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MOMENTUM

Uniquely Macomb County, Michigan

Volume 6, Issue 1

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– **Tricia Ashman**
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On the cover: More than 200 species of birds use Ford Cove and the land around it, making it the ideal location for birders to explore and school groups to learn about environmental education.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE EDSSEL & ELEANOR FORD HOUSE

MOMENTUM

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Coming back together

Look forward to Macomb County's natural beauty and community-driven spirit through local events

By Mark A. Hackel

As I write this greeting in late May, we find our county, state and nation are heading down on a safe and stable path out of the pandemic. As we continue to develop community driven solutions to aid our friends, neighbors and local businesses, let's remember to approach the recovery with dignity and respect for each other.

Looking forward to the weeks and months ahead, it is going to be a wonderful time to enjoy the county's parks and natural assets. From Lake St. Clair to our hundreds of parks, there is confidence that we can come together to enjoy the natural beauty of Macomb County. With safety as our priority we are excited to announce that the county is moving ahead with several signature events:

- August 21, the annual Sprint & Splash multi-event races are back at Lake St. Clair Metropark. Orga-

nized by our Parks and Natural Resources program area as a way to promote this magnificent park, proceeds from event entries benefit the Huron Clinton Metropark Authority.

- In early September, Major League Fishing Bass Tournament ends their National Tour at Blossom Heath Park on Lake St. Clair for a globally televised fishing tournament. Running sidelong is the Bass, Brews & BBQ Festival to be hosted by the city of St. Clair Shores and Detroit Sports Commission.

- September 16-19, 2021 Lake St. Clair Metropark will host the Metro Boat Show. Boating has remained incredibly important to Macomb County culture, and this show is one of the nation's largest outdoor shows of its kind!

- On September 25, I invite everyone to get on a nearby hike or bike path and join us for the countywide "Meet Me on the Trail" day in Macomb County.

For more about these and other great reasons to be glad you've made Macomb your home, please visit MakeMacombYourHome.com.

Mark A. Hackel
Macomb County Executive



Above: The 10th annual Sprint & Splash event includes a 5K Run/Walk, a 2-mile Paddle Race and a Duathlon, which combines a 5K run and a 2-mile paddle race.



Left: Meet Me on the Trail Day, planned for Sept. 25, will include education, recreation and stewardship activities that showcase the county's expanding system of trails.

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A call to action

When residents need food assistance, the Macomb Food Program steps up

By Jane Peterson

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck last year, many Macomb County residents found themselves suddenly – and unexpectedly – out of work. For some, especially those living paycheck to paycheck, staying home to stay safe presented a myriad of challenges, including food insecurity.

The Macomb Food Program and a network of more than 70 food pantries across the county were ready to lend a helping hand.

“When the pandemic hit, demand went through the roof,” said Linda Azar, division director, Children and Family Services, “and many people needing assistance were those who never had to access the food system before. At the same time, we had to severely limit our use of volunteers because of COVID-19 safety. Macomb County employees from several different departments stepped up to assist so that no one went hungry.”

Founded in 1975, the Macomb Food Program provides immediate relief to those in need of food. Operating as a nonprofit organization, it works to keep the shelves stocked at more than

70 community pantries and hunger relief organizations that distribute food to those directly in need, said Azar.

Like many food pantries, the Macomb Food Program mostly distributes shelf stable items – things like canned goods, dry milk, boxed mashed potatoes, dry pasta, rice, cereal and other items. It also has a 710-square-foot freezer for frozen food like vegetables, fruits, meats and other items. This wasn’t enough space to store items for the various food pantries, so Azar said the organization supplemented its freezer storage with offsite storage in Hamtramck, which involved extra costs, transportation and logistics.

In May, the program took delivery of a 1,100-square-foot freezer, allowing an additional 120 pallets of frozen food to be stored on site. Azar said it was purchased with general fund monies and will go a long way to helping fill hungry tummies with nutritious food.

“It’s more than about handing families a box of food with peanut butter, tuna fish, noodles and pasta sauce,” she said. “We consider the health and dietary needs of the people we



A volunteer packs food for the Macomb Food Program. PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA, FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

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Above: It takes a small army for the Macomb Food Program to be able to keep local food pantries stocked.

Left: The Fresh To You mobile food pantry was established to increase fresh food access to low-income seniors and families with children.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY



Left: The Macomb Food Program supplemented its freezer storage with offsite storage in Hamtramck, which involved extra costs, transportation and logistics. In May, the program took delivery of a 1,100-square-foot freezer, allowing an additional 120 pallets of frozen food to be stored on site.

PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA, FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP



CONNECT

**FIGHTING HUNGER IN
MACOMB COUNTY**

In a typical month, the Macomb Food Program serves 15,000 individuals and 7,000 families. The food pantry provides assistance at a time when Macomb County residents need it the most, said Linda Azar, division director, Children and Family Services.

Operating as a nonprofit organization, the Macomb Food Program relies on contributions to maximize its grocery budget. For every \$50 donated, it can distribute 150 meals to agencies serving hungry people. If you would like to make a donation, visit mca.macombgov.org/MCA-ES-Food for a link to online contributions.

If you need food assistance, email foodprogram@macombgov.org for more information. When emailing questions regarding services, include your name, phone number or other contact information and city of residence so you can be directed to a food pantry near your home. Interested persons can also call (586) 469-6004 for more information.



**Macomb
Community
Action**



serve and for most of them, foods like frozen chicken provide a good source of protein.”

Last year, the Macomb Food Program provided 3.3 million pounds of food to food pantries, serving 220,000 Macomb County families. The food pantry provides much-needed assistance at a time when residents need it the most by storing it for smaller community and church pantries and distributing it in increments to keep their shelves full, said Azar.

“We do everything we can to keep the pantries open and stocked,” she said. “We are dedicated to getting food out to the community.”

The organization receives a lot of support from volunteers who are just as passionate about making sure their neighbors don’t struggle with food insecurity.

Volunteers Jim and Daryl-Lynn Essig see all the hard work that goes into making sure that people have enough to eat. The Sterling Heights residents have helped prepare for the annual food drive with the postal service, sorted food and packed boxes for more than six years. Boxes are delivered directly to senior citizens or shipped to local food pantries for distribution.

“Leadership really cares,” said Jim. “They really want to serve the people.”

Since the pandemic, demand at local food pantries has soared, prompting program organizers to seek additional help from community donors.

Local residents, businesses and organizations stepped up. Thanks to generous donations from local leaders like McLaren Macomb, which recently contributed \$10,000, the Macomb Food Program has been able to increase the amount of items it gives pantries so supply can meet demand. McLaren Macomb’s donation was born out of a social media awareness campaign in which the hospital promised to make a sizable donation while persuading others to follow suit.

Daryl-Lynn said volunteering is a great way to help out. They get a lot of exercise with walking back and forth and make sure to follow all the COVID-19 safety protocols while volunteering.

“It’s physical work, but it’s well worth the effort,” she said.

Macomb County also participates in the Emergency Food Assistance Program/Commodities, a federally funded program that helps supplement the diets of eligible families and individuals at no cost to them and thanks to a 2017 grant, operates The Fresh To You mobile food pantry that was established to increase fresh food access to low-income seniors and families with children. **M**

Last year, the Macomb Food Program provided 3.3 million pounds of food to local pantries, serving 220,000 Macomb County families.

PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA, FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

New life

Grant helping county communities clean up Brownfield sites

By Jane Peterson

A \$300,000 Brownfield Assessment Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is helping local communities and private property owners assess and clean up brownfield sites for future economic development.

A brownfield is a property that has been identified as being possibly or positively contaminated and unusable until any harmful pollutants have been scrubbed from the air, structure, soil and/or water supply. The goal is to rehabilitate these sites and put them back on the tax rolls. It is estimated that there are more than 450,000 brownfields in the United States.

The Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development (MCPED) is working with the Macomb County-based consulting firm PM Environmental to inventory, characterize, assess and identify cleanup, planning and community involvement activities for sites across the county.



“Macomb County’s EPA Assessment grant provides us with the opportunity to transform under-utilized properties and attract investment in our local communities. We are excited to work with PM Environmental on this project and look forward to improving the environment, economy and quality of life for Macomb County residents,” said Amanda Minaudo, program director at MCPED.

The awarding of EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant funds

CONNECT

PAST BROWNFIELD RENOVATIONS

Renovating brownfield sites is nothing new for Macomb County. Comprised of long-established communities with a rich industrial use history, throughout the years, numerous sites have been identified, cleaned up and successfully placed back on the tax rolls. A few high profile projects include the Amazon site in Shelby Township and Jimmy John’s Field in Utica.

With Amazon, township, county and state officials worked with the delivery giant to remediate the site at 23 Mile and Mound roads and expedite construction. The 1 million square-foot facility was an industrial plant site, the former home of the Visteon Corp. auto parts plant that had sat empty since approximately 2009. In 2018, the building contractor worked with Macomb County officials, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and an independent, third-party environmental consultant to identify environmental



The 1 million-square-foot Amazon facility in Shelby Township was an industrial plant site, the former home of the Visteon Corp. auto parts plant that had sat empty since approximately 2009. A remediation plan went into effect in 2018, allowing Amazon to eventually add hundreds of full-time jobs in the region.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

allows Macomb County to directly support projects that involve the reuse of properties suspected of being contaminated from prior uses.

“The assessment of these brownfield sites is a first step toward their restoration into economically impactful redevelopments that attract private investment into the county’s urban centers, create jobs and increase local tax revenues,” said Ryan Higuchi, brownfield and economic incentives project consultant at PM Environmental.

The county is currently accepting prospects for possible projects, said Minaudo. It is estimated that the grant funds may be able to support nearly 50 brownfield redevelopment projects



hazards and execute a remediation plan that included demolishing a concrete slab that was the former plant floor and having the contaminated soil remediated. In addition, a sub-slab depressurization system was installed to mitigate indoor air quality concerns. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds provided financial support to the project, allowing Amazon to eventually add hundreds of full-time jobs in the region.

Jimmy John’s Field was an equally successful undertaking, completely transforming a vacant lot, an old capped landfill that sat virtually untouched for years and years into a vibrant regional destination. The property was highly visible, located along a busy corridor, where an average of 150,000 cars a day drove past.



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Above: When Jimmy John's Field was constructed in Utica, it completely transformed a vacant lot, an old capped landfill that sat virtually untouched for years and years, into a vibrant regional destination.

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throughout the county before the grant period ends in September 2023. Eligible activities under the grant include Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments, Baseline Environmental Assessments, Documentation of Due Care Compliance and Lead and Asbestos Surveys.

Applications for projects that are shovel-ready, located within economically distressed areas of the county, have known or suspected contamination and have the potential to create economic growth are encouraged to be submitted for the county's consideration. Targeted areas of focus include the Groesbeck Highway Corridor between 8 Mile Road and Metro Parkway; Utica Junction District in Roseville, bordered by 12 Mile Road, Gratiot Avenue and Utica Road; and the Jefferson Avenue Corridor in Harrison Township, but all communities are welcome to apply.

Already five project applications have been received for sites in Roseville, New Baltimore and Sterling Heights. Applications, accepted on a first-come, first-served basis, ask for general information about the site, along with details about how cleanup will economically impact the community and create jobs.

Once accepted, properties typically go into a Phase I assessment, which examines the history of the site through aerial photos and other historical documentation. From there, some properties may need to move into Phase II, where soil samples, asbestos surveys, baseline assessments and other actions can take place.

