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APRIL 2026
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Gatsby Glamour With Purpose



A DAZZLING 1920S CELEBRATION PRESERVING
ONE OF MACOMB COUNTY'S MOST TREASURED
HISTORIC LANDMARKS

There are fundraisers... and then there are experiences.

The Great Gatsby Gala at the Packard Proving Grounds Historic Site is decidedly the latter – an immersive, joy-filled evening that just happens to support one of the most important regional historic preservation efforts.

To understand the gala, you have to understand the grounds.

In 1925, the Packard Motor Car Company realized testing vehicles on Detroit streets had its limitations. The company began purchasing farmland in what was then rural Shelby Township and commissioned legendary architect Albert Kahn to design a state-of-the-art testing facility. Dedicated on June 14, 1928, at a cost of \$1 million, the Proving Grounds featured rugged test roads and an exceptionally smooth 2.5-mile oval track. The track was hailed as “the world’s fastest speedway” when Leon Duray set a speed record of 148.7 mph - before they

had even installed the guard rails. He joked at the time that he didn't plan to use them that day!

The site even played a role in aviation history – Charles Lindbergh visited in 1929 to test-fly a Packard-powered aircraft. After ownership changes and decades of uncertainty – including the threat of demolition – a passionate coalition of historians, car clubs, township officials, and citizens united to save this irreplaceable piece of American automotive heritage.

Today, preservation is ongoing – and costly.

“The mission is to preserve the Packard Proving Grounds,” event planner Jeannine Morris told me. Major restoration projects, including the iconic water tower, aviation hangar repairs, and the tree-lined boulevard, can cost \$500,000 or more each. “Every ticket supports that preservation.”

And yet, the gala never feels heavy. It feels magical.



“Don’t overthink what to wear or whether you’ll know anyone – just come ready to enjoy the evening. It’s a welcoming crowd, and you’ll leave feeling part of something special.”





The Gatsby theme was chosen intentionally. The Albert Kahn architecture, built in the 1920s, provides the perfect backdrop for an era-inspired evening. Guests arrive in flapper dresses, fringe, feathers, and fedoras. The décor is stunning. Cocktails nod to the Prohibition era. During dinner, the Detroit Metropolitan Chorale will perform, adding a new richness to the evening. Fox 2 Detroit evening anchor Roop Raj returns as emcee bringing charm, wit, and energy that keeps the evening flowing.

Guests can explore the historic site to view vintage Packards and tour the former residence of the site manager, Charles Vincent and his family, details that deepen the experience reminding attendees exactly what they are helping preserve.

When I attended as an event sponsor, my guests and I were treated to pre-event rides down the tree-lined boulevard in vintage Packards – a thrilling experience. It set the tone before we even stepped into the gala.

But what surprised me most wasn't the décor or the dancing (though yes – we danced all night). It was the connection. We made such wonderful new friends at our table that they later reached out asking if we were coming this year – and if we could all sit together. That's the magic of this event.

Morris says that's intentional.

"For first-time attendees, don't overthink what to wear or whether you'll know anyone," she shared. "Just come ready to enjoy the evening." She describes the gala as an opportunity to truly step back in time – to celebrate history, enjoy incredible food and drinks, and simply have fun in a beautiful setting.

"It's a welcoming crowd," she said. "By the end of the night, it feels like you've been part of something really special."

The Great Gatsby Gala takes place Saturday, April 25, 2026, at 49965 Van Dyke Ave., Shelby Township. Sponsorship opportunities remain available, along with advertising in the event's virtual book. Tickets are limited and the gala typically sells out.

Tickets and sponsorship information are available at packardprovinggrounds.org or by calling (586) 739-4800.

Dress up. Step back in time. Help preserve history.

And don't be surprised if you leave with a few new friends.