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SATURDAY IN JOLIET Party to pave way for Route 66 displays

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JOLIET - Get hip to this timely tip: Joliet Kicks on Route 66.

Starting at 11:30 a.m. Saturday, the city will celebrate its ties to the Main Street of America, the cross-country road running from Chicago to Los Angeles, and the new Route 66 exhibit at the Joliet Area Historical Museum.

It's an all-day block party with a classic car show, a sock hop, an ice cream parlor and outdoor showings of "Cars," a movie based on people and places along The Mother Road, and a showing of "Grease." All of the events will be held in the city's downtown. Joliet's prime location on Route 66 already attracts tourists, said Rebecca Lantka, spokeswoman for the Joliet Visitors Bureau. After all, the highway is the second most popular attraction in the state, falling in line right behind Chicago, according to the state tourism bureau. But there's always room for more.

So the new museum exhibit, the permanent roadside displays - including statues of Jake and Elwood from "The Blues Brothers" on top of the Rich and Creamy stand, 920 N. Broadway - and special signs will enhance the experience while drawing more tourists to Will County, she said.

The state gave Joliet more than \$83,000 to develop and market the attractions, and the city provided more than \$87,000. But the idea began with Sue Moore, a downtown businesswoman at Moore Glass, 559 N. Chicago St., Lantka said. Not long ago, Moore noticed a group of motorcyclists congregating in her parking lot as they consulted some maps. When she went outside to check them out, she realized it was an international group following Route 66.

"She told our marketing committee the story, and that got us thinking," Lantka said.

To develop the plans, the city hired John and Lenore Weiss of Wilmington, local Route 66 experts. The couple told city officials all kinds of trivia, including the fact that Joliet is an important part of the route - it's the only place where the Lincoln Highway, another legendary American road, crosses Route 66.

"Those highways helped shape the world as we know it today," John Weiss said.

And Route 66 is more than a mere road, he said. "It represents Americana, and that is what people are looking for," John Weiss said. "(International tourists) come here and see our open fields, and they can't believe the open lands we have, and the hospitality. Joliet is very wise to get in on the nostalgia of this Americana."

The highlight of Saturday's celebration will be a live, star-studded re-creation of "You're the One That I Want," the final number in "Grease." Local VIPs will do the number around 6:45 p.m. or immediately after The Blooze Brothers performance beginning at 5 p.m. Both acts will play on a stage in the Ottawa Street parking lot between Benton and

Webster streets and near the Renaissance Center.

As for the cast - Lantka will portray Sandy, and Steve Brandy of WJOL fame will be Danny. Will County Executive Larry Walsh and state Sen. A.J. Wilhelmi, D-Joliet, will be members of the "T-Birds." Joliet City Councilwoman Jan Quillman will play one of the "Pink Ladies." They're not professionals, but that's not the point.

"We just want to have a really good time," Lantka said.

For more information, call (877) 4-JOLIET or visit www.jolietkicks.com.

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Caption:

Examining Fiberglas car couches Tuesday at the Joliet Area Historical Museum are (from left) Heather Bigeck, Rebecca Lantka, Joseph Holsapple and Nicole Brinkman. The furniture was delivered for the new Route 66 Experience that will open Saturday.

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