

December 11, 2005- December 31, 2005

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Pioneer

December 13, 2005

Ferris Gala Holiday Concert set'

BIG RAPIDS - The 2005 Ferris State University Gala Holiday Concert will take place on Dec. 11 from 4 to 5 p.m. at Ferris' G. Mennen Williams Auditorium.

The event is presented by the FSU Music Center featuring Ferris' Jazz Band, Symphony Band, Chamber Music Ensembles, West Central Concert Band, West Central Chamber Orchestra and Concert Choir & Women's Ensemble. Guest performers include Dynamite the Clown, Mallet Force Percussion Ensemble and Don't Get No Respect Saxophone Quartet.

The annual Gala Holiday Concert is a lively one-hour assortment of holiday favorites, presented in a collage format by the musical groups of the Ferris State University Music Center and guest performers, including Dynamite the Clown!

Holiday decorations and treats for the kids (young and old!) help make this a wonderful holiday outing for the entire family!

For assistance with attending this event, please call Williams Auditorium at (231) 591-3676. Tickets are free of cost and are available at the door or in advance by calling the Williams Auditorium ticket office at (231) 591-5600 between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.

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December 14, 2005

Semester-end garbage pick-up Monday

BIG RAPIDS - A special, extra garbage pick-up has been scheduled for Monday to collect trash put out by Ferris State University students who are leaving at the end of the winter semester.

The one-time pickup will go throughout the city, but once the trucks have been through an area, they will not come again.

Students should have their refuse at the place where garbage is normally picked up for their residence by 6 a.m. Dec. 19.

City officials ask students who regularly use dumpsters for their trash to please be sure to place all items inside the dumpster and not just stacked near or against it.

Regular trash pick-up for the city will not change for that week.

The semester-end pickup for student trash is in addition to the regular routes.

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December 15, 2005

Pancakes with the President

BIG RAPIDS - Anyone who has been to college will know the rule: You don't turn down free food.

Even when you have to walk across campus on a frigid December night at 11 p.m. and stand in line.

Especially when it's Pancakes with the President.

Tuesday night from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. Wednesday morning, students at Ferris State University in Big Rapids could come to the Westview Dining Hall in Rankin Center for a free pancakes and sausage meal, compliments of the university.

It was an opportunity many students utilized. After the first 45 minutes, 365 students had been served; by the end of the event, more than 560 people had eaten a pancake breakfast. Some were amazed to actually see FSU President David Eisler in attendance.

"You're really here!" one student exclaimed as she stopped him for a chat. "I thought it was just a gimmick!"

Eisler buzzed around, greeting the students in line, stopping to talk to a table here or there, visiting with the faculty and staff preparing and serving the meal and having conversation after conversation one-on-one with any student who chanced to stop him.

"Look at all the students," he beamed. "We've been just mobbed - it's been great."

Eisler was not only proud of the students, but also the more than 20 faculty and staff who helped prepare and serve the pancakes - from professors to admissions office personnel to the school's general counsel.

"I think this is so impressive," Eisler said. "Look at all the people here - the faculty and staff, the student turnout - it's a great response."

The breakfast event was planned for two primary reasons, he said. "It's exam time. The students are working hard and we thought we'd give them a study break," Eisler said.

"It's just a way to say thank-you to our students and help them do better. It's a way for our faculty and staff to interact with the students ... it helps build community."

The event was a cooperative effort between the university administration and Student Government.

Students enjoyed the free meal and the break from exam preparation.

"It's great - they should do it more often," said student Brian Jaroniewski.

One group of friends was very clear about why they'd bundled up to head to the dining hall in the middle of the night.

"For breakfast," laughed sophomore Brooke Lynn Gray. "For the chocolate milk without using a meal plan."

Gray added she eats in the dining hall at least twice a week and she and friends began listing their favorite menu items.

"Broccoli and cheese soup." "Lasagna - it's phenomenal." Lori Helmer, director of food services and the woman in charge of the "phenomenal" lasagna, gave the credit for the nighttime event to the regular staffers at Rankin and the volunteer cooks and servers who pitched in for the evening.

"We prepared for 2,000 and my staff here at the Rankin Center made sure all the prep work was done for tonight," she said. "The faculty and staff are preparing the food, doing the serving.

"I'm the coffee lady tonight," she continued, smiling. "It's fun." "Fun" was a common theme throughout the evening, from the students laughing around tables to the ear-to-ear grins on the servers' faces.

