

# visions

THE NEWSLETTER OF  
**I M O D S**

Independent Merchants of Downtown Skokie

*"The Vision of the Village"*

INAUGURAL ISSUE • VOLUME I • ISSUE I • WINTER 2006

## message from the president of imods

By Randy Miles

WELCOME to the inaugural issue of "Visions", the official newsletter of the Independent Merchants of Downtown Skokie (IMODS). IMODS was founded in March, 2005 with the primary goal of extending the life of the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) fund which existed for the development of the downtown business district. At that time, the TIF was due to expire in May, 2005, a full eight years earlier than the maximum period allowed by law. We were successful in lobbying the board of trustees of Skokie for the eight-year extension, and were unanimously approved. It represented the first time in decades that a group of downtown merchants had aggressively pursued changing the laws that apply to the downtown Skokie area. We were on our way.

With the financing mechanism in place, the downtown was poised for redevelopment. We set out to tell anyone who would listen how important input from local property owners and merchants would be if redevelopment were to be successful. To legitimize our operations, we formed a board of directors from the pool of local merchants, and officially merged with the long-defunct Downtown

Skokie Merchants Association. This made IMODS a state recognized, not-for-profit corporation. We then drew up the plans of what we envisioned downtown Skokie to be in the future. On October 24, 2005, we gave a dazzling presentation to the Skokie Board of Trustees, featuring 22 speakers, showing our commitment to making our community the "hottest" area in all of Chicagoland. Since that time, we have enjoyed many successes in developing ideas and bringing them to life. This past October, the Village of Skokie approved a grant to expand our functional operations.

We have forged a positive relationship with our new neighbor, the Illinois Science + Technology Park, in the interest of co-promoting many events and efforts, and providing an excellent place for its projected 5,000 - 6,000 new Skokie employees and visitors to enjoy. Ultimately, we hope that we can provide a substantially enjoyable, ongoing experience for visitors and residents, employees and transients alike, so that they will always remember, and always come back, to their most fond memories of a new, improved, downtown Skokie!

## BREAKING NEWS

IMODS is pleased to inform you of an important Downtown Skokie redevelopment project. On Dec. 18th the Village of Skokie's Committee on Downtown Development, the Village Manager and the Downtown Task Force announced a Resolution allowing the Village Manager to issue a Request for Qualification for Developers for a mixed use retail and residential development. **The development block is bounded by Brown Street to the north, Oakton Street to the south, Lincoln Avenue to the east, and Floral Avenue to the west. This block was chosen due to its visible location near the civic center and because the Village already owns a substantial portion of the block. At this time, the only property slated for development is the Village of Skokie-owned parking lots between Floral and Lincoln. The Village, however, is encouraging discussion from adjoining property owners for possible participation in the project.**

The project will add a significant amount of new ground floor retail space and multiple floors of residential units to Downtown. The development may also include office space, public parking, and other uses allowed in the District. Plaza space with outdoor amenities, outdoor dining, and public art will be encouraged. Innovative design and unique architectural features will be expected to relate to the surrounding area and provide multiple benefits to the community. IMODS is proud to have consulted on this project and would like to applaud the Village's willingness to cooperate with the existing merchants and property owners.

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## Holiday Lights

I am thrilled with the level of participation we are seeing regarding the Holiday Lights program. Stores all over downtown are brightly lit and decorated. The Village and Park District have chipped in and done a great job with our downtown parks, Memorial Park and Veterans Park. By working together, we can bring visitors into our downtown area to experience our Holiday Lights spectacular in the future. With the enthusiasm demonstrated this year, we can grow this program to be a trademark of the downtown business district. Thanks again to all that took time out of your busy schedules to join in. IMODS wishes everyone Happy Holidays and a Healthy New Year.

— Randy Miles



Holiday Lights in the heart of Downtown.

IMODS is partially subsidized by a grant from the Downtown TIF Fund/Village of Skokie Board of Trustees.

# Putting Culture to Work for Community Development

Sonya Baysinger – Chairperson  
IMODS Arts & Entertainment Committee

Just as healthy ecosystems benefit from diversity, fostering local culture is essential in building a healthy community. Although the arts may operate “under the radar” of mainstream society, their impact is far from invisible. Each community is unique and evolution can seem as rapid as shifting sand. Uniformity and fear of change does not help communities to build on their assets. Recognizing and accessing these assets is the key to effective growth.