Armed with this information, officials can market the properties to different investors and businesses, which will have a clearer picture of what contaminants they are dealing with and the steps they need to take before renovating the site. Having Phase I and Phase II assessments completed reduces uncertainty for potential buyers and saves them time and money. Other funding sources may be available to potentially assist with cleanup efforts.

"The grant will go a long way to helping with reinvestment in a community," said Minaudo. **M**

Bon appetit!

Gourmet grocers make food shopping a sensory experience

By Jane Peterson

Grocery shopping isn't what it used to be. Instead of products lined up in a utilitarian manner on shelves, today's gourmet grocers present a feast for the eyes, nose and taste buds.

It's a formula that has worked out well for Macomb County's specialty grocers, as stores like Nino Salvaggio International Marketplace, Vince & Joe's Gourmet Market and others provide customers with an experience as they shop for their families. Many offer a wide variety of locally-sourced produce, specially cut meats, ready-to-eat meals, in-house bakeries and specialty non-grocery departments where service, quality and selection take center stage.

"We are like the Disneyland of gourmet foods," said Frank Nicoletta, vice president for Nino Salvaggio, which has four metro Detroit locations. Two of them are in the Macomb County communities of St. Clair Shores (the original store) and Clinton Township. "We have everything you need to make that fabulous dish."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear how important grocery stores were to their communities. As people stayed at home more, they were cooking more meals for their families, trying new foods and recipes and experimenting with different preparation techniques. Macomb County's grocers were right by their side, following safety protocols and offering new services, like curbside delivery, to get customers the ingredients and supplies that they needed.

Responding to the needs of their customers was nothing new for Vince & Joe's Gourmet Markets, a Macomb County staple since 1983. The business was started by the Vitale family: Vince, Domenica, Joe and Maria Vitale, who wanted to share their love of good Italian food and family with their neighbors.

The Vitales began with a small, gourmet market on Garfield Road in Clinton Township, focusing on nice cuts of meats and specialty cheeses. They enjoyed introducing people to new food experiences and finding ways to keep their specialty items affordably priced and available to all, said Marketing Director Marina Cracchiolo.

In 2006, their second store opened – a 50,000-square-foot flagship store in Shelby Township, featuring an Italian pizzeria and gelato shop. Both locations offer fresh-baked sweets like tortes and authentic Italian cookies as well as an assortment of artisan breads; a butcher shop with all natural and organic selections that can be custom cut and packaged; and a seafood department featuring a large selection of wild caught and farm raised seafood that is flown in daily.

CONNECT

WELCOME, FOODIES!

Macomb County features a diverse selection of grocery stores, farmers markets and ethnic supermarkets. Traditional retailers include Kroger, Aldi and Meijer, while gourmet grocers like Randazzo Fresh Market, Vince & Joe's Gourmet Market and Nino Salvaggio International Marketplace also attract large crowds. Macomb County is fortunate to have a number of neighborhood grocers and ethnic food markets as well as a wide array of farmers markets and other food options.





Previous page: The Vitale family began with a small, gourmet market on Garfield Road in Clinton Township, focusing on nice cuts of meats and specialty cheeses. In 2006, their second store opened – a 50,000-square-foot flagship store in Shelby Township, featuring an Italian pizzeria and gelato shop. Both locations offer fresh-baked sweets as well as an assortment of artisan breads, a butcher shop and a seafood department featuring a large selection of wild caught and farm raised seafood that is flown in daily.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

Top: Founder Nino Salvaggio had a fondness for Macomb County. He started with a small fruit market in St. Clair Shores and then built his first store in the same community in 1979. Nino was fighting cancer as plans were moving forward with the Clinton Township store, but he was very much involved in designing the blueprints.

TOP RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF NINO SALVAGGIO INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE; ABOVE PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

While the freshest produce arrives from around the world, Cracchiolo said Vince & Joe's supports local farms and keeps produce purchases as local as possible. All year long, she said one of the owners will take a truck to the Detroit Produce Terminal, where selections are made from 2-8 a.m. and brought back to the stores. In the summer, they source organic vegetables and herbs from local farms, whenever possible.

Throughout the years, the Vitales never wavered from their goal of serving customers. Although tastes and shopping habits have changed over the decades, Vince & Joe's has always responded to the needs of their customers while helping fill needs within the community.

"We have bonded with our community and customers for the past four decades because I believe we share the same passion for family life, fresh food and hard work," said founder and co-owner Domenica Vitale.

Nicolella said founder Nino Salvaggio shared this fondness for Macomb County. He started with a small fruit market in St. Clair Shores and then built his first store in the same community in 1979. He worked hard; visiting the Eastern Market's famed Detroit Terminal in the wee hours of the morning six days a week to collect the freshest produce.

"You can smell the fragrance of fresh fruit when you walk through the door," he said.

Sadly, Nino Salvaggio passed away from cancer in 2003, but his legacy lives on in the family-owned business. Nicolella is married to Nino's daughter, Andrea. The pair, along with Andrea's brother, Leo, are co-owners who operate the stores with partners Kirk Taylor and Mike Santoro.

Nino was fighting cancer as plans were moving forward with the Clinton Township store. He was very much involved in designing the blueprints and although he never got to see the store open, he continues to be a part of its commitment to the community.

"His legacy is very much alive here," said Nicolella.

Nino Salvaggio International Market is known for its produce and they continue Nino's schedule of visiting the Detroit Terminal. The stores also have a butcher shop that can cut meat any way customers like, a café, specialty cheese area, full-service deli, international groceries and more than 1,600 Michigan-made products. Stores also are fully stocked with wine/liquor, seafood, organic and gluten-free foods, full-service floral department, gourmet-to-go, bakery and more.

Nicolella is proud of the staff and how they have worked together in the face of COVID-19 to assist local families. They worked hard to keep the shelves stocked in the early days of the pandemic and continue to help people make selections as they remain dedicated to cooking family meals.

"People have been spending more time with their families, cooking together and sharing recipes," said Nicolella. "We're here for you because Macomb County is our home, too." **M**

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Mac Madness

Officials launch first-ever search for the best housemade mac 'n' cheese

By Jane Peterson

When Macomb County officials announced the inaugural Mac Madness: Best Mac in the Mac contest, they knew it was “impastable” to resist this incredibly cheesy comfort food, but they had no idea how “grate” the response would be from the community.

People love their mac and cheese and they were more than willing to share the restaurants that made their favorites. Contest organizers took the first 16 nominees and placed them in a bracket, similar to March Madness basketball tournament matchups.

Each round garnered more than 400 votes, with the final face-off capturing significantly higher vote counts, said Lauri Eisen, project manager for Macomb County Planning and Economic Development (MCPED), which organized the contest.

“Everyone loves mac and cheese,” she said. “Kids and adults, no matter your age, everyone loves this classic comfort food.”

She said she had fun trying out about half of the macaroni and cheese dishes from the nominated restaurants.

After the flurry of public voting, Sherwood Brewing Company in Shelby Township was declared the winner with their baked mac ‘n cheese that is made from scratch with cavatappi

noodles, cream, a variety of cheeses and spices then baked until melty and bubbly. Ray Sherwood, who owns the neighborhood pub with his wife, Lisa, described it satisfyingly crunchy on top with a panko topping and gooey on the inside with the blend of melty cheeses. Customers can add grilled chicken, crispy bacon or ham for an extra charge or indulge in the Pulled Pork Mac, topped with BBQ pulled pork and spicy onion straws or Buffalo Mac, topped with crispy buffalo chicken and blue cheese crumbles, Sherwood’s personal favorite.

“The mac and cheese didn’t even make it on our menu until 2012 or 2013,” he said. “When we first opened nearly 15 years

ago, we served sandwiches and pizza only. Customers started asking for an expanded menu, so we added macaroni and cheese as a special. It was only supposed to be offered for a limited time, but we received a good response



and kept it on the menu.”

Since being named Best Mac in the Mac, Sherwood has definitely noticed an uptick in the number of orders for the mac and cheese. Now he said it’s part of the daily routine to prep the cheese sauce along with the pizza dough and other essential menu items.

“It’s been crazy since the contest ended. We’ve had lots of orders,” he said.

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SHERWOOD
BREWING
COMPANY

SIMPLE
PALATE
RESTAURANT



THE TOP FOUR MAC FINISHERS

Macomb County residents were not shy about nominating their favorite places to gobble up a platter of made-from-scratch macaroni and cheese. After hundreds of votes were cast in the bracket-style contest, the winner was determined to be Sherwood Brewing Company in Shelby Township. The top four finishers and their prizes were:

- Winner, Sherwood Brewing Company in Shelby Township — a \$2,500 grant, The Best Mac in the Mac plaque and a week of free advertising on a digital billboard donated by Star Outdoor
- Runner-up, Simple Palate Restaurant of Warren — a \$1,000 grant
- Third place, Jayell Smoke House of Romeo — \$500 grant
- Fourth place, Bistro Orleans of Sterling Heights — \$500 grant



Opposite page: Classic macaroni and cheese from Sherwood Brewing Company. **Top:** Macaroni and cheese with pulled pork from Sherwood Brewing Company. PHOTO BY MEGAN DEEL — ODD FERN PHOTO LLC
Above: The macaroni and cheese from Simple Palate.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

The contest kicked off in mid-March, which not only coincided with March Madness, but also gave restaurants a little extra promotion after an exceptionally challenging year where many restaurants had to temporarily close their doors or adapt to takeout/delivery service due to COVID-19 safety protocols.

“We created this new initiative as a way to recognize these businesses while also promoting what they do best, which is making food that everyone enjoys!” said Vicky Rowinski, director of MCPED. “It was meant to be a fun contest that we hoped would inspire the public to dine-in or carry-out from a new restaurant. It’s just one small way we could all do our part to help them survive as we get through the pandemic.”

The competing restaurants did their part as well, said Eisen, promoting the contest to their customers on social media and in their restaurants in the spirit of friendly competition.

“It was interesting to see how the restaurants responded,” she said.

The Sherwoods shared the contest details on social media and received lots of support from their loyal customers who also generated buzz about it.

For Kevin Romanko, owner of Simple Palate restaurant, the contest was a lot of fun and it was a great opportunity to reach out to his customer base. The restaurant, which was the contest runner-up, posted about the competition on social media, sent out emails and put flyers on tables.

“We definitely noticed an increase in the number of macaroni and cheese orders going out,” he said.

Simple Palate’s mac and cheese is crafted from scratch, using a creamy blend of cheeses, then topped with a layer of panko breadcrumbs. Customers are welcome to add chicken, shrimp or lobster if they wish. Simple Palate is a family-owned business owned by Kevin and his wife, Carol. Their daughter and son-in-law, Aubrey and Deven Futrell, also work there.

As the top vote getter from the face-off with Simple Palate Restaurant in Warren, Sherwood Brewing Company received a \$2,500 grant from Macomb County, The Best Mac in the Mac plaque, a week of free advertising on a digital billboard donated by Star Outdoor and, of course, bragging rights. **M**

QUOTABLE

“Everyone loves mac and cheese. Kids and adults, no matter your age, everyone loves this classic comfort food.”

— Lauri Eisen, project manager for Macomb County Planning and Economic Development

Difference maker

Armada teen creates impact from organizing Earth Week event

By Jane Peterson

It started as a school project, but it ended up bringing the community together for a common cause.

While remotely learning from home, Andrea Cox, an eighth grader at Armada Middle School, was tasked with an assignment that asked her to implement a project that she began brainstorming, researching and developing in the sixth and seventh grade. Called the Armada Global Impact Project, it is a multi-year social studies assignment that challenges students to look out into the world, decide what inspires them and then help fill a need, by making a difference through actions like hosting an event or innovating a new product.

