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MOMENTUM

Uniquely Macomb County, Michigan

Volume 8, Issue 1

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REACHING FOR THE STARS:

Macomb County offers a hospitable home for niche entrepreneurs

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Warren club offers fun, friendship, healthy competition year round

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MICHELLE DAVIDSON always knew her medical assistant career wasn't the right fit. Then she discovered her career calling in social work. Her pursuit to finish her degree drove her to OU. The mother of two accomplished her goal at 38 in 2018. She now enjoys a rewarding and fulfilling career working for We the People Michigan — collaborating with community leaders on initiatives to empower Michigan residents.

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Uniquely
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Volume 8, Issue 1

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Macomb County Executive
Mark A. Hackel

Phone: (586) 469-7001
Email: Executive@MacombGov.org
Twitter: @markhackel

Director, Macomb County Planning &
Economic Development
Vicky Rowinski, CEcD

Phone: (586) 469-5285
Email: Planning@MacombGov.org

Macomb County Administrative Building

1 South Main St.
Mount Clemens, Mich. 48043
Phone: (586) 469-5285
Fax: (586) 469-6487

Websites:

MacombBusiness.com;
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Email:

planning@macombgov.org

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publication, please contact
info@macombbusiness.com

Publishing Partner

MediaNews Group / Michigan Group
6250 Metropolitan Parkway, Dock D
Sterling Heights, Mich. 48312

President
Greg Mazanec

mipublisher@medianewsgroup.com

General Manager, Advertising
Dave Swantek

mipublisher@medianewsgroup.com

Vice President / Content
Don Wyatt

dwyatt@medianewsgroup.com

Advertising Manager
Jason Uhlenhake

Advertising Executives

Aj Doppke, Carol Clancy, Dawn Emke, Mary
Ellen Zander, Monica LiCavoli

Contributors

Natalie Broda and Jane Peterson

Design, Editing and Production

Joe Pas and Jenny Sherman

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Nearly 30 trees were planted at Romeo Trailside Park in honor of Arbor Day this past April, with help from volunteers from Second Nature Brands, the Village of Romeo and the Romeo Tree Board.

PHOTO BY DAVID ANGELL — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

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Narine Mirijanian, dean of health and public services at *Macomb Community College*
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CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Peterson has been a journalist for more than 20 years, working at newspapers such as The Oakland Press, The Holly Herald and The Berrien County Record. Today, she is an active freelance writer who contributes to write articles and other materials for newspapers, online publications and private clients.

On the cover: Agriculture plays an important economic role in many Macomb County communities. Vern Kulman, whose family has farmed in Richmond Township since the 1930s, is one of several local farmers taking advantage of a county program to preserve farmland in the area.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VERN KULMAN

Transformative Macomb

Preserving farmland, injecting talent into future tech industries are among initiatives driving Macomb County’s economy forward

By Mark A. Hackel

I am pleased to present this issue of Momentum, a bi-annual publication of the Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development and MediaNews Group/The Macomb Daily.

Each time we deliver these special publications we like to provide some insights into the economic transformation happening in Macomb County. From our efforts in developing one of the nation’s most influential defense sectors to our global presence in the mobility ecosystem, Macomb County is a preferred destination to do business. In this issue, you will get insight into how our MacombNext initiative is helping inject future tech and talent into companies seeking a competitive advantage with the next industrial



revolution. You will also see how our small business community continues to make its presence known with new partnerships, products and storefronts.

As we get ready to kick off summer in Macomb County I hope you will take advantage of the dozens of farmers markets and agricultural destinations found across Macomb County that feature fresh products grown and processed here. Check out our feature story for new information about our efforts to preserve agricultural land and businesses.

The season ahead is full of opportunities to get outdoors, attend special events and celebrate all that makes Macomb County a great place to call home. Visit MakeMacombYourHome.com frequently and follow us on social media for the very latest information.

Be Well,

Mark A. Hackel
Macomb County Executive



The St. Clair Shores Farmers Market, held on the second Thursday and fourth Sunday of the month at Blossom Heath Park, is just one of several popular farmers markets throughout the county.

PHOTO BY NIKI COLLIS — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

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Reaching for the stars

Macomb County offers a hospitable home for niche entrepreneurs

By Jane Peterson

Macomb County is known for its huge industry sectors like automotive, defense and aerospace, but brick-by-brick, one at a time, small business owners and entrepreneurs are making their own mark in a big way, too.

“Entrepreneurs and small businesses will find Macomb County a very welcoming home to grow their business. We have numerous niche small businesses, from home cleaners killing superbugs like H1N1, vineyards and agritourism to small businesses working in augmented and virtual reality. Of course, GM, Ford and Stellantis you see on the news with large investments hiring many employees, but it is the small businesses that still have the largest impact economically,” said Jack Johns, economic development program director for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development. “Those large companies bring in numerous supporting businesses from restaurants, retail, construction, etc.”

A small niche business connects with those who have a similar interest. They don’t need to appeal to a mass of consumers; they simply need to serve an unmet or emerging need in their community. These types of businesses often specialize in a specific good or service and have a natural knack for building a loyal following among enthusiasts.

That’s what happened to Sarah Doyle, who started an Etsy shop selling houseplants. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, her job in the banking industry had dissipated.

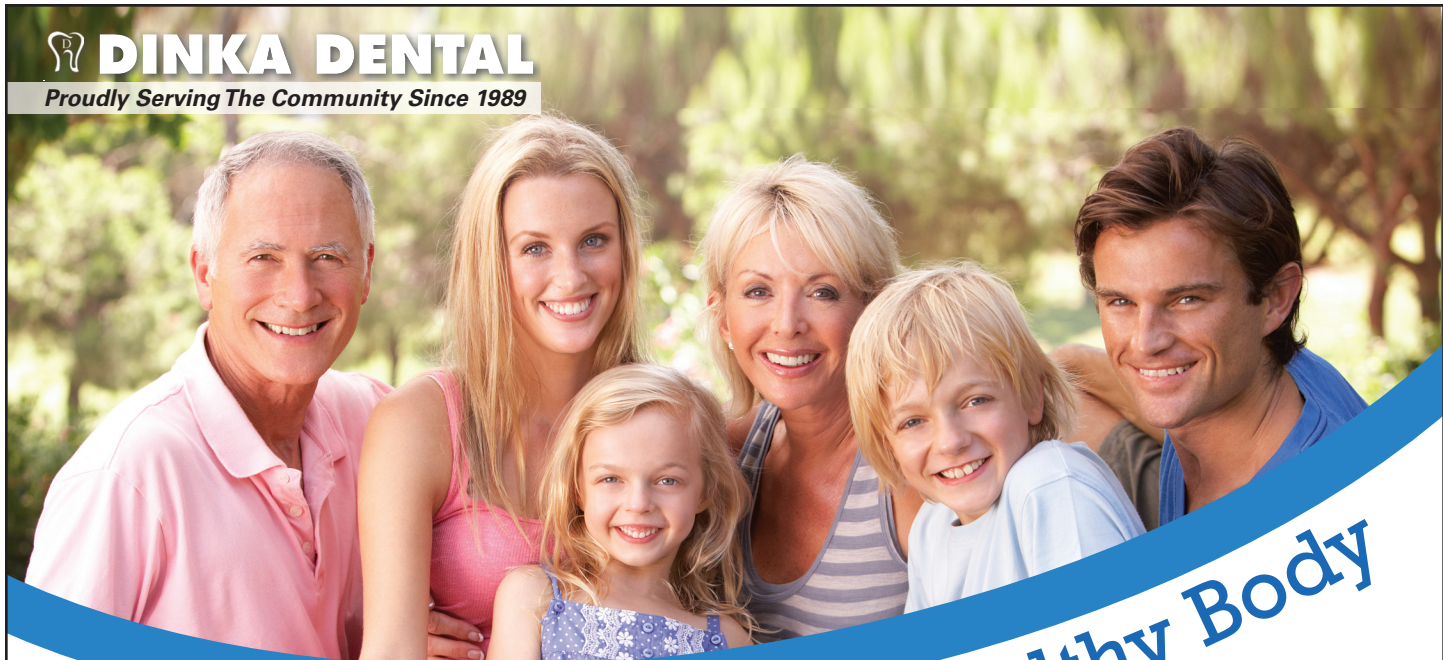


Top: The ribbon cutting ceremony for the Esports Arena in Sterling Heights was held in 2021. The facility offers state-of-the-art gaming equipment for individual play as well as league and tournament play.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTIAN FINANCIAL CREDIT UNION

Above: Sarah Doyle opened Yaya’s Plant Shop in Mount Clemens in September 2022, and has plans to grow her business by adding events for children, like homeschool and scout workshops.

PHOTO COURTESY OF YAYA’S PLANT SHOP



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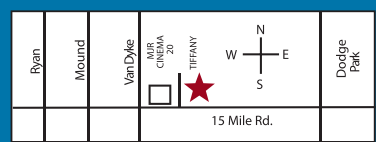
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She started selling plants to make up for some of the commission she lost. The response she received was phenomenal.

“Plants are a very popular hobby and during COVID it went viral,” she said. “People were staying at home and working from home more and they wanted a pleasant space. People love plants and plants are good for mental health.”

Once she returned to her banking job, Doyle continued selling houseplants. She lived off the income from her “day job” and stashed the plant money away in savings. Eventually she had to decide which job to continue.

“I had fears about going into debt. I mean, there are only a few retail houseplant shops out there, but I was running out of space in my home,” she said.

She checked into warehouse space where she could ship and receive her plants, but discovered it wasn’t cheaper than retail space. She thought a shop could provide the room she needed to ship while the retail side could help with costs.

So, with the money she had saved, Doyle opened Yaya’s Plant Shop in Mount Clemens in September 2022.

“I never thought in a million years that I would quit my job, but I amassed a following on social media and my real job became secondary,” she said.

Doyle is having the time of her life in the new store. Some plants she grows herself. Others she trucks in from Florida or imports from around the world. She keeps her eye on social media influencers to help gauge interest in the plants customers



Yaya’s Plant Shop owner Sarah Doyle keeps her eye on social media influencers to help gauge interest in the plants customers will be asking for in the shop.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF YAYA’S PLANT SHOP





CENTER LINE FESTIVAL FOUNDATION



Mission Statement:

The Center Line Festival Foundation strives to enrich the City of Center Line and surrounding communities by highlighting our quality of life through a variety of cultural events and fun-filled experiences.



