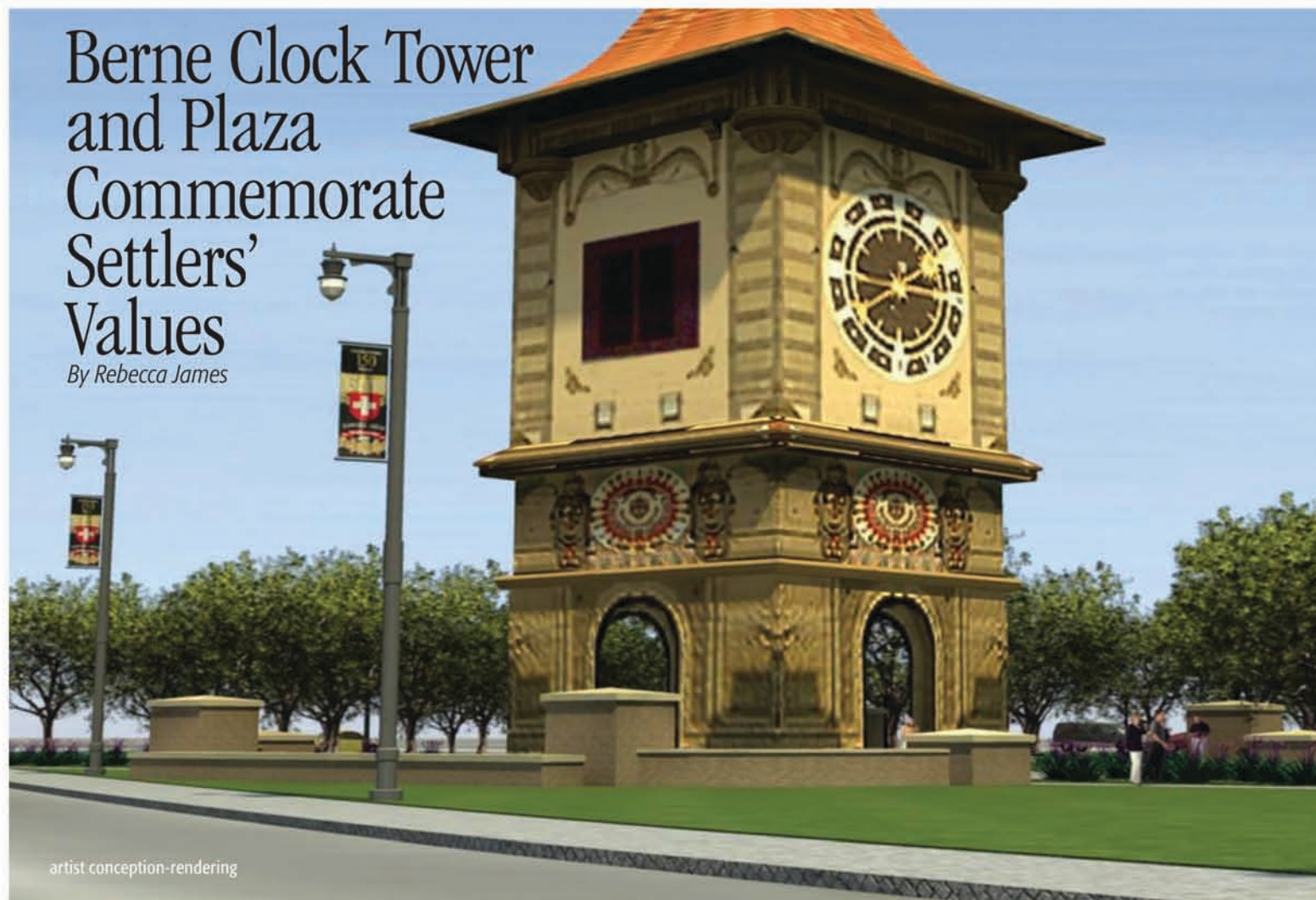


# Berne Clock Tower and Plaza Commemorate Settlers' Values

By Rebecca James



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Although Bern, Switzerland is a world apart from the small town of Berne, Indiana most of us are familiar with, they're linked by a common cultural bond that stretches back more than 150 years. In 1852, Swiss immigrants settled in Berne, providing a legacy of family and culture for generation to come. Now, in honor of those first settlers, Berne residents are preparing to invest in a new landmark, honoring those who came before them.

Led by local business leaders—Jim Beitler, Jr., Roger Muselman and Dave Baumgartner—a steering committee has been assembled to bring the dream of building a clock tower and plaza in Berne, replicating the very same one that has stood in Bern, Switzerland since the 15th century. The decision to construct the plaza and clock tower stemmed from a need to face challenging times, and promote Berne's sedate lifestyle while attracting new business to the area.

In 2002, a group of local business leaders banded together to create the Berne Community Development Corporation (CDC), with a mission to ensure that both existing and future businesses

survive and thrive. Knowing that the community has such a strong Swiss heritage, they believed the key to future success was in the past—perhaps back in the “old country.”

Committee members asked, “Why not build a replica of the famous tower [in Bern]?”

## AND SO THE VISION WAS BORN.

The proposed location of the Muensterberg Plaza and Clock Tower is the corner of US27 and SR218, across from South Adams Elementary School.

In researching the construction of the clock tower, 13 committee members traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio to visit the Verdin Company—one of the oldest family-owned companies and the world's largest supplier of clocks, towers, electric carillons and bells. Representatives from the Verdin Company have consulted on the project, to determine a tower height that will best fit with the existing Berne architecture.

“This project is significant,” said James Verdin. “People from all around the country will know about it, and they'll come to Berne to see it because there aren't many of these things in the country.”

Keith Reinhard—chairman of DDB Worldwide in New York—is serving as honorary chairman of the Muensterberg Plaza and Clock Tower project. In his opinion, the efforts of those involved extend far beyond simply beautifying and enhancing the town.

“The vision to create the Muensterberg Clock Tower and Plaza was inspired by the recognition that what you learn in Berne is not only worth celebrating, it's worth preserving in such a way that uniquely reflects our Swiss heritage,” Reinhard said. “The values brought here by our founding fathers were an important part of my own growing up in Berne, and I'm proud to say those values still guide me.”

In addition to providing a visual reminder of the community's foundation and beliefs, the addition of the clock tower and plaza in Berne will also foster tourism and business opportunities. The original tower in Bern is regarded as a popular attraction, drawing tourists from throughout the world.

“If our city is to survive in today's global economy, we've got to find a way to re-brand Berne and create a new prosperity,” said Roger Muselman, chairman of Dynamic Resource Group and co-chairman of the project steering committee.

The hope that the historic addition to the Berne community will bolster both the area's awareness of heritage as well as business opportunities has been noticed at a higher level within the state. Secretary of Commerce Pat Miller believes the project will have a positive effect on both Northeast Indiana's economy and tourism, while promoting a strong, rich heritage.

“I appreciate its deeper meaning,” Miller said. “Thank you for reminding us of the courage, faith and determination of your ancestors. You do well to pass these values along to future generations in such a powerful and visionary way.”

“We consider the plaza to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to forever improve the quality of life in Berne,” said Dave Baumgartner, president of the Berne CDC and steering committee member. “It will create an enduring legacy and put our city on the map for generations to come.”



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