



Restoration of Vermontville's historic Opera House received a boost last week with a gift of \$2,000 from the Vermontville Maple Syrup Corp. Presenting the check is Ricki Hill (left), VMSC treasurer. Accepting on behalf of the Friends of the Opera House are Village President Sue Villanueva and Chamber of Commerce President Don Mulvany.

## Opera House gets boost from Maple Syrup Corp.

By Susan Hinckley

The renovation of Vermontville's historic Opera House got an additional boost last week with the donation of \$2,000 by the Vermontville Maple Syrup Corp.

The check was presented Wednesday evening to the Friends of the Opera House by Ricki Hill, treasurer of the VMSC, sponsors of the annual Vermontville Syrup Festival.

"We are putting some of the money (earned at the festival) back into the community," noted Hill.

Accepting the check were Village President Sue Villanueva and Chamber of Commerce President Don Mulvany, both representatives of the Friends of the Opera House Committee.

Villanueva, who estimated that the renovation project now is about half completed, said the money received last

week will help with costs not covered in a state grant for renovation of the building.

She explained that these costs include such items as doors, lights, window grates and coverings and a small kitchen facility.

"We're asking for private donations (for these improvements)," said Villanueva. "Money from the grant is going just into the restoration."

The community received a \$25,000 Michigan Equity Grant from the state Department of Commerce for the project. Vermontville's required contribution was \$5,000 in-kind (labor by local volunteers) and \$5,000 cash, which was contributed by the Village of Vermontville and Vermontville Township, each governmental unit giving \$2,500 toward the project.

Insulation, electrical and most of the drywall work is now finished. Tom Branden-

burg of Brandenburg Drywall Co. of Vermontville has done most of the contracted work; local electrical Darryl Hale did the wiring.

Now that the grant-funded work is moving along so well, the Friends of the Opera House have launched a campaign to raise at least an additional \$5,000 for improvements not covered by the grant. Villanueva estimates that it will take at least that amount just for the doors and lights in the building, "but \$5,000 will get it ready so we can possibly open" by the proposed completion date at the end of October.

The Friends committee recently sent letters to area and local businesses and organizations asking for donations, and several have been received. The check from the Vermontville Maple Syrup Corp. is the largest so far.

Friends of the Opera House

are asking donors to give in honor of the Vermontville Women's Club as a way of recognizing the work the club does each year in organizing the popular arts and craft show, one of the highlights of the annual Syrup Festival.

"The Women's Club does a lot for us at the time of the festival," noted Hill.

The Opera House restoration will provide Vermontville with a much-needed community center and preserve a historic landmark. When completed, it is expected the building will be used for youth activities, programs, dances, meetings, receptions and art exhibits. Plans also call for display of memorabilia relating to the early days of the Opera House.

The state grant calls for creation of a Vermontville Fine Arts Council, which will be charged with bringing art and other exhibits to the Opera House on a regular basis.