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MOMENTUM

Uniquely Macomb County, Michigan

Volume 8, Issue 2

Ripple effect

Study finds Lake St. Clair a major driver in Macomb County's economy

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Teacher Cadet program helps districts cultivate own educators**

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**DRIVING INNOVATION:
Macomb Community College's new center prepares trade, skilled workforce**

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A close-up portrait of Michelle Davidson, a woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing large hoop earrings and a necklace. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a soft-focus green and blue.

MICHELLE DAVIDSON always knew her medical assistant career wasn't the right fit. Her pursuit to find her true calling drove her to OU – where she finished her degree at 38. She now enjoys a fulfilling career being a beacon for change in the community – and a shining example for her kids.

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A Washington Township staple during autumn, Miller's Big Red Orchard recently marked its first season under the ownership of residents Trish and Rob Misiewicz.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BIG RED ORCHARD

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Brig. Gen. Matthew Brancato, *commander of the 127th Wing at Selfridge Air National Guard Base*
Edward Scott, *director of Macomb Community Action (MCA)*
Vicki Wolber, *former deputy Macomb County executive*

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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: Capt. Luke Clyburn walks down the ramp from his ship, The Pride of Michigan. In addition to its deep economic impact, Macomb County's ties to this body of water include a rich history. With support from Macomb County and state of Michigan grants for coastal science, Clyburn of the Noble Odyssey Foundation (NOF) and his sea cadets held an underwater expedition last summer in search of the former St. Felicity Mission.

PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

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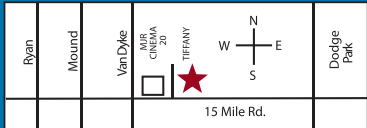
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Uniquely Macomb

How economic development is creating transformative change

By Mark A. Hackel

Greetings and welcome to the 16th issue of our biannual Momentum magazine.

Published by Macomb County Planning and Economic Development with MediaNews Group/The Macomb Daily, we aspire to bring you a broad range of stories that make Macomb County a unique place to call home.

In this issue you will find how economic development tools are being used to transform spaces and our workforce in lots of innovative ways. As a shining example, meet Macomb Community College’s newly transformed Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center in Warren! This \$45 million investment — the largest in the college’s history — is delivering edu-



cational programming in manufacturing, technology and the skilled trades and to ensure that our employers have access to the talented workforce they

need to sustain their businesses.

Equally transformative, see how a downtown Mount Clemens entrepreneur tapped unique funding to purchase and reimagine a much larger space where she could expand the services her salon offers.

As this issue is published, the quieter season of winter is upon us and a new set of opportunities to enjoy Macomb County and our outdoor spaces awaits. To learn more about upcoming events, places to visit and things to do, please visit makemacombyourhome.com frequently and follow us on social media!

Be Well,

Mark A. Hackel
Macomb County Executive



Unveiling of the Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center on Aug. 11: Pictured from left to right is U.S. Rep. John James; Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel; Katherine Lorenzo, chair of the Macomb Community College Board of Trustees; college President James Sawyer; and Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist.

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Making every minute count

Utica computer science students learn from tech experts in the classroom

By Jane Peterson

There's a saying that it takes teamwork to make the dream work. This is true at Utica Community Schools (UCS), where IT professionals are partnering with classroom teachers to provide students with a realistic look behind the industry.

"Hearing first-hand experiences and knowing what's expected of them in the workplace are valuable for students," school Supt. Robert Monroe said. "These are skills that can be built on and applied to a variety of careers."

This unique learning experience is part of the Technology Education and Learning Support (TEALS) program, a Microsoft initiative that seeks to bolster computer science programs in high schools across the nation. Its goal is to educate students about IT careers and equip them with skills they can use to further their education. The program has a special focus on reaching students in traditionally underserved communities.

The concept is simple: Industry professionals serving as volunteers are paired with a classroom teacher. These volunteers bring their enthusiasm for IT work and their knowledge of the industry. They challenge students' perceptions of computer science and inspire them to think creatively in an industry that is often based firmly on data-driven results. Students gain real experience and learn about employer expectations, giving them a competitive advantage as they seek employment in the Utica Community Schools area, Macomb County and beyond.

"There is no better time to get into this field," computer science teacher Doug Hartley said. "I knew with TEALS that we were getting ready to do something extraordinary."

Currently, there are eight computer science volunteers sharing their insight with students at Eisenhower, Henry Ford II, Stevenson and Utica high schools. Hartley was once one of those volunteers before he became a teacher (see his story in the box From Technology to Teaching). He is continually impressed by how students soak up the information presented by volunteers. When one volunteer covered the importance of a strong password and the dangers of being vulnerable in the digital world, for example, he noticed some students logging into their Instagram accounts to immediately change their login information.

Community volunteers are recruited by the school district as soon as the school year ends because those who agree to participate are required to train during the summer months both online and in person at the Microsoft Technology Center in Detroit. Volunteers commit to being in the classroom at least once per week, but can attend more often as their schedules allow.

CONNECT



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FROM TECHNOLOGY TO TEACHING

When Eisenhower High School teacher Doug Hartley heard that the TEALS program needed volunteers in 2019, he signed on without hesitation. What he didn't realize at the time was how much that single decision would change the path of his life.

"As a volunteer, I immediately saw the importance of the program and it led me to teaching. I came home that first day and knew that I had to be a teacher," he said.

That's exactly what he did, joining the district to co-teach a computer programming course, teaching students how to create games and apps. Now the program has evolved more toward cybersecurity, where he and his students often discuss common ways that people can get scammed online. What he enjoys is providing students with broad exposure to a variety of educational and career paths. Students come to understand that computer science is about more than developing the latest and greatest app or game but see how technology impacts everybody. There are apps, for example, that can help deaf individuals hear more sounds.

"I 110% know that this program can change a person's outlook. It definitely does change lives," he said.

For more information on becoming a TEALS school or volunteering with the program, visit microsoft.com/en-us/teals.





Richmond

Big city amenities with small town charm

Nearly 6,000 residents call the City of Richmond home, and the community is continuing to grow.

The city is linked by the I-94 Expressway, M-19, and the Gratiot Avenue corridor, offering easy access to the Detroit/Flint/Port Huron metropolitan areas. Richmond is also conveniently located near some of the finest recreational amenities in the state, providing nearby access to inland lakes, Lake St. Clair and the Great Lakes.

Richmond is a community where families truly flourish, with a wide-variety of housing options in various price ranges for everyone — from old beautiful historic homes on tree-lined streets to newer developments offering the latest in single family living. In fact, the city just finalized plans on the new Richmond West subdivision in the south-west portion of the city that will add 54 new homes to the community.

For the outdoor enthusiasts, Richmond offers a wide variety of recreational activities through its many municipal parks as well as a comprehensive sidewalk system throughout the city. The Macomb Orchard Trail, a 23.5-mile linear park, begins in Richmond and connects to a network of trails. The trail is an integral part of the Great Lake to Lake Route 1 trail, which will span from Port Huron to South Haven.

Some might say the best thing about the City of Richmond is its community events. The annual Richmond Good Old Days Festival is the highlight of summer for many, drawing well over 80,000 people to the city annually the weekend after Labor Day. The festival features several different events throughout each of the four days, including the state's largest marching musical parade, motorsports events, musical entertainment and more. There is also a winter festival held the first Saturday of February. For more information, visit richmondgoodold-daysfestival.org.

Richmond's small town feel doesn't stop there. Its retail business districts offer turn of the century charm and unique modern Main Street architecture. The pedestrian friendly downtown is the perfect location for shopping and services. Special events are held year round to promote local businesses. Additionally, the city is working with private property owners on the development of prime industrial property.

For more information on the City of Richmond, visit the city's website at cityofrichmond.net or call (586) 727-7571. **M**



FAST FACTS

Founded: 1879
Population (2010 census): 5,735
Square miles: 2.92





Top: Eisenhower High School computer science teacher Doug Hartley says the TEALS program can 110% change a person's life by focusing on careers in the IT industry.

Above: Julia Rice, a cybersecurity engineer at BorgWarner, volunteers through the TEALS program, helping students prepare for a career in the IT sector.

Previous page: With TEALS, Utica students focus on the cybersecurity aspect of IT work. They learn basic computer science skills, coding, creative problem-solving, computational thinking and programming.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UTICA COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The program is offered four times a week.

Monroe said Utica Community Schools was already a leader in computer science education, offering Advanced Placement courses and a Career and Technical Education (CTE) Information Technology (IT) pathway that includes courses in website development, cybersecurity and computer science. The district also recently adopted a new strategic plan that places a huge emphasis on CTE pathways and career-focused instruction.

“We wanted to broaden our reach within the region,” he said of the TEALS program.

With TEALS, UCS students focus on the cybersecurity aspect of IT work. They learn basic computer science skills, coding, creative problem-solving, computational thinking and programming, hear stories about recent applications of IT work in the field and learn about current events, like the latest hacker scam impacting some in the community. They also learn multiple computer languages like Python, JAVA and more. Geoff Clark, director of Career and Technical Education at UCS, said instruction takes place in much the same way it does on the job, with some volunteers visiting the school in person and others scheduling a Teams online with the class or interacting with students on a 1-to-1 basis digitally.

Teachers and volunteers work collaboratively during a series of meetings to ensure that the materials presented are relevant to students today. During class, volunteers share personal on-the-job situations they have encountered. One volunteer, for instance, talked about how he protected a colleague from sharing sensitive company financial information with a potential scammer.

Learning from volunteers gives students a strong foundation to build upon, setting them up for future success. Many take advantage of this by seeking out other opportunities to further their computer science education, like competitions, internships, scholarships and workshops. According to the 2019-2020 end-of-year student survey, 58% of TEALS students reported planning to study computer science in college, and 76% said they felt that they could succeed in future computer science classes. The majority of those working in the IT sector have earned a bachelor's degree.

This is good news for local employers, who often struggle to find qualified applicants to fill open positions. The hope is that many UCS graduates decide to settle in Macomb County, filling the needs of local employers and contributing their time and talents to Macomb County's strong economy. Jobs are available as computer and information systems managers, computer systems analysts, computer user support specialists and more.

TEALS provides partner schools with strategies and resources to help increase equity, including creating inclusive learning spaces, promoting diversity in enrollment and developing strategies for inclusive instruction. Volunteers support the teachers as they learn to teach computer science, creating or building thriving computer science programs. This is desperately needed as statistics show that more than half of Michigan schools offer no computer science training at all. However, jobs in this field are plentiful and pay nice salaries. TEALS seeks to narrow this gap between the number of job openings and the number of qualified individuals able to fill them.

