



Photos by Mike Janczarek



## DISCOVER NOVI

# Tollgate Farm

**Michigan State University Tollgate Education Center, A unique green space in Novi's landscape**

Have you driven by the Michigan State University Tollgate Education Center and wondered what goes on behind the white fence? MSU Tollgate, located on the corner of Twelve Mile and Meadowbrook Roads, has been part of the Novi Community for many years. The property is composed of 160 acres of woods, fields a pond and historic buildings. The site is one of the original farmsteads in the Novi area, purchased by Samuel Bassett in 1831 from the Federal Government for \$1.25/acre. The first Bassett resident of the property was John Bassett, Samuel's son, who moved to Tollgate in 1836. Originally, John built a cabin on the property constructed from logs that were cut from the farm. In his later years, John remembered wolves circling that early cabin. John and his wife Ervilla lived in the cabin with their ever growing family until they built the large Greek revival farmhouse that still stands on Meadowbrook Road, sometime between 1840 and 1855. John Bassett liked the steady, dependable nature of oxen. He



used a team of oxen to clear the land, plant and harvest crops and do other work around the farm. John also believed strongly in education. During his life he amassed a large library and supported the creation of a one-room schoolhouse located on the corner of Thirteen Mile and Meadowbrook Roads.

### Adolph and Ginger Meyer

Adolph and Ginger Meyer purchased Tollgate from the Bassett family in 1951. Almost immediately, the Meyers began an ambitious construction program. During the early to mid-1950's, the Meyer family added on to the big barn and built two additional barns. Adolph Meyer strongly believed that people needed to know where their food came from and understand the needs of the farmer. He held onto Tollgate Farm even as the Novi area became more urbanized so that the people of the area could have an association with farming. In 1956, the Meyers hired a manager to look after the farm. Ernie Morris and his family lived on the property raising corn, hogs, cattle and chickens for over thirty years. School kids took field trips to Tollgate to see what life on a farm was like. During



the 60's and 70's Tollgate was the setting for many ads. Dodge, Ford, General Motors, Highland Appliance, Purina and other companies all took advantage of the rolling hills and farm setting as a backdrop for their products.

### Michigan State University

In 1987, the Americana Foundation, a Foundation established by the Meyer family, donated 60 acres of Tollgate to Michigan State University. Although the Foundation retains ownership of an additional 100 acres, this land is also available to MSU for demonstration, education and research projects. MSU Extension now uses the 160 acres of Tollgate for Youth programming, Emerald Ash Borer research, volunteer activities, public gardens and educational programs. The facility also has conference facilities available that are used by MSU Extension as well as being rented for business and social functions. Over 200 volunteers help keep the farm going. Ownership of the farm by MSU ensures that Tollgate will continue to be a calming green space for the Novi community for years to come. Tollgate is open to the public from 8am to dusk, Monday through Saturday. For more information: [www.tollgate.msu.edu](http://www.tollgate.msu.edu) or call 248-347-3860 ext. 251.