

## IT'S NOT A BIRD HOUSE

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### INTRODUCTION

The Purple Martin. The name of this organization may make it sound like a bird house, but it's not, it's more like a nest. A nest of ideas, dreams, and a vision of hope to make a difference. The Purple Martin may be home to unique bird houses that attract a most sought after colony of endangered swallows called purple martins as they descend on this pristine stretch of Lake Huron shoreline each year, the Purple Martin is much more. It began with the desire to offer foster children and their siblings an opportunity to escape the hustle and bustle of the difficulties so many faced in their daily problems. With a vision of providing an environment of safety and warmth for at-risk children, this 501(c)(3) organization was founded by philanthropic entrepreneur Cindy Vezinau and had become a Rogers City, Michigan, fixture and beacon of hope.

From a very humble start on a shoestring budget, the Purple Martin had successfully grown into fulfilling its mission, but its future was still to be determined. How could the outreach of the Purple Martin continue to grow and be communicated and how could its stakeholders continue to be engaged?

### A BUCOLIC SETTING WITH A VIBE

Rogers City, Michigan, with a population of 2819, was a picturesque lake front town, reminiscent of a Norman Rockwell painting. Located along the shoreline of Lake Huron approximately 50 miles south of the famous Mackinac Bridge, Rogers City, was endowed with scenic beauty and natural resources that attracted a beehive of summer visitors and activities. Not far from Rogers City, visitors could find the 40 Mile Point Lighthouse; Hoelt State Park, a heavily wooded park with a mile of the sandy Lake Huron shoreline; Harbor Springs and Petoskey is just an hour away and the Presque Isle and Great Lake Sailors Museum. Local citizens took pride in their city and all the surrounding area had to offer.

The city had been successful in hosting a large nautical summer festival each year to showcase all the city and the area had to offer visitors. In addition, Rogers City had been thrust on to the stage of international publicity when a group of college students descended in the middle of main street in 2012 and became a flash mob by performing "The Hustle." This event was recorded and soon through the power of social media had gained over 30,000 viewers, and the attention of every form of mass media. Even with this new notoriety, the citizens of Rogers City still took pride in the peace and solitude their little town offered visitors. Some of the most prized visitors, both birds and people, were those who came to stay in the Purple Martin Inn.

Since Rogers City gained its instant notoriety with that 2012 flash mob, Cindy has kept the spirit of the Purple Martin alive by replicating the flash mob and involving citizens in a second event, titled, "Purple Martin Mania." She secured authorization from city council members to shut down the four corners of the main street once again for a public dance, and more than 200 citizens participated.

This event was actually duplicated for three consecutive years until the state removed the street light and city ordinances prevented the shutdown on the four corners. So Cindy moved the event down the street to the Beach Pavilion (which offers shelter and public bathrooms). This continued to be the site where Purple Martin Mania activities and fundraisers took place.

Other Purple Martin Mania events that evolved over time included sidewalk chalk, a dance, pet parade, and a county-wide art contest for school children. The winner of the contest picture was used for the official poster for the Purple Martin Mania event. The first, second, and third place winners receive prizes and their pictures were displayed in