Back in the sixth grade, what came to mind for Andrea were the times she spent with her grandmother, Marilyn Harvey, walking along down the road and picking up trash that people either carelessly let blow around in the wind or intentionally threw out the car window on an isolated dirt road. These memories were the inspiration behind “Ditch” the Trash Day, an event held this past Earth Week, April 19.

“If we want something to happen, then we have to do something about it,” said the 13-year-old. “I’m so grateful that many people thought it was something good to do.”

Each year teacher Chad Finkbeiner watches as his students see their projects come to a satisfying conclusion.

“They get some amazing things going,” he said.

Andrea came up with the idea to ask people to take a little time out of their busy day to remove miscellaneous garbage that had piled up in their own or their neighbor’s ditches. Once collected, participants were requested to either discard it properly or recycle it.

While there are occasionally some larger items deposited in ditches, most people picked up miscellaneous wrappers, papers and fast food bags.

Jim Goetzinger said he, his three kids and his nephew collected eight grocery bags full of discarded cans. They were going to return the cans to the store, but then learned about a can drive fundraiser for another community organization, so they ended up donating them instead.

The kids, he said, made the trash collection into a competition, so it was fun for everyone.

Goetzinger said he and his family travel on the back roads quite a bit and ride their bikes, so they knew there was a need. They also wanted to teach the kids about service to others. It took a small amount of time, but made a big difference.

Cheryl Murray, a member of the Armada Area Schools Board



of Education, participated in the event, cleaning her own ditch and several of her neighbors’ as well. She said she saw many people participating and has noticed a difference in the community. She participated because she appreciated the good cause and wanted to support the students, who work on these projects for a few years.

Andrea’s mom, Amanda Cox, said her daughter has always adored Earth and other things related to nature. Being able to help the planet in this small way really taught her a lot.

“We do our part and recycle,” said Amanda, “but what we’ve been floored by is the way Andrea has taken the initiative to spur action. We are extremely proud of her.”

To galvanize support for “Ditch” the Trash Day, Andrea created flyers and reached out to a few local townships. She was hoping the exposure would educate residents about this problem and encourage them to participate. Ray Township officials posted information on its website, letting people know that trash in the ditch was not only unsightly, but can also cause problems with drainage.

Most students, said Finkbeiner, called it a day right there, fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. However, Andrea didn’t stop. Going out of her comfort zone, she created a catchy slogan and challenged herself to talk to local elected officials, asking them to include “Ditch” the Trash Day on their official calendars. She also shared information about her project and participated in public meetings via Zoom during the pandemic.

“I was really proud of her that she took those extra steps,” he said.

Andrea’s efforts did not go unnoticed. Last month the Macomb County Board of Commissioners honored her with a proclamation and she also received a certificate of achievement from Macomb Green Schools. **M**



Above: Families came together to help clean up their neighborhoods thanks to a project organized by Andrea Cox.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE COX FAMILY

CONNECT

HOW SHE MADE IT HAPPEN

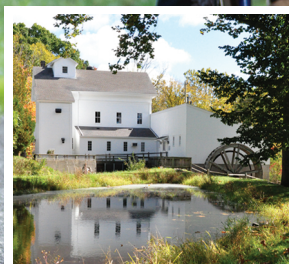
On most days, Andrea Cox is a shy 13-year-old student, according to her mother, Amanda. However, when she gets fired up about a cause she is passionate about, there's no stopping this energetic middle schooler.

Andrea could have written up her school assignment, handed it in and left it at that. Instead, she took it to the next level, creating flyers and passing them out in the community and calling local elected officials and asking them to get the word out.

Every step of the way, Andrea had to fight her own insecurities and nervousness that are natural at that age, but in the end, her efforts paid off. Dozens of her friends and neighbors participated in the April 19 event, cleaning up their community and proving that one person can make a difference indeed.



Get out and enjoy nature



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It takes a village

Back to Business roundtables help industries find common ground

By Jane Peterson

It can help to know that you are not alone.

Helping businesses grow and thrive is a priority for the Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development (MCPED). This year officials kicked off a new initiative designed to connect industry leaders to discuss issues they are experiencing, changes in industry processes, ways to counteract economic losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, strategies to attract and retain employees, concerns related to remote working and other pressing matters.

“There’s definitely value in getting businesses to talk about what’s happening to them,” said Vicky Rowinski, MCPED director.

This monthly series is called Back to Business and each month focuses on an industry critical to the county’s growth. So far this year, highlighted industries have included professional services; warehousing, distribution and logistics; advanced manufacturing and robotics; skilled trades/construction; and blue/green economy.

During their month, business owners and managers are invited to participate in a virtual roundtable event with other industry leaders.

“They are the boots on the ground. This is about what’s trending and what they see happening with their own eyes,” she said.

When the pandemic hit last year, many businesses had to

QUOTABLE

“They are the boots on the ground. This is about what’s trending and what they see happening with their own eyes.”

— Vicky Rowinski, MCPED director

make a quick pivot. Some had to shut down temporarily. Others took creative actions that helped generate an alternative source of revenue. Many highlighted additional aspects of their business not as severely impacted by the health crisis, like switching to takeout and delivery instead of indoor dining.

Whatever the case, being in crisis mode made it feel like everyone was left to fend for themselves. In Macomb County, MCPED and the business community as a whole understand that when all industries thrive, everyone wins with a stronger economy and deeper pool of workforce talent.

Many businesses have shared experiences, even if they are in different sectors of the economy. Most, for example, are dealing with gaps in the workforce. As of May, Macomb County was holding strong with 4% unemployment. That’s very similar to February 2020 right before the shutdowns when the county recorded 3.2% unemployment.

Still, business owners are grappling with a smaller pool of available employees. This is due to a number of factors, including baby boomers retiring, parents deciding to stay home with their children and people deciding to change careers and pursue their personal dreams.

By identifying shared issues, MCPED will be better equipped with strategies to help Macomb County businesses thrive. In addition, businesses may discover that they can help out one another in specific areas and the roundtables can help connect them to the proper resources.

The roundtables are purposefully kept small, said Rowinski, so that everyone has an opportunity to participate and be heard during the one-hour session.

“The roundtables are helping to make connections and find solutions,” she said. “We all want Macomb County to thrive and we are all in this together.” **M**

CONNECT

BACK TO BUSINESS FOCUS

Each month, the Back to Business initiative shines the spotlight on a different industry that is a critical segment of Macomb County’s economy. Here is a list of the industries left to be highlighted:

- July – Retail
- August – Healthcare
- September – Automotive
- October – Cybersecurity
- November – Aerospace and Defense

To be notified of a future roundtable event or to find out about specific industries that make up Macomb County’s economy, visit Business.Macombgov.org/Business-Industries.





FEBRUARY | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

MARCH | WAREHOUSING, DISTRIBUTION & LOGISTICS

APRIL | ADVANCED MANUFACTURING & ROBOTICS

MAY | SKILLED TRADES/ CONSTRUCTION

JUNE | BLUE/GREEN ECONOMY

JULY | RETAIL

AUGUST | HEALTH CARE

SEPTEMBER | AUTOMOTIVE

OCTOBER | CYBERSECURITY

NOVEMBER | AEROSPACE & DEFENSE



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- International Landing Zone
- Connections to business banks, legal and accounting services
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By example

County honors local leaders during 8th annual Macomb Business Awards

By Jane Peterson

Macomb County is home to many unique and diverse businesses which are celebrated annually as part of the Macomb Business Awards. Although 2020 was a tough year for small businesses in general, county leaders believed it was more important than ever to recognize the impact these local businesses make both economically and with regards to quality of life in Macomb communities.

The 8th annual Macomb Business Awards were presented in a digital format, with County Executive Mark Hackel and Vicky Rowinski, director of Macomb County Planning and Economic Development (MCPED), naming the recipient of each category through a weeklong series of videos.

In all, eight award winners were named, selected from among the 58 nominations. One of the newer awards is the Hidden Gem category. This year that award was presented to The Reptarium Reptile Zoo, a Utica-based business that provides access to reptiles and other animals from around the world. Its goal is to educate the public about these captivating creatures through a variety of in-person birthday parties, private tours and public events as well as virtual presentations.

“We were really pleased to receive this award,” said Brian Barczyk, owner of The Reptarium.

The Hidden Gem category was added to bring awareness to businesses that contribute an offering unique to Macomb County, said Rowinski. Many people were enthusiastic about it as this category received the most nominations in 2020.

CONNECT

GETTING READY FOR THE 2021 AWARDS

Who will win Macomb Business Awards in 2021?

While that remains to be seen, planning is already underway for this year's awards. Typically nominations begin in the fall. Businesses can nominate themselves or be nominated by residents and customers.

Vicky Rowinski, director of Macomb County Planning and Economic Development, said to stay tuned to future announcements by visiting the Macomb Business website landing page: www.MacombBusiness.com.



The Reptarium Reptile Zoo, a Utica-based business that provides access to reptiles and other animals from around the world, received the Hidden Gem honors as part of the Macomb Business Awards.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

Barczyk, who has traveled around the world working professionally with animals for 32 years, said friends and colleagues were surprised by his decision to open The Reptarium in southeastern Michigan, believing that Chicago, Los Angeles or another large metropolitan would make more sense.

“This is rewarding for me personally,” he said. “Growing up here this is one of my coolest accomplishments.”

Judging is always challenging, Rowinski added.

“It’s amazing to see what they do behind their four walls,” she said about Macomb County business owners and innovators.

A panel of judges reviewed nominations and selected the winners. Judges included: Gene Lovell, president and CEO of First State Bank; Karen Smith, executive director of Leadership Macomb; Jim Sawyer, president of Macomb Community College; Mike Lee, managing editor of Crain’s Detroit Business; and Rowinski.

After the winners were announced, their award was hand delivered.

“Even though we could not gather to celebrate the accomplishments of our local businesses, we wanted to make sure we honored them,” said Rowinski. “This has been an extremely challenging year for everyone, so it’s important that we recognize local organizations doing important work in our community.”



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When you need emergency care, you want your hospital to be ready for whatever comes through the door. Ready for any injury or any illness, ready to respond at the speed of emergencies. That's why McLaren Macomb built Macomb County's premier emergency department, with advanced technology, clinical expertise and 68 private exam rooms.

And with our online check-in you can select the arrival time that meets your needs, reducing the time spent in the waiting room. That's emergency care at McLaren Macomb. That's doing what's best.

Spend less time waiting for emergency care. When you need ER care, visit mclaren.org/macombER and check-in from home.



DOING WHAT'S BEST.®



In addition to The Reptarium in the Hidden Gem category, other Macomb Business Award winners were:

***Champion of Workplace Culture
(sponsored by MetroParent Magazine):***

FIRST STATE BANK

First State Bank is a family founded, locally owned and operated business that has been in Macomb County for 102 years. It provides generous medical benefits and 401(k) matching contributions to employees, flexible work schedules and assistance with achieving higher education and certifications, free mental health counseling through a third party, charity/volunteer opportunities and access to expert financial advice

CORPORATE CITIZEN:

WARNER NORCROSS + JUDD

Warner Norcross + Judd provides client-focused, proactive legal and business counsel to clients of all sizes. It has a robust pro bono program that in 2019, provided more than 5,600 hours of free legal counsel, totaling nearly \$3 million. In addition, it sponsors more than 100 nonprofit organizations within Macomb County and across the state. The firm also offers scholarships to diverse students pursuing a career in law and has awarded more than \$200,000 to over 100 individuals

***DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION LEADER
(SPONSORED BY ONEMACOMB):***

CARE OF SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN

CARE of Southeastern Michigan strengthens resiliency in people and their communities through prevention, education and services that improve quality of life. The nonprofit aims to fill its board of directors with individuals affected by a loved one's addiction to substances or by mental health challenges, or those in recovery themselves. This core value is also evident in its hiring practices. CARE currently employs more than 50 people who are in recovery from a substance use disorder. The organization has taken other proactive hiring steps as well, including the removal of criminal records as grounds for an instant denial to implementing consistent salary scales to create gender pay equity



Top: Gene Lovell, president and CEO of First State Bank, accepts the Macomb Business Award for Champion of Workplace Culture.

