

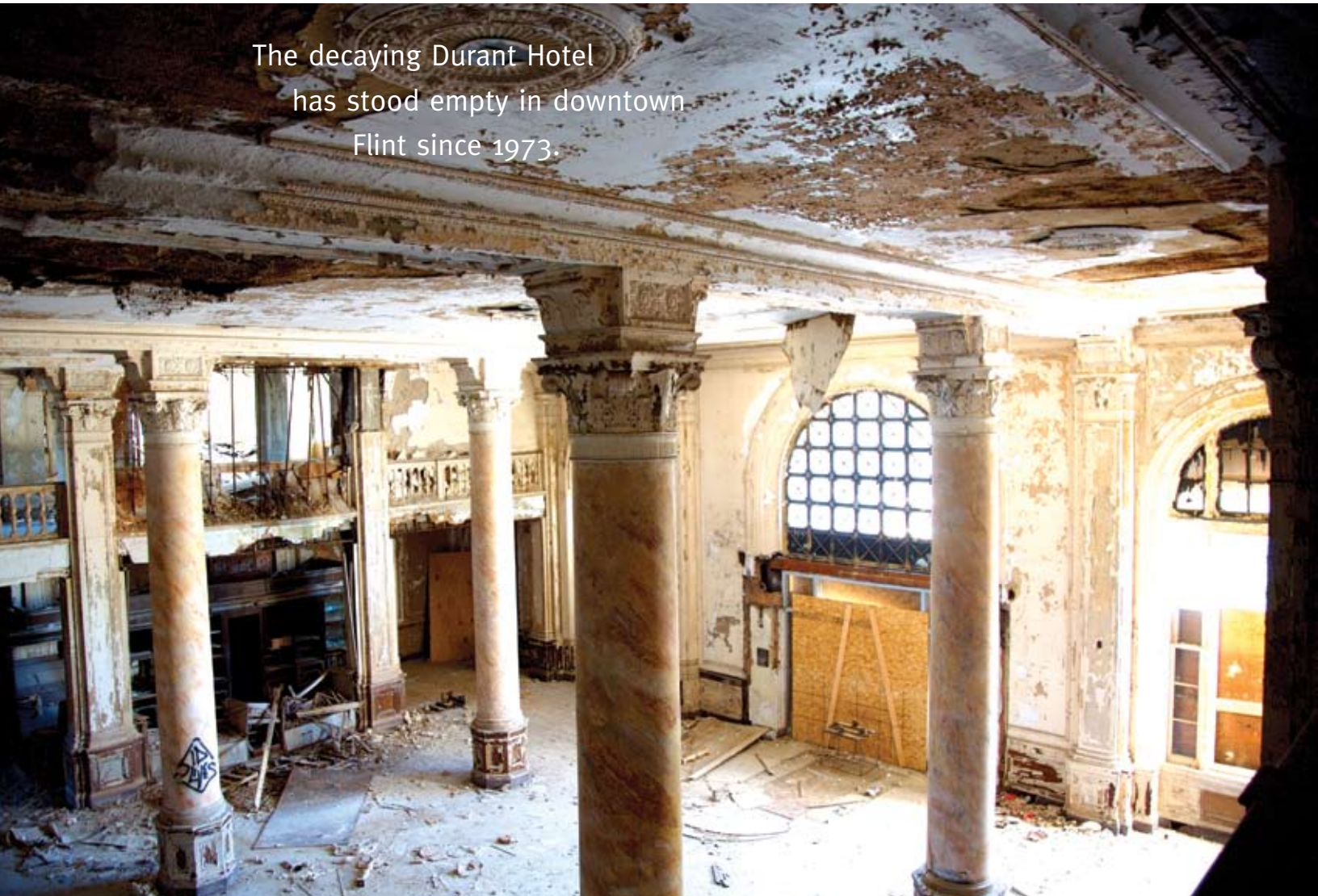
Fresh ideas can provide paths for change

The year 2008 was another good one for the Genesee County Land Bank. Working with the Mott Foundation and other philanthropic, federal, state, private and municipal organizations, the land bank began redeveloping the historic, but long-abandoned Durant Hotel in downtown Flint into 93 loft-style apartments, designed to appeal to students and faculty at nearby colleges and universities.

The \$23-million project, which includes a \$2-million grant from Mott, represents both a physical and psychological boost for the entire Flint area, which is struggling to create new pathways to reinvigorate its economy, improve the overall quality of living and “right-size” the city’s physical boundaries.

The soon-to-be-renovated hotel, symbolic of Flint’s decline for more than three decades since it closed in 1973, now is emblematic of the cooperation, planning and physical improvements that are beginning to reshape and strengthen the central city.

The decaying Durant Hotel
has stood empty in downtown
Flint since 1973.



