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## Rochester

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# A tale of the times

## Historic downtown walking tours keep moving, despite Main Street Makeover

**By Mary Beth Almond**  
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ROCHESTER — A little construction isn't going to stop the Rochester-Avon Historical Society from offering the public a stroll through Rochester's history once again this year.

In fact, RAHS member Jim Hopkins said the Main Street Makeover will actually add some excitement to the walking tour season — which kicks off at 7 p.m. May 15.

"It's going to really enhance the tours because we're going to be able to talk about the history of the road and when things were put in, and we'll show pictures of what was there before," he said.

Each year RAHS President Rod Wilson leads historic downtown walking tours in tuxedo tails and a top hat, sharing the history of downtown Rochester with all who'll listen over a portable public address system strapped to his shoulder.

"I'm just trying to help with the historic education," he said. "It's a great way for people to learn about the history of their community and hear some of the stories."

The tours, which last approximately two hours each, will continue each month — with additional dates planned for 7 p.m. June 20, July 17 and Aug. 10, and 1 p.m. Sept. 15 and Oct. 7.

They begin at the Rochester Mills Beer Co., move on to the Michigan Central Railroad Bridge, over to the Rochester Elevator, and then head up to Main Street.

"As we walk along Main Street, we talk about the various buildings — the age of various buildings, who occupied them earlier, show pictures of what the buildings looked like in the 1900s and tell some stories of the people that would have been there back in that time," Wilson said.

From Main Street, the group heads to Walnut Street to discuss the history of some of the local churches and then continues to the World War II memorial next to the Rochester Police Department.

As Wilson discusses the historic sites and some of the stories of historic downtown Rochester, tour guides show off copies of old pictures of many of the sites and buildings.

The tours are well attended, according to Wilson, who said they average about 300 people a year.



Photo courtesy of the Tom Case archives

**Main Street in downtown Rochester was paved with bricks in 1916.**

“We’ve had one person to as many as over 100, but I would say we average about 20-30 people per walk,” he said. “People of all ages and all length of time in the community come. We get new people who want to learn about the community they just moved into and we get people who have been here 40-50 years who want to know more about the community.”

Many people choose to make the event a family affair, according to Wilson.

“We do have people that bring their whole family. It’s a very inexpensive evening of entertainment,” he said. “Some people even go to dinner downtown before or after the tour.”

Those interested in taking a tour are asked to just show up at the northeast corner of Water and Fourth streets, near Rochester Mills Beer Co., located at 400 Water St. in downtown Rochester. Registration is not required.

The cost is \$5, or \$3 for students and seniors 55 and older, and all of the proceeds go directly toward funding historical society events and presentations. Children under 12 can attend for free.

For more information about the walking tours, visit [www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org).

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