Above: Vicky Rowinski, director of Macomb County Planning and Economic Development, presents the Manufacturer of the Year Award to Paslin, a full service design and build organization serving the global automotive industry.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY



Left: The Macomb County Chamber Alliance received a Macomb Business Award for Economic Development Partner of the Year. **Middle:** Warner Norcross + Judd received a Macomb Business Award for Corporate Citizen. **Right:** Stacy Ziarko, president and CEO of the Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce, accepts the award on behalf of the Macomb County Chamber Alliance.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR:

PASLIN

Paslin is a full service design and build organization serving the global automotive industry through the concept, design, construction and deployment of complex automated assembly and welding systems. For the last three years, the company has been driven by efforts to innovate and implement new technology, diversify and develop its workforce. As a result, it has grown from a \$100 million organization with 300 employees to a \$220 million organization with nearly 700 employees

TRAILBLAZER OF FUTURE TALENT:

DRIVE ONE TECHCENTER

DRIVE One TechCenter provides at-risk students with vocational training in automotive technology, machining, welding and transportation design. It aims to prepare adolescents and young adults for employment by using project-based learning, experienced instructors, state-of-the-art technology and career placement as an approach to workforce development. Since its founding in 2012, 100% of DRIVE One's 300 students have graduated high school, with 84% of graduates going on to be employed in the trades industry, enrolled in a post-secondary institution or serving in a branch of the armed forces

BEACON OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

JOHN BIERBUSSE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MACOMB-ST. CLAIR MICHIGAN WORKS!

John Bierbusse has been in this position since the creation of the organization in 1983, leading the organization through three major legislative initiatives: The Job Training Partnership Act, the Workforce Investment Act and the present Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. As executive director, Bierbusse has led the local implementation of numerous workforce programs designed to address the workforce needs of public assistance recipients, dislocated workers, offenders, aging, youth as well as the general public

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNER OF THE YEAR:

MACOMB COUNTY CHAMBER ALLIANCE

The Macomb County Chamber Alliance was awarded this recognition for its role in helping businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic. The Macomb County Chamber Alliance consists of the Macomb County Chamber, Sterling Heights Regional Chamber, Anchor Bay Chamber of Commerce, Eastpointe-Roseville Chamber of Commerce, Greater Romeo Washington Chamber of Commerce and Richmond Chamber of Commerce **M**

Macomb County Superintendents Recommend

**✓ Consider
a COVID-19 Vaccine
for 12-year olds and older**

www.macombgov.org/Covid19

Make
Macomb Schools
your home

Anchor Bay Schools, Armada Area Schools, Center Line Public Schools, Chippewa Valley Schools,
Clintondale Community Schools, Eastpointe Community Schools, Fitzgerald Public Schools,
Fraser Public Schools, Lake Shore Public Schools, Lakeview Public Schools, L'Anse Creuse Public Schools,
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**

Parents/Caregivers –

If Your Child Turns

5

**years old by September 1, 2021,*
please contact your local school district
ASAP to complete Kindergarten Registration
forms. This is an IMPORTANT time for
your child's learning.**

*According to Michigan law, if a child residing in a district is not five years of age on or before September 1, 2021, but will turn five years of age not later than December 1, 2021, the parent may contact the school district to obtain a possible Waiver for their child to enter Kindergarten this year.



Anchor Bay Schools
www.anchorbay.misd.net
Armada Area Schools
www.armadaschools.org
Center Line Public Schools
www.clps.org
Chippewa Valley Schools
www.chippewavalleyschools.org
Clintondale Community Schools
www.clintondaleschools.net
Eastpointe Community Schools
www.eastpointeschools.org
Fitzgerald Public Schools
www.fitz.k12.mi.us
Fraser Public Schools
www.fraser.k12.mi.us/
Lake Shore Public Schools
www.lakeshoreschools.org
Lakeview Public Schools
www.lakeviewpublicschools.org
L'Anse Creuse Public Schools
www.lc-ps.org
Mount Clemens Community Schools
www.mtcps.org
New Haven Community Schools
<https://newhaven.misd.net>
Richmond Community Schools
www.richmond.k12.mi.us
Romeo Community Schools
www.romeok12.org
Roseville Community Schools
www.rosevillepride.org
South Lake Schools
www.solake.org
Utica Community Schools
www.uticak12.org
Van Dyke Public Schools
www.vdps.net
Warren Consolidated Schools
www.wcskids.net
Warren Woods Public Schools
www.warrenwoods.misd.net

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Fun in the sun

Macomb County knows how to make the most of warmer weather

By Jane Peterson

The summer and fall seasons may seem short, but they are oh so sweet.

A number of events, activities and festivals are back on the calendar in 2021, giving Macomb County residents plenty of opportunities to gather together with their neighbors, share valued traditions with their children and pursue leisure activities that they enjoy.

Below are some featured festivals that Macomb County is well known for. Keep in mind that there are many other events in the county's various communities, so make sure to check with a local chamber of commerce or watch area newspapers for announcements of upcoming activities.

In addition, these events were scheduled as of press time. However, if the COVID-19 situation changes, these events may change, be scaled down or cancelled altogether. Always check the websites listed or look up the event on social media to make sure activities are proceeding as planned before heading out the door.



PATIOS N' PINTS – JULY 1-SEPT. 30

This will be the third year for Patios n' Pints, an event held every Thursday evening through Sept. 30 in Sterling Heights. From 5-7 p.m. people can gather outside the Upton House across from Dodge Park and savor local craft brews, with a different brewery featured each week. The event also includes music, games and more.

Stacy Ziarko, president and CEO of the Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce, said the event is designed to showcase the breweries while providing a fun outing for friends, neighbors, business associates and family members. It has proven to be quite popular, with tickets selling out almost every week.

Capacity is limited, so reserve a spot at shrcci.com. Sponsors include Petitpren, O'Reilly Rancillo, PC, Moore Penna and Associates PLLC, Utica Van Dyke Service, Lakeside Mall, Bonner AG and HRC.

ARMADA FAIR – AUG. 16-22

Armada Fair officials are gearing up for a fun event. According to the fair's website, main events planned include monster trucks, demolition derby, figure 8/bump & run, rodeo and tractor & truck pull. Daily events, carnival, kids zone, livestock sale, vendors and bands are also planned.

For more information, visit armada-fair.squarespace.com.

SPRINT & SPLASH – AUG. 21

The 10th Annual Sprint & Splash, a great event for sports enthusiasts, is scheduled for Aug. 21 at Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township. It includes a 5K Run/Walk, a 2-mile Paddle Race and a Duathlon, which combines a 5K run and a 2-mile paddle race. Paddlers can use either a kayak or a stand-up paddleboard. Rentals are available from two local companies, if needed.

Plans are to offer music, food and craft beer in addition to the competitive events as current public health guidelines allow.

"We have decided to cap the event at 200 participants," said organizer Amanda Minaudo. "This will give participants room to eat and enjoy a beer after the competition while they wait for the award ceremony."

The race is run on a scenic course that is flat and strollers are welcome. Water conditions depend on the weather, of course, but Minaudo said that participants will want to have some experience with kayaking or paddleboarding as two miles can be longer than it seems.

"It's definitely a family-friendly event and we encourage people to bring their supporters and enjoy a day at the park after the competition," said Minaudo.

Registration is open. Visit sprintandsplash.com for details.



Opposite page and top: The 10th Annual Sprint & Splash, a great event for sports enthusiasts, is scheduled for Aug. 21 at Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township. **Above:** The Bass, Brews & BBQ Festival will feature Michigan craft beer and local breweries, concerts, barbeque, entertainment and more.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

RICHMOND GOOD OLD DAYS – SEPT. 9-12

Richmond's small-town festival packs a big punch. With no general admission charge and lots of free events, the festival promises lots of family-friendly fun.

Chairman Tim Rix said the featured event is the 1.5-mile parade through the downtown area, which typically draws approximately 100 units, including a large number of marching bands from all around the area. Prior to the parade, people also enjoy a gathering of the drumlines, which is organized by a local volunteer who judges drumline competitions.

Other events include fireworks on Saturday, a carnival, games, vendors, beer tent, children's parade, car show, petting zoo, cruise and horseshoe and cornhole tournaments.

"We offer so many activities that people often comment that there's not enough time to see and do everything," said Rix. "We try to have something for everybody."

There is a fee for some events. For more information, visit richmondgoodolddaysfestival.org.

BASS, BREWS & BBQ FESTIVAL – SEPT. 9-12



Major League Fishing Bass Tournament ends its National Tour at Blossom Heath Park on Lake St. Clair for a globally televised fishing tournament. In conjunction with this event is the Bass, Brews & BBQ Festival, which is hosted by the city of St. Clair Shores and Detroit Sports Commission.

The regular-season MLF finale out of St. Clair Shores will determine the 2021 Angler of the Year, as well as REDCREST 2022 and Heavy Hitters 2022 qualification, according to Major League Fishing. Four MLF Cup events will follow in the fall.

The Bass, Brews & BBQ Festival will feature Michigan craft beer and local breweries, concerts, barbeque, entertainment and more.



METRO BOAT SHOW – SEPT. 16-19

The 12th annual Progressive® Metro Boat Show is scheduled for Sept. 16-19 at Lake St. Clair Metropark with boats up to 60 ft.+ in length on display and for sale. Boats featured include new and previously owned fishing boats, sailboats, cruisers, yachts, pontoon boats, personal watercraft, ski and wakeboard boats, canoes, kayaks and paddleboards. The show is a great place to get the first look at the new 2022 model introductions, and to order a boat for next season. For those new to boating, new interactive exhibits will be at the show to learn more about the sport and being safe on the water.

The outdoor location of the show and attractions at the event add to the appeal of this boat show – it's very different from indoor winter boat shows. A picturesque boardwalk lined with beautiful boats along the Black River leading to Lake St. Clair is the perfect backdrop for a day on the water. Live music, beer tents, food trucks, Kids Entertainment Zone and more promotions and giveaways make this event fun for the whole family.

The Progressive® Metro Boat Show is produced by the Michigan Boating Industries Association (MBIA). Hours are noon-7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 11 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Saturday; and 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$10 for adults, children 12 and under free with an adult. Parking is \$10 or free to those with a Metroparks permit. General park information can be found at metroparks.com or by calling 1-800-47-PARKS. For more information about the boat show, current promotions and contest information, visit metroboatshow.net.



MEET ME ON THE TRAIL DAY – SEPT. 25

Macomb County has an expanding system of trails and officials plan to showcase them at Meet Me on the Trail Day on Sept. 25. The event will include education, recreation and stewardship activities such as nature hikes, fishing lessons, restoration projects, bicycle rides, kids' games, informational presentations and picnics. Other activities are also planned and will be announced closer to the event.

