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### Freeland wins first boys basketball state championship in school history

SPORTS, PG 42

## Former Saginaw High principal Wilson “Doc” Smith leaves lasting legacy in local education



NYESHA LATOY CLARK-YOUNG (PHOTO CREDIT: PHIL EICH)



### Midland senior Halle Spears caps perfect season with MHSAA girls wrestling state title

YOUTH BANNER, COVER



### Bishop Ronald Chipp, founder of Faith Harvest Church in Saginaw, dies at 69

FAITH, PG 45

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — Wilson “Doc” Smith, a longtime leader in the Saginaw Public Schools who served as principal of Saginaw High School for nearly three decades, has died at the age of 78.

Smith died Sunday,

March 8, according to school district officials.

Smith spent more than 30 years working in Saginaw Public Schools, building a reputation as a respected educator known for strong leadership and high expectations for students.

He began his career in the district in the early 1970s

as principal of Houghton Elementary School. In 1976, district leaders appointed him principal of Saginaw High School, a position he would hold for 27 years until 2003.

**Continues on pg 2, Wilson Smith**

## From cover, Wilson Smith


During his tenure, Smith guided the school through years of transition while working to strengthen academic achievement and prepare students for opportunities beyond graduation. Students and staff often referred to him simply as “Doc,” a nickname that reflected both respect and familiarity within the school community.

After stepping down as principal of Saginaw High, Smith remained active in district leadership. He served as the district’s director of research and later as director of student accountability and customer service, roles focused on improving school performance and strengthening communication with families and the community.

In 2007, Smith returned to building leadership as principal of Loomis Academy, a theme-based school focused on math, science and technology education.

Smith’s career touched thousands of students across multiple generations in the Saginaw community. District leaders said he was known for maintaining high expectations for students while also investing deeply in their development and well-being.

His legacy is closely tied to Saginaw High School, one of the city’s historic educational institutions. The building that once housed Saginaw High now serves as Saginaw Middle School after the district consolidated its high schools and created Saginaw United High School in 2024.




**THIS DAY IN  
MICHIGAN  
HISTORY**

**MARCH 16, 1847**

On March 16, 1847, Lansing officially became the capital of Michigan, marking a major shift in the state’s political center from Detroit. The decision was made by the Michigan Legislature after years of debate over where the state government should be located.

At the time, Detroit served as the capital, but many lawmakers believed it was too close to the Canadian border and not easily accessible for residents living in the western and northern parts of the state. Choosing Lansing placed the capital closer to the geographic center of Michigan, making it more practical for legislators and citizens traveling from across the growing state.

When the decision was made, Lansing was a small settlement known as Lansing Township with only a few hundred residents. The move sparked rapid development as government buildings, businesses and homes were constructed to support the new capital city.



MICHIGAN CAPITOL BUILDING IN LANSING

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**MISSION**

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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**THE MICHIGAN BANNER  
CELEBRATES  
WOMEN'S  
HISTORY MONTH**

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# MICHIGAN YOUTH BANNER

VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 5



## Midland senior Halle Spears caps perfect season with MHSAA girls wrestling state title



HALLE SPEARS

BY MB STAFF

DETROIT — Midland High School senior Halle Spears capped a dominant high school career Saturday, March 7, by winning the Michigan High School Athletic Association Girls Individual Wrestling State Championship in the 235-pound weight class at Ford Field.

Spears defeated AnnMarie Green of Clare by pinfall with 18 seconds remaining in the first period, securing the title and completing a perfect 32-0 senior season.

The championship marked a milestone for Spears and the

Midland program, as she became Midland High's first individual wrestling state champion in 32 years and the school's first girls wrestling state champion.

Spears entered the state finals as one of the top wrestlers in Michigan and nationally in the heavyweight division. She advanced through the tournament bracket with several decisive victories before reaching the championship match.

Her run began with an 18-1 technical fall over Mariah Simpson of Wayne Memorial in the opening round. Spears followed that performance with a 35-second pin of Evangeline Figueroa of Holland West Ottawa in the

quarterfinals.

In the semifinals, Spears battled Allen Park's Mya Brandenburg, earning a 2-1 decision to advance to the championship bout at Ford Field.

The title match was a highly anticipated showdown between Spears and Green, the second-ranked wrestler in the division. Spears quickly took control and secured the fall late in the first period to clinch the state championship.

Spears' victory also served as redemption after finishing state runner-up the previous season, and it completed a decorated career for the Midland senior.

