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MOMENTUM

Uniquely Macomb County, Michigan
Volume 5, Issue 1

We all have a role in Macomb

Communities, businesses unite to
answer demand during pandemic

Page 8

Revival:

The Discovery Center
adds to downtown
Mount Clemens
upswing

Page 26

Water way:

MCC introduces
marine program to
meet regional needs

Page 40

HOPE



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– **Tricia Ashman**
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MOMENTUM

Uniquely
Macomb County, Michigan
Volume 5, Issue 1

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Its scenic views, excellent fishing and miles of beaches make Lake St. Clair one of the most popular lakes in southeastern Michigan. Of its coastline, a whopping 32 miles fall in Macomb County, attracting residents, visitors and businesses to its shore. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LAKE ST. CLAIR TOURISM INITIATIVE

INSIDE

- 3 NEW NORMAL:** Introduction from Mark A. Hackel
- 4 FUN AND GAMES:** Sport Port encourages getting physical with daily activities
- 6 IMPACT:** Work at Detroit Arsenal affects every soldier around the world
- 8 ARSENAL OF INNOVATION**
Rallying Cry: Macomb County residents, businesses and school districts unite around communities during COVID-19 pandemic [PAGE 10](#)
Line Change: Closed GM Warren facility ramps up production for face masks [PAGE 16](#)
Supply Chain: Sterling Heights firm keeps Henry Ford Hospital stocked with PPE [PAGE 18](#)
Turnaround: Cadillac Products uses expertise to produce hospital gowns [PAGE 20](#)
- 22 WELLNESS:** Recreational assets help Macomb residents achieve health goals
- 26 REVIVAL:** The Discovery Center adds to downtown Mount Clemens upswing

- 28 PAVE THE WAY:** Mound Road project lays foundation for future industries
- 32 MILESTONE:** Family-owned Whistle Stop Hobby & Toy celebrates 50th anniversary
- 34 LEARNING LINK:** Center Line schools, Ford NGL partner to teach career-focused skills
- 36 BIG GESTURE:** Local leaders step up for small businesses during pandemic
- 38 BASS DROP:** Bassmaster Elite Series brings world's best anglers to Lake St. Clair
- 40 WATER WAY:** Macomb Community College introduces marine program to address regional needs
- 42 VITAL ROLE:** Lake St. Clair pivotal in economy, quality of life in Macomb
- 45 MOMENTUM MAKERS**
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On the cover: When the COVID-19 pandemic struck Macomb County in mid-March, local businesses, residents and school districts did not hesitate to jump into action, utilizing every resource possible in support of the essential workers and heroes on the front lines of the outbreak in their community. In this issue we highlight and commend some of those efforts.

CREDITS FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOTO BY JOHN F. MARTIN FOR GENERAL MOTORS; MEGAN DEEL/ODD FERN PHOTO FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP; PHOTO COURTESY OF CADILLAC PRODUCTS AUTOMOTIVE COMPANY; PHOTO COURTESY OF PTI ENGINEERED PLASTICS

We all have a role

Macomb businesses, communities
step up to combat coronavirus

By Mark A. Hackel

I am sure you will agree that 2020 has been a year that none of us will soon forget. As we come to terms with what will be our new normal, I can't help but feel a tremendous sense of pride for all that Macomb County did to respond to the coronavirus.



We will all be forever grateful for the first responders who faced this virus head on and did all that they could for those who needed their help. This includes our health care workers, police officers, firefighters, EMTs, grocery store workers, delivery drivers and many of our Macomb County employees. On behalf of all our communities, I'd like to thank you for being on the front lines of this crisis.

Secondly, our "Arsenal of Democracy" was reinvented as the "Arsenal of Innovation," as hundreds of companies across the region stepped up to produce needed personal protection equipment including hand sanitizer, masks, surgical gowns and ventilators. This proves – yet again – that this is the place where creativity and determination can make anything happen.

Finally, our citizens are also to be commended. Whether they were looking in on neighbors to make sure they were alright, staging special ways to celebrate life's moments or just doing their best to stay home and flatten the curve, we should be proud of the way we stuck together to prevent more people from getting ill.

In times of crisis, we begin to realize we ALL have a role. And, if we all play our part – however small – we'll get through this and be better for it. So in these difficult times, when we're faced with uncertainty, remember, it is challenges like this that unite us and make us stronger.

Please continue to visit macombgov.org for all of the latest updates around the county. **M**



Above: Rob Kotowski, president of Lake Shore Boat Top Company, Inc. in St. Clair Shores, saw the need for personal protection equipment and felt the company could provide masks and shields using equipment they already had in place.

PHOTO COURTESY
OF LAKE SHORE
BOAT TOP
COMPANY, INC.

Left: Workers produce N95-style filtering facepiece respirators April 21 at the General Motors manufacturing facility in Warren.

PHOTO BY JOHN
F. MARTIN FOR
GENERAL MOTORS



Fun and games

Sport Port encourages getting physical with daily activities

By Jane Peterson

Research shows that children who are physically active and share a love for sports have increased opportunities to become engaged, physically active, successful adults.

A new program invests in children's futures by making sports equipment available for them to play. Called Sport Port, the program provides children and teens with proper sporting equipment so they can try out new sports and engage in daily physical activity.

"Sports connect children with others," said Diane Banks of Advancing Macomb, an organization that strengthens Macomb County neighborhoods by finding solutions to community challenges.

Youth recreation was identified as an area that needed to be addressed in Mount Clemens. Turns out, youth had plenty of spaces to play in, but no equipment to play with. As most parents know, sporting equipment can be costly, especially when kids are trying out new activities to see which ones they like.

Sport Port provides that equipment free of charge so children can explore various interests.

While Sport Port has been operating in Pontiac and Detroit, it made a "soft launch" in Mount Clemens in March, with three stationary locations and mobile partners opening just before the COVID-19 crisis hit. Each site had 20 basketballs, 20-25 baseballs and baseball gloves, 10 flag football kits and 20-25 soccer balls.

While the program was suspended during Stay at Home directives, organizers hope to get it back up and running as soon as they can. In May, they were working with a regional collaboration of Sport Port sites and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan to acquire and distribute equipment for local youth to keep and encourage safe free play during Stay Home,

CONNECT

Sport Port is looking forward to re-launching its sports equipment program, which encourages children and teens to get outside in the fresh air and play. For more information about the program visit Advancing Macomb's website at AdvancingMacomb.com.



Each Sport Port site has 20 basketballs, 20-25 baseballs and baseball gloves, 10 flag football kits and 20-25 soccer balls available to check out.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ADVANCING MACOMB

Stay Safe orders.

To participate, youth ages 5-18 complete a one-time registration form and use their library card to check out equipment at The Mount Clemens Public Library. Participants take the equipment and put it to good use during after school programs at local elementary schools and churches. If they don't have a library card, they can register for one the same day.

Children and teens can also check out sports equipment at the Jermaine Jackson Center and Mount Clemens Community Center during scheduled times and take it with them or use it on site during open gym and free play hours. Open gym and free play hours are supervised by volunteers or staff members and healthy snacks and educational materials regarding healthy living are available. Library card registration will also be available at the sites.

"Sports is a great way to bring people together," said Banks. "It gets kids playing with one another in their own neighborhoods where they might not always know each other because with schools of choice they attend different schools."

Sport Port is a grassroots, collaborative effort supported by local governments, area businesses and various nonprofit organizations, including the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and YMCA Encourages More Physical Activity.

Sport Port pop-up clinics hosted by the YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit are also planned throughout Mount Clemens once communities open back up and groups are allowed to gather again. Several times per week, YMCA staff will be present during the pop-up events to encourage kids to play and sample a variety of sports. Once the library re-opens, visit mtclib.org for a calendar of pop-up events.

"This program is an innovative way to bring community resources together to fill a gap in recreation programming for youth in and around the city," said Banks. "Sport Port will enable more kids to experience a variety of sports in nearby locations, free of charge. We believe this program will address a community need around healthy living and help attract families to the area."

For more information visit ProjectPlaySeMi.org. 

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Impact

Work at Detroit Arsenal affects every soldier around the world

By Jane Peterson

The Detroit Arsenal is the only active duty military installation in the state of Michigan and it's right in Macomb County's backyard.

Behind 67 unassuming buildings on 178 acres off 11 Mile Road in Warren, the United States Army installation provides support services for soldiers, families and civilians and helps to keep the nation prepared for future challenges.

"Not many people are aware of the scope of what we do here," said R. Slade Walters, director of Public Affairs, U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM), "but what we do here has a huge impact on the military's ability to do its job."

Surprisingly, it is home to more civilians than military with approximately 250 military personnel and 7,000 Department of Defense civilians and contract workers on the installation. However, it also serves more than 800 active duty members within 60 miles of the Installation and an additional 23,454 Army associated military, dependent family members, surviving family members and Department of Defense civilians in the region.

The work done at the Detroit Arsenal is critical to the military's operations and it has been for more than 80 years. Its mission is to support Army readiness with a professional workforce focused on ensuring soldiers can handle any situation with equipment that is modern, efficient and functional.

The Detroit Arsenal houses several U.S. Army commands that support and sustain the research, development, acquisition and total life-cycle management of ground and soldier systems. The Army's ground and soldier systems enterprise includes Tank-automotive and Armaments Command, Combat Capabilities Development Command Ground Vehicle Systems Center (GVSC), Army Contracting Command - Detroit Arsenal, Program Executive Office Ground Combat System (PEO GCS) and Program Executive Office Combat Support and Combat System Support (PEO CS&CSS).

While each has its own role to support soldiers, operations between the entities are seamlessly coordinated: GVSC is the research and development arm, developing cutting-edge technology; the Program Executive Offices apply technology to emerging systems and acquire systems; the Army Contracting Command takes care of contracts with manufacturers; and TACOM manages the Army's ground equipment supply chain.

"Sixty to 65% of equipment used by a soldier in a brigade combat team is touched by the organizations at the arsenal,"

said Walters. "The work we do here touches every single soldier in the world."

He said if it has wheels, tracks or a gun and doesn't fly, TACOM sustains it. TACOM manages six manufacturing arsenals and maintenance depots across the United States:

- Rock Island Arsenal - Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center, Illinois
- Watervliet Arsenal in New York
- Anniston Army Depot in Alabama
- Red River Army Depot in Texas
- Sierra Army Depot in California
- Joint Systems Manufacturing Center - Lima in Ohio

These facilities not only manufacture, they refurbish key systems and maintain inventory so parts can be repurposed as needed, said Walters.

In 1940, Macomb County was the ideal location for the Detroit Arsenal because of its close proximity to the automobile industry. The U.S. Army and the Chrysler Corporation hired Detroit architect Albert Kahn to design a self-contained tank plant and the first tank rolled off the assembly line at the Detroit Arsenal Tank Plant on April 24, 1941. It was the first manufacturing plant built for the mass production of tanks.

President Franklin Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor, inspected the plant in September 1942. During World War II, the arsenal set records and built 22,234 tanks. This was a quarter of all tanks produced in the United States. Its contributions are recognized in a Michigan Historical Marker at the site.

Tank manufacturing ended at the site in 1997, but the Detroit Arsenal remains an optimal site for its headquarters because of the partnerships with the automotive industry and deep supply chain. GVSC, which creates technology solutions for ground systems, looks at emerging automotive technologies and seeks ways to apply it to military vehicles. Technologies such as autonomous vehicles can reduce the risk to soldiers as they deliver supplies, for example.

Fuel efficiency technologies have also been tested because the more fuel-efficient the Army vehicles are, the better it operates during times of conflict. **M**

CONNECT



WORKING FOR SOLDIERS WORLDWIDE

As R. Slade Walters, director of Public Affairs, U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM), explained, the work being done at the Detroit Arsenal impacts soldiers around the world.

One example is with the fitness test that all one million active duty, National Guard and national reserve soldiers have to take. When the new test rolls out in October, soldiers will use equipment acquired, fielded and sustained by the agencies that make up the Detroit Arsenal.



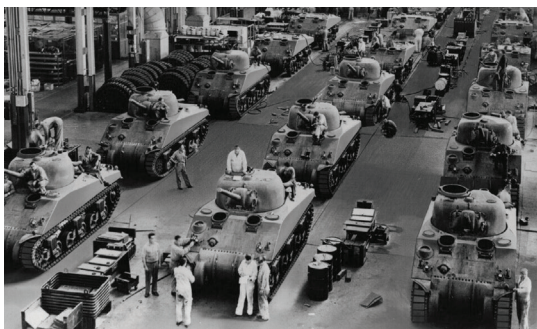
Top photos:

Employees at the Fleet Management Expansion, or FMX, site at Fort Benning, Ga. work to ensure Army equipment, like M1 Abrams tanks, are ready for Soldiers to use for training. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY RANDY TISOR

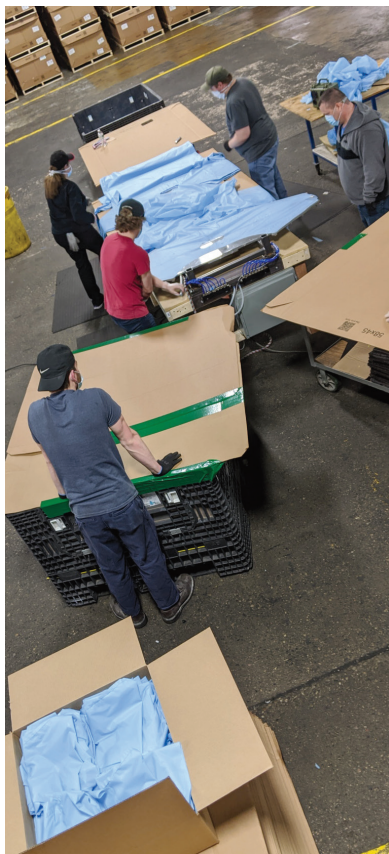
Middle: Rock Island Arsenal-Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center foundry employees test pour a basin for the M777 howitzer muzzle break at Rock Island Arsenal, Ill. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY ADRIENNE BROWN

Bottom left: Production of M4A4 Sherman tanks in 1942 at the Detroit Arsenal Tank Plant, founded on Aug. 15, 1940. U.S. ARMY HISTORICAL PHOTO

Bottom right: Employees at the Fleet Management Expansion, or FMX, site at Fort Benning, Ga. work to ensure Army equipment, like M1 Abrams tanks, are ready for Soldiers to use for training. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY RANDY TISOR



ARSENAL OF



INNOVATION



Despite the many struggles and financial challenges Macomb County businesses and residents have faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many did not hesitate to utilize every resource possible in support of the essential workers and heroes on the front lines of the outbreak in their community. Whether by retooling manufacturing processes to produce much-needed personal protective equipment for healthcare workers and first responders, or organizing clothing and food drives for community members who have found themselves unemployed in the wake of the outbreak, Macomb County residents, businesses and school districts have shown true ingenuity in the many ways they've been able to provide support to those who needed it most during this difficult time.