Center Line Independence Festival
June 2nd, 3rd & 4th 2023



Center Line Beer Fest
September 16, 2023



Center Line Halloween Town
October 14, 2023



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Captain Fantastic 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm
Sunset Blvd. 9:00 pm – 11:00 pm

SADDLE-UP SATURDAY
American Ages 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm
Bernadette Kathryn & The Lonely Days Band 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm
Jacki Daniels Show 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm
Shiatown 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Family Tradition 9:00 pm – 11:00 pm

SPOTLIGHT SUNDAY
A Little Bit Diamond 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm
The Prolifics 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm
Magic Bus 4:30 pm – 6:00 pm

Food Trucks
Cornhole tourney
Inflatables
Petting Zoo



BANDS

Full Circle Project Noon to 2:30
Silver Studz 3:00 to 5:00
Category 5 Band 6:00 to 8:00
Phoenix Theory Band 9:00 to 11:00

Local and Craft beers
Other adult beverages
Food trucks
Free beer glass with paid admission



Haunted House
Trunk or Treat
Donuts & Cider
Free Pumpkins for kids (while supplies last)



For more information regarding the Center Line Festival Foundation and its events, please call 586-757-6800 or go to <https://centerlinefestival.org/>

will be asking for in the shop.

“Most plants are very affordable, so it’s a great hobby. Like books or records, there’s also those rare and unusual plants that people like to collect, too. I like being around people and seeing the joy on their faces when they find just the right plant for them.”

Because they offer a specific item, small businesses can attract residents as well as visitors from out of town. Those visitors bring their spending power with them and while making a trip to a niche business, will often spend other money in the community at gas stations, restaurants, attractions and retailers. Their contribution to the local economy is undeniable.

“Everywhere you look there are family-owned businesses making a living with staff hired locally. This makes up the majority of the county, the majority of the jobs and tax base - 99.9% of businesses are small businesses employing less than 500 people,” said Johns. “The enthusiasm of being their own boss and doing what they love to do is contagious, and it really is amazing to see their ideas come to fruition.”

Another Macomb County destination attracting a lot of word of mouth is the Esports Arena in Sterling Heights. The facility offers state-of-the-art gaming equipment for individual play as well as league and tournament play. Opened in October 2021, it was one the first such parks and recreation facilities that focused on this emerging sport. Today, esports continues to be wildly popular among people of all ages, so much so that some schools are offering it as a sanctioned high school sport.

The Esports Arena is sponsored by Christian Financial Credit Union, which is donating \$25,000 over a four-year period. Senior Vice President Rebekah Monroe said they immediately liked the idea of being involved because of the impact it would have on the community, especially among young people.

“It’s cool how it brings people together to play and develop a camaraderie with one another,” she said. “It’s innovative and inclusive - some kids aren’t into sports and this is a great way to connect with others who enjoy a similar interest.”

In addition, Monroe said technology is a driver behind so many aspects of everyone’s daily lives that being involved with esports may help students develop much-needed computer skills or even inspire them to seek out careers in coding or other technology fields.

As for Doyle, she still runs her Etsy shop, but she is looking to grow her Macomb County store by adding events for children, like homeschool and scout workshops. As one of the few houseplant shops in southeast Michigan, she knows people travel from other counties to visit. However, she also feels much support from local residents and community leaders.

“Residents here turn up for small shops,” said Doyle. “I’m super glad I chose Macomb County for my business. There’s a lot of walkable traffic in Mount Clemens and I believe people here care about small businesses.” **M**

CONNECT

LEARN MORE

Yaya’s Plant Shop is located at 36 New St. in Mount Clemens. Learn more about plants and the shop on Facebook at facebook.com/people/Yayas-Plant-Shop/100076357743164/ or visit owner Sarah Doyle’s Etsy shop online.

The Esports Arena is located on the first level of the Sterling Heights Community Center at 40250 Dodge Park Road, Sterling Heights. For more information, call 586-446-2700.



Above: The Esports Arena is sponsored by Christian Financial Credit Union, which is donating \$25,000 over a four-year period.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTIAN FINANCIAL CREDIT UNION

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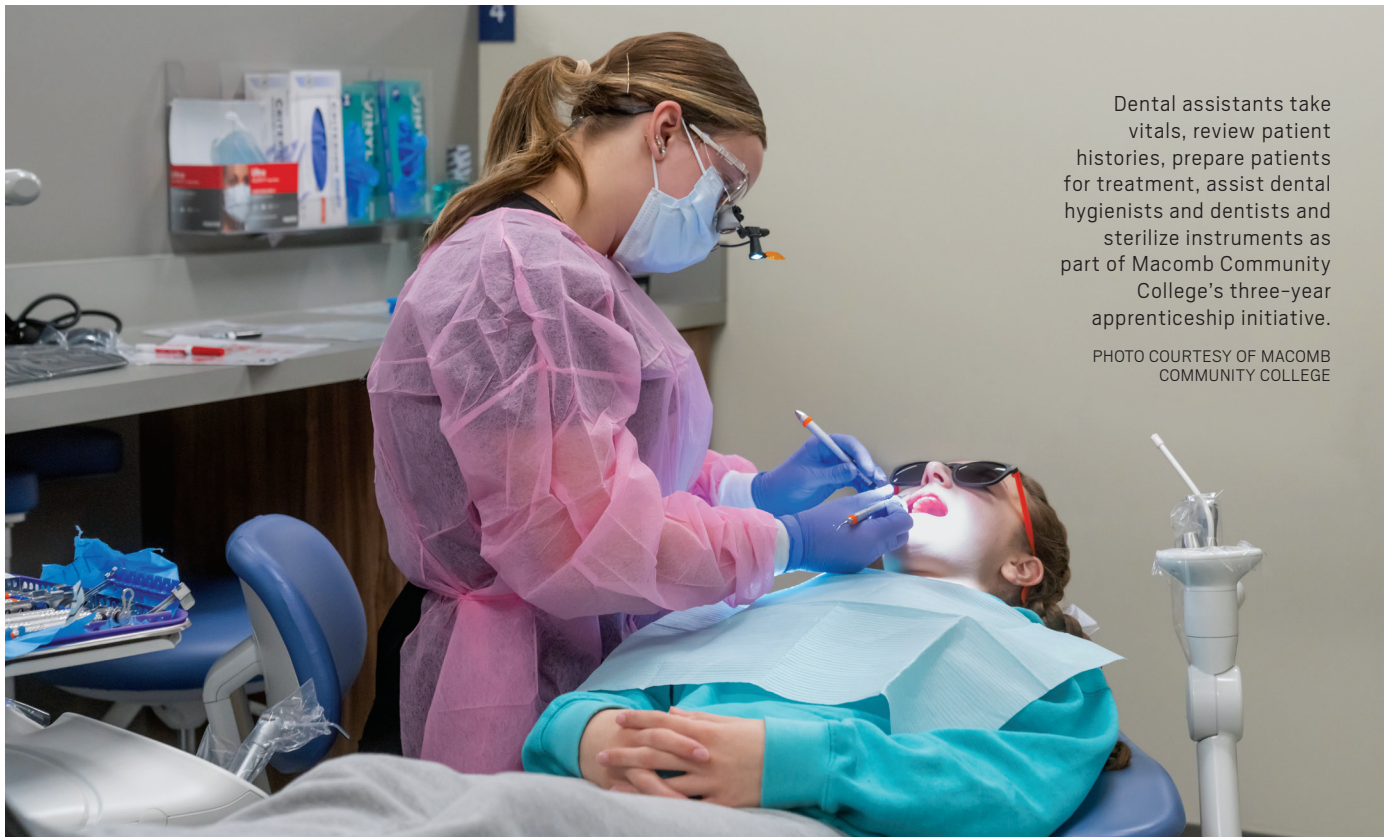
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Dental assistants take vitals, review patient histories, prepare patients for treatment, assist dental hygienists and dentists and sterilize instruments as part of Macomb Community College's three-year apprenticeship initiative.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Pathway to success

Apprenticeships provide opportunities for students, more help for health care workers

By Jane Peterson

Health care has always been a hands-on profession, but apprenticeships in hospitals and medical facilities haven't been as common as they are in manufacturing, skilled trades and other industries.

That's all beginning to change as Macomb Community College is taking this time-tested model and challenging traditional norms. By using apprenticeships to create an additional pathway to success for students, health care organizations are developing a pipeline that will lead to an increasingly skilled labor force.

It's part of a growing trend that Narine Mirijanian, Ed.D., dean, health and public services for Macomb Community College, said may encourage more students to consider careers in the medical field.

"It's a win-win situation; an example of what happens when

industry partners work together to meet the needs of the community," she said.

Macomb Community College launched its three-year apprenticeship initiative in September. Administrators expect that nearly 60 apprenticeships will be completed during the time-frame at health care facilities throughout southeast Michigan. Students can train for a variety of entry-level patient-centered or business-focused careers such as medical assistant, pharmacy technician, certified professional coder and more.

The apprenticeship program features an integrated model of classroom learning and hands-on training. Students participate in programs that last anywhere from six weeks to one year with at least 2,000 hours of on-the-job instruction.

"Apprenticeships provide a unique opportunity for students to earn as they learn," said Mirijanian.

CONNECT

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Macomb Community College has created a variety of entry-level patient-centered or business-focused health care apprenticeship programs, including:

- Certified medical reimbursement specialist, handling claims management and medical billing
- Certified professional coder, updating patient records with standardized information needed for data management and billing purposes
- Certified nursing assistant, monitoring patient vitals, assisting patients in daily living activities, and ensuring patients are safe and comfortable, under the direction of a nurse
- Dental Assistant, taking vitals, reviewing patient histories, preparing patients for treatment, assisting dental hygienists and dentists and sterilizing instruments
- Laboratory assistant, assisting medical lab professionals in processing clinical specimens for distribution
- Medical assistant, assisting in administrative and clinical duties in medical offices and clinics
- Pharmacy technician, compounding drugs, dispensing medication, preparing or mixing intravenous drugs and transferring prescriptions
- Phlebotomy, drawing blood from patients and preparing the samples for testing

For more information about health care apprenticeships, email jurya707@macomb.edu.



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Macomb Community College's expanded simulation learning laboratory allows students to learn in real workplace conditions.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

She said health care apprenticeships can also make a significant impact on current health care workers as many facilities are operating under deficits created by burnout and retirements. Health care leaders are able to fill those shortages with eager students who are well-prepared for the challenges that lie ahead while growing a workforce that meets their specific needs.

"We have two apprentices this semester and it's been a great experience," said Erin DeChambeau, human resources director for Cornerstone Medical Group.

