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Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Local spotlight

Images capture area's big 'miracle makers'

Photographer displays portraits of Metro Detroit's most influential people at Cobo Center.

Maureen McDonald / Special to The Detroit News

WEST BLOOMFIELD -- In a season where nearly all the automotive photography work Les Ward supported his studio with for 20 years has vaporized, he is using the North American International Auto Show as a backdrop for new business possibilities.

In six short months, Ward created a display called "My Town Miracles," to highlight individuals Ward regards as some of the most influential people creating jobs, celebrations, gathering places for a broader community. At least 22 of his pictures will hang in a special exhibit in the concourse of Cobo Center during the auto show.

"I found people with the can-do spirit, people bigger than the situations they came across, people who are leading Detroit's recovery," said Ward, one of 125 estimated Metro area photographers working the advertising and commercial trade. He hopes to catch a tail wind and expose the potential 800,000 auto show visitors to his versatility as a portrait artist and business photographer.

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Among the subjects featured in the display are Bill Ford Jr. chairman of Ford Motor Co.; the Hon. Damon Keith, Senior Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, 6th District; Rebecca Salminen Witt, president of the Greening of Detroit; Denise Ilitch, publisher of Ambassador Magazine in Birmingham; Bert Dearing Jr., Detroit jazz impresario; Roger Penske, chairman of Penske Racing South; and Cynthia Pasky, president and chairman of Strategic Staffing Solutions of Detroit. Ward didn't know any of these civic leaders, but he used his tenacity to book appointments.

Ward said he never listened to thoughts that resembled "no," "what makes you qualified" or "impossible." Instead he kept asking for appointments, and people came through, even the busiest executives in the region.

The task represents an innovative comeback for Ward. He came close to hitting bottom in his life in 2007. In March that year, his wife and business manager, Denise Ward, died of pancreatic cancer. Shortly after that, economic conditions in the commercial photo industry and loss of his manager forced him to close his 7,500 square foot studio and move into a home office.

As he healed from the first round of upsets, he weathered two rounds of surgeries at the University of Michigan for removal of melanomas. He helped focus his thoughts by coaching a seminar called "Self-Expression and Leadership Program, offered by Landmark Education in Livonia. He invested over \$10,000 to develop his class project. As it progressed he found it helped him market his services among powerful leaders.

"Les is one of the finest photographers I've had the opportunity to work with," said Gary D. Lichtman, director of media relations at the University of Detroit Mercy, who helped coordinate a photograph of UDM President Gerald Stockhausen SJ for his portfolio of leaders. "Les has a way of searching for that 'perfect' image, capturing people in their everyday environment with a unique kind of look and feel."

What's next? Ward said he wants to produce a book of unstoppable civic leaders adding another 25 or 30 subjects to his mix. "I'm committed to finding new sources of photographic work but I'm not attached to outcome."

Detroit News staff, wire and Bloomberg News reports.

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More information

Les Ward Photo

- ▶ **Specialty:** West Bloomfield photographer Les Ward works with graphic artists, publishers, advertising agency art directors and corporate leaders to produce still images for print and the Web.
- ▶ **Contact:** Call (248) 562-7416 or visit www.leswardphoto.com




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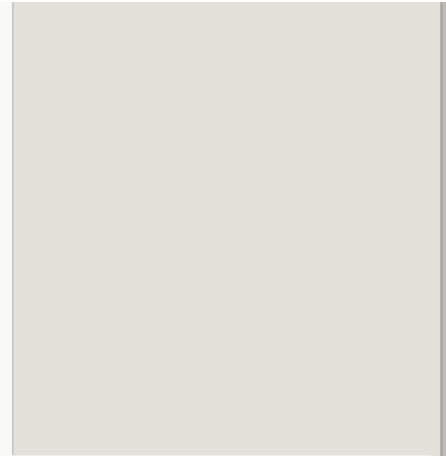
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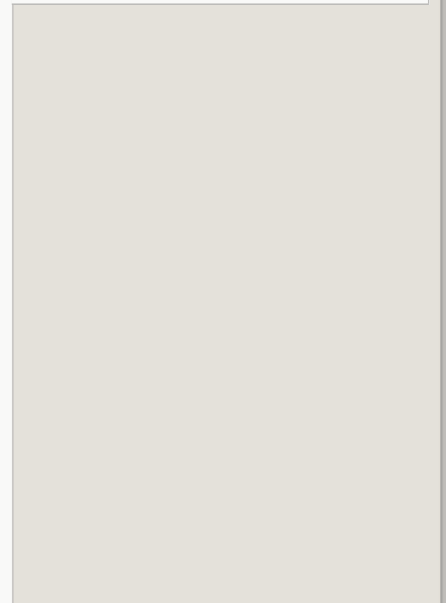
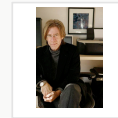


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Les Ward is adding to his portraits on display at Cobo Center in the hopes of publishing a book on what he calls "My Town Miracles." (Photo by Les Ward)

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