QUOTABLE

“We have the equipment, we have the people.”

— Andrew Blake, owner and founder of Blake's Hard Cider



Rallying cry

When pandemic came down, Macomb businesses stepped up

By Jane Peterson

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck Macomb County in mid-March, it hit hard. Everyone felt the effect as hospitals took care of vulnerable patients, businesses were shuttered overnight and area schoolchildren struggled to understand how the school year was abruptly over.

As essential workers and residents at home each did their part to mitigate and treat the virus, the disruption to the economy created its own set of challenges. Small business owners worried about the future of their stores and employees wondered how they were going to pay their bills. However, throughout it all, communities came together. The stories below demonstrate how businesses, schools and corporations stayed strong by supporting and helping their communities as they weathered the storm together.

FROM CANNING TO SANITIZING

“We have the equipment, we have the people.”

Just like that, Blake's Hard Cider went from canning hard cider to making hand sanitizer. It was an easy decision to make, based on the need in the community and surrounding area, said Andrew Blake, owner and founder.

The family-owned distillery repurposed its cannery operations to manufacture and package liquid hand sanitizer to help with supply and demand issues created in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. With people having trouble finding supplies to protect their families and employees, Blake's was happy to pitch in and help, he said.

The sanitizer is available in gallon jugs for medical facilities like McLaren and Hurley and others around the state and for businesses as they come back on line. Smaller quantities are available for personal use and families.



Above: Blake's Hard Cider went from canning hard cider to making hand sanitizer.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLAKE'S HARD CIDER



Left: A PTI toolmaker reviews tool design to create an efficient build plan ventilator component.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PTI ENGINEERED PLASTICS

PHOTO SPREAD CREDITS: FROM TOP LEFT TO RIGHT, CLOCKWISE

As a full service metal fabricator, Prototech Laser, Inc. in New Baltimore historically works with the automotive, defense and general industry markets. In order to convert its operations for COVID-19 personal protective equipment, they had to retool a portion of its operations in order to accommodate these new manufacturing specifications.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PROTOTECH LASER, INC.

General Motors Executive Vice President Global Manufacturing and Labor Relations Gerald Johnson watches as engineers and technicians

set-up and test the machines that will be used to manufacture Level 1 face masks at the General Motors Warren manufacturing facility.

PHOTO BY JOHN F. MARTIN FOR GENERAL MOTORS

TD Industrial Coverings, Inc. pivoted from its core competency of creating protective automotive robot covers to provide medical PPE for Henry Ford Health System facilities.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TD INDUSTRIAL COVERINGS, INC.

Engineers and technicians set-up and test the machines that will be used to manufacture Level 1 face masks at the General Motors Warren manufacturing facility. PHOTO BY JOHN F. MARTIN FOR GENERAL MOTORS

WORKING AROUND THE CLOCK

When PTI Engineered Plastics Owner and CEO Mark Rathbone received a call about making airflow assemblies for General Motors' ventilator program, it was 4 p.m. on a Friday. His team immediately went into high gear, working throughout that night and the weekend and by the following Monday they were making molds and prepping the work.

"We worked around the clock until we finished it," he said.

PTI made five to six different plastic components for the breathing valve and cough-assist valve. With a tight timeline, it was all hands on deck with everyone from engineers, the mold making team, quality engineers, operators, toolmakers and designers pitching in to get the work done. They were happy to do it, said Rathbone.

"A lot of it was a sense of patriotism," he said.

PTI Engineered Plastics is a custom injection molder and manufacturer of plastic components and assemblies, with a specialty in low volume production. Headquartered in Macomb, the company typically makes components for the medical industry. Also this spring,

PTI was making thousands of face shields and shipping them out each week to hospitals in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties.

Using existing designs for reference, the company made many improvements, such as a flexible frame design to accommodate a variety of head proportions and a visor on top for preventing contamination from above. The lens of the shield was designed for an overall size that would provide adequate protection and has angled cuts with rounded portions at the bottom for increased mobility. Other features include an adjustable strap with side



A PTI toolmaker displays a mold for ventilator parts.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PTI ENGINEERED PLASTICS

Blake's Hard Cider, a family-owned distillery, repurposed its cannery operations to manufacture and package liquid hand sanitizer to help with supply and demand issues created in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLAKE'S HARD CIDER

Cadillac Products Automotive Company in Roseville cuts out gown shapes for the disposable gowns.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CADILLAC PRODUCTS AUTOMOTIVE COMPANY

A U.S. flag hangs in the lobby at PTI Engineered Plastics.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PTI ENGINEERED PLASTICS



Lake Shore Boat Top Company, Inc. in St. Clair Shores, saw the need for personal protection equipment and felt the company could provide masks and shields to front-line workers.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LAKE SHORE BOAT TOP COMPANY, INC.

grip features and rear support, and open cell foam padding at the forehead to allow for air flow and provide cushion.

FROM SAFEGUARDING BOATS TO PROTECTING PEOPLE

Usually in early spring, employees at Lake Shore Boat Top Company, Inc. in St. Clair Shores are gearing up for a busy season. After the Detroit Boat Show wraps up, people are typically ready to start dreaming about summer and that starts with getting their boat repairs completed, custom canvases made and upholstery and flooring replaced. They may even make preparations to get their boat out of storage.

When Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced that all non-essential businesses had to close their doors beginning March 25, Rob Kotowski, like so many other business owners, felt a little panic set in. The president of Lake Shore Boat Top Company, Inc. wondered if his business, which has been family-owned since 1959, could survive.

"I started brainstorming on what our company could do," he said in an email. "I saw the need for PPE (personal protection equipment) and felt our company could provide the masks and shields and make that transition with the equipment we already had in place. Face shields and masks seemed like a logical choice. We have also worked with some local companies to develop protective barriers. Most of the designs came from materials we use every day or materials we had relatively easy access to."

So, company leaders started looking at how to produce PPE. Kotowski asked his sister, who works on the front line, for her input. They decided that the CNC cutting table could develop a pattern.

"We are able to cut hundreds of units in an hour," he said.

As of late April, the business had produced more than 36,000 face masks and facial shields. All of these were used by local healthcare workers and first responders.

The entire staff has stepped up to help.

“We are all working hard for a great cause and I can see it in all their faces that they feel proud to be a part of it,” said Kottowski. “We have transitioned our passion from boats to helping the hardworking people of our community.”

A FIREHOUSE THANK YOU

To thank medical professionals for their service during this time of uncertainty, Firehouse Subs Sterling Heights Franchisee Troy Osborne and General Manager Jennifer Scott partnered with Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation to donate nearly 200 meals to local healthcare workers at Dearborn Beaumont Hospital, Beaumont Hospital - Royal Oak, Ascension St. John Hospital and McLaren Hospital.

Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation has partnered with Firehouse Subs restaurants to feed healthcare workers and first responders on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as individuals and families in need and seniors who are unable to leave their homes through the Foundation’s COVID-19 Disaster Relief Fund. Throughout the month of April, all funds collected by Firehouse Subs restaurants through Round Up, canister donations and recycled pickle bucket donations supported immediate COVID-19 disaster relief efforts.

‘A PATRIOTIC DUTY’

Being in the Detroit Arsenal of Democracy corridor, Thomas Cleaver, owner of Prestige Imports LLC in Mount Clemens, said they feel it’s their patriotic duty to help out when needed in a time of crisis. Being a unique, high margin beer, wine and spirit brand that produces private label spirits for corporations across the United States, the company was capable of helping out, so Cleaver said it was no question whether or not they would.

So, the company purchased 2.5 million 1.75 liter plastic sure

grip bottles and caps and got to work. They converted their Iowa plant to handle the change in early March.

Prestige Imports’ Red Fox hand sanitizer is an 80% alcohol antiseptic topical solution available in a non-aerosol disinfectant spray. Employees have been busy taking orders from beverage distributors, janitorial companies, hospitals, military, glass companies and others.

“The reaction has been great, we have been blessed with many orders from across the United States and only have 3-4 order/ship turn around,” said Cleaver. “Sales of the hand sanitizer has off-set the sales lost to bars and restaurants being closed. Overall, we are very happy with the conversion, sales and helping keep America safe.”

COMBATting AN INVISIBLE ENEMY

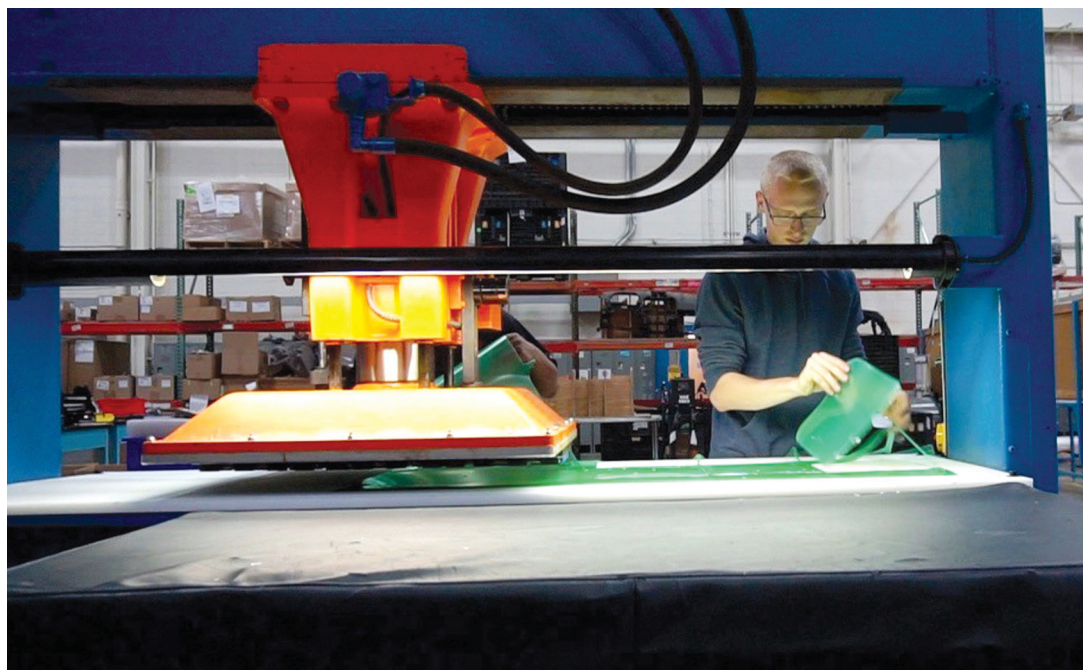
When Prototech Laser, Inc. in New Baltimore was approached by one of its long-time customers about making face shields, the response was an unequivocal “yes.”

As a full service metal fabricator, Prototech historically works with the automotive, defense and general industry markets. In order to convert its operations for COVID-19 personal protective equipment, they had to retool a portion of its operations in order to accommodate these new manufacturing specifications.

“Everybody was excited to play a part,” said Ed Genord, president. “We as a company feel as though it is our responsibility to do our part in these challenging times.”

One of Prototech’s specialties is quick response time to new programs, an approach that certainly works well during this time-sensitive and critical period.

Prototech has been in business for 30 years so they have seen plenty of ups and downs throughout the decades, specifically, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 2008 economic cri-



RCO Engineering in Roseville cut a single cavity tool capable of producing 3,000 face shields per day. As demand increased, they started building more tools. By the end of April, RCO had 25 injection molding cavities that were capable of producing nearly 50 shields per minute.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RCO ENGINEERING

RCO Engineering in Roseville was passionate about helping Michigan's front line workers. The company decided to begin the development and production of face shields a couple weeks before Michigan's stay at home order.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RCO ENGINEERING



sis. COVID-19 presents its own unique challenge, but Genord is happy to keep employees working by having this work to complete.

“Just as we are providing services to combat this current invisible enemy, we also helped our country during the Gulf War by providing up-armor kits to HUM-V ground vehicles in Iraq and Afghanistan to protect our troops from landmines,” he said. “We feel as though we saved numerous lives by our contribution to the war effort.”

The company has also been making parts for ventilators for another long-time customer.

CLASSROOMS DONATE TO EMERGENCY ROOMS

When personal protection equipment (PPE) was desperately needed, many medical facilities and painting companies that were closed donated their excess inventories of gowns, gloves and masks so doctors and nurses would have what they needed. Donations of these items also poured in from a more unconventional source: Macomb County high schools.

Within empty classroom walls sat a goldmine of PPE, mostly gleaned from the schools' science labs and vocational classes. The classroom science labs, physical therapy and pharmacy tech programs at Fitzgerald Senior High School, said Superintendent Laurie Fournier, donated safety goggles, disposable personal protection gowns, hair coverings, shoe coverings, N95 masks and gloves.

All Macomb County school districts donated equipment, which was housed at the Macomb County Intermediate School District (MISD) and turned over to county officials for delivery to the county's hospitals.

Says Fournier, “Having these items just sitting in rooms not

being used didn't make sense - it was a 'no brainer' to pack these items up and send them to be used by our wonderful medical staff and essential workers.”

