

Chikaming Township

History

In the late 1600's the Potawatomi Indians displaced the Miami Indians on the land which would become Chikaming Township. Pioneers discovered the richness of the natural resources and began to settle throughout the area. During the 1820's the Potawatomi became increasingly demoralized from the diseases and liquor received from these pioneers and in 1828 ceded the land to the U.S. government.

By 1852 Chikaming Township was still a vast wilderness with its few residents of British and German origin living in log cabins. Silas Sawyer was one of the first to open the forest in order to plant corn, wheat, and apple trees. The township was organized on March 6, 1856, and Sawyer was elected its first supervisor. Eventually, Sawyer decided to move to Dallas and placed his property for sale at its lowest cash value. He then advertised a raffle with the winner a recipient of his mansion and his 100-acre homestead.

After the completion of the Chicago and Michigan Lake Shore Railroad in 1870, several villages were founded along the tracks which still hold the principal concentrations of population. These were: Troy (now Sawyer), Greenbush (now Harbert), Wilkinson (now Lakeside) and Townline (now Union Pier). After 1890 the tourist industry dominated the area replacing the lumber industry, once the backbone of the Chikaming area. The Township and its villages became especially popular with many Chicagoans, who came by boat or train to escape into the solitude of the woods or to experience the joys of Lake Michigan and its sandy beaches.

Observations

Chikaming Township is beautifully located in scenic southwestern Michigan on the shore of Lake Michigan. It provides both medium and upper-class housing units, lake front cottages and single family homes. The latter are owned mostly by Chicagoans who can afford a second home on the lake. The Township has zoned very few lots for light industrial use and has become primarily a residential community. The largest industry in the Township is the second-home and tourist business. Currently, the Township dwellers are looking for innovative means to control the future visible use of Chikaming's land. Chikaming consists of four small communities: Sawyer, Harbert, Lakeside and Union Pier. Since each has individual characteristics, this narrative profile could never do justice to Chikaming without a brief character sketch of each of the communities.

All four communities prefer to maintain their status quo of quiet, rural, residential neighborhoods. They welcome some commercial development to sustain the communities through the winter months. However, the communities are very selective as to which businesses are allowed. Due to a rapid increase in demand for lakeshore housing units by Chicagoans, the property prices in the four communities have correspondingly increased. The result has been that many of the original township dwellers sold their properties because they could no longer afford the property taxes. As the census figures show, the number of permanent residents has declined. This trend may continue but property tax reform in Michigan may slow the process.

Sawyer: Silas Sawyer was one of the first residents of Chikaming Township. Sawyer had been a judge in Ohio before moving to Michigan where he purchased 100 acres of land. He cleared 40 acres, planting all of it with fruit trees. In 1855 he built a steam sawmill about a mile from Lake Michigan.

Originally called Troy, the village was renamed Sawyer in 1854 by officials of the Chicago and Western Railroad, after building a station there.

Of the four communities, Sawyer has more of a downtown village center than the others. It has a pharmacy, laundromat, garden center, and a lumber and hardware store. The density of housing units is greater than that of neighboring Harbert, yet it is a beautifully located, quiet community in a rural setting. As with the other communities, its lake front housing units are in high demand. Although Harbert and Lakeside are free of industry, Sawyer has welcomed some industries into the community.

Harbert: In the middle 1800's, the little settlement known as Harbert, was named after a Chicago capitalist by railroad officials. In 1912 the Erickson family of Chicago was so impressed with the area that they purchased land to start a restaurant and bakery. Their successor still serves delectable Swedish baked goods to customers who drive miles for morning rolls and fresh Swedish Limpa Bread.

The Harbert area is more wooded than Sawyer with the housing units more spread out and secluded. As with any of the four communities, the lake front cottages are expensive and in high demand. Medium priced housing units are located further from the shore. Harbert does not have a downtown area and appears less structured than Sawyer.

Lakeside: Lakeside, platted by the Wilkinson family, was originally named Wilkinson City. The Wilkinson family built the long pier which gave birth to strong industry in Union Pier. The name changed in 1874 when a post office was granted. It was supposedly renamed because James Abdon Wilkinson hired a proxy soldier to fight in his place during the Civil War.

