

Fowler, was the Michiganian of the Year, and also has the nonprofit “Big Family” in Detroit. Cindy added, “I didn’t go out looking for this . . . it came to me.” And, Jeannie proved to be the perfect mentor as she taught Cindy everything she needed to know related to all of the operational aspects of running a non-profit organization. This was the beginning of the Purple Martin for kids, a non-profit endeavor.

Now the vision was clear. First, to build the Inn showcasing the area and to help the community. Second, as an additional part of that vision, to help at-risk children in foster housing to have hope, safety and lasting experiences. However, faced with the restrictions of laws that specifically limit the general public from having exposure to foster children, the building had evolved into a funding source to send children to a summer camp.

Initially the Purple Martin Inn was created as a safe haven to connect foster children with their parents/siblings. However, as it evolved, she decided to create a camp that offered innovative activities in the *area* that fostered community partnerships. This also reinforced an important fact and feeling she desired to communicate to these foster children who came to Rogers City. She wanted demonstrate to them that the citizens of Rogers City truly cared for them and were advocating for them.

The Purple Martin Inn has grown exponentially mostly due to the fact that it has attracted a loyal following because it was built “green.” Whenever possible, she and the purple people, as she called them, people who believed in her vision, used recycled, reclaimed, and repurposed materials in every phase of the renovation process. In addition to her focus on sustainability, she also focused on nature. A second floor was added with picture windows overlooking the lake and an unobstructed view of the Purple Martins. It now attracts clientele seeking a unique experience in a clean, pristine location. She believed the Purple Martin Inn would bring more jobs and people to the area, which would result in additional economic development. Instead of hearing citizens say “the town is dying,” she believed she would hear them say, “this town is amazing” and have pride in where they live.

## FUNDRAISING ON A SHOESTRING

The Purple Martin was like many small non-profits, an idea that was founded on a shoestring with a big mission. Realizing the constraints of a limited budget, Cindy turned to her network of friends to raise awareness and supporting funds for her project. In her quest for recognition and funds, she had the premonition of tapping the developing talents of college students and their desire to create social change. These students soon caught her enthusiasm, initially creating that first flash mob sensation and then over the years other students have followed and developed a variety of successful friend raising, fundraising, and recognition programs.

It is amazing how students and other people have come up with so many creative alternatives to raise funds—everything from raffle tickets, to basket sales, to restaurant events. Because of what they have accomplished, people are now coming to her saying, “we have heard about what you are doing—we want to help you as well.” Cindy has received money regularly now because the word is out and people want to support her mission. However, with increased funding, comes an opportunity to serve more children, which is followed by an additional increase in the need for more funding to serve the needs of more children.

The Purple Martin Inn, now operated as an air b&b, allowed marketing to international and domestic visitors alike was not originally about a place you would find in a brochure, it was the type of destination you most likely found out about from others. It was a destination that required people to put their cell phone down and unwind. When they entered the doors, they were removed from the hurriedness of life, and given an opportunity to “let it go.” Although the word was now out about the Purple Martin Inn, it was still a place focused on nature and relaxation. Now, when Cindy has the time to step back and look at her success, she often wonders how can these ventures and the growth of the community be sustained?