

■ Community History ■

We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.

-Charles F. Kettering, founder of Cadillac

The Village of Lake Isabella lies nestled in the rolling hills of western Isabella County. The Village began as a plat development in the late 1960's and grew quickly. The development was the brain child of Golden and Nephi Grigg and Leo Gatehouse. The Grigg brothers were door to door produce salesmen in the early twentieth century. Their business interests grew to include their own produce and dairy farm, restaurant, appliance store and insurance and real estate businesses. In 1951, the brothers purchased the Oregon based Bridgeford Company which was in bankruptcy. In doing so, they expanded their business interests to include frozen food commodities. To support the investment they also purchased a processing plant and eventually renamed their frozen food enterprises as Ore-Ida Potato Products and would later sell their corporation to the H.J. Heinz Company. Seeking another investment opportunity they ventured into land development. The project that they would participate in would be like none other in the state of Michigan. Leo Gatehouse had a dream for the rolling hills of western Isabella County; his dream centered on damming the Chippewa River and creating an 800 acre lake. In 1968 it finally happened, and the community of Lake Isabella began to develop as a four-season recreational haven.

The development was slow to occur at first, but picked up pace over the years. Services on a governmental level were provided either by the township or the county. There was talk in the 1970's that to truly serve the citizens a local unit of government would need to be established at some point in the future. Where the townships and county left off the bulk of services and oversight was provided by the Lake Isabella Property Owners Association (LIPOA), the LIPOA not only administered the recreation programs for the community, but also, and still does, enforce Building and Use restrictions in their plats. By the mid 1990's, the community had grown enough to allow the leaders to pursue incorporation as a local unit of government. The LIPOA and the Committee for Lake Isabella Village Incorporation, also known as the CLIVI committee, began to work together on the end goal of incorporating into a home rule unit of government.

Incorporation was by no means an easy task. Committed and knowledgeable residents worked endlessly with the state and in 1998 Lake Isabella became the state of Michigan's newest incorporated Home Rule Village. Lake Isabella became the first new Village in the state in nearly half a century. Since incorporation, the Village has continued to grow both in size and in services. The rate of growth demands the highest level of training



and dedication by Village officials in order to ensure that the manner in which the community grows is orderly, sustainable and most importantly desired. The Village has also placed a high value on local control over issues that directly affect the Village. This can be seen in type of ordinances that have been adopted. To date, half of the adopted ordinances of the Village have involved zoning matters, demonstrating the high concern for how the Village is developed. Another example is the Village's choice to continue to conduct local elections despite pressure from the state to allow the townships to conduct elections on behalf of villages.