As a proud member of the Independent Merchants of Downtown Skokie, I have grown to appreciate the opportunities that await each and every one of us in this exciting time of civic redevelopment. While most organizations find fundamental change too threatening, ours is a visionary organization that is ready to do what it takes to create the kind of reality we foresee. Our efforts are not narrowly defined. By focusing attention on the cultural attributes of our community, IMODS is finding ways of working toward our vision of Skokie.

Cultural planning is a public process in which innate resources, citizens’ needs and physical and historical opportunities must conjoin to form a sturdy foundation. The Arts and Entertainment Committee of IMODS aspires to act in collaboration with citizens and civic leaders to help nurture the distinctive cultural attributes thriving in our village. Each resident has the power to play a role in increasing the impact the arts can have on society. This alliance can leverage a better quality of life by investing in Skokie’s preservation, growth and prosperity.

Artists’ works are inspirational to the public as they invite discourse and fuel dialogue. Community partnerships formed around arts activities will ensure that a diverse cross section of citizens will come together. The revitalization of downtown as a communitywide gathering place is the shape of progressive future direction. Every collaboration involving the arts encourages residents to reach beyond traditional roles to share resources. At the forefront is the acknowledgment of the contributions the arts have already made to humanity throughout history.

Artists, arts organizations, local businesses and dining and lodging establishments can work together to communicate a consistent message that attracts tourists to the community and deepens their experience once they arrive. Successful cultural tourism is the product of an arts “brand” identity for a community.

Cultural tourism is not the only benefit derived from the arts. Artists are also citizens who contribute to their environs. We are involved in schools, businesses, construction, galleries, theaters, museums, service organizations and many other activities that cultivate the vitality of our hometowns.

A deep commitment to the development of art and culture in a community will result in a positive impact on its identity, one to be embraced. As time passes, the residents of Skokie will see many exhilarating and provocative things happening throughout the village. Artwork will be popping up at some traditional as well as some very unlikely places. Keep your eyes open!

## street-level gallery project

The Arts and Entertainment Committee of the Independent merchants of Downtown Skokie Street-Level Gallery Project is the entity responsible for the art exhibits in the vacant storefront windows in downtown Skokie. We welcome the participation of all visual artists. The following is an abbreviated prospectus:

**Exhibitions and Artwork** - Exhibitions are open to all Skokie Area visual artists. Acceptable mediums include: painting, drawing, photography, installation, sculpture using traditional materials, ceramics, time arts and fiber art. All artwork must be suitable for public viewing for all age groups.

**Artwork Selection** - All area artists are qualified to exhibit pending the the decision of the members of the IMODS Arts & Entertainment Sub-Committee. Artists will be added to an exhibition stable. As each venue becomes available, a show will be curated and artists from the stable will be chosen and notified.

**Installation** - The A&E Sub-Committee will work to make the best physical pairing between the individual venue and the artwork to be displayed. No signage will be displayed with the artworks. All artwork must be delivered to the designated location within the allotted timeframe. The artist must see to it that each artwork chosen for display must be adequately rigged and ready for display at the time of installation. All required framing and hardware must be provided by the artist. Installation will be done by members of IMODS and A&E Committee with any required assistance from the artists. Once installed, no changes in the exhibit will be allowed and all artwork must remain on display for the duration of the exhibition.

**Sales** - Exhibiting artists have the option of making their artwork available for sale. All artist and price lists will be provided by the A&E Sub-Committee upon request. All transactions will take place through IMODS on behalf of the artist. As acting agent, IMODS will retain 20% of the selling price as commission. Any artwork sold must remain on display for the duration of the exhibition.

**Indemnity** - All artists must sign a legally drafted and filed Indemnity and Hold Harmless Agreement.

**Submission Requirements** - E-mail inquiries only.

The address is: backlotartdistrict@rock.com. Please include address and telephone number. An official prospectus with indemnity document will be sent to all who wish to participate.

**“Rocking the Village - One Storefront at a Time!”**



# IMODS – Past, Present and Future

By Monte Rifkin

The Independent Merchants of Downtown Skokie (IMODS) began as a small group of business people in the downtown area who knew the potential of what downtown Skokie could be.

Back in the early 1900's, Skokie effectively served as the drinking community for towns like Evanston, Glenview, and other northern Chicago areas that were dry at that time. Downtown Skokie, while fulfilling the need in this marketplace, also was the home to many silent movie productions before there was a Hollywood. Following WWII, many immigrants moved into Skokie, and developed the beginnings of the multicultural makeup that we see in the village today. By the 1960's, downtown was known in this region as the "Fashion District", featuring numerous retail clothing outlets.