Organizers hope to promote healthy lifestyles and educate residents about the trail resources available to them, their families and neighbors.

For more information, visit living.macombgov.org/living-meet-me-on-the-trail-day. **M**



Top: The 12th annual Progressive® Metro Boat Show is scheduled for Sept. 16-19 at Lake St. Clair Metropark.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHIGAN BOATING INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

Left: Macomb County has an expanding system of trails and officials plan to showcase them at Meet Me on the Trail Day on Sept. 25.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY



Back to nature

Ford Cove Shoreline and Coastal Wetland Restoration Project seeks to return lakeshore back to a natural state

By Jane Peterson

Reflecting the history of a prominent American family, the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House is an asset to the Macomb County community. On warm, sunny days, visitors can be spotted picnicking on the grounds, strolling through the gardens or sitting on blankets leisurely watching the boats roll by on Lake St. Clair. Inside, visitors are welcome to tour the home to learn more about the Ford family and their great legacy.

Built along Lake St. Clair, the Ford House stretches out along Ford Cove, nearly a mile of shoreline that attracts numerous species of birds, fish and wildlife. Plans are currently under-

way to restore this shoreline, removing man-made structures like a broken concrete seawall and replacing them with native plants. The effort is called the Ford Cove Shoreline and Coastal Wetland Restoration Project.

“The Ford House is stepping up our sustainability mission,” said Kevin Drotos, Ford House Invasive Species and Woodland specialist. “In our new buildings, we use geothermal technology for heating and cooling buildings and the parking lot has bioswales to improve the quality of stormwater runoff. When the home was built in the 1920s, the landscape architect took a natural approach, but in the 1970s, the property flooded and

pieces of broken concrete were brought in. There is not a ton of native vegetation along the shoreline. This project will address those needs.”

It was Gerard Santoro, program director, Parks and Natural Resources for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development who first identified the value in this possible project. He said with land and water available for public use, all Macomb County residents would reap the benefits whether they appreciate cleaner water, watching birds, going boating, catching fish or walking along a beautiful lakeshore.

He approached the Ford House, which today is teaming up with the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in an effort to restore disappearing fish and wildlife habitats. The project is currently in the midst of an initial feasibility study to evaluate the plan developed by Ford House and GLC, along with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Division, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy Water Resources Division and Macomb County’s Planning and Economic Development Department, Parks and Natural Resources Division. The project team selected Michigan-based community advancement firm OHM Advisors to execute the study, which should be complete by early next summer.

The Ford Cove restoration will span roughly a mile of Lake St. Clair’s coastline and more than 17 acres of the surrounding coastal marsh, nearshore habitat and adjacent forested wetlands. The project will benefit Lake St. Clair’s greater ecosystem, which is part of Michigan’s Great Lakes waterway, by boosting plant, wildlife, birds and fish in the region.

By reintroducing native plant species and softer shorelines, heavy waves that tend to disrupt vital habitats that local fish, waterfowl, mussels, turtles, snakes and other wildlife need to raise their young, find cover and forage for food should be reduced. As a result, Eric Ellis, Coastal Conservation and Habitat Restoration Program project manager with the Great Lakes Commission, said once completed, the cove could act as a nursery, creating an ideal place for fish to spawn and for wildlife to keep their young protected. Imagine a baby turtle trying to navigate a block on concrete instead of maneuvering through natural vegetation, he added.

“This is very important to the ecological integrity of the site. It will have a tremendous impact,” said Ellis.

This project is exciting on many levels as it provides a unique opportunity with a large swath of continuous shoreline in the public trust and controlled by Ford House. Natural habitats along the shoreline in Macomb County have nearly disappeared because of industry and significant development of lakefront property. In fact, the 31.5 miles of shoreline in the county is home to 15,000 boat slips and 60 marinas, leaving less than a half-mile of natural shoreline.

“Nearly the entirety of Lake St. Clair’s shoreline is not in its original condition, so Ford House will be recreating the natural world, and that’s an exciting process and a major goal of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative supported by Congress. After the study is complete, we will get to make Ford House’s shores and wetlands a more functional part of the natural community,” said Drotos.

The feasibility study will include detailed baseline chemi-



Previous page: The Ford Cove Shoreline and Coastal Wetland Restoration Project will benefit Lake St. Clair’s greater ecosystem, which is part of Michigan’s Great Lakes waterway, by boosting plant, wildlife, birds and fish in the region. **Above:** Built along Lake St. Clair, the Ford House stretches out along Ford Cove, nearly a mile of shoreline that attracts numerous species of birds, fish and wildlife.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE EDESEL & ELEANOR FORD HOUSE

cal, geotechnical and ecological evaluations, preliminary hydrologic and hydraulic modeling and produce conceptual plans with estimated costs and restoration recommendations. These measures will determine if the plan will be able to effectively reach its restoration goals.

The cost of the feasibility study is \$230,634, including a \$3,000 in-kind match from Ford House. Funding for this project comes from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative through a regional partnership between NOAA and the GLC. A project management team provides input and guidance on the project and includes members from the GLC, Ford House, NOAA, Macomb County, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Division and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy Water Resources Division.

Once the feasibility study is complete and it is determined if the project will move forward, Drotos said the completed effort will be the perfect place for walkers, birders, school groups and others to enjoy, explore and learn more about environmental education.

"Eleanor wanted the grounds open to the public. During the pandemic, we all saw how important it was to get outside. This project has potential to provide more to the public and environment. It's a win-win for everyone," he said. **M**

CONNECT

HELPING NATURE THRIVE

The Ford Cove Shoreline and Coastal Wetland Restoration Project will positively impact boaters and others who use Lake St. Clair. By restoring the nearly one mile of shoreline in Ford Cove, birds, wildlife and fish will thrive. It is an important stop on the migratory trail for many species.

"Roughly 200 species of birds use Ford Cove and the land around it. When we restore the shoreline, the birds and other wildlife can have access to the created habitat. The birds, fish and other aquatic species will be able to thrive," said Kevin Drotos, Ford House Invasive Species and Woodland specialist. "All these things benefit the ecosystem. Ford House is taking an interest in the health of the environment, hand-in-hand with caring for the estate's history and landscapes."

To learn about the project, visit FordHouse.org.



*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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Bird is the word

Macomb, St. Clair counties work together to create birding trail

By Jane Peterson

Lake St. Clair provides Macomb County residents with many recreational opportunities: Boating, fishing, swimming, kayaking and canoeing, just to name a few.

Add birdwatching to the list.

While birders have always been aware of the number of diverse species that the lake attracts, soon casual observers and out-of-town visitors will more easily be able to identify different types of birds that frequent the area. Thanks to collaboration between Macomb and St. Clair county officials, a coastal birding trail is on track to make Lake St. Clair a destination spot for birders from all around.

“There are all different kinds of species to be found here,” said Amanda Oparka, senior planner - Land & Water Resources, Macomb County Planning & Economic Development, “from the common Great Blue Heron to the more unique Snowy Owl and Eagles.”

She noted that the area, the Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River Corridor, targeted for the birding trails is uniquely located at the convergence of two major U.S. flyways: The Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River. In addition, Lake St. Clair Metropark has close to 300 bird species and inland areas all along the lake, including Ford Cove in front of the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House, boast rich ecosystems teeming with birds and waterfowl and may potentially be spots on the birding trail.

National Audubon considers Lake St. Clair a critical area for waterfowl migration with the ideal time to see thousands of diving ducks in the lake late fall and early spring; dabbling ducks in the marshes spring and fall; herons and egrets in the marshes all summer; and warblers, thrushes, orioles and more among the forest edges in spring. Additional species can be identified on the trails and on the beach, especially in late summer when fall migrating shorebirds provide magnificent viewing.

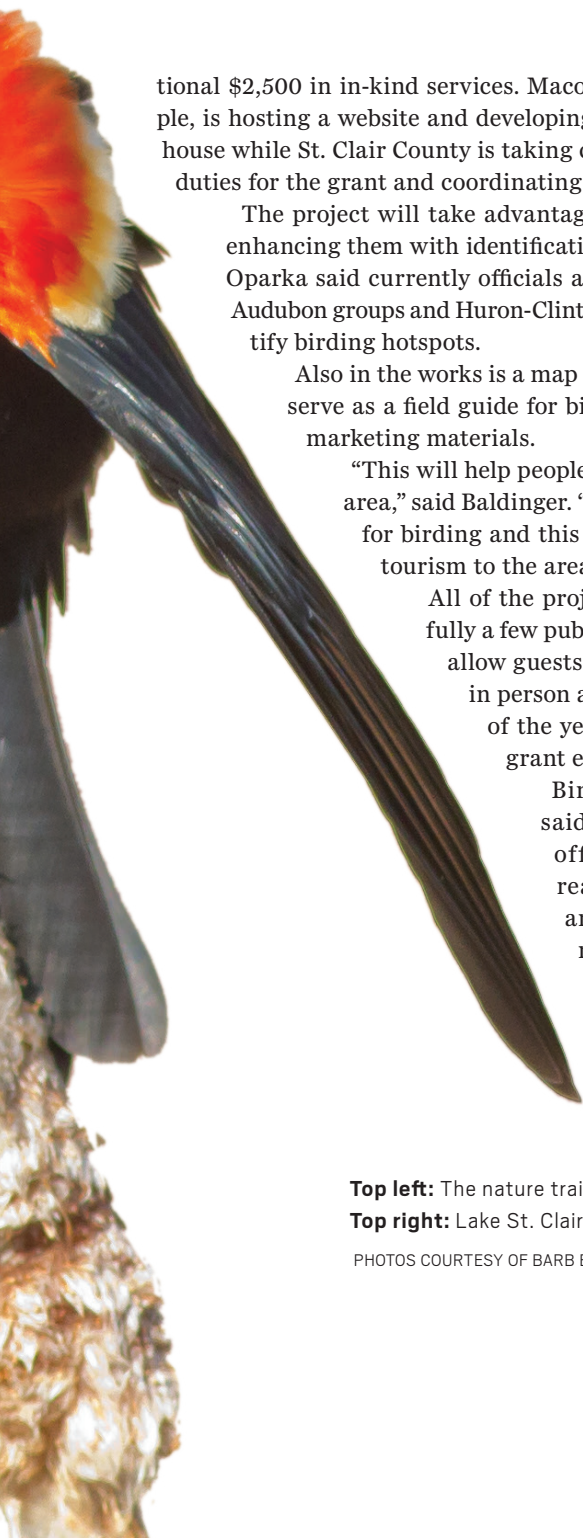
Warblers are a thrilling sighting in the spring and fall. There are more than 30 species in the area with some more rare than others, like the prairie warbler, said Barb Baldinger, a member of the Macomb Audubon Society.

The birding initiative will significantly enhance current coastal trails and raise the profile of birdwatching around the lake. St. Clair County’s Metropolitan Planning Commission applied for a \$13,200 Coastal Management Program grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), which was awarded in fall 2020. Each county, said Oparka, is providing a \$2,500 cash match and an addi-



While birders have always been aware of the number of diverse species that the lake attracts, soon casual observers and out-of-town visitors will more easily be able to identify different types of birds that frequent the area.

PHOTO BY MIKE DEE COURTESY OF HURON CLINTON METROPARK AUTHORITY



tional \$2,500 in in-kind services. Macomb County, for example, is hosting a website and developing graphic materials in house while St. Clair County is taking care of administration duties for the grant and coordinating meetings, she said.

The project will take advantage of existing trails by enhancing them with identification signs and markers. Oparka said currently officials are working with local Audubon groups and Huron-Clinton Metroparks to identify birding hotspots.

