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# » MOMENTUM

Uniquely Macomb County, Michigan

2025 Edition, Issue 17

*A little bit*

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*A little bit*

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hits has its economy thriving



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**MOMENTUM**  
Uniquely  
Macomb County, Michigan  
ISSUE 17

MOMENTUM IS A PUBLICATION OF THE  
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## CONTRIBUTOR

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.

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## MOVING MACOMB FORWARD

By *Mark A. Hackel*

Welcome to Momentum Magazine, one of Macomb County's premier publications. If you're a long-time subscriber, I thank you for your continued support. If you're a new reader, let me share what you'll discover within these pages.

From stories about our beautiful natural resources and amenities, to features on individuals making a difference, Momentum provides an opportunity to showcase what makes our community so special. It's also a chance to highlight our economic might and potential for growth. Simply put, Macomb County is a powerhouse. We have a nearly \$50 billion GRP, a highly-skilled workforce that is 457,000 individuals strong and more than 21,800 businesses that position us as an epicenter for innovation.

These are just a few facts and figures, but they are worth examining further, because the county uses these numbers and several other indicators to determine the overall health and vitality of our region. The data points to the right provide an even bigger picture. And it's clear, Macomb County is truly on the move. It's something that should make us all proud, because we live, work and explore in an incredible community.

As you continue to read Momentum Magazine you'll see that for yourself. Again, thank you for supporting this publication. Take care. [M](#)



### ECONOMY

**\$53.3 billion**

*GDP in 2024*

**\$400+ million**

*total business investment in 2024*

**1,583 jobs**

*created in 2024*

*Top industries: Manufacturing, health care and retail*

### INFRASTRUCTURE

**200 miles**

*of connected corridors*

**\$130 million spent**

*on projects to reduce pollution overflows*

### POPULATION

**881,992**

*individuals*

**8 people**

*move to Macomb County each day*

**4.8% growth**

*from 2010 to 2020 Census*

### QUALITY OF LIFE

**215 parks**

*covering 17,500 acres*

**157 miles**

*of interconnected trails*

**6 public beaches**

**32 miles**

*of freshwater shoreline*

### WORKFORCE

**61% of residents**

*over 25 have some college education*

**81,380**

*high-tech jobs*

**Ranked 3rd in the nation**

*for number of electrical, mechanical and industrial engineers*

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# THE PLACES

» NEW BALTIMORE



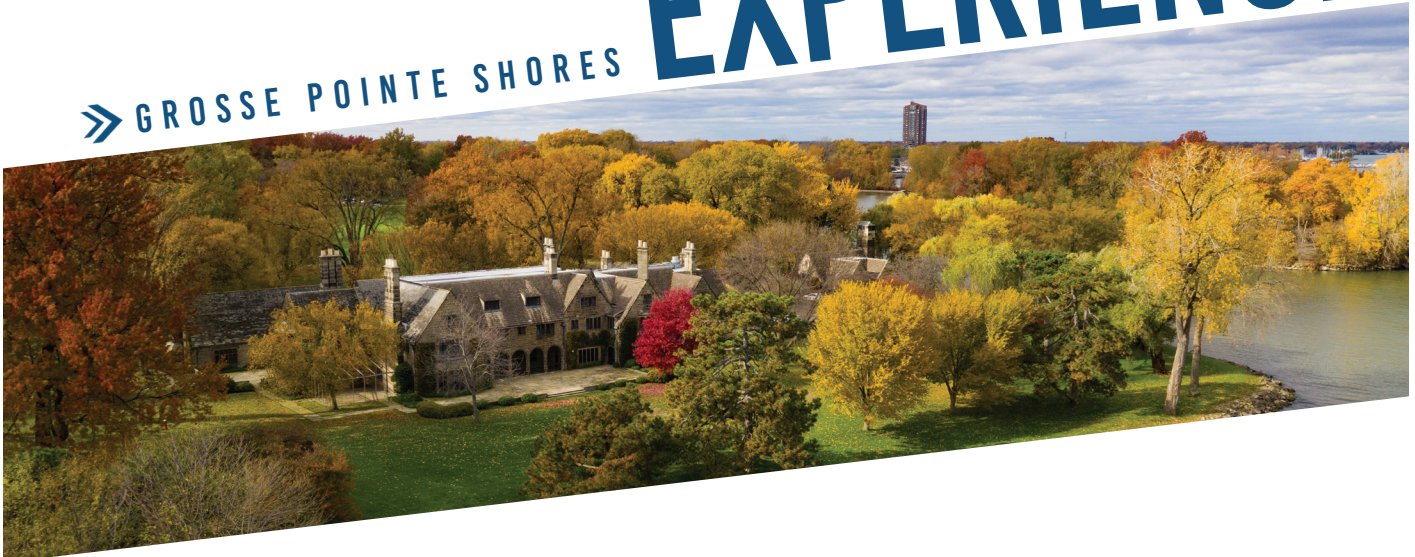
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» MOUNT CLEMENS



# EXPERIENCE

» GROSSE POINTE SHORES





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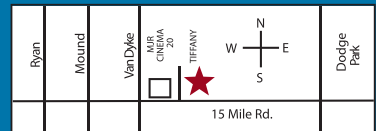
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# SMALL TOWN, BIG IDEAS

*By Jane Peterson*

New Baltimore may be a cozy town that encompasses just under five square miles, but its location along Anchor Bay means that it has huge potential — and the community is making the most of it. This is what they have been doing for more than 150 years when New Baltimore was first incorporated as a village in 1867 and later became a city in 1931.

For most of its early history, New Baltimore was a vibrant shipping town, exporting agricultural and manufacturing products via its robust port. However, as the shipping industry shifted to the railways for transporting goods, New Baltimore needed to reinvent itself, and it didn't take long to realize that its sandy shoreline made the ideal resort area for metro Detroit vacationers.

With one-quarter of the community located along the shoreline of Anchor Bay, the city's spectacular views and pristine beach spurred a bustling downtown area filled with restaurants, saloons, hotels — even an opera house. It had all the amenities visitors needed to relax and refresh.

## CITY OF NEW BALTIMORE EXPERIENCES RESURGENCE IN POPULAR DOWNTOWN AREA, ENJOYS ITS COASTAL LIFESTYLE



One-quarter of New Baltimore is located along the shoreline of Anchor Bay providing the city with spectacular views and a pristine beach along with a bustling downtown area.

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANNE NICOLAZZO*



With just over 13,000 residents today, New Baltimore continues to embrace its history as a sunny sanctuary with a waterfront park, a beach, a boardwalk with benches and a 190-foot dock that extends into Lake St. Clair. There are opportunities for fishing, boating, swimming and picnicking, as well as a universally-accessible playscape.

“The waterfront is a diamond that continues to be polished,” said Mayor Thomas Semaan.

New Baltimore added another jewel to its crown this past spring with the addition of a covered outdoor 20-by-40-foot patio spearheaded by the city’s Downtown Development



Authority (DDA). The canopied space at Walter and Mary Burke Park extends toward the water from an existing indoor pavilion. Two cozy conversation areas feature colorful landscaping, two charcoal BBQs and 12 Adirondack chairs arranged around each fire pit that provide spectacular views of Anchor Bay.

Semaan said the project cost approximately \$65,000, which was funded partially by a \$20,000 Macomb County Placemaking Grant with a \$20,000 match from the DDA. The DDA also pitched in another \$25,000 for additional improvements.

The Placemaking Grants assist local initiatives that activate public placemaking, or places where people gather and spend time, and that support the sustainability and greening of infrastructure and stormwater systems. To be considered, projects must be located in Macomb County’s traditional downtowns and other established DDA jurisdictions. Eligible projects also had to have a minimum total development cost of \$10,000 with the recipient committing to a 50% match. New Baltimore was one of three communities selected for the grant and received the maximum award possible.

There’s a lot to love about New Baltimore — and people have noticed. The town is consistently named on various lists as one of the safest mid-sized cities in Michigan. New developments and businesses are adding to the excitement downtown.

There are numerous investments in the works, including a three-story mixed-use development on the corner of Main and Washington streets, called Ashley Development. It will have first-floor retail with second- and third-floor apartments. Semaan said a developer is seeking to create 20 residential units on the second and third floors and retail on the first floor. Construction was slated to begin in fall 2024.

Also, in the New Baltimore Baker Building, often referred to as the former Stahl’s Bakery, funding is currently in the works to renovate the building, which was built in 1868 and originally served as a dry goods, clothing, medicine and grocery store.

Tashmoo Distilling Co., located on Washington Street, is a craft distillery that opened in December 2023. It specializes in premium, handcrafted small-batch spirits and is a wonderful addition to the downtown area, Semaan said.

Shoreline restoration projects also are in progress at the city’s two waterfront parks. City leaders are hoping to

## VISIT NEW BALTIMORE

*There is always something fun happening in the city of New Baltimore. The city is a northern suburb of metro Detroit located along the scenic shoreline of Lake St. Clair. For more information and a current calendar of events, visit [cityofnewbaltimore.org](http://cityofnewbaltimore.org).*



It is a handmade, homemade and homegrown market featuring fresh produce, local foods, artisanal products and more. Activities and special events are held throughout the season. The market is open for 26 consecutive weeks beginning each spring and is located in the center of the city on Washington Street between Main and Front streets.

mitigate shoreline erosion at both parks.

At Ruedisale Point Park, work will include multiple wave attenuation barriers, shallow aquatic habitat construction and approximately 650 linear feet of softened shoreline construction.

At Walter and Mary Burke Park, the city is planning a shoreline naturalization and wildlife habitat restoration project to help address issues caused by adverse lake levels, severe storm events and lack of natural ecosystem development. The city was recently awarded a state nonmatching \$2 million grant to build a break wall to create a safe harbor for boats to dock, said Semaan, as well as to protect vital infrastructure along the shoreline, including the water plant. For 50-plus years, multiple administrations have attempted to obtain funding for waterfront improvements at this park so this funding can be used as a matching grant to further save taxpayer money, he added.

Shoreline restoration is important because it supports wildlife, restores natural processes, improves water quality and protects habitats.

The thing about New Baltimore, said Semaan, is that many of its families have lived here for generations. The small-town vibe is strong and most people who pass on the street know each other. Friends and family members enjoy gathering around the fire pits to relax. Neighbors pitch in to help each other. The community comes together for local festivals and the popular farmers market is the place to be on Sundays.


“People come from all over for the farmers market,” he said.

Some of New Baltimore’s claims to fame are that it is home to Michigan’s tallest flagpole, as well as the popular Bay-Rama Fishfly Festival every summer.

The Bay-Rama Fishfly Festival is hosted by Bay-Rama, Inc., an organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in New Baltimore. Festival proceeds are used within the community. In total, the organization has donated more than \$2 million to the community in the form of scholarships and community projects through the years.

A parade featuring local organizations and youth groups is the highlight of the event along with the time-treasured festival tradition of the Bay-Rama Cardboard Boat Regatta. Boat construction begins about an hour or so before the event begins, with prizes awarded for the Best Built Boat (the one that wins the final heat) and the Titanic (the first boat to sink). The 60th annual Bay-Rama Fishfly Festival is scheduled for June 18-22, 2025.

Bay-Rama, Inc. also hosts the popular Annual New Baltimore Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony. Other annual festivals and fun include the Anchor Bay Country Fest, mid-week summer concerts, City of New Baltimore Antique Yard Sale Trail, Movie in the Park, Yoga in the Park, Chalk It Up, Bayside Jazz Nights, Memorial Day Parade, Bay Area Sports Fishing Show and Sunsatons Street Party.

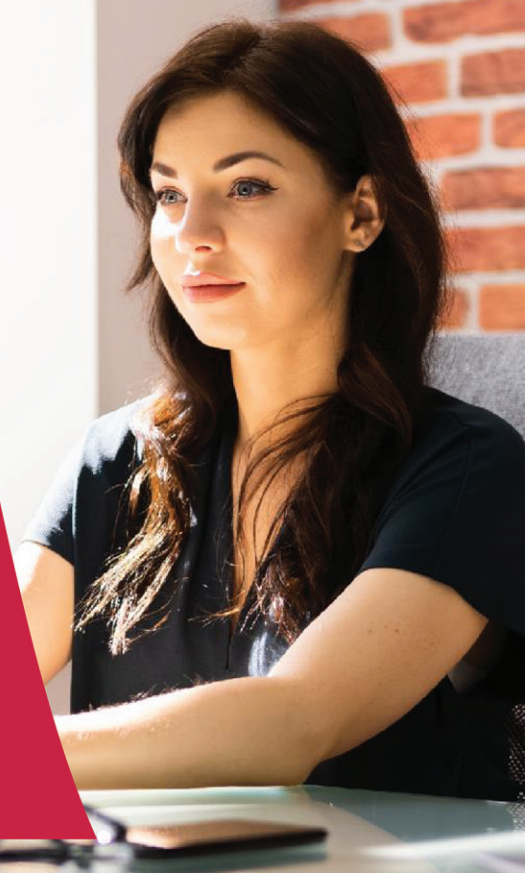
“My family moved to New Baltimore in the 1960s and it has provided us a wonderful quality of life just like it has for so many other families. There’s nowhere else I’d rather be,” Semaan said. 



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mount  
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## MARVELOUS MAKEOVER

*By Jane Peterson*

Downtown Mount Clemens is experiencing what some are describing as nothing short of a renaissance.

With renovations to the Macomb Place corridor and Cherry Street Mall, city leaders said the revitalization projects will strengthen the city's stature as the county seat, bring more economic development to the region and support a vibrant cultural and entertainment scene.

It will be the largest downtown construction project in more than 40 years.

"It's injecting life into an area that hasn't seen much movement in decades," said Brian Tingley, community development director and Downtown Development Authority (DDA) executive director. "There's a lot of excitement around these projects."

He said the city is looking to build on the momentum that began during the COVID-19 pandemic when people wanted to shop locally after small businesses slowly reopened following the mandatory closures. Downtown Mount Clemens started getting more business and things took off from there.

The project will focus on the city's downtown roots, preparing it to be a future hub for business, shopping and leisure and recreation activity without losing the historical aspects that make it a unique destination.

Mount Clemens is often referred to as "Bath City" due to the mineral bath industry. Dozens of bathhouses and health spas sprouted up during the height of its popularity. Many of the historic structures downtown are remnants of this historic era and are ingrained within the fabric of the community.

Mayor Laura Kropp said that while the revitalization effort impacts the epicenter of the city, the project is about rebranding as much as it is physical change. However, she said, city leaders are mindful of its history as Mount Clemens is one of the oldest cities in Michigan.

DOWNTOWN  
CONSTRUCTION,  
NEW  
INVESTMENTS  
INFUSING  
FRESH ENERGY  
THROUGHOUT  
MOUNT CLEMENS

Mount Clemens' revitalization project will focus on the city's downtown roots, preparing it to be a future hub for business, shopping and leisure and recreation activity without losing the historical aspects that make it a unique destination.

*PHOTO COURTESY OF JASON CARBARY PHOTOGRAPHY*



## VISIT MOUNT CLEMENS

*Mount Clemens is the seat of government of Macomb County. It's often referred to as "Bath City" due to the mineral bath industry. The downtown area is seeing a resurgence thanks to many development projects in the works. For more information and a current calendar of events, visit [mountclemens.gov](http://mountclemens.gov). To learn more specifically about the downtown area, visit [downtownmountclemens.org](http://downtownmountclemens.org).*

"Mount Clemens does have a rich history," she said. "We have evolved into a small community with a big heart. We are a diverse community and welcoming to all."

A familiar structure is the city's centerpiece — Fountain Stage, a gathering spot for many for community events and activities. As part of the revitalization project, it will be scaled back and moved 15 feet from its current location to the western side of Macomb Place.

The New Street Parking Lot will be reconfigured to resemble a plaza. Plans call for two electric vehicle charging stations and streamlined pay stations instead of clunky parking meters.

An emphasis on accessibility will enhance the downtown's walkability leading to increased community engagement as people stroll through the shops, attend events and grab a bite to eat, said chair of the DDA Board Phil Gilchrist.

The entire Macomb Place area will be converted into a walkable space accessible for those with mobility scooters and wheelchairs thanks to a fresh coat of asphalt and a curbless design. The pedestrian-only walking areas will be clearly defined by decorative boulders, bollards and planters to separate vehicular traffic from pedestrian walk-

ways. The boulders can be moved to redirect traffic during specific events and they double as outdoor seating during performances or shopping breaks.

In addition, various drainage and electrical infrastructure elements that look unsightly and could create tripping hazards have been moved underground. A decorative entrance sign, lighting upgrades, new trash cans, rock benches and a variety of hanging baskets will complete the first phase of the project.

After a ceremonial groundbreaking ceremony, phase I construction will begin in spring 2025. Work was delayed a year to meet the requirements of an Economic Development Incentive Grant.

Once completed, the clean, streamlined appearance of the walkable business district will look warm and inviting to shoppers and be accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

David and Melissa Lavender, owners of Clementine's Pastries and Uma's Market and Café, both located downtown, say that while they know the construction phase will be challenging, once the project is completed, they believe it will be a wonderful asset to the downtown business community.

"We are super positive about it and extremely excited," Melissa Lavender said. "People will be able to park once and visit for hours."

Work will continue into the second phase, scheduled for spring 2026. This part of the project will include a redesign of Cherry Street between New and Market streets. Additional focus will be placed on pedestrian use and the riverfront area, as well.

The \$6 million investment is being funded through a combination of resources, including \$334,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) monies, a \$813,000 Michigan Economic Development Corp.(MEDC) grant, a \$3.5 million allocation from U.S. Rep. John James (R-10th District), \$200,000 in DDA funds and \$1.2 million from the general fund budget.

"Everyone worked to make this happen together," Gilchrist said. "We have so many people working in the same direction at the same time."

## STRATEGIC PLANNING EFFORTS

The downtown project is just a start for Mount Clemens. The city has approved a strategic plan so leaders know what they want to be as a downtown. Now, when opportunities



arise, they have a comprehensive vision and are ready to respond. It's what Gilchrist characterized as a more "forward-thinking movement."

Kropp agreed, saying the city lacked vision at one time, but not anymore. Many of the properties downtown were vacant and there wasn't a solid plan for moving ahead. The strategic plan, coupled with the efforts from other local organizations, like the Mount Clemens Business Coalition and Downtown Development Authority, help to make projects like the downtown revitalization a reality.

The DDA plays an important role in many ways, including its façade improvement grants to assist business owners interested in refreshing their storefronts.

"It keeps the downtown an interesting place to visit," Gilchrist said.

He added the DDA is working in partnership with the MDEC to evaluate data around what gaps can be filled in the Mount Clemens business district. This can help property developers recruit businesses where there is a product or service demand that people can't fill locally and have to purchase elsewhere.

Some of these future investments could involve housing. Gilchrist said there are around 100 residents currently in the downtown district and future development could include additional units. Many cities are seeing a resurgence in the popularity of downtown living because of the convenience of being so close to daily essentials and recreation activities.

"People like to patronize local businesses and a concentration of businesses draws people," Gilchrist said.

The Mount Clemens Business Coalition is a group of downtown business owners who help guide city leaders as to what they need to attract more customers, especially during the evening hours. As the county seat, much business is conducted during the day, keeping the downtown bustling from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. After the working day and on weekends, not as many people tend to visit downtown businesses, but that is also beginning to change as shops like Black Cat Coffee have built a strong clientele who like to stop by and relax on Sundays.

The Lavenders said both of their shops have seen a greater demand outside traditional business hours already.

When Clementine's first opened, its hours were 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays. To better accommodate customers, days of operations soon will expand to Tuesdays and Sundays and eventually lead to being open until 4 p.m.



**Top:** Clementine's Pastries is located in downtown Mount Clemens. Owners David and Melissa Lavender said that while the construction phase will be challenging, they are excited about the revitalization project.


*PHOTO COURTESY OF CLEMENTINE'S PASTRIES*

David and Melissa Lavender, owners of Clementine's Pastries and Uma's Market and Café, say there is a lot of energy in downtown Mount Clemens that makes it a great place to be.

*PHOTO COURTESY OF UMA'S MARKET AND CAFÉ*

Once the revitalization project is complete, Melissa Lavender said she expects Saturdays to "be a whole new ballgame" with visitors walking through downtown well into the evening.

"It's really going to be a hub for activity," she said. "I hope people will see that Mount Clemens is the best place to be yourself. We are a diverse community and welcoming to everyone."

Downtown businesses and the DDA also are working to organize special shopping nights, an urban street fair and other events to attract people to the downtown area. Some of the DDA's signature community events include the Art Fair, Friday night concert series, Made in Michigan Fair, riverfront fireworks, Fall Craft Show and Halloween Spooktacular. 

## THE BEE'S KNEES

*By Jane Peterson*

With its residential neighborhoods and bustling business districts, the southern part of Macomb County is well known for its innovation and excitement.

However, the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House is an estate in Grosse Pointe Shores that reminds visitors of how the region looked much different nearly 100 years ago. The residence is a National Historic Landmark that attracts thousands of visitors each year, providing them with a look into Detroit's unique automotive story, as well as an intimate glimpse into the Ford family's life.

It is a unique space and one that adds to the beauty and sense of community in Grosse Pointe Shores. People gather for special events that celebrate current milestones while giving a nod to the history of the region. It is a place where people feel welcome because of the four pillars the non-profit organization is built on: philanthropy, playfulness, love and equity.

### THE EARLY YEARS OF THE FORD HOUSE

When the Fords purchased the property, the undeveloped shores of Lake St. Clair were often dotted with summer cottages, farms and estates of wealthy Detroiters seeking a relaxing retreat from busy city life. The couple purchased the land that would become known as Gaukler Pointe from Edsel's parents, Henry and Clara Ford, in 1925 and set about creating a beautiful home where no detail was left to chance.

The couple hired iconic Detroit architect Albert Kahn to design a residence that resembled the Cotswold-style cottages that Edsel and Eleanor fell in love with during their extensive travels to England. The interior mimicked a classic Western European aesthetic. Preeminent landscape designer Jens Jensen was tapped to create gardens and outdoor spaces that would be used for sporting purposes, nature watching and family gatherings. He utilized native plants and design techniques that captivated all five senses year-round and

## GROSSE POINTE SHORES' FORD HOUSE IS A RENOWNED SPACE WHERE HISTORY COMES TO LIFE



The Edsel & Eleanor Ford residence is a National Historic Landmark that attracts thousands of visitors each year.

*PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FORD HOUSE*

offered the coziness of Michigan's northern forestlands.

The Fords moved in during the fall of 1928 and joyfully raised their children — Henry II, Benson, Josephine and William Clay — on the sprawling 87-acre estate that includes stunning grounds, a formal garden with a reflecting pool, a rose garden, a flower lane that features seasonal blooms, the Bird Island wildlife sanctuary and outbuildings like Josephine's Playhouse, a gift for her 7th birthday from grandmother Clara Ford; the garage that displays several automobiles from the family's history; and the Gate Lodge, which encompasses the entrance arch, garage and three residences where some of the Fords' staff lived.

The household was lively, as the Fords welcomed extended family for visits and hosted various parties and milestone events for their children. The pool was often a focal point and center of activity for the family.

Throughout the years, the Ford House continued to evolve to reflect current styles. Some rooms were updated in the 1930s with a more modern, sleek appearance, while the interior was again remodeled by Eleanor in the 1950s following Edsel's death.

"It was Eleanor's canvas to create the world she wanted to," said Tommy Karr, director of communications and engagement. "She and Edsel were lovers of art and displayed many pieces by Diego Rivera and Vincent Van Gogh, as well as other artifacts from their travel adventures."

What remained consistent throughout the years was the couple's love for their family, home, Detroit and the arts and culture community. The Fords were avid supporters of the Detroit Institute of Arts in its early days.

## VISITING THE FORD HOUSE

Many happy days were spent here, so when Eleanor Ford made a provision in her will to open the estate to the public, her wish was to share that love for family with the community and to avoid sterile museum-like exhibits.

"This house was filled with laughter, and we want it to continue to be that way," Karr said.

Eleanor's fervent wish was to connect with visitors and have them experience the home and grounds through the eyes of her family.

"As you explore the mansion, you can almost hear the kids in the hallway. This home never felt like a brand-new space. From the very beginning, it always had a history," Karr said.

## VISIT THE FORD HOUSE

*The Ford House is located at 1100 Lake Shore Road in Grosse Pointe Shores. Enter through the arched Main Gate. The grounds, residence, exhibition spaces, gift shops, dining areas and event spaces are open year-round, but vary depending on the time of year. The Continental is a full-service lakeside restaurant, and the Speedster offers quick-dining service.*

*To learn more about tours, private events, educational programming, current exhibits, nature viewing, community activities and more, visit [fordhouse.org](http://fordhouse.org).*



## FORD HOUSE

EDSEL & ELEANOR

"Guests often remark that they feel like they are visiting a family home instead of a historic residence."

Guests can't help but marvel at the details. During the Nooks & Crannies Guided Tour, for example, visitors are treated to a behind-the-scenes peek into aspects of the home that are not often accessible to the public. This includes the massive basement and underground tunnel that Edsel could take from the study to his car.

Visitors hail from across the area and around the world. Some are auto enthusiasts or interested in architecture. Others want to explore the grounds, view the landscaping or learn more about the ecology. Detroit kindergarteners take an annual field trip to connect with nature.

## THE FORD HOUSE TODAY

The historic property is a gem in Grosse Pointe Shores. The new Visitor Center includes exhibits, dining, shopping and special event spaces. It offers spectacular views of Ford Cove and Lake St. Clair. The scenery, combined with the history and services like on-site catering, creates an elegant and memorable setting for private personal, business or corporate events.





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Guests enjoy visiting and exploring the historic property in Grosse Pointe Shores year-round.

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FORD HOUSE*




Open year-round, the Ford House frequently hosts walks around the grounds, home tours, educational programs, community events, special occasion rentals, dining, shopping and other activities.

It serves as a community hub, capturing Eleanor's playfulness with activities like a children's Halloween event and extending her welcoming nature with a Christmas Light Walk featuring classic white lights that Karr said Eleanor would have adored.

"Everything we do, every event we create, we ask ourselves, 'Is this something Eleanor would have enjoyed?'" he said. "She really wanted people to enjoy the property."

Eleanor's presence, as well as that of the entire Ford family, continues to be wholeheartedly felt by staff and visitors to this day. Several family members serve on the Board of Trustees and Martha Ford frequently visits the restaurant, Karr said. The grandchildren often return to "Granny's House" and family members are always available when staff members call with a question.

"It's nice to have that family connection," he said. "We invite everyone to visit to see the splendor, experience the peacefulness and feel the joy that is the Ford House." 



# JUST ADD WATER

*By Jane Peterson*

Lake St. Clair is a great asset to Macomb County.

While offering a seemingly unlimited number of water recreation opportunities, it also attracts businesses, residents and wildlife while supporting a diverse ecological system.

“We have a very robust maritime culture and economy right here in metro Detroit,” said Gerard Santoro, program director for Macomb County’s Parks and Natural Resources Division. “There is a whole lot you can do on the water here from boating, fishing and swimming to restaurants on the water, cruises and rentals, like paddleboarding.”

The Blue Economy Taskforce was created after the 2023 Lake St. Clair Coastal Study determined that Lake St. Clair generates \$1.6 billion to \$2 billion for the region and employs about 18,000 people. Macomb County leaders joined forces with the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce, which is connected to many of these businesses.

“We cover all 27 communities in Macomb County,” said Macomb County Chamber President Kelley Lovati. “Many of these communities are located along the coastline, so

## BLUE ECONOMY TASKFORCE EXPLORES WAYS LAKE ST. CLAIR CAN ADD ECONOMIC VALUE TO MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITIES



Lake St. Clair offers a seemingly unlimited number of water recreation opportunities. Boating is one of the most popular pastimes on the lake.

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY CHAMBER*

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# Is minimally invasive heart surgery right for me?

**Raed Alnajjar, M.D.**, Director of Cardiothoracic Surgery at Henry Ford Macomb Hospital

Nearly half of U.S. adults have some form of cardiovascular disease, and many will require a procedure to improve heart function and treat various conditions. Minimally invasive techniques such as robotic surgery offer a safe and effective alternative to traditional open-heart surgery, allowing for better outcomes and faster recovery.

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Treating complex heart conditions no longer means large incisions or long recovery times. Today, surgeons can address issues such as aortic disease and heart valve disorders with minimally invasive techniques:

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- **Robotic heart surgery:** This uses small incisions and advanced robotic technology to perform delicate procedures with remarkable accuracy.



## Benefits of transcatheter techniques and robotic heart surgery

Patients who undergo minimally invasive heart procedures, such as transcatheter techniques or robotic surgery, often experience excellent outcomes and get back to their daily routines faster.

These advanced methods offer several benefits, including smaller scars, less time spent in surgery with reduced blood loss, and a more comfortable, quicker recovery.

## Who qualifies for minimally invasive heart surgery?

As many as 80% of patients are eligible for minimally invasive procedures such as transcatheter techniques and robotic heart surgery.

These methods can be used for a range of treatments, including valve repair or replacement (aortic, mitral or tricuspid), closure of a hole in the heart (atrial septal defect), coronary artery bypass and atrial fibrillation surgery, such as ablation and left atrial appendage ligation. They can even be used to remove heart tumors.

To be a candidate for robotic surgery, additional factors are considered, such as well-managed conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure, minimal scar tissue from previous heart surgeries and lifestyle factors, including smoking status or obesity. The need for multiple heart procedures also may play a role in determining eligibility.

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The Blue Economy Taskforce was created after the 2023 Lake St. Clair Coastal Study determined that Lake St. Clair generates \$1.6 billion to \$2 billion for the region. Composed of more than 50 community leaders, the Blue Economy Taskforce is diving into the next steps outlined in the study by exploring ways Macomb County communities can leverage the lakefront to spur the economy and power positive, strategic growth across the region.

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY CHAMBER*



we thought it would be a good space for us.”

Composed of more than 50 community leaders, the task force is diving into the next steps outlined in the study by exploring ways Macomb County communities can leverage the lakefront to spur the economy and power positive, strategic growth across the region.

One of the first items that quickly stood out was the lack of a hotel and conference center along Lake St. Clair, Santoro said. The task force quickly enlisted the services of consulting firm JLL to conduct a feasibility study to determine if there’s enough support for a developer to invest in such a facility.

Santoro said a hotel and conference center, along with boutique hotels and other types of lodging, would help boost the need for overnight accommodations as the county seeks to host more regional and national events, such as the popular Bassmaster Tournament on Lake St. Clair. Past tournaments have attracted thousands of anglers drawn to the substantial fishing opportunities in the lake, as well as their families, friends and fans.

The Macomb County Chamber of Commerce fields several requests a year from people interested in hosting large-scale events in the county, Lovati said.

“This initiative is really exciting because we do get calls all the time,” she said. “While the hotel study is just getting started, this will put some numbers behind it. It’s a good time to explore these opportunities and lift up the waterfront economy.”



Lake St. Clair is well-known for its fishing opportunities.

Lake St. Clair encompasses 430 square miles and boasts one of the best freshwater fisheries in the country. Its coastline supports approximately 1,000 businesses and provides endless hours of recreation for residents and visitors.

“Our coastline adds to the quality of life when you look at workforce attraction,” Lovati said.

Task force members meet as a whole twice a year, but three active committees — marketing and public relations, blue economy and sustainability, and recreation and tourism — gather more often to discuss specific initiatives. One of those, Lovati said, was Lake St. Clair Appreciation Day, an invitation-only event where legislators toured the lake and learned more about its assets and the role it plays throughout Macomb County.

“It’s been a whirlwind year as we began our work and hit the ground running,” Lovati said. “In 2025, we will continue to define our goals and set some timelines to achieve them.”

Among the task force’s objectives will be:

- Outlining a multilateral blue economy strategy
- Improving lakefront access
- Developing facilities that help residents age-in-place
- Promoting businesses, events and amenities that support year-round recreation and tourism
- Continue expanding walking, biking and water trails

Meanwhile, progress continues on some shoreline restoration projects, including the Ford Cove restoration in St. Clair Shores and Ruedisale Point Park in New Baltimore. Historically, shoreline restoration has been shown to improve water quality, reduce erosion and boost wildlife habitats as native vegetation provides shelter and food.

Sending love to Lake St. Clair

To supplement funding for the Blue Economy Taskforce’s efforts and future lake-related events, the group’s marketing and public relations committee launched a line of “Lake Love” merchandise that includes T-shirts, sweat-shirts, hats, bumper stickers and more.

Interestingly enough, Lovati said, Lake St. Clair is shaped like a heart and many consider Lake St. Clair to be the heart of the Great Lakes, so the theme fits perfectly.

Another fundraiser for the Blue Economy Taskforce and the Noble Odyssey Foundation in February sold out as 1,000 people watched the premiere of the grant-funded documentary “The Hidden History of Lake St. Clair.” The film explores the history of the earliest known settlements in southeast Michigan — the lost village of Belvidere and the former Church of St. Felicity at L’Anse Creuse. Both lie in the shallow waters of Lake St. Clair just off the coast of Harrison Township. The film told their stories through historical data, facts, photos and underwater dive coverage.

Lake Love items will be sold online next year or available at the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce. Other fundraising events also are in the works. **M**



**Top:** Kayaking is one of the many ways people enjoy Lake St. Clair.

**Above:** The Nautical Mile at sunset is an awe-inspiring sight.

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY CHAMBER*

# IT'S CHOW TIME!

*By Jane Peterson*

The restaurant scene in Macomb County is vibrant and robust, with a wide variety of options for every taste and budget. From cafes, pizzerias, pubs, bistros, bakeries and casual dining establishments to fast food, food trucks, fine dining, fast casual eateries, themed restaurants and buffets, you're sure to find exactly what you're looking for close to home.

At certain times of the year, everyone's tastebuds tend to gravitate to different types of food.

In winter, for example, home-cooked comfort food is king. During springtime, you might desire lighter fare, like farm-fresh produce tossed together in a salad.

While the restaurants below are open more than just one season, during specific times of the year, they really shine. Whatever your heart's desire, make sure to mark your calendar to check out these fantastic Macomb County eateries.

## HERE'S THE DISH ON SOME MACOMB COUNTY EATERIES THAT ARE PERFECT TO VISIT ANY TIME OF THE YEAR



Octopus' Beer Garden owners Bob and Tonia Halaas have created a comfortable space where "all you need is love" to sit and savor some seriously tasty fare. Enjoy a never-ending selection of craft beers, seasonal cocktails and housemade small plates, including with a variety of appetizers, chopped salads, sandwiches, burgers and seafood.

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF OCTOPUS' BEER GARDEN*



## WINTER

When you're famished during snow season, you'll require a hearty feast. There's likely nothing better to fill your belly than a perfectly seared and seasoned steak and you can't go wrong with Mr. Paul's Chophouse in Roseville.

Brothers Paul and Peter Gogo opened this popular steak and seafood restaurant in 1968 and today, their legacy continues as the chophouse continues to be operated by three of Paul's children: Chris, Paul Jr. and Peter. Their siblings — Garry, Wayne and Nancy — also remain active in the hospitality industry as owners of The Brewery Restaurant.

Even if you have to strap on snowshoes to make it to Mr. Paul's Chophouse, be sure to visit around the holidays when the restaurant takes on a festive atmosphere that is the perfect fit during this magical time of the year.

Most guests fondly recall the warm hospitality they received and flavorful food they enjoyed and can't wait to return. In addition to the attentive, hands-on owners, much of the staff



The flambe chateaubriand for two is served tableside, featuring a tender filet expertly carved, carefully crafted to melt in your mouth.

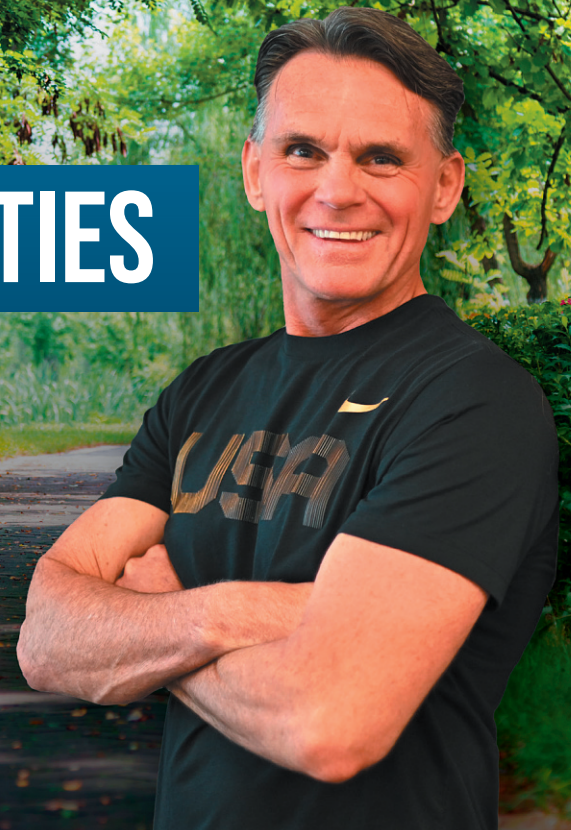
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has been together for a long time and are just like family, said Chris Gogo.

Start the meal with an exquisitely prepared appetizer like Escargot Bourguignon, steamed mussels or Chesapeake Bay raw oysters.

A favorite experience for many is the classic tableside service. At Mr. Paul's Chophouse, the signature Caesar salad is served tableside, a culinary skill that is a pure masterpiece to watch. As the cart is wheeled out from the kitchen, you know you're in for a special treat. The dressing is freshly prepared with flair and the salad ingredients tossed right before your eyes.

The flambe chateaubriand for two is also served tableside. This lost culinary art features a tender filet expertly carved, carefully crafted to melt in your mouth.

No matter the time of year, Mr. Paul's Chophouse is perfect for any special occasion or weekday dinner with loved ones. The atmosphere is warm and intimate with soft lighting and friendly service. If you enjoy steak, don't miss the ribeye, which is dry-aged for 28 days with rich marbling. It is available as a 16-ounce black Angus ribeye or a 28-ounce long bone tomahawk prime ribeye.

If you prefer seafood, consider the jumbo gulf shrimp, sautéed Lake Erie perch or broiled Lake Superior whitefish. A variety of chicken and veal dishes also are offered as are bourbon baby back ribs and roast half duckling.

"The meat and seafood are delivered twice a day," Gogo said. "Everything is very fresh."

Finish with a cup of cappuccino or espresso or end on a sweet note with a platter of assorted desserts or a hot fudge cream puff. You're guaranteed a meal you won't soon forget.

## SPRING

Ready to break out of the winter doldrums? Head over to Gino's Surf in Harrison Township to enjoy the panoramic views of Lake St. Clair, as well as the dynamic entertainment offerings. Dining here is truly special, owner Brian Jeffries of Apex Hospitality Group said.

"We want to create an experience like no other," he said. "We want to capture the feeling of a nightclub with the view of the water and elevated food."

Gino's Surf features a spectacular waterfront view along Lake St. Clair. Fresh breezes greet you while dining outdoors in the gazebo. Seating options include low- and high-top tables, booths, bar chairs and couches.



**Above:** Trumpet music adds to the atmosphere at Mr. Paul's Chophouse on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

**Left:** Enjoy steaks at Mr. Paul's Chophouse are served with au jus and a mushroom

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF MR. PAUL'S CHOPHOUSE*

"You feel like you're on the ocean, not a lake," Jeffries said. "It's just unmatched. You can't beat the restaurant, the view and the atmosphere."

Chef Richard Conover, a renowned chef and local resident with more than 40 years in the culinary industry, runs the kitchen, serving up delicious fresh seafood, juicy steaks and tantalizing Detroit-style pizzas. All food is made from scratch — even the vegetables are freshly cut on site and the pizza dough is prepped by hand. The ranch and BBQ sauces are homemade, too.

Seasonal tweaks will be made to the menu and there will be seasonal cocktails offered, as well.

The sports bar is a focal point of the restaurant, bringing modern takes to a full selection of cocktails. If you're visiting on the weekend, you'll be treated to spectacular live music, top local DJs and an endless array of sporting events to watch on whichever of the 48 TVs you choose.

“There will definitely be excitement this spring,” he said.

Future plans call for adding a large docking facility and breakwall so guests can arrive directly via boat. The restaurant’s banquet facility is currently under construction and is expected to open in summer 2025. It will be able to accommodate up to 500 guests.

## SUMMER

If you’re looking for the ideal summer vibe while dining by the water, be sure to stop by Octopus’ Beer Garden in Mount Clemens. Here, the sign says it all: “Food + Drink \* Peace + Love.”

You can chill out all summer with a never-ending selection of craft beers, seasonal cocktails and housemade small plates that are the perfect size for sharing with your tablemates. The stress from the day melts away as you relax by the fire pit, enjoy live entertainment and play cornhole to your heart’s content.

All this happens literally right on the water. The main area of the restaurant and additional seating is located on two barges while a series of floating docks houses the patio and entertainment stage on the Clinton River. Guests can arrive by boat or car.

Octopus’ Beer Garden is the brainchild of Chef Bob Halaas, who along with his wife, Tonia, are the owners. They created a comfortable space where “all you need is love” to sit and savor some seriously tasty fare like smoked beef brisket ends, jerk chicken skewers or a pulled pork sandwich. Since you’re dining on the water, some seafood might be in order, so try the Great Lakes fresh walleye, pan-fried perch, traditional Old English fish or spicy sauteed shrimp. Top off your meal with a housemade key lime pie, a mudslide (vanilla Stoli, Kahlua and Bailey’s Irish Cream blended with chocolate) or the restaurant’s signature Beeramisu with vanilla java porter-soaked ladyfingers and mascarpone custard.

The menu changes seasonally with a variety of appetizers,

chopped salads, sandwiches, burgers and seafood, but there is always plenty of beer flowing in the garden. While the selections do rotate, many of the 20 beers on tap are crafted locally in Michigan, including from Macomb County’s own Blake’s Hard Cider Co. in Armada. The Octopus’ Beer Garden Blonde is always a favorite, brewed with Michigan Crystal hops by Arbor Brewing Company in Ypsilanti.

Halaas is no stranger to the Macomb County food scene. This is his third Beatles-themed eatery, following the successes of Strawberry Fields in Chesterfield Township which he sold in 2015 and Penne Lane Italian Restaurant in Clinton Township.

“I’ve always loved the Beatles. I’m the youngest of five kids, so I grew up listening to it,” he explained.

The story of how Octopus’ Beer Garden came to be is a unique one.

Halaas was the original chef at the Captain’s Landing when it opened on the same site as Octopus’ Beer Garden in 2001. Back then, it offered lunch and dinner cruises, but Halaas saw its potential as a full-fledged dining experience. He stepped away to open Strawberry Fields and years later, while operating Penne Lane, he said a little voice told him to go back and check on the Captain’s Landing. Less than two years later, the couple purchased the business.

Today, the beer garden is a family affair. The Halaas’ three children — Kayla, Robert and Nicholas — along with daughter-in-law, Jessica, and several nephews work together. Exciting developments lie ahead as they installed see-through four-season enclosures this fall and added heaters to extend the season, hopefully through New Year’s Eve or possibly even St. Patrick’s Day. To celebrate, they also introduced a fall menu and hosted an Oktoberfest event with a special menu that paired perfectly with the beers on tap.

## FALL

Buon Appetito Italian Cuisine in Romeo is the coziest place to enjoy dinner as a couple or with the family. Enjoy a weekend date night to relax with a glass of wine and live entertainment or skip the dinner prep during busy weeknights and bring the whole family in.

“We’re very family-oriented,” said Jeannette Cangemi, who owns the restaurant along with her husband and chef Vito. “Sundays are a huge family day for us and we love it. We want people to be comfortable and feel like family.”

If you’re looking for the ideal summer vibe while dining by the water, be sure to stop by Octopus’ Beer Garden in Mount Clemens.

*PHOTO COURTESY OF OCTOPUS’ BEER GARDEN*



At Buon Appetito Italian Cuisine, it is indeed a family affair. The Cangemi's daughter, Marisa, works with Jeannette in the front of the house, while their son, Francesco, cooks in the back with his dad.

With the autumn colors popping and the leaves crunchy under your feet, especially if you're out touring Tillson Street's Halloween decorations, nothing hits the spot better than a bowl of piping hot pasta. Buon Appetito Italian Cuisine offers many traditional pasta dishes, including linguine pescatora, spaghetti Bolognese, lasagna, gnocchi, spinach and ricotta rigatoni, and ravioli. The signature dish they are known for is chicken cremosi, lightly breaded chicken sauteed in olive oil and tossed in a lemon cream sauce.

A variety of salmon, steak, veal, chicken and lamb choices also are available. Children under 12 can choose from pasta with marinara or meat sauce with or without meatballs, fettuccine alfredo and chicken strips and fries. A stunning selection of appetizers, desserts and after-dinner drinks round out your meal.

A full-service bar offers something for everyone, from beautiful wines and specialty cocktails to a full selection of beer and nonalcoholic mocktails.

Daily specials demonstrate the creativity of Vito and Francesco in the kitchen, allowing them to serve up unique dishes, such as those that inspired them during a trip to Italy this past summer. Once the specials have all been spoken for during the day, that's it until the next day. Jeannette said the specials make it fun and exciting to have different options that aren't on the regular menu.

When ordering from the menu, guests also have choices as their meal is cooked fresh to order. That means if they want to order a dish without mushrooms, they can. If they request a specific item be made gluten-free, most of the time they can make that happen.

"We have lots of regulars and many new guests, as well," Jeannette said. "I love it when people come in and say that a friend recommended that they stop in. I consider that to be a huge compliment."

When expertly crafted comfort food is what you're looking for, check out Buon Appetito Italian Cuisine. A recent renovation expanded the available seating from 45 guests to 120, so there's plenty of room for families. **M**

## RESTAURANT ROUNDUP

*Make plans to visit your favorite Macomb County restaurants today.*

- *Mr. Paul's Chophouse is located at 29850 Groesbeck Highway in Roseville. For more information, including a complete menu, visit [mrpaulschophouse.com](http://mrpaulschophouse.com) or keep up with the latest news on its Facebook page.*



- *Gino's Surf can be reached at 586-999-9201. For more information, visit [ginosurfmi.com](http://ginosurfmi.com) or make plans to visit the restaurant in person at 37400 Jefferson Ave. in Harrison Twp. Be sure to check its Facebook page for entertainment announcements and new menu items.*

- *You'll find Octopus' Beer Garden at 152 N. River Road in Mount Clemens. Check out its Facebook page for the latest updates and specials or call 586-221-1531 for more information. Also check out [octopusbeergarden.com](http://octopusbeergarden.com).*

- *Visit Buon Appetito Italian Cuisine at 117 W. Lafayette in Romeo. For more information, call 586-785-3157. View the menu at [buonappetitoitaliancuisine.com](http://buonappetitoitaliancuisine.com).*

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# MARKS



Agriculture, agritourism, farmers markets and food processing combined employ 3,538 people and contribute \$343 million annually to Macomb County's gross domestic product.

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*

# THE SPOT

## HOMEGROWN AND HAPPY

*By Jane Peterson*

There is a reason why Romeo has a Peach Festival, Richmond hosts Good Old Days and Blake's Orchard & Cider Mill is home to the Strawberry Festival in Armada each year. It's because Macomb County has a strong tradition of agriculture that continues to thrive today.

There are more than 400 operating farms, most in the rural northern regions like Armada, Bruce, Lenox, Ray, Richmond and Washington townships. These farms are essential, not only to the families who continue these traditions, but to the entire Macomb County economy.

Agriculture, agritourism, farmers markets and food processing combined employ 3,538 people and contribute \$343 million annually to the county's gross domestic product (GDP), officials say. Sales of agriculture products grown in the county total \$73.8 million.

This is surprising news to some, as Macomb County is the third largest in Michigan in population and is mostly known for its automotive manufacturing, as well as defense and aerospace sectors.

"Food processing connects to manufacturing," Macomb County Data Specialist Dan Rochon said. "We're good at skilled trades, making and producing items. It's no different with food processing."

## MACOMB COUNTY IS A LITTLE BIT COUNTRY, A LITTLE BIT CITY AND THEY BOTH WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE A THRIVING ECONOMY

Recognizing agriculture's impact as a top five industry in the county, the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development (MCPED) team created the Strategic Agricultural Economic Development Plan to ensure agriculture, agritourism and food processing continue to be an economic driver for generations to come.

Agriculture numbers tell the story, with the sector experiencing significant growth thanks to several diverse products and the way they are utilized. Turning whole cuts of meat into chops, apples into apple cider and cucumbers into pickles are examples of food manufacturing, where a raw product is transformed into a finished product.

Second Nature Brands/Sanders Candy is the county's biggest food processor with 172 employees and GDP sales of \$51 million. Other major food processors are Turri's Italian Foods Inc., Blake's Orchard Inc., Everfresh Beverages Inc., Achatz's Hand Made Pie Co., Safie Specialty Foods Co. Inc. and Ethel's Baking Co.

Not only do these food manufacturers impact the economy through sales and employment, but they purchase





There's so much to see when walking into Jusko's Greenhouse in Richmond (left); workers at Ethel's Baking Co. in Shelby Township (top center) prepare some of the gluten-free desserts the company is known for; strawberries are the item of choice for many who visit Verellen Orchards & Cider Mill in Romeo (above)

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*

more than \$26.6 million in agricultural crops annually, of which 46.7% is grown locally on Macomb County farms, making it a win-win for everyone.

Macomb County farmers grow an abundance of corn and soybeans, as well as a variety of other crops like wheat, fruits and vegetables. Some raise cattle, goats, sheep, horses, turkeys and other animals. In addition, there are several nurseries and greenhouses that supply shops with houseplants, flowers, herbs and vegetable starter plants.

Horticulture and sod farms make a strong showing, generating \$56.2 million in sales — ranking fourth in the state and the top 5% nationwide, Rochon said. Some of this sod supports new developments in other parts of the county, he added.

The strength of the industry overall indicates there is room for growth without sacrificing the county's agricultural heritage.

According to Rochon, there was a 13% growth in the number of Macomb County working farms from 2017 to 2022. In 2017, there were 404 working farms with 76,000 acres, and in 2022, those numbers rose to 457 working farms with 79,000 acres. This equates to 22% of Macomb County's total land mass, he said.

Rochon said data suggests that succession planning is playing a role in these numbers as older farmers parcel larger farmlands into smaller chunks to pass down to their children or sell. This may be one factor that has led to an increase in the number of farms in the 10-49 acre and 50-170 acre ranges, as well as the number of people who reported that they were new or beginning farmers.

Farmland is a precious resource — once it's gone, it's gone for good. Pressure to develop farmland for commercial and residential uses continues to increase depending on the location of water and sewer service. To combat this, Macomb County has taken a proactive approach, developing a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program that protects farmland by ensuring that it can never be used for anything but farming, even after it's sold.

The PDR program began in 2003 thanks to the Urban Cooperation Act Agreement with six townships: Armada, Bruce, Lenox, Ray, Richmond and Washington.

The PDR program allows farming families to voluntarily preserve their property as farmland in perpetuity by being paid fair market value for the development rights. Then, a PDR agreement places an easement on the property that prohibits future residential, commercial or industrial uses. Farmers can continue to develop their land as needed for

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## AGRICULTURAL MASTER PLAN

*The Agricultural Master Plan recognizes that the benefits of farming extend well beyond dollars and cents. By protecting the agricultural lifestyle, the community prospers with better food security, increased environmental sustainability and an enhanced feeling of general well-being.*

*Components of the Agricultural Master Plan include:*

- *Action items that promote Macomb County's agricultural businesses*
- *Promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and land use*
- *Reinforcement of education and workforce development so agriculture workers meet the demands of changing technology and markets*
- *Responsible infrastructure development and land use policies to aid local governments in future decisions*
- *A focus on how farmers markets and agritourism contribute to healthy lifestyles*



## Planning and Economic Development



Phylis Fuerstenau signs a Purchase of Development Rights for an 80-acre conservation easement on farmland in Richmond Township.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

agricultural or personal needs and are free to sell the land, but it must remain agricultural.

To date, more than 400 acres of farmland have been protected under the PDR program with more currently in the works.

In addition to growing products, some farmers have introduced agritourism into their business model. For many, this has turned out to be a profitable sector of the agricultural market, boosting interest in local farms and contributing to the county's quality of life. Macomb County is home to many U-pick farms, pumpkin patches, Christmas tree farms, corn mazes, herb farms, orchards, wineries and vineyards. These provide scenic venues for events and plenty of opportunities for family fun.

Autumn is a particularly busy time for Macomb County's apple orchards. Last season, Big Red Apple Orchard in Washington, Blake's Orchard and Cider Mill and Blake's Big Apple in Armada, Hy's Cider Mill in Romeo, Stony Creek Orchard and Cider Mill in Romeo, Verellen Orchards in Romeo and Westview Orchards, Vineyards & Cider Mill in Romeo recorded more than 1 million visits.

Farmers markets, farm stands and community-supported agriculture are other ways farmers share their fresh food directly with Macomb County residents and visitors.

The MCPED's Strategic Agricultural Economic Development Plan calls for continuing to support these actions through a Grown in Macomb campaign as an extension of the county's Make Macomb Your Home program. In addition, an agritourism promotional campaign would promote Macomb County destinations by highlighting the activities and products that create fun experiences for people of all ages.

Other long-term recommendations in the plan include:

- Expanding K-12 education to increase awareness of agricultural activities
- Establishing a local/regional agricultural workforce development program
- Developing an agricultural land and development pressure analysis tool
- Exploring a Transfer of Development Rights program
- Introducing agricultural zoning districts
- Pursuing federal, state and nonprofit funding sources to invest in agriculture programs [M](#)

# HOME SWEET HOME

By Jane Peterson

Nearly 900,000 people live in Macomb County communities and that number continues to grow every day.

People move to Macomb County for a variety of reasons — a new career opportunity, personal investments, good schools, beautiful recreation areas — but buying a home is often a signal that they plan to stay long-term to raise a family, remain near loved ones, retire or grow their career.

Macomb County's housing market continues to be healthy overall, despite a complicated 2024 dominated by higher interest rates that resulted in slower sales, said Macomb County Data Specialist Dan Rochon.



This year was a roller-coaster one, agreed Erick Monzo, broker, owner and operator of The Monzo Group, which has offices in Detroit and Mount Clemens. The influx of interest rates added pressure to housing markets and kept buyers wondering when a good time was to buy.

"Buyers were pulled in a lot of different directions," he said.

In September, the Federal Reserve cut rates by a half point and this led to increased optimism for 2025 as buyers — especially first-time homeowners — prepare to purchase properties.

Investment buyers also see Macomb County as particularly attractive, Monzo said. With the West Coast and other traditional investment areas becoming unprofitable, investors have been motivated to look elsewhere. Macomb County is appealing because of its abundance of blue-collar jobs, quality infrastructure and its track record of being a good return on investment.

Another reason the county's housing market remains strong is the area's cost of living.

"Your dollar goes further here than in many other parts of the country," Rochon said.

## POPULATION CONTINUES TO GROW AS MORE PEOPLE CHOOSE TO 'MAKE MACOMB THEIR HOME'

Other regions in the United States, like Austin, Texas; Washington, D.C.; and San Diego, California, also have thriving automotive, aerospace or manufacturing sectors, but these places tend to be more expensive to live. Macomb County scores 95.9 on the cost-of-living index compared to Austin's 106.6, the D.C. metro area's 117.7 and San Diego's 142.2.

This directly correlates to the community's housing market, where the average value of a home in Macomb County is \$288,000, Rochon said. This helps companies with their talent attraction campaigns as they seek to hire top-skilled employees, such as electrical, industrial and mechanical engineers, from across the country.

Rochon said the county continues to add about 1,000 units per year to its housing stock, maintaining an occupancy rate of 95%. Of that number, 72% of units are owner-occupied. This results in a vacancy rate of just 4.3%, compared to the national average of 12%, he said.

In addition, 32% of Macomb County homeowners own their property free and clear, Rochon said.

"Our population has grown every year for the past 10 years. People come and go, but there is a net increase, with an average of 10 new residents moving into Macomb County every day," he said.

Most of the growth continues in communities like Shelby Township, Macomb Township and Chesterfield Township which have a greater number of project developments in the works.

The housing market is an important one to monitor because its status impacts many areas that contribute to Macomb County's overall financial health, such as its S&P credit rating and future commercial planning efforts.

Monzo encourages buyers, sellers and investors to take advantage of the market turnaround.

"Owning a home offers tax advantages and provides opportunities to build wealth," he said. **M**

Homebuyers were pulled in a lot of different directions in 2024, but there is a lot of optimism for 2025.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MONZO GROUP



## LEADING THE WAY

*By Jane Peterson*

With the Macomb Next Industry 4.0 project, Macomb County Planning and Economic Development (MCPED) is helping Macomb County businesses work smarter, not harder.

Working closely with industry leaders, Program Director Jack Johns and other MCPED team members help local businesses gain a better understanding of how 4.0 technology can positively impact their daily operations through greater efficiency, productivity and sustainability.

For many Macomb County manufacturers, Industry 4.0 can help with quality control and supply tracking, said Johns, but there are many different ways the tools can be customized to the unique needs of an individual business or industry sector.

Generally speaking, Industry 4.0 involves the automation of traditional manufacturing practices. Utilizing the latest technology, like machine-to-machine communication and the Internet of Things, which shares data with various devices in real-time through the Internet, businesses can program machines to work smoothly with each other without human intervention. This can free up time for their employees, allowing them to focus on more complex projects that require human problem-solving skills. Employees also can use the data generated through Industry 4.0 technologies to complete tasks more efficiently.

MCPED has been a leader in educating Macomb County businesses about the advantages and challenges of Industry 4.0. A series of workshops was held a few years ago to introduce business leaders to Industry 4.0. Last year, MCPED provided an overview of the nine pillars that have emerged that make Industry 4.0 technology possible:

- Cybersecurity
- Virtual and augmented reality
- Big data and analytics
- Advanced robotics and automation

## MACOMB COUNTY INITIATIVE HELPS COMPANIES IDENTIFY, INTEGRATE INDUSTRY 4.0 TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE MANUFACTURING PROCESSES

- 3D printing or additive manufacturing
- System integration
- Advanced simulation
- Cloud computing
- Internet of Thing

Conversation soon began to revolve around related topics, such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity and the workshops attracted more and more business leaders.

“The amount of people that have been coming to the workshops is amazing,” Johns said. “In the beginning, we maxed out at 100, but in 2023, we were selling out. This has gone way beyond what we thought interest would be.”

There are typically two barriers that prevent companies from embracing new technology such as Industry 4.0 — fear of change and cost. These typically can be over-



With support from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, SMTAutomation expanded its operations in Bruce Township.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

come by providing information and resources. Macomb Next offers both.

Johns and other MCPED team members meet with business owners, working closely with them to assess their needs, answer their questions and provide information about Industry 4.0 Implementation Grants. Free assessments identify areas of operations where Industry 4.0 tools would be helpful and include recommendations on making any desired transitions.

This assessment is required before small manufacturing businesses can apply for grant funding. Monies are available for costs associated with hardware and software technologies, providing 50% reimbursement for eligible technology costs up to \$25,000.

So far, 32 businesses have invested more than \$5.6 million in Industry 4.0 technologies. Many received Industry 4.0 Implementation Grants to purchase technology such as 3D printers, automation software, enterprise resource planning software, robotics and automation and manufacturing execution systems.

In May, for example, Northern Industrial Manufacturing received an Industry 4.0 Technology Implementation Grant to help fund the purchase of a high-tech vibratory automated unloading system. This new system will significantly increase throughput, increase capacity and help the company retain a competitive edge. Northern Industrial Manufacturing is a premier tier 1, 2 and 3 automotive supplier headquartered in Harrison Township. By increasing its efficiency, it added three employees and retained 45 more with a significant increase in revenue.

For businesses, Industry 4.0 is a way to accelerate growth, diversify offerings and expand their customer base, Johns said. Employees benefit from high-paying skilled jobs that support the maintenance and programming of automated hardware. All Macomb County residents reap the gains from a larger tax base.

“For how much money we awarded businesses in grants, they have invested a lot more. We are super happy with the way we are moving forward,” Johns said.

## GROWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MCPED continues working to retain and attract talent to Macomb County and help businesses thrive.

In 2023, more than \$750 million was invested in Macomb County businesses, creating 2,008 jobs.

## INDUSTRY 4.0

*For more information about how businesses can benefit from Industry 4.0 technologies, call 586-469-5285 to speak with a MCPED team member. For updates and information on upcoming workshops and events, visit [macombgov.org/macomb-business/macomb-next-action-macomb-county](https://macombgov.org/macomb-business/macomb-next-action-macomb-county).*




## Planning and Economic Development

Among them was SMTAutomation, a provider of automation equipment and machining services. With support from the Michigan Economic Development Corp., the company expanded its operations in Bruce Township, Johns said. The project generated a total capital investment of \$7.2 million and created 60 well-paying jobs, supported by a \$300,000 Michigan Business Development Program performance-based grant. The MCPED team worked closely with SMTAutomation during their effort to expand.

In August 2023, with the help of MCPED, Synergy Additive Manufacturing was able to acquire an Industry 4.0 Implementation Grant. The grant assists small manufacturing businesses with the purchase and implementation of hardware and software technologies associated with Industry 4.0.

In March, Fairway Packing, a meat packing company founded in 1956, announced it is building a new, state-of-the-art food processing center and headquarters in Fraser. Johns said MCPED played a significant role in helping the company make the transition by assisting with obtaining engineering permits from Macomb County Department of Public Works and receiving a 12-year tax abatement from the city of Fraser.

Fairway Packing is constructing a 30,000-square-foot facility and completely relocating to Macomb County. It is investing more than \$9 million and will create 100 new jobs while retaining its current 45 employees. 

# GETTING THE JOB DONE

*By Jane Peterson*

You can build a large factory, stock it with the most state-of-the-art equipment and offer the best product on the market, but without talented, skilled employees to manage the workload, you won't find much success.

Macomb County's Fueling the Talent Pipeline seeks to avoid this challenge for area employers in two ways:

- By engaging young people in future work activities so they can experience potential career opportunities firsthand
- By connecting county employers with local educators so graduating students will be well prepared to fill open employment positions=



VICKY ROWINSKI

This community-driven approach requires lots of hands-on attention to coordinate all the moving parts, but Macomb County Planning and Economic Development (MCPED) teams have it down to a science as they are well-connected to area employers and tuned in to their needs. It's not a short-term solution, but rather a long-term investment

focused on retaining local talent and strengthening the workforce for years to come, according to Planning and Economic Development Director Vicky Rowinski

She explained that Macomb County is a major player in the automotive, aerospace and defense industries. These industries produce an astounding \$53.3 billion in gross domestic product, up from \$50.2 billion the previous year. In addition, nearly one-quarter of all Macomb County jobs are connected to the manufacturing sector.

"These are skilled, great-paying jobs that are in high demand," Rowinski said.

Unfortunately, many of these companies are struggling with an aging workforce and will need highly skilled employees to replace the workers who are nearing retirement. MCPED and its community partners have taken a multi-pronged approach to ensure manufacturing companies will have the employees they need when the time comes.

# FUELING THE TALENT PIPELINE ENGAGES THE NEXT GENERATION OF WORKERS BY CONNECTING THEM WITH EDUCATION, EMPLOYERS



Macomb County students take part in hands-on learning during Manufacturing Day.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The first step is introducing students to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) concepts that can be utilized in advanced manufacturing careers. The Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone (MARZ) is a vital resource, hosting workshops for K-8 students and offering small grants for startup robotics teams. MARZ also provides a place for organized robotics teams to collaborate on projects and access the tools and resources they need to work through ideas and concepts.

Students whose curiosity is piqued through these activities can further their interest in middle and high school by choosing STEM-focused courses and Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways that provide a strong foundation for future manufacturing careers.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Do you have a business and a desire to help Fuel the Talent Pipeline? Join Macomb County Planning and Economic Development in their quest to train young people to fill local jobs. There are multiple ways you can get involved:

- Work with a high school teacher to have students complete a project-based assignment
- Recruit a Cooperative Education (co-op) senior student to work while they attend school
- Hire an intern for a work-based learning experience
- Be a mentor by sharing your expertise with students, school clubs or competitive teams, like robotics
- Offer workplace tours so students can see what it looks like to work in your industry
- Participate in a career fair or expo to connect with students one-on-one
- Invite students to job shadow your employees for an up-close look at a realistic work experience
- Schedule a classroom visit to answer students' questions
- Serve on an advisory board for a local high school's CTE program and share your insights with those planning the curriculum

For more information, visit [macombgov.org/macomb-business/fueling-talent-pipeline](http://macombgov.org/macomb-business/fueling-talent-pipeline) or call MCPED at 586-469-6565.



HTI CYBERNETICS®



Planning and Economic Development



Held the first Friday in October, more than 16,000 students have participated in Macomb County Manufacturing Day since 2014, making it one of the largest Manufacturing Day events in the nation. HTI Cybernetics in Sterling Heights (shown below) has participated since 2018.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HTI CYBERNETICS





HTI Cybernetics is an automotive supplier that specializes in intelligent manufacturing solutions that integrate people and robotics. Each year the company hosts students for Manufacturing Day.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HTI CYBERNETICS



One of the most hands-on ways students learn about the variety of job opportunities available locally is during Manufacturing Day. Held annually on the first Friday in October since 2014, more than 16,000 students have participated in the Macomb County event, making it one of the largest Manufacturing Day events in the nation. v

It's so large now that one day isn't enough, said Fueling the Talent Pipeline Senior Outreach Specialist Jennifer Weot. Manufacturing Day in Macomb County has turned into Manufacturing Week.

"This event is so important because, for the longest time, manufacturing wasn't discussed as a career choice," she said. "It was a matter of where you went to college, not if. Manufacturing was often thought of as dark, dirty and dangerous."

In 2023, for Manufacturing Day's 10th anniversary, Macomb County invited a panel of recent graduates to talk about their experiences in manufacturing. Weot said one female participant shared how her dad would do welding projects in their garage as a hobby when she was growing up. She never realized that welding could be a career until she saw it in action during Manufacturing Day.

Students from all 27 Macomb County high schools tour manufacturing facilities and interact with employers directly. Some follow up by making job shadowing arrangements or seeking internships. Others return as apprentices or apply for jobs after graduation.

Weot said Sharp Tooling Solutions in Romeo was a first-time Manufacturing Day participant, but already had six students completing internships as part of the Romeo Community Schools Ford Next Generation Learning program.

HTI Cybernetics is an automotive supplier that specializes in intelligent manufacturing solutions that integrate people and robotics. The Sterling Heights company has participated in Manufacturing Day since 2018. CEO Eric McAlexander said manufacturing is an exciting industry to be in, especially with new and innovative technologies. He predicts that in the next few years, manufacturing will

progress like never before and make more advancements than in the past 100 years.

"There will be unlimited potential," he said. "I have been in automotive for a long time and have a great passion for it. I think it's the best industry in the world. There is so much excitement in manufacturing right now and we need to share that with today's students."

He said hosting young people onsite is energizing for both students and employees. He is very hopeful for the future.

"Every time the kids are here, they are focused and ask intelligent questions. It's incredible how they see things," he said.

In addition to Manufacturing Day, HTI Cybernetics has worked with summer interns and participated in job fairs at Macomb Community College. The company also participated in the Little Inventors program through the Macomb Intermediate School District, where fourth grade students had the opportunity to create inventions and a handful were chosen to be brought to life by "Maker" companies. As a Maker, HTI designed and built a watering truck that was invented by a local student from Warren to provide water to animals in the desert. HTI worked with the student to bring the child's vision to life and hosted the entire class at one of the company's facilities to show them real-life robots in action.

That's what Fueling the Talent Pipeline is all about, inspiring the next generation, Weot said.

Before joining Macomb County in 2022, she was a college admissions counselor for 17 years. She said students would visit and express an interest in college, but when she asked them what they wanted to study, more often than not, they said they didn't know. Because of this, some of them ended up switching majors halfway through their college years or even dropped out altogether.

"If we can give kids a better plan for after high school, then we should," she said. **M**

# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

*By Jane Peterson*

Employers have a lot to consider when scouting new locations for their business, but the truth is no matter how great the technology or how superior the product, a well-trained workforce is tough to beat.

Macomb Community College plays an important role in the county's talent development pipeline. Working with community partners like the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development team, college leadership continuously evaluates its degree programs to ensure students are well prepared to step into high-demand careers without having to relocate to another part of the country unless they choose to.

"The jobs that we are training students for have strong earning potential, autonomy in the workforce and good growth possibilities right here in Macomb County," said Mark Jewett, associate dean of engineering and advanced technology.

With the opening of its Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center, Macomb Community College students have access to the same manufacturing, technology and skilled trades equipment found in today's modern manufacturing facilities. The 130,000-square-foot renovated building welcomed its first students in August 2023 and Jewett said students are taking advantage of the new spaces that encourage engagement, collabora-

## MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE PREPARES STUDENTS FOR CAREERS IN HIGH-DEMAND SKILLED TRADES SECTOR

tion and communication.

"We see the students using the lounges daily to work together," he said. "These are beautiful, well-lit spaces that allow students to gather to discuss current projects or work through problems."

This type of strategic communication also allows students to practice interpersonal skills like mindfulness, empathy and adaptability. These skills are essential in today's working environment where teamwork, relationships and creativity are highly valued.

The center houses several degree programs, including computerized numerical control machining, drafting, computer-aided design, electronics, fluid power technology, media and communication arts, metallurgy, mechatronics, product development, robotics and welding. The proximity of these programs encourages students to develop an appreciation for other disciplines as they often need to collaborate in the workforce.



Macomb Community College's Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center houses the same manufacturing, technology and skilled trades equipment found in today's modern manufacturing facilities.

*PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE*

## CONNECT

*With the opening of the Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center, Macomb Community College students now have access to the same manufacturing, technology and skilled trades equipment found in today's modern manufacturing facilities. The 130,000-square-foot building welcomed its first students in August 2023. To learn more about it or to chat with a virtual assistant about all opportunities at the college, visit [macomb.edu](http://macomb.edu).*



“We understand the needs of Macomb County. These are very important programs for our local employers. Macomb County works hard to be an attractive landing spot for employers who need a skilled workforce,” Jewett said.

The Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center is in Warren, where the college's South Campus is near the city's three major industries — manufacturing, auto manufacturing and health care. Job openings in these sectors, as well as defense and aerospace, construction, agriculture and food processing, and transportation and warehousing, continue to be plentiful throughout Macomb County. The long-range jobs outlook is also compelling even with the rising popularity of artificial intelligence.

“These jobs are essential, but they are also very fulfilling,” Jewett said. “They provide opportunities to do something that's interesting and at the end of the day, you know that your work mattered, that it is important.”

Macomb County is home to more than 82,000 high-tech jobs, most of them — nearly 40,000 — skilled tradespeople. The metro Detroit market ranks third in the nation overall for its number of engineers, research and development specialists and journeyed, skilled tradespeople.


“There is a tradition of skilled trades here. What we see is

that careers tend to run in families. There may be several police officers or educators in a family, for example,” he said. “In trades' households, it's common to talk about interesting things that happen in industrial settings so you are exposed to a specific world of work that becomes very familiar.”

The Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center is an investment in its students and Macomb County communities. The \$45 million price tag is the largest in the college's history, with nearly \$15 million a capital outlay appropriation from the state of Michigan and the remaining \$30 million generated from the college's capital projects fund. The project's architects were Hobbs + Black Architects, and Barton Marlow was the construction manager.

When students enroll at Macomb Community College, they are eager to learn a viable trade that builds on their personal interests. Areas like robotics continue to appeal to students who participate in First Robotics competitions at the high school, middle school and even elementary school level. Dual enrollment, Early College and Career Technical Education opportunities generate strong interest, as well, as students learn from industry leaders and gain realistic on-the-job experience. This leads to a well-developed talent development pipeline as students graduate, enroll to learn a trade and participate in apprenticeships and internships to further develop their skills.

As new technologies and industries continue to emerge, the Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center is ready to adapt to the changes. The building was constructed with flexibility in mind with plenty of room to accommodate any type of needed software and for future expansion.

“We work closely with the Macomb County Intermediate School District as we see a lot of interest in technical careers,” Jewett said. “We assure that our curriculum, combined with state-of-the-art facilities like the Skilled Trades and Advanced Technology Center, will continue to prepare the local workforce for many years to come.” 



Macomb Community College plays an important role in the county's talent development pipeline by preparing students for future opportunities in the workplace.

PHOTO COURTESY OF  
MACOMB COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE



## KAREN ARONDOSKI

*By Jane Peterson*

When Karen Arondoski founded I.F. Metalworks more than two decades ago, there weren't many women involved in the industry, but she didn't let that stop her.

It was 2002 and Arondoski had already enjoyed two successful career paths — first in education where she worked in public relations for a school district, and later in the medical field, where she spent 25 years until a need for paint tool parts for General Motors took her career in a different direction once again.

It was welding and fabricating that first led Arondoski into the manufacturing industry, but she soon expanded I.F. Metalworks into the automotive, restaurant, architectural and industrial sectors, as well. Today, it is a leading design and fabrication company that specializes in decorative metalwork of all kinds. Arondoski said I.F. Metalworks' latest venture is in aerospace, where the company recently became AS-9100 certified to produce flying parts.

There always seems to be something new in the works for this 100% women-owned company.

"It started off with one custom job and then another and another and another," she said. "I'm a go-getter. I don't like sitting still."

Work didn't even slow down during the COVID-19 pandemic when I.F. Metalworks was deemed an essential business. It remained open with a smaller crew, but Arondoski said all employees were invited back once operations were once again in full gear. It was during this time when the company increased its drafting and computer-aided design (CAD) capabilities. Several customers who were previously doing their own work decided to reset their priorities following the pandemic and sent this work to I.F. Metalworks instead.

Through the years, I.F. Metalworks has expanded its Roseville facility from 8,000 square feet to 14,000 square feet — and now to 35,000 square feet. Truth be told, she said, they could use more space since introducing an in-house powder coating service. While the company began with less than a

*PHOTO COURTESY OF KAREN ARONDOSKI*

## SETTING AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHERS BY FORGING SUCCESS IN A MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRY

handful of employees, I.F. Metalworks now employs 35 staff members.

Its clients include numerous prominent organizations in southeast Michigan, including the Edsel and Eleanor Ford House Visitor Center, Detroit Science Center and Detroit Institute of Arts. She said her first seven-figure job was for Brookside Condominiums in Birmingham.

The company recently completed a three-year restoration and revitalization project for Michigan Central Station, where it reproduced historic stairs as well as completed work on the elevators, ticket window and 2,000 square feet of custom ventilation grills.

In May, I.F. Metalworks was honored as Manufacturer of the Year during the 12th annual Macomb County Business Awards.

**Q** *Why is Macomb County a good place for your business?*

**A** Macomb County is the manufacturing capital of Michigan, so this is a great location. From our facility in Roseville, we have easy access to the freeways and that definitely makes a difference.

**Q** *Describe the role you play in Macomb County.*

**A** I believe in giving back to the community. I used to be the president for Cruisin' Gratiot in Eastpointe, a non-profit organization that gave money to other nonprofits. I also have served on the Workforce Development Board and on the board for the Manufacturing Growth Alliance. I work with the Aerospace Industry Association of Michigan (AIAM) and as a member of Women of AIAM, started a foundation board that focuses on getting young women into the

industry. We hold the annual Michigan Girls Future Flight Challenge, an aerospace competition for girls in fourth through eighth grades. It's a really great way for these young girls to learn more about a career in aerospace.

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

**A** I love the environment. Everyone works together and supports each other. I really feel a sense of community in Macomb County.

**Q** *What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?*

**A** I love taking pictures and traveling to places that are warm, like Florida and Cancun. I also love watching my granddaughter.

**Q** *What do you consider some of your greatest achievements?*

**A** It's having a company for 23 years, offering good working conditions and good pay and benefits. I'm proud of our staff and my family. My family means the world to me and my granddaughter is my pride and joy.



## PAZZELLA COLSTON BONNER

*By Jane Peterson*

Pazzella Colston Bonner has a passion for helping her fellow veterans because she knows what it is like to walk in their shoes.

Her story began when she joined the U.S. Army to help pay for college and advance her career. At 21, she completed basic training and was stationed in Germany, serving approximately 18 months before leaving active duty to help family care for her ailing grandmother after losing her mother just two years prior. Colston Bonner finished her 16-year military career in the reserves and served in the Gulf War.

She was unaware that her contract stated that she must complete at least two years of active-duty service to receive VA benefits until she needed surgery and her request at the VA hospital was denied. She was able to receive temporary Social Security disability medical benefits to have both of her hips replaced, but she continued to fight for her service-connected benefits.

Colston Bonner did eventually receive her VA benefits after she found a Veterans to Veterans Facebook group and asked the members about her benefits. A VA em-

## HELPING HOMELESS VETERANS FIND THEIR WAY IN THE WORLD AGAIN

ployee saw the post and after looking into her situation, explained that since she left active duty due to hardship, the clause in her contract should be void.

During this personal journey, Colston Bonner learned how prevalent the homeless situation was among her fellow veterans. She may not have set out to be a voice for others, but she couldn't turn her back on their plight. She purchased a house in Warren to provide transitional housing for homeless veterans and Homes for Heroic Veterans was born in 2019.

Since then, she has partnered with her nephew, NFL player Carl Davis Jr., and the nonprofit organization has helped more than 40 veterans.

In 2021, the Macomb County Board of Commissioners honored Colston Bonner with the Pat Daniels Veteran of the Year Award for her significant contributions to helping veterans. She was the first female veteran and veteran of color to receive this award.

**Q What does Homes for Heroic Veterans do?**

**A** We provide transitional housing for homeless veterans. Homes are fully furnished and ready for move-in. Based on their individual needs, we then connect them to veterans organizations and local support services that can help them back on the path to becoming productive citizens again. Every resident has a caseworker.

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

**A** Homes for Heroic Veterans brings awareness to what's going on with veterans and what their needs are. There are lots of veterans living in our communities. The neighbors welcome veterans to the community and neighborhood.

**Q Describe the role Homes for Heroic Veterans plays in Macomb County.**

**A** We help people who no one else will help. We don't turn anyone away. Macomb County is one the best counties for vets to get their benefits. This is very fulfilling work. It is my purpose and it is my honor to serve.

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

**A** I've lived in Center Line for 19 years. Everything I need is close by and people are very friendly. I enjoy relaxing at the Warren Community Center and going to the libraries and City Hall. I'm part of a local business network in Sterling Heights.

**Q What do you consider some of your greatest achievements?**

**A** There are two things: First, as a mother, is my boy/girl twins. My son is an Iraqi War veteran. Second is the difference Homes for Heroic Veterans is making in the community. I had to go through some tough times to get to this point, but we are successful as we are because of my story.



## STEPHANIE FALOTICO

*By Jane Peterson*

After graduating from Saginaw Valley State University in 2014 with a bachelor's degree in social work and from Michigan State University in 2015 with a master's degree in social work, Stephanie Falotico quickly racked up an impressive resume.

She worked with infants as a mental health case manager, offering support to expecting and new mothers. She provided them with education and supplies that helped contribute to healthy pregnancies and babies. From there, she joined a neuro and biofeedback company, providing QEEGs that supported healthy brainwave activity. In midtown Detroit, she worked for a nonprofit children's center, assisting youth with their mental health care.

"Mental health is so important to your overall health," she said. "Building good mental health in children creates se-

## ASSISTING CHILDREN, YOUTH THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES

cure and confident kids."

Falotico loved working with teens, but knew she had even more to give.

In 2022, she opened her own practice, Epoch Expressions, an outpatient mental health treatment experience now located in Clinton Township. As a clinical therapist, she specializes in assisting children, youth and adolescents who have experienced trauma, as well as with young adults with adverse childhood experiences. She and her certified therapy dog, Apollo, help young people living with anxiety, depression, ADHD and mood disorders. She also works with high-performing adolescents.

Falotico offers services for individuals and families.

Her clients love working with Apollo, who she described as a COVID-19 baby who helped lift her spirits during the pandemic when she was isolated at home. When Falotico returned to the office, she wanted him to go, too.

“He’s been an invaluable tool and wonderful member of the team,” she said. “Children pet and play with him and it helps soothe them. They build confidence when he follows their commands and they practice conversations with him because he is a really good listener.”

In less than two years, her practice has served 73 clients, with many receiving certified trauma treatment. This has resulted in stronger family bonds as children and teens feel more confident and parents have new perspectives on their behaviors.

In May, Epoch Expressions was honored as Startup of the Year during the 12th annual Macomb Business Awards.

Today, Falotico is looking to expand Epoch Expressions and is working with Velocity to grow her practice. Velocity is a business incubator, accelerator and co-working space that serves as a center for entrepreneurship and innovation in Macomb County.

**Q What does Epoch Expressions do?**

**A** We primarily assist children and teens with their mental health concerns. Growing up today is hard with the pressures of social media and online bullying. Social media is their connection to their peers. Their lives are in the palms of their hands. However, many young people focus on how well people appear to be doing in their posts without giving equal consideration that their friends don’t post about their struggles and challenges online. The constant comparing of self to others can create a lot of damage to a child’s mental health and overall self-esteem.

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

**A** We are centrally located near school districts with quality, high-functioning schools. Our No. 1 referral source is word of mouth and this area provides a lot of opportunity.

**Q Describe the role Epoch Expressions plays in Macomb County.**

**A** Epoch Expressions is becoming known as a place that is safe for children and families. Our in-person



Clinical therapist Stephanie Falotico and her therapy dog, Apollo, help young people living with anxiety, depression, ADHD and mood disorders.  
*PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHANIE FALOTICO*

sessions are in high demand as not many providers see children, especially the younger ones, in person. There’s a huge mental health care gap for elementary and middle school students. Not as many providers are seeing the under-12 population, and those who are, have mile-long waiting lists.

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

**A** There’s always something to do in Macomb County with music in the parks and festivals. There are new restaurants popping up all over town, as well as it’s enjoyable to try new environments and new cuisine.

**Q What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?**

**A** I enjoy trying new restaurants and taking advantage of the parks. There’s lots of beautiful areas to explore. My family is also a host family for players at Jimmy John’s Field in downtown Utica.

**Q What do you consider some of your greatest achievements?**

**A** The lightbulb moments for clients and their families, those times when they have a change in perspective and have hope for digging themselves out of the darkness.



## KEAGAN SEMLOW

*By Jane Peterson*

In the days following the mass shooting at Michigan State University on Feb. 13, 2023, Keagan Semlow realized just how impactful a cup of coffee and a little bit of human interaction can be for customers.

Working as a manager of a coffee shop just a block away, Semlow pushed to open the business with a skeleton crew of nonstudent employees. She wanted to be there for her community and her instincts were right. Customers were lined up outside waiting for the shop to open.

For the next few weeks, Semlow was there to listen to the stories customers wanted to tell. She cried with them, hugged them and served them comforting cups of coffee.

“We were fostering community through coffee,” she said. “Coffee done the right way is so much more than just a cup of coffee.”

When one young woman shared her appreciation for Semlow’s hospitality by commenting how coffee was cheaper than therapy and that she got to walk away with a treat she loves, Semlow knew her life was about to change, too.

Semlow grew up in Saint Clair Shores and Chesterfield Township, but moved to East Lansing to pursue her dream of entering the ministry. She was unsure exactly how she wanted to serve, but felt a need to move back closer to home. A few weeks before the shooting, she spoke with her parents about her future, telling them she wanted to open a coffee shop near home to help children aging out of foster care.

Semlow had previously worked with foster children at a summer camp and saw firsthand how important it is for them to know that someone cares. She was concerned about their welfare as adults when they aged out of the system and left with almost nothing. Semlow wanted to offer that support through a coffee shop aptly called

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY SERVING ENDLESS CONVERSATIONS AND CUPS OF COFFEE



Keagan Semlow, founder of Lighthouse Coffee in Mount Clemens, with a few of her staff members.

*PHOTO  
COURTESY  
OF KEAGAN  
SEMLOW*

Lighthouse Coffee because a lighthouse is a beacon of light that offers assistance, but always sends ships back out to sea once they are safely prepared to set sail.

Just one week after the MSU shooting, Semlow’s dad relayed a conversation he had with her hometown pastor. He said that her family should start a coffee shop to help foster children and call it Lighthouse.

“I thought: ‘Alright, God. You’ve got my attention,’” she said. “I started thinking and praying about it.”

In June, she followed her heart — and her faith — back to Macomb County. In partnership with a nonprofit organization her family created called iTURN, Lighthouse Coffee opened its doors in Mount Clemens in June. Proceeds support foster children who age out of the system, helping them acquire the skills and household items they need to not only be self-sufficient, but to thrive during their transition into adulthood.





**Q** *Why is Macomb County a good place for your business?*

**A** The crosswalk from Lighthouse leads directly to the courthouse steps where so many life-changing events happen from court cases to marriages and adoptions. This presents opportunities for deeper-level conversations with the people I meet daily. I want to get to know someone. There's not a day when I don't meet someone new. I love working in Macomb County.

**Q** *Describe the role you play in Macomb County.*

**A** iNTURN owns the coffee shop and the funds we raise go to help people. We walk life with them. They need people who love and care about them, not just provide physical things. We get to be a light in this community and let people know that they are seen and that they are known.

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

**A** Macomb County is home. It's a good hub with areas in the country and areas in the busy city. People travel in and out. You get to meet a substantial amount of people.

**Q** *What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?*

**A** I love beach volleyball, spending time with family, watching sports, playing games and anything outdoors.

**Q** *What do you consider some of your greatest achievements?*

**A** The coffee shop. To be entrusted with something like this is huge. **M**

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