Through the 1970's and 1980's, Skokie's makeup changed, population decreased, and the downtown area gradually deteriorated. Searle, Pharmacia, and Pfizer, owned the large industrial property just north of Oakton Street, and adjacent to the majority of the downtown area, although no direct involvement was planned to enhance the downtown area. Into the 1990's, the population increased somewhat, and the major retail zone at Old Orchard was redeveloped into one of the only 5-star malls in America.

Now, Forest City plans to open the campus of the former Searle property to include 5,000+ jobs, living density, and all that goes with it. In response to the need for coordinating housing, entertainment, recreation, transportation, and food & beverage, IMODS was created from what had been the former Downtown Merchants Association, and is a recognized Illinois Not-for-Profit corporation. Our goals are to operate in an "advice and consent" role with the government of Skokie, proposed developers, community art shows (including a themed "Backlot Art District" – drawing on the silent movie roots), festivals, and general downtown Skokie enhancement. IMODS moniker has been "The Vision of The Village", and at a year-and-a-half, we've established that we are moving forward in leaps and bounds, (by bureaucratic standards), and that we are being heard, at every meaningful level. Thanks to you, and to all the believers that downtown Skokie can, once again, be vital, necessary, and economically functional for the residents, visitors, and businesses that thrive here.

Welcome to our debut newsletter!

## what's been happening

- Wi-Fi is up and running in three locations: Memorial Park, Veterans Park and Oakton Park. Our goal is to enlarge this to the entire downtown area to include the green space at Oakton Community College and Forest City.
- Arts Funding Program: providing resources to fund the purchase of public art for downtown. Estimated available annual funds are \$90,000 to \$118,000 per year.
- TIF facade incentive program has been expanded to cover capital improvements and interior buildouts. 50% up to \$50,000 is available to restaurants and retail. Contact Tom Thompson, Economic Development Coordinator, 847-673-0500, for more information.
- In 2006 IMODS was instrumental in developing a creative plan to disconnect developed properties from the TIF district so taxing bodies were able to receive immediate revenue from the TIF.
- Two fundraising concerts for Katrina Relief Funds raised over \$12,000.
- The Village and IMODS have joined forces to make the Downtown Skokie Holiday Lights the best in the area.

## what's on the horizon

- IMODS will host its second Developers' Forum in the first quarter of 2007. Our first forum in October was a success putting sellers, developers, buyers and businesses together.
- IMODS and the Consumer Affairs Commission is exploring the possibility of moving the Farmers' Market to the parking lots between Floral and Lincoln, allowing expansion of this wonderful seasonal event and bringing more people to the heart of Skokie. In consideration: Arts & Crafts, Music, Car Show, police and fire involvement with fire truck rides and bike safety checks, plus working with Skokie Park District to showcase the Historical Museum and log cabin.
- Street Level Gallery has 5 additional shows in the planning stage. See articles on page 2. IMODS is working with School Districts 69 and 219 to present storefront art shows for students next fall.
- IMODS and the Park District are partnering on an End of Summer spectacular street fair to take place in the heart of Downtown Skokie. This event will include a carnival, great music, arts and much more.
- 8110 N. Lincoln Ave. – Plans have been drawn for the redevelopment of the former Glenwood Auto property into a 45 unit condominium building with ground floor and mezzanine commercial space. This development will provide more residence options for the employees at the technology park. It will feature an attractive outdoor plaza, green space and large balconies.

### New Construction Condo Sales for the Greater Downtown Skokie Area

As compiled by Steve Marciani, Planning Supervisor, Village of Skokie, effective 12/6/06.

Development		# Built	# Sold	# Contracts
Madison Place	Building 1	60	60	
Madison Place	Building 2	56	55	1
Madison Place	Building 3	56	41	2
Oakton Park		24	22	1
Metropolitan		61	48	1
8200 Lincoln	Condos	42	20	3
8200 Lincoln	Townhouses	5	0	0
Madison Square	(Skokie & Madison)	30	16	0
Astoria at Main		18	6	0
<b>Totals</b>		<b>352</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>8</b>

Not including the three early projects in the heart of Downtown where all 147 residential units have been completely sold for several years.