Lakeside is well known for its large, old compounds built by wealthy Chicagoans. Interestingly enough, some of these large homes are still owned by the same families who built them. The original trading post still stands and now houses a local museum. The density of housing units is low, adding to the rural, upper-class character of the community. Many of the homes are owned by Chicagoans and are occupied mainly on the weekends and during the hot summer months. Lakeside encourages the tourist industry with art galleries, antique shops, Bed & Breakfasts and summer rental properties.

Union Pier: The towering forests of Union Pier were so dense that squirrels could run through the area without ever touching the ground. In 1861 John Gowdy migrated from New York and found hard and softwood trees that rose 60 feet to the lowest limbs, and tree trunks five and more feet in diameter. The forests were an incredibly valuable resource for those who recognized that the burgeoning city of Chicago had an insatiable need for timber. Soon Gowdy was joined by other New Yorkers who understood the economic potential of the area and another community was born in Chikaming Township.

Gowdy and his associates displayed unusual ingenuity, perseverance, and business acumen. Felling the timber and processing it in the mills some distance from the lakefront was not significantly difficult. What was needed, however, was a lake pier so that ships could carry cordwood and timber to Chicago. They built their "Union Pier," a remarkable feat for the early 1860's. The pier stretched 600 feet into the surging waters of Lake Michigan. It was equipped with tracks so that mules and horses could pull timber from saw mills in the forests to waiting ships. As many as a hundred people were employed in Union Pier's early endeavors.

When Chicago burned in 1871, Union Pier's early settlers were already building a 130-ton schooner on the beach near their pier. Soon timber and bricks from Union Pier were rebuilding Chicago.

It was not long, however, before the once towering forests were depleted. Agriculture, already an important economic contributor in the region, became the major industry along with commercial fishing and tourism.

Union Pier is the largest and most densely populated of the four communities. Half the property belongs to Chikaming Township, half to New Buffalo Township. The housing units are smaller than those of Lakeside -- many of the old cottages have been restored by second-home owners and the second-home industry is vital to the health of the community. This phenomenon has created a new level of employment within the service industry. The number of restaurants and cafes has steadily increased to serve the summer population. Like the other communities, Union Pier remains largely a quiet, bedroom community.

Government

Municipal Hall

Chikaming Township Hall
P.O. Box 40
13535 Red Arrow Highway
Harbert, MI 49115
Phone: (269) 469-1676
Fax: (269) 469-4416

Council Meetings

Second Thursday of Each Month
Start: 7:00 p.m.

County Commissioner

Andrew Vavra
(District 10)
7120 W. Elm Valley Road
Three Oaks MI 49128
Phone: (269) 756-7162
vavrafamily@qtm.net

State Governor

Rick Snyder (R)
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 373-3400
Fax: (517) 335-6863
Rick.Snyder@michigan.gov

State Senator

John Proos (R), District 21
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536
Phone: (517) 373-6960
Fax: (517) 373-0897
SenJProos@senate.michigan.gov

State Representative

Sharon Tyler (R), District 78
Michigan House of Representatives
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514
Phone: (517) 373-1796
Fax: (517) 373-5918
sharontyler@house.mi.gov

U.S. Representative

Fred Upton, 6th Congressional District
2183 Rayburn H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: (202) 225-3761
Fax: (202) 225-4986
tellupton@mail.house.gov

U.S. Senators

Debbie Stabenow (D)
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-4822
stabenow.senate.gov/email.htm

Carl Levin (D)
269 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-6221
levin.senate.gov/contact/index.cfm
Access via website Contact Center

Public Services

Police

Chief of Police: James Stormont
Phone: (269) 469-3245
Fax: (269) 469-3568
Sworn Officers: 7
Civilian Employees: 1
Number of Cars: 3

Fire

Fire Chief: Michael Davidson
Phone / Fax: (269) 469-6362
Number of Stations: 1
Professional Firemen: 0
Paid Volunteers: 22
Insurance Rate Classes: 7 and 9

First Responder

Director: Fire Chief Mike Davidson
Phone / Fax: (269) 469-6362
Number of Vehicles: 1
Service Level: MFR (Medical First Responder)
Full Time Employees: 2 (MFR)
Part Time Employees: 7 (MFR)

Trash Collection

Contact: Chikaming Township Hall
Phone: (269) 469-1676
Type: Independent – Individual Contracts

Recycling

Berrien County Community Development
Jill Adams, Environmental Specialist
(269) 983-7111 Ext. 8234
Program information available online at
www.berriencounty.org/recycle.