"I thought it'd be a lot of fun," explained Executive Secretary to the President Elaine Kamptner about why she was helping out. "The university is here for the students - they need a break at exam time, and it seemed like the right thing to do.... I've got to tell you, the students coming through all seem very pleased. When I welcome them in, they just say, 'Thank you.' They think it's a great thing."

This is not the first time Ferris has had a Pancakes with the President event, but it is the first time in many years, Kamptner noted.

Looking around at the full tables and smiling faces, she added, "This is going so well, I would expect we'd do it again next year."

Pioneer

December 15, 2005

Dreaming big: Ferris student aims to be the next 'Nashville Star'

BIG RAPIDS - Ferris State University sophomore Ashley Grutter is heading to Houston for the holidays but not to vacation.

The Music Industry Management major from Sand Lake is one of 43 semi-finalists for "Nashville Star," the country music equivalent of "American Idol." More than 20,000 people auditioned at one of 20 different sites around the country, trying to make the final group of 10 who will appear on the show.

"It's kind of crazy. It's just going so fast," said Grutter. "My name is on Yahoo Music now and stuff like that. It's been fun and I'm really excited about it."

The group of 43 semi-finalists will be split into two groups to compete for the final group of 10. Grutter will be leaving on Dec. 31 to compete in the semi-final in Houston on Jan. 3 and 4. The other competition will take place in Nashville on Jan. 6 and 7.

Grutter says she should know if she'll be a finalist within a week after completion of the semi-finals.

In the first round of the "Nashville Star" competition at the Hard Rock Cafe in Chicago, Grutter performed Dolly Parton's hit song "Jolene."

"I gave it my own feel, with more of an edgier sound to it," she said. When called back the next day, she again sang "Jolene," as well as her own song "Tattoo." To increase her chances with the judges, Grutter also competed in Washington D.C.

Producers chose the semi-finalists from a group of about 400 who survived the initial round of competition. Now Grutter is scrambling to prepare for the semi-finals while finishing up the semester.

"I have to make this video that's 10-minutes long about my life, my family, my friends, and my school. We're trying to figure that out while I'm studying for finals," said Grutter. As part of the video, a group of Ferris students, faculty and staff gathered at the Rankin Student Center in support of her bid. The gathering was filmed to be part of her biographical video.

In addition to her musical achievements, Grutter recently was awarded the Student Leadership Award from Ferris' Honors program.

Grutter performs throughout west Michigan with her band Rose Colored Glasses. She also performs as a duo with her older brother, Zachery - also a Ferris student. The pair has won numerous contests; including the Grand Rapids Festival Idol contest.

Audio clips of her songs are available on her Web site, <www.ashleygrutter.com>.

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December 17 & 18, 2005

Commission reviews timeline to replace public safety director

BIG RAPIDS - Once Big Rapids Director of Public Safety Kevin Courtney announced his retirement in early September, the wheels began to turn to begin the process of finding his replacement.

Courtney is expected to exit his position on March 29. Currently, the replacement timeline calls for a new director to come on board in September.

The Big Rapids City Commission first looked at a timeline at the Dec. 5 study session. City Manager Steve Sobers presented the working timetable to commissioners with the comment, "It's a fairly liberal calendar."

According to the document considered Dec. 5, the commission will create a professional/ citizen committee, with a membership expected to be in the eight to 12 individuals range, to develop a job description for the next director. The majority of this committee is expected to be composed of professional people, such as state police officers, Ferris State University criminal justice and/or public safety personnel and area lawyers. Anyone wishing to be considered for the committee may go to Big Rapids City Hall and fill out a form to be considered.

City commissioners will select the members of the committee from those interested.

In February and March, the committee will meet to create a job description. This task is more than it may appear, Sobers said, because it will amount to a review of the position as a whole.

"We're looking for a review that would give us some guidance if we should stay with the public safety director (as the leader of both police and fire departments) or go back to a police chief and a fire chief," he said.

The vacancy will be advertised in local and professional publications in March.

"The application period will run for 30 to 45 days," Sobers said. "Roberta (Cline) will run background checks as the personnel director."

In April, following Courtney's retirement, interim management of the public safety will begin.

"There's a couple of people in the department who can lead for a four- to six-month period," Sobers said.

In May, the applications period will close and review of the applicants will begin. The selection process will narrow the field to five to seven candidates, who will be invited for interviews in June. In July, the committee would recommend the top two or three

candidates. Final background checks would be conducted in August, along with the final review by the city manager and recommendation of the selected candidate.

The new director would start in September.

