

When you build your own home, you make it a point to put your roots down in a community you desire to live for awhile. In 2004, my husband Tim and I after one year of marriage made the leap of faith to buy property and build a home and a life together in West Olive. He grew up in Grand Haven, and I was a Hudsonville girl. Staying in Ottawa County was important and here is our checklist why.

Being close to family—check.

I first lived in Hudsonville on Port Sheldon Road. There I took my first steps, learned to ride a bike, go for walks to throw rocks in a small pond, and on nice days ride my bike to school at Alward Elementary. I had grandparents nearby and could see them often. When I was in high school my family and I later relocated into a farm house in the country which was previously my grandparents. My parents continue to live there today where my kids now hunt with grandpa, ride their bike, climb the apple tree, and work in the yard and garden just like I did years ago.

Good school district—check.

I have fond memories of my education. Field trips to the zoo, winning a spelling bee in fourth grade, first learning to use a computer, being apart of the National Honors Society, and along the way making friends while participating in cheerleading and choir just to name a few. My schooling prepared me for college which was Allendale's own Grand Valley State University. Through the school's social work program, I had service learning opportunities along the way at Ottawa County's Community Action Agency and later an internship at the Juvenile Detention Center in the treatment program. With schooling from Kindergarten through my Bachelor's degree in Ottawa County, it would make the natural choice for my children. We are now in the Zeeland school district where I have a son at Quincy Elementary School and another in pre-school at Borculo Christian School.

Strong faith community—check.

Growing up in the church and being involved in various congregations, my Christian faith is the top priority. To live in an area where churches abound proclaiming the gospel is truly a blessing. While building, we were in search of a new church home and we found it at Lighthouse Community Church in Allendale. There we worship, serve, and gather with fellow believers who now are like extended family to us. Many deep friendships have formed along the way including those who would care for my children during their toddler years.

Near work and employment opportunities—check.

Before we broke ground, I was working at my first “real jobs” and practicing in the field of social work at the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Holland and Kandu Inc. In both these jobs I got to serve the community and witness the amazing ways these non-profit organizations were transforming people’s lives. At the Boys and Girls Club I got to see first hand how being involved in a youth’s life coming alongside him or her built character and confidence while providing a sense of belonging. Then at Kandu Inc. I fell in love with working with adults with developmental disabilities while promoting their job skills and community involvement. Little did I know then that eight years later I would find myself working part time with Ottawa County as a Supports Coordinator with Community Mental Health continuing to serve this population but in a whole new way. With having two small children, I am truly grateful to work at a place that provides opportunities to serve and for growth while still understanding the importance of being there for your family.

The great outdoors and recreation—check.

Parks. You would be hard pressed to drive around Ottawa County without finding a beautiful city, county, or state park. Growing up I often would ride my bike to Hager or Hughes Park. Going to the

beaches of Holland or Grand Haven State Park were also a favorite. With working in the Holland area, I would soon learn about more great parks and trails including Kollen Park and Riley Trails. This was another reason to build in Ottawa County as I could not give this up. Just within the past week, I have hiked and jogged at Pigeon Creek and Hemlock Crossings. Plus I go to these places in the winter to cross country ski, so they offer something year round.

Parades. Growing up participating in gymnastics, I had the joy of tumbling down Baldwin for several years on Memorial Day. Later as a teenager at Hudsonville's homecoming parades I could ride on a float with my fellow cheerleaders. Now as a parent, I've watched my children's faces light up at Fourth of July, Kids Day and Santa Claus parades. My kids also got to be in the infamous Dandelion Festival Parade putting the quaint town of Borculo on the map.

Fireworks and fairs. Ottawa County has so many terrific family events to be apart of and enjoy: Fourth of July, Coast Guard Festival, Tulip time, Ottawa County Fair, Hudsonville Fair and the Berlin Fair just to name a few. When you live in Ottawa County, you really do not have to travel far to have a good time.

Growth—check.

Whether it's the school districts, hospitals, hotels, the road improvements, new jobs, you name it, growth is all around us looking forward to benefit future generations.

As you can see, my family and I have no plans anytime soon to move outside of Ottawa County. It's a wonderful place to learn, grow, work, and play.