

Sparks of Creativity: Automotive Innovators & Entrepreneurs in Southeast Michigan

Jackson County (Jackson, Brooklyn/Irish Hills)

Brooklyn/Irish Hills area (traveling along US 12)

Accommodations

Super 8 Motel

155 Wampler's Lake Rd., PO Box 687, Brooklyn
517.592.0888

www.super8.com

Stay where the crews of the race drivers stay! Bill Elliott's crew (among others) make the Super 8 their home when racing at the Michigan International Speedway. The Super 8 Motel chain sponsors NASCAR driver Andy Houston; read more about it and download free racing wallpaper on their website:

www.super8.com

Sidebar/"Drive-by"

Michigan International Speedway

US 12 in Brooklyn
517.592.6666

www.mispeedway.com

Nestled in the scenic countryside of Irish Hills is one of the largest motor speedways in the U.S. MIS features IRL- and NASCAR-sanctioned auto racing on its two-mile oval track. The 1000-acre track has a seating capacity of 111,000 in its main grandstand and bleachers. Spectator capacity in the infield and outfield areas is 150,000, virtually tripling the county's population on "race weekends."

Irish Hills Twin Towers

8424 US 12

The Twin Towers are one of the early attractions in the Irish Hills for tourists driving from Detroit to Chicago. The Brighton Tower was constructed by the Michigan Observation Company to accommodate the streams of tourists who wished to climb the hill for a spectacular view of the area. The first tower opened in the fall of 1924 with over 1200 people passing through on the first weekend. Soon a feud developed between two sets of neighbors, the Brightons and the Kellys, and the Kellys built another tower only feet away from the first. Whatever one man did to his tower, the other followed suite and only when the Observation Company threatened to install a steel tower unless the height war ceased. Both sides added radios and picnic tables to encourage visitors to stop. In 1955, upon the death of Mr. Kelly the tower competition finally was over and the bases of the towers were merged into one and a gift shop was opened. The Twin Towers remain an impressive site in the Irish Hills area as they rise above the

hill. There now is a miniature golf course that surrounds the towers. The view of the area is still spectacular.

McCourtie Park

10426 S. Jackson Road, Northwest Corner of US 12 and S. Jackson Road

Open 9:00 am to dusk daily

“Aiden Lair” was the home of Trinity Portland Cement Company founder, W.H.L. McCourtie. His wealth allowed him to turn his family home into a showplace which included life-sized cement trees which house the chimneys for his earth-sheltered home. Around the grounds are 17 rustic folk art cement bridges completed for McCourtie during the early 1930s. During McCourtie’s time, many of the auto leaders including Henry Ford would travel from Detroit to visit Aiden Lair for smoking and poker parties. The estate is now a park with a shelter for picnics.

Jackson

To get to Jackson go north on S. Jackson Road from McCourtie Park. At about 10 miles, the road will turn to the east and become Horton Road. Two miles down, Horton Road deadends at the back of the Ella Sharp Museum and Ella Sharp Park. To reach the Museum, turn left on 4th Street, right on E. Hickory, and right on Oakwood.

Attractions

Ella Sharp Museum

3225 4th Street, Jackson

517.787.2320

Open Tuesday through Friday, 10 to 4; Saturday & Sunday 11 to 4

www.ellasharp.org

Stop by Ella Sharp Museum to pick up a special driving tour and family activity sheet of automotive history sites in Jackson. The tour includes a 1920s Italianate Revival Ford dealership, the sites of several automobile companies and early automotive parts manufacturers, the 1924 site of the Detroit Auto Club (an affiliate of AAA), and the old Michigan State Prison where Michigan’s first license plates were stamped.

“Sound Your Sparton: The First 50 Years of the Sparks-Withington Company”

Late Winter 2002- Summer 2004

In the Ella Sharp Museum’s Pyron Gallery, visit the semi-permanent exhibit on one of Jackson’s largest automotive parts manufacturers, Sparks-Withington Company. The company, lead by charismatic entrepreneur, William “Cap” Sparks, began in the year 1900 and during the height of its production employed a full third of the workforce in Jackson. One of the company’s best known products is the automobile horn under the name Sparton (“Spar” for Sparks plus “on” for Withington), including the ‘ah-ooo-gah’ horn.