Commissioners seemed comfortable with the timeline, but wanted to see a few changes.

"I think there is value in taking our time," said Commissioner Peg Brennan. "There doesn't seem to be an avenue for the public to make their wishes known. I think between January and March there should be some way for the public (to have input)."

Other commission members also emphasized their desire for public input.

Mayor Ed Burch noted members of the public were welcome to share their input with commissioners, either in a formal session of the commission or privately.

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December 17 & 18, 2005

Ferris Board of Trustees hold special meeting

BIG RAPIDS - The Ferris State University Board of Trustees will conduct a special meeting today (Saturday) at 11:30 a.m. in the Whitney Young Room of the Rankin Student Center on the university's Big Rapids campus. The meeting is open to the public.

Items for consideration include approving candidate Richard (Dick) Shaw of Hesperia to the Ferris Foundation Board of Directors. Shaw is a member of the Ferris President's Club and is a 1971 graduate of the university with a bachelor of science degree in technical education

He is employed as the technical education consultant with Air Conditioning Contractors of America.

The university also will be holding commencement ceremonies at 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. in Wink Arena. Approximately 450 students from the colleges of Allied Health Sciences, Education and Human Services, Technology, Arts and Sciences, and Business will participate in commencement exercises. Robert N. McCullough, associate professor of mathematics, will serve as commencement speaker.

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December 19, 2005

Ferris State holds winter commencement ceremonies

BIG RAPIDS - Ferris State University held commencement ceremonies for approximately 450 graduates from the colleges of Allied Health Sciences, Education and Human Services, Technology, Arts and Sciences and Business Saturday at 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. in Wink Arena.

Robert N. McCullough, associate professor of Mathematics, served as commencement speaker during both the morning and afternoon ceremonies. McCullough's special interest lies in the mathematics needed for space exploration. As a regional resource person for the National Air and Space Museum, he has given more than 130 presentations on space exploration.

He has also written and presented several papers on the mathematics used by the Wright Brothers to prove that flight was possible, and was chosen last spring as one of the University's Distinguished Teachers for 2004-05 in recognition of his teaching excellence, professional development activities and support of students both inside and outside the classroom.

Pioneer

December 21, 2005

Ferris hosts Christmas party for MOARC

Merry Christmas: Ferris State University's Dining Services hosted a Christmas celebration Tuesday afternoon for the Mecosta Osceola Area Rehabilitation Center. The annual event included caroling, lunch and a visit from Santa.

Pioneer

December 23, 2005

Funding for Ferris State IRC update project assured

BIG RAPIDS - Gov. Jennifer Granholm approved a \$228 million capital outlay budget Tuesday, which earmarked \$5,624,800 in construction funding for Ferris State University, one of 17 educational institutions included in the budget.

"The university community is delighted the capital outlay budget has been passed by both the Michigan House and Senate and approved by Gov. Granholm," Ferris President David L. Eisler said. "Rep. Darwin Booher and Dave Farhat have been especially helpful in support of this project. We all appreciate the support of Sen. Michelle McManus."

Ferris officials will renovate and re-purpose the Instructional Resource Center. The 54,700 square-foot building situated on the university's Big Rapids campus was built in 1969 and up to now has received only minor cosmetic renovation, normal maintenance and weather damage repair.

The renovation will include a floor plan reconfiguration, an upgrade of all exterior and interior finishes, as well as replacement of furniture, fixtures and equipment.

Plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems also will be upgraded with energy-efficient systems that meet academic program requirements and reduce operational and maintenance costs. A connecting atrium between the IRC and business building also is included in construction plans.

The IRC currently has four auditorium-style general education classrooms that each seat approximately 240 people, four television and digital media production program laboratories, classroom and computer lab space for the College of Business' graduate information systems program and faculty/staff office space. Media distribution and the testing lab also are housed in the IRC.

"We are delighted construction to renovate the Instructional Resource Center can begin after the first of the year," Eisler added. "When completed, this will become an exciting, new center for learning and learning support on our campus."

Pioneer

December 27, 2005

Ferris State records high-water marks in 2005

BIG RAPIDS - For Ferris State University, 2005 was a year for the record books. Student numbers, student preparedness and community and alumni support reached pinnacles, and FSU President David Eisler sees more good things ahead in 2006.

For 2005 starters, the university experienced record fall enrollment. "We're talking about 12,550 students," Eisler said. "That's unbelievable - this is the largest the university has ever been. Add with that our 70 percent retention of first-year students, up from 52 percent in 1992."