Also in the works is a map and brochure that can serve as a field guide for birders as well as other marketing materials.

“This will help people who are not from the area,” said Baldinger. “People will travel a lot for birding and this trail is likely to bring tourism to the area.”

All of the projects, as well as hopefully a few public events this fall that allow guests to experience birding in person are planned by the end of the year, which is when the grant expires.

Birdwatching is great, said Oparka, because it offers people another reason to head outside and enjoy outdoor recreation.

“You can go birdwatching as a family or on your own,” she said. **M**

CONNECT

A BIRDING DESTINATION

While the birding trail will make it easier for birders to share their love for the hobby and better for casual observers, students and visitors to learn more about birding in the region, it is also predicted to draw tourists to both Macomb and St. Clair counties. This can present a unique economic opportunity.

“Birders will travel to see certain birds and that definitely brings in tourism,” said Amanda Oparka, senior planner - Land & Water Resources, Macomb County Planning & Economic Development. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, more than 45 million people enjoy birdwatching. They will go to their favorite local spots, but they are also willing to travel in order to spy birds not native to their region. Along with other wildlife watchers, it is reported that bird watchers help pump nearly \$80 billion into the U.S. economy, mostly through travel expenses like gas, food and lodging, although books, equipment, entry fees and licenses also contribute to the bottom line. Some industry watchers say the numbers could be even higher now as many residents sought refuge outdoors during the COVID-19 pandemic and took up additional hobbies like birdwatching and wildlife photography.



Top left: The nature trails at Stony Creek Metropark is another good place for birders to check out.

Top right: Lake St. Clair Metropark has close to 300 bird species and this boardwalk is an ideal place to enjoy birding.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BARB BALDINGER

Stepping up

Black-owned businesses continue to grow, provide diverse experience

By Jane Peterson

Macomb County is incredibly diverse so it should come as no surprise that the number of businesses owned by African-Americans continues to increase. In 2010, the county's Black population was 8.6%. By 2016, the number had grown to 11.4%.

Black entrepreneurs are passionate about their products and love reaching out to people who are looking to diversify their shopping experience and support local businesses. From food and fashion to cakes and cars, residents can find what they need to support their friends and neighbors and make Black-owned businesses strong.

GIRL BOSS FASHIONS

When she noticed that Macomb County didn't have too many boutiques, Tenisia Evans took it upon herself to change that.

"Many African Americans like to shop where they live," she said. "Local businesses are the backbone of the community."



Tenisia Evans

Evans should know the role businesses play in neighborhoods. Last year she opened her fourth Girl Boss Fashions locations at the Macomb Mall in Roseville.

Women gravitate to the store's clothing collection because the pieces are designed to be flattering on women of all shapes and sizes. The stores stock sizes from small to 3x. Most pieces have just the right amount of bling to stand apart from the crowd. T-shirts feature heartfelt sayings like "The Struggle is Real, but I Make it Look Good!" and "My Secret is

Simple, I Pray."

It's a style that Evans calls "Bossed Up."

"We want customers to smile," said Evans. "We offer unique, one-of-a-kind pieces. I want my customers to feel special and empowered."

Her business received a boost when Taraji B. Henson, known for her role as Cookie Lyon on Fox's *Empire* television series, was spotted wearing one of her T-shirts. She said Jenifer Lewis, who currently plays Ruby Johnson in the ABC comedy series *Black-ish* has also sported her T-shirts.

A Macomb Township mom whose four oldest children graduated from Mount Clemens Community Schools while her youngest still attends school, Evans has been steadily growing her business since opening the very first boutique and hair salon in Detroit called Girl Boss Beauty Bar & Boutique. Her hus-



Above: Tenisia Evans describes the style of clothing and accessories offered at her store as "Bossed Up." COURTESY OF GIRL BOSS FASHIONS

Opposite page: Andrea Jones is proud that of the four Nothing Bundt Cakes franchises in Michigan, two of them are owned by her and her cousin, Kelly Rankin. COURTESY OF ANDREA JONES

CONNECT

TO LEARN MORE

Girl Boss Fashions currently has four locations, with the original location — Girl Boss Beauty Bar & Boutique located at 18927 Kelly Rd. in Detroit. Girl Boss Fashions locations include:

- 1232 Library in Detroit. Hours are 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon-6 p.m. on Sunday. For more information, call (313) 474-2677 or visit GirlBossFashions.com.
- 14000 Lakeside Circle, Sterling Heights in the Lakeside Mall. Hours are 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon-6 p.m. Sunday. For details, call (586) 800-2677 or visit GirlBossFashions.com.
- 17420 Hall Road, Clinton Township in The Mall at Partridge Creek. Hours are 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon-6 p.m. Sunday. Call (586) 228-2677 for more information or visit GirlBossFashions.com.
- 32233 Gratiot Ave., Roseville in the Macomb Mall. Hours are 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon-6 p.m. Sunday. For details, call (586) 400-2677 or visit GirlBossFashions.com.





band surprised her with space at the Lakeside Mall in Sterling Heights in 2018 and the following year, she won Partridge Creek Mall's Battle of the Pop-Up, receiving free rent in the Clinton Township shopping center for four months. The location was so popular, it remained open afterward, too.

Evans is proud that she is able to be an encouragement for women. Before being diagnosed with an autoimmune disease that caused her to lose 96 pounds in two months, she said she was a curvy lady and she's never forgotten how important it is to feel beautiful both inside and out.

"I want to empower people and let them know that they can do it," she said. "I want them to know that there is a boss inside of every woman."

Most important to Evans is her family. Her husband, Bishop J. Richard Evans, has always been very supportive of her dreams. With her children and grandchildren, she wants them to see the example of a strong African-American woman who can overcome any hurdles tossed in her direction.

"I want African-American women to know that they can be successful. All things are possible to those who believe," she said.

Evans practices what she preaches, hiring women and acting as a mentor for other entrepreneurs.

"If you have a dream to pursue, there are people willing to help," she said. "I want Girl Boss to be a household name."

NOTHING BUNDT CAKES

Andrea Jones is proud that of the four Nothing Bundt Cakes franchises in Michigan, two of them are owned by her and her cousin, Kelly Rankin. The pair started their entrepreneurial journey after innocently buying a cake while visiting Texas. As they carried the cake around, people kept noticing the cake's signature style, commenting about it, as in "Ohhh, you have Nothing Bundt Cakes." They couldn't figure out what the big deal was until they arrived back in southeast Michigan and tasted a slice. They wanted more, but there were no Nothing Bundt Cakes stores in the state at the time.



Andrea Jones

It was Rankin that took the leap of faith first in Novi while Jones was working in human resources in the automotive sector. However,

CONNECT

TO LEARN MORE

Nothing Bundt Cakes is located at 14924 Hall Road in Sterling Heights. Hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Saturday. The

bakery franchise offers a variety of bundt cakes, cake platters and gift baskets. For more information, call (586) 884-3666 or visit NothingBundtCakes.com.



searching for something different – and knowing that Nothing Bundt Cakes has an excellent product – Jones soon found herself opening a store in Sterling Heights.

"It's a big deal to switch and do something different," she said. "I enjoy the connection I make with people when they realize that I am the owner."

For Jones, cake brings people together. She loves to feed people and make them – and their stomachs – happy.

Nothing Bundt Cakes is a Las-Vegas based franchise that features 10 classic cake flavors such as lemon, white chocolate raspberry, red velvet and chocolate chocolate chip as well as seasonal flavors, like pumpkin spice in the fall. Jones was attracted to the business because the franchise uses nothing but fresh, high-quality ingredients in a bakery atmosphere that is warm and inviting. There are several sizes of cakes to choose from, from bite-sized BUNDTINIS® to two-tier cakes that feed up to 26 people. Each is carefully topped with Nothing Bundt Cakes' signature petals of cream cheese frosting.

Jones chose Sterling Heights because she knew the city was growing and that she would have a good customer base. She did her research, talking with the mayor, city council and chamber of commerce. Like many businesses, COVID-19 stopped her store in its tracks, however, she is proud of the fact that Nothing Bundt Cakes never closed its doors and adapted to the changes so well.

"At one time, there weren't many bakeries open and people still wanted to give gifts to their loved ones. We are a very holiday-oriented business and Mother's Day is one of our busiest," said Jones.

Still, she said without assistance of Macomb County officials and grant programs, she would have had a much more difficult time during the pandemic.

"They really stepped up," she said.

Jones rises to the challenge as well, believing that it is important to be active in the community. She is a participant in the African American Coalition on Equity, an organization aimed at improving race relations in the city. She is also a member of the Italian-American Chamber of Commerce of Michigan. **M**

All systems go

Sterling Heights company gets grant for unmanned drone development

By Jane Peterson

Sterling Heights-based RAVE CAVE received a \$100,000 testing grant to help accelerate the integration of mobility solutions into the state's infrastructure last December. The grant focuses on testing unmanned aerial systems, commonly known as drones, at the Michigan Unmanned Aerial Systems Consortium (MUASC).

Mobility solutions have been researched for years, but recently have expanded to include a wide range of innovations that are designed to propel businesses forward by streamlining current processes and practices. The grant was announced in December 2020 by PlanetM, the state's mobility industry accelerator, and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation in coordination with the Office of Future Mobility and Electrification.

"Drones are a burgeoning industry," said Art Adlam, president of RAVE CAVE, a nonprofit organization. "It's a worthwhile area for the community to explore."

The grant will support ongoing testing at the MUASC as it prepares its facilities for a 3D virtual environment to develop drone training. A major portion of grant funds were used for upgrading tracking projectors, equipment and technology hardware.

The site will be used to train drone pilots. In Michigan, in order to commercially fly a drone, pilots must be licensed, said Adlam. Using real terrain data, drone pilots will be able to fly in an immersive 3D atmosphere that includes buildings, terrain and roads built to scale, creating flight paths based on traffic patterns

CONNECT

HOW DRONES IMPACT OUR LIVES

The use of unmanned aerial systems, commonly known as drones, continues to grow quickly worldwide. Organizations like the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International and the Commercial Drone Alliance advocate for the safe use of drones while organizations such as the RAVE CAVE continue to innovate ways to make flying drones safer through training that simulates real-life situations. Macomb County is on the cutting edge of these simulated safety technologies, which are also embraced in the automotive industry as driverless cars are tested and more drones are being used for commercial use.



Above: Using real terrain data, drone pilots will be able to fly in an immersive 3D atmosphere that includes buildings, terrain and roads built to scale.

Opposite page: The simulations include a mix of environments found in Michigan, such as a potential test site in the Upper Peninsula and a representation of the downtown metro Detroit area.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RAVE CAVE

Here is a list of how drones may impact our lives in the very near future according to Know Before You Fly, an education campaign organized by the Academy of Model Aeronautics, the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International and the Consumer Technology Association in partnership with the Federal Aviation Administration:

- Crop monitoring/inspection
- Research and development
- Educational/academic use
- Power line/pipeline inspection in hilly or mountainous terrain
- Antenna inspections
- Bridge inspections
- Aerial photography, including for events, real estate or construction
- Wildlife nesting area evaluations



and landing sites common across the state. The simulations include a mix of environments found in Michigan, such as a potential test site in the Upper Peninsula and a representation of the downtown metro Detroit area, said Adlam.

The result of the MUASC's work will keep people safer while protecting expensive technology equipment as companies explore different ways to integrate drone technology into their current business operations. As more businesses rely on drones, Michigan overall is focused on various air mobility issues, including airspace, safety and future infrastructure needs.