TAKING PRIDE IN THE ARSENAL OF INNOVATION

RCO Engineering in Roseville was passionate about helping Michigan's front line workers, said General Manager Jeff Simek. As COVID cases in Michigan were rapidly increasing this spring, RCO began to brainstorm various ways in which they could help Michigan health care workers.

A leading product development partner primarily in automotive, aerospace and defense industries, the company takes pride in its ability to move from concept and beyond production with a flexible manufacturing environment. This flexibility coupled with scalability allowed RCO to pivot toward manufacturing of medical personal protection equipment (PPE), he said.

RCO decided to begin the development and production of face shields a couple weeks before Michigan's stay at home order. Considering this an important investment for the community, RCO ordered the steel required and started cutting a single cavity tool capable of producing 3,000 face shields per day. As demand increased, RCO started building more tools. By the end of April, RCO had 25 injection molding cavities that were capable of producing nearly 50 shields per minute.

“RCO is inspired to be a part of Michigan's arsenal of innovation,” said Simek. “We truly feel that the industrial strength in Macomb will be left with a diversification for medical products to put alongside our strength in automotive, aerospace and defense. The pivot to supporting the medical industry with face shields, gowns, masks and ventilator components has up-lifted RCO's spirit.” **M**

CARING ^{FOR} OTHERS DURING A CRISIS



Since 2009, 1st Call Home Healthcare and Preferred Care at Home have offered senior care, skilled nursing, and physical/occupational therapy to those recuperating from a serious illness, recovering from a catastrophic auto accident or needing assistance as they age. With a team of more than 150 staff in the field, the Clinton Township business takes its responsibility very seriously.

So, when Karen Nichols, a registered nurse who serves as clinical manager in the Medicare division for 1st Call Home Healthcare, starting hearing about a contagious virus spreading overseas, she didn't hesitate to protect clients.

February: Before the shutdown

Nichols activated the company's emergency preparedness guidelines in early February.

The challenge facing company leaders was how to take care of at-risk clients in their own homes while keeping both them and caregivers safe.

Caregivers, who often work independently and report directly to a client's home, were able to stay connected through digital messages from Nichols. For example, she forwarded Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's messages and executive orders so caregivers could stay informed. The first notification was sent Feb. 5.

Then, owners Bob Mlynarek, Mike Barnhard and Jason Groth helped everyone gather additional personal protection equipment. Most staff already had masks and gloves, but more supplies would be needed in the coming months. That's because the company wanted to provide clients as well as caregivers with masks to enhance safety efforts. In particular short supply were N-95 masks, but staff members asked friends and family for assistance and one staffer's husband found a gold mine of the masks in his painting supplies.

March: The shutdown starts

1st Call Home Healthcare and Preferred Care at Home started screening clients very early and took universal safety precautions if clients presented any symptoms such as fever. Company leaders and caregivers also spent time educating families on updated protocol because understandably, some were concerned about caregivers entering their homes.

In addition, the company provided required online training for caregivers that specifically covered COVID-19 symptoms, policies and procedures.

"I've been a nurse for more than 30 years and I had never seen anything like

this," said Nichols. "Staff looks to us to protect them and it is our responsibility to get them what they need."

April: Full-blown crisis mode

Families were asked to avoid visits in order to limit outside contact with potential symptom carriers. Caregivers were provided instructions and supplies to conduct additional disinfecting inside the home. Caregivers were told not report to work if they were sick.

Throughout the Stay Safe, Stay Home order, 1st Call Home Healthcare and Preferred Care at Home caregivers were considered essential workers. They remained committed to their clients. Two clients, for example, tested positive for COVID-19. To limit contact with multiple caregivers as part of routine shift changes, two staff members volunteered to become live-in caregivers during the quarantine period.

May: Preparing for a new normal

Caregivers continued to provide quality services for clients, even as their job became more challenging due to lack of auxiliary services like physical therapy, occupational therapy, other nursing services and family support care.

The owners also had to deal with a new reality that with elective surgeries prohibited, there would be no new clients seeking home care during their recovery period. Also, patients weren't being discharged from rehabilitation and long-term care facilities to recuperate at home.

"We knew going into this that we were going to need to hold on and maintain," said Mlynarek.

It wasn't easy, but as the company emerged from the crisis, staff was looking forward to meeting new clients and continuing to meet their care needs.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT AUTO INSURANCE CHANGES

Starting this July, every driver in Michigan will need to make a choice about their auto insurance. For the first time, they will have a choice in catastrophic insurance coverage, being able to decide between the following options:

- Unlimited lifetime medical benefits
- \$500,000 personal injury protection coverage
- \$250,000 personal injury protection coverage
- \$50,000 personal injury protection coverage
- Complete opt out for people with Medicare or separate health insurance covering car crash injuries



As a full-service home care agency and auto injury care provider, 1st Call Home Healthcare and Preferred Care at Home are in a unique position to step back and evaluate the choices. 1st Call provides skilled, at home nursing care for clients injured in auto accidents. Owners Bob Mlynarek, Mike Barnhard and Jason Groth are former firefighters who have seen firsthand the spectrum of care from the accident scene to long term, in-home

rehabilitation with licensed physical, occupational and speech therapists.

Mlynarek hopes drivers give the change careful consideration because it can drastically change a family's life.

// Unlimited coverage is crucial //

While \$500,000 worth of coverage may seem like enough money to take care of medical needs after an auto accident, Mlynarek said if a serious auto accident results in ongoing care, the amount of funds needed over the course of a lifetime could potentially bankrupt a family and put their future on tenuous footing, he said.

Washington Farm Bureau Insurance agency owner Leo Terzo agreed.

"Unlimited coverage is crucial," he said. "I always try to advise people that it's a good idea to buy unlimited Personal Injury Protection, even if their health insurance carrier will pay primary for injuries related to auto accidents. The reason I say that is there is a small price difference, but we are unlimited and it means just that. We are unlimited for the rest of your life. That



can include in-home health care. That can include home renovations to make the home handicap accessible. It could include everything under the sun."

Mlynarek added that equipment like specialized wheelchairs, long-term rehabilitation and custom equipment to help injured people work, are all generally covered under unlimited auto catastrophic insurance while they may not be with even the best health insurance coverage.

Prior to July, all Michigan drivers were required to carry full, unlimited injury protection. While resulting in higher insurance premiums, the law mandated full coverage of reasonable medical expenses resulting from a vehicle accident for life. Mlynarek worries that after July, as people renew their policies over the next year, they will opt out of the unlimited coverage in order to save money on their policy. This could be a dangerous gamble, he said.

"Usually a catastrophic patient will exhaust the maximum allowable, which is usually about a million dollars within the first three or four months of the incident and then it is basic

care. There is not much rehab long term after that."

Unlimited coverage also makes provisions for a nurse case manager who orchestrates all care. The case manager assists with doctors, attends appointments and coordinates the entire care plan.

"To have that person who is a nurse and specializes in this, to be able to be by your side every step of the way and give you advice and coordinate all that care for the family, that alone is priceless," said Mlynarek.

In the end, people need to determine whether they can afford to save money on their insurance premium and take the chance that they won't need unlimited care in the effect of a devastating auto accident, because if the worst happens, it could potentially financially ruin them, said Mlynarek.

To learn more, call 1st Call Home Healthcare and Preferred Care at Home at (800) 908-3890 or Leo Terzo at (586) 745-4025.

Information:

1st Call Home Healthcare
22367 Starks Dr.
Clinton Township, MI 48036
(800) 908-3890
www.3firefighters.com
referrals@3firefighters.com



Line change

Closed GM Warren facility ramps up production for face masks

By Jane Peterson

General Motors' Warren plant was back in commission this spring, but it was face masks, not automotive parts, rolling off its line.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the country throughout March, April and May, there was a critical need for face masks to help protect workers providing essential services. GM launched a rapid-response project to produce masks on March 20. With help from GM's partners around the globe, just a week later the team had produced its first sample on the new production line.

"Our team began looking at ways we could quickly utilize our talents and resources to help in the shared fight against COVID-19," said Peter Thom, GM vice president, Global Manufacturing Engineering, in a news release. "Working around the clock, our team rallied with incredible passion and focus

to come up with a plan to produce masks that will help protect the women and men on the front lines of this crisis."

The Warren facility was in the middle of all the action. The ISO Class 8-equivalent cleanroom at GM's manufacturing plant in Warren was the perfect location, said GM spokesperson Monte Doran, because a clean space was needed to produce medical supplies and ironically, also transmissions. Even a minor speck of dust can upset a transmission build, so this cleanroom with massive wind tunnels and air exchangers worked well.

Work began at the Warren facility by removing existing equipment from the cleanroom. The team cleared approximately 31,000 square feet to accommodate the mask production lines. Crews then installed new electrical service lines to power the production equipment and assembly stations.

With the site cleared and prepped, production equipment and materials were then delivered to the Warren facility. Crews worked around the clock to install equipment and stage the production line. The team then tested each step in the production process, looking for opportunities to improve quality and production speed.

They immediately noticed a problem: One of the last steps in the face mask production process is disinfection before face masks are wrapped in sterile packaging. Doran said disinfecting the masks was time-consuming and really holding mass



Workers begin final preparation for manufacturing Level 1 face masks at the General Motors facility in Warren.

PHOTO BY
JOHN F. MARTIN
FOR GENERAL
MOTORS

production back. GM was on the hunt for a second sterilizing cabinet, but couldn't locate one.

Enter the Detroit Red Wings. CEO Chris Ilitch heard about GM's dilemma and wanted to help. He called staff and asked if they could assist in getting the company an ozone sanitizing machine. The team doesn't have a machine to sanitize its equipment and skates because the sanitizing technology is built right into the ventilation system at Little Caesars Arena.

A second sanitization cabinet was found at a metro Detroit hockey shop. Two more room-sanitizing machines came on loan from the Chicago Blackhawks and Philadelphia Flyers. With four sanitizing machines, the face mask production has dramatically increased.

More than two dozen paid volunteers from Detroit-area plants staffed the Macomb County mask operations. Safety measures, such as physical distancing, enhanced on-site cleaning and pre-entry health screenings, were implemented to protect workers.

"People feel they are doing something important to help their community," said Doran. "Many have a personal connection with family members who are essential workers. It's about keeping people safe."

In addition, more than 30 engineers, designers, buyers and members of the manufacturing team were asked to help with product development, sourcing materials and equipment, and planning the production process.

The team sourced the necessary raw materials by leveraging GM's existing supply chain. These materials include metal nose pieces, elastic straps and blown, non-woven fabric filter material. Simultaneously, GM collaborated with JR Automation in Holland and Esys Automation in Auburn Hills to design and build the custom machinery needed to assemble the masks. In the case of Esys, needed tooling was built so that the nose piece could be inserted into three layers of fabric and the ear pieces welded to the mask. Previously, this welding work had to be completed manually.

The flat, level 1 face masks have been delivered to metro Detroit and greater Michigan area hospitals as well as to medical facilities across the country, said Doran. **M**

Top: General Motors Chairman and CEO Mary Barra tours the GM Warren facility where workers began final preparation for manufacturing Level 1 face masks on April 1.

Bottom: Workers produce N95-style filtering facepiece respirators April 21 at the General Motors manufacturing facility in Warren.

PHOTOS BY JOHN F. MARTIN FOR GENERAL MOTORS

CONNECT

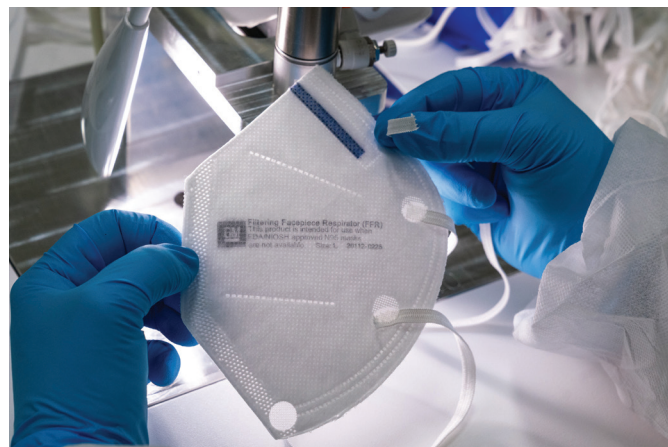


CONTINUING COVID-19 EFFORTS

General Motors originally planned to produce up to 50,000 masks a day – or up to 1.5 million masks a month. With the improved process, that number later jumped to more than 3 million per month. GM distributed the masks to medical facilities as well as to its own plants to protect employees in critical GM operations in the spring. When many

GM facilities started coming back on line in mid-May, face masks were also delivered to plants to protect workers on the assembly line.

For more information on General Motors' efforts to combat the COVID-19 outbreak, visit gm.com/coronavirus.



Supply chain

Sterling Heights firm keeps Henry Ford Hospital stocked with PPE

By Jane Peterson

As Henry Ford Health System's doctors, nurses and medical professionals took care of the sick and vulnerable during the COVID-19 outbreak, TD Industrial Coverings, Inc. (TDIC) took care of staff by ensuring that they had the personal protective equipment (PPE) that they needed to stay safe as they went about their work.

The longtime family owned and operated business, located in Sterling Heights, pivoted from its core competency of creating protective automotive robot covers to provide medical PPE. Since the company is used to sewing different designs with various materials for its customers, this task was "pretty much right up our alley," said Tom D'Andreta, sales and design representative with TDIC.

"We didn't need to retool all that much," he said.

The gowns, which utilize a polyester woven material with a laminated back layer similar to linings in military bags, were designed with as few seams as possible for ease of design and production. They include a forward-facing design so medical staff can "walk into the gown" instead of bringing their arm up behind them to wrap it around. They also feature a thumbhole so a glove can be put over the cuff to further limit exposure, said D'Andreta.

