



Harbor of Hope

AU's mission and service in
Benton Harbor, Michigan

*Artwork from "Building Bridges
with the Arts" (see back cover).*

It has been over a year since our neighbor eleven miles to the northwest suffered through the dramatic social upheaval that garnered national media attention in June 2003. After local community leaders and state politicians, including Governor Jennifer Granholm, took stock—attention that was long overdue—initiatives were passed that were intended to help the city move forward. In the last 14 months, Benton Harbor has become ever more hopeful of turning the corner on years of economic and social unrest. The following pages document some of the obstacles confronting the city and, further, how Andrews University can enlarge its already significant role in enhancing the social welfare of Benton Harbor. Long active in the city through a variety of volunteer programs, Andrews continues to partner with Benton Harbor as university students, faculty and staff find ways to share Christ's love with residents.

Benton Harbor: Hope & Opportunity

■ by Desmond H. Murray

Like the Indians before them, the founders of present day Andrews University and the City of Benton Harbor found the natural beauty of the Saint Joseph River Valley full of promise and favorable for their purpose.

Shared History

When American novelist James Fenimore Cooper, author of *The Last of the Mohicans*, saw this valley he wrote, "it looked like a huge garden, one of the most beautiful in all of America."

Located on the east side of the St. Joseph River, Benton Harbor was a thriving lake port in the early 1870s, when Andrews University, then called Battle Creek College (BCC), was founded in Battle Creek, Michigan. In 1901, ten years after Benton Harbor became incorporated as a city, sixteen boxcars moved the now-named Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC) to Berrien Springs along the banks of the St. Joseph River, about eleven miles south of Benton Harbor.

In 1960, EMC became a university and got a name change to Andrews University in honor of Adventist pioneer John Nevins Andrews' unique combination of scholarship with faith and mission.

This was also the decade that Benton Harbor began its unfortunate decline from being "the metropolis of the Michigan fruit belt" to what a July 21, 2002, *Detroit News* article described as "predominantly black and floundering," with a downtown where "there's hardly anything at all." This was in stark contrast to the public image painted

in *Chips Fell in the Valley*, a 1963 book written by Catherine Moulds and published by Andrews University Press.

I can still recall tears streaming from the eyes of gray-haired seniors for "what could have been," as they reminisced about Benton Harbor back in its heyday. It was a deeply moving experience for me while conducting a local-history project in August 2001, Remembering The Flats, at Benton Harbor Public Library. This was not simply feeling nostalgic over old-folks' tales. Those were tears for dreams deferred and lives unfulfilled. And they

were not alone in hoping for more. In "Hopeful Harvest," the final chapter of her book, Moulds begins with "The future looks very bright" and ends with, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

Fast-forward to two summer nights in June 2003 when burning houses, overturned cars, stone-throwing youth and pepper-spraying, riot-clad cops brought Benton Harbor national and international notoriety. This was not the first time that Benton Harbor received such attention.

In 1998, Alex Kotlowitz's book, *The Other Side of the River*, spotlighted the unsolved 1991 death of a black 16-year-old Benton Harbor boy who was last seen alive in St. Joseph being chased by a white man. The "truth" of what is believed to have happened depends on which side of the St. Joseph River, that separates the Twin Cities, you live on.



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Who do You Say I Am?

Reflecting on common misperceptions of Benton Harbor, current City Manager Dwight P. Mitchell says, “we never condone violence. Yet, while some might classify the June 2003 events solely as the Benton Harbor riots, I see them partly as some young people demonstrating over unaddressed concerns that have plagued our beloved community for too long. For our youth, it has been a whole lifetime of pent-up neglect, frustration and being left behind.”

Princella Tobias, founding CEO and Publisher of the *Benton Spirit*, assesses the issue of Benton Harbor’s image: “I started the *Benton Spirit Community Newspaper* back in February 2002 to address important needs of the community that had been ignored for decades. An essentially good people were being portrayed for decades by unfair and unbalanced images and words. It is persistent; it is pervasive. Just ask yourself, what have I heard or seen about Benton Harbor? How do I feel and what do I think about Benton Harbor?”

