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*Remembering*  
**Marshall 'Coach T' Thomas**  
COMMUNITY, PG 18

## Marshall 'Coach T' Thomas, championship coach, remembered in Saginaw



MARSHALL THOMAS

**BY MB STAFF**

SAGINAW, Mich. — Family, former players, educators and community members gathered the weekend of Nov. 29 to honor the life and legacy of Marshall Othella “Coach T” Thomas, a Saginaw sports figure whose influence stretched far beyond the basketball court. Thomas, 78, died Nov. 17 after a lengthy illness, surrounded by loved ones. Funeral services were held Nov. 29 at Victorious Believers Ministries C.O.G.I.C., following a well-attended visitation the day before at Evans-Browne Funeral Home.

Thomas, born Aug. 29, 1947, in Saginaw, was widely regarded as a pillar of strength, faith and leadership. A 1966 graduate of Saginaw High School, he excelled in football, basketball and track and field before continuing his athletic career at Western New Mexico University. There, he earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees and distinguished himself as a standout multi-sport athlete. He led the NAIA in punt returns in 1967, earned MVP honors as a junior in track and competed in both football and basketball.

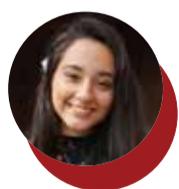
Upon returning home, Thomas began a 33-year teaching and coaching career

in Saginaw Public Schools. He coached football, track, golf, cross country and basketball, but became best known for his leadership of the Trojans’ varsity boys basketball program. Over 22 seasons, he compiled a 381–133 record and led Saginaw High to the 1995–96 Michigan Boys Class A State Championship. He also guided the girls’ varsity team to a 53–13 record during a three-year coaching span.

His achievements earned him seven regional Coach of the Year awards and four Class A Coach of the Year honors. Thomas later served as Saginaw High’s athletic director and worked with the Michigan High School Athletic Association as a color commentator for boys’ state championship games.

Beyond athletics, Thomas was deeply committed to education and service. After retiring from Saginaw Public Schools in 2009, he continued to support students as a substitute teacher and a devoted math tutor, known throughout the community for his patience, generosity and dedication to young people. He also served as an ordained deacon at Holy Communion Gospel Center, where he taught Bible study and participated in jail ministry outreach.

**See MARSHALL THOMAS, Page 2**



**Young teacher inspires MAC child artists**

LATINO BANNER, COVER



**'World-class' mentor helps young athletes thrive**

SPORTS, PG 40

## MARSHALL THOMAS, from cover

His community involvement extended to leadership roles on several boards, including the City of Saginaw Public Schools Foundation from 2010 to 2025 — where he served as vice president, Saginaw Promise liaison, academic grant advisor and workshop facilitator — and the Charles McNair Booker T. Washington Student Development Foundation, where he served from 2011 to 2025 and as president from 2019 to 2025.

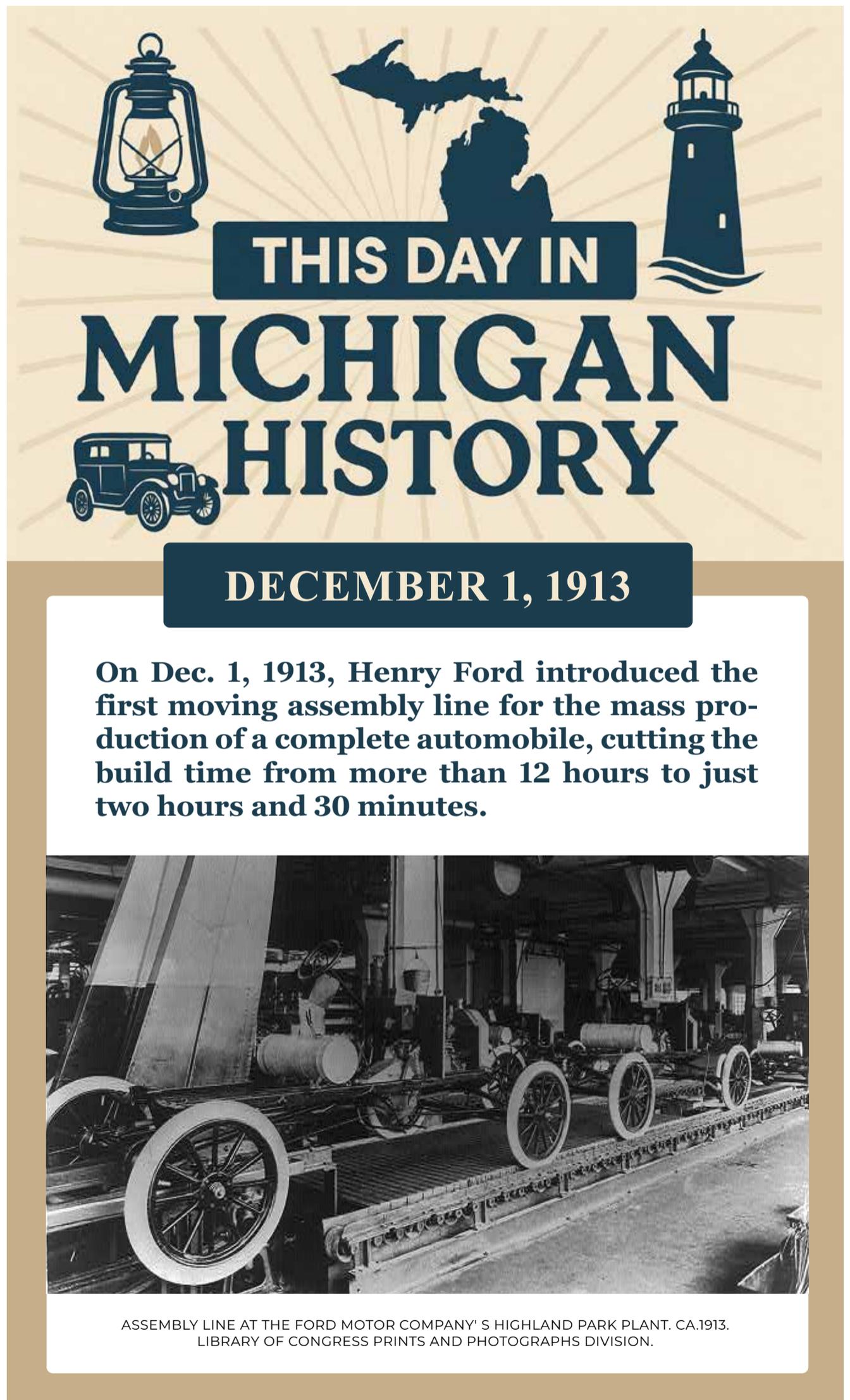
Thomas earned widespread recognition throughout his life, with honors including induction into the Western New Mexico University Athletic Hall of Fame (2004), Saginawian of the Year (2009), the Saginaw County Sports Hall of Fame (2011) and the Michigan High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame (2014).

In 2023, Thomas received the Motivation Award at The Michigan Banner's Heart of the City Community Banquet, an honor presented to an individual who engages, motivates and inspires community members.

At home, he was known as a devoted husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He married Yvonne D. Tijndaal on Aug. 18, 1973, and the couple shared 52 years of marriage. To his daughters, he was a constant example of integrity and service, always present and always leading by example. Loved ones recall his willingness to rearrange his days to support his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, ensuring they had every opportunity to succeed.

A passionate golfer, Thomas spent summers on the course and achieved the rare feat of four hole-in-ones. Friends and fellow golfers say he prized the camaraderie and conversations as much as the competition.

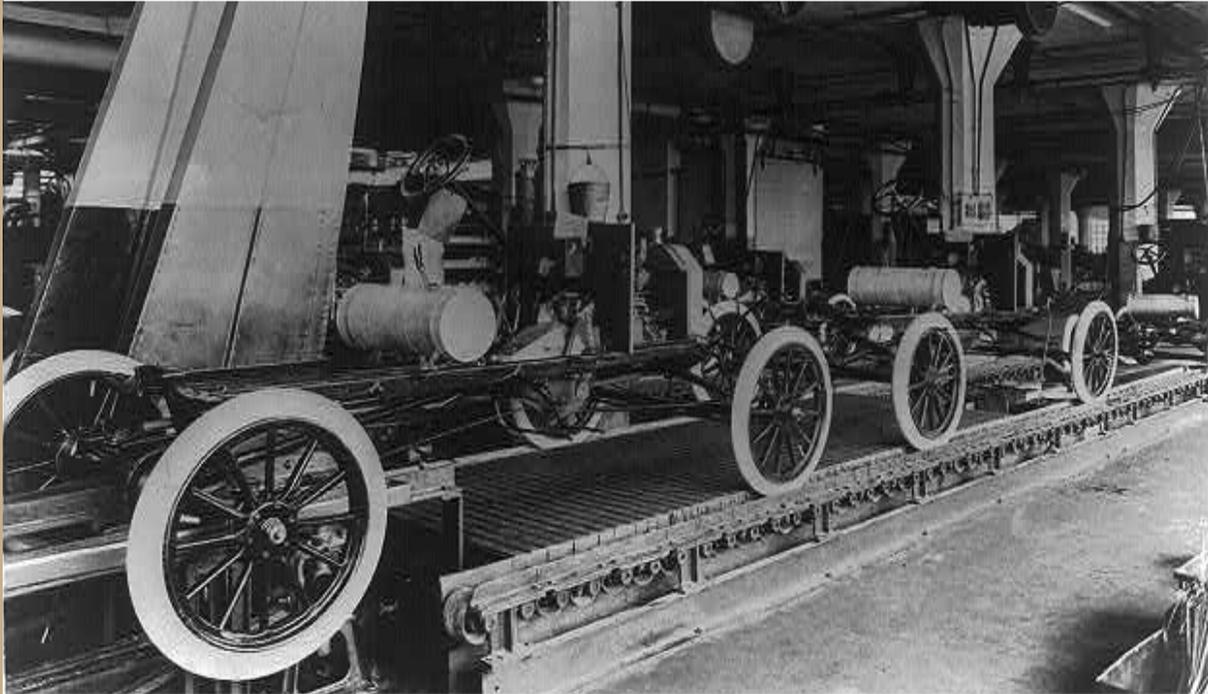
Thomas is remembered as a coach, educator, deacon, mentor and community leader — a man whose influence shaped thousands of lives and whose impact will endure for generations.



**THIS DAY IN  
MICHIGAN  
HISTORY**

**DECEMBER 1, 1913**

**On Dec. 1, 1913, Henry Ford introduced the first moving assembly line for the mass production of a complete automobile, cutting the build time from more than 12 hours to just two hours and 30 minutes.**



ASSEMBLY LINE AT THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY'S HIGHLAND PARK PLANT. CA.1913.  
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION.

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Saginaw, MI 48607  
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The Michigan Banner, Latino Banner and Youth Banner operates and serves as a print and online media venue committed to educating, informing and enlightening our readership regarding events and news that directly and indirectly affect the communities regionally and globally. Furthermore, to serve as a catalyst and a link for cultivating young adults as entrepreneurial and business leaders for the future.

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1 week before each publication date of the 1st and 16th of each month

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DECEMBER IS  
**HIV/AIDS**  
AWARENESS MONTH

**IN THIS ISSUE ▶**

Youth Banner .....	4 - 6
Latino Banner .....	LB 1 - LB 6
Community .....	13
Health .....	23
Education .....	27
Business .....	36
Sports .....	40
Faith .....	42

# MICHIGAN YOUTH BANNER

VOLUME 7 • NUMBER 23



## Saginaw Youth Protection Council receives \$2M to support homeless teens



FILE PHOTO

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — A major boost to youth housing and homelessness prevention efforts is coming to mid-Michigan, following the announcement of more than \$2 million in new federal funding for the Saginaw County Youth Protection Council.

U.S. Rep. Kristen McDonald Rivet (MI-08) said the two grants — totaling \$2,018,790 and awarded by the U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services — will strengthen the region's support system for homeless and runaway youth. The Youth Protection Council serves as Saginaw County's lead shelter provider for vulnerable young people.

The funding will expand the agency's housing capacity, improve case management services, and increase its ability to intervene before homelessness occurs. It will also establish a new street outreach program aimed at connecting at-risk teens and young

adults with immediate support.

"Every child in our community deserves to grow up with a roof over their head and an opportunity for a great future," McDonald Rivet said. "The Saginaw County Youth Protection Council is an important resource for kids and young adults in mid-Michigan. They give them a safe place to live, learn, and make real progress in their lives. This grant funding can help bring an end to homelessness in mid-Michigan and set young people, and all of

us, up for a bright future."

The Youth Protection Council serves single youth, young adults, young families, and pregnant or parenting teens across Saginaw and neighboring counties. The new grants underscore the organization's central role in addressing housing instability, especially for young people navigating crises without family support.

"We're excited that the Youth Protection Council has been awarded two major federal grants to further our mission of ending homelessness and housing insecurity," said Jasmine Calhoun, the organization's president and CEO. "These awards represent more than numbers on a page. They represent real opportunity, real impact, and real hope for thousands of young people and their children in mid-Michigan."

Calhoun also expressed gratitude for the congresswoman's support, noting that federal advocacy helped protect critical local resources. "We are honored by the trust placed in us and remain dedicated to building a future where every young person has a safe, stable place to call home," she said.

The funding arrives at a time when youth homelessness remains a pressing issue statewide. Local leaders say the investment will help fill service gaps, strengthen early-intervention efforts and provide more young people with the stability they need to pursue education, employment and long-term independence.

# John Alden Chapter honors 10 local seniors as 2025 DAR Good Citizens



JOHN ALDEN CHAPTER GOOD CITIZENS: (BACK ROW, FROM LEFT) AUDREY SCHMIDT, ANGELINA CHEN, PAYTEN COGGINS, CARRIE CUTSHALL, JAZLYN STEINS; (FRONT ROW, FROM LEFT) JOCELYN BALLIET, BRIELLE COFFEY, MIRAYA HUNTER, HOPE VAN TIEM. (COURTESY OF JOHN ALDEN CHAPTER, NSDAR)

## BY MB STAFF

MIDLAND, Mich. — Ten high school seniors from across the region were recognized this month as 2025 Good Citizens by the John Alden Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, celebrating their leadership, service and civic character during a ceremony at St. John's Episcopal Church.