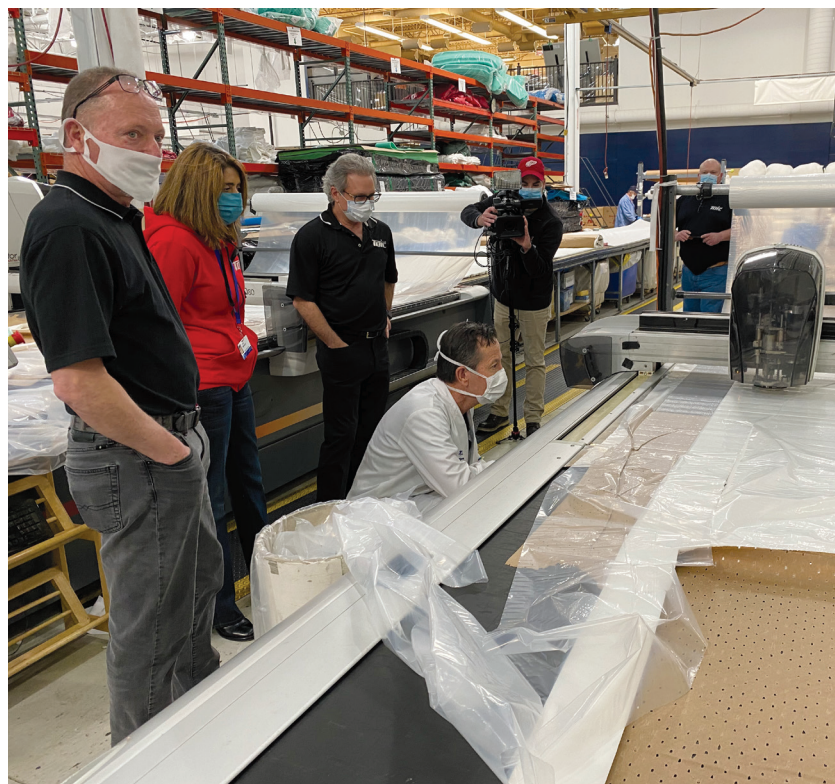
Products produced by TDIC, including isolation gowns and medical masks, are available immediately for use by Henry Ford Health System employees.

Having a local provider for these PPE items limits the liability of supply chain disruptions and is critical to the state's fight against COVID-19, said D'Andreta.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

ABOUT TD INDUSTRIAL COVERINGS, INC.

TD Industrial Coverings, Inc. (TDIC) is a 9001 ISO certified manufacturing company that develops custom protective coverings for automotive, medical, aerospace and general manufacturing verticals. Established in 1981 by Tommaso D'Andreta, TDIC is located in Sterling Heights and continues to demonstrate and operate according to the same family values that it was founded on nearly 40 years ago.



"TDIC is proud to aid healthcare workers on the front lines of this effort," he said. "Our employees have a real sense of purpose and take pride in their work. They know it might go to our friends and family in the area."

The transition from automotive to medical supplies was smooth and swift. By the first week in April, TDIC employees had made multiple deliveries to Henry Ford Health System hospitals in multiple locations across the metro Detroit region.

"We are impressed with TDIC's rapid deployment and grateful to all of their employees who are supporting us during this critical time," said Lisa Prasad, managing director of Henry Ford Innovations, in a news release in April.

Shipments were prioritized so the hospitals that were the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic received the essential protective equipment in the most expeditious manner possible.

TDIC worked with Henry Ford Health System professionals to design effective and comfortable PPE utilizing TDIC's design and production capabilities.

"We are proud TDIC is leveraging their expertise at this most critical time of need," said Sterling Heights Mayor Michael Taylor. "TDIC has been a long-standing committed community partner in Sterling Heights and we are fortunate they are stepping up to the plate. Our area is well positioned to face this crisis head on due to the advanced manufacturing and highly skilled workforce we possess in Sterling Heights. This is a fine example of our local manufacturers' agility and ability to shift on a dime to meet demand."

Even once TDIC employees go back to their automotive roots, D'Andreta said they may continue to seek out additional sources of production as well as other sources of PPE to other medical facilities on a first-come-first-serve basis. This would allow TDIC to help as many medical providers as possible and diversify its product offerings. **M**



Left: TD Industrial Coverings, Inc. pivoted from its core competency of creating protective automotive robot covers to provide medical PPE for Henry Ford Health System facilities. The company worked with Henry Ford Health System professionals to design effective and comfortable PPE utilizing TDIC's design and production capabilities.

Opposite page: Products produced by TD Industrial Coverings, Inc., including isolation gowns and medical masks, are available immediately for use by Henry Ford Health System employees.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TD INDUSTRIAL COVERINGS, INC.

Turnaround

Cadillac Products uses expertise to produce hospital gowns

By Jane Peterson

When she had a need, Maggie Williams did what many people do: She turned to her family.

Williams, a certified registered nurse anesthetist at Sinai-Grace Hospital in Detroit, was working the frontlines of the COVID-19 outbreak this spring when she and her co-workers were worried about running dangerously low on personal protective equipment (PPE). She mentioned the need to her father, Robert Williams Jr., who quickly noted the similarities between the protective medical gowns and the plastic films made at his company, Cadillac Products Packaging Company. Robert then turned to his brother, Michael Williams Jr., who is chairman of Cadillac Products Automotive Company. Together, Cadillac Products Automotive Company and Cadillac Products Packaging Company have locations in Roseville as well as Troy, Rogers City, Illinois, Georgia and Texas.

Robert and Michael moved quickly to figure out how they could help boost the supply of these disposable gowns critical to protecting doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, nursing home workers, clinical workers, emergency responders, COVID-19 testing personnel and other medical staff members. Tooling and other needed equipment were designed and manufactured, taking into consideration the challenge of sizing mismatch between machinery and gown dimensions. Then, the team kicked into high gear.

Mike Williams III, general manager of Cadillac Products Automotive, said materials arrived at 1 p.m. March 27 and by 6 p.m. the same day, the first test gowns were rolling off the machines. In all, it took only 50 hours from the time materials were received to when the first gowns were perfected and



produced. The team manufactured 500 gowns the first week with the first shipment sent to Sinai-Grace Hospital on April 5.

“Our team saw a need, were ready to show up and happy to help,” said Mike. “I’m extremely proud of how quickly our team responded to this manufacturing challenge. All our team members were excited to help, working through the weekends to bring our capability online. It’s great that we have such a capable team that can make a difference in this time of need.”

In all, about 75 employees volunteered to be a part of the effort.

Since then, improved tooling and equipment has enabled the company to make 20,000 gowns a week. The polyethylene film is made at Cadillac Products’ Paris, Ill. plant and shipped to the Roseville facility, where the gown shapes are cut out. Then they are sent to Troy to have the sleeves heat sealed and the gowns packaged in boxes.

By late April, Cadillac Products produced more than 30,000 gowns. Sinai-Grace had received 18,000 gowns and Detroit Receiving Hospital also received a shipment. Additional boxes of gowns were sent to hospitals in northeast Michigan, Maryland, Washington state, Chicago and Texas as well as given to employees to donate to their friends and family in need on the frontlines.

Maggie said she and her co-workers appreciated the steady supply and high quality of the gowns. She said they were designed with a thumb hole so that the sleeve of the gown wouldn’t ride up, potentially exposing the wrist and lower arm.

Maggie and her family are proud of the effort put forth by Cadillac’s team members.

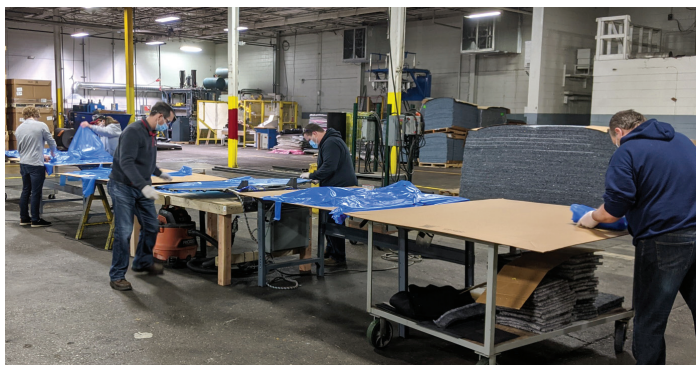
“It’s definitely been a beneficial effort,” she said. “We’ve always had enough gowns and we have received many compli-

MORE WHERE THAT CAME FROM

In addition to producing disposable hospital gowns for medical personnel, Cadillac Products has donated 180 N95 respirators from inventory to Sinai Grace Hospital. These

respirators were normally used in the company’s manufacturing processes; however, because normal production was suspended due to the pandemic, leadership felt the respirators should be further used to help the cause instead.





Left: Cadillac Products Automotive Company in Roseville cuts out gown shapes for the disposable gowns which are distributed to Detroit-area hospitals.

Middle: Cadillac Products Automotive Company in Roseville cuts out gown shapes for the disposable gowns to protect doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, nursing home workers, clinical workers, emergency responders, COVID-19 testing personnel and other medical staff members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bottom: Cadillac Products Automotive Company in Roseville has been producing disposable gowns for medical personnel throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Opposite page: Cadillac Products Automotive Company team members are proud to produce disposable gowns used to help fight the COVID -19 pandemic.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CADILLAC PRODUCTS AUTOMOTIVE COMPANY



ments and words of encouragement from staff. Throughout this crisis there have been many unknowns and anxieties. This effort helped to mitigate those anxieties and allowed healthcare workers to focus on their vulnerable patients.”

Several suppliers also donated toward the cause, including Dow Chemical, which donated resin for making the polyethylene film; Universal Container Corporation donated boxes; Stevens Custom Fabrication donated custom heat-seal bars; and Rupp Engineering worked on design and fabrication of tooling.

“This would have been a lot harder without the support of our key suppliers,” said Michael. “Asking for help once, and help arriving right on time is exactly what these companies do for us normally. Having them step up and deliver in this difficult time doesn’t surprise me — these are great family-owned companies.”

Should a continued need for gowns exist after the automotive industry returns to work and the Cadillac Products factories are needed once again to produce their normal production, manufacture of these gowns can transfer entirely to the Troy site. The plant is currently being prepared for the move.

Cadillac Automotive Products has a rich history of contributing during times of need. In fact, it was formed in 1942 to help address urgent needs during World War II. Today, the company employs nearly 250 people and is managed by third-generation family owners.

“My grandpa is 93 and he was amazed by the impact the family business could have during this medical crisis,” Maggie said. “It really is meaningful for healthcare workers to know there are people out there caring for us while we are caring for patients.” **M**



Wellness

Recreational assets help Macomb residents achieve health goals

By Jane Peterson

If there's one thing everyone realized this spring, it's the importance of being active outside, breathing in the fresh air and soaking up the sunshine. The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced to many in the community that recreating outdoors isn't a luxury regulated to just the weekend, but a necessity to everyone's physical and mental well-being that should be enjoyed as often as possible.

Macomb County's Healthy Parks initiative supports healthy community engagement by focusing on the region's recreational facilities and green spaces, places where people of all ages, abilities and activity levels can recreate outdoors.

"We're pretty excited about it," said Gerard Santoro, program director, Parks and Natural Resources for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development. "Just being outdoors and feeling the sun is healing for the body and mind."

Formed by the Macomb County Health Department and Macomb County Planning & Economic Development, the initiative is part of the Parks and Natural Resources master plan. It seeks to build on the parks facilities already in place while welcoming new ideas to make the county's outdoor spaces more beneficial to fitness and family fun. The goal is to create a conversation about the best use of parks funds by sharing ideas and replicating successful programs in other areas.

County parks directors and planners met virtually in late April to identify ways that current recreational assets can help Macomb County residents establish a fitness routine and en-

hance healthy habits. A big part of that is finding ways to engage residents and local governments in the health department's Community Health Assessment.

The assessment is a way to gauge the community's health and fitness needs, said Whitney Litzner, health planning manager for the Macomb County Health Department. The first assessment, completed in 2016, showed that residents were struggling to find places to go for physical fitness activities, facing chronic disease challenges and wanting more information about a healthy lifestyle.

From those findings, the Macomb County Health Department developed the 2017 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), a work plan that defined how community partners planned to address these priority health issues. In coordination with local hospitals, community stakeholders and partner organizations, more than 30 Macomb County organizations identified four priority areas for the CHIP:

- Chronic disease and healthy lifestyle
- Behavioral health
- Access to services
- Social determinants of equity

The Move More Macomb campaign was one initiative developed from these survey results. Created in 2018, its focus is to help community members find physical activity opportunities for all fitness levels, ages and budgets. Its mission is to encourage everyone who lives, works and plays in Macomb County to move more. The program's website is a community resource for discovering more information about the importance of physical activity, where to exercise and how to get started.

According to Santoro, chronic diseases are a major concern in Macomb County with numbers that trend slightly above national averages for obesity, diabetes and other illnesses. By working with the health department, the Healthy Parks initiative seeks to develop a plan that would better address these issues.

The Healthy Parks initiative brings a regional approach to planning by bringing local government entities together to collaborate on issues associated with access, places and programs. Santoro said the program creates dialogue between local governments and county agencies as all entities work to improve the health and well-being of local residents.

Down the road, the group plans to work together to build, maintain and increase access to regional trails, greenways, waterways and parks. Santoro said there are areas in the southern portion of the county that lack access to trails, so he would like to see that change.

Already there have been improvements to trails in Warren and Center Line, he said. In addition, there is a plan for improving green spaces along the north branch of the Clinton River that would also mitigate flooding in the area. The Green Macomb program is also focusing on its Urban Forestry program which seeks to boost the tree canopy in Macomb County communities. **M**

CONNECT

COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT 2020

This summer, Macomb County residents can expect to see the Community Health Assessment.

The survey, said Whitney Litzner, health planning manager for the Macomb County Health Department, should be sent out in mid-June. Organizers hope to receive 8,000 responses. These will be used to determine future health and fitness goals through the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) that establishes an action plan for focus areas.

The goal is to complete a Community Health Assessment every three to five years. The first one was completed in 2016. For more information, email healthplanning@macombgov.org.





