

"We're looking forward to the hotel construction in the spring," she said. "While we don't have any museums coming, the Eagle Theater is pretty top on our list of things we're going to promote.

"I do a lot of trade shows with tour operators and tour managers, and one of the first things I always ask is 'what's new?' Our 'what's new' for 2016 is the Eagle Theater and the Hampton Inn coming soon, so that's what we're going to be concentrating on."

For Karls, one of the most exciting things for Pontiac was its part in a bid for being a part of a Livingston County enterprise zone, which was engineered by the Greater Livingston County Economic Development Council.

"One thing that just happened that I think is very significant for the whole county is the application submitted for the enterprise zone," he said. "It's a significant economic development tool. We won't know if we're approved for a year, but we've laid down the groundwork.

"Another thing is we're back out for bids for the train depot, and that will be constructed this year. Also, a part of Old Route 66 is slated to be improved this year ... We're just starting our budget process, and a lot more will come into focus in the coming months."

As for the achievements of the last calendar year, Karls cited the groundwork laid by the Humiston Trust in funding a study for Humiston-Riverside Park in order to make substantial improvements to the recreational area, the results of which he said "were on the horizon."

Though Alexander did not have specific numbers in front of her, she was confident in another record-breaking year for Pontiac tourism.

"Right now, we're working on getting all of the statistics of what our visitorship looks like for 2015, and we'll be sending out a press release next week once the year ends and we get them all together, but it's been another record year, I know that," she said. "Our hotel tax numbers have steadily increased over the last few years, and our visitorship has as well.

"Looking back, we're very excited that our numbers keep growing, and that we keep enticing thousands of visitors every week during our peak season to our community so they can spend more time. Having more visitors spending more time means that they're spending more money.

"Tourism is really based on economic development, and we're really proud that we have the role that we do in supporting our community and local businesses."