Each student selected as their school's Good Citizen demonstrated dependability, service, leadership and patriotism — the four core values emphasized by DAR. Honorees received a special DAR pin and certificate during the event.

Students chosen at the school level are also eligible to compete in the DAR Good Citizens Essay Contest, which offers scholarship opportunities at the state, district and national levels.

Angelina Chen of Dow High School was named the John Alden Chapter winner and will

advance to the DAR of Michigan competition. Chen, the daughter of Xiaoguang Wang and Shawn Chen, received a cash award along with a special State of Michigan tribute signed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II, Sen. Roger Hauck and Rep. Bill G. Schuette.

Other students honored as Good Citizens include:

- **Hope Van Tiem**, Beaverton High School, daughter of Heather VanTiem and Scott McKenna
- **Miraya Hunter**, Bullock Creek High School, daughter of Stacey Hunter and Lee Hunter
- **Gracie Hutton**, Calvary Baptist Academy, daughter of Laura Hutton and Evan Hutton
- **Jocelyn Balliet**, Coleman High School, daughter of Amie Zylman and Jason Balliet

- **Brielle Coffey**, Freeland High School, daughter of Krista Bedford and Matt Bedford
- **Audrey Schmidt**, Gladwin High School, daughter of Melissa Schmidt and Ryan Schmidt
- **Payten Coggins**, Meridian Early College High School, daughter of Chantel Coggins and Anthony Coggins
- **Jazlyn Steins**, Midland High School, daughter of Fabiola Litherland and Keith Litherland
- **Carrie Cutshall**, Windover High School, daughter of Michelle Cutshall and Benjamin Cutshall

The ceremony featured guest speaker Christopher Corbat, a Midland Police officer and the 2025 Police Officer of the Year. Corbat spoke about the significance of the four core values

embodied by the Good Citizens award:

- **Dependability:** Being present for others.
- **Service:** A driving force behind his work in law enforcement and coaching.
- **Leadership:** Setting a positive example and “walking the walk.”
- **Patriotism:** Small gestures that strengthen a community.

Corbat encouraged the students to continue their efforts, telling them they represent “the best that we have to offer our communities.”

This year's essay prompt asked students to reflect on how the qualities of a good citizen can strengthen American democracy ahead of the nation's 250th birthday in 2026.

In her winning essay, Chen wrote that the fabric of the nation is woven from the contributions of all its citizens, histories and values. She described dependability as the “backbone” of democracy, service as the countless acts that uphold freedom, leadership as lifting others to reach their potential, and patriotism as loving the country enough to work for its growth. As the child of immigrants, she emphasized how precious democracy is and how these values keep the nation “strong, vibrant and uniquely ours.”

The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution is a women's service organization focused on historical preservation, education and patriotism, with members tracing their ancestry to individuals who supported the American Revolution.

For more information, email [jaldenregent@yahoo.com](mailto:jaldenregent@yahoo.com) or visit the John Alden Chapter DAR on Facebook.

# 6 fun things Michigan teens can do this winter

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — Winter in Michigan doesn't have to mean staying inside waiting for spring. Whether you love the snow or just want new things to do with friends, here are six teen-friendly activities to try across the state this season.

## Hit the best sledding hills in your area

Michigan is full of fast, snowy hills perfect for teens looking for a quick winter thrill. Local favorites include:

- Hoyt Park in Saginaw
- City Forest in Midland
- Bay City State Park
- Mott Park Recreation Area in Flint

Race your friends, wipe out (safely), then warm up with hot chocolate afterward.

## Go ice skating, indoors or outdoors

Open-skate hours across Michigan make skating an easy, low-cost winter hangout. Check out:

- Midland Civic Arena
- Saginaw Township's SK8 & Bounce
- Iceland Arena in Flint

Perfect for beginners, pros or anyone who just wants a fun night out.

## Try skiing or snowboarding at one of Michigan's most popular resorts

Michigan is known for great ski hills, and many resorts offer teen discounts or beginner lessons. Some top picks include:

- Boyne Mountain (Boyne Falls)



FILE PHOTO

- Crystal Mountain (Thompsonville)
- Mount Holly (Holly)
- Pine Knob Ski Resort (Clarkston)
- Nub's Nob (Harbor Springs)
- Cannonsburg (Belmont, near Grand Rapids)
- Shanty Creek Resort (Bellaire)

Whether you're carving down the slopes or learning to stay upright, skiing is one of winter's most exciting ways to get outside.

## Check out Michigan's holiday and winter light displays

Drive-through light shows and walk-through displays make for perfect winter outings. Local stops include:

- Saginaw's Wonderland Light Display

- Riverwalk Lights in Bay City
- Downtown Frankenmuth's holiday lights

Grab a playlist, pile into the car and enjoy the glow.

## Get creative with winter photography or content-making

Snowy trees, frozen rivers, glowing city lights and winter sunsets offer plenty of photo and video opportunities. Teens are using winter to build:

- Instagram aesthetic posts
- TikTok winter edits
- YouTube vlogs
- Personal photo journals

Winter is the perfect time to experiment with new angles and outdoor shots.

## Warm up indoors with fun hangouts

If the cold isn't your thing, there are still plenty of cozy ways to have fun:

- Youth centers hosting games, movies and workshops
- Libraries with crafts and study spaces
- Local cafés with seasonal drinks

Arcades, bowling alleys and trampoline parks for weekend meetups

Winter in Michigan is long — but it's also full of chances to make memories. Whether you want adventure or something low-key, bundle up, call a friend and try something new this season.



# Latino Banner

LIDER EN LA  
DIVERSIDAD

VAMOS ADELANTE

## Young teacher inspires MAC child artists

BY MIKE THOMPSON

SAGINAW, Mich. — Early this year, Estelle Hackos finished her studies at Eastern Michigan University and headed up the highway for her first career job at First Ward Community Center, as youth programs coordinator.

This would seem like enough of a full load for a young person finding her feet in a new role, in a new hometown.

Still, Hackos is donating volunteer time as teacher of a weekly children's art class at the Mexican American Council, 1537 South Washington.

Gatherings are free of charge from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on Thursdays.

On a recent evening, the MAC Center was like a one-room schoolhouse as Estelle guided a dozen youngsters, preschool through middle school ages. First they made paper airplanes and took part in a contest to see which would fly the farthest. Next she handed out small canvas squares and water colors with step-by-step tasks to create owls perched on tree limbs.

She seemed like an experienced school teacher as she was unfazed by some rambunctious behavior, including a 7-year-old who ran a few "laps" around the work table.

"This is art class," was her gentle rebuke. "Gym class will be another time."

And the young man finished his owl along with all the rest, thrilled to see the end product from his efforts.

Estelle grew up in a Denver



ESTRELLE HACKOS

exurb, Broomfield. She notes that her mom was a teacher, which has influenced her choice to work with children and to feel confident in her abilities, which were enhanced by her co-captain's role on the EMU Forensic Team, a perennial national power. Her social consciousness also was tapped during her years in Ypsilanti, where she attained

leadership in the student Senate and protested "Title 42" migrant crackdowns that started during Donald Trump's first term and continued for two years under Joe Biden.

She majored in political science, graduating magna cum laude, and minored in economics. She also was a standout soccer athlete in high school, which

was only natural because two sisters were good enough to compete on major college Division I squads

She could have made more money if she had stuck to her original plan for a business career, but that doesn't matter.

"I'm always trying to add something to my classes," she notes.

THE LATINO BANNER IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY GREAT LAKES BAY HEALTH CENTERS

# 5<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas K?Onda Bazaar returns to Saginaw

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — The Christmas K?Onda Bazaar will return to Saginaw on Saturday, Dec. 13, bringing a full day of holiday shopping, entertainment and community giving to Radiant Church of God.

Now in its fifth year, the annual bazaar will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 708 W. Genesee Road, offering local residents a chance to support small businesses while enjoying seasonal activities.

Vendor spaces are available for \$25, or \$20 with a non-perishable food donation. All donated items will benefit Colibri Hope COC Ministries, with a donation box available at the entrance for attendees who wish to contribute.

The event will feature a variety of vendors selling holiday crafts, handmade gifts, specialty items, and homemade treats. Organizers say the bazaar provides both an opportunity for community members to complete their holiday shopping and for small businesses and local artisans to connect with customers before Christmas.

A highlight of this year's event is a holiday baking competition, open to participants of all ages. The winner will receive a trophy along with official title recognition.

The bazaar is designed as a family-friendly celebration and typically draws a strong turnout from across the Great Lakes Bay Region. Community members are encouraged to attend, shop local, and support the charitable efforts tied to the event.

For more information, residents can contact event coordinator Miguel Torres at (989) 332-1107.

**5<sup>th</sup> Annual CHRISTMAS K?ONDA! BAZAAR**

**DECEMBER 13, 2025 10AM-3PM**

**\$25 Vendor Spot OR \$20 with non-perishable donation**

**Non-Perishable donations to benefit Colibri Hope COC Ministries**

**DONATION BOX AT ENTRANCE**

**Radiant Church of God  
708 W Genesee Rd Saginaw, MI**

**Baking Competition!  
Winner takes trophy & Title Recognition**

**MORE INFORMATION CONTACT MIGUEL TORRES (989) 332-1107**

Promotional Flyer by Colibri Yanza Promotions - Mari Vela (956) 560-4124



# TERCER JUEVES EVENTS

Date	Event & Location	Sponsor
Thursday January 15th	Tercer Jueves Business Networking Event Barton Malow. 26500 American Dr. Southfield, MI 48034. 5:30 - 7:30PM	Barton Malow
Wednesday January 28th	Annual Membership Meeting MHCC office. 1700 Harmon Rd. Suite one Auburn hills, MI 48326. 5:30 - 7:30PM	MHCC
Thursday February 19th	Tercer Jueves Business Networking Event TBD 5:30 - 7:30PM	Detroit Pistons
Thursday April 16th	Tercer Jueves Business Networking Event 91 N Saginaw St, Pontiac, MI 48342. 5:30 - 7:30PM	Centro Multicultural La Familia
Thursday June 18th	Tercer Jueves Business Networking Event TBD 5:30 - 7:30PM	Yanfeng
Thursday July 16th	Tercer Jueves Business Networking Event TBD 5:30 - 7:30PM	General Motors
Thursday September 17th	Tercer Jueves Business Networking Event SMTAutomation. 14100 33 Mile Rd. Bruce Township, MI 48065. 5:30 - 7:30PM	SMTAutomation

Dates and locations are subject to change without notice.

# MSU choirs and symphony to present 'Alegría Navideña' holiday concert at Wharton Center



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY CHOIR AND SYMPHONY

## BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan State University will celebrate one of its most beloved musical traditions next month as the Symphony Orchestra and university choirs unite for “Alegría Navideña (Christmas Joy)”, a festive holiday concert at the Wharton Center.

The performance is scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025, at 7:30 p.m., with tickets available exclusively through the Wharton Center.

Reserved seating is priced at \$24 for adults, \$22 for seniors, and \$14 for students, with an added \$1.50 convenience fee for online or phone purchases.

The program brings together some of MSU’s premier vocal ensembles — Choral Union, State Singers and University Chorale — under the direction of conductors Sandra Snow and Octavio Más-Arocas. The evening highlights music that captures

the spirit of the season through Spanish-language repertoire and Latin American rhythms.

### Featured selections include:

- El Mesías, the Spanish-language version of Part I of Handel’s Messiah
- Navidad Nuestra by composer Ariel Ramírez
- The world premiere of Festival of Lights by Lee R. Kesselman, set to English and Hebrew texts

The concert will close with a festive audience sing-along.

“Alegría Navideña” forms part of MSU’s Showcase Series, with generous support from Barbara and Bill Given, Kevin and Amy Guskiewicz, and Ann, John and Abby Lindley. The series is underwritten by the MSU Federal Credit Union.

More details and tickets are available through the Wharton Center Box Office or at [wharton-center.com](http://wharton-center.com).