Since its inception, more than 100,000 students have participated in TEALS. Utica Community Schools first welcomed the program in 2019 and has continued to grow it ever since. There are 166 students impacted throughout the district by the TEALS program. An Introduction to Computer Science class is also taught at the junior high school level, reaching students at younger ages so they can hone in on their goals in high school. **M**

Ready to grow

MISD's Teacher Cadet program helps cultivate future teachers

By Jane Peterson

A new program developed by the Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD) provides a fresh take on the current teacher shortage. Instead of trying to lure educators from far and wide to Macomb County's 21 school districts, many districts are now able to "grow their own."

The MISD's Teacher Cadet program encourages high school sophomores, juniors and seniors to explore careers in education by being placed with teachers in summer programs. Students, who are paid a regular wage for their efforts, gain first-hand classroom experience while summer program teachers get a little extra assistance with everyday tasks. In just three years, the program has already been deemed an overwhelming success with several students enrolling in education degree programs after graduation.

"It's a good way to expose students to a career in education," said Sarah Strohbeck, MISD career readiness and counselor consultant and Teacher Cadet program coordinator. "It's an actual job, not just a job shadow. Students become instructional assistants and are paid for their work."

MISD Supt. Mike DeVault said he's extremely proud of Macomb's Teacher Cadet program.

"The cadet program provides paid summer jobs for teens, and an experience in a professional work environment, while uplifting the teaching profession and its future," he said. "Whether they become teachers or not, they will grow and contribute. Once you experience working in a classroom with children, you never forget it. It stays with you your entire life."

Students actively engage with the teacher in creating and implementing lessons. They attend staff meetings and see all



aspects of the job. They meet with their teacher mentor to discuss what worked and didn't work during the week, what steps they need to take if they want to pursue a career in teaching and what types of job positions are available in education today.

However, the best part for many is that they also get to know the children, playing with them during recess and working with them on academic milestones. They bond with them and really feel what it's like to make a difference in someone else's life.

"For most students, this is their first professional job. They have to get up early and be on time knowing that the younger students are there waiting for them," Strohbeck said. "The gift a high school student brings to an elementary student who may not want to be there is immeasurable. They make it fun right from the start, welcoming students into the building every morning and interacting with them throughout the day. The cadets remember what it was like to be in elementary school, so that helps them bring out the best in the students."

Strohbeck visits the school sites all summer long. She said many teachers have commented on how helpful the cadets have been in the classroom.

For some, the experience opens their eyes to what a career as an educator would be like. For others, it reinforces that teaching is definitely their career of choice. Teacher cadets are assigned to K-8 classrooms throughout Macomb County.

Adam Sukiennik, a 2023 graduate of Fraser High School, said he always knew he wanted to be a teacher and joined the Teacher Cadet program to reinforce the choice was best for him. He participated in the program for three years and is currently attending Wayne State University, majoring in elementary education.

CONNECT

APPLY TO BE A TEACHER CADET

Want to see what a career in education is all about? Students can visit misd.net to learn more about the Teacher Cadet program or reach out to their school's Career and Technical Education director for more information.



Previous page: A Fitzgerald teacher cadet helps a student with a math activity.

Below: Teacher cadets gather at a workshop hosted by the MISD to prepare for their summer with students.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT



“I’ve always wanted to be a teacher my whole life, so when I heard about this program, I knew I had to be a part of it,” he said. “It’s fascinating to see how children’s minds evolve and how you can have an impact in their life.”

Now that he’s in college, Sukiennik said he recognizes how the Teacher Cadet program prepared him for his future success. Working directly with young students and seeing the behind-the-scenes work teachers do with lesson planning and handling emotional and behavioral issues provided him with valuable insight into the profession.

There are no class prerequisites for the program, but students do need to complete an application for consideration. They also must attend a workshop training day at the MISD

and commit to participating for the entire summer program session. Students must be in good academic standing with no disciplinary infractions. The local school district pays the cadet wages while the MISD covers training and materials. Last summer, 11 out of 21 Macomb County school districts participated in the program.

Completing its third year this summer, the Teacher Cadet program continues to grow. In 2021, there were 64 students involved. In 2022, that number swelled to 105 and the following year expanded to 125. The program is definitely gaining some positive attention outside of Macomb County, too. In June, a group of teacher cadets were invited to make a presentation to the Michigan State Board of Education in Lansing. Sukiennik was one of several cadets who traveled to Lansing. He said the experience of presenting to the board was amazing, especially seeing how interested they were in the program.

The MISD was one of 80 school districts across the state to receive a Grow Your Own grant last spring. In Macomb County, the funds are used to support cadets in their career training. Strohbeck said 18 students who were former cadets or part of the Early College of Macomb program received full college scholarships and will return to Macomb County school districts to begin their teaching careers. A reported 1,375 future educators will be able to access funds as a part of this effort statewide. Sukiennik is one of them.

“It was amazing to get that call. I couldn’t stop smiling. I feel very blessed to have this opportunity,” he said.

Sukiennik recommends the Teacher Cadet program to any high school student even slightly interested in teaching.

“It’s a great opportunity and you get paid and have fun,” he said.

“Macomb’s Teacher Cadet and Grow You Own programs are exemplary examples of how the Macomb Intermediate School District partners with our local districts to provide innovative and impactful experiences for Macomb County students and their families,” said Alesia Flye, MISD’s assistant superintendent for instruction/chief academic officer. **M**

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When Rob and Trish Misiewicz learned that Miller's Big Red Orchard was for sale, they were anxious at the thought of a developer buying up these precious acres that had served as an orchard for more than 145 years, so they bought it and are in the process of updating the property. They put in endless hours of work to prepare for the September 2023 opening, creating an experience very familiar to long-time guests seeking freshly baked treats, crisp apples, tasty cider and donuts and family-friendly activities.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BIG RED ORCHARD

“ THIS PLACE
DESERVES TO
BE BROUGHT
BACK TO LIFE.”



Bushels of memories

New owners of Big Red Orchard carrying on treasured autumn traditions

By Jane Peterson

A Washington Township staple during autumn, Miller's Big Red Orchard recently marked its first season under the ownership of residents Trish and Rob Misiewicz. The couple put in endless hours of work to prepare for the September 2023 opening, creating an experience very familiar to long-time guests seeking freshly baked treats, crisp apples, tasty cider and donuts and family-friendly activities.

When the Misiewiczzes learned that Miller's Big Red Orchard was for sale, they were anxious at the thought of a developer buying up these precious acres that had served as an orchard for more than 145 years. They had enjoyed the fun times they shared at the orchard, that go all the way back to when Rob visited as part of an elementary school field trip. They wanted

to offer these cherished memories for other families, too.

“We want to preserve the orchard,” Trish Misiewicz said. “So many people have a big history here and lots of memories.”

So, just when everyone thought the orchard was closing for good in the fall of 2022, the Misiewiczzes purchased the business just over a month later in December 2022. They immediately went to work, first taking on the task of pruning the trees and planting 1,000 new apple, plum and peach trees. They have another 400 trees on order for next spring when they plan to plant a new peach orchard. Then, they invested in a new barn to store the new equipment they purchased before setting their sights on fixing up the main barn and instituting regenerative farming practices.

Their plan is to reuse and repurpose as much as possible. The couple built a new entrance area using existing wood from an old barn, for example. They also created vintage décor inside, using part of the barn door.

“This place deserves to be brought back to life,” she said.

The orchard has been a vibrant part of the Washington Township community since the 1870s when Jacob Hosner emigrated to Macomb County and furrowed the land to create fields and a farm. His son, Jesse, one of 11 children, worked the farm until his retirement in 1904 when his three children and future generations kept up the tradition. In 1971, Ben Mossman, co-owner of the Wrigley Supermarket chain, partnered with Sam Franco to purchase Big Red Apple Orchard to supply his grocery stores with the fresh fruit.

Misiewicz shared this interesting tidbit: When Wrigley Chewing Gum Co. was seeking a name for the new cinnamon-flavored gum in 1973, Mossman, who loved operating the orchard, influenced the decision and Big Red chewing gum was introduced to the world.

It was 1982 when the Miller family bought the orchard and changed the name to Miller’s Big Red Apple Orchard. They operated it for many years as a cider mill with a fudge shop and bakery. From 2016-22, the orchard was owned by different investment groups and finally it was placed up for auction in November 2022. That’s when the Misiewicz family stepped in and took the reins.

Big Red Orchard grows 20 types of apple varieties and planted a new type, EverCrisp, the past spring. It should be available three to five years. In addition, the farm offers pumpkins, raspberries, plums, peaches, cherries, blackberries and next year, flowers.

This type of work wasn’t totally new to the Misiewiczzes. Although they met while studying physical therapy, Rob went on to establish an insect supply business in Bruce Township. Called Great Lakes Hornworms, it sells high quality worms and insects, like crickets, as food supplements for reptiles and other exotic pets. Through this work, they became familiar with regenerative farming practices they plan to implement at Big Red Orchard.

Although they did not purchase the orchard from longtime owners the Miller family, they did work closely with siblings Kevin, Kenny and Colleen, learning what needs to be done both in the orchards for healthy trees and to operate the hospitality side of the business, inviting families to join in fun fall festivities on the farm. Colleen continued to prepare homemade pies for sale, too.

While things moved quickly along and the Misiewiczzes were pleased they could host the public this past fall, the journey was not without its challenges. Trish said the cider press was sold at auction and they couldn’t get a new one delivered in time for the fall season. A local cider mill agreed to press cider and provide it for Big Red Orchard.



A Washington Township staple during autumn, Miller’s Big Red Orchard recently marked its first season under the ownership of residents Trish and Rob Misiewicz.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BIG RED ORCHARD

“My husband and I enjoy a challenge. It’s great to see the fruits of our labor right in front of us,” she said.

The couple has many plans for the farm’s future. Trish said there is an 11,000-square-foot metal building that was left unfinished for a number of years. In October, they received approval from the Washington Township Planning Commission to proceed with their plans for an event center, which they hope to transform into an inviting, rustic wedding venue and multi-use space as the back portion faces a lovely area of peach, plum and apple trees.

“We want to highlight the ambiance of the farm,” she said.

Construction is expected to begin in January with completion slated for the end of 2024 or early 2025. It will consist of two spaces with the largest space holding almost 400 attendees.

The couple also received their Class C liquor license in October so they can have a full-service bar with many choices for beer, wine and liquor. This will allow them to stay open year round in the future.

In addition to working with the state, they said Washington Township officials were overwhelmingly positive about their efforts.

“Without support from everybody, this wouldn’t succeed,” Misiewicz said. “Sometimes if you want change, you have to get out there and do it yourself with an open mind and an open heart. This is a pretty big investment, but it’s worth it for us, the community and our family.” **M**

CONNECT

WHAT ARE REGENERATIVE FARMING PRACTICES?

Trish and Rob Misiewicz, new owners of Big Red Orchard in Washington Township, are integrating regenerative farming practices at the orchard. What this means is they plan to replace synthetic pesticides and fertilizers with more natural deterrents. Over time, this helps to regenerate the long-farmed land by creating healthier soil free of chemicals, reducing root-strangling weeds for stronger plants and increasing the diversity of crops.

