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## Downtown Lemont

### HISTORIC DISTRICT | Stores, restaurants and art inviting for residents, visitors

June 15, 2007 **BY MARCIA FRELICK Staff Reporter**

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A colorful mural welcomes you to Lemont's downtown historic district.

Painted in 1976 to honor the nation's bicentennial, it pictures workers digging the Illinois and Michigan Canal that brought life to the land that would become Lemont. Hard work is evident in the businesses families have built and nurtured over the decades.

Historic Lemont is a charming mix of old-fashioned storefronts, some with wood siding and flowerboxes, boutiques and casual and formal restaurants. It offers a relaxing, slower-paced getaway within an hour southwest of Chicago. Store owners are proud to talk about the town and its changes with visitors. The village has a surprising number of restaurants and bars offering Italian, Mexican, Asian and American fare along with a burger some say is worth the drive by itself. But call before you visit. Many places are closed on Mondays in Lemont.

The village began in the 1830s when canal was built to connect the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River. Limestone quarries helped build the town. The railroad transformed it.

Now change is coming again to the town of more than 13,000 with the launch of a project to revitalize downtown with pedestrian-friendly walkways, condos and tourist attractions while preserving the village's rich history and character.

Here are some spots to hit:

#### HERE'S THE BEEF

**Nick's Tavern**  
**221 Main**  
**(630) 257-6564**

You have to see these 1-pound Nickburgers to believe them. Past the barroom adorned with Cubs and Bears memorabilia is the kitchen, where raw beef is stacked in slabs in the refrigerator. The giant patties cook down to a 5-inch diameter and owners Louie and Joanne Novak special-order the buns to match. Nick's, named for founder Nick Pappas, has been family-owned since 1945.

*Hours: 11 a.m.-10:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday; closed Sundays and holidays.*

#### SEW IT SEAMS

**Touch of Class Fashion Center**  
**311 Canal**  
**(630) 257-6848**

When owner Jeannine Nielsen moved to Lemont 22 years ago, the community was mostly "just churches and bars," she said. Nielsen, 80, grew up in Belgium during the Nazi occupation. Fabric was hard to come by then, so she made clothes out of "anything we could find in the house -- curtains, pillow cases, my father's old pants," she said. She uses that creativity at Touch of Class, operating in a building built in 1879. Seamstresses design and create women's clothing and prom and wedding gowns along with alterations

and repairs. "We're an endangered species," she said.

*Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday; closed Sunday-Monday.*

### **PAST PERFECT**

**Lemont Area Historical Society  
(In the Old Stone Church)  
306 Lemont  
(630) 257-2972**

Steeple punctuate the bluffs overlooking downtown. The most distinct among them, the Old Stone Church, was established in 1861. During the Civil War it was used as a recruiting depot. It now houses the Lemont Area Historical Society and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is built of the "Athens Marble" limestone from the quarries that helped the town grow in the 1800s. Lemont limestone was also used to build Chicago's historic Water Tower on Michigan Avenue.

Inside the historical society you'll find examples of an old school room, a medical office and a livery stable, as well as war memorabilia and artifacts.

*Hours: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday; 1-4 p.m. Sunday.*

### **TASTE OF LITHUANIA**

**Bravo Coffee and Deli  
238 Main  
(630) 257-3300**

Bravo caters to the substantial Lithuanian community in the Lemont area. The bread, cheese and butter are shipped straight from Lithuania, as are wild mushrooms and berries.

The shop is filled with smoked fish, caviar, sausages, chocolates and American deli staples as well. "The Americans come in the morning for coffee, and the Lithuanians in the afternoon," says owner Rasa Mileris.

*Hours: 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Friday; 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday; 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday.*

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