## Discounted Tickets Available!

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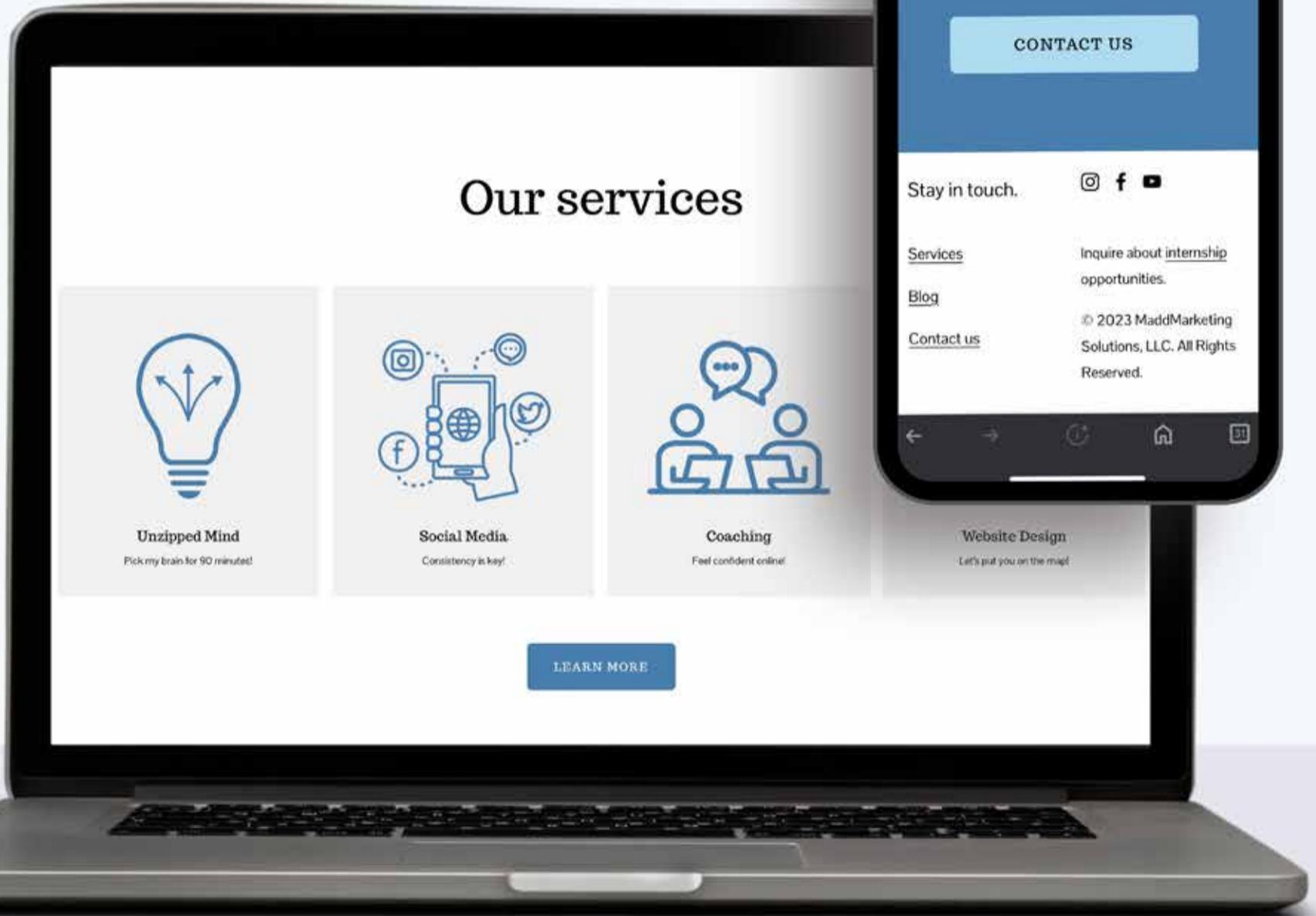
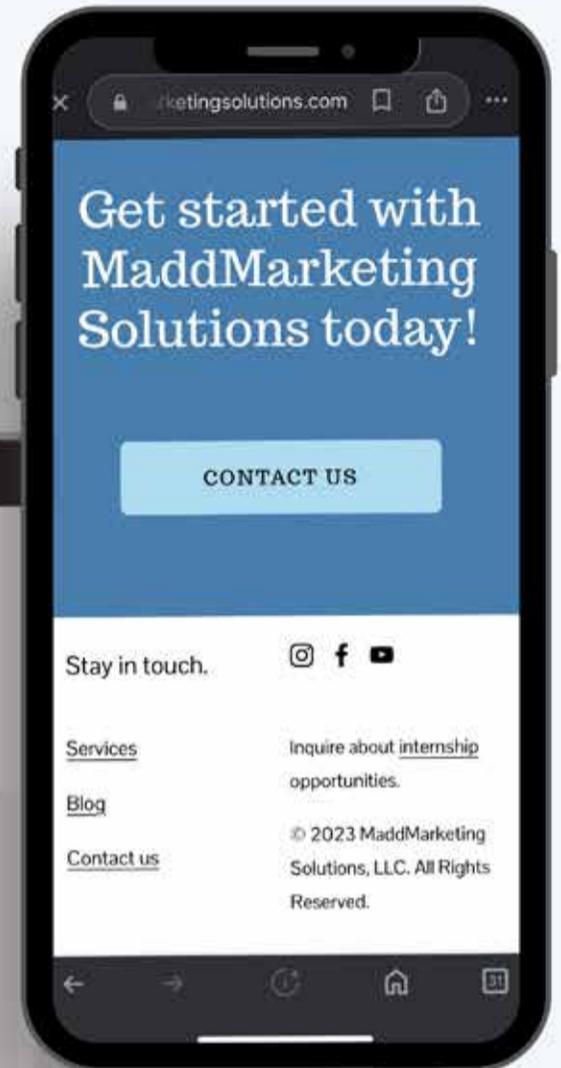
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## COMMUNITY

# HORIZONS Conference Center brings back Ultimate Small Business Holiday Party after five-year pause



HORIZONS ULTIMATE SMALL BUSINESS HOLIDAY PARTY (PHOTO CREDIT: NICOLE MCNEIL PHOTOGRAPHY)

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — After a five-year break, the HORIZONS Conference Center is reviving one of its most popular year-end traditions: the Ultimate Small Business Holiday Party, set for Thursday, Dec. 11, from 6 to 11 p.m.

The event is designed for small businesses, office teams, families and friend groups looking for a festive night out without having to plan a party of their own.

Groups that purchase tickets by Dec. 1 will be entered into a drawing for one of two exclusive prizes, available to groups of 30 or fewer:

- Assorted Half Sheet Grazing Table from Patisserie, including cookies, cupcakes, assorted mini desserts

and half bars.

- Party To Go Package from Michigan Cream & Sugar Ice Cream Company, featuring 3-ounce pre-scooped servings of handcrafted ice cream with napkins and spoons.

Winners may choose their prize and schedule delivery in 2025 or receive a voucher valid through May 1, 2026.

### Dinner, desserts and entertainment

Tickets are \$45 per person and include a full dinner, desserts, two drink tickets and a full night of entertainment. The dinner menu features:

- Imported and domestic cheeses
- Tossed salad

- Creamy red bliss and herb potato salad (gluten-free, vegetarian)
- Roasted Brussels sprouts salad with maple balsamic glaze (gluten-free, vegetarian)
- Carved herb-crusted slow-roasted prime rib
- Ricotta and Parmesan stuffed shells (vegetarian)
- Classic chicken piccata with lemon caper cream
- Mashed potato bar with numerous toppings
- White and wild rice blend with toasted almonds and kale (vegetarian)
- Steamed seasonal vegetables (gluten-free, vegetarian)

Guests will also enjoy Crème Brûlée Ice Cream from Michigan Cream & Sugar Ice Cream Company and a grazing table of min-

ature desserts from Patisserie.

The evening includes a name-brand cash bar with beer, wine and liquor options, plus entertainment by Rusch Entertainment, a large dance floor and a digital photo booth.

### Tickets and reservations

Those interested in securing a table can contact the HORIZONS Conference Center sales office at (989) 799-4122. Additional information is available online through the event page.

The Ultimate Small Business Holiday Party offers a turnkey celebration option for workplaces and groups looking to mark the holiday season together — without coordinating their own event — as the tradition returns to HORIZONS for the first time since 2019.

## COMMUNITY

## Isabella Bank launches “Holiday with Heart” campaign to donate \$24,000 to Mid-Michigan nonprofits



ISABELLA BANK

BY MB STAFF

MIDLAND, Mich. — Isabella Bank is launching a new year-end charitable initiative that will direct \$24,000 to nonprofit organizations across Mid-Michigan, inviting both employees and community members to take part in selecting the recipients.

The campaign, called “Holiday with Heart,” marks a renewed focus on community strengthening and local support as the bank highlights organizations making a difference throughout the region.

Bank employees began the process by nominating nonprofits that inspire them. From those

nominations, eight finalists were selected to receive funding based on public voting:

- Isabella Community Soup Kitchen
- Mid-Michigan Community Action
- Midland County Food Assistance Network
- Emmaus House of Saginaw
- Boys and Girls Clubs of the Great Lakes Bay Region
- Child Advocacy of Gratiot County
- Angels of Action of Mecosta County
- Montcalm County Habitat for Humanity

Each of the eight organizations is guaranteed a portion of the \$24,000, with award levels determined by voting results:

- Grand Gift: \$10,000
- Impact Leader: \$5,000
- Difference Makers: \$2,500 each (two awards)
- Community Gifts: \$1,000 each (four awards)

Public voting runs Nov. 24 through Dec. 8 on the Isabella Bank website. Community members can also follow the bank’s Facebook page for daily profiles spotlighting each nominated nonprofit and the work they do in their respective counties.

Neil McDonnell, president of Isabella Bank, said the initiative reflects the bank’s longstanding connection to the communities it serves and its interest in supporting organizations that directly impact the lives of local residents.

The campaign arrives at a time of heightened need for many regional nonprofits, particularly those focused on housing, food assistance, youth support and emergency services.

For more information or to cast a vote, residents can visit [isabellabank.com](http://isabellabank.com).

Established  
November 26, 1935

# Cheers

# 90<sup>th</sup>

• BIRTHDAY •



## COMMUNITY

## VCD empowers youth and families at community gathering



TOM MILLER, PRESIDENT OF SAGINAW FUTURE



KYLE MCCREE CONSUMERS ENERGY DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS



TEAM ONE CREDIT UNION REPRESENTATIVES, BRANCH MANAGER MICHAEL HAYES AND DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS KIM SCOFIELD

## BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — Victorious Community Development (VCD) recently hosted a powerful Community Gathering as part of its Safe City Initiative, created to empower families and strengthen neighborhoods throughout Saginaw. The event brought together strong partners and community leaders in support of the organization's mission.

VCD welcomed several key community partners, including:

- Tom Miller Jr., President of Saginaw Future
- Kyle McCree, Consumers Energy Director of Community Affairs
- Team One Credit Union representatives, including Branch Manager Michael Hayes and Director of Community Relations Kim Scofield

Each partner shared important information with families, including new job opportunities, pathways to stable employment, and financial strategies to help households meet everyday needs.

Consumers Energy also pro-

vided winter heating tips and resources to help families keep their homes safe, warm, and energy-efficient in the months ahead. Children at the event enjoyed time with the Saginaw Police Department, whose officers played games, interacted with youth, and answered questions — positive exchanges that help build trust and show young people that officers are allies within the community.

VCD expressed gratitude for the support of the MCOLES grant, which helps the organization build a safer city while giving youth opportunities to learn how they can be part of the solution. The grant enables VCD to offer tools, mentoring, and hands-on engagement that encourage young people to become leaders in their own neighborhoods.

The organization also reported that it has helped more than 20 community members secure employment at Hemlock Semiconductor, Corning, Covenant Healthcare and other local employers — moving families toward stability and long-term success.

Together with its partners, VCD continues working to build a stronger, safer Saginaw, one family, one opportunity and one act of empowerment at a time.



PASTOR CHRIS PRYOR, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF VICTORIOUS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND CITY OF SAGINAW POLICE OFFICERS ENGAGE WITH YOUTH ATTENDEES.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS ATTEND VCD'S SAFE CITY INITIATIVE EVENT.

COMMUNITY

# MDOT to begin \$1.6 million Veterans Memorial Bridge improvements in Bay City on Dec. 1

BY MB STAFF

BAY CITY, Mich. — The Michigan Department of Transportation will begin a \$1.6 million maintenance and improvement project on the M-25 Veterans Memorial Bridge in Bay City on Monday, Dec. 1, marking the start of a four-month effort to repair and preserve one of the city's key river crossings.

The project includes concrete deck patching and repairs, painting, and mechanical work designed to ensure the continued safe and reliable operation of the bridge. Work is scheduled to continue through March 31, 2026.



VETERANS MEMORIAL BRIDGE IN BAY CITY

To limit disruptions for motorists, MDOT will maintain traffic flow with nighttime single-

lane closures in both directions from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. daily.

MDOT officials say nighttime

work is being used to minimize traffic impacts, especially with the nearby Lafayette Avenue Bridge already closed. Lane closures are required to give crews a safe work zone while also protecting motorists traveling through the area.

The Veterans Memorial Bridge is a critical connector for residents, commuters and commercial traffic in Bay City. MDOT reports that the work will extend the service life of the structure and help avoid more significant repairs in the future.

Additional information about the project and statewide road work updates is available at [Michigan.gov/MDOT](https://Michigan.gov/MDOT).



THE NEIGHB

## "Pancakes and Storytime with Santa

Join us for breakfast and story time with Santa & his elves!

Cookie frosting, hot chocolate station, movie, and more.

**The NeighB COMMUNITY CENTER**  
3145 Russell Street Saginaw, Mi

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6th**  
11AM-1pm

\*Christmas Pajamas Are Welcomed

Sign up is required.  
<https://forms.gle/wW8PDS1Mua1ndXAE8>



## END OF YEAR CELEBRATION

2025



DATE/TIME: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11TH | 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

LOCATION: 1708 JOHNSON ST. SAGINAW, MI

HIGHLIGHTS: FOOD • MUSIC • FELLOWSHIP

FREE & OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY!  
LET'S CLOSE OUT THE YEAR TOGETHER!

## COMMUNITY

## Community Voices: tributes to Coach Thomas



WILLIE BUTLER

A consistent companion for Coach Thomas during the Trojans' final seasons before the Saginaw United merger was Willie "Bud" Butler, Class of '57, which made him the elder by nearly a decade over young Marshall, Class of '66. Alexis, the first of Coach's five daughters, would drive them to the tournament games and listen to the chatter.

Bud was so proud to be a Trojan that he would dress up like he was going to church. He compared the 1996 state champs under Coach Thomas to the undefeated 1962 team with Ernie Thompson.

"They played hard and they were deep in talent," Butler notes. "They learned to play together."

BY MIKE THOMPSON

Marshall Thomas, for whom the Saginaw High School gymnasium is now named within the middle school, is receiving praise and thank-yous from across the Saginaw area upon his passing on Nov. 17 at age 78. On Nov. 28, visitation at Evans-Browne Funeral Home was packed with well-wishers from the first hour onward, followed by the memorial service on Nov. 29 at Victorious Believers Ministries to avoid an attendance overflow at his home church, Holy Communion Gospel Center. Long-time Saginaw News sports reporter Hugh Bernreuter described him as a "coach, teacher, tutor, counselor, administrator, deacon and community volunteer." At Michigan Banner, we join the tributes with stories from a foursome of everyday folks who demonstrate how Coach Thomas touched thousands of lives.



TONY TATUM

On Saginaw High's 1996 state championship team, Tony Tatum says he would feel angry before Coach Thomas yelled at him, not after the fact as one might suppose.

He might feel upset about misplays on the practice court, or simply be worn out from the rigors of the intense physical conditioning.

Tony recalls, "You may not appreciate his tone at the time, but it was positive, like 'get up' and 'no excuses' and 'hustle' and 'show some heart.' He made you feel better and do better. All the students, not just the players — he made all of us better."

As a 6-foot-2 center, Tatum faced foes who were up to a half-foot taller.

"And I was only 180 pounds,"

he notes, with pride in taking down the Goliaths. This reflects the '96 team's undersized, underdog status that made waves with a comeback from 19 points down in the state semis.

Coach Thomas would tell Tony, on defense, "Get in position, the right position to deflect or bother the pass. Hustle on every single play. You are faster and in better shape, so wear him down."

Tatum, now a professional in Atlanta's music industry, arranged a reunion six years ago that brought a dozen Trojans teammates back together. After so many times when Coach went into his own pocket to take his young men to McDonald's, it was their chance to treat Coach Thomas and to say "thank you."



BOBBI NORMAN

She didn't even attend Saginaw High, but Bobbi Norman says her basketball life was influenced by Coach Thomas.

He was a friend of the family, a golf partner with her dad, and so he was aware of their shared love of hoop. All five of his own offspring are girls. He had coached the Lady Trojans for three seasons to start the 1980s, just prior to the years when Bobbi plied the hardwood for the Bridgeport High Lady Bearcats, graduating in 1985.

The connection began with the former Friendship Games, which paired Saginaw with Sault Ste. Marie, Canada.

"He would watch me and critique my game," says Bobbi, who was a 5-foot-6 wing player. "He taught me to look for more consistency, and that you don't have to be a shining star to make an impact for your team. If you are not a star player, just get out there and hustle."

"I don't know how he kept up with me playing in Bridgeport, because he had just started coaching the varsity boys at Saginaw High, but somehow he did — from seeing the reports in the newspaper or the film on TV highlights."

Prior to her 1994 move to Atlanta to enlist as a UPS package car driver, Norman coached at Bridgeport Junior High School. In her new home, she oversees the Atlanta Select boys AAU squad.

She concludes, "Coach taught us that you have to evolve as a player, to compete outside of your own little box."



REGGIE ROBINSON

As a South Side elementary coach, Reg Robinson was the first youth coach for many future players, and when Coach Thomas needed some help with the jayvee team at SHS, he trusted Reggie to fill in.

There was only one issue: From one end of the gym, Coach Thomas could not hear what Coach Robinson was telling the kids at the other.

"I've never been a yeller," Reg explains, with a chuckle. "Coach Thomas would holler all the time, but it was always positive. Sometimes he would ask me, 'How do you get the kids to play without raising your voice?'"

The golf course, home of a main hobby for both, was the one place where each would keep his vocal cords quiet. Coach T struck enough straight tee shots that he recorded five holes-in-one, while Robinson has recorded seven aces.

"He could really play the game," Reg says, "back when he was in his prime."

COMMUNITY

# FLINT FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Rotary Park | 555 Saginaw St. | Downtown Flint



**Friday, December 5, 2025 | 5-8pm**

- ❄️ City & Tree Lighting
- ❄️ Free Kids Coats & Ski Goggles
- ❄️ Holiday Drinks & Treats
- ❄️ Santa Claus

- ❄️ Free Ice Skating with Flint Firebirds' Hot Wing
- ❄️ Ugly Christmas Sweater Party featuring DJ Sic Musiq
- ❄️ Live Music featuring High Definition with Lateena Martin

the<sup>fm</sup>.org











## \$10

### Builds 1 Box

BOXES -ON- BREAK works to ensure K-12 students in Saginaw have access to easy to open, easy to prepare meals during Winter Break and other extended school recesses.

Many children rely on school for breakfast and lunch, and over the 16-day Winter Break in 2025, we believe no child should go hungry!

That's why we're committed to providing, packing, and delivering 500 food boxes directly to students doorsteps in Saginaw December 28th & 29th.




More information: 989-272-2526  
[www.BOBSaginaw.org](http://www.BOBSaginaw.org)



## Join us for the YMCA of Saginaw Christmas Prayer Breakfast.

**WHERE:** THE YMCA OF SAGINAW FIELDHOUSE  
1915 FORDNEY ST., SAGINAW, MI 48601.

**WHEN:** FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2025. 8:00 A.M. TO 9:30 A.M.

**WHAT TO EXPECT:** THIS IS AN INFORMAL GATHERING TO CELEBRATE THE SEASON WITH PRAYER AND BREAKFAST. **ALL ARE WELCOME.**

8:00 A.M. REGISTRATION COFFEE AND CONVERSATION.  
8:15 A.M. WELCOMING AND BREAKFAST.  
GOOD WILL DONATIONS ARE APPRECIATED.  
8:30 A.M. PROGRAM BEGINS. FEATURING:

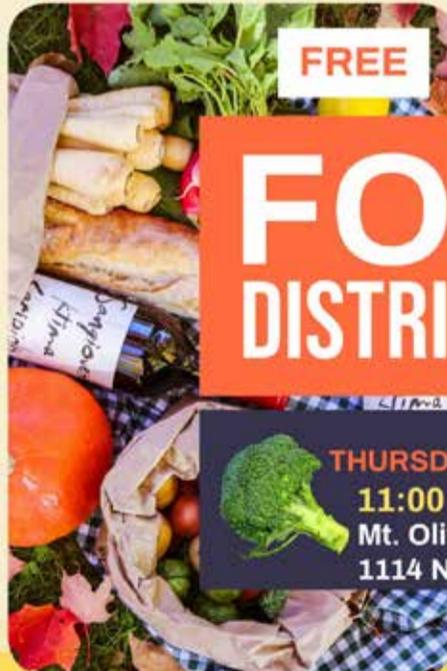
- \* BISHOP RON FRIERSON PASTOR OF NEW COVENAT CHURCH CENTER.
- \* LITURGICAL PRAISE DANCE MINISTRY - ANOINTED WOMEN OF DIVINE PURPOSE AND POWER (AWDPP) SVSU STUDENTS.

9:30 PROGRAM CLOSSES WITH A COMMUNITY BLESSING FROM YMCA OF SAGINAW PRESIDENT AND CEO STEVE MEYER.



PLEASE REGISTER FOR PLANNING PURPOSES BY SCANNING THE QR CODE OR CONTACTING DAN WEIGL AT [DWEIGL@SAGINAWYMCA.ORG](mailto:DWEIGL@SAGINAWYMCA.ORG) OR CALLING 989-753-7721 EXT. 205.

## Saginaw City Wide Food Collective



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1114 N. 6th Avenue

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AVAILABLE FOR **SAGINAW CITY RESIDENTS**

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*"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me..."*

## POLITICS

## Forum to host all 10 candidates in race for vacant 35<sup>th</sup> District Senate seat

BY MB STAFF

UNIVERSITY CENTER, MI — Voters in the Great Lakes Bay Region will have a rare opportunity to hear directly from all 10 candidates running in the special election to fill Michigan's long-vacant 35th District Senate seat during a public forum on Tuesday, Dec. 2.

The event, co-hosted by the NAACP Saginaw Branch and the League of Women Voters, comes at a critical moment for residents in Saginaw, Midland and Bay counties. The Senate seat has been unfilled for nearly a year, leaving thousands of constituents without representation in Lansing during that period.

The candidate forum will begin at 6 p.m. at the Delta College main campus in the lecture theater of the G-Wing. Delta College President Michael Gavin will moderate the discussion, marking one of his final public appearances before stepping down from his role.

Organizers say all 10 candidates — six Democrats and four Republicans — have accepted the invitation to participate. The format will give each candidate time to share their background, explain their reasons for seeking the seat, and outline positions on policy issues that matter to voters across the region.

NAACP Saginaw Branch President Terry Pruitt said the goal is to provide residents with clear, direct access to the individuals seeking to represent them.

"This forum will afford citizens in the region an opportunity to hear directly from the announced candidates," Pruitt said.

MIDLAND, MI SIGN

The 35th District, which covers portions of Saginaw, Midland and Bay counties, has been the focus of growing public attention as the vacancy has stretched on.

Tuesday's forum is expected to be one of the most comprehensive opportunities for voters to evaluate the full field of candidates ahead of the 2026 special

election.

For more information, residents may contact the NAACP Saginaw Branch at (989) 992-1816.

# Michigan Supreme Court renames DEI commission amid political debate



COURTESY PHOTO

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — The Michigan Supreme Court has renamed and redefined the mission of one of its key commissions, removing references to diversity, equity and inclusion as debates over DEI continue to dominate national politics.

In an order issued Wednesday, the court announced that its Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion — formed in 2021 — will now be known as the Commission on Fairness and Public Trust. The revised panel will shift its stated purpose away from explicitly addressing demographic disparities within the justice system and toward ensuring that “all those served by the justice system are heard, valued, and respected.”

Justice Elizabeth Welch, who served as one of the commission’s initial co-chairs, acknowledged the political climate surround-

ing the decision in a concurring opinion.

“The Commission became aware of two seemingly contradictory facts: that ‘DEI’ is now a polarizing concept in American life, while, at the same time, a commitment to fairness, acceptance of others, and equity is not,” Welch wrote, calling DEI a “political lightning rod.”

The commission’s structure — including membership and terms — will remain largely the same. However, its responsibilities will broaden to address any disparities in the courts rather than focusing specifically on demographic ones. The change arrives as DEI programs face heightened scrutiny across state and federal levels; on his first day in office, President Donald Trump labeled such initiatives “radical” and “shameful discrimination.”

The decision drew criticism from some advocacy groups, including Michigan Voices.

“The action of the Michigan Supreme Court is disappointing,” said Lynna Kaucke, the organization’s director of communications and coalitions. “What remains to be seen is if this name change negatively impacts the original intent of the commission; the consequences of that could devastate the progress that many of Michigan’s marginalized communities have made in recent years.”

Kaucke argued that a continued focus on fairness requires more, not less, commitment to DEI principles.

“Now more than ever we must remain committed to ensuring that no matter what you look [like], where you come from, or how much money you have in your wallet you should have equitable access to all the resources and opportunities that are necessary to thrive,” she said. “Removing references to DEI amounts to nothing more than kowtow-

ing to the Administration’s continued attacks on marginalized communities.”

Justice Brian Zahra, the court’s lone Republican, issued a dissenting opinion questioning the transparency of the change.

“What does it say about our commitment to transparency that this Court is willing to scrape the name off its DEI Commission at a time when DEI just so happens to be losing its popularity among the people?” Zahra wrote. He argued that the shift alters the commission’s name but not its authority or original mission. “This is a DEI Commission, no matter what name the Court now intends to give it or how vaguely the Court intends to phrase its goals.”

Zahra added that the court should have kept the original DEI label and allowed the public to judge the commission’s work on its merits.

Welch countered Zahra’s transparency concerns by pointing to similarities between the new commission and the Justice for All Commission, which Zahra chairs. Both, she noted, aim to improve access and fairness in the legal system.

“The FPT Commission was created precisely to ensure that we center service to the people of the state and remain steadfast in our commitment to transparency, best practices for retaining and attracting talent, and processes that ensure dignity and fairness for every person who walks through our courthouse doors,” Welch wrote.

The order marks a significant rebranding of the Supreme Court’s equity-focused work, even as debate continues over whether the change reflects a substantive shift in direction or a symbolic response to broader political pressures.

# Holiday Cheer is Here!



Fun to give and even more fun to get, Holiday Instant Tickets from the Michigan Lottery are bursting with cheer. Everyone loves to scratch and play for a chance to win up to **\$500,000** instantly. Whether tucked into stockings or handed out with a grin, these festive tickets are the kind of surprise that makes spirits bright. This year, gift something wonderful with Holiday Instant Tickets.



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Overall odds of winning Holiday Colors: 1 in 4.66. Overall odds of winning Holiday Doubler: 1 in 4.46. Overall odds of winning NATIONAL LAMPOON'S CHRISTMAS VACATION: 1 in 3.76.  
Overall odds of winning 25 Days of Winning: 1 in 3.60. Knowing your limits is always the best bet. Call 1-800-GAMBLER for confidential help.



## HEALTH

# CMU College of Medicine receives historic \$80M in gifts to expand medical education in Saginaw



CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — Central Michigan University's College of Medicine announced Wednesday that it has received two landmark \$40 million gifts from Covenant HealthCare and MyMichigan Health, the largest philanthropic commitments in the university's history. The combined \$80 million investment launches CMU's "Advancing Health Together" initiative and paves the way for a new medical education building in Saginaw.

CMU President Neil MacKinnon said the partnership represents a united commitment to addressing both the region's health care challenges and long-

term economic needs.

"We are thrilled to announce this extraordinary collaboration that brings two of our state's most respected health care systems together with our university to strengthen medical education, enhance the medical student experience, improve patient outcomes and expand healthcare access here in the Great Lakes Bay Region," MacKinnon said. "This tremendous partnership will have a positive effect on lives and communities for generations to come."

Under the agreement, the College of Medicine will adopt a new name — the Covenant HealthCare College of Medicine at Central Michigan University — and relocate to a new home with-

in the CMU MyMichigan Health Medical Education Building on MyMichigan Health's Saginaw campus.

### Health systems cite longstanding commitment to training future providers

Leaders from both health systems said the initiative strengthens the medical talent pipeline needed across Michigan.

Covenant HealthCare President and CEO Beth Charlton said the gift reflects decades of investment in medical training.

"Meeting our mission of extraordinary care for every generation starts with supporting education and training for the next generation of extraordinary

physicians," Charlton said. "Individuals and families across the Great Lakes Bay Region are experiencing an increasingly critical need for well-educated medical professionals."

MyMichigan Health President and CEO Dr. Lydia Watson said the collaboration builds on more than a decade of partnership with CMU's medical school.

"This next chapter will not only help grow the volume of health care providers but also continue to pave the way for a future where health care is more accessible, equitable, and effective for all," Watson said.

### Addressing statewide physician shortages

The investment comes as Michigan faces significant gaps in healthcare access, especially in rural and underserved communities. Currently, 74 of Michigan's 83 counties hold at least a partial designation as health professional shortage areas.

"The need for a strong, community-oriented medical education program and physician pipeline has never been greater," MacKinnon said.

Established in 2010, CMU's College of Medicine grew rapidly, doubling its class size from 60 to more than 100 students per year. First- and second-year students attend class in Mount Pleasant while third- and fourth-year students complete clinical education in Saginaw — a split model that has presented challenges.

Dr. Tina Thompson, interim dean of the College of Medicine, said consolidating students in

**See CMU, Page 24**

## HEALTH

## CMU, from HEALTH, pg 23

one location will improve educational outcomes.

“Bringing the majority of our medical students together into a single geographic area will provide greater opportunities for peer-to-peer mentoring and student engagement,” Thompson said.

### New Saginaw-based medical campus part of Medical Diamond project

The new medical school facility will be part of the Medical Diamond, a growing healthcare hub along Saginaw's riverfront that aims to become the state's third major bioscience center and the only one in northern Michigan. The project includes multiple healthcare partners and

a planned public riverfront park.

With the gifts secured, CMU will begin designing its new education building and hopes to break ground in 2026 while continuing to fundraise toward its \$100 million goal.

### Broader impact for CMU and the region

Consolidating medical education in Saginaw will open space for expanded health programs on CMU's Mount Pleasant campus, including its new four-year nursing program.

“CMU, Covenant HealthCare and MyMichigan Health have a shared commitment to improving the lives of patients and strengthening the communities we serve,” MacKinnon said. “This

unique, collaborative partnership is a perfect alignment of our missions and visions.”

According to the university, CMU's College of Medicine is one of the nation's top programs for producing physicians who serve in rural and underserved areas. The school receives more than 7,000 applications annually for 104 seats and has achieved a 100% residency match rate for two consecutive years.

Approximately half of CMU's medical graduates choose to practice in Michigan.

### About the participating organizations

Covenant HealthCare, the largest employer in Saginaw County, provides a comprehen-

sive continuum of care and was named one of Michigan's “Best Regional Hospitals” by U.S. News & World Report in 2025.

MyMichigan Health, headquartered in Midland, operates medical centers across 26 counties and employs more than 10,500 people. The system provided more than \$243 million in community benefits in fiscal year 2025.

Both organizations have longstanding roles as teaching hospitals and clinical training sites for CMU medical students.

More information about the Advancing Health Together initiative is available through CMU, Covenant HealthCare and MyMichigan Health.

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[CovenantCancerCare.com](https://CovenantCancerCare.com)

\*National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers

# Nominations open for Michigan's 2026 Hometown Health Hero awards



FILE PHOTO

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — The Michigan Public Health Week Partnership is seeking nominations from across the state for its 2026 Hometown Health Hero awards, which honor individuals and organizations making significant contributions to the health of their communities.

Nominations are due Friday, Dec. 19, and must be submitted online at [Michigan.gov/MPHW](https://Michigan.gov/MPHW).

The Hometown Health Hero awards are presented each spring during Michigan Public Health Week, which is observed in conjunction with National Public Health Week. Award recipients will be recognized at a reception on Wednesday, March 18, in Lansing.

The partnership — a collaboration of 13 health, academic and

community organizations — said the awards are intended to highlight local efforts that preserve and improve community health, from addressing emerging health threats to advancing long-term wellness initiatives.

“As we look toward a healthier future for every Michigan resident, it’s important that we recognize the individuals and organizations leading the way,” said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, the state’s chief medical executive. “The 2026 Hometown Health Hero Awards honor those addressing critical public health issues and creating safer, stronger communities.”

Each year, the American Public Health Association sets a national theme and outreach campaign for National Public Health Week to educate the public, policymakers and health care providers on key health issues. Michi-

gan’s observance aligns with that effort while spotlighting local champions.

The Michigan Public Health Week Partnership includes:

- Central Michigan University Public Health Programs
- Eastern Michigan University Master of Public Health Education
- Grand Valley State University Master of Public Health Program
- Michigan Association of Counties
- Michigan Association for Local Public Health
- Michigan Association of Medical Examiners
- Michigan Health & Hospital Association
- Michigan Public Health Association
- Michigan Public Health

Institute

- Michigan State University Charles Stewart Mott Department of Public Health
- University of Michigan School of Public Health
- Wayne State University College of Human Medicine Family Medicine program
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

The partnership works to increase the visibility of public health accomplishments and to recognize those who help improve health outcomes at the local level.

Questions about the nomination process can be directed to Jim Koval at [KovalJ@michigan.gov](mailto:KovalJ@michigan.gov).

## HEALTH

# Michigan surpasses doula enrollment goals as state expands maternal health support



FILE PHOTO

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan is seeing significant progress in its effort to expand maternal health support, with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services announcing that more than 1,000 doulas are now listed on the state's official doula registry—doubling its original goal three years ahead of schedule.

As of September, over 700 registered doulas have become Medicaid-enrolled providers, ensuring that every county in Michigan has access to doula services for Medicaid-eligible families. The milestone exceeds the target outlined in the 2024 Advancing Healthy Births Plan, which aimed for 500 registered doulas by 2028.

“Michigan's investment in

doulas is transforming maternal health outcomes across the state,” said MDHHS Director Elizabeth Hertel. “When families have access to trusted birth support, we see healthier parents, healthier babies and stronger communities.”

### Doula care linked to improved birth outcomes

Doulas are trained birth professionals who provide emotional, physical and informational support before, during and after childbirth. Research cited by MDHHS shows that doula-assisted births are:

- Four times less likely to result in low birth weight
- Two times less likely to involve complications for parent or baby

- More likely to initiate breastfeeding

State officials say these outcomes underscore the importance of continuing to expand doula access, particularly in communities disproportionately affected by maternal and infant health disparities.

### A collaborative statewide effort

Michigan became one of the first states in the country to provide Medicaid coverage for doula services, establishing coverage in January 2023 and expanding it in October 2024. The MDHHS Doula Initiative followed, focusing on building a sustainable doula network and providing resources for both providers and families.

That work includes:

- Supporting a growing Medicaid doula network
- Managing the state's official doula registry
- Offering technical assistance to doula providers and partners
- Facilitating the Michigan Doula Advisory Council

Doula Advisory Council member Jessica English, a birth doula trainer and owner of Birth Kalamazoo, noted that doula voices have been central to shaping Michigan's Medicaid policies. “With that collaborative approach, in less than three years Michigan has become a national leader in Medicaid coverage for doula services,” she said.

Full-spectrum doula and childbirth educator Erika Millender emphasized the impact for families statewide, particularly Black and Indigenous families who experience higher rates of pregnancy-related complications. “Doulas are absolutely vital to improving birth outcomes,” she said. “When we intentionally focus on improving outcomes of Black and Indigenous families ... we create a wave of safety and dignity that genuinely improves the experience for everyone.”

### Continued work ahead

MDHHS says the rapid expansion of doula access reflects a long-term commitment to reducing infant and maternal mortality across the state. The agency intends to continue strengthening partnerships with doulas, health providers and community organizations as the initiative evolves.

More information about the Doula Initiative is available at the state's website or by contacting MDHHS-MIDoula@michigan.gov.

## EDUCATION

# 68 Michigan schools exit state support after showing gains in student outcomes

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — Sixty-eight Michigan schools have improved enough in student performance to exit state support, according to the 2024–25 Michigan School Index results released Wednesday by the Michigan Department of Education.

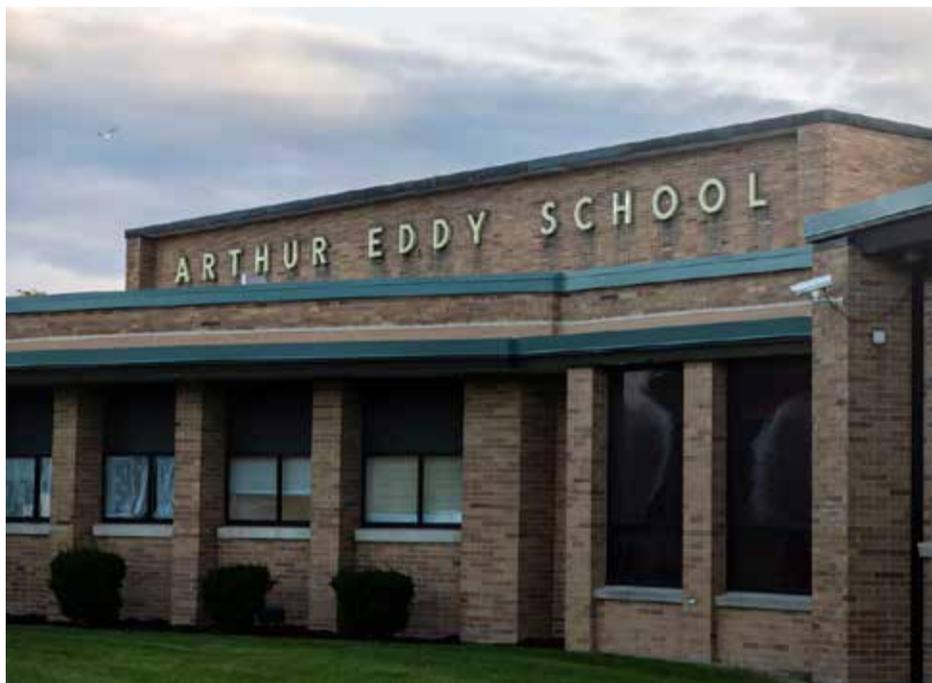
The schools — including 33 previously under district partnership agreements — no longer meet the criteria for additional state intervention, reflecting academic gains in areas such as English language arts, math and graduation rates.

Interim State Superintendent Dr. Sue C. Carnell said the progress reflects the collective work of educators, families, district leaders, community partners and MDE staff.

“With the release of today’s results, we see what’s possible when we work together,” Carnell said. “These 68 schools no longer require additional supports because of the hard work by local district and intermediate school district staff, children, parents, community members and MDE employees.”

## New support agreements for 113 schools

While dozens of schools improved enough to exit state oversight, MDE will now enter into partnership agreements with 57 school districts to support 113 schools identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) — Michigan’s designation for the lowest-performing 5% of schools or those with a four-year graduation rate below 67%.



ARTHUR EDDY ACADEMY

These schools will receive intensive support from MDE and their intermediate school districts to set 18-month benchmarks and 36-month outcome targets for academic improvement.

Alternative education and virtual schools in the bottom tier will receive tailored support through the Office of Educational Supports rather than full partnership agreements.

## Michigan School Index: What it measures

The Michigan School Index is the state’s federally required accountability system, identifying schools needing assistance and measuring outcomes such as:

- Student proficiency in math and English language arts
- Graduation rates
- Student growth
- Attendance
- School quality indicators

Statewide results showed slight gains across several measures compared with the prior year.

Schools can exit CSI or Additional Targeted Support (ATS) status when they demonstrate improved performance over a two-year period.

## Additional Targeted Support: 15 schools exit early

This is not an identification year for ATS schools, but MDE offered early exit opportunities. Fifteen ATS schools statewide met the criteria to leave that designation early.

## Schools exiting state support

Of the 68 schools exiting support, many are located in Detroit, Lansing, Saginaw and other urban districts, while others represent charter, suburban and rural communities. Schools exit-

ing CSI include:

- Academy for Business and Technology High School (Melvindale)
- Beecher High School
- Eisenhower School (Flint)
- Ottawa Hills High School (Grand Rapids)
- Arthur Eddy Academy and Jessie Loomis School (Saginaw Public Schools)
- Saginaw Preparatory Academy
- Multiple Detroit Public Schools Community District buildings, including Central High School, Burns Elementary-Middle School, Martin Luther King Jr. Senior High School, and others

Schools exiting ATS include Burton Glen Charter Academy, Bow Elementary-Middle School, Holt Junior High School, Spain Elementary-Middle School and several others across southeast and mid-Michigan.

A complete list is available on MDE’s Michigan School Index webpage.

## Looking ahead

Federal law requires MDE to publish the Michigan School Index annually under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). State officials say the results help direct support where it is most needed and recognize districts making progress.

More information, including historical index results and current school identification lists, is available at [Michigan.gov/MDE](https://Michigan.gov/MDE).

## EDUCATION

# Mott Community College receives state grant to expand access for adult learners in Genesee County

BY MB STAFF

FLINT, Mich. — Mott Community College has been awarded a Reconnect Community Action Grant from the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP), a move that will expand access to postsecondary education for adults ages 25 and older and strengthen workforce collaboration across Genesee County.

The funding is part of an \$8.1 million statewide investment designed to support adult learners, boost educational attainment and improve workforce readiness in communities across Michigan.

“These investments reflect

our deep commitment to adult learners and the communities that support them,” said Dr. Beverly Walker-Griffea, director of MiLEAP. “By working with local colleges and community leaders, we are removing barriers to education and helping more Michiganders earn the credentials they need to thrive in today’s economy.”

### Countywide coalition to expand services

Mott Community College will lead the Community Action Genesee Collaborative, a coalition of regional partners working to build new outreach, support and career navigation services. Partners include:

- City of Flint
- Flint & Genesee Group
- GST Michigan Works
- GCCCAN
- Catholic Charities
- Latinx Center
- The Disability Network
- Greater Flint Health Coalition
- United Way’s 211
- GearUp2Lead
- MCC University Center
- Genesee County Commissioners

“This grant will allow us to increase adult student access, improve organizational collaboration and maintain alignment with our community’s work-

force needs,” said Shaunda Richardson-Snell, president of Mott Community College.

### College and career navigators to support adults

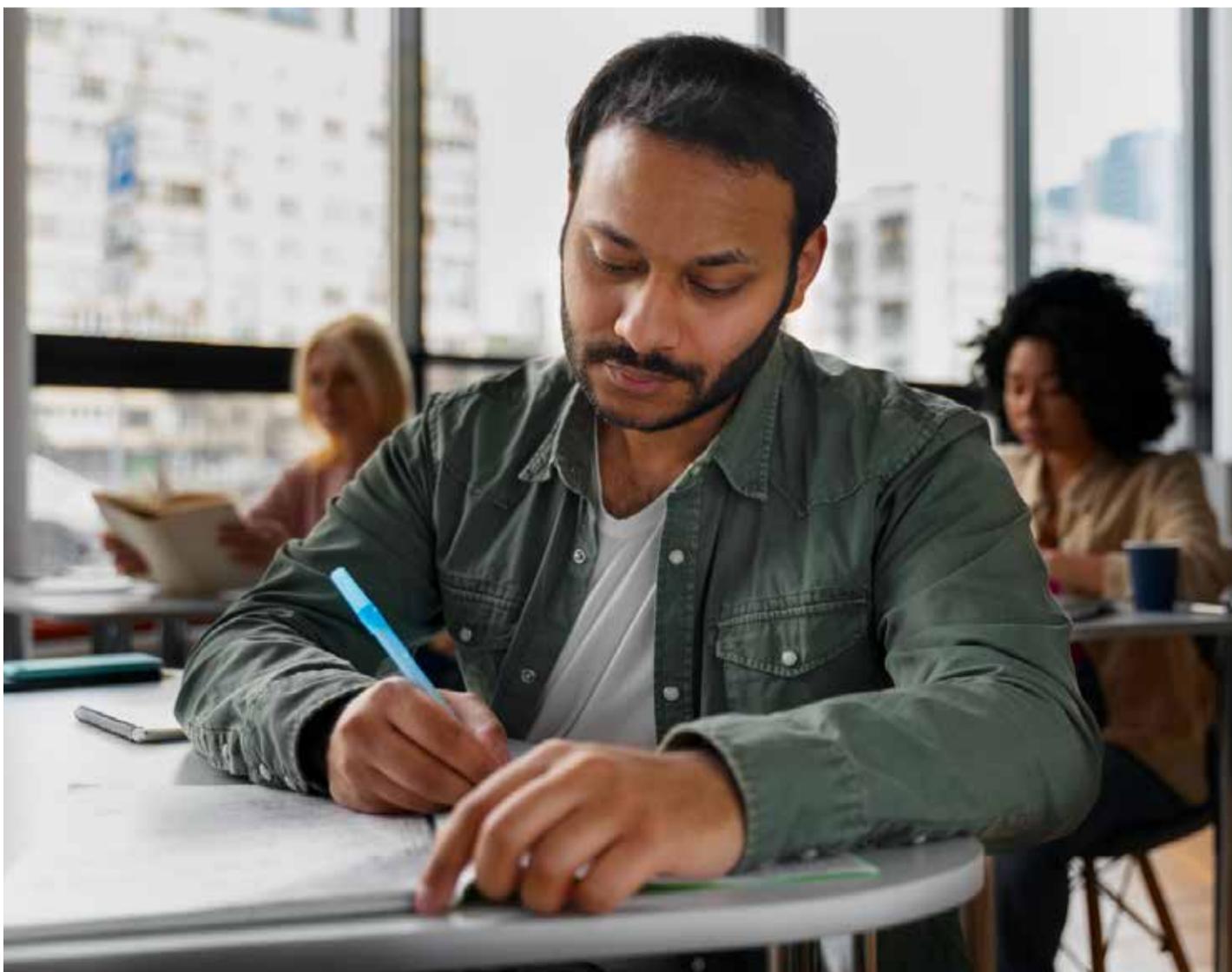
Funding from the Reconnect Community Action Grant will support the hiring of college and career navigators who will be stationed at six partner sites across Genesee County. These navigators will guide adult learners through career pathways, connect them with resources and help reduce barriers that often prevent adults from enrolling in or completing postsecondary programs.

“Genesee County believes that a comprehensive countywide approach utilizing college and career navigators is essential to providing adult students the needed guidance for post-secondary options and career success,” said James Avery, chair of the Genesee County Board of Commissioners.

### Part of Michigan’s Sixty by 30 goal

Reconnect Community Action Grants are one component of MiLEAP’s broader effort to reach the Sixty by 30 goal: ensuring that 60% of working-age Michigan residents earn a postsecondary credential by 2030. The grants are among five new funding categories introduced in 2024, accounting for more than \$45 million in support for community colleges, tribal colleges and universities across the state.

More information on the Reconnect Community Action Grants and other Sixty by 30 initiatives can be found at [Michigan.gov/Sixtyby30grants](https://Michigan.gov/Sixtyby30grants).



FILE PHOTO



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## EDUCATION

## Benefits of dual enrollment in the state of Michigan



FILE PHOTO



BY CRAIG DOUGLAS

Dual Enrollment continues to be one of the most effective ways for Michigan high school students to advance their education while still completing their K-12 requirements. Across the state, this option has helped thousands of students accelerate learning, reduce the cost of college, and build confidence for life after graduation. Here are some

of the key advantages:

**College Credit** - Through dual enrollment, students earn college credits while still in high school. These credits may transfer to the college or university they attend after graduation, helping reduce both the time and cost required to complete a degree. For many families, this is a meaningful financial benefit.

**Academic Challenge** - Dual enrollment often gives students access to courses not offered at their high school. Whether it's higher-level math, specialized sciences, or career-focused classes, students can experience a more rigorous curriculum and broaden their academic horizons.

**A Smoother Transition to College** - One of the greatest

long-term advantages of dual enrollment is exposure to the college environment. Students learn how college classes operate, gain experience with professor expectations, and begin developing the independence needed for success in higher education. This early exposure often leads to an easier and more confident transition after high school.

For students considering dual enrollment, the first step should be a conversation with their high school guidance counselor. Counselors understand the program requirements, know the partner colleges that specialize in dual enrollment, and can explain how specific courses fit into a student's long-term goals. They also often know success stories

from past students—examples that can help shape a new student's path.

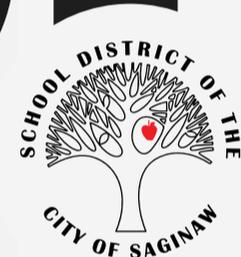
Dual enrollment saves tuition. It saves time. It allows students to begin college already having earned credits—credits that are paid for and recognized by many colleges across the state. For motivated students looking to build momentum toward their future, dual enrollment is an option well worth exploring.

For more information, visit the Michigan Department of Education's Dual Enrollment resource page: <https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/flexible-learning/dual-enroll>



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## EDUCATION

## Nominations encouraged for Michigan Lottery's Excellence in Education Awards to honor outstanding educators



FILE PHOTO

BY MB STAFF

Parents, students, school staff members, and others are encouraged to nominate outstanding public-school educators for the Michigan Lottery's 2025-26 Excellence In Education awards.

All public-school employees may be nominated for the Excellence In Education awards, which recognize educators who go "above and beyond" to make a difference in the lives of children. To nominate a public school educator, go to <https://www.michiganlottery.com/excellence-in-education>.

"The Excellence in Education awards are our way of honoring the phenomenal work being done by educators in communities throughout Michigan," said Lottery Commissioner Suzanna Shkreli. "These dedicated professionals do so much more than teach; they are a constant, supportive presence who instill life-long skills and inspire students to

believe in themselves."

The Michigan Lottery established the Excellence in Education awards in 2014 to recognize outstanding public-school educators across the state during the school year.

One outstanding educator will be selected each week and will receive a \$2,000 cash prize. At the end of the school year, one of these weekly award winners will be selected to receive the Lottery's Educator of the Year award and will receive a \$10,000 cash prize.

Winners of the weekly award are featured in a news segment on the Lottery's media partner stations: WXYZ-TV in Detroit, FOX 17 in Grand Rapids, FOX 47 in Lansing, WNEM-TV in Saginaw, WWTV-TV in Traverse City, and WLUC-TV in Marquette.

The winner of the 2025 Educator of the Year award was Kelly Herberholz, a science teacher and administrative intern with Dakota High School in Macomb.

Hundreds of educators were nominated during the 2024-25 school year, which was the 11th year of the Excellence in Education awards program. Thirty-four of these nominees, including Herberholz, were selected to win a weekly award.

Previous winners of the Educator of the Year award:

2024 – Samantha TwoCrow, the director of the Indigenous Education Program for Suttons Bay Public Schools in Suttons Bay.

2023 – Kathryn Kluzak, a kindergarten teacher with Robert L. Green Elementary in East Lansing. 2022 – Spencer Vanderheide, a high school teacher with Kenowa Hills High School in Grand Rapids. 2021 – Janice Smith, a school social worker at Fisher Magnet Lower Academy in Detroit.

2020 – Megan Sidge, an Autism Spectrum Disorder teacher at Hickory Woods Elementary in Walled Lake.

2019 – Stewart Kieliszewski, an Earth science, biology, mechatronics, and media teacher for eighth through 12 graders at the Uby Community Schools.

2018 – Kerri Moccio, a first-grade literacy intervention specialist at Bedford Elementary School in Dearborn Heights.

2017 – Linda Holzwarth, a social studies teacher at Portage West Middle School in Portage.

2016 – Daniel Carr, a Spanish and sports marketing teacher at Waverly High School in Lansing.

2015 – Michael Craig, a special education teacher at the Charles Drew Transition Center in Detroit.

Excellence In Education award nominees should demonstrate the following qualities:

- Excellence – Their work consistently helps students and/or their schools or school districts advance to higher levels of academic achievement.
- Dedication – They consistently go above and beyond expectations to help students succeed.
- Inspiration – Their work inspires others around them to exceed expectations either academically or professionally.
- Leadership – They demonstrate clear leadership skills in their positions with their school or school districts.
- Effectiveness – The nominee's work has clear and positive results on the educational advancement of students within the school or school district.

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Executive Director  
of Early Childhood

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## EMPLOYER REQUIREMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Offer the MI Tri-Share program to one or more employees with dependent children between 0-12 years old.
- Agree to cover 33% of participating employees' child care costs.
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- Communicate if an approved employee is no longer employed.
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### MI Tri-Share Program Eligibility 2025

Household Size	Minimum	Maximum Income	Household Size	Minimum	Maximum Income
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3 People	\$53,300	\$106,600	7 People	\$97,300	\$194,600
4 People	\$64,300	\$128,600	8 People	\$108,300	\$216,600
5 People	\$75,300	\$150,600	9 People	\$119,300	\$238,600

200% - 400% Federal Poverty Level - Effective May 1, 2025

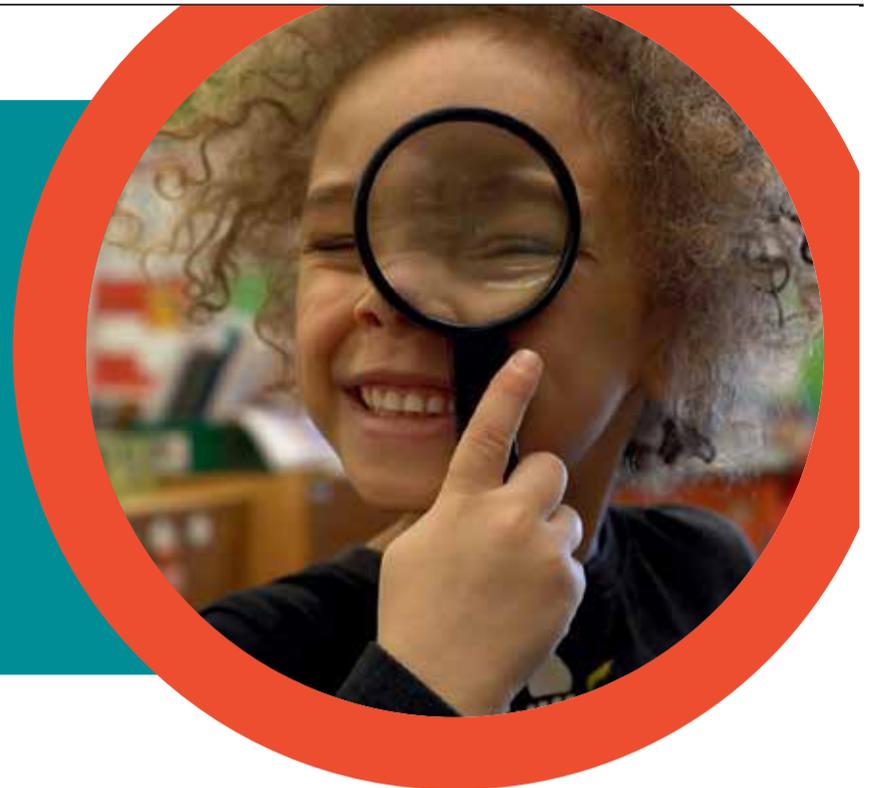
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*\*Administration for Children and Families: Children's Learning and Development Benefits from High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Summary of Evidence*



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Sabrina Beeman-Jackson

Saginaw ISD Head Start/Early Head Start  
Program Director

### About Saginaw ISD HE/EHS

Established in 1965, Head Start promotes school readiness for children, ages three to five, in low-income families by offering educational, nutritional, health, social and other services.

Head Start programs promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families.

Early Head Start, launched in 1995, provides support to low-income infants, toddlers,

pregnant women and their families.

EHS programs enhance children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development; assist pregnant women to access comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care; support parents' efforts to fulfill their parental roles; and help parents move toward self-sufficiency.

Together Head Start and Early Head Start have served tens of millions of children and their families.

At Saginaw ISD Head Start our attentive staff is available Monday through Friday to answer all your questions and make every effort to ensure you are 100 percent satisfied.

Saginaw ISD Head Start  
Claytor Administrative Building  
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Saginaw, MI 48601  
Phone 989.752.2193  
Fax 989.921.7146

#### Office Hours

Monday: 8 AM - 4:30 PM  
Tuesday: 8 AM - 4:30 PM  
Wednesday: 8 AM - 4:30 PM  
Thursday: 8 AM - 4:30 PM  
Friday: 8 AM - 4:30 PM  
Saturday: 8 AM - 4:30 PM  
Sunday: 8 AM - 4:30 PM

For additional information concerning Saginaw ISD Head Start visit: [www.saginawheadstart.org](http://www.saginawheadstart.org)

Source: [www.saginawheadstart.org](http://www.saginawheadstart.org)

**“Head Start graduates are more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to need special education, repeat a grade, or commit crimes in adolescence.”**

**Joe Baca, former Dem. California Congressman**

***“Our mission is to provide high quality services, developing school readiness and family empowerment for prenatal to age five children and families by working in partnership with parents and the community.”***  
***-Saginaw ISD HE/EHS***

## BUSINESS + FINANCE

# Michigan launches statewide LEADS program to strengthen workplace mental health

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — The Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity's Labor Division is launching a new statewide initiative aimed at improving mental health in workplaces across Michigan. The program, known as LEADS — short for Learn, Educate, Act, Deploy, Study — provides employers with a structured, evidence-based model to assess and strengthen mental health and well-being on the job.

State officials say the approach is designed to help businesses take measurable steps toward improving communication, safety and support in the workplace.

"Keeping workers healthy — physically and mentally — is good for our families, our businesses and our economy," LEO Director Susan Corbin said in announcing the initiative. "Michigan is proud to lead the way in showing how mental health belongs at the center of workplace safety and success."

## Pilot program set to begin in early 2026

LEO is now recruiting employers statewide to participate in a four-month pilot program beginning in early 2026. The pilot will focus on small- and mid-sized companies, particularly those operating in areas with high socioeconomic needs.

Enrolled employers will:

- Complete assessments
- Receive expert-led

training

- Implement strategies to improve mental health in their workplaces

Each participating business will designate a LEADS Champion responsible for coordinating the program, reviewing policies and ensuring mental health remains a long-term organizational priority.

The program is part of LEO's broader Healthy Work Healthy Mind initiative, which promotes research-backed solutions to reduce workplace stress and boost resilience.

## Statewide effort builds on three years of research and collaboration

LEO Deputy Director Sean Egan said LEADS is the next step in a statewide push that began after Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's 2022 State of the State address, which called for expanding mental health support throughout Michigan.

"Healthy Work Healthy Mind represents our next evolution in supporting working people and employers as they address the challenges of mental health in the workplace," Egan said. "Over the past three years, we've built a strong foundation through research, education and collaboration. Now, with LEADS, we're taking the next step — turning knowledge into action."

Healthy Work Healthy Mind currently hosts monthly webinars, connects employers with experts, and publishes a statewide report on workplace mental health needs and trends.

## \$1 million collaboration supports program development

The LEADS program is being developed through a \$1 million statewide collaboration facilitated by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) and funded by LEO. The pilot will test the impact of intervention tools and training across multiple industries.

Partners include:

- Corporation for a Skilled Workforce
- University of Michigan's Eisenberg Family Depression Center
- Michigan State University's School of Human Resources and Labor Relations
- Willamette University

CSW President and CEO Kysha Wright Frazier said the organization is "grateful for the opportunity to share successful practices with private sector employers in Michigan."

## Support from labor unions and business groups

The initiative has earned support from a wide range of statewide organizations, including the Michigan AFL-CIO, Small Business Association of Michigan, Michigan Manufacturers Association (MMA) and Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council.

"Michigan manufacturers know that a healthy, resilient workforce is the foundation of our state's competitiveness and

that includes supporting our employees and their mental health as strongly as their physical safety," said David Worthams, director of employment policy for the MMA. "The new LEADS initiative is an important step in giving employers practical tools and resources."

Construction industry leaders also emphasized the need for mental health support in high-stress fields.

"Construction workers experience one of the highest suicide rates in the country — a crisis that demands action," said Steve Claywell of the Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council. "LEADS is another powerful step forward."

## Linking workplace mental health to economic growth

LEO officials say improving mental health in the workplace is critical for both workforce retention and Michigan's long-term economic stability. Studies cited by the agency show that for every \$1 invested in mental health initiatives, employers can see a \$4 return, along with reductions in burnout and turnover.

## How to get involved

Participation in the LEADS pilot program is voluntary and fully funded by the state.

Michigan employers and community partners interested in joining the effort can access resources, sign up for updates or learn more at [Michigan.gov/HealthyWorkHealthyMind](https://Michigan.gov/HealthyWorkHealthyMind).

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**BUSINESS + FINANCE**



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## SPORTS

## 'World-class' mentor helps young athletes thrive



RICKY FLOWERS

BY MIKE THOMPSON

SAGINAW, Mich. — Leaders of the Houghton-Jones Neighborhood Association are in search of more volunteers like Ricky Flowers.

"I had never served on a board, anything like that," says Flowers, Saginaw High Class of '76, a standout in all the sports and world-class in the track and field sprints.

He adds, "Coaching, helping the community, is why I'm here."

He was inducted into the Saginaw County Sports Hall of Fame during 2010, two years after he returned to town to "run a gym," as he had made his career after studies and track at Michigan

State. He moved back home from Houston following the 2008 passing of his mother, Georgia Williams-Gibson, and set up his fitness training sessions at the Buena Vista Community Center on Outer Drive. He teaches nearby at the city schools' Success Academy, within the former OIC site on Tuscola and Third.

The Houghton-Jones facility did not yet exist during Ricky's 1960s childhood, but the neighborhood at the time was full of kids who gathered in the park and basketball courts that surrounded the old Mershon Pool, and this was part of his stomping grounds up to Fourteenth near the tracks, where he encountered older peers to compete with.

It was only natural that he

would choose this location to give something back when he returned home 18 years ago, a move in honor of his mother's memory. This past summer, he helped conduct the Boys to Men Empowerment Program at Houghton-Jones, in tandem with Gary Dawkins and Assigid Mersha.

"As kids, we were always running and doing things," he notes. "That's what we try to restore with the young people nowadays."

Glendorah Lawrence was Houghton-Jones office manager when Flowers got started. She recalls, "He helped to get the kids outside and he conducted group drills."

"The children loved it," she adds, with a chuckle, "and a few hated it."

**Trojan tradition**

At Saginaw High, Flowers was sandwiched between a pair of fellow Trojans, Reggie Jones (Class of '73) and Terry McDaniel (1983). Ricky received a track scholarship to Michigan State and became a professional in phys-ed after a career curtailed by injuries.

The main Saginaw High claim to fame for Flowers was in 1975 with a record-setting 880-yard Class A state champion relay quartet that also included Dan Abraham, Reggie Carter and Henry McClung. Their clocking, converted to 1:27.1 for today's 800 meters, remains best-ever in the Saginaw region a half-century later.

"For all those years," he recalls, "our names would be in the newspaper every Saturday with the top track times and records."

He evolved into longer sprint distances and was ranked as high as third in the world for 300 meters, but the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics cost him

a shot at a medal. He protested at first but in the end, he supported President Carter's decision "to keep us out of harm's way."

The disappointment would have ended incentive for many athletes, but Flowers continued competing and winning in senior events up to age 50, learning insight for injury prevention that he incorporates into his training tips.

He was a football standout who drew some pro scouts, but at 6-foot-2, 155 pounds, he felt too lean and lanky for the contact sport. For the sake of his exposed ribs, he focused on track instead.

He also was a part of Saginaw High's 1976 Class A state runner up on the basketball floor.

"The tradition was so deep," he says, "and it brought out the best in the athletes."

He continues to bring out the best in young athletes, both at Houghton-Jones and as girls track coach at Heritage High, where five teammates have advanced to the state finals for two years in a row, shattering school records in the process. He already is recruiting for next spring.

Flowers may be contacted via [RickyDFlowers@yahoo.com](mailto:RickyDFlowers@yahoo.com) or (989) 714-9902. For the neighborhood group, [info@houghton-jones.org](mailto:info@houghton-jones.org) or (989) 752-1660.



RICKY FLOWERS PICTURED IN MSU TRACK UNIFORM

## SPORTS

## Great Lakes Loons announce 2026 game times



DOW DIAMOND

BY MB STAFF

MIDLAND, Mich. — Baseball will be back at Dow Diamond this spring, and the Great Lakes Loons are getting fans ready early with the release of their full slate of 2026 game times and major event dates, including the return of Fireworks Loontaculars, School Kids Days and several marquee matchups against in-state rivals.

The Loons' 19th season begins Friday, April 3, when they host the Fort Wayne TinCaps on Opening Day presented by MISS DIG 811. First pitch is scheduled for 6:05 p.m. The month of April will also feature four weekend day games, all beginning at 1:05 p.m.

A complete list of game times for all 66 home games is available at loons.com.

### School Kids Days return in May

Thousands of students from across the Great Lakes Bay Region will once again fill the ballpark for two School Kids Days presented by Central Michigan University. The special events,

set for Tuesday, May 12, and Tuesday, May 19, will feature interactive activities designed specifically for K-12 students. Both games begin at 11:05 a.m.

Fireworks Loontaculars highlight the summer

The Loons will host 11 Fireworks Loontaculars presented by Farm Bureau Insurance, launching postgame fireworks from center field throughout the season. The first two shows in May will start at 6:35 p.m., while all other fireworks nights begin at 7:05 p.m.

### 2026 Fireworks Loontacular Dates:

- May 16 – West Michigan Whitecaps
- May 23 – Wisconsin Timber Rattlers
- June 6 – Lansing Lugnuts
- June 18 – Lake County Captains
- June 20 – Lake County Captains
- July 11 – Dayton Dragons
- July 17 – West Michigan Whitecaps
- July 18 – West Michigan Whitecaps
- August 1 – Fort Wayne

TinCaps

- August 15 – South Bend Cubs
- August 29 – Lansing Lugnuts

### A busy May homestand

The Loons will play 15 home games in the first 24 days of May, including a six-game visit from the West Michigan Whitecaps from May 12–17. While Minor League Baseball will not play on Memorial Day, the Loons will host the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers during the week leading up to the holiday, from May 19–24.

In-state rivalries headline the schedule

Nearly one-third of the 2026 home schedule features matchups against Michigan opponents, including the Lansing Lugnuts and West Michigan Whitecaps—series that historically draw strong crowds and high energy.

In-state home series include:

- May 12–17 – West Michigan Whitecaps
- June 2–7 – Lansing Lugnuts
- July 17–19 – West Michigan Whitecaps
- August 25–30 – Lansing Lugnuts

### Ticket packages and memberships on sale

The team is offering a full range of ticket options, including:

- Voucher packs
- 5- and 10-game mini plans
- Bronze, silver and gold memberships

All packages include benefits such as unlimited ticket exchanges, the Never-a-Wasted-Ticket Program, exclusive events, easy payment options, and playoff priority. Packages can be reserved by calling (989) 837-BALL or visiting loons.com.

### Single-game ticket sales and promotions

The Loons will begin announcing individual promotions in January 2026, with the full promotional schedule set for release on Monday, Feb. 16.

Single-game tickets will go on sale to the public on Monday, March 2.

For more information, fans are encouraged to visit loons.com.

## FAITH IN FOCUS



MINISTRY WITHOUT WALLS - 3783 MANNION RD, SAGINAW, MI 48603

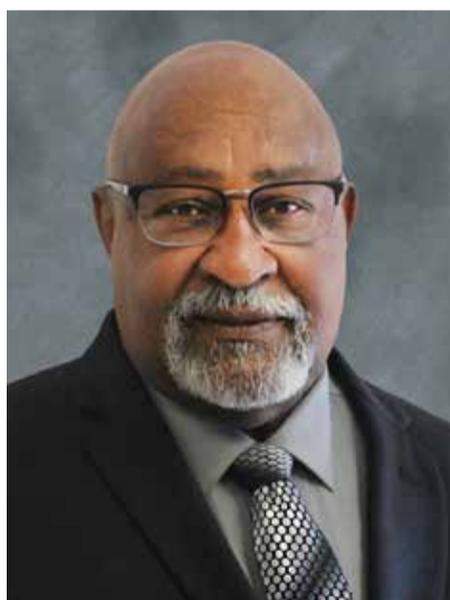
## Ministry Without Walls expands vision with community-focused mission

BY PASTOR JOHN DUNN

Ministry Without Walls has recently returned to its location at 3783 Mannion Road with a renewed vision, shaped by recent global events and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Seeking divine guidance, the organization has embraced a broader mission: to make the church an integral part of the community.

The new direction for Ministry Without Walls is centered around the theme of "Breaking Down Walls." This initiative aims to bridge gaps between spiritual life and community service, uniting church members, volunteers, and local professionals in a shared mission.

The organization's vision includes several key objectives:



PASTOR JOHN DUNN

- Creating a space where the spirit, soul, and body can achieve wholeness.
- Providing resources to those in need.
- Fostering collaboration

between the church, volunteers, and community professionals.

- Ensuring a welcoming environment where love prevails and judgment is absent.
- Maintaining privacy and prioritizing safety.
- Emphasizing the importance of the whole person.

Ministry Without Walls will continue to offer various teachings and seminars on topics such as outreach, spiritual growth, mental health, healthy living, finding purpose, financial management, entrepreneurship, and more. These programs are designed to address diverse needs and support personal development.

Recognizing that the mission field is close to home, not far

away, the organization is committed to a collaborative approach, knowing that achieving this vision will require the collective effort of many. Ministry Without Walls is dedicating its resources, talents, and connections to dismantle barriers and connect with the community more deeply.

Those interested in learning more or getting involved are encouraged to visit the church on Sundays at 11:00 AM. This offers an opportunity to meet Pastor John Dunn, ask questions, and experience the ministry's mission firsthand.

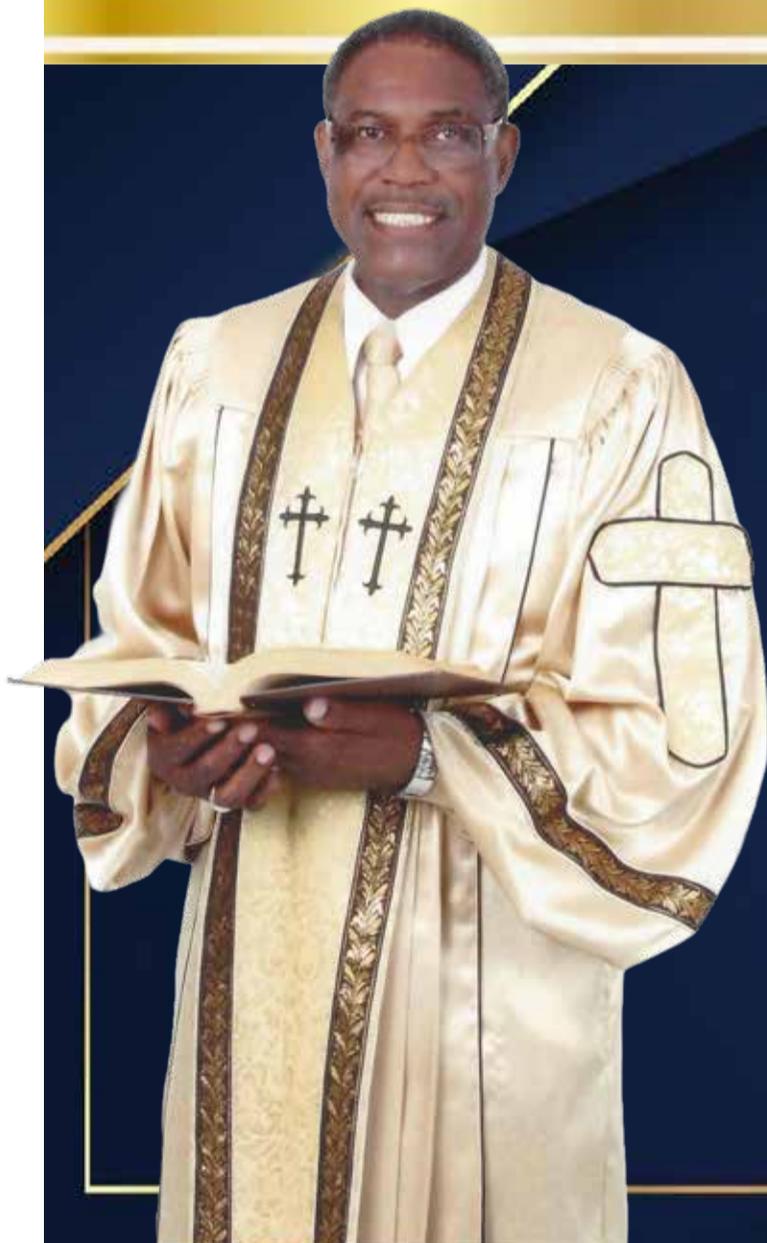
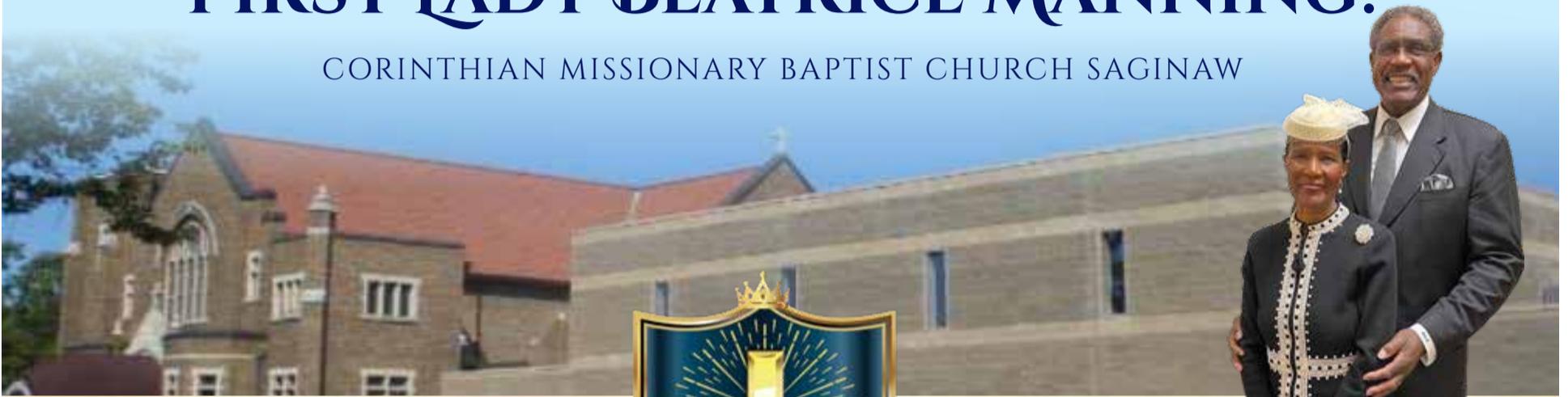
For more information, visit Ministry Without Walls at 3783 Mannion Road, Saginaw, MI 48603.

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Your ministry has been a beacon of light, and your legacy will continue to inspire generations to come. Your example of humility and grace has strengthened the community. As you enter this new chapter of life, may God continue to bless you abundantly with joy, peace, and fulfillment, knowing that your labor in the Lord has not been in vain.

## FAITH IN FOCUS

## SERMONETTE SERIES

## The weight of our Blessings

*"To whom much is given,  
much is required"*

*Luke 12:48*



BY MINISTER CAROLYN  
CARTER TOWNSEL

In a world filled with constant striving, it is easy to measure life by what we lack. Yet Scripture turns our attention to what we have already been entrusted with. Jesus' words in Luke 12:48 ring with both comfort and challenge: "To whom much is given, much is required."

At first glance, this verse can feel heavy. Responsibility rarely feels light. But look closer. Jesus is reminding us that God sees us as capable, chosen, and equipped. God does not place purpose in empty hands. If He has entrusted you with gifts—whether influence, opportunity, wisdom, resources, compassion, or resilience—it is because He intends to use you as a vessel of hope in a weary world.

Every blessing carries a divine assignment.

Your voice is meant to speak life.

Your story is meant to strengthen someone else's faith.

Your time, talents, and treasure are meant to point back to the One who gave them.

This Scripture also encourages humility. We are stewards, not owners. What we possess—material or spiritual—has been placed in our care to reflect the heart of Christ. That means showing kindness when it is easier to stay silent. Giving when it is tempting to withhold. Serving when no one is watching. Leading with integrity even when others choose shortcuts.

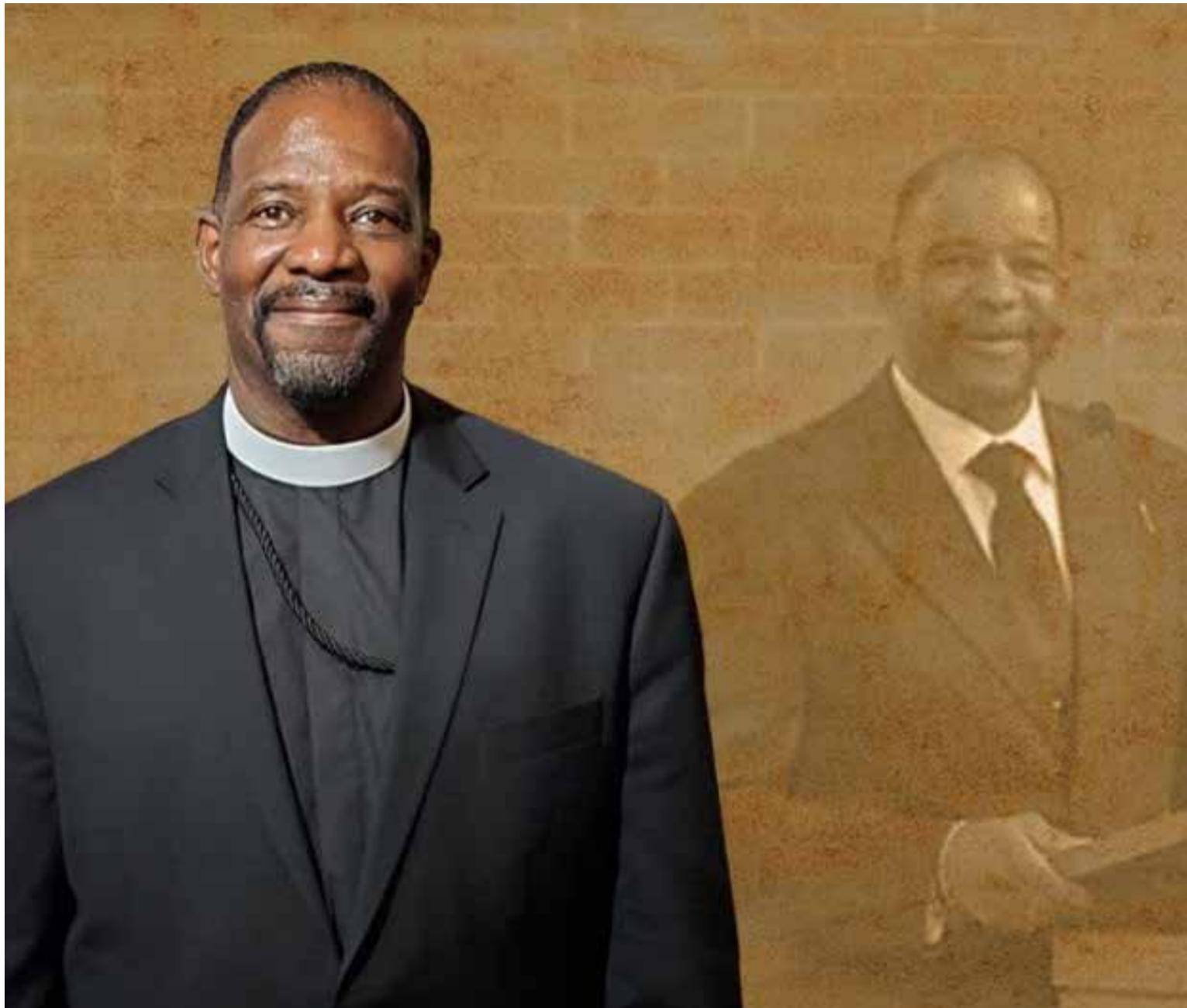
But here is the promise hidden inside the responsibility: God never requires what He will not empower you to fulfill. The same God who placed the assignment in your hands will strengthen your steps, guide your decisions, and multiply your efforts. When you partner with Him, your "little" becomes much.

Beloved, Remember, responsibility is not a burden—it is evidence that God trusts you. And when God trusts you, He also walks with you.

Blessings To All,  
Carolyn

## FAITH IN FOCUS

# From Philly to Saginaw, a 'recovery ministry' takes root



FELIX ALEXANDER JR.

(“three blocks from Comerica Park”), Flint 2012, and finally Saginaw eight years ago.

He never became an SSI case, instead gaining income from jack-of-all-trades skills he gleaned from helping at his father’s junkyard. This continues in Saginaw with his “All In One Enterprise,” finding work through word-of-mouth that includes his Facebook page.

“I’m a handyman and a mechanic,” he notes. “I can do landscaping, painting, drywall, hardwood floors, I buy and sell cars.” This means his addiction ministry is self-funded and free of charge at this point, with hopes of attaining a state certification at some point.

Even amid the worst throes of his struggles, Alexander was “functional” to the point where he would imagine himself as a motivational addiction counselor. In effect,

some of the “curriculum” he will offer took root while he was high on crack and whatever other substances he added to the mix. Sometimes he will opt for a “tough love” approach, other occasions a shoulder to cry upon, even with the same individual.

“Everybody needs something different,” he explains.

Felix Alexander may be contacted via [Wallbuildersrec24@gmail.com](mailto:Wallbuildersrec24@gmail.com) or through the Detroit-based telephone number he has maintained, (313) 318-2798. To view his initial sermon at Bethel AME, [click here](#).

BY MIKE THOMPSON

SAGINAW, Mich. — As part of his “Wall Builders Recovery Ministries” at Saginaw’s Bethel AME Church, Felix Alexander Jr. compares a rock of crack cocaine with a slice of creamy cheesecake.

Of course, the temporary ecstasy from his illicit drug of choice, which he kicked 20 years ago, is far more destructive than the excessive calories from a sweet-tooth dessert pie. His layman’s message is that temptation always will exist. Self-discipline, and self-respect, are corner-

stones in all aspects of a faith-based honorable life.

“Any addiction has changing faces,” says Alexander, age 65. “It can be drugs, clothes, eating, sex, the casino, anything.”

Stories of individuals who engage in misbegotten behaviors often are rooted in negative childhoods, but Felix grew up in a solid Philadelphia family, with a father and several elders among clergy in the City of Brotherly Love.

As an adolescent, his experiments with recreational drugs — any and all, he recalls — seemed

innocent enough. He was what therapists would describe as a “functional” addict. But his conduct bottomed out with stealing from his closest kin and eventually cost him a pair of marriages, although he remains close with a son and a daughter, now in their 40s.

“I would be at the (counseling) table, go into rehab, come out and start all over,” he says.

Family, friends and social workers decided he needed new settings, which led to his move to the Midwest, starting with Indianapolis in 2006, Detroit ’09

# CHURCH DIRECTORY



### Christ Disciples Baptist Church

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Pastor Genevieve Benson  
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989-754-2444



### Ministry Without Walls

Pastor, John Dunn  
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newlife3881@gmail.com



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## FUNDRAISING GOOD TIMES

## The secret self-care ingredient



BY MEL AND PEARL SHAW

*Are you sad or are you depressed? Yes, there is a difference.*

*Having the blues, being down, and feeling “not OK” are part of life. Depression is something different.*

*Like it or not, its recommended that you reach out for help when you are experiencing depression – even if that’s the last thing you feel like doing. Here’s the catch: how do you know the difference?*

We checked with the Center for Disease Control’s website to gain some insight. Symptoms of depression include feeling sad, empty, or hopeless often or all the time; not wanting to do activities that used to be fun; weight gain or loss, or changes in appetite; sleep changes; feeling irritable, easily frustrated, or restless; lack of energy or feeling tired; feeling worthless or overly guilty; trouble concentrating, remembering things, or making decisions; and/or thinking about suicide or hurting yourself. The CDC – and so many healthcare professionals – recommend you talk with your healthcare provider if these continue for two weeks or more, interfere with daily activities, or cause significant distress.

COVID and its aftermath increased awareness of depression



FILE PHOTO

and the importance of getting help. But what about those feelings of sadness that come and go, the feelings of isolation, and the increasing feelings of helplessness, given the changes that are happening all around us? More and more people are wondering, “How did things get like this?” Too often, we hear, “the answer is complex.” It is, and so is “the cure.” We recommend a self-care combo: slow down, eat better, rest, exercise, journal, take a walk, talk to a friend, and volunteer with a nonprofit. This last part is the overlooked self-care “special sauce.” Reaching out to others and becoming involved with something bigger than ourselves helps us feel better and increases our sense of connection. If you volunteer for a project or organization on a regular basis, you may find yourself looking forward to upcoming meetings or

events. You might reflect – with a smile – on a past experience. You may make a new friend or two.

Nonprofits are a way we collectively bring about change. And making a change can reduce feelings of helplessness. Most nonprofits began as groups of people wanting to make a difference. No matter their size today, most continue to depend on volunteers. As a volunteer, you may end up traveling to another state to help with emergency aid, or you might box up food to give to families in

your community. Maybe you will guide a nature walk in a regional park or facilitate Zumba classes at your local senior center. Most importantly, you’ll experience being a member of a team: together, you and others will accomplish that which no one person can accomplish on their own. That’s the thing about life: we need each other. Our nonprofits need you, and believe it or not, you just may need to be involved with a nonprofit. God protect America and the world we live in.



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Mel and Pearl Shaw are authors of four books on fundraising available on Amazon.com. For help growing your fundraising visit [www.saadandshaw.com](http://www.saadandshaw.com) or call (901) 522-8727.



## PICS OF THE WEEK

The East Side Soup Kitchen hosted its annual Thanksgiving Feast on Thursday, Nov. 27.



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**We**

*empower.*

*Brittany Saunders is ready to pay it forward. The Chicago native enrolled at SVSU with ambitions to pursue a teaching career. Brittany was encouraged and invigorated by other passionate educators who worked closely with her to ensure she would accomplish her goals. And she is. Even before she was set to graduate, Brittany could boast a résumé with a paid internship in a school district along with K-12 classroom experience. **Now she can't wait to begin a professional career, inspiring students with the same kind of one-on-one attention she received from her professors at SVSU.***



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