“Now it serves a great connector for our community,” said Daniel Kildee, Genesee County treasurer and chairman of the land bank. The 90-year-old building sits at the center of four land-use plans for the downtown Flint area created with Mott support by Sasaki Associates Inc., of Watertown, Massachusetts. The Durant project is helping create a “university corridor” linking downtown with the city’s cultural center and three major educational institutions.

The Sasaki plans — produced from 2001 to 2003 — have helped guide decisionmaking for several major institutions that have stakes in creating a more livable, vital central city in the Foundation’s home community. They also have helped provoke conversations that buttress the connections that are beginning to occur between and among the institutions and their physical environments.

The Foundation’s interest in pursuing policies that would help its hometown transition to a post-industrial economy started more than 20 years ago, as automotive manufacturing jobs began leaving the area.

Pursuing policies that help people and communities work together to resolve complicated problems cuts to the heart of Mott’s grantmaking — in Flint and across the globe. From its earliest years, Mott has focused on policy change, initially by expanding the use of public school buildings in Flint through an extended school day. Before- and after-school programming, considered revolutionary in the 1930s, now is common in schools across the world.⁹

Grants that help individuals rethink their approach to a problem and develop a plan of action are just one strategy for crafting effective policy. Mott also makes grants to encourage best practices, test model programs and disseminate research. In Flint, where the Foundation has an 82-year commitment to place-based grantmaking, it has had the opportunity to encourage effective policy by making grants over long periods of time to a set of strong educational, cultural and nonprofit institutions.

The land bank is one of the most widely recognized of the Mott-supported policy reform efforts in its home community. Recipient of Harvard University’s Innovations in American Government Award in 2007, the land bank currently serves as a national model for reshaping policy and planning in distressed cities.

Mott’s support for land banking dates to 1997, when a grant was made to the Hudson Institute to develop a



▼ Chery Wagonlander is principal of Mott Middle/Early College High School.

broad framework around urban land-use policy, which ultimately led to the development of Michigan’s Public Act 123. The legislation enabled county governments to move tax-delinquent property through the forfeiture, foreclosure and sale process within a 25-month period. Since then, the Foundation has provided more than \$1 million to develop a land bank model for Michigan and other municipalities to replicate or adapt.¹⁰

Flint’s Mott Middle/Early College High School (MMEC), the first multidistrict, middle college high school in the country, is another Mott-funded project that has had local and national policy impact.

“At Mott, higher education begins in high school,” said Chery Wagonlander, longtime principal of the middle college high school, a Mott grantee since 1993. “Our goal is to eliminate the gaps between high school and college.”

MMEC, located on the campus of Flint’s Mott Community College, has been pioneering the early college model for 18 years, helping to launch 16 early college high schools across the country. The school will graduate its first “13th year” class — 40 students dually enrolled in both high school and

community college classes — in 2009. Each dual-enrolled student will graduate from high school with college credit — several with enough to earn a two-year associate’s degree.

MMEC has been selected as a model for replication by the national early college initiative and the Michigan Department of Education. Through its Center for Middle and Early College in Michigan, funded in 2008 with a multiyear, \$700,000 Mott grant, the school will serve as the hub for research and implementation related to middle and early college high schools, with a focus on Michigan school districts participating in a state initiative to open 12 early colleges by 2011.

Mott also provided \$199,250 in support through the Genesee Intermediate School District for the Genesee Early College on the University of Michigan-Flint campus, one of the first of the state’s new early colleges to be opened.

Across town, Kettering University is using Mott funding to build a successful future for itself and its home community.

Kettering, a Mott grantee since 1983 when its name was General Motors Institute, is using grant dollars — \$2 million in 2008 — to launch a multiyear series of strategic initiatives aimed at increasing the enrollment of engineering students who will have a hand in shaping the economic future of the Midwest, including distressed communities such as Flint.

Across the country, engineering schools are competing for a diminishing number of students interested in the sciences and working to diversify the pool of existing applicants. The Mott grant will enable Kettering to institute a wide range of recruiting strategies and provide tuition merit scholarships for qualified students.

Mott stepped up its support to the university in



Two Kettering University professors talk with students.

1982, after the school separated from General Motors Corporation. One of the top 20 undergraduate engineering schools in the country, Kettering has received more than \$23 million in capital, endowment and operating support from Mott.

As the only fully co-op engineering and management university in the U.S., Kettering combines practical experience in the workplace with academic study in mechanical, electrical, computer, industrial and manufacturing systems engineering; and in applied



“We want to recover the entrepreneurial spirit that flourished along the Flint River 100 years ago.”

STANLEY R. LIBERTY, KETTERING UNIVERSITY



▼ In some Flint neighborhoods, occupied housing is now surrounded by empty lots because of demolition of dilapidated buildings by the Genesee Land Bank.

mathematics, environmental chemistry, computer science, applied physics and management systems. The students' presence at their co-op placements provides Kettering with ongoing, consistent relationships with a diverse set of businesses in the automotive, plastics, bio-engineering, medical device, management, finance, chemical and metallurgy fields.

