

THE OCEMAW COUNTY HERALD, THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2006 — PAGE 7C

## COMMUNITY



OCH — Patricia Ecker

The City of West Branch accepted a \$14,500 check from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, on behalf of the Growth Assessment Planners (GAP). Pictured above from left to right with the grant check: Beverly Bloom, district director for Senator Tony Stamas's office; Denis Stephens, supervisor for Ogemaw Township; Steve Steinhauser, supervisor for West Branch Township; Lydia Murray, account manager of business development for the MEDC; Bonnie W-Zoia, director of the Economic Development Corporation; and West Branch City Manager Bill Gascoigne.

## GAP gets market analysis grant

By Patricia Ecker  
Staff Writer

WEST BRANCH — A West Branch-based organization recently received some funding to do a study on a local business district.

The Growth Assessment Planners have received a grant from the State of Michigan to conduct a market analysis of the region in Ogemaw County known as the "Loop."

The three municipalities of GAP — the city of West Branch, Ogemaw Township and West Branch Township — were presented a Community Development Block Grant, which is a matching grant for \$14,500, to

conduct a market study that may develop ways to promote the downtown market.

The Land Information Access Association, a non-profit organization based in Traverse City, is doing all the planning for the project, which includes the area between I-75 exits 212 and 215.

"The market study is part of a larger project known as the Corridor Plan," said Harry Burkholder of LIAA. "This grant is to do a component of the (Corridor) Plan project that started last fall."

According to Burkholder, the plan has three main components: to preserve the Victorian landscape, to control pollution, and to

attract businesses and visitors to the downtown area.

"The city was the applicant," said Bill Gascoigne, city manager of the city of West Branch. "The city of West Branch (and) Ogemaw and West Branch Townships will have to match the \$14,500 between the three entities."

"The market study is a tool that we will be able to use to verify potential business opportunities in the area."

The market study will be conducted by Anderson Economic Group of East Lansing, according to Gascoigne.

AEG's market study objectives, dated Nov. 2, 2005, to

LIAA say that AEG's project goals include increasing and retaining jobs in the West Branch community, expanding the area's tourism sector, and to increase visits to businesses along the entire loop.

"We will strive for an optimal strategy that draws visitors off I-75 at two exits along the entire loop road and into the downtown," said Sharon M. Vokes for AEG in a letter to Burkholder.

"The I-75 Business Loop Market Study and Plan will address the entire 5.2-mile length of the business loop, with particular emphasis on the downtown and other areas not considered as part of the exits."