Right away, they implemented a core practice of regenerative farming: Minimizing the physical and chemical properties in the soil. They did this by skipping standard consumer fertilizers in favor of mulch mixed with worm feces to fertilize plants and keep weeds at bay.

Trish Misiewicz said by also using new soil that hasn’t been touched by chemicals, they plan to work toward opening a garden market on a small scale that uses regenerative farming practices in spring 2024. For more information, visit bigredorchard.com.



The Misiewiczzes purchased Big Red Orchard in December 2022 and wasted no time preparing for opening day.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BIG RED ORCHARD



Destination Macomb County

Family vineyard's new event center drawing visitors from near and far

By Jane Peterson





As agri-tourism continues to grow in popularity, a new event space in Ray Township provides an authentic rural experience within a vineyard — an agricultural setting unique to Macomb County and southeastern Michigan.

For Jess Youngblood and her family, the construction of a 16,000-square-foot event venue with a commercial kitchen and seating for up to 199 people year-round is the realization of a dream and a strengthening of their family legacy. Since 1945, the farm has been owned and operated by five generations of Youngbloods. Throughout the years, they have grown Christmas trees, raised cattle and harvested soybeans and corn among many other crops. In 2016, Youngblood and her husband,

Dave, decided to take the farmland in a different direction and, along with the help of their children, Georgia, Gracie and Wyatt, planted 23,000 vines. Today, those vines produce more than 25 acres of grapes and have created a scenic destination that draws thousands of visitors to Macomb County each year.

Agriculture, agri-tourism and food production continue to be a thriving sector of the county’s economy, Economic Development Program Director Jack Johns said. His work is dedicated solely to locating food processing grants, helping move projects forward and securing tax abatements and other incentives that help agriculture-centered businesses expand. He has worked with the Youngbloods from the very beginning of their journey.



The vineyard hosts many events, including Fourth of July fireworks, goat yoga, a winemakers dinner (featuring old-fashioned grape stomping pictured here) and live music. With the indoor event venue, the Youngbloods have made a huge investment in their business and created a rustic, yet elegant setting for weddings.

PHOTOS BY SAVANNAH WITH A CAMERA COURTESY OF YOUNGBLOOD VINEYARD
GRAPE-STOMPING PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUNGBLOOD VINEYARD





As agri-tourism continues to grow in popularity, a new event space in Ray Township provides an authentic rural experience within a vineyard — an agricultural setting unique to Macomb County and southeastern Michigan.

PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUNGBLOOD VINEYARD

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. Youngblood Vineyard stands out because it is Macomb County's lone vineyard. The northwestern portion of the state is typically considered Michigan's wine country, but the Youngbloods have successfully planted six varieties of hearty grapes that can withstand the region's brutal temperatures without the insulation protection Lake Michigan provides other growers. Since opening the winery in 2019, harvests have been plentiful and the wines have earned several awards. They are Detroit wine country.

"We take pride in the fact that we are an estate winery that uses 100% of the grapes we grow in our wines," said Jess Youngblood, a self-taught winemaker who serves as co-owner and operator of Youngblood Vineyard LLC. "Because of this, we are the only Michigan wine that features the Pure Michigan trademark on our bottles."

Beyond being a five-generation family farm that is veteran-owned and woman-operated, its location in Macomb County provides many benefits, Youngblood said.

"Ray Township is rich agriculturally with more than 7 million people within a one-hour drive. We are right in the middle of it," she said.

In 2022, the Youngbloods embarked on a new business venture, breaking ground on a 16,000-square-foot facility. It opened in July 2023, housing much-needed production space, a wine-tasting room and a stunning event venue. With floor-to-ceiling windows providing a panoramic view of the vine-

yard, it offers a warm and welcoming space for weddings, parties and other special events. Rental includes access to a bridal suite, a 4,000-square-foot covered porch and other amenities.

"It's a beautiful fit for the Youngbloods' long-term plans," Johns said.

During the summer, many guests enjoy outdoor seating under two pavilions and a beautiful pergola. The winery offers wine-tasting flights and wine by the glass or bottle. A Neapolitan-style pizza created from scratch dough and cooked in an authentic wood-fired pizza oven also is a popular choice. A fenced-in petting zoo area with goats, chickens, piglets and rabbits provides great fun for families, while the family's great Pyrenees working dogs also are often spotted roaming the property.

The vineyard hosts many events, including Fourth of July fireworks, goat yoga, a winemakers dinner (featuring old-fashioned grape stomping), live music and more. Weddings are gorgeous affairs, with capacity for 199 people indoors and up to 300 people outdoors.

Johns said it has been a pleasure working with the Youngbloods and watching their business grow. Through very purposeful planning, they have been able to achieve their goals and he said he's excited to see what comes next for them and the county's agricultural sector as a whole.

Macomb County Planning and Economic Development is very intentional with its agriculture sector, taking great care to preserve as much farmland as possible through thoughtful zoning, strong support of agriculturally-centered businesses

and development of a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program in 2003, Johns said. The PDR program allows farming families to voluntarily preserve their property as farmland in perpetuity by paying them fair market value for the development rights. This helps ease the pressure many agriculture businesses and farms experience from commercial land developers who want to purchase farmland for more urban purposes, like home construction.

Johns also helps businesses work through any potential barriers and guides them through the zoning and grant processes that can lead to growth.

“We definitely feel the support from Macomb County,” Youngblood said. “They have attended Ray Township planning and zoning meetings to help us move our business forward. They cared enough to come to these meetings at night in our small township. That says a lot.”

Johns also connected the Youngbloods with state grant opportunities that helped to fund the purchase of transformational equipment for the vineyard, such as a harvester that accomplishes in 10 hours what used to take 17 days and 500 volunteers to do. A grape press that allows the vineyard to process grapes seven times faster than before with the push of a button was purchased thanks to a grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development. In August, the Youngbloods hosted Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel and other state and county officials, giving them a tour of the new wine processing facility, indoor event venue and wine tasting room.

Partnering with government officials and the community as a whole is a crucial component to the vineyard because, while most visitors only see the hospitality side of operations Thursdays-Sundays, much of the work happens behind the scenes with tasks like pruning, mowing and netting taking priority to produce a good harvest.

“It all begins in the vineyard,” she said. “Having a farm-owned business is hard. Having a small business is hard.”

With the indoor event venue, the Youngbloods have made a huge investment in their business, not only financially, but in

sweat, time and energy. Since its opening, they have hired four additional staff members, bringing the total number of employees to 12. During the 2021-22 season, Youngblood Vineyard bottled just under 3,000 cases of wine made from its Itasca, Marquette, Frontenac, Petite Pearl, Prairie Star and Frontenac Blanc grapes.

“They have a phenomenal place,” said Jeff Schroeder, deputy director for Macomb County Planning & Economic Development. “It’s a destination that draws people from around the county as well as outside the county.”

Support for small businesses is critical, he added. These businesses are the backbone of any local economy and Macomb County is no exception. From 2010-18, the county’s food and agriculture sector grew its job growth by 55.6%.

“Specialty crops and agri-tourism help agriculture-based businesses diversify their earnings and they are a significant contributor to the agriculture and food production sector of our economy,” he said. “This is definitely a sector that is growing.” **M**

CONNECT

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Youngblood Vineyard is located at 61829 Ray Center Road in Ray Township. The 46-acre farm is home to a 25-acre vineyard, indoor and outdoor wine tasting, indoor and outdoor event venues and wine production facility. All of its wines are bottled on-site with all grapes grown in its vineyard. Wine is sold directly to the public by the bottle or glass. The vineyard hosts a variety of private and community events each year, including goat yoga, wine dinners, live music and more. For more information, visit youngbloodvineyard.com or call 586-770-5220.



In 2022, the Youngbloods embarked on a new business venture, breaking ground on a 16,000-square-foot facility. It opened in July 2023, housing much-needed production space, a wine-tasting room and a stunning event venue.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
YOUNGBLOOD VINEYARD

Frosty fun

Macomb County's ice skating rinks, arenas an 'axel-lent' way to enjoy winter recreation

By Jane Peterson



When the weather is right, guests will find an ice skating/ice hockey rink at Lake St. Clair Metropark.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HURON-CLINTON METROPARKS

“When you embrace winter activities, you unlock a whole new world of possibilities to enjoy and share with others in your community.”

Children can Skate with Santa at Mount Clemens Ice Arena.

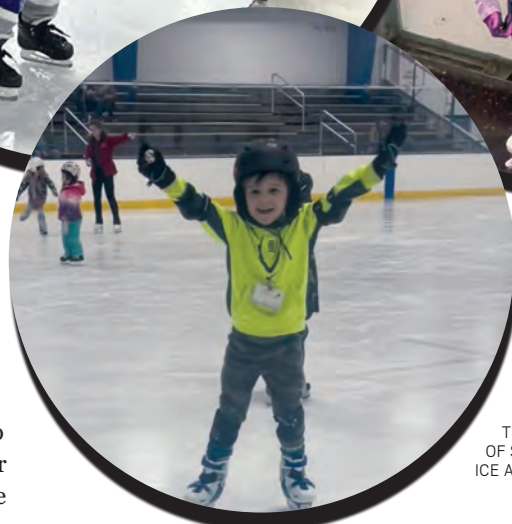
PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNT CLEMENS ICE ARENA



There is nothing like the feeling of lacing up your skates and effortlessly gliding across the ice with a bit of chill nipping at your nose. When the family needs a little outdoor recreation to chase away the winter cabin fever, head out to one of Macomb County's numerous ice skating arenas and ice rinks.

"When you embrace winter activities, you unlock a whole new world of possibilities to enjoy and share with others in your community," said Marie Povilaitis, ice rink coordinator for St. Clair Shores Civic Ice Arena. "Skating is a great way to remain active in the winter when your fair-weather, outdoor activities have ended. It is a healthy option for families to have fun together and for kids to make new friends."

Macomb County has six ice skating facilities that offer multiple activities for youth, adults and professionals. Skating times are available for casual skaters looking to have fun with friends, hockey players practicing with their team and figure skaters training for competitions. Most ice arenas also offer lessons.



The city of St. Clair Shores' Learn to Skate program is a popular offering.

PHOTOS BY CAMDEN AND TESSA CALLEJA COURTESY OF ST. CLAIR SHORES CIVIC ICE ARENA

In Michigan, ice skating is a life sport, said Mindi Priskey, skating director at Mount Clemens Ice Arena, a skill everyone should learn, like swimming. After all, lakes, ponds and canals are everywhere in the Great Lakes State, providing a plethora of opportunities for recreational fun or a great full-body, low-impact workout. The city of Mount Clemens has owned the ice arena since 1994, but it is privately managed and self-operational, Priskey said. The 65,000-square-foot facility is

home to multiple high school hockey teams; its premier junior program, the Metro Jets; and the Mount Clemens Hockey Club, the Jr. Jets.

