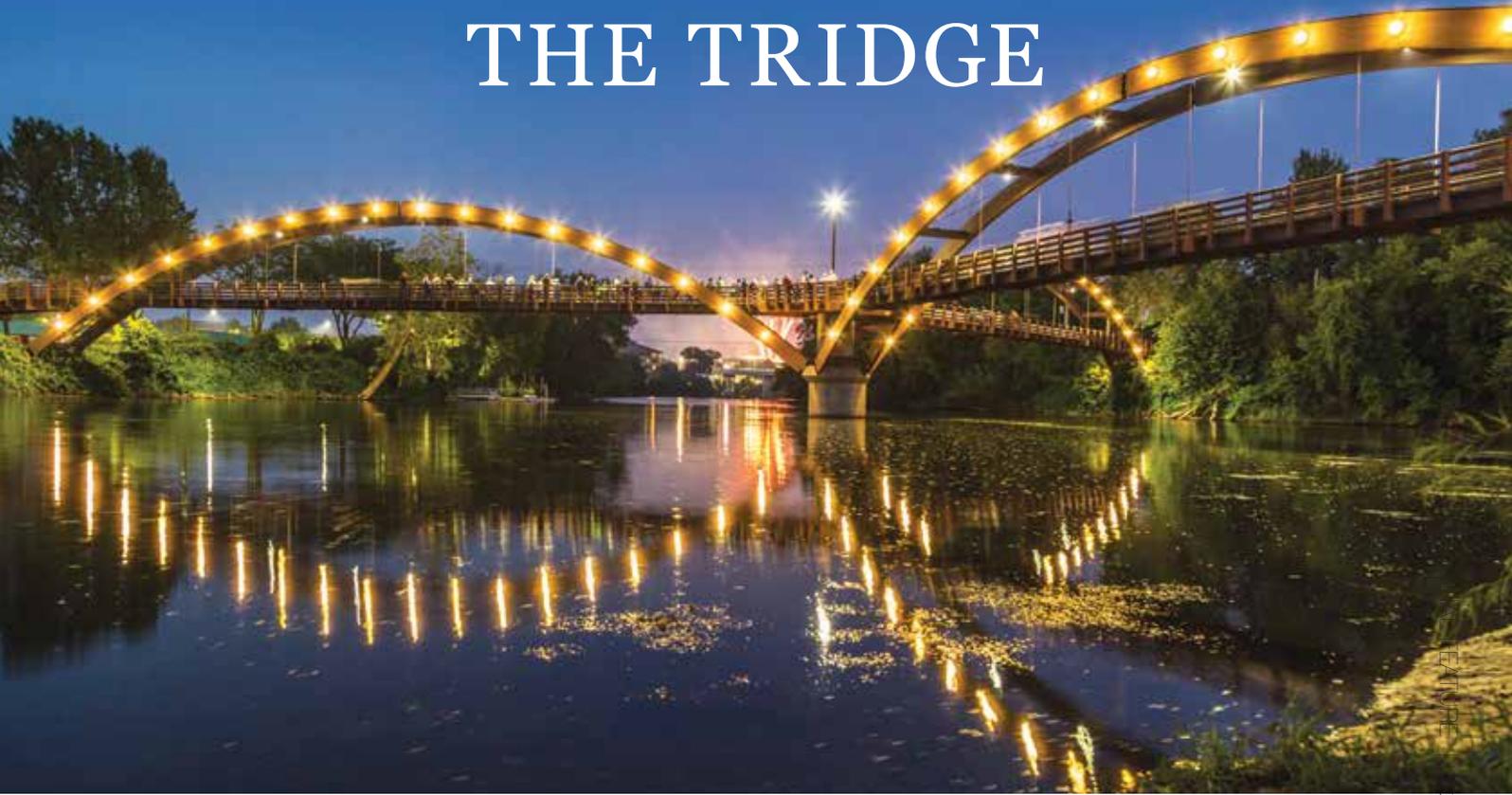


Chronicling the Rich History of a Midland Landmark: THE TRIDGE



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A popular destination spot for tourists and community members alike, the Tridge is a three-way foot bridge that was constructed in 1981 with the help of the Midland Area Community Foundation and other local supporters. Originally forecast to be called the “three-legged foot bridge,” local grade school students, who were also involved in the fundraising efforts to build the bridge, determined “Tridge” had a better sound to it.



Early on, it was estimated that the Tridge would cost around \$730,000 to build. In response, schools from all over the city organized fundraising events to capitalize on a matching grant offer of up to \$366,000 by the Carl A. Gerstacker and Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation. Funds were raised through student bake sales, penny drives, can collections, and a school carnival. The final tally came out to be \$3,500 raised by 21 schools in the surrounding area, and while it was clear that additional help was required, the students made an impressive contribution to the project.

To help close that gap between the amount raised and the amount needed, the Midland Area Community Foundation set up a fund for other community members to donate to the project. The response was overwhelmingly positive with hundreds of donations from individuals and a number of organizations in town. Larger gifts were made from local foundations such as the Herbert H. Dow and Grace A. Dow Foundation, Dow Chemical Company, and the Charles J. Strosacker Foundation. Eventually all the funds were secured for construction to begin and the project was finally under way.



The Tridge was designed by Commonwealth Associates based out of Jackson, and built by Gerace Construction, which is based in Midland. The bridge consists of three wooden arches (weighing 44,000 pounds) that are supported by a single concrete pier, which also supports three 8-foot wide decks.

It is located in downtown Midland and has become an icon for the city where two waterways, the Tittabawasee and the Chippewa Rivers, connect. The bridge also marks the start of the Chippewa Nature Trail and the Pere Marquette Rail Trail. It is surrounded by the St. Charles and Chippewassee Parks and is a great spot for leisurely activities, including the regular farmers market and the annual Labor Day Walk.

Gerace Construction president Tom Valent spoke about building the Tridge during an interview a few years back, stating “The arches came in from Brown Lumber; we bolted them all together and took them on wagons to the river. We built a causeway, we had two big cranes, one in the middle of the river, and another one on the side. At that time, it was the largest wood arch bridge in the world. I can still remember watching that pin being driven in for the first leg, because to me, that was my job, to make sure that this thing went together. Once we did the first one, we knew the rest would work.”

Valent also reflected on his nerves the day the bridge opened. “When they opened that Tridge for the first time, it felt like a stampede. The Tridge just filled with people. That’s an extreme load, and that thing was creaking. There’s more of a load on a pedestrian bridge than there is on an automotive bridge. There can be a 200-pound per square foot load with it full of people. So all I could think was ‘I hope everything is in there just right.’”

Indeed, everything was, and the Tridge stands as sturdy as the day it was opened to the masses who come to enjoy the unique construction and design of the bridge that so many worked to fund and implement.

In the words of Ben Tierney, who is the Communications Officer at the Midland Area Community Foundation, “The Tridge is now an established icon of our city, and one of the great landmarks in the state of Michigan. When community members and organizations believe in and support a good idea, we can make it happen. We are blessed to live in a community that consistently chooses quality projects to support that benefit all.” □