# I M O D S

Independent Merchants of Downtown Skokie

*"The Vision of the Village"*

c/o 8050 Lincoln Avenue • Skokie, IL 60077

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IMODS is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the revitalization of downtown Skokie.

We are comprised of merchants, property owners, residents and interested citizens who recognize the need to be involved to help shape the future of downtown Skokie.

We have been recognized by the Skokie Board of Trustees and funded through the downtown tax increment financing district to work with Planning, Zoning, Economic Development and the Manager's office on matters pertaining to downtown issues.

We welcome your questions and are actively seeking new members and volunteers.

For more information, contact Randy Miles, IMODS president at [rmiles@covad.net](mailto:rmiles@covad.net) or call 847-477-7876.

## I M O D S Current Membership

### Board of Directors:

Randy Miles, President, Village Inn Pizzeria  
Monte Rifkin, Secretary, Remred, Inc.  
Dick Witry, Treasurer, Attorney  
John Haben, Outreach Chair, Haben Funeral Home & Crematory  
Peter Nicholas, Developer Relations Chair, Nicholas & Clark Architects  
Sonya Baysinger, Arts & Entertainment Chair, Northbranch Art Gallery  
Jordan Hirsh, Membership Chair, Cigar King  
Paul McGivern, Skokie Ace Hardware  
William G. Schmidt, Skokie Park District

### Members:

Annie's Pancake House  
Gary Beres, Crafty Beaver  
Kristofer Berggren  
Larry Binder, Al's Cycle Shop  
Lauretta Burke, North Shore Community Bank  
Christian Carini, Attorney  
Guy Cummins, Prinmar Corp.  
Allan Curtiss  
Lowell Deringer, Drapery Center, Inc.  
Jill Dunbar & Rino Libertore, IMODS Arts & Entertainment Comm.  
Sam Eckerling, Print-Xpress  
Dick Flando, AJ Equities, Property Owner  
Grigorm & Alla Fridman, Eurostyle Deli  
Mark Friedman, Myron & Phil's Steak House  
George & Patty Gazis, Axion Development, Property Owner  
Jim Hammersmith, Skokie Lanes  
J. Patrick Hanley, Village of Skokie  
Paul Hardej, The Metropolitan, Developer  
Sam Hemani, Subway  
Gloria & Ron Kalmes, Marge's Flowers

Edgard Leguizamon, Eddy Skokie Optical  
Paul Leisner  
Howard Meyer, Skokie Chamber of Commerce  
Bill Novello, Novello & Associates, PC, Property Owner  
Oakton Community College  
David Putrus, First Bank & Trust  
Glen Roter, Edward Jones Investments  
Corrie Sammon, IMODS Arts & Entertainment Comm.  
Joy Schaefer, Le Potpourri  
Benjamin Shaw, United Printing Equip. & Mtls., Property Owner  
Sherwin Williams  
Demetrius T. Simpson  
Kathy Skobel, Arts & Letters Ltd.  
Skokie School District 69  
Barry Traeger, Traeger Furs  
Kevin Walsh, G & W Press, Inc.  
Michael Waterkotte, Waterkotte, Inc.  
Betty Wolff, IMODS Arts & Entertainment Comm.,  
Rush North Shore Medical Center

## Skokie Swift Coming to Downtown Skokie

By Peter Nicholas, IMODS Developer Relations Chair

We at IMODS have been very vocal and proactive in promoting "Transit Oriented Development" for Downtown Skokie. Our goal is to encourage new development which adds density; including retail, business, residential and the appropriate amount of parking in a way that compliments existing businesses that choose to participate. We all want Downtown Skokie to have a unique character and not the "generic" character that we have seen in some other new downtown areas.

The key element to any Transit Oriented Development is of course the presence of a primary mode of transportation from which the development can benefit. In our case it is the creation of a new Skokie Swift stop at Oakton Street adjacent to the Crafty Beaver. This station, which is currently in the planning process, will be designed to encourage residents to leave their cars at home and take the train into Chicago and for the people who work in downtown Skokie to do the same. There will purposely be no long term parking at the station in order to encourage walking. It's an old idea, but it has always made sense for the reduction of automobile trips and congestion. We are also pushing to get Swift service extended into the weekend so that our downtown can be accessible not just for work, but for entertainment as well. Village officials are predicting that the stop will be complete and operational by 2008.

*...watch us grow!*

VISIONS newsletter designed by IMODS member Kathy Skobel of Arts & Letters Ltd., a Downtown Skokie graphic design/marketing/advertising firm.