Many fun events are planned throughout the year, including Skate with Santa, toy drive skate, coat drive skates and Rock the Rink with a DJ and glow lights.

Mount Clemens Ice Arena has more than 200 pairs of skates, both hockey and figure skating blades, for rent during open skate sessions. Priskey said rental skate blades are a bit flatter, making them more stable for guests who don't skate frequently.

PHOTO BY CAMDEN AND TESSA CALLEJA COURTESY OF ST. CLAIR SHORES CIVIC ICE ARENA



Right: Mount Clemens Ice Arena offers a Learn to Skate class.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNT CLEMENS ICE ARENA

Dodge Park Ice Rink has staff on hand to assist new skaters, Recreation Supt. Mark DiSanto said.

“We have skate trainers on site to help new skaters with their balance as they are learning to balance on their skates on the ice. We do recommend new skaters wear a helmet,” he said “We also offer skate lessons from youth to adult, beginning to intermediate, ages 3 years to adult, on Tuesdays and Saturdays starting Jan. 9 and Jan. 13.”

The past four years, Dodge Park Ice Rink has averaged more than 12,000 skaters a season with half of the visitors being Sterling Heights residents.

While local families love them, ice skating facilities also tend to be a draw for people from surrounding counties. Povilaitis said Macomb County’s central location in southeast Michigan makes the St. Clair Shores Civic Ice Arena, a classic community arena located in the original Hockey Town, a short drive from numerous areas due to the accessibility to multiple freeways. In addition, Macomb County offers a wide variety of restaurants, breweries and festivals, including many in St. Clair Shores, that are open year-round and add to the destination skating experience. Activities include summer concerts, Independence Day fireworks, Red Wings alumni game, figure skating show, fishing pier, farmers market, Halloween in the Park and more.

“We have two NHL-size rinks which service the St. Clair Shores youth hockey association, SCS Figure Skating Club, the city of SCS Learn to Skate program and SCS Unified High School Hockey. We offer multiple opportunities for public skating and open hockey,”



The Dodge Park Ice Rink began operating seven days a week on Dec. 1 and the season will run through March 3.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DODGE PARK ICE RINK

ICE SKATING TIPS

FROM MINDI PRISKEY

- Dress warmly. While you’re indoors, the ice still needs to stay solid, so the temperature stays right around 50 degrees.
- Safety first. Children under age 5 should wear a helmet. She said a bike helmet works just fine.
- Wear thin socks. While thicker socks may offer warmth, movement inside the skate can cause friction and lead to blisters.
- Plan to visit the concession stand for hot chocolate. It’s all part of the experience.

FROM MARIE POVILAITIS

- Have patience, be open-minded and trust that it is a learning process.
- If you have a friend who skates, bring them for assistance and moral support.
- A helmet and gloves are always recommended.
- No matter your age, there are classes available ranging from toddlers to adults. You can move ahead quickly even if you take one session to get the basics.
- If you are going to continue skating on a regular basis, purchasing a pair of properly fitting skates is recommended. There are two basic types of skates: hockey and figure. Both require unique styles of skating. She finds hockey skates easier to learn in, but that is not always the case for everyone. If you find one style doesn’t work, don’t quit until you try the other

she said. “Skate rental is available for an additional fee. Private rentals are offered when there is open ice.”

When the weather is right, guests will find an ice skating/ice hockey rink at Lake St. Clair Metropark. This outdoor rink is located in West Playfield at Lake St. Clair Metropark. A comfort station, picnic tables for resting and a warming station are conveniently located close to the parking lot, said Danielle Mauter, chief of marketing and communications for Huron-Clinton Metroparks.

Dodge Park Ice Rink is a unique outdoor facility. Just shy of 10,000 square feet, it is located underneath the city’s farmers market so it is partially covered with a roof, but the sides are open for fresh air. It began operating seven days a week on Dec. 1 and the season will run through March 3. Sterling Heights residents pay nothing with proper identification while the fee for nonresidents is \$5/person. Ages 12 and younger must be accompanied by an adult. Skate rentals, skate sharpening and heated restrooms are available.

“Ice skating is a great winter activity, We recommend coming during the holiday season as Dodge Park is lighted and provides a nice background for skating, a great activity to do with family and friends,” DiSanto said.

It might be cold outside, but winter is still a great time to get out into the parks and enjoy activities like ice skating, but also trails, cross-country skiing, sledding and more, Mauter said.

“It’s a great way to stay active, combat seasonal depression and spend time with family and friends,” she said. “Having these outdoor opportunities near home contributes to a higher quality of living and saves you the drive up north during a snowstorm to experience them.” **M**

CONNECT

LET'S SKATE!

There's no better way to chill out during winter than by grabbing your skates and heading to the local ice rink or arena. Macomb County offers a variety of indoor and outdoor ice skating facilities perfect for everyone, from those just learning how to skate to experienced skaters. Check out this list and make plans hit the ice soon:

Big Boy Ice Arena, 34400 Utica Road in Fraser, is a 20,000-square-foot ice center offering five rinks for hockey, figure skating and inline skating. Check out its camps, clinics, private lessons, leagues and special events, too. Information: 586-294-2400, bigboyarena.com

Dodge Park Ice Rink, 40620 Utica Road in Sterling Heights, offers open skating, skate rental and skate sharpening. January and February bring special event nights at the ice rink: Glow stick nights will be Jan. 6, 13, 20 and 27. New this year is Skate with a Superhero on Jan. 12, Skate with a Princess on Feb. 9 and

Date Night on Feb. 10. Information: 586-446-2700, sterlingheights.gov

Lake St. Clair Metropark, 31300 Metro Parkway in Harrison Township, offers a comfort station, picnic tables for resting and a warming station at its outdoor ice rink. Information: 586-463-4581, metroparks.com

Mount Clemens Ice Arena, 200 N. Groesbeck Highway in Mount Clemens, is an indoor, year-round facility that offers open skating as well as hockey, classes and special events. Information: 568-307-8202, mountclemensicearena.com

Suburban Ice Macomb, 54755 Broughton Road in Macomb Township, offers hockey, ice skating and special events. Information: 586-992-8600, suburbanicemacomb.com

St. Clair Shores Civic Ice Arena, 20000 Stephens in St. Clair Shores, offers ice skating and hockey for adults and youth, as well as a Figure Eight Skating Club. Look for the monthly arena calendar under the Parks and Recreation tab. Information: 586-445-5350, scsmi.net



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- Lake Shore Public Schools www.lakeshoreschools.org
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- Utica Community Schools www.uticak12.org
- Van Dyke Public Schools www.vdps.net
- Warren Consolidated Schools www.wcskids.net
- Warren Woods Public Schools www.warrenwoods.misd.net

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



The Nurse-Family Partnership program gives babies a strong start in life by focusing on the needs of first-time mothers. A core component of the program is regular at-home visits by program nurses who offer solid advice, steady support and even a good laugh while working with participants throughout their pregnancy and early parenthood.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Healthy babies, healthy Macomb

County's Nurse-Family Partnership supports first-time moms, builds strong families

By Jane Peterson

The Nurse-Family Partnership is one tool the Macomb County Health Department utilizes to help protect the health and well-being of the residents it serves. The program gives babies a strong start in life by focusing on the needs of first-time mothers.

A core component of the program is regular at-home visits by program nurses who offer solid advice, steady support and even a good laugh while working with participants throughout their pregnancy and early parenthood.

“There’s so much to learn and that can understandably be overwhelming for first-time moms,” said Katie Naujokas, public health services manager for the Macomb County Health Department.

Shirlina Crockett of Warren said she’s grateful for the additional resource. She registered for the Nurse-Family Partnership when she was six months pregnant and likes having someone she can count on to answer her questions and provide reassurance.



The Nurse-Family Partnership is a national program that has served first-time moms for more than 45 years.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



“I never had to take care of a newborn before,” she said. “She (Public Health Nurse Jamie von Dollen) gives me peace of mind, knowing that I’m not alone.”

While not a medical-based program, the nurses are a valuable resource for new moms who can seek support whenever they have a question. The program’s public health nurses are happy to lend a friendly ear, listening to the struggles the moms face throughout pregnancy, delivery and early motherhood. They help celebrate the family’s progress and achievements, too.

If needed, the public health nurses can guide families to local resources that provide a hand up through educational, financial or housing assistance. By focusing on the whole family unit, this type of 1-to-1 mentorship often leads to positive results, like satisfying employment for parents and children engaged in their education and after-school activities. Naujokas said literacy rates for participating children are higher than average. It’s all about achieving healthy outcomes for families based on their personal goals and what they envision for themselves and their children.

“What we’re doing is investing in the family when they are young,” she said. “The first years of life are so valuable for babies.”

This all starts with small steps, like helping parents build their network of support, which can include knowing which friends and family members are willing to babysit, identifying resources to help in emergency situations like when a vehicle breaks down and developing job skills so they can achieve their financial goals.

The Nurse-Family Partnership is a national program that has served first-time moms for more than 45 years, with more than 360,000 first-time moms enjoying the benefits of having a personal nurse. In Macomb County, the program began in 2017 with three public health nurses making personal visits to participating families. As its popularity increased, so did funding and staff. In 2020, the Nurse-Family Partnership Program received a \$260,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and in 2022, another \$414,000 from the organization that allowed it to expand to eight nurses.

“The program has been greatly received in the community,” she said.

Since its inception, the program has assisted hundreds of Macomb County mothers, who receive regular visits from a personal nurse throughout their pregnancy up until the child is 2 years old.

The first visits are about getting to know each other and identifying the family’s goals. With each subsequent visit, the nurse and mother create a deeper sense of trust and develop stronger bonds. The visits are casual and begin on a weekly basis, then drop to every other week until the baby is born. Once the child arrives, visits return on a weekly basis for the first six weeks as participants adjust to the highs and lows of motherhood. Then they likely go back to every other week, but it’s really up to the nurse and mom to set the schedule. They can even take a “vacation” and pause visits for a little while.

Naujokas said the goal is to help children and parents be healthy and achieve the life they want.

Crockett, whose son, Kairo, is now 3 months old, welcomes the friendly face of her nurse. She likes that von Dollen visits

her at her home because it saves on gas money, is convenient since she doesn’t have to get the baby ready to go out and is more comfortable for Kairo to be in his home environment.

“It was especially nice in those first weeks at home with Kai, when I was still sore, adjusting to motherhood and tired,” she said.

Von Dollen was there to teach Crockett and her fiancé some baby basics, like how to hold a tiny infant and how to change a diaper. She made suggestions on how the new mom could take care of herself, too, and provided advice on dealing with stress.

