

Michigan's Most Amazing Attractions: Lavender Hill Farm

By: Crystal E. Green

A blissfully blue sky kisses the plush purple horizon. The warm wind gathers the green for a bit of gossip. The shimmering sun smiles at faces both young and those not so much. The big red born-again barn begs for all of the attention. And a colony of Italian honeybees prepares a sweet treat across the way. *This* is Lavender Hill Farm, Michigan's largest commercial lavender farm and Boyne City's most beloved beauty.

Each year, twenty-nine varieties of lavender welcome families and friends alike to experience a richly scented calm like no other. Lovers tie the knot, buddies babble over brunch, yogis find their yin and fans frolic over their favorite tunes as bands bring the beat, live and in-action. The mission, according to their website: "To create a beautiful sensory experience in rustic elegance to share with guests and the community." Consider it done! Lavender Hill Farm is magical and everybody knows it.

Claiming ownership to Lavender Hill Farm in 2015, owners Rita Robbins, Bill Mansfield and Erin Mansfield share one common passion: the people! "I like to take some distance to see our growth through other people's eyes," Bill said when asked about the farm's progress since taking over. "Every time I hear visitors talk about how much they love the farm is a proud moment," said wife Erin. "The most exciting and rewarding part became working with our employees and watching them bloom and grow!" Rita exclaimed when asked what excited her the most about starting her journey with the farm.

The vast thirty-three acre farm houses a boutique shopping experience, stocking an array of unique gift options mostly crafted by locals, businesses owned by women and ingredients certified naturally grown. And yes, thanks to the hard work of those busy Italian honeybees, lavender honey is canned and available for purchase onsite *and* on the web! Private farm tours can be booked in advance, more than a dozen kid-friendly activities have been planned for the season and a diverse selection of cool and classy events have been carefully curated for the rest of us.

Eager to enjoy Lavender Hill Farm but burdened by a small budget? Don't you worry about a thing! During their normal business hours, Lavender Hill Farm is absolutely FREE to visit! Immerse yourself in the lush lavender fields, browse the boutique, picnic with a pal or find a new friend on Lavender Fest Friday. The options are endless! To learn more about Lavender Hill Farm, to book an event or to shop their online store, please visit <https://lavenderhillfarm.com/>. The luxury awaits!

Michigan's Most Amazing Attractions: Vargas & Sons

By: Crystal E. Green

The perfect crunch. That stubborn chew. The unmistakable aroma. And that earthy, sweet corn goodness that invigorates the senses every step of the bite. That's a Vargas & Sons tortilla and those who *know*, know that there will never be any other mistaken for one. Vargas & Sons Tortilla Factory, affectionately known around town as *Vargas*, has become the unofficial mascot amongst Saginaw's communities of color, vying for more than fifty years to never be replaced or replicated. And *my*, what a success that has been!

Established in 1968 by Texas native, Alberto Vargas Sr. and his wife Pauline after their acquisition of the Vasquez Mexican Bakery, Senor Vargas set out on a faith-filled journey to secure a future for the couple's eleven children. Through perseverance and sheer determination, Vargas' honorable yet humble station wagon tortilla delivery beginnings across the mitten would ultimately put Vargas & Sons in the driver's seat of the local tortilla industry. Competitors' efforts to take Vargas down were unsuccessful because his will and dedication had other plans.

Today, customers cross state and country lines to experience that signature Vargas taste. Loyal locals hold no hesitation when tacos and enchiladas are on their minds. Homesick natives convince their relatives to mail them a few packs of "taco bread" when they're unable to find an adequate alternative. Some people place orders on the company's website or simply hit the road when their tastebuds make the call. Whatever it takes, Vargas fans, both near and far know exactly where to look when their cravings are on the line.

But Vargas & Sons offers more to the community than just warm packages of freshly made tortillas. Located at 125 South Park Avenue in Downtown Saginaw, the Vargas store carries other Mexican favorites like chorizo, chicharones and pan dulce, just to name a few. The family-owned business also makes and sells a variety of some of the best Mexican-style meats found in Mid-Michigan. One foot inside of the iconic red, white and green building will make you feel right at home and a pleasant and familiar encounter with the friendly face behind the counter will make you wish you didn't have any place to be.

Although both Pauline and Alberto are no longer with us, there is no doubt that their legacy will live on forever. Mention tacos to any 90s baby from the East Side and they will be sure to mention Vargas. Suggest hunger to any ethnic aunt from *any* side of town and you'll soon find yourself removing toothpicks from a paper towel-covered hot plate of pinned and deep fried Vargas tortillas, stuffed with ground beef *or turkey*, lettuce, tomatoes and shredded cheese, of course. And if you're brave enough to insist that another tortilla brand is better, well then, you'd better be ready to fight.