Ferris also has more locations to serve students, Eisler continued. The school now operates 26 locations across Michigan.

"In direct response to the governor's (Gov. Jennifer Granholm) call to increase the number of people in higher education, we're providing opportunities all over the state," Eisler said.

One of the locations outside Big Rapids is Kendall College in Grand Rapids. There, growth has been booming, as well. At the time the two institutions merged, Kendall had roughly 500 students, Eisler said.

"This year, Kendall passed two milestones," he began. "They enrolled over 1,000 students and their budget went from \$4 million (at the time of the merger) to \$10 million."

Ferris constructed residential housing for Kendall students in Grand Rapids and 2005 saw that facility full, he continued.

With larger student numbers came higher faculty numbers. Ferris advertised faculty positions and hired 33 new people; 13 of those positions were new, Eisler noted, adding the university has "flourished" despite continued budget reductions from the state.

In addition to being the largest student body in the history of the school, the students now attending FSU also are the best prepared.

"This the best prepared student body in the history of the university," Eisler said. "They have the highest GPA (grade-point averages) and ACT scores. ... Our students are incredible in their academic ability and their Willingness to make a difference for the community. Their willingness to make a difference is something I'm really proud of."

Ferris students volunteered in area schools, with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, raised money for United Way and Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, led Girl Scout troops and worked with the city on projects such as the new bandshell.

"Our students designed the band shell and worked with the folks at the city and Rex Schuberg (to make it a reality)," Eisler said. "And (students) played at the ' opening." That support for the community also comes back to the university.

"We've had great support from the community," Eisler said. "I can tell you, having lived in other small communities with universities, that this is not the way the world is."

Eisler credits the City of Big Rapids for street improvements made around campus and the overall community for reaching out to students through events ' such as the Bulldog Bonanza.

"There's been incredible support for our students from the community and alumni in terms of scholarships and donations," he continued. "We had our most successful Ferris Foundation Gala in history... Homecoming was a great parade, a great day, with lots of involvement.... We had sold out alumni event last year ... our bus tour was incredibly successful, in terms of building relationships..."

With a year for the history books, Ferris also took time to look back at its own history. The institution observed its first Founders' Day, a recognition of the efforts of Woodbridge N. Ferris, the school's founder, and key people throughout the school's years of operation.

"I think that was a wonderful event," Eisler said. "We continue to celebrate the history of our founder and the people who helped the university. The Founders' Room was dedicated last spring (in the Rankin Center) and we rededicated Williams Auditorium this fall. I think we went back and celebrated our history.

"I think the Veterans' Scholarship fits into that, really tying into the roots of Ferris," Eisler continued. "Ferris is the gateway for returning military veterans to get into the civilian workforce ... it really goes back to our strengths."

Personnel changes - in addition to the new faculty - also were part of the landscape for Ferris in 2005. "We were sad and happy at the same time to see Scott Hill-Kennedy leave us to become the (49th) Circuit Court judge," Eisler said. "It was a lifelong dream of his."

Hill-Kennedy had served as the school's general counsel, a position filled by Miles Posterna, the previous deputy general counsel.

Two new - yet familiar - faces joined the Ferris State University Board of Trustees in 2005. George Menoutes and Ron Snead, in addition to being the new board members, also are both Ferris alumni.

Like the new trustees, some matters beginning in 2005 will stretch forward to have an impact on the future.

The year saw the school begin to work on replacing all faculty and staff computers. Additionally, half of FSU's campus is now wireless-capable. FSU also began a program to renovate every classroom on campus. The classroom renovations are slated to be complete in five years.

Other matters leaning into the future are larger in scope. The state approved funding to renovate the Instructional Resource Center in 2005. The building, mostly structurally the same as when it was built in the late '60s, will be completely updated. An atrium connecting it to the College of Business also will be constructed, allowing the two buildings to be connected and part of the space in the IRC building to be utilized for offices for business faculty.

The groundbreaking ceremonies are expected in 2006.

More construction efforts also will take shape in 2006.

The plans for the new Michigan College of Optometry building are moving forward," Eisler said.

A fund-raising drive involving the faculty has raised three-quarters of a million dollars toward the university's contribution to the project.

"We are working as hard as possible to get the legislature to step up to the plate to (allocate) funding for the College of Optometry," Eisler said. "There are 17 (optometry colleges) in the nation, and only one in the state."

Besides the capital improvements 2006 is expected to bring to Ferris, other improvements will be evident as well, Eisler believes.

