

New company adds immediate value to Cassopolis community

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CASSOPOLIS — On the east side of Broadway Street in Cassopolis, just south of the Pioneer Log Cabin, is a piece of land that recently underwent a slight transformation. A few months ago, the surface of the land consisted of dirt and dying grass and was covered with old garbage, such as a worn couch, a box television, pillows, full trash bags and other items that someone no longer wanted.

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Today, that same land is pristine, with vibrant green grass growing and all of the garbage removed.

The transformation happened in part thanks to Contract Land Staff, a nationwide company that three months ago also opened an office in the heart of downtown Cassopolis.

“We’re glad to be here,” said Bill Baldus, a Right of Way Supervisor with the company. “There’s something special about working in a small town. We’re very comfortable and we feel appreciated here and we go into the Broadway Cafe here and everybody knows us.”



The company specializes in right of way acquisitions and land management consultations. Currently, one of its main projects in the area is assisting AEP as it facilitates almost a complete rebuild of the state power grid. The company also has an office in Mishawaka, and — between the two — about 25 employees are frequently driving back and forth to different projects going on throughout southwestern Michigan and northern Indiana.

“On all these projects, there’s an easement where the poles are built and when it’s a new project, we go out and acquire new land rights that billed the project or if there is existing rights or existing easements,” Baldus said. “A lot of this infrastructure is old. It comes from the 1940s and even earlier than that. There’s some stuff that’s from the 1920s even.”

The company acts as a liaison between AEP and landowners who have power lines running through their property. The current projects focus on replacing old, wooden poles with new metal poles.

“If you drive just down Main Street here, you can see the brand new shiny poles,” Baldus said.

After the new poles are put in, the land is often damaged and Contract Land Staff is in charge of making sure it is restored. That was the case with the land on the east side of Broadway Street, only the company, with the approval of AEP, decided to go above and beyond when repairing it.

“[Council woman Geraldine Norwood-Sims] of the Village of Cassopolis came to us and asked if we could clean that up,” said Tim Goldizen, a senior right of way agent. “I said, ‘well let me see,’ so I contacted my supervisor with AEP and he said ... ‘yes, we will do that. That’s something that would really help the community and beautify the town.’”

The company and AEP are not always able to go above and beyond for a community like this since they have to take into account costs and other variables, but Goldizen and Baldus said that they like when they are able to.

“It does make you feel good,” Goldizen said. “[I like working] for a company that is involved with the community and cares about the needs of the community.”