The benefits of the program are two-fold, she explained. As an employer, they get to fill positions and have more help with tasks like checking in patients, scheduling appointments and communicating test results. For the apprentices, it allows them to pursue their dreams of working as medical assistants while providing a valuable service to the community at large.

Apprentices do not pay for tuition, books, laptops, uniforms or background checks. Instead, they earn a nationally-recognized industry credential and benefit from immediate earning potential and an in-depth exploration of health care jobs that are very much in demand. This provides relief to apprentices who always wanted a career in the medical field but found it financially prohibitive to pursue in the past, said DeChambeau.

Students also make invaluable connections with their employer and co-workers that can inspire them to examine future career advancement.

Funding for the apprenticeship program was made available thanks to the support of a congressionally directed spending appropriation of \$2.6 million secured by Sen. Debbie Stabenow.

Macomb Community College is no stranger to collaborating with community partners. Regular advisory board meetings provide school officials with insight into the region's workforce and economic needs, spurring development of academic programming that can meet those needs while developing local talent who will make Macomb County their home.

"Ensuring that our community's residents have access to the training and support to succeed and prosper in the 21st century workforce, and that local employers have the talent necessary to sustain and grow their businesses is an imperative for Macomb Community College," said James O. Sawyer IV, president, Macomb Community College.

For Mirijanian, collaborations with community and business organizations just makes sense. Under her leadership, Macomb Community College has targeted the unique local needs of Macomb County and developed innovative educational opportunities, like an expanded simulation learning laboratory and a dental science program that offers a low-cost dental clinic for community members. **M**

Leading the way

L&L Products investing \$25 million to expand its Romeo facility

By Jane Peterson

While L&L Products has more than 1,200 employees worldwide and locations in 16 countries, when it came time to expand its production footprint to accommodate finished goods for the auto industry, the company chose its facility in Romeo.

“We believe that our success is directly related to the large number of people and partners that are found right here in Macomb County. From hiring to services to infrastructure, Macomb County is readily able to meet those needs,” said John Babi, director of operations.

L&L Products, named after high school friends Bob Ligon and Gene Lane, has been operating in Romeo since 1961. Established just a few years earlier in Almont, the company expanded in Romeo to offer plastisol dipping among its services. Today, the company creates solutions for reduced Noise, Vibration and Harshness (NVH), static sealing, acoustics, structural reinforcement and substrate bonding in the automotive, aerospace, rail and commercial vehicle markets.

The new space will include expansive warehousing facilities and room to accommodate two-shot injection molding production processes. Supported with a \$450,000 Michigan Business Development Program performance-based grant and \$25 mil-

CONNECT

ABOUT L&L PRODUCTS

L&L Products is a technology-driven business-to-business company with unique expertise in static sealing, acoustics, vibration reduction, structural reinforcements and composite components for automotive, aerospace, commercial vehicle and other industrial applications. Today, L&L employs more than 1,200 people worldwide with locations in 16 countries and nine manufacturing facilities. For more information, visit lproducts.com.



lion in capital investment, the project will add more than 65 advanced manufacturing jobs in Macomb County.

“The timing of this news could not have come at a better time for the Village of Romeo,” said Village of Romeo President Meagan Poznanski. “L&L Products’ decision to expand their business here not only provides employment opportunities for our community, but maintains their business’ contribution to the growth and stability of Romeo’s industrial corridor. We are excited to know that our downtown businesses will also feel the positive effect as the L&L workforce is sure to stimulate the local economy as well.”



Above: The Romeo campus at L&L Products during the expansion groundbreaking. **Opposite page top:** L&L Products’ new space will include expansive warehousing facilities and room to accommodate two-shot injection molding production processes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF L&L PRODUCTS



Progress is being made daily on the new facility. Earlier this year, site preparation and work on the footings took place. With the warmer weather in the second quarter, the steel structure was erected on the east side of the building.

L&L Products said its Romeo location provides convenient access to its local suppliers and customers, like General Motors, which enables it to support their “high touch” business model. In March, the company celebrated its third consecutive selection as Supplier of the Year in San Antonio. GM’s Supplier of the Year award recognizes global suppliers that distinguish themselves by exceeding GM’s requirements, in turn providing customers with innovative technologies and among the highest quality in the automotive industry.

“The Macomb County area is home to our talented workforce,” said Babi, “and we appreciate that Macomb County supports its local businesses.”

He cited an example of how the Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development team organizes an Industry 4.0

program to help companies integrate Industry 4.0 technologies.

“We are also grateful for access to Curt Chowanic, senior development specialist with Macomb County Planning and Economic Development, who served as a liaison between all city, county and state agencies for the expansion project,” he said.

The liaison made it easier for L&L Products to seek and apply for the funds needed to support the expansion and keep it in Romeo as opposed to a competing site in South Carolina. The company currently employs approximately 525 Michiganders.

As a major driver of economic prosperity in the northern part of the county, L&L Products looks forward to providing additional jobs and supporting the local community with this investment. The company strives to “be a good place for all who touch it,” including employees, partners and customers.

Within the Romeo community, L&L Products partners with local schools to share information and their enthusiasm for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and manufacturing careers. The L&L Educational Foundation Scholarship Program also provides opportunities for the spouses and children of L&L Products employees to receive financial support for continued education. **M**

L&L Products creates Composite Body Solutions™ (CBS™) technologies that combine highly engineered heat activated structural adhesive material with a customized thermoplastic carrier. CBS™ enables lightweight but strong structural applications for both current and future-ready applications.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF L&L PRODUCTS

INDUSTRY

An aerial view of Vern Kulman's farm in Richmond Township. Kulman is among the farmers in the county who have sold the development rights on a portion of their land in order to preserve it for farming use for future generations.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VERN KULMAN



Down on the farm

**Why the agriculture
sector continues to grow,
thrive in many parts of
Macomb County**

By Jane Peterson

From farming, food processing and agri-tourism, agriculture plays an important economic role in many Macomb County communities. The sector provides nutritious food, increases the quality of life, attracts tourists, protects the environment and provides jobs for many residents.

“We recognize that agriculture and the food production industry are big drivers of the economy,” said Jeff Schroeder, deputy director for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development. “We have some excellent soil and agriculture continues to grow in the county.”



Despite the county’s population numbers (ranking third in the state of Michigan), Macomb County maintains an active agriculture community. There are more than 400 operating farms covering nearly 73,000 acres, many in the more rural northern regions, areas like Armada, Richmond and Ray townships.

Farms vary greatly in appearance and size, but they all make important contributions, cultivating a variety of crops like soybeans, wheat and vegetables. Farmers also raise cattle, goats, sheep, horses, turkeys and other animals. In addition, there are several nurseries and greenhouses that supply shops with houseplants, flowers, herbs and vegetable starter plants as well as sod farms.

Vern Kulman’s family has farmed in Richmond Township since the 1930s. He, his dad Robert and brother Ken operated the land as a dairy farm for years but began selling the cows to slowly transition to beef cattle beginning in 2016. Today, he and Ken, along with his nephew and his son, farm some crops as well as raise beef cattle.

He knows the next person to farm the land will likely do something different with it, because that’s the nature of the industry. Some of the best farmland in the state can be found

in Macomb County, said Kulman, making it imperative that what farmland still exists is preserved for future generations of farmers.

“I’m not against development, I’m in favor of organized development,” said Kulman. “You could see what was coming as even some of the northern counties were starting to be developed.”

He remarked that some of the best vegetable garden soil is under Lakeside Mall, but once you cover that land up, it is lost forever.

PROTECTING FARMLAND

While nearly a quarter of the county’s land is still being used for agricultural purposes, there’s no denying that the number of farms and farmland has dwindled compared to the past. In 1950, there were 2,345 operating farms on 197,000 acres. To protect its existing farmland, Macomb County developed a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program in 2003 as part of the Urban Cooperation Act Agreement that is active in six townships: Armada, Bruce, Lenox, Ray, Richmond and Washington.



To avoid losing this land, PDR agreements place an easement on the property that prohibits future residential, commercial or industrial uses. However, farmers are still able to develop their land as needed for agricultural or personal needs. They are also free to sell the land, although it must remain agricultural.

Kulman placed 100 acres into a conservation easement in 2020. He said he simply wanted to save the land for future farming use.

“What the next generation does with the land is up to them,” he said.

So far, more than 400 acres of farmland has been preserved thanks to the PDR program, and Macomb County farmers have received more than \$500,000 in state grant funds to receive the conservation easements.

A THRIVING INDUSTRY

In recent years, agriculture and its supporting industries have flourished. Interest sparked in food cooperatives, farm to fork restaurants and farmers markets as people became more aware of where the food they were eating was coming from.

This, combined with advancements in technology, created a 55.6% increase in job growth in the county’s food and agriculture sector

Below: Kulman says some of the best farmland in the state can be found in Macomb County, making it imperative that what farmland still exists is preserved for future generations of farmers.

Opposite page: Kulman and his family gave up dairy farming several years ago, but they still farm some crops and raise beef cattle.

PHOTOS BY DAVID ANGELL — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP





Macomb County maintains an active agriculture community, with more than 400 operating farms covering nearly 73,000 acres.

PHOTO BY DAVID ANGELL — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

from 2010 to 2018. In fact, since 2009, food manufacturing jobs have doubled from more than 760 to just over 1,400 and agricultural production jobs have increased from 850 to approximately 1,100.

Macomb County Planning and Economic Development has a dedicated staff member to assist food processing businesses. Economic Development Program Director Jack Johns assists by locating food processing grants, helping move projects forward and securing tax abatements and other incentives designed to help businesses expand.

The county has offered this service for 10 years and has a solid plan when it comes to developing established corridors for food businesses that are close to distribution routes.

“We want to make it easy for manufacturers to grow,” he said. “We don’t ignore even the smallest businesses. You never know who will be a shining star in the county or the country.”

THE GROWTH OF AGRI-TOURISM

Agri-tourism is also a profitable sector of the agricultural market, boosting interest in local farms and contributing to the county’s quality of life. Macomb County is home to many U-pick farms, pumpkin patches, Christmas tree farms, corn mazes, herb farms, orchards – even a vineyard. These provide scenic venues for events and plenty of opportunities for family fun.

Perhaps one of the county’s most well-known agri-tourism businesses is Blake Farms in Armada. Schroeder said the family has turned what used to be a place to go in the fall for doughnuts and cider into a year-round tourist destination with national distribution of its hard ciders, festivals and activities. **M**

CONNECT

THE FUTURE OF FARMING

The outlook for Macomb County’s agricultural sector looks fantastic as demand for farm fresh and organic food continues to rise.

