

## Road Construction Gone ... Good?

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By [Lynn Geiger](#)



When you take a five-lane highway that sees 38,000 cars daily and reduce it to two -- or sometimes one -- it's an exercise in patience for motorists and business owners alike. But the intense 12-week road construction schedule on U.S. 31 is starting to wind down and visions of a new, smooth ride are dancing in everyone's heads.

"We try to take a positive spin on it ... 'Look how great it's going to be when we're all done,'" says Nick Trahair, general manager of AmericInn,

one of the East Bay Township businesses that has weathered the reconstruction of 1.5 miles between Three Mile and Holiday roads since early April.

If the weather holds, the prize could come earlier than anticipated – the week of June 15, bumped up from the original date of June 27, according to Team Elmer's Project Manager Nick Broad.

"It has been a large undertaking from a resource standpoint," says Broad. "And it has gone well so far. We have had overwhelmingly positive feedback."

It's likely that Jimi, Jesse, and Josh – the main traffic regulators – have had a lot to do with that.

"Their actions have helped reduce the stress level of many drivers, just by acknowledging what they were going through with a smile, a wave, a tip of the hat, or a 'good morning' – and even an occasional dance move," says Tonya Wildfong, Team Elmer's communications director.

The company has also used the electronic billboard at Three Mile to communicate with its captive audience.

"How do you inform and inspire 38,000 vehicles per day during traffic delays? That's where the billboard came in," she says. Not only did it provide daily updates – sometimes several a day – Team Elmer's also used the outlet to share an occasional insight or motivational thought.

"We hope it helped some motorists through a tough day," adds Wildfong.

Businesses along the construction corridor have also been getting creative with campaigns like the “buy one, get one” entrée deal available to anyone who pedals or walks to Red Mesa via the TART Trail (find the coupon in this week’s *Northern Express*.)

“We’ve been up the last week even with construction going on,” says Manager John Jason. “We expected doom and gloom and it hasn’t been that way.”

Other establishments, including as Bob Evans, Don’s Drive-In, Subway and Wendy’s have been offering discounts to the road construction crews, while the Cherry Tree Inn, ParkShore Resort and AmericInn have provided lodging discounts when workers have needed a place to stay.

Adds AmericInn’s Trahair, “We did a big PR push that construction was going on. We wanted our guests to know what to expect. We heard from people how nice it is with the workers helping people get in and out of the parking lot.”

When there has been an occasional problem, it has been fixed right away, Trahair adds.

“You can tell they care about what’s going on,” he says. “I’ve dealt with a lot of construction projects through the years and this is a rare case where you are on a first name basis with the people working the project.”

Pirate’s Cove General Manager Tim Olson says business has been down a bit due to locals avoiding the area, but says the recent cooler, wet weather has actually been more trouble.

“The weather is bothering us more than the construction lately,” Olson says. “This could have been a lot worse. Between MDOT (Michigan Department of Transportation) and Elmer’s, they have done an excellent job both planning and executing.”

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