Dr. Paula Dawning, Superintendent of Benton Harbor Area Schools, adds, “There is a perception that individuals do not care and do not want the same things as everyone else. This is not true. Parents want their children to have a great education and be successful. There are individuals who want help and not a handout. They would like to learn to fish rather than be given a fish. Benton Harbor is a proud community with a sense of destiny that we shall overcome and rise to greatness.”

Janeva Shaw, a 2002 graduate of Benton Harbor High School and a social-work major at Michigan State University, who recently conducted ten weeks of chemical research into Novel Flavyium Salts at Andrews University in my summer independent-research program, puts it more bluntly, “Because Benton Harbor is a predominantly black community, outsiders make many negative assumptions about us. They assume that we are unintelligent and incapable of succeeding. Well, I want them to know that everybody here is not a felon; just because we are black and from Benton Harbor does not mean we are going to cause a problem, it does not mean we are going to be violent, and it does not mean that we are uneducated. Urban does not translate into bad, negative, wild,

uncivilized, stupid, or criminal. In fact, there is so much talent and potential in the youth of Benton Harbor, I know our future is bright and we will hold down our side of the bridge.” Janeva Shaw is also the director of public relations and sales for a recording company started and owned by several Benton Harbor teenagers.

Janeva’s sentiments are echoed by Laura E. Miles, a white female, and Epidemiologist for the Berrien County Health Department: “Never—not once in all of the hours and hours I have spent in the neighborhoods of Benton Harbor—have I felt threatened or treated poorly. A common misperception of Benton Harbor is that residents are unapproachable, dangerous, or criminals. In fact, the reality is the exact opposite. I have come across compassionate people who are sympathetic to the needs of the community. The residents have invited me into their homes, and have been friendly and openly honest. I always learn something through my conversations with the residents and usually leave laughing or smiling.

“If you are someone who drives straight through Benton Harbor, and have a tendency to avoid ‘certain’ areas, I can understand why you have this misperception. You only see people who loiter around stores and dilapidated houses, but there is something more—something that doesn’t have to do with clothes, education,

race or living in a house with a white picket fence; its called character and it is owned by residents of Benton Harbor.”



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Making Benton Harbor Better

Since June 2003, there has been an acceleration of positive changes in Benton Harbor. There is a sense that hope once dormant and futile is now emergent and

fruitful. There is a long and growing list of achievements being made in housing, employment, education, recreation, health, and citizen engagement. At the one-year anniversary of the June 2003 events, over 60 persons: young and old, black and white, residents and nonresidents, responded to a Benton Spirit Urban Renewal survey on How To Make Benton Harbor Better.

Respondents identified things like: creating jobs, eliminating health disparities, cleaning neighborhoods, valuing education more, fixing schools, conflict resolution,

setting goals, increased health education, working hard, increased job opportunities, helping each other, greater youth involvement, graduating from high school and college, parenting-skills classes, hiring more policemen, building more houses, more caring adults, better qualified teachers, taking greater individual responsibility, closing liquor stores, improving the physical appearance of the city, encouraging peoples of all colors to unite, developing drug, violence and teen-pregnancy prevention programs, fixing up the parks, teaching youth about making right choices, tearing down old buildings, going to church, respecting each other, getting new books in our schools, developing relationships with people that are different than themselves, and eliminating poverty.

Many local individuals and organizations from Benton Harbor are actively involved in making Benton Harbor better. Some have been in the trenches all their lives; others are just coming onboard. Local churches offer after school- and summer-enrichment programs, college scholarships, and food-and-clothing donations. Neighborhood block clubs are being revived and energized. Community nonprofit organizations conduct homeownership seminars, credit-counseling workshops, health fairs, parenting classes, computer-literacy courses with ownership of a computer upon completion, small-business workshops and voter registration drives, among many other initiatives. Benton Harbor is pulling itself up by its bootstraps.

A significant development post-June 2003 was the formation of the Citizens for Progressive Change (CPC). This organization is responsible for the implementation of Michigan Governor Jennifer M. Granholm's Benton Harbor Task Force report (The full report is available at http://www.michigan.gov/documents/BH_final_report_76471_7.pdf). The 23-member Task Force was appointed by the Governor following the events of June 2003 to recom-

mend specific "quality of life" improvements for the citizens of Benton Harbor. With well over 200 members, Citizens for Progressive Change served to broaden the involvement and input of Benton Harbor residents in prioritizing their own needs and in suggesting possible

solutions. The October 15, 2003, Task Force report, "Benton Harbor, A Plan for Positive Change," reflects the community wishes that came out of CPC workgroups on: economic development, housing, job-training, education, health, police-community relations, diversity with inclusion, parenting and family, criminal justice, recreation, arts and culture, communications and the faith-based community.