Top: Macomb County's Healthy Parks initiative supports healthy community engagement by focusing on the region's recreational facilities and green spaces, places where people of all ages, abilities and activity levels can recreate outdoors.



Above and right: The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced to many in the community that recreating outdoors isn't a luxury regulated to just the weekend, but a necessity to everyone's physical and mental well-being that should be enjoyed as often as possible.

Bottom right: Playing at the beach is a wonderful way to involve all family members in healthy outdoor activity.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MACOMB COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

Respond



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Mount Clemens Community Schools, New Haven Community Schools, Richmond Community Schools,
Romeo Community Schools, Roseville Community Schools, South Lake Schools, Utica Community Schools,
Van Dyke Public Schools, Warren Consolidated Schools, Warren Woods Public Schools

For more information about Macomb Schools, go to www.misd.net

Revival

The Discovery Center adds to downtown Mount Clemens upswing

By Jane Peterson

The past five years have brought many changes to the county seat in downtown Mount Clemens. It started with the revival of the historic Emerald Theatre in 2016 and continues with The Discovery Center, scheduled to open later this year.

The Discovery Center is an 18,500-square-foot science and technology museum that features hands-on activities for children and teens. Formerly the Macomb Children's Hands On Museum, the facility has been transformed with new exhibits, science displays, educational and family programming and year-round events. It is expected to bring more than 45,000 people to town its first year and inject thousands of dollars into the local economy with weekend visitors and school groups visiting the facility and frequenting nearby restaurants, gas stations and stores.

It adds to the rich history of culture and heritage in Mount Clemens, which is also home to Anton Art Center, Crocker House Museum, Michigan Transit Museum and the Emerald Theatre.

Originally the center was slated for a spring opening, but construction was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic this spring



when the facility was in the middle of installing exhibits.

For years, the nonprofit organization was a traveling museum, bringing science experiments directly to children. In 2018, it moved into a former Art-O-Craft store location in the 70 Macomb Place Building near Southbound Gratiot Avenue. The facility was near many downtown businesses and restaurants, but looking to expand their vision, museum leaders decided they wanted the downtown facility, that once sat vacant for 12 years, to be part of the revitalization effort that was bringing new energy to the historic downtown area.

"The timing was right for us," said Dusty Welsh, the center's executive director. "The county team is passionate about what is happening in the area and we think it's a really big deal. That's why we wanted to be a part of it."

Seeking to fill the demand for STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) activities in Macomb County, the center set about renovating its two-story space. The building is owned by GTR Companies and leased to the center for 10 years.

Working with the Mount Clemens Downtown Development Authority, a number of improvements were ready to be made in the spring, but scheduled construction was postponed due to the response to the COVID-19 crisis. Once the construction industry was able to get back to work, the façade is scheduled to be updated and other outdoor improvements made, such as installing new garage door windows and painting. Work will be completed using a combination of funding resources, including private donations, corporate sponsorships, state grant monies, local partnerships, volunteer work and fundraisers.

Inside, the space will be completely renovated with fresh paint, new flooring and exhibits.

The additional new exhibits are designed to appeal to children of all ages as well as teens and adults, offering additional exhibits and programs that go beyond a traditional children's museum that is geared toward ages 2-10. The upper concourse level inspires art and science learning and is a community space with free admission to the general public. It features a gift shop, ticketing booth, group gathering space for up to 80 people with a kitchen, art and science gallery, restrooms and lockers.

The lower level also includes a nature-themed Indoor Tots Play Park, with a treehouse jungle gym and slide for children under age 5. A parent lounge area offers moms and dads a place to sit and relax while they watch children play. Activities and programming will take place in various other community rooms, including a library room and reading circle, makerspace and art stu-

CONNECT

CHECK IT OUT

The Discovery Center is slated to open up this fall once COVID-19 restrictions on large gatherings are permitted. In the meantime, the center's website, DiscoveryMacomb.org, highlights several awesome indoor activities and science experiments that families can complete together.

The Discovery Outpost is an online hub that provides access and links to fun and educational partner content such as:

- Videos, webinars and programs
- Games and interactive apps
- DIY home science projects

For more information, call (586) 615-7928, email discoverymacomb@gmail.com or visit DiscoveryMacomb.org.



THE DISCOVERY CENTER

of Macomb Located in Downtown Mount Clemens



Above and opposite page: The additional exhibits at The Discovery Center are designed to appeal to children of all ages as well as teens and adults, offering additional exhibits and programs that go beyond a traditional children's museum that is geared toward ages 2-10.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MACOMB COUNTY DEPT. OF PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

dio room, STEAM Station lab and computer and technology lab. A Museum Without Walls hands-on exhibit is also located on the first level.

Upstairs, organizers plan to have rotating exhibits that change seasonally. One of the first will be "Space Odyssey: The Final Frontier," a space-themed aeronautics exhibit and space camp workshops. Other initial attractions include:

- Great Lakes Explorer exhibit and Michigan Natural History programming that allows families to delve into Great Lakes geog-

DEVELOPMENT

raphy, meet native wild animals during live demonstrations, play with a hands-on nature touch table, learn about invasive and native species and interact with live bugs and butterflies

- Body Works health exhibit. Designed for children ages 5-10, this space includes hands-on medical doctor play in an office setting, x-ray machine and slides and human anatomy charts. Materials emphasize healthy food choices and the importance of outdoor play

- The Michigan Farm and Garden exhibit includes a hands-on u-pick garden and produce section as well as a Michigan orchard apple picking activity while educating children about local farming efforts and agriculture

- The Robotics & Automotive Technology section is space dedicated to how items are manufactured. Targeted toward children ages 8-13, it includes a hands-on assembly line activity, mechanical and technology demonstrations and How It's Made Systems and Processes. It also incorporates information about workforce development programs for children and teens

Each exhibit is made possible thanks to local donors that provided funding resources for renovation. The Discovery Center is also working with area groups for sponsorship and programming opportunities, such as the Warren Astronomical Society, which will be presenting stargazer programs. **M**

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Pave the way

Mound Road project lays foundation for future industry innovation

By Jane Peterson

When construction on Mound Road begins in 2021, it will look like every other road project, but don't let that fool you. Macomb County Department of Roads (MCDR), along with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the cities of Sterling Heights and Warren, is installing state-of-the-art improvements designed to reduce the number of accidents on the local roadway and make traveling this busy corridor safer.

The improvements include unified lighting, improved pedestrian access, non-motorized multi-use paths, traffic flow improvements and more. Work is scheduled to begin in summer 2021 and last through 2024.

"Mound Road is a major roadway that connects people, communities and commerce, and Innovate Mound is an initiative to rebuild one of the most important corridors in southeast Michigan," said MCDR Director Bryan Santo. "The vision of the partnership behind this effort is a high quality, long-lasting roadway that incorporates the future of mobility and technology."

The project includes reconstructing nine miles of Mound Road from I-696 north to M-59. A section from 17 Mile Road to M-59 will also be widened to add a fourth lane in each direction.

Project cost is estimated at \$234 million. A large chunk of the tab will be picked up by an Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grant awarded through the U.S. Department of Trans-



portation. MCDR, along with the cities of Sterling Heights and Warren, coordinated with MDOT, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments and the Federal Highway Administration to secure the grant in 2018. At \$98 million, it is the largest grant any agency has ever received from the federal government, said John Abraham, director of traffic and operations with MCDR.

More than 47,000 people are employed along Mound Road, which supports an additional 71,100 jobs in Macomb County. Another 101,000 jobs are supported by the corridor's business activity, which serves as a major hub for global automotive, defense, aerospace and advanced manufacturing industries.

Mound Road has played a vital role in the county's prosperity since it was constructed in the 1940s. From moving tanks produced during the World War II effort to transporting high-tech research and development tools, every sector in Macomb County's economic fabric has traveled through this region for the better part of 80 years.

Unfortunately, during this time, the condition of the road dramatically deteriorated as it exceeded its expected performance lifespan, said Santo.

Abraham agreed that Mound Road has been a thorn in the side of drivers for a number of years. As the pavement eroded, potholes were filled, but they were a temporary fix. According to Abraham, MCDR was spending more than \$4.5 million every year on repairs that were not a permanent solution.

A second component of the project is the use of smart technology. The Innovate Mound team has discussed emerging technologies in automobile automation with General Motors, Chrysler and Ford, said Santo, so that the road infrastructure can be prepared for future innovation. As a result, the project's infrastructure includes advanced tracking technology, electric vehicle charging stations embedded in the pavement and technology with the ability to coordinate logistics for just-in-time delivery systems between suppliers, drivers and manufacturers, said Abraham.

Technology can also monitor road temperatures, said John Crumm, director of planning for MCDR, so that in the winter, road crews will be able to load trucks with the salt mixture best designed to react to current conditions.

In addition, there has been discussions with utility and communication companies such as Consumers Energy, DTE Energy, Verizon and others so the infrastructure addresses their needs as demands continue to grow, he said.

"This is going to be a showcase corridor," said Abraham. "We've fielded calls from officials in other states about how the technology is being embedded."

Some of this technology is not too far off in the future. General Motors' Research and Development team has tested technology that allows vehicles to alert drivers when they need to slow down or stop at upcoming intersections. Called Vehicle-to-Infrastructure (V2I) communication, the tests demonstrated how

CONNECT



WORKING DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Innovate Mound's pre-construction phase continued during the "Stay Home, Stay Safe" directive issued by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer earlier this spring. Using proper safety protocols, Bryan Santo, MCDR director, said work progressed on environmental analysis, traffic operations, access management,

engineering, project delivery, emerging mobility and non-motorized planning. The primary concern, he said, was the safety of the public, employees, contractors, consultants and their employees. After assessing whether every person working on the project could be appropriately protected by social distancing and the universal precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the decision was made to continue moving forward.

a sensor in a development vehicle picks up a signal from a traffic light equipped with smart signal technology. It then either lets the vehicle pass smoothly through the intersection or alerts the driver for the need to slow down or stop.

In essence, the vehicle knows when the traffic signal is going to turn red, green or yellow before the action takes place and you see it with your own eyes. This simple action could decrease the number of crashes at intersections that result in serious injury or death.

It could also be beneficial for first responders rushing to the scene of a crash or transporting a patient to the hospital because emergency vehicles could be given green lights all the way to their destination, said Crumm.

“It has different layers of priority,” he said. “If a sensor sees a truck coming and notices that it doesn’t have time to stop, the light can stay green a little bit longer to keep the truck moving.”

Tests have also been done to see if the strategy can get SMART buses back on schedule. Reliability is important to bus users and timely arrivals and departures could encourage more people to use public transportation, Crumm said.

This is a major step forward into the world of next-generation automotive research and development, which include connected vehicles and even autonomous vehicles. The Innovate Mound

project supports these technologies, such as Intelligent Transportation Systems, traffic signals and signs, connected vehicle pilot projects and real-time traffic monitoring.

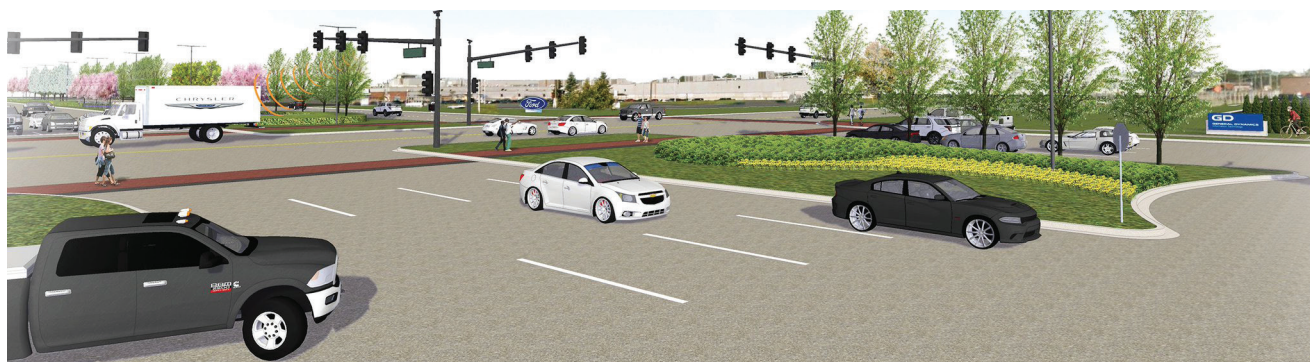
By allowing the timing of traffic signals to be reset based on real-time traffic patterns, already smart signal technology has led to better traffic flow and less traffic congestion on Mound Road.

Thanks to its state-of-the-art Communications and Technology Center called COMTEC, Macomb County has professionals trained in real-time traffic engineering who monitor traffic situations and use infrastructure to respond to them, said Crumm. This same method, he added, will be used during construction to help with congestion and let drivers know in real-time what challenges and time delays lay ahead.

The Innovate Mound project will ensure the roadway’s legacy throughout the community and promote economic investment in future decades, said Santo.

“This is a once-in-a-generation project that the entire community can take pride in,” he said. “Rebuilding this critical corridor will enhance our region, strengthen our economic future and provide the infrastructure necessary for Macomb County to continue to connect, grow and thrive.”

For more information, including complete project details, visit InnovateMound.org. **M**



Top and opposite page: State-of-the-art improvements designed to reduce crashes will be installed on Mound Road to make traveling this busy corridor safer. After assessing whether every person working on the project could be appropriately protected by social distancing and the universal precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the decision was made to continue moving forward on the project this past spring.

Middle: This rendering shows how the Mound Road project will look when completed. More than 47,000 people are employed along Mound Road, which supports an additional 71,100 jobs in Macomb County. Another 101,000 jobs are supported by the corridor’s business activity, which serves as a major hub for global automotive, defense, aerospace and advanced manufacturing industries.

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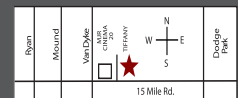
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Milestone

Family-owned Whistle Stop Hobby & Toy celebrates 50 years

By Jane Peterson

Being in the toy business isn't always all fun and games. It takes serious know-how and lots of work to make an independent toy and hobby shop not only survive, but thrive for 50 years.