Water

Contact: Water Department
Phone: (269) 469-1676 and (269) 426-3200
Source: Municipal Wells / Lake Charter Township
Capacity: 1,500,000 GPD

Sewer

Contact: Galien River Sanitary Department
Phone: (269) 469-3434
System Type: Activated Sludge
Capacity: 2,000,000 GPD

Telephone

Frontier Communications
Residential and single line
Business: 1-877-875-8899

Gas

Contact: Semco Energy Company
Phone: (800) 624-2019

Electric

American Electric Power Company
(800) 311-6424
2425 Meadowbrook Road; Benton Harbor, MI

Demographics

All Demographic Information is based
upon the 2009 Census Estimate

Population

1980 Census	4,302	
1990 Census	3,717	13.6 % decrease
2000 Census	3,678	1.10 % decrease
2009 Census Estimate	3,674	0.11 % decrease

Personal Income

Median Family	\$47,252
Average per Capita	\$28,576
Median Household	\$42,405

Labor Force

Total Work Force	1,790
Unemployment Rate	9.3 %

Principal Economic Base Employers

Arlington Metals Corp	70 Employees
Corvette Central	80 Employees
Quali-Tone Corp	20 Employees
River Valley School District	102 Employees
Travel Centers of America	120 Employees

Housing

Number of Dwellings	3,994
Owner Occupied	1,423
Renter Occupied	240
Median Rent	\$831
Median Home Value	\$211,800

Building Permits – 2010

	Number Issued	Dollar Amount
Residential	14	\$5,074,630.00
Commercial	9	\$206,800.00
Other	182	\$5,834,038.00
Total	205	\$11,115,468.00

Education

Chikaming Township is served
by the following school
Districts:

New Buffalo Area Schools
1112 East Clay Street
New Buffalo, MI 49117
Phone: (269) 469-6010
Enrollment: 654

River Valley School District
15480 Three Oaks Road
Three Oaks MI 49128
Phone: (269) 756-9541
Enrollment: 721



Taxes

In March 1994, Michigan voters approved a new tax structure (Proposal A). The following table provides a simplistic look at the taxes currently levied within this community. Property tax is based now upon taxable value, not state equalized value.

General Taxes

General County	4.7723
Law Enforcement/ Public Safety	0.3500
Special Voted 911	0.2500
Senior Citizens	0.3000
LMC College	1.7854
Township	0.7171
Special Voted	0.0000
Subtotal	8.1748

School Taxes (Berrien RESA)

	Buchanan	Galien	River Valley
State Education Tax	6.0000	6.0000	6.0000
Non-Homestead (Business)	18.0000	18.0000	18.0000
Extra Voted Building & Site	0.8000	0.0000	0.0000
Debt Retirement	4.2000	2.6500	0.0000
Berrien RESA	0.1745	0.1745	0.1745
Special Education	2.1954	2.1954	2.1954
Subtotals			
Homestead	13.3699	11.0199	8.3699
Non-Homestead (Business)	31.3699	29.0199	26.3699

Economic Development

Berrien County Community Development Department
 701 Main Street
 St. Joseph, Michigan 49085
 Contact: Daniel Fette, Director
 Phone: (269) 983-7111, Ext. 8617

Bridgman Lake Township Economic Growth Authority
 P.O. Box 366
 Bridgman, MI 49106
 Contact: Dan Buckenmeyer
 Phone: (773) 255-7286

Chamber of Commerce

Harbor Country Chamber of Commerce
 530 S. Whittaker Street, Suite F
 New Buffalo, MI 49117
 Phone: (269) 469-5409
www.harborcountry.org