However, working during a global pandemic presented some challenges, such as working remotely instead of collaboratively in a group setting. Plus, there were some delays in shipping with equipment. Everyone put in a lot of hard work to keep the project on track, said Adlam.

Beyond drone training, 3D model simulation is used by government officials and corporation decision-makers because it allows officials to visualize new projects without the added costs and time delays of building prototypes, he said.

"Lots of ideas need models and simulations to visualize their concepts," said Adlam. "There is a big demand for these types of high-tech capabilities."

Since 2013, RAVE CAVE has specialized in 3D simulation, operating a 3D virtual reality simulator where businesses can test products and students can explore educational STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) activities.

The CAVE, which stands for Cave Automatic Virtual Environment, is a room where projectors are directed toward every wall forming a virtual reality cube. Built by Rave Computer engineers, user's movements are tracked by the sensors and recorded on video, which adjusts according to what's happening in the room. Computers control both the movement and the audio with numerous speakers placed at multiple angles to offer 3D sound to complement the 3D video. Just as with 3D movies, users wear special glasses to see the 3D graphics.

Its location in the Southeastern Michigan Defense Corridor, Center for Collaboration and Synergy (DC3S) in Sterling Heights is ideal being near its sponsors, TARDEC, RAVE COMPUTER, DC3S Defense Corridor, Autodesk, Intel, Nvidia and Get it Right.

Adlam has an engineering background and served for 38 years as a director at TARDEC before retiring in 2008. While in the research and development sector, he was exposed to modeling and simulation and recognized the impact it would make in future project development. In 2011, officials from TARDEC met with the RAVE COMPUTER and DC3S Defense Corridor to establish a nonprofit organization that would take a 3D immersion cave out of storage at TARDEC and repurpose it as an educational experience for local students to let see how exciting careers are in STEAM-related fields.

Open for public use, Adlam said the RAVE CAVE is available for use by governmental entities, educational institutions, corporations and others. It is a hub for Virtual Memory System technologies with the goal to encourage development and retention of Michigan's high-tech workforce. **M**



The Velocity Center, led by Alchemist Ventures LLC CEO Patrick Wearn, can assist entrepreneurs with many needs, including event hosting; training and education; technical and professional staffing resources; a podcast studio; and intellectual and patent support services.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE VELOCITY CENTER

Powering innovation

Changes at technology hub Velocity Center to boost profile for Macomb County small businesses, start-ups

By Jane Peterson

Patrick Wearn has big plans for the Velocity Center. Since his company, Alchemist Ventures LLC, won the entrepreneurial services contract for the Velocity Center last year, changes have been under way to enhance the collaboration and innovation capabilities at this technology hub located in Sterling Heights.

The Velocity Center is an entrepreneurial incubator. Capturing pockets of innovation, it provides the space and resources for small business and start-up companies to work together collaboratively, instead of in a vacuum. Entrepreneurs have the opportunity to shape and fully develop an idea, gaining a different perspective and benefitting from the experiences of others who

have gone before them.

“Bringing these innovators together gives Macomb County a chance to be competitive because it draws talent to the area,” said Wearn, founder and CEO of Alchemist Ventures LLC.

Among the most notable changes is increased utilization of the outdoor spaces where Wearn wants to show off technology through engaging seasonal displays. These spaces will also be the site of various programming, such as Technology Tuesdays, an outdoor technology series. Topics will include everything from learning about venture capital to ways to grow ideas into marketable products.

A Manufacturers Series with Toffler Associates will examine

what manufacturing will look like five years from now so businesses can keep on top of current trends and appropriately work with Macomb Community College on training programs to prepare future employees to fill new roles.

The Velocity Center is also upgrading some equipment and undergoing renovations to develop co-working space that is COVID-19 safe.

The global pandemic is driving change at the Velocity Center as much as the change in leadership. When people were laid off from their jobs and found themselves staying at home, they did more than binge watch Netflix, organize their closets and make

sourdough bread. Many seized the opportunity to devote the extra time to their dream projects, developing ideas they had in their head for some time into real products.

A lot of these companies have now outgrown their basements, garages and home offices, said Wearn, and are looking for affordable space where they can collaborate with others and bring their products to market.

“We are a vibrant center with competitive rates for incubating,” he said. “Our goal is connecting local business leaders and investors with entrepreneurs and college students to help grow ideas.”

In addition to a full slate of public events, Wearn said the Velocity Center can assist entrepreneurs with other needs, like event hosting; training and education; technical and professional staffing resources; a podcast studio; and intellectual and patent support services.

Wearn has a personal passion for supporting local entrepreneurship. A former Marine who worked as a civil servant for the defense department until his retirement a few years ago, he launched Alchemist Ventures in 2017 to link technology with economic development.

He sees great opportunity for the Velocity Center, which in May hosted the Macomb Science Olympiad and is also home to Macomb County Robotics Collaboration and Innovation Center, a nonprofit organization formed in partnership with Macomb County, Macomb Intermediate School District, Macomb Community College and the City of Sterling Heights, to encourage interest in robotics and engineering careers.

Sterling Heights ranks fourth in the United States for its high concentration of engineering jobs, following in the tradition of well-known high-technology epicenters in Los Alamos, N.M.; Huntsville, Ala.; and Silicon Valley. The goal is to nurture and keep that generation of talent in southeastern Michigan, where numerous opportunities exist for those interested in advanced manufacturing, automation and robotics careers.

“One of the manufacturing industry’s biggest challenges is finding the right talent,” said Wearn. “We want this to be the place employers and business owners reach out to.” **M**



CONNECT

TO LEARN MORE

The Velocity Center provides entrepreneurial support services for high-tech companies. To learn more about its mission and how it assists small businesses and start-up companies, visit velocity-center.com. The Velocity Center is located at 6633 18 Mile Road in Sterling Heights.

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In demand

Short-term programs at MCC address needs in local workforce

By Jane Peterson

When Macomb County employers need to fill gaps in their workforce, Macomb Community College answers the call. College officials have developed a series of short-term intensive programs to address local industry needs and provide training for high-demand careers in the region.

Many of these programs are in the area of advanced manufacturing, currently the greatest need among Macomb County employers. The programs run from five to 13 weeks and operate like an on-the-job experience. Students attend class Monday-Friday as part of a standard 40-hour work week and learn on the same equipment that is used in manufacturing facilities today, said Patrick Rouse, director, Workforce & Continuing Education, Engineering and Advanced Technology at Macomb Community College.

“We’re replicating the workplace environment,” he said.

In May, Macomb County had a 4% unemployment rate, pretty close to where it was before the COVID-19 pandemic. The issue for many employers is not being able to hire employees, but being able to find those who possess the specialized skills they need. Current programs at Macomb Community College include robot programmer, robot technician, industrial maintenance technician and controls technician.

CONNECT

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Those considering enrollment in the robot programming, robot technician, industrial maintenance technician and controls technician programs should contact Macomb Community College for updated information on the next session. Participants should be interested in the topic and motivated to succeed, but do not need to have any specialized knowledge or skills to register.

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



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Macomb Community College has been offering these short-term programs for a few years and always strives to meet employer needs, adapting the curriculum as industry needs change and technology advances.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The college has been offering these short-term programs for a few years and always strives to meet employer needs, adapting the curriculum as industry needs change and technology advances. The robot programmer and robot technician programs, for example, are in the middle of a revamp to incorporate additional competencies, including use of augmented reality.

With these short-term, intensive programs, the goal is to get skilled employees into the workplace as quickly as possible. Upon completion, many students already have solid, good-paying jobs lined up, said Rouse.

“We’ve created a pipeline for high-demand jobs,” he said. “These are positions with good wages, starting at the low end around \$14/hour, but the vast majority pays \$18-\$22/hour right after graduation.”

The college constantly re-evaluates its offerings to fill local and regional needs without oversupplying the market. Officials have regular communication with more than 400 companies in Macomb County, the United States and abroad. Locally, several industry leaders serve on the college’s advisory board and

participate in other events like job fairs.

These short-term, intensive programs continue to be offered as need exists.

“We maximize the number of cohorts depending on what industries are looking for,” said Rouse.

Students come from diverse backgrounds. Some have recently graduated from high school and are seeking a path to a good career. Others are displaced workers who are good employees, but for any number of reasons, find themselves out of a job. Still, there are some who pivoted during the health pandemic, deciding to switch careers to do something important to them.

Whatever their situation, Rouse said the college has systems, like tutoring and assistance from faculty members, in place to support students throughout their education.

“We want them to be successful and get employed. We have high graduation rates and the vast majority of graduates are still working in their chosen field more than a year later,” he said. “We help maximize the investment they have made in their future.” **M**

Hang ten

Students dive into woodworking, create celebrity paddleboards

By Jane Peterson

A woodworking course is generating national attention for Henry Ford II High School in Sterling Heights after celebrities began taking notice of the signature class project: Paddleboards.

For the past three years, Christopher Davis' woodworking students have crafted custom paddleboards for celebrities. The project started when Davis was researching interesting new projects for his students. He came across information online about wooden paddleboards and his interest was immediately piqued since most paddleboards are made from standard foam. Expecting to have to travel to the Caribbean or West Coast to learn more about the build process, Davis was delighted when he learned that wood paddleboards were being made right here in Michigan at Little Bay Boards in Petoskey by owner Jason Thelen.

"I thought these are some of the most beautiful boards I've seen in the world," he said.

While Davis tries to select projects based on the interests of students, the paddleboards are about much more than a class assignment. It's about working with your hands, learning valuable life skills and discovering that you could do something you never thought you could.

Recent graduate Alyssa Fiantaco said she always learns concepts better by doing projects with her hands instead of reading a book, so three years ago she thought woodworking class sounded like a good idea. She has never regretted her decision.

"I enjoy taking scraps of wood and making something cool," she said.

The woodshop is an ideal place for hands-on learning, said Thelen, and that can lead to a good job after high school.

The paddleboard project really took off when Kristy Petrillo, host of "Cabin Reno" on HGTV and the DIY Network, ordered a custom board. Then, she did the Virgin STRIVE charity challenge with Sir Richard Branson — founder of Virgin Atlantic airlines, Virgin Records and other businesses — and he expressed interest in a paddleboard, too. He sent the class a video message request.

Davis decided to have an all-girls team build Branson's board because he wanted to encourage more young women to take the class.

"I felt like I was onto something with the celebrity builds. The kids were more into it. They worked to impress who the paddleboard was going to," he said.

The unique class project achieved its goal as class sizes, including female enrollment, has increased.

"When I started there were only a few girls in my class," said





Little Bay Boards owner Jason Thelen taught Henry Ford II High School woodworking teacher Christopher Davis everything he knew about crafting hollow wood core paddleboards.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
LITTLE BAY BOARDS

Fiantaco. “Now there are more girls in class. We are changing the image of woodworking for girls.”

The paddleboards are customized based on hobbies, interests and achievements. Branson’s board, for example, incorporated a hot air balloon since he and his team were the first to complete a transatlantic flight in a hot-air balloon in 1987. Also included in the design was the Virgin logo, waves and islands.

Much attention goes into the design. Students often look up the celebrity on Instagram and watch YouTube videos to get a sense of their interests. Then, they sketch a design before beginning the build process.

Teams of six students comprise each build team. Some attend different class hours so work can continuously progress on the project. During the 2020-21 school year, students worked on two celebrity boards, one for Sara Blakely, founder of Spanx, and her husband, Jesse Itzler, co-founder of Marquis Jet, a partner in Zico Coconut Water and an owner of the NBA’s Atlanta Hawks. Blakeley’s board is being built by an all-girls team while Itzler’s paddleboard is being constructed by an all-guys team.