These relationships are especially important to Flint, which is not only seeking to transition from a manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy, but also striving to increase the number of locally owned businesses.

"We want to recover the entrepreneurial spirit that flourished along the Flint River 100 years ago," said Stanley R. Liberty, Kettering's president. The university has inaugurated a four-year initiative to train faculty to incorporate entrepreneurial skills across its curriculum.

Kettering also has created high-end laboratory, business incubation and business commercialization space within the C.S. Mott Engineering and Science Center Building — constructed in 2000 with \$7 million in Mott funding. In 2006, Mott provided \$541,966 in matching funds to launch Kettering's Fuel Cells and Advanced Technologies Commercialization Incuba-

tor to help emerging businesses seeking to commercialize high-tech products and services.

Anchoring the western end of Flint's new university corridor, Kettering also is using \$251,141 in Mott funding to create a campus that is more vibrant and attractive to students. Working with the land bank, the university has acquired a number of blighted properties that have been cleared and green-spaced for future campus expansion. Ultimately, Kettering hopes to increase the density of student housing on campus with spillover down the university corridor to downtown.

Taken together, these Mott-funded initiatives illustrate the painstaking amount of time (often decades), commitment and dollars needed to help a community break from the familiar and begin to effect the policy changes that will help restructure the future.

Developing and implementing good policy is a hallmark of successful communities, but it is complicated work and holds no guarantee of success. In Flint, current conditions have created no choice but change — presenting the Foundation with an ongoing and important opportunity to determine how strategic grantmaking can help move a community forward. ▼



▼ Dancers attending the Joffrey Ballet's Midwest Summer Intensive workshop use the East Kearsley Street "connector" to walk from UM-Flint to the Flint Cultural Center.

Paving a new path for town and gown

Although it's just 1,300 feet long, the new East Kearsley Street "connector" is having a major impact on pedestrian and vehicular traffic in downtown Flint. By linking the University of Michigan-Flint campus and the central business district with the Flint Cultural Center and Mott Community College, the reopened street creates an easy route that eliminates a physical barrier between town and gown.

"It's a very simple idea — its power comes from its symbolism — acknowledging the need to open up the university to the larger community," said Jack Kay, who was interim chancellor of UM-Flint in 2008, when the work on the connector was begun and completed with a grant of \$1,891,588 from the Mott Foundation. (Kay now is provost and executive vice president of Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti.)

For many years, Flint's downtown — like many in the U.S. — was marginalized by the growth of suburban commerce; inferior land-use planning; and poor decisions regarding zoning, parking and traffic flow. Recognizing that the central city could have the assets to make it attractive to students and residents, the Foundation made a grant to UM-Flint to undertake a campus master plan to tie the downtown and university to the cultural center to the east and Kettering University to the west. It was one of four such plans by Sasaki Associates Inc. that Mott funded between 2001 and 2003 at a total cost of \$1,074,300.

Prior to the reopening of the Kearsley Street connector, the cultural center — a 30-acre, park-like complex of seven arts and cultural institutions — existed as a separate sphere from the campus and downtown. Building off the notion of creating a "university corridor" running from Kettering through downtown and UM-Flint to the cultural center and Mott Community College, the four master plans helped cement those connections in 2008, when W. Third Avenue (another east-west connector) was rechristened University Avenue.

The new physical link went hand-in-hand with programmatic collaborations that began in 2001 among the institutions, including articulation agree-

ments, friendly competitions and College Town, a program that has attracted more than 2,600 student memberships to the Flint Institute of Arts.

"The various physical connections underscore and validate the spirit of collaboration that was happening between the campuses, the city and the cultural center," said Stanley R. Liberty, Kettering president.

One of the most psychologically significant boosts to downtown Flint's regeneration was the 2008 dedication of UM-Flint's long-anticipated First Street Residence Hall. Graced with a permanent student presence, the campus and downtown are benefiting from this new vitality.

"It's only 300-plus beds, but the magnitude of change it has brought is stupendous," Kay said.

Mott also supported the renovation of the Berridge and Durant hotels — formerly blighted properties along the northern edge of downtown. Targeting young professionals and the more than 30,000 college students attending Flint's various colleges and universities, the refurbished properties will provide more than 120 loft-style apartments as well as street-level commercial space.

In 2008, the Foundation also provided support for the purchase and renovation of another closed downtown hotel, the former Character Inn, now the Riverfront Residence Hall, which will house up to 550 students when completed.

The Foundation has supported the construction or renovation of several commercial and residential buildings along Flint's historic, brick main street. In 2008, the new Wade Trim Building opened and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint moved into two rehabilitated buildings, bringing new life, commerce and jobs to a block of shuttered buildings.

"These physical connections — they're symbolic of things this community has been hoping for and working on for a long time," said Cindy Ornstein, CEO of the Flint Cultural Center Corporation. "These relationships are enabling us to move forward together." ▀