

Traffic in Lakeville drops 80 percent with new U.S. 31

By *Mark Peterson* |

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It was a life-altering event for the tiny Town of Lakeville. In August of 2014, a realigned U.S. 31 between South Bend and Plymouth opened to traffic.

“We were here when the road went out and it was like a ghost town,” said Dan Deniger, Lakeville Park Board president. “It was shocking because we’ve always had 27,000 cars and trucks going by every day.”

Lakeville has now been out of the U.S. 31 loop for some 21 months.

A traffic count taken in 2013 showed that 26,973 vehicles passed through Lakeville on a daily basis when it was still a small town with a big highway passing through. In a followup count taken after the bypass around Lakeville opened, that number dropped by 80 percent to 5,382 vehicles.

Now, hundreds of thousands of dollars are being poured into new sidewalks in the Lakeville business district, an area that has long had a reputation for being so pedestrian unfriendly that it was nearly impossible at times to walk across the street.

“It got a lot quieter for sure,” said Mary Parmalee, owner of A Mary Heart.

Quiet enough to invest in trees, park benches and bicycle racks. The Streetscape Project even includes a bicycle repair station. A municipality long linked to a major thoroughfare for motorized vehicles is developing ties to a designated artery for two-wheelers.

“We’re part of a trail that goes all throughout Indiana. We’re on one of the major trails, so as people ride bikes, they’ll be able to stop here, fix their bikes, get air, hopefully we’ll have more restaurants coming as the town grows,” said Deniger.

Some business owners here do have high hopes for what could be looming on the horizon. “It’s a big improvement, the sidewalks and the benches. Prettier little town,” said Mary Parmalee. “I think it’s going to be artsy. Kind of modeled after a Nashville or St. Joe where there’s a lot of little shops. People will stay in town because there’s things to do.”

The town even has plans to capitalize on Lakeville’s new-found quiet nature with a marshland nature park on the west side.

“The streetscape is really only the beginning of the revitalization effort in Lakeville,” said Ken Jones, President with JPR (Jones Petrie Rafinski). “Lakeville is looking to attract new business, new residents, trying to make sure that this becomes a destination for people.”

The total being spent on the Lakeville Streetscape Project is about \$800,000. The town is responsible for 20 percent of the price tag, with the state and federal governments picking up the rest.