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### >MOMENTUM

Uniquely Macomb County, Michigan 2026 Edition | Issue 18

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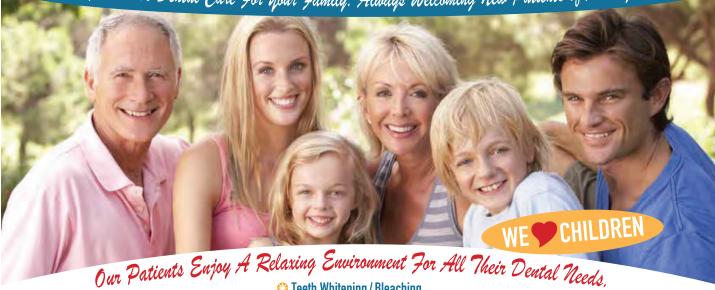
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In Eastpointe, the Kelly Court Apartments modular housing is helping to bring much-needed units to a community where demand outpaces supply.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### **≫MOMENTUM**

Uniquely Macomb County, Michigan

ISSUE 18

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### **MOVING MACOMB FORWARD**

By Mark A. Hackel

I'm proud to share with you another edition of Momentum Magazine, a premier publication that tells the story of our community. Within these pages, you'll find features on local people and places that, as I like to say, make Macomb a great place to call home. And that isn't just a clever slogan. Keep reading and you'll see why this phrase is something you'll take to heart, something that evokes pride and appreciation for our 27 unique municipalities. Because there's range here. We've got walkable downtown corridors, bustling industrial areas, rich farmland and a freshwater shoreline along Lake St. Clair that rivals any other coastal community.

With all those assets, it's no surprise that eight people move to Macomb County each day – and that's just one example of the incredible growth our region has seen in 2025. The data points included here paint a bigger picture. For instance, you can see that our GDP is more than \$56 billion. For context, that's larger than the economies of Wyoming and Vermont.

Articles throughout this magazine tell more of that story. From our feature on Selfridge, our hometown airbase, to the Q&As with our local momentum makers, this publication offers a dynamic overview of why Macomb County is on the move.

So, I hope you'll take the time to explore these pages. It's a great publication and I'm proud to once again share it with you all.



### ECONOMY

\$56.4 billion\*

### \$353.3 million\*

total business investments

### **1,300** jobs\*

created and retained

\* Data as of October 2025

### POPULATION

**881,992** *individuals* 

### 8 people

move to Macomb County each day

### **4.8% growth**

from 2010 to 2020 Census

### WORKFORCE

**453,745** *labor force* 

**82,198** high-tech jobs

### **Ranked 3rd in the nation**

for number of electrical, mechanical and industrial engineers

### EDUCATION

21

public school districts

### **61% of residents**

over 25 have some colledge education

### Home to

Macomb Community College

### QUALITY OF LIFE

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covering 17,500 acres

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of interconnected trails

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### DOWNTOWN DREAMS

By Jane Peterson

While many communities are trying to breathe new life into aging downtown corridors, Macomb Township is on a different path, looking to design an entirely new downtown district that reflects its unique character.

"We have the opportunity to bring something unique to southeast Michigan," Planning Director Josh Bocks said. "It's not often you get to develop a downtown from scratch."

Known for its stunning subdivisions and peaceful neighborhoods, the township has never had a dedicated downtown space. However, that will soon change as urban planning efforts are underway to create a new mixed-use development with government offices, restaurants, shops and residential housing.

# LONGTIME VISION BECOMING REALITY AS MACOMB TOWNSHIP PLANS CENTRAL COMMUNITY HUB

A rendering of the planned Macomb Township downtown district. PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB TOWNSHIP





What the layout of the Macomb Township downtown district may look like in the future. PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB TOWNSHIP

"Our residents enjoy a low tax rate, low crime and great school districts, but there are very few businesses and places to eat here. People have to travel elsewhere to shop or enjoy an evening out," Bocks said. "A downtown provides an important sense of place."

An extension of Broughton Road is the first step toward establishing the Macomb Township Town Center, a centralized hub of commercial and residential development that will provide a walkable community space where residents can meet for coffee, enjoy local events and shop for essential needs without leaving their hometown.

Development of a downtown area has been on the minds of township leaders for decades. A plan was first developed in the late 1990s and the township purchased property to build a town hall in 2002. That was quickly followed by a recreation center in 2004.

"In the early 2000s, the momentum was there, but the recession of 2008 derailed plans," Bocks said.

### VISIT MACOMB TOWNSHIP

Centrally located in Macomb County, Macomb Township is home to many families who enjoy a low tax rate, modern amenities, good schools, outdoor recreation

MACOMB TOWNSHIP

opportunities and rural spaces where farming continues to thrive. The city is located just 26 miles north of Detroit. For more information, visit macomb-mi.gov.

The setbacks were discouraging, but hope was never lost for the project as Macomb Township continued to grow. Township Supervisor Frank Viviano said Macomb Township has more children in its households than any other community in Macomb County. It's the most populous civil township in Michigan, he said.

"We're really centered around families. Residents find value in our lower tax rates," Viviano said.

As time passed, one subdivision after another was built, bringing more residents, but not businesses. Township officials hope an extension of Broughton Road as a divided streetscape boulevard will provide the structural backbone for restaurants, bars, shops and residential homes. The roadwork is expected to go out for bid in the spring with a 2027 completion date.

"Once Broughton Road is complete, we expect this north/south connection to spur economic development and keep the ball moving forward," Bocks said.

Township officials received a \$5 million grant with the assistance of state Sen. Veronica Klinefelt (D-Eastpointe) and an additional \$23,750 from a Southeastern Michigan

Council of Governments Planning Assistance Grant to aid in the expansion of Broughton Road.

The Macomb Township Recreation Center. PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB TOWNSHIP

A \$982,000 state of Michigan placemaking grant will help finance a water play fountain, outdoor restrooms adjacent to the fountain, walking paths and landscaping within the square lawn bounded by Macomb Township Hall, Recreation Center and the Clinton Macomb Public Library North Branch on Broughton Road.

Broughton Road will lead to the downtown area with the town square at its core. Since walkability is key, township Treasurer Leon Drolet said 10-foot-wide paths will enable pedestrians to traverse the area safely, while an additional 10 feet of space will be available for public-type use, such as outdoor dining or garden space.

To keep traffic moving at a slower pace, a half-mile stretch of the road will include four roundabouts, he added. Parking will be available on both sides of the road, as well as behind buildings.

Events like art fairs, classic car shows, the annual Christmas tree lighting, concerts in the park, Easter activities and Rosco's Picnic Palooza will provide opportunities for the community to gather.

The Township anticipates a governing body for the downtown area, such as a Downtown Development Authority. A DDA typically coordinates public improvement

> projects, supports businesses and promotes economic growth.

> The mixed-use development will feature traditional single-family homes with Victorian architecture, where neighbors will know each other and children can play on the front porch instead of the backyard, Bocks said. Multi-family housing is also part of the plan.

> "We want to keep flexibility in the plan to have the downtown area grow organically so it will be more interesting," Viviano said.

> With nearly 100,000 residents, more than 150 established subdivisions and thousands of new units in various stages of development,

Viviano said businesses that invest in this corridor will have a built-in customer base.

"Our job is to build the shell and let private business enterprise build it out," Drolet said.

### A FRESH FACELIFT

By Jane Peterson

Maintaining a home can be a big job, but keeping an entire downtown business district looking beautiful? Well, that's another story.

Richmond's Tax Increment Finance Authority and Economic Development Corp. have partnered to offer the Richmond Downtown Revitalization and Project Cleanup programs, making sure that business owners have the funds needed to keep their buildings in tip-top shape. These robust programs have played a huge role in keeping the downtown district well-maintained, with funds available for painting, general building improvements, window replacements and more.

"They've made a notable difference in the appearance of our downtown," City Manager Jon Moore said. "We take great pride in that area as it is a traditional downtown with owner-operated businesses like family restaurants, hair salons, resale stores and antique shops."

Funds are available for new businesses moving into town or existing businesses that need a little sprucing up.

Fixing up older buildings does more than prevent blight; it preserves a little piece of the city's history and protects the sense of nostalgia that so many people associate with smaller towns. Each building has its own authentic story that is woven into the fabric of the community. Unlike newer, more uniform structures, Richmond's downtown buildings add character to the overall landscape and feel special from the moment customers walk inside.

While small businesses often ooze charm and are known for their warm, welcoming atmosphere, what they frequently face are financial challenges — especially when just starting out. Recognizing this, in the early 2000s, Richmond city leaders took proactive steps to encourage entrepreneurship and invest in the downtown area by successfully implementing a streetscape program that included signage, lighting poles and tree plantings.

Building on that momentum, Richmond's TIFA launched Project Cleanup, a façade improvement program that RICHMOND'S FACADE
PROGRAMS KEEP
QUAINT DOWNTOWN
BUSINESS DISTRICT
LOOKING BEAUTIFUL

### VISIT RICHMOND

Richmond is bursting with small-town charm. From its historic downtown district to its

classic Main Street architecture, the city is a great place to spend an afternoon exploring. It is located



in northern Macomb County, about 38 miles northeast of Detroit. For more information and a current calendar of events, visit cityofrichmond. net.

provides up to \$2,000 of funding per year for the interior and exterior upgrades like masonry repair, new signage, fresh awnings or rehabilitation of existing awnings, parking lot renovations, repair and replacement of architectural details or materials, repair of flat and pitched roofs, window replacement and more. Businesses are reimbursed 50% on the first \$2,000 investment and dollar for dollar after that, up to a total of \$2,000.

The building that is now home to the Commercial House, for example, used to have windows boarded up on its top floor, but thanks to the funding program, had windows on all three floors replaced. Today, the American restaurant on Main Street is thriving and a favorite place for locals to hang out.

The overwhelming success of Project Cleanup led to the establishment of the Richmond Downtown Revitalization Program, a funding vehicle that encourages exterior improvements or site renovations to vacant commercial buildings and properties within the city's TIFA district. Matching grants of up to \$15,000 per building are available from the EDC to offset costs.

When Restore Vitality Naturally opened in 2024, for example, the holistic health and wellness center moved into a former dental office that needed repair. Funds were available to help modify the building to suit their current needs. Another successful example is Main St. Mercantile & CO., which was refurbished into a vintage resale shop.

"These are excellent financial tools to make the front of the buildings look appealing and maintain the charm that Richmond's downtown is known for," Moore said.

TIFA funds are captured from the TIF district, a geographical boundary that includes the two traditional downtown areas. The properties within the TIF district are assessed in the first year, and as the values of the properties within the district grow in subsequent years, the difference between the original assessment and current appraisal is

deemed captured revenue. Instead of being deposited into the general fund, the captured revenue is diverted to the TIFA and reinvested in the form of grants and other programs that help the downtown TIF district thrive.

It certainly is a formula working for Richmond, where the downtown plays an active role in the community, hosting several events each year, including a weekly farmers market in season, concerts in the park series, golf cart photo scavenger hunt, holiday events and more. Richmond's Planning and Economic Development Director Troy Jeschke said TIFA funds help cover the advertising of specific events to further market the area and attract visitors from across Macomb County.

"People love the traditional downtown and the sense of community we have in Richmond," he said.

Thanks to legislation passed following the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Richmond established a downtown social district, which allows adults of drinking age to purchase an alcoholic beverage at one of four participating Richmond businesses. Drinks in designated social district cups can be taken with customers within the social district boundaries, allowing guests to move about freely where they can meet up with friends, window shop and attend outdoor community events, like parades, festivals, car shows, the annual tree lighting and other activities.

"We've received very positive feedback from the public," Jeschke said. "It makes for a more lively, vibrant downtown shopping experience."



### REINVENTING WARREN

By Jane Peterson

The city of Warren is undergoing a transformation, driven by recent efforts to revisit the Town Center development — a project nearly a decade in the making.

Their goal is to attract young professionals to choose Warren as their home; retain resident spending from flowing out of the city for upscale apartments, food and entertainment options; and have an active City Center for residents and visitors to enjoy events and entertainment.

"We know that approximately \$10 million of Warren money goes outside of our community," said Tom Bommarito, Warren's director of community, economic and downtown development. "People today have different expectations when it comes to modern apartments, walkable communities and upscale restaurants."

He said the city wants to meet the needs of its diverse population, which includes young talent working at General Motors, busy parents and older adults who want to age in place.

Warren's strengths, including convenient access to downtown Detroit, more than 35 parks and green spaces, thriving school districts, plentiful employment and affordable housing, attract many to the city. The Town Center project will build upon these assets while creating additional economic development and benefits for both residents and businesses.

During four public community engagement meetings, several residents expressed the need for places to gather with friends and family, like comfortable pubs, friendly ice cream shops and open festival spaces. Others wanted varied shopping options beyond big chain stores.

A mix of retail, dining and housing development in a downtown setting near City Hall on Van Dyke Avenue north of 12 Mile Road would transform Michigan's third largest city and create a walkable, destination community.

LEADERS LEVERAGE
CITY'S UNIQUE ASSETS
WHILE CREATING
FOUNDATION TO
ENCOURAGE FUTURE
ECONOMIC GROWTH

### **VISIT WARREN**

Warren is a familyfriendly city with lots of activities, including more than 35 parks. The city is located just 15 miles north of



Detroit. For more information and a current calendar of events, visit cityofwarren.org.

City leaders are also considering additional opportunities like office space, a hotel and a conference center, that could cater to the needs of the city's core industrial tax base — General Motors, the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command and Henry Ford Warren Hospital — that often bring visitors into town.

"There are many possibilities, but our job is to create the opportunities for developers to come in and make the investment in Warren," Bommarito said. "We've conducted



new retail, housing and market studies and a committee is narrowing down site plans. We want to let developers know what we're looking for and give examples of what residents can benefit from."

### **SOUTHERN REVITALIZATION**

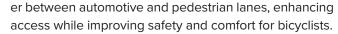
While the downtown redevelopment is centered in the city's north end, an area that has experienced the most growth in recent years, Warren's older southern neighborhoods have also been the focus of revitalization efforts.

Since 2019, the city has invested in this historic area by building a southern civic center with a new branch library, 24/7 police station, mini City Hall, fire station and inclusive playground. The southern end is where Warren's original neighborhoods were established, as it was popular among Gls who settled here following World War II, buying homes and raising families throughout the 1940s and '50s, Bommarito said.

This area also received a refresh thanks to storefront façade improvements, decorative light poles, benches, flower planters and pocket parks. The entire investment totaled more than \$16 million, he said, and served as a catalyst for residential and economic growth in recent years.

City leaders are also working with the Michigan Department of Transportation, Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments, engineers and planners on a new plan that incorporates planters and greenery along Van Dyke bicycle lanes. These enhancements create a clear barri-





### MOUND ROAD INDUSTRIAL PARK

Another spot in the city's south end spurring economic development is the former General Motors Transmission Plant. After the property was remediated and redeveloped by NorthPoint Development, Home Depot built a new, 500,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art distribution center on the sprawling site, now called the Mound Road Industrial Park. It is located on Mound Road north of Nine Mile Road.

The distribution center is part of a larger development designed to house multiple tenants in its 1.4 million square feet of industrial space. Bommarito said the in-





Left: A 3-D image of Warren's downtown corridor plan.

**Top:** A mix of retail, dining and housing development in a downtown setting near City Hall on Van Dyke Avenue north of 12 Mile Road would transform Michigan's third-largest city and create a walkable, destination community.

**Above:** The city of Warren is revisiting plans for the Town Center development project.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CITY OF WARREN

dustrial park is under consideration to be named a MI Site, a Michigan Economic Development Corp. program that touts ready-to-develop industrial sites to investors and businesses seeking to relocate or expand in the state.

"It's a site that checks all the boxes," he said.

MI Sites undergo a thorough analysis to determine their developability and potential for industrial use. As of press time, Warren leaders had met with MEDC officials to discuss this exciting possibility, but no final determination had been made.

### **MOVING FORWARD**

Bommarito said it's encouraging to see the progress being made, but acknowledged there is still more to do in Macomb County's largest city.

"There's definitely a lot of positive things happening here," he said. "Warren is quickly becoming a destination city and we're excited about its future."





### GAP

NEW PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE OVER
THE CLINTON RIVER SPILLWAY TO
ENHANCE TRAIL CONNECTIVITY
THROUGHOUT THE REGION, STATE



Macomb County residents have access to a vast trail network that includes nonmotorized paved trails, water trails, nonpaved nature trails, mountain biking trails and equestrian trails. When complete, the new pedestrian bridge over the Clinton River Spillway will link Jefferson Avenue from St. Clair Shores to Lake St. Clair Metropark (pictured above) and the Macomb County Freedom

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOP-MENT By Jane Peterson

Enhancing trail connectivity is one way Macomb County is helping to create healthy, safe and pleasant communities.

Spearheaded by the Macomb County Planning & Economic Development team, one of the largest and most visible projects this year is the new pedestrian bridge over the Clinton River Spillway. When complete, it will link Jefferson Avenue from St. Clair Shores to Lake St. Clair Metropark and the Macomb County Freedom Trail.

This multimillion-dollar project has been years in the making, with the effort beginning back in 2021, when the Southeast Council of Governments awarded MCPED a grant to develop a vision for the 2.5-mile public property surrounding the Clinton River Spillway. While evaluating issues like water quality, flood control, habitat restoration and public use, the study revealed that the Great Lakes Way Trail — a heavily used regional trail that traverses four southeast Michigan counties — abruptly halted at the Clinton River Spillway, creating a critical gap in Macomb County's Trail Network.

"Once the gap was identified, we knew we needed to secure funding to correct it by creating a connector that would improve local, regional and statewide access to various trail networks," MCPED Project Manager Amanda Oparka said. Investment in the \$4 million project comes from four major funding sources: The federal Transportation Alternatives Program, which is providing approximately \$1.6 million; a grant from the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation for more than \$1 million; Harrison Township's contribution of \$650,000; and \$300,000 from the Macomb County Department of Roads.

While expanding the current trail network, the pedestrian bridge will also create a safer environment for those walking, jogging or biking across the Clinton River Spillway. Oparka said there is no sidewalk on the existing vehicular bridge, so crossing is challenging for pedestrian traffic.

The bicycle and pedestrian bridge will be a single-span prefabricated steel truss structure approximately 202 feet long, with a 14-foot-wide clear opening. Once across the bridge, users will be able to take the Clinton River Bike path that links up to an existing 10-foot path leading into Lake St. Clair Metropark and joining the Macomb County Freedom Trail.

The project also includes two additional paths designed to make pedestrian navigation easier. A 0.4-mile trail along Jefferson Avenue in Harrison Township will begin at Saint Christopher Street and head north to meet up with the Clinton River Spillway. A separate 0.1-mile path, part of an existing 10-foot walkway along Jefferson Avenue, will connect cyclists and pedestrians to Harrison Township's Downtown District, waterfront park, senior center and Michigan DNR boat launch.

The Clinton River Spillway attracts more than 26,000 visitors a year, with most engaged in walking, biking, birdwatching, fishing, kayaking and dog walking.

### **STAYING CONNECTED**

Macomb County residents have access to a vast trail network that includes nonmotorized paved trails, water trails, nonpaved nature trails, mountain biking trails and equestrian trails. These provide virtually unlimited opportunities for nature viewing, physical health activities, meditation, recreation and more.





Trails provide virtually unlimited opportunities for nature viewing, physical health activities, meditation, recreation and more throughout Macomb County.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

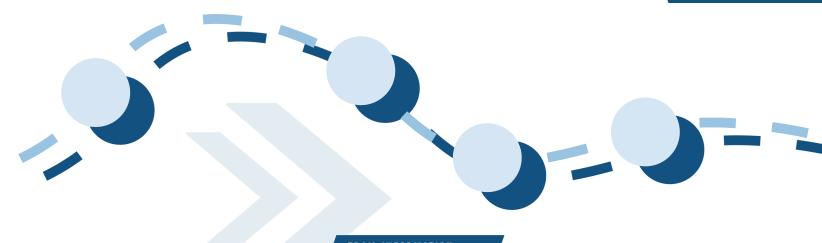
"Trails help people maintain healthy and active lifestyles," Oparka said.

In addition to promoting physical activity, trails reduce traffic congestion, promote good mental health, support equity in underserved communities, contribute to local economies and foster quality social interaction.

Many of Macomb County's trails connect to each other and wind through shared community spaces, places of interest and local landmarks. Often, popular trails become destinations for pedestrians and create pockets of tourism within communities.

Businesses can also receive a boost as trail users will eat at local restaurants, fill up their gas tanks and shop in area stores before heading back home. This added economic support can lead to the development of new business districts and infrastructure like sidewalks, making entire neighborhoods more walkable in general.

For wildlife, birds and the environment, connected trail systems can mean a coordinated effort to care for green



### TRAIL INFORMATION

For more information on Macomb County's expansive and diverse trail network, visit macombgov.org and search for "trail network." You'll find safety rules, maps and more to help you plan your adventure.

corridors and better management of soil erosion and pollution. Birds and fish, for example, benefit as they pass through one community into another.

### **MACOMB COUNTY TRAILS**

Macomb County's major trail networks include the Freedom Trail, Macomb Orchard Trail and the Iron Belle Trail.

The Freedom Trail is about 10 miles long, stretching from Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township to Schoenherr Road in Sterling Heights. It takes users through a variety of experiences, including urban, residential and natural settings. Scenic views of the Lake St. Clair shoreline are a favorite among nature photographers. Others

like to walk, run, bike or rollerblade. The Freedom Trail is wheelchair accessible.

The Iron Belle is maintained by the state of Michigan. In its entirety, the trail traverses an impressive 2,000 miles from Detroit's Belle Isle to the western tip of the Upper Peninsula in Ironwood. There are two routes, one for hiking and another for biking. The biking trail runs through the southwestern corner of Macomb County, including Warren and Sterling Heights.

The Macomb Orchard Trail is a favorite trail among residents as it winds through picturesque areas that include tree canopies, rural small towns, orchards and farms, as well as urban landscapes and wide-open spaces. It runs from Dequindre and 24 Mile roads in Shelby Township to Division Road at Main Street in Richmond.

Wayfinding signage makes it easy for visitors to navigate the Macomb Orchard Trail. Mile markers, road intersection signs and informational boards help users make plans, be aware of their location, stay safe and know how to direct first responders in case of an emergency.



The Macomb Orchard Trail winds through picturesque areas that include tree canopies, rural small towns, orchards and farms, as well as urban landscapes and wide-open spaces.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### A TASTE OF ITALY

By Jane Peterson

Whether you're looking for a tasty pizza, grilled octopus or just a load of meatballs, Macomb County has the Italian food you — and your stomach — desire.

Italian restaurants play a unique and significant role in communities across the county, often offering so much more than just a good, hearty meal. In many cases, these restaurants are run by families with deep local roots and the social, cultural and economic contributions they make are significant.

The county has numerous Italian restaurants, much to the delight of food connoisseur and Macomb County Deputy Executive John Paul Rea, who has probably visited the vast majority of them.

"What I really enjoy is the uniqueness each restaurant brings to the table," he said. "There are varied approaches from old school comfort food to elegant metropolitan dining options."

Mangiabevi Urban Italian has served traditional Italian dishes in Sterling Heights since 2020. Business partners Stefano Pecoraro, the restaurant's general manager, and Mauro Querio, executive chef, have years of experience in the industry and are proud of their fresh, creative approach to Italian food.

They often find inspiration during visits to Italy. Querio was born in Monfalcone, Italy, and worked in Italy prior to the

# ITALIAN EATERIES PROVIDE DELICIOUS DINING OPTIONS WHILE CONTRIBUTING TO ECONOMIC FABRIC OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

1990s when he joined Detroit's Italian food scene. Pecoraro was born in Detroit and grew up in St. Clair Shores. He spent every summer in Sicily and moved there for a short time when he was 20. He is very familiar with the way Italians cook, thanks to his grandmother and experiences in Italy.

"Italians hold and protect the tradition of their dishes. If you call it something specific, it better be made the right way," Pecoraro said.

Italian cooking is very regional.

In southern Italy, for example, menus are often filled with seafood, fresh from the coast. Further north, families cook with more meat, cheese and milk and thanks to the strong agricultural heritage in the region.



**Above:** Mangiabevi Urban Italian has served traditional Italian dishes in Sterling Heights since 2020.

Right: Partners Stefano Pecoraro, the restaurant's general manager, and Mauro Querio, executive chef, have years of experience in the industry and are proud of their fresh, creative approach to Italian food.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MANGIABEVI URBAN ITALIAN









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A selection of traditional Italian dishes served at Mangiabevi Urban Italian in Sterling Heights. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MANGIABEVI URBAN ITALIAN

Querio, he said, maintains the authenticity of Mangiabevi Urban Italian's dishes, but puts his own twist on them. Classic beef Wellington is wrapped in prosciutto and spaghetti carbonara is served tableside. The restaurant only recently added a Caesar salad, but the romaine lettuce is kept whole and chargrilled.

Other traditional menu items include grilled octopus, roasted bone marrow, veal saltimbocca, grilled quail, duck breast and a variety of pasta dishes. Most include five ingredients or less.

"Simplicity is what makes Italian food special," Pecoraro said. "The way you make it with just a few ingredients is what it's all about — the procedure."

Nearly 90,000 immigrants have chosen to make their home in Macomb County, creating rich, diverse communities. Sterling Heights, in particular, has the second-largest population of foreign-born residents in Michigan.

Rea said he believes many people from around the globe choose Macomb County because of its commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment. Initiatives like OneMacomb promote multiculturalism and community engagement through the arts and cultural events. Additionally, services such as English as a Second Language classes, citizenship preparation, and job skills training provide vital support for immigrants as they begin their new lives.

Many immigrants bring their traditions and recipes that have been passed down for generations with them. Italian restaurants often feature a variety of dishes that vary greatly from region to region, such as Sicilian, Roman, Tuscan and Neapolitan.

Rea said Romeo's Buon Appetito Italian Cuisine is a warm and inviting place to enjoy a delicious meal in a beautiful setting. The restaurant exudes a true family atmosphere, especially on Sundays when two, three and even four generations of family members gather together to enjoy traditional pasta dishes, including linguine pescatora, spaghetti Bolognese, lasagna, gnocchi, spinach and ricotta rigatoni and ravioli. The restaurant's signature dish is chicken cremosi, lightly breaded chicken sauteed in olive oil and finished in a lemon cream sauce.

Culturally-rooted restaurants that serve German, Polish, Chaldean and other ethnic cuisines are also popular staples in Macomb County communities, added Rea.

"I love how our communities really embrace the wide variety of choices," Rea said.

Beyond dishing up delicious food, Italian and other cultural restaurants make a significant impact on their local economies. They generate job opportunities for residents, support nearby suppliers and give back to the community through sponsorships, donations and fundraising opportunities for

schools and local organizations. Many business owners are also active community members, sitting on local boards and committees where they provide valuable input and diverse perspectives.

"This is a wonderful part of their legacy," Rea said. "These business owners are invested in our communities."

Macomb County Planning and Economic Development supports restaurants and other small businesses through programming and collaborating with local partners like Downtown Development Authorities on special promotions.

Rea noted that dining districts, where a high concentration of restaurants is located in a specific area similar to a downtown, can often create bustling destination spots. These clusters attract both residents and visitors with their diverse culinary offerings and further contribute to the local economy by encouraging foot traffic and community engagement.

Pecoraro said Mangiabevi Urban Italian is like a little Italy with Ventimiglia Italian Foods next door. The Ventimiglia family has been in the food business for four generations, since Antonio Ventimiglia settled in America with his brothers to pursue his dreams. Their subs are made with authentic Italian meats and cheeses and soup is served fresh daily. In addition to prepared food, shop the wide selection of imported grocery items.

### RESTAURANT ROUNDUP

Make plans to visit your favorite Macomb County Italian restaurants today. For more information on the restaurants featured in this article, reach out using the contact information below:



- Mangiabevi Urban Italian is located at 35219 Dodge Park Road in Sterling Heights. For details, call 586-553-9600 or visit urbanitalianmb.com
- Buon Appetito Italian Cuisine is located at 117 W. Lafayette in Romeo. For more information, call 586-785-3157 or visit buonappetitoitaliancuisine.com
- Ventimiglia Italian Foods is located at 35197 Dodge Park Road in Sterling Heights. For more information, call 586-979-0828 or visit ventimigliafoods.com



### MISSION: ACCOMPLISHED

By Jane Peterson

A new mission holds a new promise for Selfridge Air National Guard Base. It also means there's going to be a lot of activity happening around the base in the next few years as the installation prepares to welcome a new fighter fleet, which is expected to arrive in fiscal year 2028.

"The mission retains a fighter presence at Selfridge ANGB, keeping the base at the forefront of modern military aviation and a leader in national defense," said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Paul D. Rogers, adjutant general and director of the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. "This has been a role Selfridge has proudly played in Macomb County for more than 100 years."

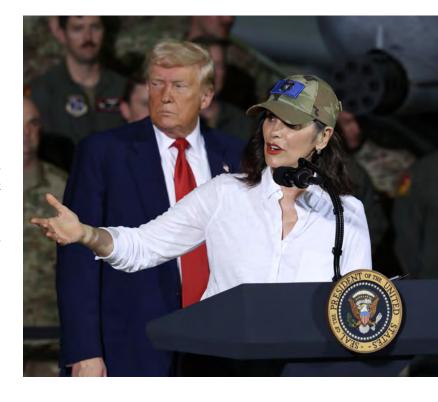
Initially, Selfridge ANGB was identified as the preferred site to host the new KC-46A Pegasus refueling mission, intended to replace both the A-10 and the aging KC-135 Stratotanker. However, those plans were later redirected under President Donald Trump's administration.

In April, Trump visited Selfridge ANGB and announced that the F-15EX Eagle II aircraft will replace the A-10 Thunderbolt II mission when the latter is retired. The president was joined for the announcement by Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth; Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer; Rogers; U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Daniel J. Kramer II, assistant adjutant general and commander of the Michigan Air National Guard; Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel; and more than 300 airmen.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer appears with U.S. President Donald J. Trump to speak to Airmen of the 127th Wing at Selfridge Air National Guard Base on April 29, 2025. President Trump visited Selfridge to announce plans to bring 21 F-15EX Eagle II aircraft to the 127th Wing.

SCOTT OLSON — GETTY IMAGES

NEW MISSION
ANNOUNCEMENT TO
BRING BIG CHANGES
TO SELFRIDGE AIR
NATIONAL GUARD BASE
IN COMING YEARS



### BY THE NUMBERS

### **FISCAL YEAR 2028**

expected arrival date of a new fleet of F-15EX Eagle II aircraft to replace the A-10 Thunderholt II

### \$850 million

total pumped into the local economy

### \$1 billion

total investments to transform SANGB

### 30,000

amount of jobs supported by SANGB statewide

### 5,000

number of men and women who can be employed at SANGB

### OPPORTUNITIES IN MACOMB COUNTY

With the transition from the A-10 Thunderbolt II mission to the F-15EX Eagle II aircraft, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Paul D. Rogers, adjutant general and director of the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, said there will be numerous opportunities for Macomb County businesses to be involved in the transformation.

With Macomb County being the center of aerospace work, he said, it's great to have this new mission hosted in a county that has dedicated so much energy, talent, knowledge and resources into this industry.

Rogers encourages interested companies to begin the process of becoming eligible to bid on federal projects now. Doing so will ensure that they receive official announcements of projects going out to bid so they can submit their proposal and not miss out on any local opportunities.

"Construction and skilled trades will be in demand," he said.

There had been a cloud of uncertainty hanging in the air as to the future of the base once the Air Force began officially retiring the 127th Wing's A-10 fleet in 2022. The F-15EX announcement capped a bipartisan effort and years of advocacy, led by Whitmer, to bring a new fighter mission to Selfridge.

Selfridge ANGB is a strong economic driver in Macomb County, pumping \$850 million into the local economy. Because it is the only Air National Guard Base with a federally-owned flight line, it is able to employ more than 5,000 men and women and house multiple military units from every U.S. Armed Service branch except Space Force. In addition, it is home to the Customs and Border Protection's homeland security operations.

"It's a very dynamic location," Rogers said.

Statewide, the base supports 30,000 jobs. With the F-15EX mission, the loss of approximately \$30 million in wages was prevented and millions of dollars in investment will be coming to Macomb County as substantial infrastructure improvements will be necessary to host the 21 F-15EX fighter jet fleet. This includes an extension of the runway and construction of new hangars to support the larger jets, as well as the accompanying KC-46 Pegasus refueling aircraft.

The entire community will be economically impacted by the activity on base as supporting businesses like restaurants, hotels, local suppliers and others will likely see an influx in business thanks to materials needed to complete the work and contractors staying near the base to complete projects.



Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, right, speaks with U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Paul D. Rogers, adjutant general and director of the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, at Selfridge Air National Guard Base on April 29, 2025.

U.S. AIR NATIONAL GUARD PHOTO BY TECH. SGT. DREW SCHUMANN















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Clintondale Community Schools www.clintondaleschools.net

Eastpointe Community Schools www.eastpointeschools.org

Fitzgerald Public Schools www.fitz.k12.mi.us

Fraser Public Schools www.fraser.k12.mi.us/

Lake Shore Public Schools www.lakeshoreschools.org

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South Lake Schools www.solake.org

Utica Community Schools www.uticak12.org

Van Dyke Public Schools www.vdps.net

Warren Consolidated Schools www.wcskids.net

Warren Woods Public Schools www.warrenwoods.misd.net

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

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A dedicated team has been formed to advance the recapitalization plan, Rogers said. The new facilities represent \$1 billion in total investment, which includes not only construction and related jobs, but also design work needed to support the transformation. He is hopeful that many local businesses will be involved.

"There's an incredible amount of jobs and contracts that will result from this project," he said.

Preparing for the new mission involves federal, state and county leaders. He said Hackel, Macomb County Drain Commissioner Candice Miller, planning officials and other Macomb County leaders have been integral in helping to plan for the infrastructure enhancements that will be needed to welcome the fighter fleet.

One of the biggest changes will be a 1,000-foot shift in the runway to the north that will enhance safety by moving flight operations further away from residential areas near the base. The runway will also need to be extended for the larger jets.

"We have a very strong relationship with the county and enjoy patriotic support from the community, which takes ownership in Selfridge and thinks of it as 'their base,'" Rogers said.

As the largest Air National Guard installation in the United States, Selfridge ANGB is the perfect choice for this new fighter mission with a strategic geographical position along the country's northern border, he said. Located in Harrison Township near Canada and with access to the Great Lakes, its flexibility in operations makes Selfridge ANGB a national asset.

"Michigan is critical for national security," he explained.

### A STORIED HISTORY

For more than 100 years, Selfridge ANGB has served Macomb County – and the nation – with pride. Selfridge Field, as it was then known, opened July 1, 1917, when the Michigan National Guard took possession of the former Joy Aviation Field, and transferred it to the Army a week later. After the Air Force became a separate military branch in 1947, its name changed to Selfridge Air Force Base. On July 1, 1971, the Air National Guard took command from the Air Force, changing the name to what it is today.

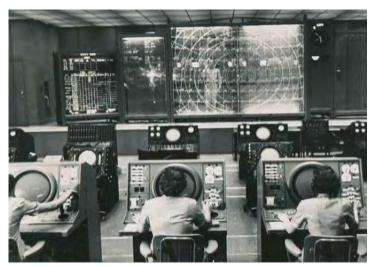
In 1972, the predecessor of the 107th FS converted from a reconnaissance to a fighter mission and redesignated the unit as the 107th Tactical Fighter Squadron. Since then, the 107th FS has operated three fighter and two attack missions: F-100 Super Sabre, A-7D Corsair II, F-16 Voodoo, F-16 Fighting Falcons and the A-10. The F-15EX is the perfect fit for the base and honors the generations of 127th Wing who contributed to Selfridge's fighter mission tradition throughout the decades.

Today, Selfridge Air National Guard Base is one of the busiest facilities managed exclusively by the Air National Guard and with its long history, is one of the oldest continuously operating military airfields in the country.

"We're excited for the future at Selfridge and for the missions that will unfold while employing this great multirole fighter. The men and women who serve within the Michigan National Guard will continue to protect the homeland and serve the nation for many decades moving forward," Rogers said.







**Opposite page, top:** 17th Pursuit Squadron P-6E aircraft on the flight line at Selfridge Field in 1930.

**Top:** A historical photo of Selfridge Field, facing the flight line, in 1931. Building 50, the operations building, stands center, between ridge Field in 1941.

**Left:** The Selfridge Air Force Base Nike master missile control center in 1960.

**Below:** A panoramic view of Selfridge Field, facing the flight line, in 1931. Building 50, the operations building, stands center, between two aircraft hangars. All still stand today.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SELFRIDGE AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE



### HOME SWEET HOME

By Jane Peterson

Macomb County leaders understand that there is a great need for affordable housing and they are moving forward with plans to ensure that everyone who wants to live in Macomb County can afford to move — or stay — here.

"Macomb County is a great place to live and invest in over time," said Bob Taylor, CEO of the Grosse Pointe Board of Realtors. "It's growing and it's where people want to be."

The Macomb County Department of Health and Community Services and the Macomb Regional Housing Partnership concluded a community and housing needs assessment earlier this year. Officials wanted to identify market challenges and explore proactive solutions.

While the final data was still being evaluated as of press time, early findings from almost 1,000 surveys and 14 community engagement sessions revealed a clear need for more affordable housing.

### **COMMUNITY CHALLENGES**

Andrew Cox, director of Macomb County Health and Community Services, said 49.5% of renters responded that rent was a cost burden that makes it hard to put away savings for a down payment on a house.

Even those who do save enough for a down payment have other forces working against them. Rising costs and higher interest rates in recent years, for example, have kept many homeowners in their current houses. They don't want to sell their home where they have a low interest rate just to buy a new one at a higher rate, even if their family's needs call for them to downsize or upgrade to a larger home.

In addition, while Macomb County has healthy new construction rates when compared with other southeastern Michigan counties, construction in general has struggled to keep pace with an aging population. Insufficient new construction keeps people in their current housing, as well.

"Housing is driven by supply and demand. The demand for Macomb County is high," Taylor said.

# IN MACOMB COUNTY, AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS KEY TO A THRIVING ECONOMY, PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR RESIDENTS



To get a diverse number of perspectives, 14 community engagement events were held to gather community-level input and feedback on affordable housing in Macomb County.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The good news is that homes in the county range from under \$50,000 to upwards of \$4 million and there is housing inventory. Taylor said the number of homes available for sale increased by 35% in August — a plus for buyers.

At the same time, home values continue to increase. The median home value, said Taylor, increased by 6% — a plus for sellers.

"If you take care of your home, it will increase in value," he said. "Macomb County is a great place to build up your net worth."



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According to Cox, the county's median home price is \$263,326. In a few years, that price is projected to rise to \$311,899.

### HOW THE HOUSING ASSESSMENT SURVEY WILL HELP

This is the first time the county has completed a housing assessment survey. It plans to repeat it every three years to gain fresh data.

"It's the most comprehensive study completed on housing in Macomb County to date. We wanted to not just identify challenges, but look at solutions with our community partners," Cox said.

The first step was hosting the Macomb County Housing Summit on Nov. 17. Held after this story went to press, community leaders were expected to join forces to hear the results of the housing assessment survey, explore recommendations for action and participate in discussions to guide the future of housing in Macomb County.

"We wanted to bring people together to host sessions on actionable items," Cox said. "We plan to discuss best practices, how we can assist communities with zoning rules and look at policy reform that can remove the barriers to diverse and accessible housing."

Because each region of the county has different challenges and needs, breakout sessions were scheduled to focus on the unique priorities of Macomb County. For example, Cox said 25% of homes in the southern portion of the county were built prior to 1939. Actions like expanding home maintenance education and energy-efficiency programs, as well as investing in funds to fix up these homes and keep them in good shape, are crucial to safe, livable neighborhoods.

"It could go a long way to revitalizing these communities," he said.

### **KELLY COURT APARTMENTS**

In Eastpointe, a modular housing project is helping to bring much-needed units to a community where demand outpaces supply. The challenge here, said Dave Rose, real estate development program manager with Community Housing Network, Inc., is the lack of land availability. The parcel size needed for a multi-family housing development simply isn't available despite studies showing that there is a total shortage of 122 units in this southern Macomb County community.

"Eastpointe is a fantastic community made up of good, hard-working residents who are familiar with the challenges of affordable housing," Rose said.

### BY THE NUMBERS

49.5%

renters responding that rent was a cost burden that makes it hard to put away savings

\$311,899

projected median home price in Macomb County within a few years, up from \$263,326

400

inquiries made in newly erected Kelly Court Apartments within two weeks

25%

percentage of homes built before 1939 in southern Macomb



Left: What's unique about Kelly Court Apartments is that they were built off-site by Champion Homes in a controlled manufacturing environment and then transported in modules to the housing site.

Below: Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel speaks during the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Kelly Court Apartments.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Enter Kelly Court Apartments.

Located on a previously vacant lot at the corner of Kelly Road and Toepfer Drive, it utilizes modular construction techniques for eight rental units. The apartments include five, one-bedroom homes and three, two-bedroom homes, including one that is fully accessible.

What's unique about these units is that they were built offsite by Champion Homes in a controlled manufacturing environment and then transported in modules to the housing site. Each four-unit building, or quadplex, was installed on a permanent foundation and then siding was installed and plumbing connected.

Rose said the entire building process takes only six to eight months compared with 12 months or more for traditional construction due to weather and other variables.

"Data showed that there was a huge need. This project brings much-needed housing to where people are," Rose said. "The housing crisis is real."

Indeed, interest was high, with more than 400 inquiries received within a two-week timeframe.

"Affordable housing is critical to Macomb County communities," said Macomb County Planning and Economic Development Project Manager Stephanie Burgess. "We all know someone who needs affordable housing."

Completed in September, the modular homes were leased to low-to-moderate income families at affordable rents. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held prior to move-in day.

The Eastpointe modular homes are a partnership initiative between the Macomb County Planning and Economic

Development and Community Housing Network. Macomb County's HOME program, which distributes federal block grants through the Department of Housing and Urban Development, contributed \$1.1 million of the funding. Another \$230,000 of program income from a 2019-20 HOME-funded resale project and a \$450,000 loan the Community Housing Network received through the Springhill Housing Corporation made up the difference.

"We are proud of the relationships created to tackle this issue," Burgess said.

The Community Housing Network has been an invaluable community resource for Macomb County. Its goal is to create home ownership opportunities through acquisition, rehab and resale projects, as well as rental property development. Rose said the organization would like to coordinate more modular housing in Macomb County on compact sites.

"Our goal is to empower people to live in affordable homes with dignity in thriving communities," he said.

### HOW THE HOUSING SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

Just under 1,000 people responded to the community and housing needs assessment from May to July 2025. In addition, to get a diverse number of perspectives, 14 community engagement events were held to gather community-level input and feedback.

The assessment included 25 questions on a range of topics, including housing affordability and what amenities residents valued in their neighborhood. The vast majority wanted safe communities while other top vote-getters included:

- Access to nature with parks and trails
- Walkable, accessible neighborhoods
- Homes that suited their needs and budgets, including single-family homes, apartments, condos, townhouses, mobile homes and mother-in-law and other types of accessory housing





### INNOVATING TOMORROW

By Jane Peterson

Workplace technology isn't limited to just offices and manufacturing plants anymore.

Industry 4.0 is touching every aspect of business, including the agricultural sector, which is utilizing technology for everything from using drones to efficiently plant seeds to real-time data to monitor crop health and make better informed decisions about irrigation, fertilization and pest control.

The innovation continues from field to factory as food and beverage producers seek strategies to improve operational efficiencies.

Macomb County is home to more than 200 food companies, so Macomb County Planning and Economic Development works closely with the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center. The MMTC offers personalized services designed to help Michigan manufacturers operate smarter so they can thrive for years to come.

Industry 4.0, often described as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, plays a big role in helping small businesses prosper. It refers to the sophisticated and coordinated methods used to bring advanced technologies like artificial intelligence, robotics, data analysis and cloud



# HOW FOOD AND BEVERAGE COMPANIES ARE UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE OPERATIONS RUN MORE EFFICIENTLY



Achatz Handmade Pie Co. received an Industry 4.0 grant in 2024 that totaled approximately \$20,000 to purchase a piece of equipment that automates a crucial component of its pie-baking process.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ACHATZ HANDMADE PIE CO.



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586-826-8550 586-677-4000 computing together to solve a singular problem. Food and beverage producers can use Industry 4.0 to increase their business growth by implementing Industry 4.0 strategies and equipment to enhance operational efficiency, product quality and overall customer satisfaction.

Cobots, robots and other equipment can be used to scan and place labels, for example, or help with quality control, utilizing scanning equipment that can inspect products and supplement the human eye.

"There are vision systems that can pick up even slight color variations of a run," said George Singos, MMTC's business solutions manager, "so if some cookies are baking lighter than others, this can be detected early on, saving time and money."

Other ways that Industry 4.0 can assist are through real-life monitoring systems that can detect any issue promptly and supply chain sourcing to tap into available resources.

"It can't solve all problems, but it can find connections that can help," said John Spillson, MMTC's food business development manager and lean business and leadership advisor.

Industry 4.0 offers powerful automation opportunities, but it can feel overwhelming at first, he said. The MMTC provides a no-cost technology opportunity assessment to identify technologies like robotics and Al that can maximize improvements and the return on investment. Walking the production floor with managers helps pinpoint where efficiency can be improved. Once leaders see how the technology applies directly to their operations, they start to recognize the real value of Industry 4.0 solutions.

Singos agreed that working together to help educate small food and beverage producers about Industry 4.0 is a vital component to driving business expansion and maximizing potential.

"It is a true roadway for future growth," he said.

MCPED supports the food and beverage industry in many ways, including doing walk-throughs on the factory floor and offering grants that make equipment purchases more manageable.

"There are approximately 19,000 businesses in Macomb County and many are small businesses. We want to get them connected with resources that can best benefit them," said Hali Lenney, Macomb County's senior economic developer. "Our goal is to help companies grow and Industry 4.0 can help them do just that."

Assisting with production line automation to reduce manual



#### INDUSTRY 4.0

19,000 BUSINESSES IN
MACOMB COUNTY AND MANY
ARE SMALL BUSINESSES. WE
WANT TO GET THEM CONNECTED
WITH RESOURCES THAT CAN BEST
BENEFIT THEM."



labor and quicken processing is one way Industry 4.0 can benefit local companies and contribute to a healthy economy.

Lenney gave the example of a Macomb County company that was bagging all of its orders by hand. It was a tedious process and company leaders even had to turn away orders because they couldn't keep up with the demand. Industry 4.0 technology was able to streamline this cumbersome task, freeing up time so all orders could be fulfilled in a timely manner.

Achatz Handmade Pie Co. has seen the power of technology work firsthand. The company received an Industry 4.0 grant in 2024 that totaled approximately \$20,000. It allowed the company to purchase a piece of equipment that automates a crucial component of its pie-baking process, Director Dave Yono said.

The result was not only more consistency in the finished product, but also a 15% daily increase in the number of pies produced with less wear and tear on other equipment.

"This has been one of the busiest years we've had," co-owner Zack Achatz said. "Macomb County has been a huge supporter of our company that my parents started out of their house in 1993. We have nine locations in



Thanks to an Industry 4.0 grant, Achatz Handmade Pie Co. purchased a piece of equipment that has resulted in a 15% daily increase in the number of pies produced with less wear and tear on other equipment.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ACHATZ HANDMADE PIE CO.

metro Detroit, including stores in Chesterfield Township, Armada and Shelby Township that helped launch our business."

Automation has also made it easier on the Achatz workforce, while still keeping the company's strict quality standards, Yono said.

Spillson said it's important to note that adopting Industry 4.0 technology and implementing automation tools doesn't necessarily mean reducing the workforce. In some cases, additional employees are needed to support and manage the new systems



JOHN SPILLSON

Increased efficiency can also lead to higher wages, added Singos, while keeping prices as low as possible for consumers.

The bottom line is that improving efficiency is essential for small business growth. Though the cost of implementation can be a hurdle, the good news is that funding opportunities are available to help overcome that challenge.

MCPED's Equip and Thrive (known creatively as E.A.T.) grant is one example. Eligible Macomb County food and agriculture manufacturers who package food or produce beverages for wholesale or distribution are eligible to apply for funds that would cover 75%, or up to \$5,000 in reimbursements, for one piece of Industry 4.0 equipment. Because businesses need to have less than \$2 million in annual sales to qualify, this limits applications mainly to small businesses.

What they've learned is that many companies get so caught up in day-to-day operations that they never have the opportunity to step back and evaluate the packaging process, but that doesn't distract MCPED from its mission to retain, grow and attract economic investment. Lenney said they often cold-call companies to see how MCPED can assist, attend networking events to help spread the word about MCPED grants and host quarterly food task meetings to hear from food and beverage producers themselves.

"It's really rewarding work," she said. "We strive to see companies grow. Industry 4.0 can often be the catalyst for boosting sales revenues and future expansion, strengthening Macomb County's economy for everyone."

# TRANSFORMING LIVES

By Jane Peterson

While many teens spend their final years of high school deciding what college to attend or career path to pursue, young New Americans, especially those from war-torn countries, often face a very different set of challenges, including a language barrier, food insecurity and limited access to basic needs.

Motivated by a desire to help these families thrive in Macomb County, Asaad Kalasho and his family founded the American Arab Chaldean Community Outreach Services in 1993. At that time, many new families were moving into immigrant communities in the Detroit area and often had little support. AACCOS stepped in to provide essential resources like English language instruction, workforce training and basic needs like food, housing and utilities.

"When someone walks through the door and they need something, we don't stop at listening. We make every effort to make sure they get the support they deserve," Executive Director Sumaiya Ahmed Sheikh.



KALASHO FAMILY'S
COMMITMENT
TO EDUCATION,
ADVOCACY SETS
YOUTH FROM
UNDER-RESOURCED
COMMUNITIES UP
FOR SUCCESS



**Left:** The organization's Lorraine Center in Warren is a busy place as staff quietly go about helping underserved populations find their path to prosperity.

**Above:** MINDgarden utilizes play therapy, music therapy, art therapy, equine therapy and life skills therapy to connect with children and teens.

 $PHOTOS\ COURTESY\ OF\ KALASHO\ EDUCATION\ AND\ YOUTH\ SERVICES$ 



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The organization's Lorraine Center in Warren is a busy place as workers quietly go about helping underserved populations find their path to prosperity. Their hard work may not always receive the attention it deserves, but with every person they help lift up, local communities reap the benefits of a talented, well-educated workforce and young families eager to call Macomb County home.

From its early years, the nonprofit organization made educational opportunities the cornerstone of its mission, seeking to empower young people with knowledge and skills through academic excellence, leadership opportunities and personal growth.

"When you are uprooted from a young age to go to another country, education is key," Sheikh said. "We help young people as they are beginning to build their lives."

The Kalasho family established the International Network for Vocational Educational Skills Training, which would later be renamed Kalasho Education and Youth Services. The nonprofit offers free employment training, workforce development and entrepreneurial skills through services like career coaching, job placement, industry certifications, small business training, mentorships, resume support, interview prep and digital skills workshops in partnership with local employers.

"Everyone deserves access to quality resources that they need. We work to identify gaps in the community and find solutions for them," she said.

That philosophy led to the opening of KEYS Grace Academy, a charter school where officials believe in providing a quality education, as well as celebrating diversity, preserving history and igniting a spark in each and every student. The curriculum is designed to equip young people with the skills they'll need not only to adapt to an ever-changing world, but to lead the change. At KEYS Grace Academy, cultural heritage is more than just a study unit or one multiculturalism night; it's everyone's unique story.







Top: From its early years, the nonprofit organization made educational opportunities the cornerstone of its mission.

Middle: Children learn independence through real-world simulations at MINDgarden.

Bottom: A Life Skills Grocery Store utilizes real-life applications to help children learn independence skills.

PHOTOS COURTE-SY OF KALASHO EDUCATION AND YOUTH SERVICES

#### LEARN MORE ABOUT KALASHO

Kalasho Education and Youth Services was established in 2001 with a firm mission to support and lift up New Americans and



traditionally underserved communities. In the past two decades, it has blossomed into a multi-faceted nonprofit organization that tackles issues from all angles while compassionate providing care with a deep sense of understanding. To schedule a therapy appointment, call 586-393-1570. To explore programs and services, visit kalasho.org.

From there, Kalasho Education and Youth Services founded Invest Roosevelt High School, a public school that takes a deep dive into each student's unique skill set so they are prepared to pursue their personal dreams upon graduation. Students receive a comprehensive academic experience blended with career-ready preparation.

Invest Roosevelt proudly embraces the SME Education Foundation's SME PRIME (Partnership Response In Manufacturing Education) initiative. This program brings together private industry and educators through the development of manufacturing and engineering lessons designed to prepare students for in-demand jobs in the manufacturing industry. As one of Macomb County's leading economic drivers, the manufacturing industry offers students a pathway to stable, well-paying jobs that not only help improve their families' quality of life, but also contribute to a stronger local workforce and possibly attract even more job opportunities to the region.

The school's Sports Academy helps propel its commitment to personal growth forward. By participating on the soccer team, students learn the value of teamwork, the satisfaction of working toward a common goal and the benefits of hard work.

By working closely with students, educators discovered that some were struggling with food insecurity. Kalasho Education and Youth Services tackled this issue through KEYS Food Service. As Sheikh stated, "It's hard to learn with a grumbling tummy." Today, the program serves 14,600 meals daily to more than 6,000 children.

"Children are served fresh, nutritious, hot food daily. These are healthy meals that taste good so children look forward to mealtime," she said.

In addition to educational programs, Kalasho Education and Youth Services promotes advocacy, financial literacy and empowerment, and legal aid services at the CODE Next Gen Family Resource Center.

"We love it when people become financially independent, and learn how the government can work for them — move forward and give back to others," she said.

Staff members work diligently to ensure families have access to legal representation and knowledge to navigate the often complex immigration legal system. They help people with issues like asylum, green cards and citizenship.

In 2024, the nonprofit opened MINDgarden, a behavioral and mental health initiative that combines holistic healing practices with a modern, scientific approach to promote overall health and wellness among youth. They partnered with other nonprofit organizations to curate the space, which utilizes play therapy, music therapy, art therapy, equine therapy and life skills therapy to connect with children and teens. Compassionate, caring counseling fosters open communication in a safe environment.

"It's a fun, loving and inviting space in Warren that serves as a one-stop shop for therapy support services like physical therapy, occupational speech, ABA and more," Sheikh said. "Macomb County is very supportive of our work."

Kalasho Education and Youth Services works with a number of community partners who support their work, including Advancing Macomb, Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone, Women of Warren and Macomb Township. Grants, as well as private donations and public funds, provide money for this important work.

"We're not just supporting people; we're shaping the next generation of leaders," Sheikh said. "When you truly listen and build around people's needs, they don't just show up; they thrive and grow. We meet people where they are at."

# BIG IDEAS, SMALL INVENTORS

By Jane Peterson

There's nothing like seeing your idea for an invention come to life — especially for a fourth grader.

The Little Inventors Program seeks to create the next generation of entrepreneurs by igniting their curiosity, encouraging innovation and allowing them to dream big.

"Macomb County is home to some of the nation's most advanced manufacturing and we are proud to partner with local industry to bring those opportunities into our classrooms. By connecting our youngest learners to career possibilities, we are building both a stronger community and a brighter future for Macomb," Macomb Intermediate School District Supt. Mike DeVault said.

Each year, Macomb County schools are invited to have fourthgrade classrooms participate in this unique, hands-on learning opportunity. The Little Inventors curriculum was developed with teacher input and meets state standards for English Language Arts and science learning. While reading texts in their classroom, students use engineering and design skills to develop an invention that solves an authentic problem based on that year's theme.

This program is a joint venture between the Macomb County Intermediate School District, in partnership with local districts, the MiSTEM Network and the Little Inventors program. Past themes focused on space, energy, innovation and more, with challenge themes such as "MISD Mission Blue: Oceans!" "Operation Lift Off: MISD Mission Moon!" "MISD Go Green: For a Better Planet," "MISD Born to Invent: Michigan and Beyond!" and "MISD Energy: Feel the Power!"

Mark Muzzin, STEM education consultant and Macomb region director for the MiSTEM Network, said the goal is to use a fun, student-friendly approach to learning difficult topics and build creative confidence.

"We want to break the mold and give all students the chance to be inventors," he said. "They are at a great age to explore their creativity and be introduced to robotics and innovation with our industry partners. Being a part of a project like this greatly increases engagement."

# FOURTH GRADERS RECEIVE CREATIVE BOOST THANKS TO MACOMB INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATIVE



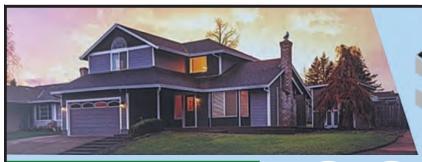
The HTI Cybernetics team built a London LEGO kit complete with a circuit underneath it to light the lampposts and illustrate the idea for pressure energy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HTI CYBERNETICS

Kellee Witgen, a science and engineering K-5 teacher at Armada Area Schools' Krause Elementary School, said she looks forward to the program every year.

"We are loving it here at Krause," she said. "I get excited knowing that the program is getting ready to start up again. Students learn so much about communication and problem-solving. They discover that they have the courage to share their ideas."

As students learn about the year's theme, they dive into hands-on lessons that teach a variety of science, social studies and language arts skills. However, what Witgen enjoys most is





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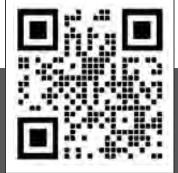


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A college student helped create Kolin's Sticky Boots prototype.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT



Roseville fourth grader Christopher shows his invention, Super Wings. PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSEVILLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS







Left: Inventor Kolin and her mom share the Sticky Boots project idea. Using high-efficiency solar panels hidden in faux fur, the energy generated fuels a heating system that keeps the user warm and safe when traversing sidewalks and trails in the winter snow and ice. Middle: Ariana, 10, from Armada, worked with TARUS Products in Sterling Heights to create a prototype of her HammoGlow design. She was delighted when they made a life-sized version, too. Right: Need an extra set of hands? This solar-powered device invented by Claire can help.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

seeing her students realize that it's OK to make mistakes and then change course and learn how to break a large project into more manageable goals.

"Little Inventors gives students space to explore their own ideas and unlock the creativity that is in all of them," she said.

Each participating school is provided with invention journals for each student, book recommendations and a complete curriculum designed with the input of local educators.

"We walk them through every step," said Lisa Rivard, K-12 language arts consultant for Macomb Intermediate School District. "Students are exposed to authentic challenges and provided tools and skills to solve those problems in novel ways."

Using just a napkin sketch and no special equipment, students put their ideas on paper. Their concepts are always nothing short of amazing.

"Kids invent with empathy. They are naturally curious about the world and want to help others," Rivard said.

Little Inventor's first year was in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic when children were learning at home. The topic that year was oceans and one of the ideas centered around a puffer fish-shaped submarine that scoured the ocean bed for discarded trash. The idea used biomimicry concepts and was designed not to alarm other sea life. The idea was brought to life as a prototype by Jay Enn Corp.

Teachers submit their top five ideas, which are posted online and given professional feedback from the Little Inventors' team. From there, the top 40 ideas are shared with industry partners. Each partner gets to select one idea to bring to life.

Students are in the classroom when they learn which ideas were chosen for prototype development. It is an electric mo-



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ment, Rivard said, as students support, encourage and cheer for the inventors selected. It is also a moving moment for the inventor's parents or guardians who are on the call during the announcement and get to see their child's immediate reaction to the news.

Industry partners, including advanced manufacturers, non-profit organizations and college students, donate their time and talents to working with students.

During the process, the student inventor becomes the industry partner's client, and they collaborate to bring the idea to life as a concept model, prototype or animation. They conduct a business meeting where the student inventor communicates their idea and develops it further so the maker can ensure their client will be happy with the result.

Marisa Bennett, marketing manager for HTI Cybernetics in Sterling Heights, said this was the company's second year, and her third, participating as a maker. Her favorite part is working with students through Zoom calls with their teacher.

"Kids have all the details in their mind," she said. "It's easy to spot their level of pride when they see their invention come to life."

This year, a student at Lake Shore's Rodgers Elementary School had an idea for pressure plates that, when placed on a city sidewalk, would retain the energy from people walking on them to light the city. The HTI Cybernetics team built a London LEGO kit complete with a circuit underneath it to light the lampposts.

#### CALLING ALL INDUSTRY PARTNERS

If you want to play a role in inspiring young inventors, consider partnering with the MISD Little Inventors program. Makers, designers and engineers are needed to work with student inventors. It is a great opportunity to feel like a kid again, where you're only limited by your own imagination and you build something just for the fun

Industry partners/makers donate their time and materials and expertise.

of it.

"You're committing your time for a good cause," said Mark Muzzin, STEM education consultant and Macomb region director for the MiSTEM Network.

HTI CYBERNETICS

If you take children's ideas seriously and want to join the fun, visit misd.littleinventors.org/makers/join to create your profile and begin your adventure.

Bennett said Macomb County is in a unique position because of its large manufacturing base. Programs like Little Inventors help to ignite student interest, leading them to explore other learning opportunities as they get older and even consider a career in the skilled trades.

"It's one way to keep fueling the talent pipeline," she said.

Ten-year-old Ariana from Armada was chosen for her Hammo-Glow idea that generated green energy using a hammock. She envisioned a swing with a battery to store kinetic energy created from the swinging motion of the hammock. The battery could then power lights around the swing at night, creating a soft glow.

The maker she worked with, TARUS Products in Sterling Heights, even invited Ariana's classmates to take a field trip to tour the facility.

Sheryl Vitale, a STEAM teacher from Roseville Community Schools, was new to the program this year. Unsure about what to expect, she said, she was pleasantly surprised by how much students stretched themselves creatively.

"They had some fantastic ideas that were so cool to see," Vitale said. "They were able to share what they had in their head with everybody. It was great to see their self-confidence grow."

One of her students, 10-year-old Christopher, was selected to work with an industry partner. One of the quieter children in class, Christopher had no idea his idea was chosen, but was elated at the outcome and celebrated by classmates.

"His face just lit up. The other students were so happy for him. He said he felt like a celebrity," Vitale said.

The program has grown from 380 students and two makers to over 2,100 students and 10 makers in 2025.

"We are so proud to see our youngest inventors so engaged in learning. The Little Inventors Challenge keeps fourth graders excited by blending STEM and literacy in creative ways, and that student energy is what has fueled the program's growth year after year," said Alesia Flye, MISD's assistant superintendent/ chief academic officer

Another great part of the program for educators is seeing students be so proud of their work. Those selected to work with an industry partner bring family and friends with them to the celebration ceremony when their prototype is unveiled.

"Little Inventors is a powerful learning experience in a short amount of time," Muzzin said. "We have seen students go from being shy to talking into a microphone in front of a crowd. By getting students involved in innovation to solve real-world problems, we get them excited about learning and expose them to careers they never knew existed."



By Jane Peterson

# EMPOWERING INDEPENDENT BEAUTY OWNERS WITH THE SPACE THEY NEED TO GROW, THRIVE

Lauren Falzone doesn't just provide space for beauty professionals to welcome clients. She empowers them with the knowledge they need to grow their business.

Falzone, a hairstylist since 2006, knows all about the beauty industry. Growing up, she watched her mom, Janet, care for clients in The Hair Room, an affectionate nickname for the inhome salon built by her dad, Joe. Inspired by how her mom made women feel beautiful and confident, she obtained her cosmetology license and followed in her footsteps.

Like many other hairstylists, Falzone went to work in a traditional salon, where she received a percentage of the services she provided to her clients through a commission-based pay structure. Seeking more flexibility, she ended up leaving the corporate world behind and went to work full-time with her mom in The Hair Room.

"During this time, I enjoyed the freedom to adjust my schedule as I needed to travel or spend time with my family. I thought that I could empower other people to run their own beauty businesses, too," she said.

Together with her husband, Tony, the idea for beautiLofts was born. The business offers separate, fully-furnished rooms, or "Lofts," under the same roof that cater to beauty professionals. Make-up artists, laser hair removal specialists,

PHOTO COURTESY OF BEAUTILOFTS

#### $0 \& A \gg FALZONE$

# Why is Macomb County a good place for your business?

It's close to where I grew up and built my clientele. It's home to me

#### Describe the role beautiLofts plays in Macomb County.

We keep local beauty professionals connected and provide them with resources to be successful. Building up small business owners builds up the economy as a whole. We also support local charities like Maggie's Wigs 4 Kids Michigan and Painted Wings.

# What do you enjoy about working in Macomb County?

Over the years, I've developed relationships with Loft owners who are running their businesses at our facilities. That's the best part – building the relationships. I'm excited about doing hair still, seeing clients one day a week in our Clinton Township location. I love being able to empower others that work alongside me with knowledge. Being an industry professional allows me to relate to the people who work with us. We speak the same language. We know what it's like to skip lunch during a busy day and face other daily challenges while running our businesses and practicing our craft.

# What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?

I like to go to the gym and I love to sing. We go to karaoke once a month in Clinton Township. I also like to travel with my husband, Tony, and two sons, Julian and Oliver.

# What do you consider your greatest achievements?

My children. I have two boys who are 5 and 7, and parenting is such an important job. Being present is everything, and being able to show up means everything to me. Professionally, beautiLofts just celebrated 10 years in business, and I'm proud to have been able to guide so many people on their journey to becoming business owners.

# How has Macomb County helped grow your business?

Macomb County Planning and Economic Development keeps business owners connected. They are always trying to build things up and make them better. They are very approachable and host many events for the business community.

nail technicians, nurse injectors, hairstylists and others can rent and make the space their own.

The Lofts are rented for a flat rate, so loft owners keep the money they earn. They answer to no one, creating their own schedules and prices, while decorating the way they want to create their own space. Each owner has access to common areas, like a waiting room, break room and laundry room. Building cleaning and maintenance are provided.

Falzone founded beautiLofts in 2015 with just nine lofts in Clinton Township. Today, she manages 76 lofts in four locations – three of them in Macomb County.

"It started with me wanting to have some freedom to have flexibility in my life," she said, "but I am passionate about helping other business owners in the beauty industry succeed with their own businesses."

She does this by providing one-on-one coaching, offering networking opportunities and hosting business workshops where business owners can learn more about budgeting, accounting, payroll and more.

"I'm happy to answer questions about running the business side," she said. "I want them to be successful in their own businesses."

This year, Falzone celebrated beauti-Lofts' 10th anniversary, knowing she's helped more than 90 beauty professionals take the leap to becoming independent Loft owners. She was honored for her contributions to empowering women with the ATHENA Leadership Award from the Macomb Foundation, an affiliate of the Macomb County Chamber. Falzone was recognized for her efforts to foster a supportive environment in which women can thrive professionally on their own terms.



By Jane Peterson

# A DYNAMIC LEADER COMMITTED TO KEEPING MACOMB COUNTY RESIDENTS IN THE KNOW

While he juggles numerous responsibilities as Macomb County's deputy county executive, Tom Lehrer likes to sum up his position in just a few words: "I tell the story of the county."

In July 2024, county Executive Mark Hackel expanded Lehrer's role of public information officer to better align with the county's strategic communications and public engagement efforts. He leads a team of communications specialists to ensure residents have the information they need, when they need it.

"I have the opportunity to work with all the county's departments," he said. "It's been great showcasing all the wonderful things that are happening here and sharing the assets Macomb County offers with the rest of the world."

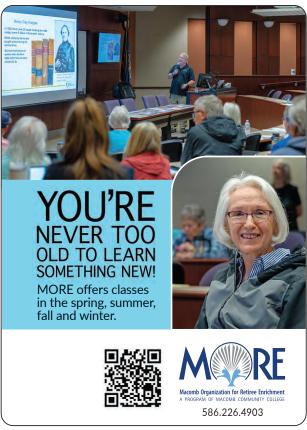
Lehrer is passionate about highlighting Macomb County. He is enthusiastic and dedicated to public service, having joined Macomb County after many years in the private sector. A Western Michigan University graduate who studied elementary education, his first career was in teaching, where he spent five years in a Detroit classroom.

 $PHOTO\ COURTESY\ OF\ MACOMB\ COUNTY$ 









 $Macomb\ Community\ College\ |\ Center\ Campus\ |\ 44545\ Garfield\ Road\ (at\ Hall\ Road),\ Clinton\ Township,\ MI\ 48038$ 

Wanting to move closer to home, he accepted a position with AT&T, where he found a passion for global sales. He excelled in his career with AT&T, where he sharpened his communication and project management skills, for 20 years before the entrepreneurial bug hit, leading him and a friend to start up their own digital media company.

Their business offered graphics and web design, as well as creative video production. While working with Macomb County on the State of the County address and the Make Macomb Your Home initiative through his company, Lehrer became familiar with the executive team and accepted the public information officer position when it opened, and was appointed as deputy county executive in June 2024.

#### 0 & A ≫ L E H R E R

#### Why is Macomb County a good place for you and your family?

It's a great place to raise kids. My wife Jennifer and I have two children, Ayden and Isabella. Jennifer is an art teacher at Utica Community Schools.

#### Describe your role with Macomb County.

My job is to share information. I want to make sure our thriving business community is show-cased so potential business owners and residents will know why it is important for them to be located in a Macomb County community. Through words and videos, I tell the story of Macomb County. I feel like my entire career path as an educator, sales and content creator has led me to my current role at the county. I am where I am supposed to be.

#### What do you enjoy about working in Macomb County?

What I enjoy most is the people. It's nice to see the interactions between staff and residents. Everyone wants to help. For me personally, my job is something different every day. I never know what I may be doing at any given moment, and I love it.

#### What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?

I am an avid volunteer. I deliver Meals on Wheels to senior citizens throughout Macomb County and I love my work with Angel's Place, an organization that provides lifelong care for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, which was started by my aunt, Annemarie Lopez, in 1992. In my spare time, I also enjoy live music, mountain biking and traveling with family and friends. I recently traveled with my dad to Germany to visit his family and we also got to enjoy a couple of European Cup soccer games during our visit. It was a memorable trip.

#### What do you consider your greatest achievements?

It's my children and my family. I've enjoyed watching them grow and finding their own passions.



# JAMES O. SAWYER IV

By Jane Peterson

During his tenure at Macomb Community College, James O. Sawyer IV led the school through some of its toughest times during the pandemic, but perhaps what the college president will most be remembered for is the support he offered students and the enthusiasm he had for helping them reach their academic and career goals.

Sawyer announced earlier this year that he will be retiring on June 30, 2026.

EDUCATOR TO LEAVE
BEHIND LEGACY
OF LEADERSHIP AT
MACOMB COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

He joined Macomb Community College in 2002 with 17 years of experience in engineering, quality and operations roles. He was a senior technical manager when the New Haven Foundry closed, leaving him pondering his next career steps. When he heard about an opening as the dean of engineering and advanced technology, he applied, thinking he would be involved in education for a short period of time.

Turns out the position was a perfect fit, combining his deep knowledge of the industry with a passion for helping people.

"Once I joined the college, I became

committed to education," Sawyer said.
"There was no turning back when I realized what an impact education has on people's lives and that I could play a pivotal role in that journey."

So what he initially thought would be a brief opportunity to expand his leadership experience and learn new skills ended up changing the direction of his life, too.

"I have a special place in my heart for community colleges and admire students who work hard to achieve their personal goals and dreams," he said.

From dean, Sawyer was named vice provost for career programs before becoming provost and senior vice president of the learning unit, now called academic and workforce education.

Sawyer was named as the college president on July 1, 2017, after serving for 15 years in leadership roles there.

He has been a Macomb County resident since 1976. After graduating from Utica High School, Sawyer earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Lawrence Technological University and later completed a master's in administration and a doctorate in educational leadership from Central Michigan University.

"It's the community connections I've made that are important to me," he said.

#### Q&A>SAWYER

# Why is Macomb County good for places of education like Macomb Community College?

There is a very strong support system here for community college. We have meetings with the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development team, Michigan Economic Development Corp. and Michigan Works! This group is always looking at the needle and determining next steps that can help residents achieve their career goals and provide a talented workforce for employers. Also, the Macomb Community and Education Roundtable meets monthly to review job opportunities that fill a need in the community.

# Describe the role Macomb Community College plays in Macomb County.

Students are our top priority as we work together with Macomb County companies to support economic development by preparing students for high-demand, well-paying local jobs. We also offer cultural experiences and performances that help make Macomb County a welcoming place for everyone.

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

This is a very beautiful and friendly area. We raised our daughter here and there's lot of activities for people of all ages. There is a multitude of opportunities here.

#### What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?

I golf, bowl and go boating. I also belong to community organizations like Advancing Macomb, Leadership Macomb and Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone.

#### What do you consider your greatest achievements?

Seeing students graduate and having the honor of shaking their hands at the graduation ceremony. That is by far the most rewarding part of my job.

#### What are your plans for retirement?

Retirement will be bittersweet, but I've been very fortunate in my career. I plan to travel and spend time with my family.



By Jane Peterson

# WORKING TIRELESSLY TO EMPOWER, ADVOCATE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AT DUTTON FARM

Not many people can say they're the inspiration behind an entire nonprofit organization, but Rebecca "Becca" Smither can.

Smither's mom, Michele, founded Dutton Farm in 2010 after recognizing the lack of adult support available for people with disabilities after they age out of school. At Dutton Farm, individuals with disabilities can continue to explore their interests and pursue their passions.

Today, Dutton Farm serves more than 150 adults from across Macomb and Oakland counties. Led by Smither's sister, CEO Jenny Brown, the pair are working diligently together – along with their mom – to empower adults with disabilities to live a life filled with love, purpose, friendship, inclusion and dignity.

Programs like adult education, community involvement, workforce development and Art Without Limits foster independence and empowerment. Participants discover what they can do and build on their strengths to achieve their goals.

Hands-on experiences like interacting with animals, gardening and painting make learning fun. Participants develop social interaction skills, receive job training and volunteer in the community. Dutton Farm operates on the belief that every adult with disabilities deserves to live a life with purpose, dignity and inclusion.

For Smither, who was born with Down syndrome, her desire to be helpful means staying busy. She juggles three jobs as a barista, production associate and bus captain. She enjoys

#### 0 & A ≫ S M I T H E R

# Why is Macomb County a good place for your business?

It's a great place to create meaningful experiences for people with disabilities. There are opportunities to showcase our artwork at community events and for job placements as part of our workforce development program.

# Describe the role Dutton Farm plays in Macomb County.

We never want people to be left out. Our services include adult education, a community involvement program, workforce development program and Art Without Limits program. We've worked with Macomb County to provide these services to residents and we love participating in community events.

#### What do you enjoy about working in Macomb County?

Helping other people.

#### What activities do you enjoy outside of your work?

I like to sleep in on my days off. I also like to make soap and candles

#### What do you consider your greatest achievements?

Helping our community involvement program as a bus captain. I'm proud of that work.

# What do you most want people to know about you and Dutton Farm?

Kindness is the spirit of Dutton Farm. I'm kind, smart, funny, important, valuable and helpful. I really like to be helpful.

being with her large family, which includes 13 siblings and more than 20 nieces and nephews. She's known as "the little mom" and the best aunt for her kind spirit, compassionate manner and unwavering patience.

"Life is always better when you have a job. It feels good to help people out," she said.

Smither is a fierce advocate for people with disabilities.

She has met with numerous legislators and attended the State of the State address with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. She spreads the word about jobs, workforce development, transportation barriers and unemployment rates for individuals with disabilities. Her goal is to make a difference by opening up opportunities for people with disabilities.

Smither, who just turned 50, is doing just that. She's setting an example by being a leader and a voice for people with disabilities everywhere.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DUTTON FARM



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