As one can imagine, it’s often very difficult to say goodbye once the child turns 2 years old. The nurse and families have spent hours upon hours together working through tough life events, making life-changing decisions and been through so much together that it can be hard to let go. While an intensely personal journey together, Naujokas said it’s rewarding to see families progress through the years.

“Every family leaves an impression upon us,” she said. “We’re really all about setting families up for success and that’s exactly what we hope to do for a long time for even more mothers.”

Crockett, who agreed it will be emotional to leave the program when Kai turns 2, said she definitely recommends the Nurse-Family Partnership program for new moms. She said in talking with some of the other moms at her son’s day care, they didn’t know the program existed, so she is eager to help spread the word.

“I wish they would offer it up to age 18,” she joked. ■

CONNECT

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR THE NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM?

Participants in Macomb County’s Nurse-Family Partnership Program need to meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Be a first-time mom less than 28 weeks pregnant
- Live in Macomb County
- Meet income requirements

For more information, call 586-466-6975 or visit nursefamilypartnership.org.



Time to shine

10th year of Manufacturing Day highlights opportunities for students

By Jane Peterson

Advanced manufacturing is a critical sector in Macomb County's economy, one that provides thousands of good-paying jobs as part of the nation's most pre-eminent defense, automotive and aerospace sectors. Manufacturing Day highlights these lucrative positions, introducing Macomb County high school students to challenging career paths they may have never known existed. For employers, the event is an opportunity to introduce the next generation to the world of manufacturing and dispel stereotypes about the industry.

This year, 64 host sites opened their doors to high school students, providing 74 tours as part of Manufacturing Day activities. More than 1,700 students from all 21 county school districts participated. The event is coordinated by the Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development (MCPED) and the Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD).

This year marked the 10th anniversary of Manufacturing Day in Macomb County. It was celebrated for an entire week Oct. 2-6 with an anniversary theme that included photos dating back to 2013 and a display of the annual T-shirts given to students throughout the years. In addition, plaques were awarded to five businesses that participated in Manufacturing Day activities all 10 years: Fori Automation; RCO Engineering, Inc.; The Paslin Company; PTI Engineered Plastics; and Fisher Dynamics.

"It's amazing to think we have reached the 10-year milestone in our involvement with Manufacturing Day. That's a lot of generous host sites and sponsors exposing our students to potential manufacturing careers," said Vicky Rowinski, director of MCPED.

According to MISD Career & Technical Education Consultant Shannon Williams, since 2013, 186 Macomb County companies have been a part of Manufacturing Day, reaching approximately 16,000 student participants. There have been 551 student tours provided.

Macomb County's Manufacturing Day is part of a national awareness campaign that was launched in 2012. It was created to share the excitement of modern-day manufacturing after years of students opting for college over careers straight out of high school. Combined with misconceptions that manufacturing jobs are dirty, low-paying, unsatisfying jobs with little room for advancement, there was a need to support the industry by educating students about what this career path can truly offer.

Williams pointed out that even if students aren't interested

CONNECT

TO LEARN MORE

Manufacturing is a huge industry in Macomb County with many opportunities available to students. To learn more about next year's event and to view videos from Manufacturing Week 2023, visit business.macombgov.org/business-events-manufacturingDay.



Planning & Economic Development



in a manufacturing position on the floor, there are plenty of other options in the industry to consider, such as human resources, IT, marketing, office staff and more. She said students are often surprised to learn how broad and vast manufacturing is, and that it is responsible for fostering so many different careers.

Macomb County first participated in Manufacturing Day in 2013 after County Executive Mark Hackel toured manufacturing facilities and participated in a roundtable discussion with area manufacturers. Since then, the county has operated one of the largest Manufacturing Day programs in the nation with thousands of participants, said Jennifer Weot, senior outreach specialist for Macomb County Planning and Economic Development.

"Manufacturing is the largest industry in Macomb County," she said. "We need a strong workforce to get the job done. When it comes to manufacturing, we need this younger workforce to get involved."

Held the first Friday in October, students are exposed to various manufacturing careers through tours of manufacturing sites and conversations with industry leaders. Through these discussions, students are able to outline the next steps they need to take with their education and are equipped with the information they need about internships and apprenticeships so they can pursue their own career course. This creates a talent pipeline that helps drive the local economy.

Jessica Weiss of JB Cutting told Weot that because of Manufacturing Day 2023, her company had a student from Eisenhower starting soon and will be enrolling in their apprenticeship program.

Tony Nahas from Synergy Prototype shared with Weot that his company had a couple students extremely interested. One student, he said, reached out on his own and set up a job shadow.

"All safety precautions were taken, and the student arrived on time and ready to learn. He further went on to contact his counselor and we are in the process of hiring the student through the co-op program. Watch out for this kid. He's going to be a superstar!" he said.

Macomb County has always been at the forefront of this national movement, never missing an opportunity to grow and expand the program. Even the COVID-19 pandemic didn't slow down Manufacturing Day in 2020, when the events were quickly transformed from in-person to virtual without skipping a beat. Companies held Zoom calls, students watched virtual tours and videos about the industry. The changes produced some pretty unexpected and lasting benefits, like organizers being able to keep videos up online for a year after the event ended, potentially reaching additional students to manufacturing careers who didn't participate in Manufacturing Day.

After taking tours, being introduced to company leadership, discovering qualifications for employment, learning about opportunities for career growth, talking with employees, touching machinery and tools and watching equipment in action, students develop a deeper understanding for what a career in manufacturing might look like and how it can be incorporated in the vision they have for their future.

"There is so much good in connections that come from par-

ticipating in Manufacturing Day," Williams said. "You never know what goes on inside these buildings that you drive by all the time until you walk in. It's an eye-opening experience."

Hosting companies create their own tour experience and attend an orientation breakfast to work out the details with local schools prior to the event. Appearing at this year's breakfast were four graduates who participated in Manufacturing Day and now work in the industry. They shared their path to success and how Manufacturing Day inspired their choices.

"We've seen real connections come out of our Manufacturing Day events," Rowinski said. "And given current workforce challenges, like talent shortages and other issues, our program is especially relevant. We're helping create a pipeline that can supply workers and solve real problems facing our local businesses."

Ultimately, the coordinated effort it takes to organize Manufacturing Day speaks volumes about the proactive nature of Macomb County officials.

"It shows the investment the community has in its students and lets corporations know that we are addressing a long-term goal," Williams said. **M**



This year, 64 host sites opened their doors to high school students, providing 74 tours as part of Manufacturing Day activities. Pictured are students touring HTI Cybernetics.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ripple effect

Study finds Lake St. Clair a major driver in Macomb County's economy

By Natalie Broda & Jane Peterson

Lake St. Clair is a huge asset for Macomb County. The first-time Lake St. Clair Coastal Study released in July revealed just how far the ripple effect extends, providing valuable information county officials will use to address deficiencies, strengthen opportunities and support a cohesive plan of action among the multiple communities the lake serves. The result will be a resilient “blue economy” that provides jobs, increases equity when it comes to accessing water activities and creates a better quality of life for all.



The Pride of Michigan is pictured docked in Harrison Township.

NATALIE BRODA — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

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“This is one of our most important industries,” said Gerard Santoro, program director for the county’s parks and natural resources. “First and foremost, we need to protect this resource through infrastructure improvements and environmental restoration because none of this would be happening if we didn’t have clean water.”

The Lake St. Clair Coastal Study examined a myriad of sectors within the “blue economy,” including real estate and land values; hotel, lodging and campgrounds; fishing and angling; boating marinas; beaches, parks and boat launches; and ecological restoration efforts.

The scope of Lake St. Clair’s impact is clear: There are 51.4 miles of real, physical shoreline, but when inlets, man-made canals, spillways, piers and wharfs are included, that number jumps to 160.3 miles of coastline. Of this, nearly 11 miles are accessible to the public and attracted 17.3 million visitors in 2022.

Much of Lake St. Clair’s economical impact revolves around its world-class fishing industry. There are more than 100 licensed chartered fishing boats and 62 active marinas. The study revealed a 620% increase in Lake St. Clair licensed charter boats since 2012 with nearly 1.5 million visits to marinas

in 2022. Of these visits, 44% of visitors were from outside Macomb County.

Santoro said that it is fortunate that the lake functions like one of the kidneys through the upper Great Lakes and the lower Great Lakes, creating a 430 square mile lake that with an average depth of 11 feet, is shallow enough to encourage healthy, balanced lake habitats.

“It’s a very unique ecosystem that has allowed for this,” he said.

In fact, Lake St. Clair is one of the most significant fishing locations in the country, Santoro said. According to the study, 583,000 hours were spent by recreational anglers on Lake St. Clair/Lake Erie. Anglers appreciate the variety of fish, including musky, walleye, bass, sturgeon, yellow perch and Northern pike. These fish populations are maintained naturally, without any re-stocking efforts — a testament to the lake’s healthy ecosystem. A combined \$173 million has been invested in projects that have addressed the lake’s pollution overflows and habitat enhancements like shoreline restoration and tree canopies. Due to these efforts, 235 acres of habitat and 130 acres of wetlands have been restored and 365 tons of sediment reduced.



Vinnie Dziengowski, a young sea cadet, raises the American flag aboard The Pride of Michigan.

PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP



Capt. Luke Clyburn (right) poses with a few of his sea cadets at attention aboard The Pride of Michigan, which is pictured, docked in Harrison Township.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

Creating more equitable access to water activities has been another area of focus. While there are eight public boat launches and seven paddling launch locations, 94% of the coastline is privately owned. There are 10 public parks along the lake, including Lake St. Clair Metropark. In 2021, Huron-Clinton Metroparks, working with the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), introduced the Metropark Express, a pilot program where SMART riders exited the bus at the 15 Mile and Gratiot Road stop, then boarded a SMART Flex vehicle to one of four locations within Lake St. Clair Metropark.

A universally accessible kayak launch also was planned at Lake St. Clair Metropark, Spillway and Webber Paddle Park.

County and local community officials will use the study's findings to implement a multilateral "blue economy" strategy. The Macomb County Chamber of Commerce is facilitating a Blue Economy Task Force that focuses on the areas of growth identified through the study, including developing different types of housing on the lake, supporting year-round tourism and recreation with activities such as ice fishing derbies and expanding access to all by improving walking, biking and water trails as well as creating more walkable and fishing piers with public access.

Kelley Lovati, chief executive officer at the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce, said the study did a great job giving officials a better overall look of the impact of Lake St. Clair, but it didn't capture everything. The lake, she said, provides a recreational quality of life that is important to attracting a talented and diverse workforce. Employees want to live in vibrant, attractive communities where they can work hard, play hard and raise their families. The lake is a strong contributor to this lifestyle.

"I know the value of this resource to our community," she said. "This project is so needed in Macomb County."

The task force will review past tourism initiatives and identify areas where different entities can join efforts for new experiences.