Boards are crafted with a hollow wood core instead of foam, which Thelen said while cheap and effective, is not great for the environment. He said although it feels like you’re floating on air, the

wooden boards are stronger and eco-friendly as there are no chemical processes used in production. Strips of mostly reclaimed wood are selected for their beauty and pieced together by hand, glazed with low volatile organic compounds acrylic-based resin, so nothing ends up in the landfill.

Thelen enjoys mentoring students and has also worked with other schools up north, but not on an ongoing basis

like with the Henry Ford II High School.

Depending on how complicated the design, one paddleboard can take the entire school year to complete.

However, for Davis, the paddleboards project is about more than producing a quality product, more than just taking a woodworking class.

“It’s about digging down to see what you’re made of while learning about woodworking, communication, design and artistic skills,” he said. “When students leave, there is a real sense of accomplishment and pride in their work.”

Through her involvement, Fiantaco has learned that even if you make a mistake, it can be fixed. She has also overcome her fear of using machines, which has made her more confident overall.

“You have to dream big. Even if you think it’s a crazy idea, you can do it,” she said. **M**

CONNECT

A FABULOUS PARTNERSHIP

Henry Ford II High School woodworking teacher Christopher Davis and Little Bay Boards owner Jason Thelen have struck up a wonderful friendship

while teaching students about the wonders of woodworking and paddleboards. Thelen taught Davis everything he knew about crafting hollow wood core paddleboards when Davis hung out at the shop one summer for a week and essentially worked for free while taking in all the information that he could to share with his class.

To this day, the pair communicates frequently and Davis continues to visit the shop whenever he can. Thelen acts as a mentor to students, sometimes joining the class in-person to review certain points and other times speaking with them online via video chat. Thelen also donates the wood for the paddleboards.



QUOTABLE

“It’s about digging down to see what you’re made of while learning about woodworking, communication, design and artistic skills.”

— Christopher Davis



Top and above: For the past three years, Christopher Davis' woodworking students have crafted custom paddleboards for celebrities and others.

Left: While Henry Ford II High School woodworking teacher Christopher Davis tries to select projects based on the interests of students, the paddleboards are about much more than a class assignment. It's about working with your hands, learning valuable life skills and discovering that you could do something you never thought you could. Depending on how complicated the design, one paddleboard can take the entire school year to complete.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LITTLE BAY BOARDS

Christopher Bunch

Helping Macomb County communities preserve, care for natural land

By Jane Peterson



Christopher Bunch

Under Christopher Bunch's 10-year leadership as executive director of the Six Rivers Land Conservancy, the nonprofit organization has protected more than 2,000 acres of land in Oakland, Macomb, St. Clair, Lapeer and Genesee counties.

He takes the mission of Six Rivers Land Conservancy to conserve, sustain and connect natural areas, lands and waters very seriously, finding creative ways to help communities to secure land parcels that will be used to beautify neighborhoods, enhance wildlife and preserve land in its natural

state. He approaches challenges from all angles, whether it's helping communities purchase property for preservation or removing invasive species that pose a huge threat to natural vegetation and, if left unchecked, can eliminate views of the water, close beaches, push up concrete on highways and plug drains.

Born and raised in Lansing, Bunch first became involved in conservation efforts when he volunteered at his local sportsman's club. That led to a position with the Michigan United Conservation Clubs and later he moved to Ohio to accept a position as the executive director of the Medina Summit Land Conservancy. During his tenure, he led the organization through a merger process where it became part of the much larger Western Reserve Land Conservancy and he served as field director covering Medina and Summit counties.

But his heart was in Michigan, so in 2007, he and his wife, Maureen, returned to Baldwin, where they settled on property that had been owned by his family for four generations. During this time, he renovated and transformed a cottage into a year-round home while working for a local lumber company where his grandfather had worked 75 years prior.

When he accepted his current position with Six Rivers Land Conservancy in 2011, he had no experience living in southeastern Michigan, but Maureen was born and raised in the Birmingham and Bloomfield area, so she showed him the ropes..

Q Why is Macomb County a good place for your organization?

A Macomb County is the third most populous county in Michigan and its Lake St. Clair shoreline is an important resource locally, regionally and globally.

Q How does your organization specifically benefit from its location in Macomb County?

A There is tremendous need and opportunity for conservation work in Macomb County. Water quality issues are vital to every community and natural restoration projects can help with storm-water management.

Q How does your organization contribute to Macomb County's business and economic growth?

A We have undertaken a lot of projects here. Recently, Six Rivers Land Conservancy purchased 33-acres in the Salt River Intracoastal Marina District thanks to a community partnership between Six Rivers Land Conservancy, Chesterfield Township and First State Bank. It was purchased on behalf of Chesterfield Township and we served as a facilitator, holding the property for the township while officials waited to hear on the status of their grant application from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. Preserving this property helps protect the ecological systems and wildlife habitat while increasing access to nature.



Q How does Macomb County contribute to your organization's success?

A We have a strong partnership with Macomb County. We are very involved with Macomb County Planning and Economic Development. Gerry Santoro, program director, Parks and Natural Resources for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development, sits on our board. We have identified important pieces of land to protect in Macomb County with regards to water quality and we helped with a reforestation program.

Q What does the future hold for your organization in Macomb County?

A There is a lot of opportunity in Macomb County and we expect to receive more grants and have additional projects happen here. I would like to see the amount of public land in southeast Michigan double.

Christopher Bunch, executive director of the Six Rivers Land Conservancy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SIX RIVER LAND CONSERVANCY

Patricia Lopez

A natural born leader making a difference in Macomb County

By Jane Peterson



Patricia Lopez

Patricia Lopez was destined to be a leader in the business world.

She spent her childhood hanging out and then working at her family's business, Elmhirst Industries, an automotive manufacturing company based in Sterling Heights.

Growing up, Lopez didn't let anything deter her from her goals. She pursued her dreams and today is a respected industry innovator and enthusiastic supporter of women in manufacturing in Macomb County.

She earned her Masters of Engineering in Manufacturing Systems and Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Lawrence Technological University and went to work for a couple of different companies, including Chrysler, but she ultimately left.

"Working for a large business wasn't for me," she said.

Undecided on her next move, she contemplated enlisting in the military, then her dad, John Elmhirst, invited her to come and work with him. After success with several large contracts, he suggested she and her sister, Jennifer Howard, branch out to found their own company: Rose-A-Lee Technologies.

Rose-A-Lee Technologies is the defense manufacturing arm to Elmhirst Industries. Lopez, who handles business development and operations, was fearless when it came to starting and growing the business. Often she would then turn around to share her knowledge with other women looking to follow in her footsteps.

Today Lopez serves as President of Rose-A-Lee Technologies; Chief Operating Officer for Alchemist Ventures; and Vice President of Operations and Personnel for Elmhirst Industries. While involved with several business ventures in Macomb County, she still finds time to be an active leader in community organizations, encouraging the next generation of engineers and manufacturers.

Q Why is Macomb County a good place for businesses and organizations?

A Macomb County is a tight-knit community. We have leaders who want to help businesses grow and thrive. "Make Macomb Your Home" is more than a slogan; there is real drive and passion

behind it. Every day I do what I can to help move the needle forward by engaging with local schools, filling job gaps and encouraging students to pursue careers in computer science, robotics and science. That's why I love the Velocity Center. Alchemist Ventures, where I serve as chief operating officer, won the entrepreneurial services contract for the Velocity Center last year and as an entrepreneurial incubator, it helps to connect people and set them up for success.

Q How does your organization specifically benefit from its location in Macomb County?

A Located off 18 Mile Road between Mound and Van Dyke in Sterling Heights, we are located in the heart of innovation. In our backyard at Rose-A-Lee Technologies, there are all sizes of businesses. We have easy access to goods, services and everything we need.

Q How does your organization contribute to Macomb County's business and economic growth?

A At the Velocity Center, we talk a lot about where the future of manufacturing is going and we provide a map of resources for people to be successful. We want to make entrepreneurship as smooth as possible. We offer business development training at a reduced rate to people in the building. We engage manufacturers with the community through events like Manufacturers Engage and Tech Tuesdays that feature guest speakers and presentations on topics like cybersecurity, advancements in technology and how to attract employees. We also work with the Macomb County Robotics Collaboration and Innovation Center to help fill the talent need for robotics in the community.

Q How does Macomb County contribute to your organization's success?

A I was born and raised in Macomb County. County officials are very supportive. They help with the marketing of the Velocity Center and are always on top of training, events and grants that are available for manufacturers. They are very proactive.

Q What does the future hold for your organization in Macomb County?

A We want to be the catalyzing energy that makes Macomb County explode. We seek to expose students to the exciting world of manufacturing and connect schools with available jobs. Macomb County has a lot going for it: Technology, arts and creative resources. There is the culture here that we get things done.

Patty Lopez, President of Rose-A-Lee Technologies.
PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSE-A-LEE TECHNOLOGIES

Cheryl Woods

Taking care of families, strengthening the fabric of community

By Jane Peterson



Cheryl Woods



Cheryl Woods went into nursing because she wanted to help take care of people – and that’s exactly what she has dedicated her career to doing. As a public health nurse, Woods’ mission is to promote healthy living and strong communities. As the Division Director of Family Health Services for Macomb County, her role is to prevent illness, promote wellness, educate the public, advocate for families and help keep the community safe.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Woods has played a vital role in protecting Macomb County residents. She has been there assisting with the implementation of public health measures to guide the public through the pandemic, such as the development of a call center, testing site and most recently, vaccination clinics.

“The community needs to know we stand with them. We are there to guide them through

this,” she said.

After graduating from Wayne State University as a registered nurse, Woods worked at Children’s Hospital of Michigan in Detroit on the adolescent medical/surgical floor. Wanting to make deeper connections with families and be able to teach, she moved into home healthcare with the Visiting Nurse Association. For more than 20 years, she found fulfillment being in homes caring for people.

“I’m a strong believer that people heal best at home,” she said. “There’s nothing like being in your own environment where you feel safe and comfortable.”

In public health, Woods said she can do more health promotion through educating families and connecting the community to the resources they need. It’s just one of many reasons why she loves living and working in Macomb County.

Q Why is Macomb County a good place for health-related businesses and organizations in general?

A This county and its residents have such a strong work ethic. County leadership is grounded, compassionate and believes in promoting health and wellness. The support we have from the community and leadership is there, especially for preventative care.

Q How do you benefit from your involvement with Macomb County?

A I live and work in the county. Everything I do with education and preventative care strengthens the community. Every day I make an impact in someone’s life. Many times that impact can be generational as what is learned can be passed down to children who then benefit from that knowledge, too.

Q How does your organization contribute to Macomb County’s business and economic growth?

A Public health is about long-term growth. By helping the community to be healthier through maternal/child care, age-related care and other ways, we increase the quality of life and make it a desirable place to be. In the long run we help across the board economically.

Q How does Macomb County contribute to your organization’s success?

A Whenever we have a new idea, county leadership is there. We are always assessing, aligning our services with the needs of the community. Leadership offers support.

Q What does the future hold for your organization in Macomb County?

A The future for public health is strong. There’s always going to be a need for public health and while this year has been challenging with the pandemic and the politics surrounding it, people don’t need to shy away from public health as a career. I wholeheartedly recommend it to others despite its many demands. **M**

Cheryl Woods, Division Director of Family Health Services for Macomb County.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY



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