“We’ve seen the desire growing for events like farmers markets that contribute to the quality of life here,” said Jeff Schroeder, deputy director for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development.

There are also many opportunities for partnerships between farms and restaurants, schools and food banks, with the goal of making fresh food more accessible for everyone.

Economic Development Program Director Jack Johns said food processing has really taken off over the years, with \$78.8 million in total products sold. Among the county’s top producers are Achatz Handmade Pie Co., Blake Farms & Hard Cider Co., Bosco’s Pizza Co., Ethel’s Edibles and Safie Specialty Foods.

As more farms participate in the Purchase of Development Rights program to preserve farmland for agricultural purposes, Macomb County is laying the foundation for future farming success.

“The actions we are taking now are putting the tools in place to mitigate the challenges of the future,” said Schroeder.



Home is where the heart is

Chaldean Community Foundation breaks ground on new affordable housing development

By Jane Peterson

Countless numbers of families travel to America each year in search of a better life. Many have found it in Macomb County.

Chaldeans specifically have been a growing segment in communities such as Sterling Heights. In fact, the region has the largest Chaldean community outside of Iraq, leading to major investments designed to help not only new immigrants, but create prosperity for all. The Chaldean Community Foundation (CCF) has spearheaded the latest effort, breaking ground on a new housing development in Sterling Heights' Van Dyke corridor.



Martin Manna

The mixed-use development will include housing as well as 9,000-square-feet of commercial space while preserving seven acres of wetlands. The project will also create a new public park near the Clinton River on land the CCF donated to the City of Sterling Heights.

The 135-unit mixed use development will make a monumental difference in the lives of hundreds of families by providing the affordable housing they desperately need, said CCF President Martin Manna. Both one- and

two-bedroom units will be available.

"There are thousands of families on waiting lists for affordable housing," he said. "We're looking to create long-term solutions for the people we serve who left their homeland with virtually nothing."

The four-story housing complex is funded through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority and a capital fundraising campaign that seeks to raise a total of \$13 million. While it is expected to be complete by the end of 2024, the project has already been years in the making. Located 100% in the Clinton River floodplain, the CCF worked with Macomb County officials to move forward.

Sterling Heights Mayor Michael Taylor said he is excited about the project and the way that it addresses the need for more affordable housing. Like Manna, he hopes that it will lead to future development in the corridor.

The Chaldean community has already made an enormous impact on the local culture and economy. Manna said at their core, Chaldeans are entrepreneurs. As a result, there is a heavy Mediterranean influence in the area as Chaldean restaurants, bakeries and shops continue to open their doors. Overall, Chaldeans contribute more than \$11 billion to Michigan's economy, he added.

Taylor said the CCF has been a wonderful community partner throughout the years and that Chaldeans are an important part of the culture of Sterling Heights.

"We are incredibly blessed to have this Chaldean community," he said. "Sterling Heights has one of the largest Chaldean populations in the world. I think we have a great relationship with the foundation."

The CCF is a nonprofit organization with a long history of service in Macomb County. It serves approximately 40,000 people a year from 48 different countries of origin. It provides a plethora of services such as mental health care, career services, assistance with learning English and earning GEDs, citizenship preparation, health care for the uninsured and programs for those with disabilities.

Manna also appreciates the support the CCF has received from the City of Sterling Heights and Macomb County officials. He said early on, some of their neighbors had concerns about the Chaldean refugees, but community leaders quickly acted and organized events to educate residents about the reasons they left their homeland and shared details about their cultural traditions. Macomb Community College hosted a Chaldean summit, for example, and police departments held workshops.

"From department heads to the county executive office, this is how government should work, representative of the people they serve," said Manna. "We are proud to be a one-stop resource for people in the greatest county in the country." **M**

CONNECT

ABOUT THE CHALDEAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The Chaldean Community Foundation (CCF) was founded in 2006 as the nonprofit arm of the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce. It serves the unique needs of Chaldeans and other immigrants from around the world, helping them adjust to life in the United States while preserving their treasured cultural traditions. In 2011, noting the large Chaldean population in Sterling Heights, the CCF opened an office in the city. Over the years, it has advocated for the needs of immigrants and put thousands on the path to prosperity while providing acculturation services to the community. For more information, visit chaldeanfoundation.org.



CHALDEAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Ready, set, grow

AGS Automotive Systems set to expand Sterling Heights facility

By Jane Peterson

Little did the team at AGS Automotive Systems know that when they celebrated the expansion to the company's Sterling South chrome plating facility in 2018, that they would be undergoing another major expansion just five years later. This time, the expansion will increase the size of the Tier 1 auto supplier's Sterling Heights campus by approximately 40%.

It's an exciting development for Canadian-based AGS, which has been located in Macomb County since 1991. Senior Human Resources Manager Jennifer Rizk said the latest expansion will provide space to expand the injection molding operations as well as position AGS for future work with electric and autonomous vehicles in the light and heavy duty truck market.

"This investment will secure our capabilities for future technological advances," she said. "There is definitely excitement about this growth."

The project is generating a total capital investment of \$20 million and is expected to create more than 100 good-paying jobs in the advanced auto manufacturing and future mobility sectors. While it's unknown what specific jobs will need to be filled based on future contracts, all positions will offer a competitive wage and allow for promotion from within.

The expansion will add up to 235,000 square feet to bolster additional business from the new manufacturing capabilities, which will support the company's long-term vision to provide leadership in the areas of mobility and vehicle electrification. In

CONNECT

ABOUT AGS AUTOMOTIVE SYSTEMS

AGS Automotive Systems' core business is the manufacturing of front and rear bumper assemblies for the light and heavy-duty truck market in North America. The company has extensive internal manufacturing capabilities ranging from heavy metal stamping, welding, painting, chrome plating, assembly and sequencing. The company's extensive manufacturing capabilities, commitment to innovation and strong customer partnerships have fueled their current growth and positions the company well for new opportunities. AGS currently employs nearly 600 people in Michigan and is part of a larger group, owned by J2 Management, that employs more than 2,000 employees across nine manufacturing facilities in Canada and the U.S. For more information, visit agsautomotive.com.



The stamping press operations at AGS Automotive Systems.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AGS AUTOMOTIVE SYSTEMS

early spring, the expansion project was well under way, with the outer frame completed and work progressing on the interior. The company expects to receive full occupancy by September.

AGS Automotive leadership worked with the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development team to secure a \$900,000 Michigan Business Development Program performance-based grant and a 50% property tax abatement with the City of Sterling Heights to support the project.

"Sterling Heights and Macomb County are very supportive of our efforts. County officials are always willing to help us out and it has truly been a great partnership," she said.

Rizk and AGS Controller Devin Eble said Sterling Heights was a natural choice for the expansion because of its proximity to a vast Tier 1 supplier network that provides collaborative opportunities and its talented, diverse workforce.

The local Chaldean community makes up nearly 55% of the company's hourly workforce and it is also reaching out to the Bengali population.

"We are proud of our corporate culture," said Rizk. "We value our employees and cultivate a fun work environment. Everyone works together toward a common goal."

AGS Automotive has found much success in Macomb County. In 2022, it was named a Macomb Business Award winner in the Workforce Champion category. The award committee cited the company's strategies for recruiting and retaining employees in a competitive and challenging job market by implementing several initiatives that resulted in a turnover rate of less than 5% for hourly employees.

"AGS Automotive Systems has continued to grow since it chose to establish U.S. operations in Macomb County," said Vicky Rowinski, director for Macomb County Planning and Economic Development. "As a recent recipient of a Macomb Business Award, we are proud to support their expansion and to see their ongoing efforts to attract and retain a skilled and talented local workforce."

Macomb County is also a wonderful place for AGS Automotive Systems' employees to live. Rizk said she spent her childhood in Sterling Heights and as an adult, chose to stay in the city, which she says has convenient access to amenities like restaurants, shops, malls, parks and more.

"Sterling Heights is known as a welcoming, business-friendly community. It's a reputation and culture we've worked long and hard to build," said Sterling Heights Mayor Michael Taylor. "The proof in the pudding is when we see successful companies like AGS choosing to stay and expand right here in our city, despite some robust competition from other parts of the country and world. Businesses know we have all the assets they need to thrive in Sterling Heights." ■

The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Macomb County's partnership with Velocity Center
focused on helping businesses thrive

By Jane Peterson

With skilled talent familiar with supply chain management and driven to innovate the future of manufacturing, Macomb County is uniquely situated to take the lead on Industry 4.0, often referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

County leaders have not let the opportunity pass them by, partnering with Sterling Heights' Velocity Center to educate manufacturers about Industry 4.0 topics. Throughout a series of workshops, keynote speakers and top industry panelists discuss robotics and automation, advanced simulation, 3D printing and other core Industry 4.0 elements, focusing on how implementation benefits individual companies across economic sectors and the Macomb County region.

"We are currently living through this industrial revolution where digitalization changes every aspect of our life. At Macomb County Planning and Economic Development, we are focused on what the next 10 years look like for our businesses and workforce," said Vicky Rowinski, director of Macomb County Planning & Economic Development.

She said Industry 4.0 has the power to completely transform the way business is conducted by integrating sectors like robotics, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, cybersecurity and other technologies into manufacturing. This led to the creation of the Macomb Next project, which is funded through a grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) with a goal to create awareness of all the Industry 4.0 programs available to businesses.

Currently there are more than 1,200 companies in Macomb County that integrate design, prototyping, production and supply chain management to create shorter product development cycles and increased manufacturing efficiencies. Collectively, these organizations employ almost 121,000 skilled workers across science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields. Through Industry 4.0 implementation, county leaders want to set the stage for increasing those numbers and continuing job growth within the sector.

The Velocity Center plays a significant role in achieving this mission.

Velocity is one of 21 Michigan Economic Development Corporation SmartZones that function as a hub to bring together universities, governments, local community organizations, industry leaders and research and development companies for collaborative opportunities within the technology, manufac-

CONNECT

LEARN MORE ABOUT INDUSTRY 4.0

Boosting efficiency and ultimately profitability is the driving force behind Industry 4.0's nine pillars: Additive manufacturing (3D printing); advanced robotics and automation; advanced simulation; big data and analytics; cloud computing; cybersecurity; Internet of Things; system integration; and virtual and augmented reality.

Business owners are welcome to learn how these pillars can be integrated into their business operations during two remaining Industry 4.0 workshops in 2023:

- Aug. 17 – Additive manufacturing, advanced robotics and automation
- Oct. 19 – Cybersecurity

There is no cost to attend, but pre-registration is necessary at MacombNext.com. Most sessions include a keynote speaker presentation, panel discussion, question and answer session, networking opportunities and vendors.