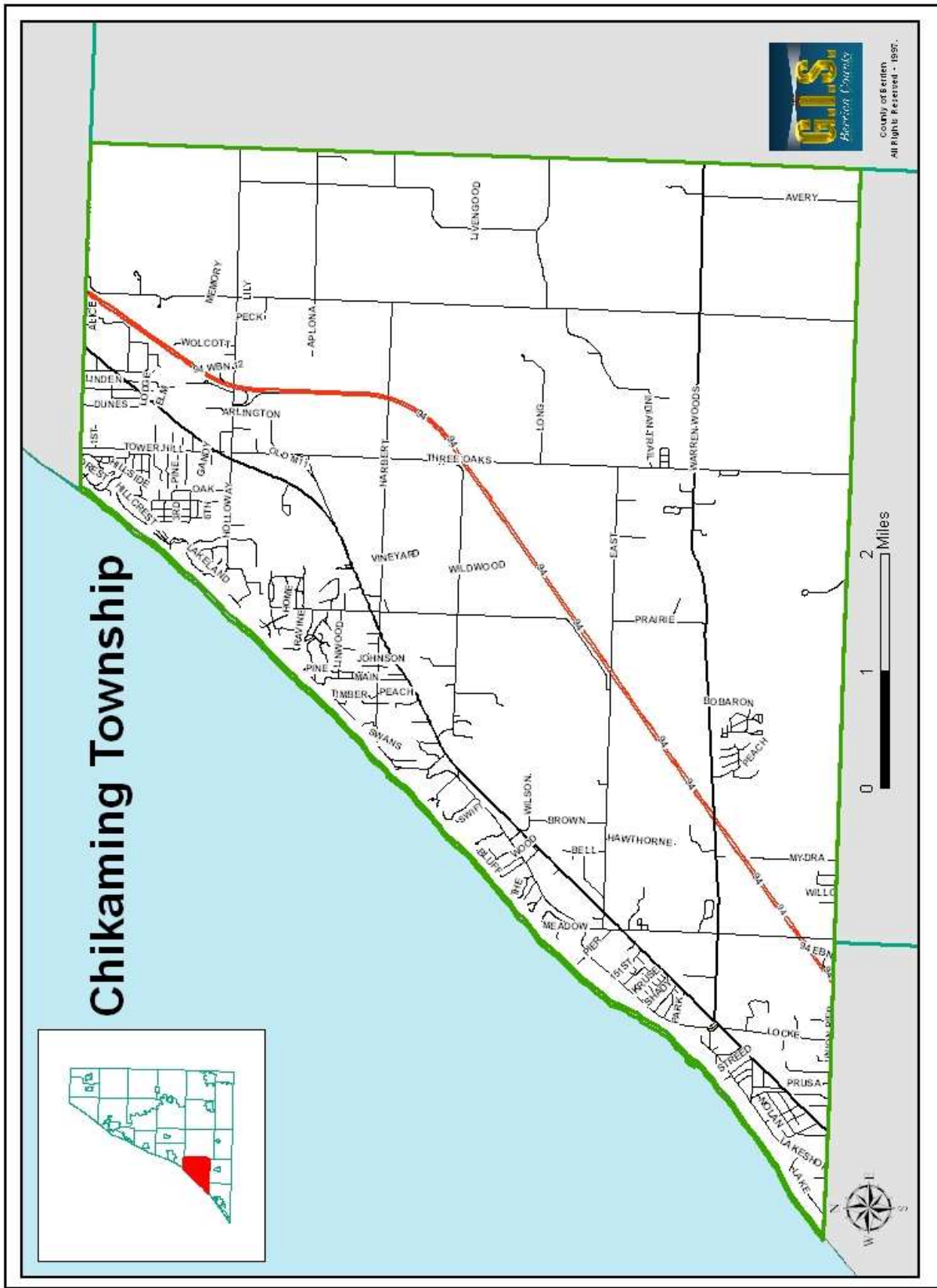


Union Pier Public Beach

Climate

	January	July
Average Maximum Temperature	32F / 0C	82F / 28C
Average Minimum Temperature	18F / -8C	61F / 16C
Days over 90F or 32C	11	
Days below 0F or 18C	4	
Days of Growing Season	162	
Average Annual Rainfall	37" / 94cm	
Average Annual Snowfall	70" / 178cm	





This Community Snapshot has been prepared by the Berrien County Community Development Department. For more detailed information on services available in Berrien County, please visit our website at www.berriencounty.org/CommunityDevelopment.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information. However, as data is constantly changing, Berrien County will be held harmless for any omissions or errors contained herein.