On his list of things to watch for in the next year are better students due to higher admissions standards, more new faculty, more student involvement in the community and more ways to involve the community in the university, more transfer students and increasing numbers of veterans.

"I think all those are really good things," he said. "...We're gong to see more donations for Ferris State University in the next year than at any time in history as people respond to the involvement of alumni in the university as they help Ferris continue to be accessible and affordable.

"We're going to see some truly world-class faculty and staff retire," Eisler continued.

"You always hate to see people with 20, 25, 30 years of experience retire, but you're happy they have the opportunity to be able to do what they want."

The Grand Rapids Press

December 29, 2005

College campuses eager for burst of construction

LANSING -- For the first time in four tough budget years, state funds will flow to 17 universities and community colleges for construction and renovation projects.

A capital outlay budget signed last week by Gov. Jennifer Granholm commits \$198 million to be raised through the sale of bonds in the fiscal year that began Oct. 1.

Newly authorized projects include a 52,200-square-foot addition to Grand Valley State University's Grand Rapids campus, a chemistry building upgrade at Michigan State University, the transformation of a 1930s apartment building to classroom space at the University of Michigan, and construction or renovation at 10 community colleges.

"It's very exciting. We're very pleased," said Mike Boulus, executive director of the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan, representing 15 public university presidents and chancellors. "We've got a lot of unmet capital need on campuses, and this is a kick start."

Granholm wants to double the number of college graduates over the next decade, and the infrastructure must grow, Boulus added.

That is exactly what GVSU administrators hope for.

The university will receive \$12 million for its \$16 million expansion of the Padnos College of Engineering.

Administrators expect enrollment in that college to double before the end of the decade, spokesman Matt Logan said.

"Having even more capacity for enrollment means we'll be able to better meet the future needs of our region's employers," he said.

"(Legislators) recognize what we do, and the governor has now confirmed that these are the jobs of the future and we need to be producing more grads in these fields."

The engineering laboratory opened in 2000 with 533 students, and its enrollment increased steadily to capacity, 700 last fall.

Nearly all its graduates find jobs after graduation, with starting annual salaries of \$48,000.

Meanwhile, Ferris State University will get \$5.6 million for an \$8.5 million project to renovate its Instructional Resource Center, built in 1969.

Shelly Armstrong, Ferris' associate vice president for marketing, said now that funds are secured, construction will start as soon as next week.

Bids for the project were awarded to Rockford Construction. The renovated building is expected to open in fall 2007.

"This is going to significantly enhance our classroom and auditorium space, improve energy efficiency and contribute to our vision of a learning' centered university," Armstrong said.

Construction has continued at college campuses statewide through projects authorized in the late '90s or through self-financing.

The state authorized nearly \$1.5 billion in construction and renovation projects from 1993 to 2001, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency.

GVSU has not received capital funds since 2000, when the state paid \$37.1 million toward the \$57.1 million Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences in Grand Rapids.

The state generally pays about 75 percent of university projects and 50 percent for those at community colleges. The \$198 million in bonds will cost state taxpayers about \$20 million a year for 12 to 15 years, the Senate Fiscal Agency said.

Granholm proposed selling bonds this year as a way to provide jobs right away, while getting to needed projects that may have been deferred due to tight budgets.

The list of projects was shaped by legislators who serve on House and Senate appropriations committees.

Boulus, who was a state deputy treasurer under former Gov. John Engler, said higher education officials would push for even more capital projects next year.

He said Michigan is a low debt state, so it can afford to sell more bonds, although legislation is needed to raise the cap on the bonds the state is allowed to authorize.

"We clearly have some need out there," Boulus said. "It's a great way to jump-start the economy."

Logan said GVSU soon would call for bids to ensure the new hall is ready to go for the fall of 2007.

All the labs are in the Keller Engineering Laboratories, and additional classrooms and faculty offices are in the Eberhard Center. The new John C. Kennedy Hall of Engineering would connect both buildings and provide additional classroom and laboratories.

Michigan History Magazine

November/December 2005

Industry, Recreation, and Education

In April 1869, the Michigan state legislature passed a resolution officially incorporating the city of Big Rapids. Before this, the community and its township were formally called by the postal address of Leonard, named after Dr. F. B. Leonard, and the county seat was listed as the Village of Leonard. But despite the official name, residents referred to it as Big Rapids until incorporation. The origin of the name Big Rapids came from the logging activities in the area. The Muskegon River-which once saw Odawa Indians, camped in springtime along its bank, while collecting maple syrup-flowed through the area south to Muskegon's mills. Because of the swift currents, lumbermen referred to this portion of the river as the "big rapids." These currents were later stemmed by the creation of dams.

