



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published February 27, 2008

## Busby's vision still inspires

Old Town thrives a year after slaying

Kathleen Lavey  
Lansing State Journal

Robert Busby dreamed of making Lansing's Old Town neighborhood into a lively, interesting corner of the world, filled with art and music.

Today - a year after the popular Creole Gallery owner was found dead - people who live, work and visit Old Town say Busby's dream is very much alive.

"There will always be a void where Robert was," said Jamie Schriner-Hooper, executive director of the Old Town Commercial Association. "We are doing our best to try to continue Old Town's revitalization in Robert's vision."

Busby, 60, known by some as "the mayor of Old Town," was a tireless advocate for Lansing's oldest neighborhood. He was found bludgeoned to death Feb. 27, 2007, in a building he was renovating on Turner Street.

Elio Ramon Garcia, 55, whom Busby employed as a handyman, died Feb. 28 of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after police tracked him driving Busby's pickup in Clinton County.

When Busby died, many feared the momentum behind Old Town's transformation would die, too. But since his death, a spate of new businesses have opened in Old Town, and it won a \$50,000 Ikea revamp of 10 businesses.

Busby's daughter, Ena Busby, reopened Creole Gallery in August, though it does not currently have a show.



(Photo by Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal)

Going strong: A portion of Lansing's Old Town looking out from the Creole Gallery on Tuesday. Gallery owner Robert Busby was found dead one year ago today.

### Related content from LSJ:

- [Art scene in Old Town lost 'voice' with death](#)

### Photo Gallery:

[Old Town one year later](#)

Busby's granddaughter, Mone't Robinson, 18, recalled her grandfather always putting her to work, dusting his apartment or tearing tickets for concerts at the Creole. She thinks he'd be pleased that progress has continued in Old Town.

"Just because he's gone doesn't mean people will stop what they're doing," she said. "They'll push on with his dream and make Old Town better for years to come."

A total of 23 businesses opened in Old Town last year, Schriener-Hooper said.

A few closed quickly, but: "That happens when you're primarily dealing with small businesses," she said.

This month, real estate agents Brian Huggler and Martha Bashore with Coldwell Banker Briarwood opened an Old Town office on Grand River Avenue. Perspective 2 Photo Studio on Grand River Avenue offers photography classes, rents studio space and is the new venue for Peppermint Creek Theatre Company shows.

Pet lovers drive from around the region to go to Preuss Pets, a Caribbean-themed fantasy space featuring birds, reptiles and fish in a renovated warehouse at 1127 N. Cedar St.

Brandon Sanders and Andrew Lavendusky came to Lansing from Oklahoma so Lavendusky could go to law school. After getting to know Lansing, they were drawn to Old Town and snapped up a third-floor apartment with two bedrooms, stainless steel appliances and great views.

"We liked the architecture and we liked the people," Sanders said of Old Town. He and his partner eat breakfast in the neighborhood every Sunday with other loft neighbors.

"We look out for each other," he said.

### **Marketing analysis**

On Monday, Old Town business owners and others met at Mama Bear's Cafe to start a new marketing analysis.

The last analysis was done in 1999. Topping the wish list back then: a bakery, more restaurants, and a hair salon. Old Town now has all three.

On the list now: A restaurant that would draw people from outside the neighborhood.

Lots of other things are on the table, Schriener-Hooper said.

"I've heard florist, I've heard sushi bar," she said. "Destination retailers are always welcome."

Pablo's Panaderia on Grand River Avenue is one of the businesses that got new furniture and decor in the Ikea makeover. A new counter, tables and chairs and an exposed-brick wall covered with white pots of aloes give it an urban chic feel.

Owner Pablo Maldonado said he would welcome more restaurants in the area.

"My hope for this area is to have more restaurants so people can choose where to go," he said. "Any restaurant they open in Old Town, I believe, is only another door for more customers."

The analysis, which includes surveys of Old Town business owners and people who live and visit there, will be complete in June.

### **Fond recollections**

Potter Deidre Hunt of Shaftsbury is one of the artists who market their work at The Artisan's Circle, which opened last fall on Turner Street.

Hunt's raku and horsehair pottery are on display as well as blown glass, stained glass, paintings and felt and knitted hats and handbags made from llama hair.

She recalls him fondly.

"Robert was a wonderful person and we all miss him dreadfully," she said. "He was a motivating force for everybody a lot of the time, and he really believed in Old Town."

She said most of the artists involved in The Artisan's Circle have shown in Old Town galleries before they opened their own spaces.

So far, business has been good despite Michigan's tough economy.

"We love Old Town," Hunt said. "It's having such a renaissance."

Contact Kathleen Lavey at 377-1251 or [klavey@lsj.com](mailto:klavey@lsj.com).

---

Copyright 2008 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service (updated August 2006)

[\[Back\]](#)