Some recent projects undertaken by the county, cities and townships include a new pier at Blossom Heath Park in St. Clair Shores, a new playground at Walter and Mary Burke Park in New Baltimore and habitat restoration and shoreline stabilization at Brandenburg Park in New Baltimore.

The results of the Lake St. Clair Coastal Study also have county officials dreaming big. Santoro said Macomb County currently lacks a destination hotel on the water that can host a large number of attendees. A separate study will be conducted to look at attracting a lakeside resort and conferencing center to the area. A waterfront hotel could significantly impact the food and beverage, retail and recreation sectors by possibly adding 470 regional jobs and \$27.03 million in new income, including wages, profits and taxes, according to the study.



Top: Capt. Luke Clyburn shows a map to sea cadets aboard The Pride of Michigan. **Bottom left:** Capt. Luke Clyburn poses behind the wheel of The Pride of Michigan. **Bottom right:** Jessika Hadash (right), a former sea cadet, chats with Capt. Luke Clyburn.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP



Top left: Capt. Luke Clyburn of the Noble Odyssey Foundation points to a nearly 7,000-year-old piece of wood found amidst a drowned forest in lower Lake Huron, sparking interest in what could lie beneath nearby Lake St. Clair. **Bottom right:** A map showing the outcropping of land that once held St. Felicity. The shoreline has since changed due to the rising water levels. **Bottom left:** A small, 9-inch statue made of alabaster that was discovered in Lake St. Clair in 1962, thought to be a relic of St. Felicity's.

TOP: NATALIE BRODA — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP
 BOTTOM: PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

In addition to its deep economic impact, Macomb County's ties to this body of water include a rich history. With support from Macomb County and state of Michigan grants for coastal science, Capt. Luke Clyburn of the Noble Odyssey Foundation (NOF) and his sea cadets held an underwater expedition last summer in search of the former St. Felicity Mission. It was constructed in 1826 and is believed to have been an active church until 1855. The mission was subsequently lost underwater when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers channelized the lower Great Lakes to be accessible for larger trading ships.

More than 130 years later, an expedition organized by the Great Lakes Maritime Institute Underwater Research Team found five tombstones and a boundary marker of the church's former cemetery in 1995. Near where the old mission is believed to be, Our Lady of the Hope Parish, formerly St. Gertrude Parish, continued through the years to collect research.

Over time, the county learned of and gained interest in preserving the history of St. Felicity, ultimately leading to this upcoming expedition through NOF, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing together scientists, educators, volunteers and youth to conduct underwater research projects throughout the Great Lakes Region. The foundation has procured 12 feature-length documentaries and trained hundreds of future sea cadets throughout Macomb and Oakland counties. Diver training classes also are available, separate from sea cadet enrollment.

For the St. Felicity mission, NOF acted as both a research institution and a facilitator of the U.S. Navy League's Naval Sea Cadet program. Kids from the ages of 10 to 17 gain maritime training aboard Clyburn's ship, The Pride of Michigan. What they found were numerous items that need to be continued to be studied by professionals in order to perhaps unlock some of the mysteries Lake St. Clair has held for generations.

"The more you start looking, the more there is to tell," Clyburn said. "I think Lake St. Clair has quite a story."

The program is an investment into the county's past that will pay off far into the future as young people learn more about the importance of freshwater and become intrigued by the stories that wait to be told underneath the surface.

"This site is part of our founding and our cultural history. There's significance here for how Macomb County started out. There's intrinsic value to knowing the history of our home, and I think overall taking care of our history and preserving our founding is significant to the entire Macomb community," Santoro said. **M**

CONNECT

NOTABLE STUDY FINDINGS

- There is a total of 160.3 miles of Lake St. Clair shoreline in Macomb County, both physical (51.4 miles) and augmented (108.9 miles) through manmade extensions (shoreline protection structures, piers, docks, canals, etc.). The augmented shoreline more than doubled the publicly accessible areas within the county, which currently sits at 10.8 miles of shoreline.
- The Lake St. Clair Coastal Area of Study is older, more educated and more affluent than surrounding areas. It has a higher proportion of baby boomers, a higher proportion of college degrees and a per capita income 27% higher than the rest of Macomb County.
- Recreation in the coastal area of study is on the rise. For instance, there has been a 620% increase in charter boat trips since 2012 and in 2022. In addition, marinas saw 1.4 million visitors.
- Environmental sustainability remains a priority. More than \$130 million has been spent on projects in the last 20 years to reduce pollution overflows and \$43 million has been invested in habitat enhancements.
- Macomb County's "blue economy" provides \$1.6 billion in economic value for the region and supports 18,692 jobs.





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CONNECT



FORMER GM WARREN TRANSMISSION PLANT HISTORY

The GM Transmission plant has a rich history in Warren, having opened in 1941. Much of its history includes making six-speed transmissions for GM passenger vehicles, many of which have since been discontinued.

Shuttered in 2019, the plant reopened briefly in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the country and there was a critical need for face masks to help protect workers providing essential services. GM launched a rapid-response project to produce masks, selecting the Warren facility because of the building's ISO Class 8-equivalent cleanroom. Since even a small speck of dust can upset a transmission build, this cleanroom with massive wind tunnels and air exchangers provided a clean space needed to produce medical supplies. In 2022, NorthPoint Development began renovation and remediation of the site, which now houses two buildings that will help strengthen Macomb County's industrial sector for years to come.

Building blocks

Home Depot regional distribution center coming to site of former GM Warren Transmission Plant

By Jane Peterson

The home improvement retail giant will house the state-of-the-art center on Mound Road near Nine Mile Road on the site of the former GM Warren Transmission Plant, creating numerous new jobs while providing same-day and next-day delivery to customers across the Midwest.

The new facility was announced in February and since then, steady progress has been made in anticipation of opening in spring 2024.

According to Evelyn Fornes, Home Depot's senior manager of public affairs, the regional distribution center will service stores in the upper Midwest and customers throughout the greater metro Detroit market. It will be staffed by approximately 100 associates with the potential for more as business grows. Operations will include replenishment of Home Depot stores for building materials like lumber, drywall and other products as well as complex order picking and flatbed delivery for do-it-yourself and professional customers.

"Warren provides the location, infrastructure and workforce we need to service our stores, customers and pros in the Detroit/Upper Midwest markets," she said in an email response.

Most associates in the new distribution center will prepare large or bulk items like lumber for shipping to stores and customers. The jobs offer consistent schedules and competitive pay, and The Home Depot provides growth and promotional opportunities, training programs, paid internships, and tuition reimbursement to its associates, officials said. The city of Warren has offered staff assistance in support of the project.

The project is expected to generate a total capital investment of \$6.1 million and create around 80 jobs, supported by a \$480,000 Michigan Business Development Program performance-based grant. Michigan was chosen for the project over a competing site in Ohio.

The Home Depot facility is part of a larger project — NorthPoint Development, based in Kansas City, Missouri — that has

been working with Macomb County for the past two years. The work included demolition of existing structures, environmental remediation, site and utility infrastructure development, bringing 1.4 million square feet of new commercial and industrial space that will house multiple tenants. This space will be utilized for light industrial, manufacturing, subassembly work and distribution industries. Construction also included improvements to the parking lot and added attractive green space on the 117-acre site.

"It is very rewarding to see old, blighted projects torn down and replaced with new, state-of-the-art industrial buildings," said Tim Conder, vice president of development for NorthPoint Development. "Further, these new facilities bring jobs, both temporary construction and permanent jobs, and become tax-paying entities."

He said The Home Depot needed rail for their facility and Mound Road Industrial Park is rail served.

"Macomb County is very pleased to see this very large and recently idled corner in the city of Warren redeveloped for a new use so quickly," said Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development Director Vicki Rowinski in a news release. "It goes to show that Macomb County's busy-friendly ecosystem is working as it should."

Throughout the demolition and revitalization process, NorthPoint Development worked extensively with local, county and state officials.

"The city of Warren, Macomb County and the state were all involved with various aspects of the development, and all were fantastic to work with," said Conder, giving specific shoutouts to Tom Bommarito from the city of Warren, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel, Macomb County Deputy County Executive John Paul Rea, Macomb County Planning and Economic Director Vicky Rowinski and Rob Garza and Matt Chasnis from the Michigan Economic Development Corp. ■

A Home Depot regional distribution center is coming to Warren. The home improvement retail giant will house the state-of-the-art center (opposite page) on Mound Road near Nine Mile Road on the site of the former GM Warren Transmission Plant, creating numerous new jobs while providing same-day and next-day delivery to customers across the Midwest.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE HOME DEPOT



Mindful approach

County project wants to transform jail system to accommodate mental health

By Jane Peterson

Macomb County officials are looking to reimagine the criminal justice system with a new central intake and assessment center that focuses on the mental health of prisoners. The move, officials say, will improve inmate access to care and address the root cause of their imprisonment that, for some, leads to return trips to jail.

“Most jails are not designed for mental health care,” Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel said. “What we’re doing is taking a more mindful approach towards inmates.”

The Macomb County Board of Commissioners approved the new central intake and assessment center for county jail inmates in July. The project will renovate and expand current jail facilities to add space for assessing individuals entering with substance abuse issues or acute mental health concerns.

This area will include 210 medical beds for inmates who need crisis care.

For those in a crisis, jail might be the first point of contact they have with medical professionals who have the ability to help, he said. However, jails are designed to be places of confinement, keeping potentially dangerous individuals away from the general population. The new central intake and assessment center will properly access the mental health needs of new inmates and provide a place where they can receive the initial care they need.

“An assessment center is critical to prevent individuals from being placed in a system that is not currently equipped to deal with these concerns. Confinement is not a substitute for treatment,” Hackel said.



Top: The exterior second-level entrance of the Macomb County Jail.



Bottom: Macomb County Community Mental Health CEO Dave Pankotai, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel and Macomb County Sheriff Anthony Wickersham hosted an event in May to discuss mental health and how Macomb County plans to address the pressing issue in corrections with a proposed new jail intake facility.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

The new \$228 million central intake and assessment center coordinates efforts and creates a smooth system for intake, booking and preliminary medical examinations. From there, individuals will be sent to prison blocks specifically for detox, mental health care or general population. Anyone deemed a danger to society will continue to be housed in the jail while other inmates could be diverted to an alternate facility for care.

He called the move a transformative approach that will save time and money while directly addressing a pressing community need. Conducting psychiatric evaluations in jail also is expected to relieve overcrowding in the county facility.

“We’re going to get them care instead of simply detaining them,” Hackel said. “We’re going to change lives.”

At one point, state mental health facilities took in those who needed care. As these facilities and others across the country began to be taken offline in the 1970s and ‘80s, it led to a gap in care as many individuals didn’t have the means to seek treatment on their own. This gap has remained the case for years, despite an increase in advocacy, awareness and understanding of mental health. Through its new jail intake center, Macomb County officials said they plan to tackle the issue head-on, partnering with trained professionals at Macomb County Community Mental Health who are prepared to deal with and treat a wide variety of mental health concerns.

