

UpFront

By Naseem Stecker

SBM Dedicates 33rd Michigan Legal Milestone on "Poletown and Eminent Domain"

Legal and historical perspectives from a stellar panel of mostly eminent domain lawyers made for a fascinating retelling of the "Poletown" story on December 2, 2008. The occasion was the dedication of the State Bar of Michigan 33rd Legal Milestone at a banquet facility in Hamtramck. The experiences of a working-class Polish neighborhood that was demolished 28 years ago to make way for a General Motors plant and the legal repercussions that followed were re-told by (from left to right) historian Gregory Kowalski, Hon. Paul Paruk, Norman Ankers, David Baker Lewis, Jerome Pesick, SBM President Ed Pappas, and Alan Ackerman. At the



Photo by Jim Korshner

heart of the dedication was the landmark 1981 ruling by the Michigan Supreme Court (*Poletown Neighborhood Council v Detroit*), which set a new standard expanding the power of eminent domain and allowing the definition of public use to include economic development. In 2004, the Court reversed itself (*County of Wayne v Hathcock*). A bronze plaque highlighting the events that occurred will be permanently

installed at Zussman Park in Hamtramck in the spring. The State Bar Public Outreach Committee has been placing these markers around the state for the past 22 years as part of the Michigan Legal Milestones program, which highlights significant cases and personalities in our history. For more information about the milestones dedicated so far, visit <http://www.michbar.org/programs/milestones.cfm>. ■



Photo by Sarah Nussbaumer

SBM President Ed Pappas, Hon. Victoria Roberts (also involved in the original Poletown case), and Jeff Paulsen, chair of the Public Outreach Committee.

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Naseem Stecker, State Bar of Michigan
306 Townsend Street
Lansing, MI 48933-2012
e-mail: nstecker@mail.michbar.org
phone: (517) 367-6428