Whistle Stop Hobby & Toy in St. Clair Shores has weathered economic crises that resulted after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the 2008 recession and now, the COVID-19 pandemic. Through it all, husband and wife team Richard and Carol Claggett – and now their three children, Rick Claggett, Julie Everitt and Wendy Bacon – have found a way to continue bringing joy to children's faces with a huge selection of educational toys, board games, plastic model kits, books, jigsaw puzzles, building blocks, train sets and more.

The secret to their success is simple: Outstanding customer service, quality products and competitive pricing. Through the years, Whistle Stop Hobby & Toy had become a destination spot, a place in the community where neighbors come to gather, chat and make play dates. There's a train that runs around the ceiling and a hands-on play table where kids play with toys while their parents shop.

"There's nothing like seeing the faces of kids when they come in and see all the bright colors and all the fun toys," said Everitt. "It's all about the experience."

She described how busy parents come into the store to shop for a birthday party gift for their child's classmate. They'll ask for recommendation from staff, who likely already knew the birthday boy and girl and what gifts had already been purchased. They steer the customer in the right direction, let them make a decision and then gift wrap the product and have them on the way to the party in no time.

All products in the store are hands on; no electronics are available for sale. Bacon orders all the toys and books; Claggett orders the hobby products, science kits, games and puzzles; and Everitt handles the hiring, training and customer service.

Bacon's sons worked in the store when they were teens and continue to work there part-time now. Although retired, Carol comes in to balance the books and Richard likes to talk to customers and keep an eye on the hobby part of the business – the antique collection, at least.

In fact, it was Richard's love for model trains that started this entire family adventure. Back in 1970, he was a designer at General Motors who was big into trains.

So, the couple opened up a hobby shop and Carol ran it during the day.



From its original spot in 1970 (third picture down) to its current location, Whistle Stop Hobby & Toy has become a destination spot. Owners Wendy Bacon, Julie Everitt and Richard Claggett Jr. (pictured left to right) keep the store stocked with traditional toys and books for children of all ages.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WHISTLE STOP HOBBY & TOY

The Claggett children all grew up in the store, which they joked about not being nearly as fun as it is now. Back then, the focus was on the hobby portion and Lionel trains.

“This is the only job I’ve ever had. I started when I was 16,” said Claggett. “I never wanted to do anything else.”

With community support, the store has doubled in size twice, once in 1986 when it moved to its current location at 21714 Harper Avenue in St. Clair Shores and then again during an expansion in 1996. Over the years, as interests changed and customer needs evolved, it turned into more of a toy store from strictly a hobby store, although electric trains continue to be

CONNECT

50TH ANNIVERSARY PLANS

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Whistle Stop Hobby & Toy with the Claggett family. There will be lots of sale items, giveaways, raffles and more Sept. 24-26 at the store, located at 21714 Harper Avenue in St. Clair Shores. For more information, visit, call (586) 771-6770 or check out their website at Whistle-Stop.com.



a big draw for adults.

Today, some of the big selling toys are Legos, Melissa & Doug wooden toys and Breyer horses.

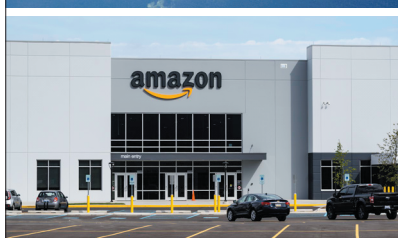
“We cater to trends lightly and stick with the tried and true toys that people recognize,” said Everitt. “We want to make learning fun.”

With the current COVID-19 pandemic, the family is selling a lot of jigsaw puzzles, art and crafts kits and board games like Settlers of Catan for family game nights at home. Customers are also requesting homeschool supplies and educational games as the school year finishes up at home. The business offered an online shop and curbside pickup during the crisis when customers weren’t allowed in the store.

Claggett predicts that the business will look slightly different in the coming months as restrictions are lifted.

Some business practices, like the hands-on play table, will change at least in the near future. The business has also cancelled its Play Days throughout summer.

Although some aspects of operations are bound to change thanks to the pandemic, the Claggett family plans to carry on in many ways like they have in the past with good prices, excellent products and a commitment to customer service. **M**



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Learning link

Center Line schools, Ford NGL partner to teach career-focused skills

By Jane Peterson

Ford Next Generation Learning (FNGL) and Center Line Public Schools (CLPS) are partnering to transform the way students will learn this fall. Students will shift to a more career-focused style of teaching with the goal of enhancing the regional workforce.

It's not changing what students learn, but rather the way they learn it. A national network of schools, Ford Next Generation Learning is an educational transformation model designed to prepare students for future careers by integrating academics with relevant job skills.

Today's employees are likely to switch jobs several times during their career. This means they need to be prepared to transition to multiple pathways and take more entrepreneurial action, said FNGL Coach Scott Palmer. That's why schools need to develop independent thinkers, allowing students to apply the theories they learn in class to relevant work environments.

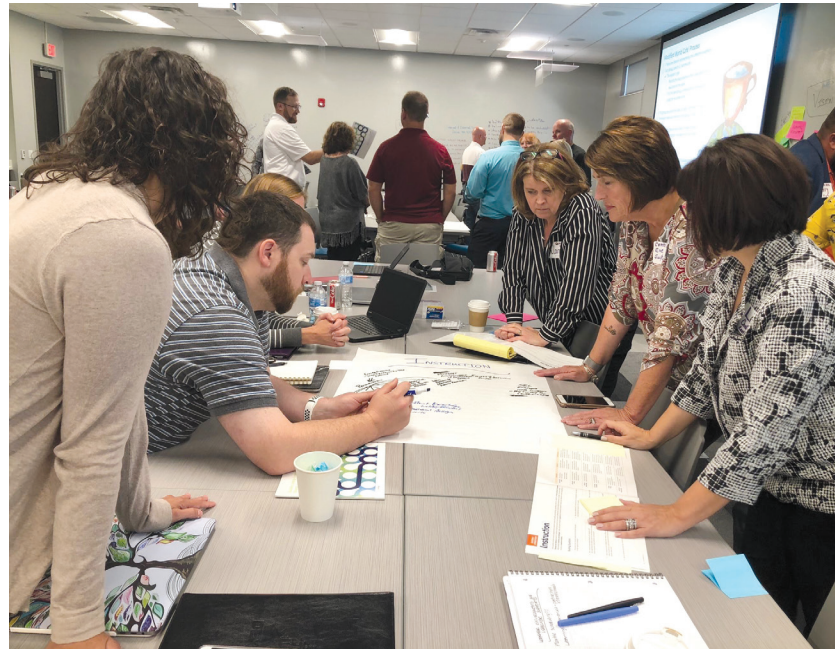
Center Line administrators, teachers, business owners, community leaders and parents have been committed to the FNGL process and are excited to teach lessons within a framework of career, school and life preparation. It hasn't been an easy or fast process despite the fact that CLPS was already moving in this direction, but it will be beneficial to students and that's all that matters to Center Line Superintendent Eve Kaltz.

"We have always been committed to doing what is best for our kids. We see the power in this process," she said.

CLPS currently has three educational academies: The 9th Grade Academy, the Academy of Industry, Technology and Innovation and the Academy of Health and Human Services. FNGL's career-focused teaching method will take place within the already established academy framework, providing students with information about career paths, giving them opportunities to interact with professionals in the field during job shadowing, going on visits to vocational programs and seeing presentations by local business leaders. During their time in the academies, students can also take part in internships and earn industry certifications as well as learn valuable life skills and college preparation tips.

Previously, Center Line High School, along with the Utica Center for Science and Industry in Sterling Heights, was among 10 powered by Ford STEAM Academies, meaning that the districts were utilizing the Ford Next Generation Learning concepts for a segment of their student population, but not for all high school students. For Center Line, that changes this fall.

Through the FNGL partnership, CLPS is able to take what



Above: In addition to studying core subjects, students explore different career paths and learn how the lessons of today fit in with their careers of tomorrow. The academies at Center Line High School teach core academics like science, math and English, but the topics and discussion within those subjects are geared to a specific career path, giving students a real-world application in their course of study.

Opposite page: At community planning sessions, local leaders and school officials reviewed outcomes, debated what a 21st century high school graduate should look like and developed plans.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CENTER LINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

they already had in place and make it more scalable and sustainable for systemic change, said Palmer.

The goals of FNGL are to adequately prepare students for their next steps in life, whether that is college, a career or trade school. This is achieved in a few ways, such as injecting workforce concepts into classroom lessons and introducing students to local business leaders.

Students see how the lessons presented in the classroom relate to the workforce. They aren't abstract concepts they may never use again. They are skills they can transfer to their future job and schoolwork.

By connecting students with local business leaders, the objective is to develop relationships and retain talent locally so the Center Line community continues to thrive with young people well trained for careers available in their hometown. Kaltz sees this strengthening the community as a whole.

Palmer said it takes a village to raise a school district and Macomb County officials and Center Line community leaders have come through for students. At some planning sessions, there were 80-100 people involved in the process by discussing goals, transformational learning and community engagement. They reviewed outcomes, debated what a 21st century high school graduate should look like and developed plans.

For three years, community groups have met, parents were polled and teachers became students. FNGL provided much of the professional development for educators, which is based on Ford Motor Co.'s transformational model and previous experiences from establishing FNGL schools in Nashville and Romeo school districts. Thanks to a Ford Next Generation Learning grant, teachers had the opportunity a few years ago to travel to Nashville to see other academies in action and attended many training sessions, said Kaltz.

Once implemented this fall, Center Line will be the second Macomb County school district with the FNGL model, following Romeo Community Schools. Overall, FNGL has been implemented in 40 communities across the United States, with additional programs in Europe.

CLPS already had the academies in place, so it was a mat-



CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

To learn more about the academies at Center Line High School, visit clps.org or call (586) 510-2100. Center Line High School is located at 26300 Arsenal Road in Center Line. To learn more about the Ford Next Generation Learning model, visit FordNGL.com.



ter of building from that foundation and taking learning to the next level.

The journey has been a long road that required a lot of self-reflection, re-thinking and re-focus. There were visits to other FNGL schools and FNGL representatives visited CLPS to conduct an audit on the district's strengths and identify where improvements were needed. No stone was left unturned.

Kaltz embraced the opportunity to put the district under the microscope.

"It allowed us to see things from a different perspective and brought a critical eye to the process," she said.

Teachers welcomed the new focus and were energized by the training sessions, said Lisa Oleski, CLPS assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

Things began to move quickly last fall and winter, when FNGL and CLPS developed a master plan and established a Community Convening Organization. This organization is the catalyst that brings business and industry together with the schools. Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development is stepping forward in this capacity for Center Line Public Schools.

Oleski said the master plan focused on four different areas:

- The 9th Grade Academy and how it will continue to build the foundation for career exploration
- Business engagement, examining ways to involve businesses in student learning and receiving feedback about skills businesses need future employees to have
- K-12 student career awareness and ways to begin career exploration at every level of education
- Communication and public relations, relaying information externally and internally while including student voices and letting them be heard

While the COVID-19 pandemic did interrupt the process this spring, Center Line Public Schools didn't miss a beat. Instead, said Palmer, it opened the door to thinking differently. Teachers went completely virtual and district leaders continued moving the process forward by working remotely and hosting online meetings.

This fall, additional grant monies will allow FNGL coaches to support Center Line staff with professional development and classroom coaching. **M**

Big gesture

In wake of COVID-19, local leaders step up to help small businesses

By Jane Peterson

Words cannot describe how small businesses throughout Macomb County have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. After non-essential businesses were directed to close their doors as part of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's March 24 executive order, many small business owners did so without question in an effort to stop the spread of this contagious virus.

However, as time marched on, small business owners began to feel the pain. Many operate on very slim margins and were concerned about the continued loss of business. Vicky Rad, director, Macomb County Planning and Economic Development (MCPED), said more than 18,000 businesses call Macomb County home. Many of them are small businesses directly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis by either shutting their doors or laying off employees.

"They are the heart of Macomb County," she said. "Small businesses bring value to a community through their unique products and customer-oriented services. They create walkable downtowns and add to the quality of life here."

MCPED distributed community grants for small businesses affected by COVID-19 through the Michigan Small Business Relief Fund. Working with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), First State Bank and the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce, MCPED coordinated economic assistance for local businesses affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

"Macomb County is committed to ensuring our small businesses survive this crisis," said Macomb County Executive Mark A. Hackel in a news release. "These local companies and organizations make Macomb a great place to call home and we will do everything we can to help them get through the COVID-19 situation."

The goal with the COVID-19 Small Business Relief Fund is to make sure small businesses have the funding necessary to get through this period of uncertainty so they can remain open or reopen in the future and provide services and employment opportunities for our community, added Rad.

Macomb County was awarded \$800,000 by the state, First State Bank donated \$100,000 and the county contributed \$30,000, officials said. In all, 148 Macomb County businesses shared \$930,000 in grant funds, with grant awards at \$5,000 and \$10,000 levels.

To help small businesses around the country, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) on March 27. This legislation included funding for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), a Small Business Association (SBA) loan program designed to help businesses keep their workforce employed during the COVID-19 crisis.

Under the PPP, eligible small businesses can receive the direct in-

centive of a loan to keep their workers on the payroll. SBA will forgive loans if all employees are kept on the payroll for eight weeks and the money is used for payroll, rent, mortgage interest or utilities.

The quick response from the government and financial institutions to address the needs of small businesses was appreciated, said Eugene Lovell, president and CEO of First State Bank, explaining that small businesses needed immediate help. Although the rollout wasn't as smooth as some hoped and the demand was tremendous, the PPP was re-funded on April 24.

Many small businesses with less than 500 employees, like restaurants, salons, spas and accounting offices, needed to reach out for assistance for the first time, said Rad. They were in different stages and had varying needs, with some completely shut down, others modifying operations with lower sales and some deemed as essential working on procedures to protect the safety of their employees.