In the 1850s large numbers of permanent settlers established homes in the area. However, in 1833 there were just 1,200 farms, taking up only 10 percent of the available land. Big Rapids residents have always thought of the town as an industrial community. As the logging industry boomed, many Scandinavian and German settlers built homes and stores, and three railroad companies began operating. By 1884 twenty-one mills were cutting logs in Mecosta County.

In 1863, Reverend H. Lucas, a Methodist minister, declared that in sixteen years of preaching he had never found "a more respectable and attentive" congregation. The Reverend Lucas attributed this to the absence of liquor establishments and to a quiet, industrious citizenry.

Big Rapids earned the nickname "Water Power City" at the turn of the century because of two hydroelectric dams built between 1906 and 1915. One dam was removed in 1966 and the other dam continued to provide power to Consumers Energy. Hydroelectric power spawned the creation of many manufacturing industries, such as furniture factories, mills, saw/knife grinding factories, shoe factories and other plants.

Water itself also played an important role in the Yolanda Mineral Springs Company. Alf Clark in the 1880s drilled a hole looking for oil, and instead found a spring with "healthful properties." The water was bottled and shipped out until 1912.

One prominent company was the Peerless Oil Company formed by William C. Taggart and his brother James in 1921. The company operated several service stations and oil refineries in Michigan and Illinois. In 1932 they sold their interests and formed the Taggart Brothers Company, which supplied the city with natural gas from the Austin Field through a pipeline they built to the city. Today the American Natural Resources Company still operates pipelines across the state from this original field.

The largest and longest-lasting Big Rapids "enterprise" began soon after Woodbridge N. Ferris (later two-time governor of Michigan and senator) moved to the area in May 1884. He was an active local citizen. Serving, on the boards of local banks. Ferris

founded a school called the Big Rapids Industrial School, later named the Ferris Institute. Originally housed in a few rented rooms over the Vandersluis block with Ferris and his wife as instructors, the campus moved to its permanent location in 1894. In 1950 this school became a part of the state college system and in 1987 was renamed Ferris State University. The original enrollment of fifteen students in 1884 has grown to over 12,500 in fall 2005. The university remains one of the largest employers in the county.

Another leading Big Rapids citizen was Anna Howard Shaw, whose statue stands today in a park north of the Big Rapids Community Library. Shaw immigrated to the area with her family in 1859 from England. After attending Albion College and receiving degrees from Boston University in both theology and medicine, she served as a minister and doctor. She is remembered as a leading women's rights activist and a close friend of Susan B. Anthony. After Anthony died, Shaw led the suffrage movement until the final passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Shaw also received the Distinguished Service Medal for her humanitarian work during World War I.

The first city hospital was built in February 1879, named Mercy Hospital and headed by Sister -Man Mother Joseph Lynch who had trained with Florence Nightingale on the Crimean Peninsula. This hospital burned in December 1882 and a second Mercy Hospital was built in November 1883. A fire also destroyed this hospital in April 1908.

The Northern Hotel was purchased and converted into a hospital, again destroyed by fire in 1918. Ferris opened a hospital for contagious diseases in 1918 and the Sisters of Mercy left. Today, the recently renovated and expanded Mecosta County General Hospital serves as one of the largest employers in the area.

Surrounding tourist and natural areas have strong links to the city. Recreational opportunity abounds with over 197 acres of parks in the city-including a river walk and another 495 county park acres. The 2000 removal of a deteriorating dam on the Muskegon River improved fishing and canoeing. Some former railway tracks have been converted to recreational use as part of the Rails-to-Trails program.

Today, Big Rapids is a vibrant city of 12,000 residents who enjoy a strong downtown business district and a beautiful university campus. Big Rapids also takes pride in two buildings listed on the National Historic Register: the Fairman Building and the Nisbett Building. The Mecosta County Historical Museum, the Old Jail, and the Bergelin House (undergoing renovation into a furniture museum) are located within easy walking distance of each other in an area becoming known locally as the historic triangle.

The city logo sums up the town's rich offerings with the words "industry, recreation and education." In 2005, Big Rapids celebrates its sesquicentennial with scheduled events, a display about leading citizens, a church and city history and a series of articles published by the *Big Rapids Pioneer*. For more information on Big Rapids, visit www.ci.big-rapids.mi.us.