Constructed in the 1950s, the current county jail in Mount Clemens is an aging facility not designed to assist those with mental health and substance abuse issues. Through the years, the jail expanded to house more prisoners, but there was no comprehensive building plan, resulting in a disjointed facility that’s unable to properly address the immediate needs of today’s prisoners, Hackel said.

The central intake and assessment center is the largest infrastructure project Macomb County has ever embarked upon. The multimillion-dollar cost will be paid with \$128 million in American Rescue Plan funds with the remainder of the cost drawn from the county’s general fund. Officials also requested approximately \$50 million in state funds as some Macomb County jail inmates are sentenced to state prisons. Hackel said the funds are already in place; there is no need for any additional bond or millage requests.

At this time, it’s unknown what impact there may be on staffing levels. Since the current rehabilitation center will be replaced with the central intake center, those staffers would likely continue on in the new facility.

Groundbreaking for the project is still about a year and a half away, Hackel said, as there will be an extensive design and planning period. Construction will likely begin by the end of 2024 or perhaps the early part of 2025.

He said this project will be a model for other county and state prisons as well as possibly those throughout the nation



Through the years, the jail expanded to house more prisoners, but there was no comprehensive building plan, resulting in a disjointed facility that’s unable to properly address the immediate needs of today’s prisoners.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

CONNECT

PROJECT TIMELINE

Construction of the new central intake and assessment center is expected to get underway in late 2024 or early 2025 once an extensive planning and design process is complete. To keep track of the facility’s progress, visit macomb.gov.



with case studies providing the opportunity to showcase the impact it will have in the community.

“Almost everybody is touched by mental health and substance abuse in some way, whether it their own issue they struggle with or that of a friend or family member,” Hackel said. “We’re making a choice to do something big here and really make a difference.”

The central intake and assessment center is one piece of the solution. Macomb County Community Mental Health is actively working to expand its crisis programming within the community, as well, including:

- Working closely with the county executive’s office regarding the possible repurposing of the Juvenile Justice Center to the central point of the Community Mental Health Crisis Stabilization continuum.
- Working with a consultant to implement a 24/7 engagement center, which will offer a possible alternative to jail and/or emergency rooms primarily for people with alcohol use issues.
- Working closely with schools to expand mental health services to students.
- Expanding partnerships with all first responders.
- Implementing an on-site mobile crisis screening presence in local emergency rooms. **M**

Makeover

Chaos Studio Salon utilizes state, local grants to fund renovation

By Jane Peterson

Jenn Magri knows a little bit about restyling. Since 2005, when she opened Chaos Studio Salon, she has been transforming old hairstyles into new looks for her guests. So, when the time came for her to move her business to a new location, Magri did what she does best — she restyled it, transforming a former law office into a modern, cool, fun space for her hair salon.

At first, she didn't see the vision for the building as it was broken up into offices and extremely outdated. However, after six months of renovations and removing walls and cubicles, she is thrilled with the result.

"The only place I wanted to be was Mount Clemens," she said. "The renovations created a space that is homey and inviting. It has a very positive, upbeat vibe. It's now a gorgeous space where people come in and can't stop smiling!"

The overall look is rustic, yet feminine, said Magri, with lots of natural warm wood used throughout the design. In addition, each room includes unique, whimsical details, like wallpaper on the ceiling in the shampoo area so guests have something to look at when their hair is getting shampooed. The lash area is surrounded by a wallpaper mural of swans, that look a lot like lashes, that provide a calming presence. The bathroom is painted a rich deep green almost black color and prominently features a gorgeous vintage gold mirror.

The entire renovation process, while stressful at times, was a labor of love for Magri, who wanted to provide a safe haven for her guests while helping them look their best and create a supportive atmosphere for her team. She employs 10 women and says it has been phenomenal watching them grow. Chaos Studio Salon has always been woman-owned and operated.



Chaos Studio Salon owner Jenn Magri (top) and her staff are proud of the renovations that will transform the future of the business. Pictured on the opposite page are before (left) and after (right) photos of Chaos Studio Salon in Mount Clemens.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHAOS STUDIO SALON

CONNECT

MATCH ON MAIN

All communities that participate as a select and master-level community in the Michigan Main Street program or are considered an Essentials or Certified Redevelopment Ready Community are eligible to receive funds from the Match on Main program. With this funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corp., participating municipalities award grants of up to \$25,000 to



eligible businesses seeking financial support to grow or strengthen their establishment. The goal is to help Michigan's downtown areas thrive for the benefit of all in the community.

For more information, visit chaosstudiosalon.com or call 586-465-2278. To apply for Match on Main, visit bit.ly/Mlmatchonmain.

“Our team, guests and the community are like family. We have a wonderful life here in Mount Clemens,” Magri said.

She took her whole life savings, a total of \$180,000, as well as her heart, soul, blood, sweat and tears and put it into the new building. She said she knew it was going to be a lot.

“I even slept there a few times so I could get it done as soon as possible,” she said.

The renovations were completed with assistance from two grant programs, one through the Mount Clemens Downtown Development Authority (DDA) for the outside facade that totaled \$8,000. This allowed for replacement of the building’s inefficient, single-paned windows in the entrance.

The other was from the state’s Match on Main program, which was a \$25,000 award. Chaos Studio Salon is the first business in Macomb County to receive this grant, according to Otie McKinley, media and communications manager for the Michigan Economic Development Corp. (MEDC). Since 2019, the Match on Main program has deployed nearly \$5 million to small businesses across the state, supporting 463 businesses. The program has leveraged \$14.2 million in private investment, supported the activation of 390,618 square feet of vacant or underutilized space and created 383 jobs.

Match on Main funds can be used for interior and exterior renovations, inventory purchases, furniture, fixtures, equipment, marketing and other needs.

For Magri, the \$25,000 grant was used to replace the entire entryway of the building, which she said was an added expense in the business’ tight budget. When Macomb County Economic

Development Program Director Jack Johns approached her about the available grant funds, he said he thought the project perfectly fit the parameters of the Match on Main program, but there was just one catch — the application deadline was just one week away.

“I knew we at least had to try,” Magri said.

With assistance from Linda Davis-Kirksey, who takes care of grants for the DDA, the application was filed on time and was one of 28 businesses across the state chosen to receive more than \$697,325 in funds.

“Many small businesses have difficulty getting access to capital,” said Suzanne Perreault, director of small business services for the MEDC. “This program invests in mom-and-pop businesses so they are sustainable over time. It’s been a really successful tool in supporting these businesses.”

Renovations at Chaos Studio Salon, while still ongoing, are now being completed on a more relaxed time schedule. Magri said she still wants to do something exciting in the back of the property, for example.

She is proud of the new building, calling the business a home away from home. She said Chaos is a place to escape the hectic rigors of everyday life to get pampered. The hair salon is now a full-service spa, with more space, more services and more people to take care of. In August alone, the salon welcomed 85 new clients to Mount Clemens, Magri said.

“It’s everyone’s happy place and it was the right move for all of us,” she said. “It was always my dream to have a space for people to go to feel better and smile.” **M**



Driving innovation

Macomb Community College's Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center prepares local workforce for ever-changing demands

By Jane Peterson

With the opening of Macomb Community College's Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center, students will be more prepared to take on the high-demand careers in advanced manufacturing, technology and the skilled trades that Macomb County is known for across the nation.

"Everyone is beyond excited," said Don Hutchison, dean of engineering and advanced technology. "This building was originally constructed in 1968 and during the renovations, they did a great job giving it a high-tech look with well-lit spaces and state-of-the-art equipment to make it representative of today's industry."

The 130,000-square-foot building, which opened for fall classes on Aug. 21, features collaborative working spaces that allow students studying the various skilled trades disciplines to interact with each other to get projects completed, much like they would communicate in the workplace. It is located on the college's South Campus in Warren, the heart of the county's manufacturing base, where it is easy to envision how seamless the transition from student to employee can be for program graduates.

Its interior is bright and inviting with plenty of windows that add natural light. It was purposefully designed to encourage gathering and engagement among the student body, Hutchison said.

"After class, we see students hanging out with each other and talking. They may discuss a problem they are working through or help each other prepare for an upcoming test. They are exposed to so many different ideas. Communicating in this manner naturally develops soft skills like problem-solving and creative thinking that go a long way in today's workplace," he said.

Hutchison said the updated facility and new equipment will better prepare students for the rigors of working in Macomb County's manufacturing, technology and skilled trades sectors. Job openings in these industries are expected to continue on a course of steady expansion, with an anticipated 14% growth in 3-D modeling and design technology jobs alone.

"Macomb Community College is a leader in higher education and workforce development," Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel said. "This facility is a prime example of the college's ability to develop facilities and programs that help students thrive and support the ever-changing needs of industry."

The \$45 million renovation is the largest in the college's history. Of the total costs, nearly \$15 million was a capital outlay appropriation from the state of Michigan, with the remaining approximately \$30 million coming from the college's capital projects fund. The project's architects were Hobbs + Black Architects, and Barton Marlow was the construction manager.





Left: Macomb Community College's newly renovated Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center, located on the college's South Campus in Warren.

Below: Macomb Community College President Jim Sawyer (left), Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist and Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel tour the Advanced Manufacturing Computer Numerical Control Laboratory.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE





Faculty member Jim Carlson (left) explains the basics of clay modeling to Don Hutchison, dean of engineering and advanced technology; Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist; and Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel (right).

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CONNECT

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR FUTURE CAREERS

Macomb's Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center optimizes the environmental infrastructure for teaching and learning that embodies the current impact of Industry 4.0, as well as the flexibility to readily adapt to the ongoing convergence of the physical and digital worlds this industrial revolution is driving. The goal is to develop a robust talent pipeline for industry and to prepare students who are immediately ready to contribute when they enter these careers with great futures. Programs housed in Macomb Community College's Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center include:

- Apprenticeships
- CNC machining
- Drafting/computer-aided design
- Electronics
- Fluid power technology
- Land surveying
- Media and communication arts
- Mechatronics
- Product development (including digital sculptor/clay modeling)
- Robotics
- Welding



The project is an investment in its students and Macomb County communities. Students will be competitive with any industry that comes into the state with a need for skilled workers.

Manufacturing, technology and skilled trades provide good-paying jobs for men and women. Some students discover their passion for the industry while still in high school, thanks to active Career Technical Education pathways and special events like Manufacturing Day that give students an up-close view of the factory floor with in-person tours, presentations and hands-on activities.

Macomb Community College plays a critical role in the jobs pipeline. As young people graduate from high school, those who chose to pursue a skilled trades career may accept an entry-level position or opt for an apprenticeship or additional training at the college. Working with local business partners, these career paths are formatted to provide a realistic on-the-job experience for students. They use the same equipment to replicate the synergies of today's workplace and learn the skills they need to adapt to an ever-evolving industry.

