Partnerships 1: Community Partnerships in Niles

Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project

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Community Partnerships in Niles

The benefits of working with anthropologists

Anthropologists have always engaged with communities, though not always for their direct benefit. To ensure positive outcomes in collaboration, students interviewed members of community groups to identify community goals and assets. We also began to determine the interests that anthropologists and communities share and how specific communities can benefit, if at all, from anthropological studies. WMU students and faculty are equipped with anthropological skills and understandings to assist communities in meeting their goals.

The benefits of inclusivity

To ensure ethical, relevant, and sustainable archaeology, WMU students prepared a strategic plan (2014) in consultation with heritage professionals, municipal representatives, educators, and members of the public. The plan identified various types of facilities, programs, and partnerships that could be developed to carry out the mission of the Project. A number of partnerships have emerged among community groups with shared interests. The goal is to enhance and expand these collaborations to ensure mutual benefits.

Anthropology can be a catalyst

The purpose of this exhibit is to explore some of the partnerships that the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project can develop. We have begun to reach out to some of the communities that have a vested interest in the history and archaeology of Niles to explore ways that we might establish and strengthen our collaborations.

The ripple effect of collaboration

Community groups and academics recognize the importance of collaboration for implementing their goals and vision. The initial search for Fort St. Joseph, an 18th-century French trading post in Niles, was conducted by Western Michigan University archaeologists in partnership with Support the Fort, Inc. and the City of Niles. This initiative, now known as the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project, has grown to become a long-term, multidisciplinary, community-based research endeavor that aims to investigate and interpret the history and archaeology of the fur trade and colonialism in the interest of the public. The Project has the potential to engage a wider group of stakeholders on a variety of topics.

Together we can change the world

We began by consulting with St. Mary’s Church, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, living history re-enactors, educators in the Niles school system, and naturalists. The aim of this work is to lay the foundation to seek common ground between scholars and the Niles community and to create transformative change toward a more equitable world. Will you join us in this noble goal?