



Detroit, with a Dash of Perspective

Posted by [KAREN DYBIS](#) Friday, April 9, 2010 at 10:33 am

I am what you might call a local. I've been a Michigan resident my whole life. I've lived in Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties. I worked in downtown Detroit for years.

And this city still mystifies me. How did it fall to this decaying state? Who is living here, working here and staying here – and why? What does the future hold?

To that end, I'm doing a deep dive into Detroit. Next week, I'll accompany [Inside Detroit](#) and the [Detroit Orientation Institute](#) on a 12-hour crash course on the city. Other participants will include local reporters, publishers, Wayne State University students, members of the corporate, non-profit and foundation world and anyone else with an abiding interest (and time to invest) in Detroit.

In the next few months, I'll be going on other guided tours, such as the one offered by [Culinary Escapes](#), to see the more glamorous sides of the city (and find out where Oprah's favorite grilled cheese is – more on that later). I'm also going to do some informal individual tours, walking the city's neighborhoods with residents of all walks of life to see what they have to say. Suggestions welcome.

My goal is to find and share some frank, honest reviews of the city. To be fair, my jaunts into Detroit for the blog have focused on specific areas (Midtown, downtown, etc.) Six months of this project are done and (hopefully) there are six more to go. So let's make the most of them.

The first stop is *Understand Detroit: Past, Present and Future*, a concentrated one-day experience that provides participants with "12 Hours in the D". The day will be a mix of bus tours, walking tours and group discussions with experts on demographics, news gathering and other aspect of living in Detroit.

"This is a candid look at Detroit," said Ann Cuddohy Slawnik, Director of Detroit Orientation Institute and a native. "We cannot ignore the problems, the issues. We try to give a sense of why it happened and we also look at the opportunities."

Typically, Slawnik said this tour runs in April and October. It is spread over three days, giving those involved a very detailed look into the city and its processes. When the tour guides talk about Detroit Schools, you then make actual visit to one of the schools. If they talk about development, you hear about it standing in the middle of a recently renovated building.

This 12-hour tour is a new program, driven in part by the economy (the three-day tours are pricey but worth it). There also was an opportunity to partner with Inside Detroit, Slawnik said, and to give tour participants a balanced view. (Inside Detroit's programs aim to showcase the city's assets through walking tours, Segway tours and more experienced-based events, like an Opening Day pub crawls.)

Still, the tour will be comprehensive – and largely off the record to give participants full freedom to ask what they want, Slawnik said. (The blog posts that follow will respect this – we'll only post information that we first clear with participants in follow-up discussions.)

And any tour of Detroit has to include lots of talking, questioning, pestering and posing. That's because we all have our own theories on the place. We all have our paths that we've traveled. We all have ideas on what makes Detroit unique, horrible and special all at the same time.

Everyone asks, "Why did this happen?" Slawnik says the answer is complicated, just like Detroit. And, no, it's not JUST because of Coleman Young or the riots or the car companies.

Detroit is harder to comprehend because "we've had more difficulty than other cities in Northern rust belt; our degree of severity is larger," Slawnik said. "We're the poster child for all urban problems right now."

Trying to shine a positive light on Detroit is one reason why Detroiter Ann Wilson started Culinary Escapes. She wanted to highlight some of the good things happening in the city and the suburbs – especially around the subject of food. With a huge diversity of populations here, Metro Detroit is home to some of the finest restaurants around – and even Oprah's favorite grilled cheese sandwich.

That famous cheesy goodness is from Café Muse in Royal Oak. It is a three-cheese combination (harvarti, fontina and fresh mozzarella) with honey, grilled tomato and basil. Drooling now....

Wilson's first dates start this weekend with the Royal Oak tour beginning Saturday; Birmingham starting April 24, and the Downtown Detroit tour beginning in July. All the tours continue through October.

"Detroit loves to experiment and learn about different foods. It's not just about the food your mother made, but what someone else's mom made," Wilson said.

"Many people are not aware of the amazing foods indigenous to our state," Wilson added. "From our cider mills to our Coney dogs, the food of Michigan is steeped in rich traditions and stays with you long after the last bite."

(P.S. A few weeks ago, Culinary Escapes participated in taping a pilot for a new Food Network Show, "Food Feud," hosted by Iron Chef, Michael Symon (who owns the downtown fine-dining establishment Roast). Culinary Escapes solicited the crowd that came out to do the judging of Detroit's best Coney dog. No official word on when the show will air if it gets picked up. But here is a picture of Ann with Symon.)