VELOCITY

turing and defense fields. As a business incubator, accelerator and co-working space provider, it offers business planning, networking events, coaching, working space, grant writing, market analysis and other services.

That's why partnering with Velocity is a natural fit for MCPED as companies transition through Industry 4.0 technologies.

"As Velocity was formulating its strategic plan, the linkage between the Macomb Next effort and the goals of the center emerged," said Rowinski. "The world of Industry 4.0 is overwhelming for most. We formed a partnership to host a series of workshops in 2023 that break down the pillars of Industry 4.0 into smaller and more concentrated content including guest speakers and panelists."

Last year, Velocity unveiled an ambitious new vision statement that states it will be "the center of gravity for entrepreneurship and innovation in Macomb County."

"We've really re-imagined this space," said April Boyle, Velocity's senior advisor for entrepreneurship and innovation, "and

OPPORTUNITY



As a business incubator, accelerator and co-working space provider, The Velocity Center offers business planning, networking events, coaching, working space, grant writing, market analysis and other services. In 2021, Velocity underwent a complete renovation and refocus to include flexible co-working spaces, dedicated offices, larger event space, new equipment and expanded programs.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE VELOCITY CENTER

it's been so amazing to watch. People are so passionate about what they do and we want to make sure Macomb County companies have the tools they need to compete.”

These tools can come in many different forms. Some entrepreneurs need funding. Many seek solid advice. Others require business space, connections to fellow entrepreneurs or other resources to take their company to the next level.

Their needs are varied and so are the programs at the Velocity Center. For 11 years, Velocity's focus has been on supporting the business community, including introducing high school students to different industries, providing guidance to start-up companies and assisting growing businesses with expansion plans.

In the first year of its newly adopted strategic plan, Velocity plans to develop an asset map and community platform that identifies and communicates entrepreneurial resources; undertake exploratory programming to better understand market needs and gaps; and launch or expand 10 companies. Year two calls for filling the building with tenants and launching or expanding 20 businesses while year three builds an invest-

ment ecosystem, robust programming and launching or expanding 30 companies.

In 2021, the building underwent a complete renovation and refocus to include flexible co-working spaces, dedicated offices, larger event space, new equipment and expanded programs.

For many entrepreneurs, getting their business off the ground is a combination of having space that meets their needs, adequate funding to achieve their goals and access to knowledge that can propel their ideas forward.

Velocity offers entrepreneurs flexible space to work, a business address, black and white printing and access to meeting rooms. Through programs like Entrepreneur in Residence (EIR), entrepreneurs can fine-tune their strategic plan, learn about various funding mechanisms available locally and statewide and participate in an active networking organization to share ideas and knowledge.

“We offer everything entrepreneurs need because we believe businesses are the backbone of our economy. Velocity is welcoming and inclusive, providing opportunities for collaboration and innovation.” **M**

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

Parents/Caregivers –

If Your Child Turns

5 years old

by September 1, 2023,*

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, 2023, but will turn five years of age not later than December 1, 2023, 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
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A helping hand

Mobile mental health unit assists families, children during crises

By Jane Peterson



As more people reach out for assistance with mental health needs, Macomb County Community Mental Health is developing programs and services that can respond quickly and efficiently to situations – especially urgent needs.

The county’s Children’s Mobile Crisis Unit Program provides face-to-face intervention from a master’s level clinician and parent support partner. Having this level of care available means families and children can quickly receive the services they need while potentially avoiding the involvement of law enforcement or a trip to the hospital emergency room.

“Mental health is just as essential as physical health,” said Traci Smith, chief operations officer for Macomb County Community Mental Health (MCCMH). “Asking for help is OK. There’s no judgment.”

Noting an uptick in mental health concerns with children and teens following the COVID-19 pandemic, MCCMH continued its focus on the mobile program, which began in 2018. The goal is to provide prompt, compassionate care as opposed to transferring a distressed child to a hospital emergency room or psychiatric facility.

“We meet people where they’re at,” said Smith. “It’s so important that we have these programs available when they are needed. There is such a stigma attached to mental health, but if you broke your leg, you wouldn’t hesitate to see a doctor. Your mental health is no different.”

MCCMH provides community outreach and education about the mobile program service to local school districts, law enforce-



Above: Dave Pankotai, chief executive officer at Macomb County Community Mental Health, cuts the ribbon at an event celebrating MCCMH’s new Children’s Mobile Crisis Unit Program. The program provides face-to-face intervention from a master’s level clinician and parent support partner. Having this level of care available means families and children can quickly receive the services they need while potentially avoiding the involvement of law enforcement or a trip to the hospital emergency room.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

ment, juvenile court officials, Macomb Intermediate School District and the Department of Health and Human Services and responds when crisis calls are made.

Children often act out when they become frustrated or believe no one understands how they feel. Parents can sometimes manage the situation through a family conversation or regular therapy sessions, but if immediate help is needed due to a child expressing suicidal or homicidal thoughts, acting out in unusual ways or displaying risky behavior that poses a possible danger to themselves or others, seek immediate intervention.

Parents, legal guardians or others who have verbal parental consent, like grandparents, therapists and school staff, can request the Children’s Mobile Crisis Unit directly by calling the Macomb County Crisis Line at 586-307-9100 from 8:30 a.m.- 9 p.m. Monday-Friday and 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on Saturdays. Once basic information is collected about the situation, the call will be transferred to the mobile crisis therapist on call. This is a Master’s Level Clinician who will assess the situation, determine whether deployment is needed and tailor interventions to the child’s specific needs. The clinician can provide someone to talk to, immediate intervention, help to de-escalate the situation, make recommendations for ongoing care and/or offer resources for families to take advantage of in the future.

Sometimes all someone needs is a person to talk to and an understanding heart.

In cases of deployment, the clinician will support the youth while the parent support partner will be there for the adults.

The Children’s Mobile Crisis Unit Program is free to all Macomb County residents and provides care for individuals through age 21, so teens and college students can also be involved with the program.

Often, families just don’t know where to turn for help, said MCCMH Program Supervisor Diana Ray. To receive assistance, parents can call the Macomb County Crisis Line at 586-307-9100. The line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, although the Children’s Mobile Crisis Unit Program is currently available Monday-Saturday.

The crisis is handled immediately or there is a continuation of services in most children’s mobile unit calls. In other cases, families are referred to mental health services or the emergency room.

While a rising issue before the pandemic, the months that followed brought a nearly 30% increase in requests for MCCMH services. The department responds to 5,800-6,200 calls every month.

Quality attention to mental health makes communities stronger by taking care of its most vulnerable residents. In addition to immediate care, MCCMH crisis counselors can create safety plans with people and refer them to community resources that can help with housing and other needs, said Ray.

May was Mental Health Awareness Month, an ideal time for MCCMH to continue its mental health education. This year, for the first time, the agency is hosting a Mental Health Matters

Awards ceremony where people and/or agencies who have contributed to the increasing mental health efforts in the community will be honored as champions in self-advocacy, provider, caregiver, community partner and advocate categories.

Since there remains some hesitancy to getting help with mental health, MCCMH also attends community events, such as Dakota High School’s recent wellness fair, to share information about the MCCMH programs and hopefully work toward reducing the mental health stigma.

“There’s so much stigma. It’s so important that we are available,” said Ray.

Smith agreed, saying that evidence-based programs have proven to be successful with helping people of all ages with mental health.

“It’s about getting people to the right place,” said Smith. “You can have great physical wellness, but if you’re not in a great mental place, you’re not going to feel good.” **M**

CONNECT

MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

In addition to its Children’s Mobile Crisis Unit Program, Macomb County Community Mental Health (MCCMH) offers a variety of services to meet the needs of the community. Among them are:



- Case management
- Adult outpatient treatment services
- Nursing services
- Residential services
- Forensic and jail diversion services
- Peer delivered services
- Family counseling
- Family skills training
- Respite care
- Infant mental health
- Outpatient counseling
- Home-based services for children and families
- Skill building, respite care, community living support, nursing services and psychiatric evaluations for individuals with developmental disabilities
- Early intervention, case management, outpatient and residential treatment, recovery housing and peer support services for substance users
- Opioid Medication Assisted Treatment
- Sub-acute Withdrawal Management/Detoxification
- Adult Stabilization
- 24/7 Telephone Crisis Counseling
- Veteran navigator

Call 855-996-2264 to reach the MCCMH customer service line or 586-307-9100 if you or someone you know is in crisis.

Down at the farmers market

Scenes from St. Clair
Shores' Blossom
Heath Park



The St. Clair Shores Farmers Market, held on the second Thursday and fourth Sunday of the month at Blossom Heath Park, is just one of several popular farmers markets throughout the county.

PHOTOS BY NIKI COLLIS — FOR
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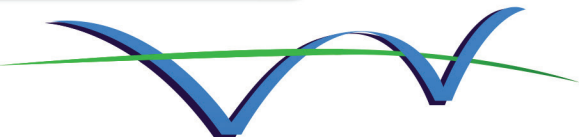
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Focused on the future

Rising Stars Academy prepares adults with disabilities for careers in their communities

By Jane Peterson



Above and opposite page: Rising Stars Academy in Center Line provides postsecondary education to individuals ages 18-26 who have an intellectual disability. The Academy opened in 2011 with just 26 students and today serves more than 100.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RISING STARS ACADEMY

CONNECT

ABOUT RISING STARS ACADEMY

This is the time of year when many high school students make plans for the future. Any 12th grade student with a disability earning a certificate of completion is welcome to visit Rising Stars Academy and take a tour. They and their families can visit the facilities and see firsthand how lessons are taught and what kind of impact postsecondary education can have on young adults.

To schedule a tour, donate or partner with Rising Stars Academy or Rising Stars Foundation, visit rising-stars-academy.org.



At Rising Stars Academy, observers won't find college students with their heads buried in books, professors lecturing students in large auditoriums or young people stressing out over final exams. Instead, they'll watch as students train with community leaders, practice job skills in a hands-on environment and take pride in a job well done.

Rising Stars Academy in Center Line provides postsecondary education to individuals ages 18-26 who have an intellectual disability. The school opened in 2013 with just 26 students and today serves more than 100.

Co-founder Deborah Prentiss says the number of students enrolled in special education classes is at an all-time high. This makes the availability of postsecondary education even more critical as students exit high school in need of furthering their work-ready skills so they can turn their education into a career.

"We put away the paper and pencils. We are hands-on with our career training," she said. "The need is great and will only continue to grow. As we teach skills that students can use in the workforce, they are also learning about teamwork, dedication and how to work with others."