This requires them to develop a deep understanding – and appreciation for – the industry as a whole, including how current impacts, like Industry 4.0, will continue to push the limits and refine manufacturing processes.


With students working with modern physical equipment and mastering digital knowledge, they are ready to step in and begin immediately contributing to local businesses.

There is a great deal of demand to keep students working in Macomb County. To create this robust talent pipeline and retain young talent, students interact with guest speakers, take tours of local facilities, participate in co-op opportunities and apply for apprenticeship positions. These activities inspire students and provide them valuable contact with industry leaders.

Flexibility was a key element of the building design, too. There is plenty of room to accommodate any type of needed software and for future expansion.

“We needed to be able to integrate many types of technology,” he said. “Students will no longer have one job title for their entire career. We need to make sure students learn hands-on skills that can filter into any job title.”

The renovations have ushered in an exciting time for Macomb Community College.

“Students are thrilled about learning in the new Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center. The college offers something for everyone whether they are a recent high school graduate or an employee looking for a mid-career change,” Hutchison said. 

Brig. Gen. Matthew Brancato

Always ready to respond when needed

By Jane Peterson



Brig. Gen. Matthew Brancato

Brig. Gen. Matthew Brancato has been all over this great country, on assignments from South Carolina, California and Maryland to Colorado, North Dakota and Washington, D.C. He has flown in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom and supervised hundreds of military personnel.

In August, he arrived in Michigan, where he took over the commander post for the 127th Wing in Harrison Township. Here, he is responsible for the readiness of 1,700 Air National Guardsmen at Selfridge Air National Guard Base. It is a task he is well prepared for and eager to take on, knowing how im-

portant the National Guard is to the safety and security of the citizens it serves. The National Guard must always be ready to be called up, ready to serve in any kind of domestic or foreign capacity.

This is not a small task. While Selfridge Air National Guard Base may be one of the oldest National Guard bases in existence, it remains among the most active due to the 127th Wing being host to 70 tenant units, including every branch of the military and several Department of Homeland Security organizations — totaling more than 5,000 active, Guard, Reserve and civilian personnel. It is the last remaining military air base in Michigan and the only one in the United States where five branches of the military come together. Among the busyness of the base, Brancato has settled into his new role.

“I have received a very warm reception here,” he said. “We do a lot of work here — some high-stress things together — and this base has a strong future. We are a part of something bigger than ourselves.”

Prior to moving to Michigan, Brancato served as the senior executive officer to the 29th chief of the National Guard Bureau and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon. He has commanded at all levels of the Air Force, most recently as the commander of the 164th Airlift Wing, Memphis, Tennessee. He graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1999 with a bachelor’s degree in general engineering.

Brancato is a strong believer in health and wellness benefits. In his civilian capacity, he opened a nonprofit wellness retreat cen-

ter for military survivors and their families in 2014 and continues to support wellness initiatives for those on base.

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

A The mission of the National Guard is to prepare for engagement. We make sure that if incidents happen, we are ready to respond. The Macomb County community is very supportive of the base in general. The community has adopted us as a base they want to support in any way they can.

Q Describe the role Selfridge Air National Guard Base plays in the greater Macomb County community.

A The 250-member Selfridge Community Council has a long tradition of working to benefit the community. Together, its members help plan the annual open house and air show and if I need anything, this is the group I go to. They are very supportive of the entire base. I also work with Macomb County Chamber of Commerce’s Aerospace & Defense Committee.



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

A People here are really friendly and there’s lots of opportunities to spend time on the water. As part of military appreciation nights, I was able to throw the first pitch at Jimmy John’s Field and at Comerica Park. We like Macomb County and being close to Detroit for sports and entertainment options.

Q What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?

A We’ve been visiting the Metroparks. We love so many outdoor activities including hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing and skiing.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SELFRIDGE AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE

Edward Scott

Seeking to make a difference in Macomb County

By Jane Peterson



Edward Scott

Edward Scott believes that when you give people a helping hand when they need it the most, the entire community benefits. That's why as the new director of Macomb Community Action (MCA), he plans to empower people by collaborating with community groups, providing those in need with personal stability and security and working tirelessly to diminish the impacts of poverty for all. He brings a strong background in diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, a commitment to advocacy and a compassionate heart to his new role.

Since Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel appointed Scott this past spring, he has settled into his new position and is earnestly working toward improving the lives of Macomb County residents. He said everyone he has met has been warm and welcoming and he is excited about the future.

"Every day I go home happy," he said.

Scott joins Macomb County Community Action after an impressive tenure at Michigan State University Extension, where he held various leadership roles since 2010. He operated a mentoring program for at-risk youth as part of 4-H, contributed to curriculum design and delivery teams within the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the National Urban Extension Leaders training programs and expanded cultural diversity efforts with his involvement in the Sakura Garden, which included the planting of 18 ornamental cherry trees and construction of a structure inspired by a Japanese tea house.

With a bachelor's degree in music and social studies education and a master's degree in curriculum design from Spring Arbor University, his career could have taken him anywhere in the world, but he, his wife and their daughter decided to settle in southeastern Michigan and enjoy the diverse community and recreational opportunities Lake St. Clair offers.

Q What brought you to Macomb County?

A I had worked in a leadership role in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties and just felt like it was time for a change

in my career. I had previous interactions with Macomb Community Action in the past, so when I heard the former director was resigning, I thought it would be a good opportunity for me. I've always worked with youth and MCA is a chance to get closer to people and really make a difference.

Q What are you looking forward to as the new director of Macomb Community Action?

A There is so much potential here. I want to leave my mark with helping people. I want to build morale and help people feel truly appreciated.

Q How is your organization making a difference in Macomb County?

A Community action agencies seek to reduce poverty by providing essential services specific to the needs of local communities. This can include programs like Head Start, help with energy bills, rental and housing assistance, community food banks, housing rehabilitation projects like new roofs and weatherization programs for insulation.



Q How is Macomb Community Action contributing to Macomb County's business and economic growth?

A There are many studies about the journey a dollar takes in a community. Helping people frees up money for them to spend in the community on other items. In addition, we work to leverage county money to bring in more state and federal funding and always hire local contractors whenever possible to keep money here.

Q What do you enjoy about working in Macomb County?

A Macomb County is incredibly diverse and the people are very welcoming. I am looking forward to good things happening here.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY

Vicki Wolber

A career spent dedicated to public service

By Jane Peterson



Vicki Wolber

When Vicki Wolber retired from her position as deputy county executive in October, she left behind a legacy that will be hard to fill. A Macomb County employee for 23 years, she was instrumental in a number of projects during her tenure, most recently approval of the new central intake and assessment center for the Macomb County Jail. Her achievements are long, but as she looks back at her career, what stands out the most to her are the people she's met along the way.

She said Macomb County is a very empowering organization — one that provided real challenges, but also plenty of opportunity for growth. Building relationships with those around her helped her achieve her career goals and make things happen with the community.

“I’ve loved every minute of it,” she said. “It’s sad to see it go, but I’m excited for our next chapter.”

Her husband was already retired, so they wanted to spend some time traveling and golfing. Wolber also plans to volunteer at local organizations and become more involved in her church. She has no plans to move out of Macomb County and has lived in Michigan all her life.

“I love living here, love living in Michigan,” she said.

Wolber began working with the county in 2000 when she was hired as the assistant director for emergency management and communications. In 2007, she was promoted to director and took on the responsibilities of preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation activities as they related to large-scale emergencies or disasters that could impact the entire county. In addition, she also managed the coordination, oversight and maintenance of the county’s 800 MHz Public Safety Radio Communications System, which provides voice communications for all of the public safety agencies in the county.

Wolber was appointed to the position of deputy county executive by County Executive Mark Hackel in November 2018. In this capacity, she has served as the liaison for public safety and criminal justice-related programs, as well as health and human service programs and initiatives. She has provided oversight for

several county departments, including Animal Control, Community Corrections, Emergency Management & Communications, Health & Community Services, Community Action, Health Department, the Juvenile Justice Center, MSUE and the Public Defender’s Office. She also served as one of two Macomb County representatives on the SMART Board of Directors.

Prior to working for Macomb County, Wolber was employed at the city of Fraser where she served in many capacities, starting in 1988 as a part-time secretary within the Department of Public Works, progressing to emergency management coordinator and then serving as deputy city clerk.

She is a certified professional emergency manager in the state of Michigan and holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Walsh College and an associate degree in general business from Macomb Community College. Twice she was recognized for her service to the emergency management profession by the Michigan Emergency Management Association, being awarded their Mitigation of the Year award in 2005, as well as the group’s Local Coordinator of the Year award in 2007. She also was awarded the Professional Emergency Manager of the Year award by the Michigan State Police, Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division in October 2014.



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

A As deputy county executive, I focused on many areas within the county, but in the past two years my focus has been on health and community services, so I spent a lot of time working with the Macomb Community Action agency, senior services, health department, Michigan State University Extension, community corrections, veterans services and the sheriff’s department as the liaison. I would attend meetings, make phone calls, conduct outreach to coordinate and support departments, discuss new initiatives and make sure that there were no road-

blocks to what we wanted to achieve. The ability to serve and see the direct impacts of our work are very important to me.

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

A Macomb County is a great place to be. We anticipate what needs are and look at ways to plan for them. We are dedicated to providing the services our residents need. If people have ideas, we want to hear them.

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

A I've enjoyed bringing people together for projects and services that touch the whole county. We launched Macomb County's Communications and Technology Center, a state-of-the-art facility that houses Sheriff's Dispatch, the Department of Roads Traffic Operations Center, the Information Technology

Department and the Emergency Management office. That took a new skill set that challenged me. Other achievements were creating a Rescue Task Force for responding to active assailant incidents along with public safety agencies, the MISD and local school districts within the county; overseeing the county's COVID response team to provide emergency assistance and continued planning and mitigation efforts to reduce the effects of COVID-19 on residents, businesses and county employees; and launching the Safe & Healthy Macomb initiative to provide collaboration, support and resources to enhance the efforts within the mental health and opioid/substance abuse areas.

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

A I've loved working here. I've been surrounded by people who want to make a difference, are dedicated and innovative. It's motivating. I hope/feel that I've been useful and I've been very blessed to be a part of the county and this community. **M**

LET'S GO!
Explore Macomb

[MakeMacombYourHome.com](https://www.makemacombyourhome.com)

Make Macomb YOUR Home

The graphic features a blue background with a white QR code in the center. To the right, a photograph shows a woman with a white headband and a man with glasses, both smiling and laughing. In the foreground, there are two orange drinks with black straws. The text 'LET'S GO!' is in large, bold, white letters, and 'Explore Macomb' is in a white script font below it. The website URL 'MakeMacombYourHome.com' is at the bottom left. The 'Make Macomb YOUR Home' logo is in the top right corner of the image area.

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