"This is one of the toughest times to be in business. Our mission is to lead with compassion by determining how we can help you survive during this crisis," she said. "This was an immediate downturn. It was not gradual. There was no time to prepare."

Lovell said he was proud of the way Macomb County reacted to the crisis. He said his staff stepped up to the challenge, even though it was unprecedented territory and all new to them. Typically, First State Bank's operations center handles 4,000 to 5,000 calls a month, said Lovell. After PPP was announced, they received that same number of calls in just one week.

"Our staff is doing whatever they need to do to get the applications processed and help our customers," he said in mid-April. "People are working in a positive way to get through this crisis."

That wasn't easy, seeing how First State Bank, like many other

CONNECT

CHANGING THE WAY THEY DO BUSINESS

As the shutdown continued into mid-June, many small business owners continued to feel the pain from lack of sales.

Some applied for business loans and then worked to set up online shops or curbside pickup. Restaurants that may not have offered takeout before redesigned their operations to do so. Mid-level manufacturers adjusted their core competencies and retooled in order to produce personal protection equipment for medical personnel and essential workers. Some signed up new clients to fulfill services and orders once they reopened.

Many Macomb County residents, in an effort to help small businesses as much as possible during the shutdown, purchased gift cards in the hopes of being able to offer them some income during the crisis.

Throughout the crisis, businesses continued to care for each other, said Kelley Lovati, CEO of the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce. Some offered gift bags, free services and free meals to essential workers, for example.



As the shutdown continued into mid-June, many small businesses adjusted operations to bring in sales.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

businesses, was also in the midst of having its staff adjust how to work from home in order to keep them safe during the COVID-19 crisis. This was a step it had never taken before. Despite the challenges, staff did exceptionally well by immediately reaching out to customers and coordinating their efforts to get the phenomenal number of applications processed in a timely manner, said Lovell.

Many businesses had to change their daily operations during the crisis, added Kelley Lovati, CEO of the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce. With more people working from home, businesses depended on Zoom and other services to hold meetings online. Essential businesses had to adjust operations to make their environments safer for employees to come in and work, by adding hand sanitizer stations, scheduling extra cleanings and implementing social distancing policies, she added.

“We’re not going to see most businesses operate as normal for a while,” said Lovati.

The Macomb County Chamber of Commerce offered numerous resources to local small businesses and MCPED provided information about available loan programs in addition to PPP, such as the Economic Injury Disaster Loan, SBA Express Bridge Loan and SBA Debt Relief program. The Economic Development Foundation, a nonprofit Certified Development Company of the SBA serving businesses and banks throughout the state, offered SBA 504 Loans.

The Macomb County Chamber of Commerce is also working with legislators to let them know what local small business owners need, said Lovati.

Small business owners should consult with their local lender as to whether it is participating in the PPP and what other options may be available to them. **M**



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PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

Bass drop

Bassmaster Elite Series brings world's best anglers to Lake St. Clair

By Jane Peterson

When Pro Angler Kevin VanDam calls Lake St. Clair “the best smallmouth fishery on the planet,” you know you have something special.

Macomb County residents may take the lake for granted because it's such an integral part of their daily lives. However, some of the world's best fishermen can't wait to get out on the lake during the annual Bassmaster Elite Series. With the Bassmaster Angler of the Year title and numerous Bassmaster Classic berths hanging in the balance, the Elites will finish their season during the popular four-day fishing competition at Lake St. Clair Aug. 20-23.

The Bassmaster Elite Series is the highest level of professional bass fishing tournaments. Competitors qualify through the Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Opens or the B.A.S.S. Nation, and anglers who are already on the Elite Series must re-qualify each year by maintaining enough points throughout the season. In addition, pro anglers compete all season for the opportunity to win points toward the Toyota Bassmaster Angler of the Year award and to qualify for the Bassmaster Classic.

Macomb County is the last stop on this year's nationwide series tour, marking the ninth time the major event has returned to Lake St. Clair since 1994.

The event is expected to inject \$1.1-\$2.1 million into the local economy as participants and spectators stay in area hotels, eat in local restaurants, purchase merchandise at small businesses and fill up their gas tanks across the county, said Gerard Santoro, program director, Parks and Natural Resources for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development.

In 2018, attendance at Elite events averaged 12,000 people.

By promoting Lake St. Clair as a premier bass fishing location on a nationally-televised stage, the tournament also spurs economic development by showcasing the community and encouraging tourism.

“We all know how great it is, but this event brings exposure to Lake St. Clair that attracts bass fishermen from around the world,” said Santoro. “They often come to fish throughout the season.”

During the final two days of the fishing tournament, the Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce and Make Macomb Your Home partner to present the Bass, Brew and BBQ Festival. The event, scheduled for Aug. 22-23 at Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township, features Michigan craft beer and local breweries, concerts, barbeque, entertainment and more. Tours are also available of the Navy ship Pride of Michi-



gan, home of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps, a national youth development program modeled after the Navy's professional development system.

The festival is open to the public and there is no cost for admission. Even if you are not a fisherman, Stacy Ziarko, president and CEO at Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce, said you'll enjoy the competition and festival.

"It really opened my eyes up to the sport," she said. "Come out and learn something new and see why these anglers love Lake St. Clair. There is a big pride factor in what we have here."

The festival is part of Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel's Blue Economy Initiative that continues to seek ways to attract positive attention to the lake.

An Outdoors EXPO featuring Bassmaster sponsors is also scheduled for Aug. 22-23. Consumers can shop for apparel and fishing gear while enjoying take on-the-water boat/motor demos, special giveaways and interactive exhibits. Fans may be able to catch their favorite pros when they are not competing as well.

Competition starts early all four days of the Bassmaster Elite Series. Fans gather along Lake St. Clair the first two days of competition, beginning at 7 a.m., for the Take-Off. During this time, colors are raised, the National Anthem is played, competitors are announced and a parade of bass boats head off across the lake for competition. After Friday's event, the field is cut to the top 35. On Sunday, only the top 10 will compete.

Every day, spectators gather around the Bassmaster stage and settle in their lawn chairs to cheer for their favorite pros. There's a DJ to keep the event fun during pre-show activities before weigh-ins occur. The entire event is very family-friendly.

"Fishing enthusiasts or not, these events are something everyone can look forward to," said Santoro.

Ziarko agreed.

"Come out, have a great time and learn more about fishing, boating and water recreation," she said. "It's very cool to have this event right here in our own backyard." **M**



Local vendors feature fabulous food at the Bass, Brew and BBQ Festival. The event is scheduled for Aug. 22-23 at Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township. The Festival highlights Michigan craft beer and local breweries, concerts, barbeque, entertainment and more.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

As this issue was going to press, the Bassmaster Elite Series and Bass Brew and BBQ Festival was scheduled to be held. To discover more details as the festival gets nearer, visit the Bass, Brews & BBQ Facebook page or log on to MacombGov.org.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, both events may look a little different than past years. Gerard Santoro, program director, Parks and Natural Resources for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development, said safety is a priority, so in order to reinforce social distancing, some events or practices may change.



Water way

MCC introduces marine program to address regional needs

By Jane Peterson

When Macomb Community College officials discovered that local marinas were sending employees out of state for training, the college did what it does best: Develop a program to address local business needs and provide training for careers that have great demand in the region.

In this case, it was a comprehensive five-week program for marine technicians. The program focuses on developing the skill sets critical to helping the marine industry address its shortage of qualified personnel and providing individuals with entry into a dynamic field.

In conjunction with the Michigan Boating Industries Association (MBIA), Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and their partners, Macomb Community College created a short-term, intensive program in order to get skilled employees into the workplace as quickly as possible.

“One of the struggles is that they were dealing with a skilled trades gap. The industry as a whole reached an apex in the struggle to find skilled employees,” said Patrick Rouse, director, Workforce & Continuing Education, Engineering and Advanced Technology at Macomb Community College. “It’s a great



In conjunction with the Michigan Boating Industries Association, Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and their partners, Macomb Community College created a short-term, intensive program in order to get skilled employees into the workplace as quickly as possible.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MACOMB COUNTY DEPT. OF PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

opportunity for those who want to get involved in the marina industry.”

Typically a skilled trades program requires eight months of instruction, but since the need was so great, Macomb Community College worked with its partners to develop a fast-track program. The five-week course requires a 40-hour week commitment from its 20 students.

Nicki Polan, executive director, Michigan Boating Industries Association, said workforce development is a priority for members.

“Our industry has a \$7.8 billion impact on the state’s economy each year, and we need qualified marine technicians to keep it going and growing,” she said.

Macomb County has 32 miles of Lake St. Clair shoreline and is home to more than 100 marinas. This freshwater coast is a premiere location for lakefront living as well as recreation activities like swimming, boating and fishing. Communities see an annual economic impact of \$1.7 billion. This blue economy also provides more than 5,700 jobs with over 200 businesses that sell and/or service boats employing nearly 1,200 people.

So, it should come as no surprise that with an estimated 10,000 boat slips, 53,000 registered boats and more than a million launches from public ramps in 2013, Macomb County ranks near the top of the state in recreational boating.

With such a large industry in its backyard, it’s been exciting to watch this program come together, said Rouse.

Macomb Community College was set to launch the marine technician program in April, but it was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pause, Rouse said interest in the program grew quickly and the college received encouraging feedback from the business community as well as poten-

CONNECT



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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Those considering enrollment in the marine technician program should contact Macomb Community College for updated information on the next session.

Participants should appreciate the water, boating and the outdoors, be mechanically inclined and enjoy hands-on work. To be eligible for the training program, prospective students must pass the Tests of Adult Basic Education and Wide Range Achievement Test 4, which will be administered by the college.

For more information, call (586) 498-4100 or email workforcedev@macomb.edu.

tial students.

Students learn in both classroom and lab environments. The cost of the training is \$5,000 plus approximately \$500 in materials. Upon completion, graduates are prepared for jobs as marine service technicians, which encompass a range of duties including interacting with boat owners about engine concerns, maintaining working engines, trouble-shooting engines, replacing worn or damaged parts, assembling and disassembling engines, as well as keeping records on inspections and repairs.

Those who complete Macomb's marine technician program earn six certifications/certificates:


- American Boat and Yacht Council – Marine Service Technician
- National Occupational Competency Testing Institute
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration – OSHA 10 – Maritime
- First Aid
- CPR
- Macomb Community College – Certificate of Marine Technician

Marine mechanic jobs provide full-time, year-round employment with competitive salaries and benefits. Many mechanics earn \$35,000-\$45,000 annually. It's a great entry-level position, said Rouse.


"Once again, our business development team continues to develop impactful partnerships with strategic employers to create community driven solutions," said County Executive Mark A. Hackel. "We are pleased to partner with the college and our marinas to introduce this first of its kind program in Michigan. Not only will this training help our marinas hire qualified employees, but it will open the door to an interesting and well-paying career for graduates of the program."

Macomb Community College is also working in partnership with the Macomb Intermediate School District to pilot a dual enrollment marine technician program for high school seniors pursuing career and technical education pathways.

This program will run two to three afternoons a week for approximately 28 to 30 weeks at the Michigan Technical Education Center in Warren. There will be 15 to 20 spots available. Students will learn in both the classroom and in technical training labs, working on a variety of engines to learn about and conduct routine maintenance as well as to identify and troubleshoot engine problems. Technical components of the program include blueprint reading, electrical wiring, engines/propulsion systems, plumbing, hydraulics, rigging and carpentry. Students will also learn customer service skills, as well as developing a resume, conducting a job search and interviewing. **M**



*God be in my head,
and in my understanding.
God be in my eyes and in my looking,
God be in my mouth and in my speaking.
God be in my heart and in my thinking,
God be at my end and at my departing.*



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Vital role

Lake St. Clair pivotal in economy, quality of life in Macomb

By Jane Peterson

Its scenic views, excellent fishing and miles of beaches make Lake St. Clair one of the most popular lakes in southeastern Michigan. Of its coastline, a whopping 32 miles fall in Macomb County, attracting residents, visitors and businesses to its shore.

“There is an intense, passionate boating community in Macomb County,” said Steve Remias, president of the Lake St. Clair Tourism Initiative and retired president of MacRay Harbor. “We were set for an incredibly active boating year.”

COVID-19 may slow down projections a bit as people begin to cautiously emerge from the shutdown this summer and get back out on the water. Overall, however, boating is a great way to spend time with family.

Many visit Lake St. Clair to relax on a boat, swim or go fishing. Bird watching is another favorite pastime as Lake St. Clair is along a major migratory path for waterfowl and song birds.

Lake St. Clair is an amazing asset for the entire state, said Nicki Polan, executive director of the Michigan Boating Industries Association. She said roughly half of the boats on the water are involved in fishing and Lake St. Clair is a tremendous draw for anglers.

The Lake St. Clair Tourism Initiative is a nonprofit organization created several years ago to protect the lake as well as boost awareness and help encourage development of assets in the freshwater community on and around the lake. Members hail from a variety of related industries, including Macomb County, the Michigan Boating Industries Association, the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce, boat dealers, marina owners and other related businesses.

Recognizing that Lake St. Clair plays a central role in Macomb County’s economy, with hundreds of businesses like marinas, water rentals and restaurants depending on the lake to draw in customers, Initiative leadership is looking forward to expanding membership and ramping up their efforts to promote this beautiful lake from Bridge-to-Bridge.

“We’re looking at ways to promote all the great things we have to offer in, around and near Lake St. Clair,” said Brad Simmons, director of the Lake St. Clair Tourism Initiative.

Members are currently engaged in conversation about developing an app and enhanced website so visitors can zoom in for up-to-date information about launch sites, marinas and other businesses. Remias said they want to make the experience both visual and verbal so visitors can hear the stories behind local businesses and experience everything Lake St. Clair has to offer.

Implementing lifestyle promotions and wayfinding signage are other items on the to-do list.