Rising Star Academy focuses on each student's abilities, not his or her disabilities.

"We celebrate every little win we get," said Prentiss.

In addition to traditional classrooms, the school is equipped with a garden, aquaponics area, retail space, woodshop, bakery, food production facility, commercial kitchen and more where students learn practical work skills like how to set a table and accurately measure ingredients. They role play how to serve customers and what to do during a less-than-pleasant interaction with customers.

They learn cooking skills from Prentiss's husband, Mark, co-founder of Rising Stars and a professional chef who loves teaching and making connections with students.

The academy collaborates with many community partners throughout Macomb County. Some, like the ARC of Macomb County, provide additional resources for students. Others make donations or welcome students as part of external job site training. Many food service businesses have contracts with Rising Stars for students to bake slider buns, cut French fries or manage other food prep tasks. This allows restaurants to serve fresh products to their customers without all the prep work while at the same time providing students with work-ready skills.

Students train while spending their time in the academy. Ris-



Above, below: Rising Stars Academy students learn cooking skills from Mark Prentiss, co-founder of Rising Stars and a professional chef who loves teaching and making connections with students.



ing Stars Academy Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides work opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities, is a vendor for Macomb County Community Mental Health and provides skill-based training for consumers over 26. Consumers receive payment once they have completed training in the skill-based program. The foundation's latest project is Gathering + Grounds, a 4,000-square-foot coffee house that serves hot lattes, homemade bakery treats, tasty soups and fresh sandwiches bistro-style from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to noon Saturdays.

"It's a place where we will gather our community together to help the most underserved among us," said Prentiss, explaining that without viable social connections with others in an environment where they feel safe and loved, many adults with intellectual disabilities will retreat into the cyber world, where they feel comfortable using their cell phones and social media to communicate without leaving their homes.

Gathering + Grounds provides that non-judgmental place of belonging for these young people, whether they are there to socialize, eat or work. It also demonstrates to patrons just what these amazing young adults are capable of.

Prentiss said her hope is that Gathering + Grounds, which opened in April, can be replicated outside of Center Line as well.

Parents are thrilled to see their adult children thriving in

their independence and succeeding on the job, she said.

"Students are so proud of the fact that they can do these skills," she said. "For them, it's not just a job, it's that socio-emotional connection with others."

When COVID-19 hit back in 2020, the school shutdown was devastating for many special needs students and their families. Then, they started doing what they were trained to do – feed people. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, special needs adults at Rising Stars Academy assembled community meals, feeding breakfast, lunch and dinner that consisted of healthy choices like fruits, milk, vegetables and proteins, to those in need. While doing so, it helped participants maintain social interaction with others and ward off feelings of isolation.

They prepared more than 1 million meals for the community during that time, said Prentiss.

"We all have abilities and disabilities, things that we can do well and things that we don't do so well. When we focus on our abilities, we all shine," she said. **M**



CONNECT

ABOUT THE DETROIT RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Players come from across the metro Detroit area and around the world to play for the Detroit Rugby Football Club, one of the nation's first and most recognizable rugby clubs. Its clubhouse is located at 21618 Van Dyke in Warren and its home playing field is at Austin Dannis Park, 5200 Stephens Road in Warren.

There are men's, women's wheelchair and youth leagues in two distinct seasons: Spring and fall. Spring is more casual play for fun while fall marks a return to a more competitive schedule. For more information, visit DetroitRugby.org.



Ready for rugby

Warren club offers fun, friendship, healthy competition year round

By Jane Peterson

For many, rugby is more than just a game, it's a lifestyle. Located in Warren near Toepfer Road at 21618 Van Dyke Avenue, the Detroit Rugby Football Club (DRFC) maintains an active clubhouse that is open to players and members who just love the sport and its social culture. The clubhouse opened in 2015 and includes a gym and fully stocked bar.

Its event center hosts many events and fundraisers, like concerts, open houses and rugby

clinics, which are designed to share a love for rugby and encourage growth of the sport within Macomb County and the greater metro Detroit region.

Anyone that has played rugby or even watched a game as a spectator knows that it is not for the faint of heart. During competition, players are hit hard and there's a lot of tackling, running and passing. Players need to be physically fit and mentally alert as the game is amazingly fast paced. Rivalries are strong among rugby clubs and earning that win is always a hard-fought proposition that is never guaranteed right up until the last moment of play.

However, after the game is all said and done, players from both teams often come together for food and fellowship.

"Rugby is a lifestyle," said DRFC social media chair Oscar Flores. "It's a really big brotherhood where lifelong friendships are made."

DRFC is one of the most established rugby clubs in the nation that continues such storied traditions such as hosting the opposing team in the clubhouse after a game for food or drinks.

Opposite page: Rugby involves a lot of tackling, running and passing, making the game fun and challenging for players at all levels.

Left: Rugby is a lifestyle where lifelong friendships are made between team, club and league members.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DETROIT RUGBY CLUB



“ RUGBY IS A SPORT FOR EVERYONE.”



“Rugby is a community sport, so often after a game the hosting team will hold a social where players have time to sit and talk to each other off the field, outside of the game. You get to know people and become very connected to players outside of the sport.”

The DRFC was established in 1968 by a handful of rugby enthusiasts who worked in the local Ford plant. At the time, they had to cross the Canadian border to play their favorite sport. That all changed when the club was formed and members from Detroit and Windsor quickly embraced the new organization.

DRFC has leagues for men and women in several divisions. The lower divisions are perfect for beginners and those who just want to play for fun and enjoyment. The highest, Division 1, is by invitation only, for the most competitive of players. In addition, there is a wheelchair league and programs that focus on getting youth involved in the game.

“It’s always so interesting to see people from many different professions come together on the field and in the clubhouse afterwards,” said Flores. “Rugby is a sport for everyone.”

As a former rugby player in college, Ariana Castillo knew she wanted to stay active in the sport. For her, rugby provides a sense of empowerment, as men and women play under the same set of rules and at the same level of intensity.



Top: Growing the sport by teaching youth about the fundamentals of rugby is one of the Detroit Rugby Football Club's goals.

Above, opposite page: The Detroit Rugby Football Club has leagues for men and women in several divisions. In addition, there is a wheelchair league and programs that focus on getting youth involved in the game.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DETROIT RUGBY CLUB

As a women's captain and secretary of the club, she appreciates the culture of the club and the exercise as well as the networking and social connections it provides off the field, too.

"Rugby is fun no matter what level you're playing at. It is a very inclusive sport, and we welcome everyone to consider trying it."

Castillo is one of more than 1,500 players who have proudly donned the DRFC's recognizable colors of red, black and gold throughout the years. Today, the club remains strong, boasting thousands of members, both active and non-active.

There are opportunities to become involved as players or supporters as fans are welcome to be spectators at games and cheer for their team's players on the field. Diverse levels of membership allow community members access to the clubhouse and club events. Since the DRFC is also a 510(c)(3) organization, it accepts donations and hosts fundraisers to help club operations, for items like equipment, travel costs and clubhouse maintenance.

"It's our club, it's our responsibility," said Flores. "All this money goes back to the club."

The DRFC is also active within the Macomb County community, partnering with the City of Warren for various events, holding Friday fish fries that benefit local organizations, supporting causes like Wounded Warrior and hosting American Red Cross blood drives.

"We do a lot of fundraising to give back to other organizations," said Castillo. "There's a real sense of community that comes through playing rugby. It enhances your quality of life by providing exercise and making those social connections with others." **M**

Just add water

Master plan to take Clinton River Spillway project to the next level

By Jane Peterson

The gateway to the Great Lakes.

For many, this is what the Clinton River Spillway represents. It was constructed in the 1950s to help alleviate flooding in Clinton Township, Mount Clemens and Harrison Township. However, home to a variety of wildlife and recreational opportunities, in recent years, the waterway has played an increased role in these communities.

This has prompted local leaders to come together and create a vision for the 2.5 mile Clinton River Spillway and the 230 acres of public property that sits along the prominent waterway in eastern Macomb County.

Funded through a grant from the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development team was tasked with coordinating the vision planning, which involved ensuring that the original goal to control flooding remain intact while looking at future ways to increase public use, improve water quality and encourage wildlife habitats. The vision plan was released last winter, but the work is just beginning.

“This vision will assist in creating regional plans with multiple municipalities that will benefit the community as a whole,” said Gerard Santoro, program director for parks and natural resources at Macomb County Planning and Economic Development Department (MCPED). “It’s an interesting opportunity to create a more defined plan for the future.”

Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice Miller agreed that this is a pinnacle moment for the Clinton River Spillway.

“It’s an interesting ecosystem in the middle of a very urban area,” she said. “While we want to increase public usage, we need to be careful not to overdo it. It’s a delicate balancing act and first we must maintain the integrity of the spillway.”

A LOOK BACK

Before the Clinton River Spillway was constructed, anytime there was a heavy rain event, the banks of the Clinton River would spill over into Clinton Township, Mount Clemens and Harrison Township, causing catastrophic damage to homes and businesses and hampering future growth within these communities. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers constructed the 15- to 30-foot-deep channel from approximately Gratiot Avenue to Lake St. Clair, including a control weir at the upstream end to ensure low-water flow in the natural river channel. The





Dubbed an engineering marvel, the Clinton River Spillway brilliantly served its purpose for decades, effectively controlling floodwaters while encouraging natural habitat and passive recreation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
MACOMB COUNTY

spillway is managed by a joint Clinton River Spillway Drainage Board consisting of drain commissioners from all communities impacted by the spillway.

Dubbed an engineering marvel, the Clinton River Spillway brilliantly served its purpose for decades, effectively controlling floodwaters. However, some less-than-desirable actions also developed as invasive species thrived, erosion occurred and layers of sediment were deposited, preventing fish communities from flourishing.

HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS

Noting that the spillway and the areas surrounding it had so much more to offer residents, a multi-million dollar grant was secured from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) for habitat improvements on the Clinton River Spillway in 2011. In 2014, NOAA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) contributed another \$4 million towards the environmental efforts.

This federal funding restored the spillway in many ways. By reducing the angle of the banks, for example, more coastal marshland was created, said Santoro. This encouraged fish to spawn, provided areas for migrating birds to rest and attracted turtles to the waterway. Native plants replaced the invasive species and a fishing pier was built.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Today, the Clinton River Spillway is utilized by residents in many different ways. A paved trail is perfect for bicyclists, hikers and dog walkers. The fishing pier hosts anglers from across Macomb County in search of fresh perch, walleye, bass and catfish. Kayakers are a common sight along the waterway.