During her high school career,

Spears established herself as one of the top girls wrestlers in the country. She earned All-America honors by finishing third at the U.S. Marine Corps Junior Nationals in Fargo, North Dakota, and won her weight class at the nationally recognized Super 32 Challenge in North Carolina.

The MHSAA girls wrestling state finals bring together top qualifiers from across Michigan and represent the culmination of the high school wrestling season.

By finishing 32-0 with a state championship, Spears concluded her senior season with one of the most dominant performances in Midland High wrestling history.

# Scholarship program opens for Great Lakes Bay Region students

BY MB STAFF

MID-MICHIGAN — A scholarship program designed to support performing arts education for students in the Great Lakes Bay Region is now accepting applications for the upcoming academic year.

The Spark Artistic Mentorship Program recently opened applications for its 2026–2027 scholarship cycle, offering mentorship and financial support to students interested in pursuing performing arts training.

The program focuses on expanding access to performing arts opportunities for Black, Indigenous and students of color in the region, organizers said.

Students entering grades 8 through 12 in the fall of 2026 are eligible to apply for the scholarship, which supports training in disciplines such as dance, theater, music and other performing arts fields.

Organizers say the program aims to connect young artists with professional mentors while helping them develop their skills and explore potential careers in the arts.

The initiative was created by a group of artists and educators who wanted to increase access to performing arts education for students who may face barriers to training and professional opportunities.

Recipients of the scholarship receive mentorship and support designed to help them expand their artistic development while building connections within the performing arts community.

Applications for the program can be submitted online, and the deadline for the current scholarship cycle is April 15.

Organizers say the program is intended to help cultivate the next generation of performers and creative professionals across the Great Lakes Bay Region.

**SPARK**  
Artistic Mentorship Program

**PERFORMING ARTS AWARD FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

- 1**  
Apply on our website
- 2**  
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- 3**  
Develop your skills with professional teaching artists

The Spark Artistic Mentorship Program is accepting applications from Black, Indigenous and students of color from the Great Lakes Bay region seeking training and development in the performing arts for the '26-'27 school year.

**APPLY BY**  
**APRIL 15TH**

**APPLY HERE**

for more information visit [WWW.SPARKARTISTICMENTORSHIP.ORG](http://WWW.SPARKARTISTICMENTORSHIP.ORG)

# Preparing for the SAT



BY CRAIG DOUGLAS

Next month thousands of high school juniors across Michigan take the SAT as part of the Michigan Merit Examination (MME). The SAT is widely used by colleges and universities as part of the admissions process, and some scholarships use the SAT in weighing awards. Each student needs to prepare now to do their best.

The test date in Michigan is **April 15, 2026**.

In recent years, the SAT changed to a digital format, meaning students complete the test using a computer or other approved device. Most schools provide guidance ahead of time to ensure that devices are prepared, and students understand the testing procedures. The format and rules are very strict, a much different environment than for other tests given in school. Preparation can reduce test anxiety when taking the SAT.

There are practical ways students can prepare ahead of time.

Students should consider taking a practice SAT exam. A full-length practice test helps students become familiar with the structure of the exam, the types of questions they will see, and the time limits for each section. This is extremely important.

Students can take advantage of free online preparation tools. School counselors can help students connect with these



FILE PHOTO

resources. The College Board partners with Khan Academy to provide personalized SAT preparation in reading, writing, and mathematics. These resources allow students to focus on areas where they need the most improvement.

Again let me emphasize these are **free** tools.

Reviewing core academic skills can be helpful. The SAT measures reading comprehen-

sion, grammar and language usage, and mathematics topics such as algebra, data analysis, and problem-solving. Regular reading and continued practice with math concepts can strengthen these skills.

Finally, students should practice time management strategies. Because the SAT is a timed exam, practicing under realistic conditions can help students pace themselves and reduce test-day anxiety. Students should never leave a blank answer; it is better

to make an educated guess on a question than to leave it blank.

Michigan juniors still have time to review key skills and take advantage of available resources. Practice and preparation can help students approach the exam with greater confidence.

## References

<https://www.collegeboard.org>  
<https://www.michigan.gov/mde>

# Pressure makes diamonds

BY AMARIA TARVER

Pressure. To be psychologically pressured would mean that you are being forced by someone or something to react to a situation. When your mind feels heavy and your judgement feels clouded because of external mantras and grievances projected onto your life, that is pressure at its finest. