

Three Rivers: More Than Just Three Bodies of Water

By Dara L. Gishler

Look beyond the spider's web of intersecting roadways in the heart of St. Joseph County and you'll see there really are three rivers in Three Rivers: the Portage, the Rocky and the St. Joseph. But don't stop there. Notice that the surrounding area is dotted with lakes, nine of them offering public access sites. Move from the map to other sources and you'll find an abundance of recreational opportunities – from boating and golf to skiing and a zoo.

The area has an interesting history. Downtown Three Rivers is a National Historic District and home to the Sue Silliman House, which features an operating blacksmith's forge.

Nearby Centreville maintains a covered wooden bridge. Glen Oaks Community College, also in Centreville, is the site of another historic home, the Nora Hagen House, which dates from 1887 and now houses the college's Small Business Resource Center.

The French and Indians began trading in the general area of what is now Three Rivers around 1680 and historians believe a trading post was established by the French before the Revolutionary War. A granite marker in LaSalle Park on Constantine Street indicates the location of the trading post.

Growth really took off beginning in the 1830s. Three Rivers was platted in 1836 and the first school was built in 1837. The public library also started that year, with \$5 in funding voted at a town meeting. That money went to buy books, which were kept in the school building.

Nearly 70 years later, in 1904, the Carnegie library building was erected on North Main Street. Today that same building houses the Carnegie Center for the Arts, which displays many



As witnessed every winter, Mother Nature can create a masterpiece of beauty with the simplest of materials. Photo by Janet M. Dane.

types of art in month-long exhibits, as well as booking periodic special shows and classes.

The Three Rivers area offers several winter activities including skating, sledding and tobogganing. Snow bears and bunnies can swish down the slopes at the Swiss Valley Lodge in Jones, or enjoy cross-country skiing at Pine View Golf Course. Three Rivers also has a new winter park – Dimmick Lodge – which opened in December.

With spring just around the corner, warm-weather fun can't be far behind. Some of the special events capitalizing on the area's waterways include the Mendon Country Inn Riverfest in May and Three Rivers' an-

nual Water Festival the third weekend in June. In addition to the annual Bierfest, more Water Festival entertainment and activities are being planned for Scidmore Park, Conservation Park, Memory Island Park, downtown and other locations.

The Three Rivers Area Chamber of Commerce sponsors the Water Festival, and can provide more information on year-round recreational activities and points of interest, as well as lodging and resorts in the area. Call 616-278-8193. **022**