Using the vision plan as a guide, local communities are exploring the amenities they want to offer along the spillway.

“A lot of different ideas have been brought forth,” said Santoro.

Some of these ideas include a nature center, nature trails, swing bridges, a tridge, farmers market, amphitheater and more.

Clinton Township is considering trail refurbishment while Harrison Township officials are looking at installing a pedestrian bridge and repaving the bike trail.

Miller would like to see some more educational uses, saying that schoolchildren could visit to do some water sampling and learn about environmental issues.

“I see this as an opportunity for an outdoor classroom experience among nature,” she said. **M**



Home to a variety of wildlife and recreational opportunities, in recent years the waterway has played an increased role in neighboring communities.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

CONNECT

AND THE SURVEY SAYS ...

In 2022, residents were asked how they currently use the Clinton River Spillway and what they would like to see along its greenways in the future.

It was revealed that most visit the property for walking, biking, bird watching and fishing as well as dog walking and kayaking.

As for what they want to see included in future plans? The Top 5 items were:

- Restrooms
- Walking and running paths
- Scenic views
- Kayak/canoe rentals
- Habitat restoration

Other activities mentioned were disc golf, tables/benches, drinking fountains, pickleball courts, more natural areas, boat access and a home for the Harrison Township Library.



Every *family* has a story...
 thanks for allowing us to celebrate *yours.*



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1917



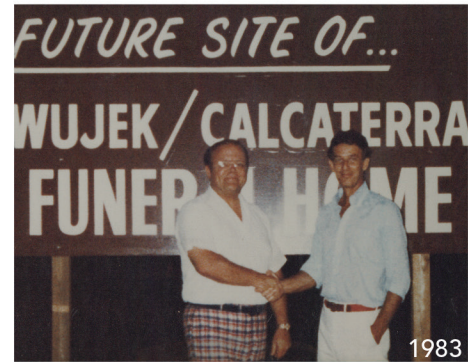
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Back to nature

Grants used to significantly boost tree canopies in urban communities

By Jane Peterson

Every gardener knows that spring is the ideal time to establish new trees, but while residents may have planted just one or two trees in their yard, the Green Macomb Urban Forest Partnership was busy helping to plant hundreds in neighborhoods across Macomb County.

The effort seeks to increase tree canopies in urban communities where streets and sidewalks are more commonplace than leaves and branches. It also looks to help replenish trees in areas that have been hit hard by Emerald Ash Borer and Dutch Elm disease.

A \$250,000 Consumers Energy 2022 Planet Awards grant is helping Green Macomb Urban Forest Partnership move forward with its ambitious goal to double the county's tree canopy. The grant dollars are being used to plant 1,000 trees, 1,500 native shrubs and 40 acres of pollinator habitat. These plants and trees will assist in reducing air pollution, providing shade to combat the heat radiating from hard surfaces, lower energy costs and add to beautification projects. They can also assist with reducing stormwater runoff, said Gerard Santoro, program director for parks and natural resources at Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development (MCPED).

"A 20-year-old mature tree can hold 2,500 gallons of water in the trunk, which helps with flooding," he said.

Macomb County Planning and Economic Development was the top recipient of the foundation's 2022 Planet Award grant funding, where a total of \$500,000 was distributed to three different programs and initiatives.

"This is one of the largest philanthropic grants ever awarded to the County, and that speaks to the vision and ability of our Planning and Economic Development team," said Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel. "I am so proud of that department and the continued work they are doing to increase native trees and plants in our community, and I am grateful to the Consumers Energy Foundation for recognizing us and our commitment to the environment through the generous Planet Awards."

The county's tree canopy has been a top priority for county officials since 2016. That's when the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) identified Macomb County — and specifically the population-dense areas along and south of the Clinton River — as good candidates for urban tree canopy efforts. Macomb's tree cover is 26%, which falls short of the USDA recommendation of a 40% cover or



CONNECT

WHERE TO PLANT TREES

Just as important as the tree plantings themselves is education about how and where to plant trees. Gerard Santoro, program director for parks and natural resources at Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development, said some trees were poor choices, planted in areas susceptible to disease or where the roots could pop up sidewalks. Others were planted too close to power lines or too far away from dwellings where the cooling protection and wind-blocking benefits of trees were lost. "It's about the right tree, in the right place for the right purpose," he said. "Macomb County is becoming a great example of how to make an impact with a tree program."





Top: From left to right: Carolyn Bloodworth, Executive Director of Corporate Giving, Consumers Energy; Vicky Rowinski, Director, MCPED; Gerard Santoro, Program Director for Parks and Natural Resources, MCPED; Amanda Oparka, Senior Planner for Parks and Natural Resources, MCPED; County Executive Mark Hackel; Don Brown, Chairman of the Macomb County Board of Commissioners; Harold Haugh, Macomb County Board of Commissioners; Chris Fultz, Vice President of Gas Operations, Consumers Energy; Lauren Brosch, Community Affairs Manager, Consumers Energy pose with the \$250,000 Consumers Energy 2022 Planet Awards grant check during the award announcement last year.

Opposite page: Second Nature Brands donated 50 trees and about 13 employees plus their family members helped to plant them in Armada Township after a July 24, 2021 tornado uprooted many mature trees.

Above: Armed with shovels and rakes, volunteers planted 50 trees to replace dozens of large, mature trees that were uprooted during a July 2021 tornado in Armada.

PHOTOS BY DAVID ANGELL — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

better in urban areas, said Santoro. In some communities, the tree canopy was less than 12% at the time of the assessment.

Partnering with local governments and community organizations, Green Macomb Urban Forest Partnership is adding to the green infrastructure by educating, encouraging and assisting with conservation and preservation efforts throughout the county. Already thousands of trees have been planted in Clinton Township, Sterling Heights, Warren, Utica, Center Line, Macomb Township, Chesterfield Township and other municipalities.

The City of Sterling Heights has been evaluating its tree ordinances and policies in an effort to boost its tree canopy, said Mayor Michael Taylor.

“We’ve had an incredible amount of development the past several years and while this creates a great tax base and provides jobs, trees are important to increase the quality of life for residents,” he said.

Working with the Blue Water Conservation District, Green Macomb Urban Forest Partnership was able to host a sale where residents and business owners could purchase trees and plants at wholesale cost.


“There’s only so much public land you can plant in,” said Santoro. “We need local businesses and residents to plant, too.”

It was encouraging to see, for example, how quickly trees were re-planted after an EF-1 tornado struck Armada Township in 2021. On July 24 that year more than 50 large, mature trees were uprooted as winds up to 105 mph blew through in the evening.

Efforts to re-plant the trees began almost immediately. In late September, 44 trees were planted thanks to an effort led by ReLeaf Michigan along with the Village of Armada, Armada Township and the Consumers Energy Foundation. A few weeks later in early October, Second Nature Brands donated 50 trees and about 13 employees plus their family members helped to plant them.

Second Nature Brands has continued its support of tree plantings, participating in an Arbor Day event at Romeo Trailside Park this past April. Nearly 30 trees were planted at the park, a natural space that once housed a Macomb County Road Commission storage site, with help from volunteers from Second Nature Brands, the Village of Romeo and the Romeo Tree Board. Afterwards, students from Amanda Moore Elementary School received a tree sapling for their own use.

Green Macomb Urban Forest Partnership continues to seek grants to fund additional tree plantings and related activities, such as expanding its Geographic Information System (GIS) maps to evaluate tree canopies in each Macomb County community.

To assist residents, Green Macomb has published planting guides and other community resources. These are posted on the organization’s website, [Green.Macombgov.org](https://www.GreenMacombgov.org). 

Young at heart

Meals on Wheels grant helps keep veterans, seniors strong and healthy

By Jane Peterson

The Macomb County Office of Senior Services maintains 84 routes for the Meals on Wheels program. That adds up to more than 1,700 meals served each and every day.

Now, a \$15,000 grant from Meals on Wheels America will allow them to reach even more people.

The grant will provide two weeks' worth of delivered meals to eligible Macomb County veterans who have been discharged from the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit. As they complete their recovery at home, they may be unable to cook or find it challenging to stay on their feet for very long, said Sheila Coté, director of the Macomb County Office of Senior Services.

“Good nutrition contributes to better outcomes and supports healing. We are so pleased to be given the opportunity to support those who served our country,” she said. “We look after the overall health of our seniors.”

If needed, veterans may continue receiving meal delivery beyond the standard two weeks based on an individual assessment.

While hot meals high in nutrition are the primary focus of Meals on Wheels, the program also provides an opportunity for volunteers to check in on seniors to make sure they are doing well and adds a social component with friendly conversations.

In Macomb County, 18% of the population is aged 65 or older. Most want to age in place, living independently in their own



homes like they have most of their lives, said Coté.

Many only require a little assistance to do so, like help with changing door locks, heavy cleaning or pest control.

The Macomb County Office of Senior Services was established to create and establish programs that meet the diverse needs of older adults. Much of its funding is provided by the Area Agency on Aging 1-B. Prior to becoming a stand-alone department, senior services were provided as part of Macomb Community Action.

“Our goal is for seniors to recognize us as a community resource that they can reach out to for varying types of assistance, information or referrals,” she said. “We want this to be the place seniors go as we promote our mission of aging well in Macomb County.”

In addition to Meals on Wheels, services provided through the Macomb County Office of Senior Services include:

- Nutrition programs
- An adult day center that serves as a respite program for adults with dementia. Participants make their own decisions about how to spend their day based on their individual strengths and personal preferences
- Loan closet for temporary medical supplies and equipment
- A community liaison program that helps seniors with Medicaid enrollment and identifies other benefits seniors may qualify for
- A friendly caller program, which started during the

CONNECT

VOLUNTEER TO HELP

Providing extra meals means more volunteers are needed to help with delivery. Drivers are needed to deliver meals twice a month between the hours of 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Monday-Friday. Assigned routes take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

Individuals interested in volunteering can apply through the Office of Senior Services at macombgov.org/seniors by selecting the volunteer option. They will need to complete a new volunteer orientation, pass a background check, and have their own vehicle, a valid driver's license and automobile insurance. Mileage reimbursement is offered. For more information, email volunteer@macombgov.org.





COVID-19 pandemic to socially connect with seniors, continues to help combat loneliness today

Its Handy Helper program assists senior with simple household tasks, like changing a lightbulb located on a high ceiling, while the Safe at Home program assesses all needs homeowners may have and then addresses items that will help them stay safely independent in their home, like installation of handrails, checking smoke detectors and providing a bath chair.

One of Macomb County Office of Senior Services' newer initiatives is the Elder Abuse Task Force. Seeking to address issues ranging from fraud to neglect, the task force takes a multidisciplinary approach to help seniors in serious situations, educate the community about reporting elder abuse and implement solutions to prevent abuse from happening as well as support victims when it is discovered.

Participants include representatives from the Macomb County Sheriff's Office, local police departments, Adult Protective Services, Legal Aid, senior center directors, senior care providers, the Prosecuting Attorney's office, the Area Agency on Aging 1-B and Macomb County Community Mental Health.

Coté said older adults are part of a proud generation and they need to know that it is OK to ask for help. In some situations, they might be afraid or not want to get a family member in trouble.

"As a community, we owe our seniors respect and proper care," she said. "Macomb County is a great place to start a family as well as live out your sunset years. Many residents have lived their entire lives in our neighborhoods. The elderly have a wealth of experience and wisdom and have a lot to contribute to our communities." **M**



The Macomb County Office of Senior Services maintains 84 routes for the Meals on Wheels program. While hot meals high in nutrition are the primary focus of Meals on Wheels, the program also provides an opportunity for volunteers to check in on seniors to make sure they are doing well.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MACOMB COUNTY OFFICE OF SENIOR SERVICES

John Hanna

Building strong community bonds forged on remnants from the past

By Jane Peterson



John Hanna

Although he owns a development company, John Hanna isn't your typical developer. He prefers to bring fresh life to older buildings instead of constructing completely new structures from the ground up. He finds it notable that businesses like the Emerald Theater in downtown Mount Clemens were built 100 years ago and are still utilized for the same purpose today. He also appreciates knowing that his company has a shared goal with other businesses in the area to build a strong sense of community for future generations.

However, he'll never tell you any of this because Hanna doesn't like to talk about himself. He prefers to quietly carry on behind the scenes and let his work speak volumes instead.

Hanna has been successful for years with family-owned Hanna Development & Management, based in Royal Oak. The company owns numerous properties in Oakland County, including D'amato's Italian restaurant, Goodnight Gracie's Bar, Iron Horse Mexican restaurant, Atomic Coffee in Royal Oak, the Royal Oak Music Theatre and Washington Square Plaza in downtown Royal Oak and it was the developer for The Fifth, an 18-story residential complex, in Royal Oak. It wasn't until 2016, after the Emerald Theater experienced a flooding situation, that he discovered the

charm of downtown Mount Clemens and began to set his sights on Macomb County.

Today, Hanna's company operates several Mount Clemens businesses, including Mae's in the Cherry Street Mall, Bath City Bistro and Black Cat Coffee in addition to the Emerald Theater.

Q Describe the role your organization plays in the greater Macomb County area.

A My goal is to take the value of what is here now and increase it. There's a lot of opportunity and a real sense of community here and that's why we are committed to downtown Mount Clemens. The people greeted me with open arms. There's still a lot of work to do and I want to be a part of it.

Q How does Macomb County contribute to your company's growth and success?

A Working with city and county leaders is always a positive, that's No. 1. They want to help, and they have the resources to help. You'll find Macomb County has an open ear and an open heart. They really care. They've assisted me by answering my questions and making introductions among other things.

Q What do you enjoy about working and/or living in Macomb County?

A It's the people, times 10. Getting to know the people in the Mount Clemens community has been the best experience.

Q What does the future hold for your company?

A We will continue to work on fun, unique projects in downtown Mount Clemens and get involved in new businesses. We want to do our part to make a positive difference.

HANNA

DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT CO.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HANNA DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT

Narine Mirijanian

Passionate about education that supports local communities

By Jane Peterson



Narine Mirijanian

Narine Mirijanian believes that a community college should serve the needs of the community. That's why as dean of health and public services at Macomb Community College, she regularly collaborates with local leaders and supports state-of-the-art technology that simulates typical work environments. Her efforts have helped to build a talented and educated workforce ready to respond to the ever-changing needs of today's employers.

Since being named dean in 2019, Mirijanian has played a pivotal role in improving access to quality health care in Macomb County. She expanded a simulation learning laboratory to support the college's health care programs, established a new dental science program that offers a low-cost dental clinic for community members and spearheaded an initiative to develop the apprentice model with local health care organizations.

Mirijanian began her career as a faculty member in a health sciences department. She served in a variety of roles during her 18 years in higher education, including academic advisor, director for online learning and business and associate dean and dean of health sciences. In 2017, Mirijanian joined Macomb Community College as associate dean of arts and sciences before being named dean of health and public services in March 2019.

With a master's degree in cellular and molecular biology from Oakland University and a research background in breast cancer cell growth and proliferation and hormonal regulation of breast cancer cells, she could have settled practically anywhere in the coun-

try. However, after earning her doctorate in higher education leadership from Walden University and serving in a variety of roles in higher education, she and her husband Mike, a business consultant who teaches business and economics, chose to settle in south-east Michigan..

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

A Macomb County is an amazing county. It has everything to offer the public. I'm proud that my organization, Macomb Community College, plays a central role in the community by bringing students and business partners together to create a better quality of life for everyone.

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

A Macomb Community College is an institution for higher learning, so it provides an opportunity for adult learners, veterans, recent high school graduates — really anyone who has a vision and curiosity for learning — to advance themselves. We meet the needs of stakeholders while making access to education a priority. I'm proud of what we do here, creating diverse programs for everyone while removing barriers to education and employment.

Q What do you enjoy about working and/or living in Macomb County?

A The best part of my job is seeing former students in the field, working and making their impact in the world. This county is so vibrant, and I love the diversity here. There's no place else where I'd want to be..

Q What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?

A I love music, traveling and boating with my husband and son, Andre.



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PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Barbara Rossmann

A career well spent improving health care for all residents

By Jane Peterson



Barbara Rossmann

As Macomb County's population grew and demand for more complex care close to home increased, Henry Ford Macomb Hospital has grown along with it. Leading the way has been President and Chief Executive Officer Barbara Rossmann. For nearly 25 years, she has dedicated her career to improving the health of residents, but this chapter in her life came to a close on June 2, when she retired from service.

"I absolutely love Macomb County and the people of Macomb County. I have called it home personally and professionally since

1999. The people are remarkable by every definition of that word," she said.

Rossmann's career in health care has been a calling driven by relationships, partnerships and accountability. She received Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science degrees. In addition to executive leadership roles within the Daughters of Charity Health System and Trinity Health, both leading health systems in the United States, Rossmann served as a Captain in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps.

She joined Henry Ford Macomb Hospital in 1999 as executive vice president and chief operating officer and was appointed president and chief executive officer in January 2004. In retirement, Rossmann and her husband plan to settle in San Antonio to be near family.

"Of course, we will return frequently to visit because we love our Macomb community and have lifelong friends here," she said..

Q Describe your involvement in Macomb County community organizations and why you chose to be part of those organizations.

A As a leader and as a Macomb County resident, I've always felt accountable to help improve the health of residents and keep them as close to home as possible for care. Beyond my work with Henry Ford Health and Henry Ford Macomb, the organizations I've served and engaged with have that same underlying mission – to facilitate health and quality of life improvements. I have served as a board member for the Sterling Heights Regional

Chamber, Greater Detroit Area Health Council, Families Against Narcotics Advisory Board, Advancing Macomb, Medstar, Macomb Community College Foundation, Fifth Third Bank Eastern Division Board of Directors, Southeast Michigan American Red Cross board, Metropolitan Affairs Coalition (MAC), and the Trauma Center Association of America (TCAA). We are blessed with past and present partnerships that have helped make remarkable strides in all facets of life within Macomb County. I have been privileged to align in partnership with these individuals and their respective organizations.

Q Describe the role Henry Ford Macomb Hospital plays in the greater Macomb County community.

A Our vision is to be our community's trusted health care partner. That includes being responsive and sensitive to the individual needs of all members of our community and valuing the diversity of our region. Our Diabetes Prevention Program is a perfect example. Through our Faith & Community Nursing Network, we recognized that we needed to get ahead of the Type 2 diabetes epidemic.

Working with area churches, community groups, schools and primary care physicians, we've brought this prevention program to where people live, work and worship. We strive to meet people where they are and help to educate them about preventative healthcare. For Henry Ford Macomb Hospital specifically, we have been very strategic in understanding what our community needs and developing services to meet those needs. The Community Health Needs Assessment and other mechanisms such as alignment with the Macomb County Health Department assists us to inform our decisions. Health care is certainly complex. The strides we've made in bringing the latest technology, physician experts and supportive teams to this region is nothing short of amazing. While not inclusive, this would represent everything from advanced heart and stroke care to our Level II Trauma Center and advanced emergency services. All services we provide have been strategically developed based on community need and to support those we serve.

Q What are some of your big goals for the initiative?

**HENRY
FORD
HEALTH**

PHOTO COURTESY OF HENRY FORD MACOMB HOSPITAL

A Our continued success is because of the trust, belief and support that Macomb County residents have shown us through the years. We do not take that for granted. From our surgical expansion to our structural heart, thrombectomy and robotic surgery programs, to now the opening of the new north tower, I believe to truly serve a community, you need to become part of it. In health care, we cannot just treat people when they are sick. We need to address “upstream” issues, ranging from lifestyle habits and access to basic necessities such as food, transportation and housing. I am inspired by the people we serve, by the team members I am privileged to lead with, and by the partners throughout Macomb County who have come from all walks of life to serve our community.

Q Please share some of the achievements you are most proud of while working in Macomb County.

A For me, it has always been about people. Aside from my remarkable husband and family, I’m most proud of the team I am privileged to work with, the relationships built and the many lives that we have touched while having a positive impact over the years.

Q What do you enjoy about working and/or living in Macomb County?

A I personally and we as Henry Ford Macomb have appreciated the opportunity to be an active part and contributing partner to the growth within our county. As our county has grown to be increasingly diverse in business and industry as well as culturally rich, so have we. I believe we continue to have opportunities to raise our voices within the region, and shout from the rooftops regarding the influence that Macomb County offers to the richness of our broader region — recognizing that more and more are Making Macomb Their Home to live, work and play.

Q What does the future hold for Henry Ford Macomb Hospital?

A Our next step will be to continue our campus transformation, so that eventually we are able to offer all private rooms throughout the hospital. Most importantly, we will continue to expand and advance our clinical services based on community need while incorporating loving, embracing care in every encounter. **M**

LET'S GO!
Hit the trails



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Contact Your APEX Accelerator

Businesses located in Macomb County

Macomb Regional APEX Accelerator
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At Henry Ford Macomb Hospital,
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June 29th 3pm 4pm
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Donny Rod

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