Cap Sparks was a great salesman for his company, and a wonderful civic leader. His nickname "Cap" is derived from his forming and heading up a world-famous drill team, the Zouaves. "Cap" lead the Zoaves on a European tour and together they made several appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show.

Ella Sharp Park

3225 4th Street, Jackson

517.788.4040

Open until 10:00 pm daily

<http://ci.jackson.mi.us/>

This 562-acre park was the gift of Ella Sharp to the city of Jackson in 1912. Influenced by similar parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, construction began in 1915 on the park's roads, bridges, picnic grounds, and ballfields, continuing through the mid-1920s. The park was designed for the automobile to be the primary means of access. A hilltop rotunda pavilion was completed in the mid 1920s that immediately became a prime commercial photography site for automobiles. The park constructed an auto tourist campground at the northeast entrance in 1924, and designed an aviation field that same year. Modern-day features of the park include an Olympic-sized swimming pool, miniature golf, a golf practice center, soccer and ball fields, nature trails, and a golf course praised by Golf Digest as one of their "hidden gems."

Sparks Foundation County Park and Cascades Falls

Brown Street south of Kibby, Jackson

517.788.4227

Open Memorial Day to Labor Day, 7:30-10:45 pm

www.jkncascadespks.com/CascadeFalls.html

While in Europe with the Zouaves, Cap Sparks saw a fountain that would serve as the model for the Cascades, a series of cement waterfalls and fountains. The structure, which was built in 1929, is 500 feet in length and contains 16 waterfalls, eleven of which are illuminated at night. Cascades Falls are located inside Sparks Park (sometimes known as Cascades Park), which includes paddleboat rides, miniature golf, picnic areas and two golf courses.

Eateries

A&W

4061 Page Avenue, Jackson

517.764.2940

Open mid-February through the end of September, 11:00 am to 9:00 pm daily
Drive up in your car and put in your order at this authentic drive-in restaurant. Servers greet you quickly to place your order, then return with your mug of root beer, hot dog or hamburger and onion rings on a stand that they hang from your window. When you're finished eating, just flick your lights on, and they'll remove the tray. Run by the same management for nearly 40 years, this fixture of east Jackson is usually busy. The root beer is homemade on the premises and some say the onion rings are the best in the county.

The Jackson Brewing Company

6020 Ann Arbor Road, Jackson

517.764.5010

Open Tuesday through Thursday 11 am to 11 pm; Friday & Saturday 11 am to midnight; Sunday 11 am to 8 pm

Located in one of Win Schulers' original restaurants, The Jackson Brewing Company still sports its original Tudor façade and handlettered quotes on the beams in the dining room. Built in the 1930s along I-94, the Jackson Schulers, along with its companion restaurant in Stevensville, took advantage of the growing automobile traffic traveling between Detroit and Chicago. (The original Win Schulers in downtown Marshall was built about a decade before the two along I-94.) The modern-day restaurant now features two menus: lunch/dinner and pub, and, of course, homebrewed beers, ales, stouts, and root beer. Tours of the brewing area are available upon request.

Sidebar/Drive-by

Downtown Jackson Cruise Nights

Michigan Avenue between Mechanic & Blackstone; Jackson Street between Washington and Louis Glick Hwy.

Fourth Friday of the month from May through August, 5:00 to 9:00 pm

517.788.4355

One of the largest cruise nights in the Michigan/Ohio/Indiana area takes place in downtown Jackson on the fourth Friday of every month during the summer. Approximately 500 cars are on display for this event, which also features live music, contests, prizes, and "bash plaques" for the classic car owners.

Fun Facts

The Car Parts Town

Jackson, Michigan has been involved with the manufacture of automobile parts for 100 years. In autumn 1901, Byron J. Carter developed an improved valve mechanism for a steam engine at his bicycle business on Cortland Street. Carter's patent application of Jan. 18, 1902 states that his object was to, "... provide a simple, cheap and durable valve mechanism for engines especially adapted for propelling automobiles...". His improved steam engine was the basis for the Jaxon car of 1902 and was manufactured by the Trask Field Gas Engine Company, also of Jackson. Carter's steam engine was the first design for a Jackson-made part to be exclusively manufactured for use in automobiles. In the decades that followed, Jackson built 23 models of automobile, and continues to produce millions of car horns, wheels, tires, gears, seats, jacks and specialized parts for car manufacturers around the world. This "motor city" has been "the car parts town" since 1901.