Rev. James Atterberry, cochair

of the Benton Harbor Task Force, chairman of CPC and the first African American male appointed to the Michigan Parole Board, believes that the top areas of need in Benton Harbor are "improving economic conditions through adult and youth job-training and skills-development programs, creating jobs by attracting new businesses and industries to Benton Harbor, downsizing welfare roles by training and putting recipients to work, improving the quality of education for children and youth, providing credit counseling and finance management training for adults, and increasing the homeownership rate in Benton Harbor."

Rev. Yvonne Hester, executive director of Benton Harbor Street Ministry located right at the center of the June 2003 unrest, says: "For change to be truly effective we must provide a spiritual foundation based firmly on the Word of God. Benton Harbor is in need of financial resources but we all must be first willing to give of ourselves. Can money fix the hearts of neglected, uncared-for children in our community? Can money fix a teenage

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mother who wants to do right but doesn't know how?" Prior to the events of June 2003, Rev. Hester played a central role in the establishment of the Benton Harbor Socrates Project, which involves Andrews University science, math and engineering faculty and students in mentoring Benton Harbor Area Schools students at three different sites in the city.

What Can You Do?

Andrews University has made and continues to make a significant impact on Benton Harbor. But challenges remain, more help is needed and alumni can become involved. Larry Ulery, director of the Andrews University Service Learning Center, believes that "a task force should be set up to determine how the Andrews community, including alumni, can be better neighbors not only in Benton Harbor but throughout southwest Michigan." Further, Ulery states that "our efforts in Benton Harbor can become more effective by having some central coordinating structure, that at the very least can allow communication between groups currently involved or planning to be involved in our extended community."

I support Ulery's view as a step towards Andrews University intentionally embracing and institutionalizing the two-part legacy of J. N. Andrews—scholarship and mission. One creative way to blend scholarship with faith and mission might include assigning students research projects on issues involving Benton Harbor, with class bonus points awarded for actually serving in the city. Faculty and staff could also collaborate with agencies and individuals in Benton Harbor to write grants and develop programs to provide internship and service opportunities for Andrews students.

Faculty might also arrange for Benton Harbor community leaders and business people to attend relevant classes on leadership, educational administration, and business management. Also, the university could play a role in establishing an Urban Renewal Scholarship Fund that would provide financial aid to deserving Benton Harbor High School students.

What can you do? Serve with humility. Serve with one agenda: to love as God loves us, unconditionally. Our service to others, including Benton Harbor, is a feeble, faltering thank offering for God's amazing grace. And as we set forth in generous service with a shared history and shared geography, Andrews University and Benton Harbor will also be inseparably united by the promise of a better day and a better place.

Desmond Murray, PhD, is assistant professor of chemistry at Andrews University. He is also editor of the *Benton Spirit Community Newspaper*.

People and Organizations Helping Benton Harbor

Support Citizens for Progressive Change, which addresses areas identified in the Task Force report. Contact Mrs. Rose Hunt-Redd, executive director, at (269) 925-2357.

Contact Larry Ulery, director of Andrews University Service Learning Center, at ulery@andrews.edu and (269) 471-3296, about potential community-service initiatives.

Support the *Benton Spirit Community Newspaper* through subscription, advertising, writing and submitting articles and news releases, volunteering your expertise and services in journalism, business, photography, and layout. Contact Princella Tobias at bentonspirit@aol.com and (269) 926-4241.

Support the Benton Harbor Socrates Project through donations of books, computers, science videos and funds to subsidize Andrews students' transportation costs. Alumni and retired Andrews employees who live in the area can volunteer as mentors in this after-school program. Contact Desmond Murray at murrayd@andrews.edu and (269) 471-6087.

Contact City Commissioner Etta Harper, (269) 926-4063, who is involved in establishing a family institute to proactively address many of the social ills in Benton Harbor.