There are nearly 8 million people in the entire region surrounding Lake St. Clair, said Simmons, and businesses along the shore enjoy a vibrant boost from the many festivals that attract thousands of visitors to the area each summer. Among the popular events are the concerts at Lake St. Clair Metropark, the Air Show from Selfridge Air Force Base, St. Clair Art Fair,

The sunset is striking over Lake St. Clair. This is a view from MacRay Harbor.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LAKE ST. CLAIR TOURISM INITIATIVE



CONNECT

LAKE ST. CLAIR ACTIVITIES

You don't need to own a boat to enjoy water adventures on Lake St. Clair.

"There are lots of activities you might not have thought about," said Steve Remias, president of the Lake St. Clair Tourism Initiative and retired president of MacRay Harbor.

You can also:

- Go swimming
- Relax at the Lake St. Clair Metropark beach
- Go fishing
- Rent a boat
- Go for a walk on the beach
- Rent a paddleboard
- Rent a kayak or canoe
- Go birdwatching
- Float on a tube
- Take a tour boat cruise
- Watch the sunset over the lake
- Have dinner along the waterfront
- Rent a tiki boat

New Baltimore Fishfly Festival, Aqua Fest in St. Clair Shores, Algonac Lions Pickerel Tournament & Festival, St. Clair Riverfest Races, Metro Beach Festival and Metro Boat Show, to name a few.


A number of competitive fishing tournaments are also held at the lake, including the Bassmaster Elite Series. Macomb County is the last stop on this year's nationwide series tour, marking the ninth time the major event has returned to Lake St. Clair since 1994. It is expected to inject \$1.1-\$2.1 million into the local economy. It returns because of the world-class bass fishing and the fans.

Many anglers agree that Lake St. Clair is one of the best bass fishing lakes anywhere, so anglers are often out on the water. When anglers come back to shore, they often pump money into the local economy by stopping at stores, getting gas, grabbing a bite to eat, staying in hotels and visiting other areas of recreation.

Although many festivals have been canceled this year due to concerns about COVID-19 safety, some near the end of the season, like Bass, Brews & BBQ, are still planned. Make sure to check event websites before heading out as events are subject to change or cancellation.

There is so much to do in Lake St. Clair Metropark as well, said Simmons, calling the popular lakefront park a "crown jewel."

The lake can have an impact even on businesses that aren't connected to Lake St. Clair. Today, employees want a place they can call home, a community where they can work and play. Lake St. Clair makes Macomb County's cities, villages and townships an appealing option for talented, skilled employees the area's automotive, defense and aerospace industries are trying to attract.

"There's a lot of community pride in the lake. You don't have to go far to enjoy this incredible resource," said Simmons. 





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Celebration

Macomb County Pride group encourages diversity regionwide

By Jane Peterson

Residents of all religions, ethnicities and cultures are drawn to Macomb County not only for its good schools, plentiful career opportunities and ample recreational activities, but also because it is full of welcoming communities that celebrate diversity and inclusion.

However, until recently there was never an organized group geared toward the LGBTQ+ community.

“We know that Macomb County has a LGBTQ population,” said Phil Gilchrist, one of the Macomb County Pride organizers. “We just never had a group where people could come together to connect.”

He and other community members organized the group to focus on creating a more supportive environment for the LGBTQ+ community and becoming a resource in Macomb County.

According to Gilchrist, small business owners have been supportive of the effort and county officials have been champions for inclusivity. Macomb County has long believed that diversity leads to more vibrant communities where everyone feels safe and welcome.

Macomb County Pride was hoping to share its mission with the public during the county’s first Pride Festival on June 27, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event has been postponed for now.

Detroit and Ferndale have long held Pride events that bring the LGBTQ+ community together and feature local resources available for the local LGBTQ+ members and activities for participants to show their support, said Gilchrist. Macomb County Pride was hoping to bring that same spirit to Mount Clemens.

While a new organization, Macomb County Pride did host



The DRAG-ing in the New Year fundraiser for Macomb County Pride was well received, attended by more than 100 people.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PRIDE

a very successful fundraising event on New Year’s Eve called DRAG-ing in the New Year. Held at the Emerald Theatre, the evening featured a professional drag show with local drag performers and entertainment by DJ Marquis, food, activities and specialty cocktails. It was well received, attended by more than 100 people.

As an alternative to the postponed June celebration, Gilchrist said organizers are hoping to host a series of smaller events later this year to continue to raise visibility. There is discussion about a Pride picnic or tea party, but nothing has been finalized. Depending on state guidelines, these may turn into virtual events if larger gatherings can’t be held yet, he said.

In the meantime, Macomb County Pride continues to raise awareness about the local LGBTQ+ community throughout the county. Earlier this year the organization asked several cities and townships to approve Pride Month resolutions, stating their support for the LGBTQ+ community. These were approved by Eastpointe, Utica and Warren. Gilchrist said he expected other local governments to pass the resolution in upcoming months as well, but their actions were thwarted by the immediate response necessary to address the COVID-19 crisis.

“People are looking for diversity in neighborhoods,” said Gilchrist. “We want to recognize that the LGBTQ+ community exists as well as connect and elevate the LGBTQ+ community that is already here.” **M**

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

According to Phil Gilchrist, one of the organizers behind Macomb County Pride, there has been a tremendous amount of support for the organization since it was organized last year. To show your support or learn more, visit Macomb County Pride at macombcountypride.com or email macombcountypride@gmail.com. For the latest details on upcoming Pride events, visit facebook.com/macombcountypride.



Michael DeVault

Working with others, providing leadership during pandemic

By Jane Peterson



Michael DeVault

Let's face it: 2020 hasn't necessarily been kind to educators, students and parents. After the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly shuttered schools in mid-March, the school year was turned upside down. Students wondered when they would see their friends. Seniors worried about missing prom and end-of-the-year celebrations. Parents questioned if it would be safe for their children to return to school and teachers quickly transitioned from classroom lessons to online learning.

It has been a complex and ever-changing situation, but Macomb Intermediate School District Superintendent Michael DeVault said one thing has always guided his discussions with Macomb County school officials this spring: The safety of students.

DeVault has looked after the county's students after joining the Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD) as assistant superintendent for Personnel and Employee Relations in 1991. He has experience in the private sector, public sector and has a long history of collaborating with superintendents, educators, parents, business and community leaders. A long time superintendent at the MISD, DeVault has had career stops in Utica Community Schools and Kalamazoo. He started his career as a teacher in the Port Huron area following his service in the military. DeVault received his bachelor's degree in business and master's degree in education from Western Michigan University.

People choose Macomb County because it is a great place to grow a business and raise a family. Here is what he had to share about the MISD's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q How has the scope of your work changed from the impact of COVID-19?

A The actual work hasn't changed. Despite not being in the buildings every day with students, our mission remains two-fold: To provide a quality education and to make sure children don't go hungry. We have provided both since classroom learning ended in mid-March. Macomb County superintendents have met almost daily since March to make countywide plans.

The pandemic has had a major impact on families and support systems. The need is so great. Tens of thousands of Macomb County students have been provided food because of the strong relationship of a healthy diet and education. If students are hungry, they can't engage in learning. It has been a significant collaborative effort with volunteers and school employees wearing masks and gloves to distribute food. Special needs families receive service at their doorstep, while others visit countywide sites to receive a variety of nutrients. We are gearing up to continue through summer by working with Gleaner's and other groups.

Q How has the MISD helped districts transition to remote learning?

A Districts have scaled up their learning with remote lessons and the MISD has partnered to develop these plans. Those that have the technology use similar software and common platforms to deliver instruction. Districts without the digital resources distribute packets of work that can be completed with a pencil and paper. We work in a collaborative way for our 130,000-plus students.

Research shows there is no substitute for a classroom teacher, however, teachers are rising to the occasion to help children receive lessons remotely. The MISD has provided guidelines for all Macomb County school districts that were developed with input from district superintendents.

Q How has the MISD assisted the community during the crisis, especially essential workers?

A The governor asked us to provide childcare so our first responders would have a place where they could send their children for quality childcare while they went to work. Our staff did an excellent job, working with community partners, responding to this request. They reached out to several childcare providers who agreed to open for essential workers from 7 a.m.-8 p.m. A hotline helps parents find the childcare they need.

Q What role did the MISD have in helping first responders in the community?

A When we learned that hospitals needed personal protection equipment to safely do their jobs, all Macomb County districts decided to donate equipment from their science labs and vocational programs to our local medical professionals. These were items like masks, goggles, gloves, gowns and cleaning supplies. The districts responded unselfishly to this community need. The MISD was a warehouse for these donations that were turned over to the county and delivered to the county's four hospitals. **M**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MACOMB INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Haley Kehus

Using data analysis to keep Macomb County residents healthy

By Jane Peterson



Haley Kehus

Chances are not many people knew what an epidemiologist did before the COVID-19 crisis hit, but now many are quite familiar with how these public health officials perform disease surveillance by examining patterns, investigating causes and recording strategies to protect residents from negative health outcomes.

Haley Kehus, Macomb County's only epidemiologist, started on the job in September 2019. She was always interested in the health field and loved data and math, so studying epidemiology was a natural fit.

Her first county project revolved around the opioid epidemic, tracking deaths, overdoses and medical emergencies. The dashboard, with real-time statistics, analysis and data, often revealed specific sequences that are utilized not only by the health department, but also the Macomb County Sheriff's Office, local law enforcement agencies, first responders and community action agencies. Together, these organizations use the data to better understand who is impacted by the opioid crisis and what targeted steps need to be taken to address the challenges of this crisis.

"We collect information to know where we're at in terms of a crisis," she said. "Are we at a plateau or peak? Where is the greatest concentration of cases? These are the questions that need to be answered so we can see if there are any health disparities so we know the best way to implement a solution."

Kehus came to Macomb County after graduating with her master's degree in public health from Emory University in Atlanta. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Michigan in neuroscience. While pursuing her master's degree, Kehus worked as a clinical research coordinator at Emory University School of Medicine and a graduate research assistant at Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University. Previously, she worked as a project associate for Arbor Research Collaborative for Health.

In her work at the Macomb County Health Department, Kehus' main responsibility is culling and monitoring data to keep residents healthy. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the county hard beginning in March, the spotlight has never shined as

brightly on the field of epidemiology before.

Q How does epidemiology contribute to combatting COVID-19?

A I created a dashboard with COVID-19 stats. I collect information from the Michigan Disease Surveillance System and import it into graphs that demonstrate the local epidemic curve. I track deaths, hospitalizations, new cases and other information in order to present a clear view of where Macomb County is currently in fighting the pandemic.

Q How does the health department impact the daily lives of Macomb County residents?

A We work in a number of different areas to keep residents safe and their families healthy. Some examples include family planning services, sexually transmitted disease clinics and tracking communicable diseases like measles to mitigate outbreaks.

Q How is the department contributing to Macomb County's success?

A When you have information and data, it gives you a clear picture of where county residents stand with their health goals. We work, often behind the scenes, to keep families not only healthy by reacting to current situations and providing treatment, but also by preventing potential health threats. By looking at the county as a whole, we can identify areas that need improvement and work toward achieving healthy living objectives that contribute to the overall quality of life here.

Q How does the health department's work contribute to Macomb County's business and economic growth?

A Initiatives like the Community Health Assessment engage residents by asking for their feedback about their health priorities and what they would like to see in their communities to help them reach their own personal health goals. These items often involve quality of life issues, like access to trails and green spaces that work to boost the health of current residents while attracting new people to the area. **M**

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Brandon Lewis

Working to protect residents during the COVID-19 pandemic

By Jane Peterson



Brandon Lewis

To say that life has been busy for Brandon Lewis lately is an understatement. As the director of Emergency Management and Communications for Macomb County, Lewis was on the job for a little more than a year when, on March 13, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel announced a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Since then, the focus of his job changed from planning for an emergency situation to activating an emergency response to a full-blown global pandemic.

“Our goal is to keep the people of Macomb County safe,” said Lewis. “We’ve been assessing the situation daily while responding to the immediate needs of local healthcare providers, emergency responders and residents.”

Lewis is certainly up to the task. Before he accepted the position as director of emergency management and communications, he served as the department’s emergency program manager, a position he held for six months in 2018. Prior to that, he was the program coordinator for the Southeast Michigan Urban Area Security Initiative for more than six years and a solution area planner for Oakland County for more than seven years. Lewis earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Oakland University in 2003.

Macomb County Emergency Management works to protect residents year round from situations like weather-related events, health crises, acts of terrorism, catastrophic chemical spills and more. Lewis and his staff support and coordinate county preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery capabilities by facilitating resources for first responders and citizens in order to provide a more safe and secure community.

Q How does your office work to keep Macomb County citizens safe on a daily basis?

A We are responsible for developing emergency operation plans for a variety of situations, including terrorism and man-made and natural disasters. There is also a strong educational element to what we do with monitoring school safety and

required drills and assisting in the coordination of mock disaster training exercises for first responders. Perhaps the most important step we take is building collaborations with leaders throughout the county.

Q What actions have you taken since the state of emergency was announced?

A We have taken a very proactive stance since the second week in March. This is when the state of emergency was announced before there were even any COVID-19 cases in the county. We have been very active in securing personal protection equipment (PPE) for local hospitals, first responders, nursing home facilities and other agencies in need. We’ve focused our planning efforts on how to make our residents and workers safer throughout the pandemic. We’ve also explored ways for government to continue to operate safely throughout it all.

Q How is the department contributing to Macomb County’s success?

A We look at all types of hazards and come up with plans and tools to respond to those hazards. Many times plans can be used during multiple types of disasters so we are ready to go no matter what happens. Before the pandemic, we were partnering with the county’s lakefront communities and a diverse group of federal, state, county and local agencies to host public information meetings for local residents interested in gathering more information on protecting themselves, their families and their property from the effects of lakeshore flooding. This year record water levels are being predicted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the National Weather Service on the Great Lakes.

Q How is the department contributing to Macomb County’s business and economic growth?

A Businesses want to operate and people want to live in a community that emphasizes public safety. We put forth a collaborative effort to operate in a safe community and we participate in community events like the Super Prepared Conference with the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce. **M**

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

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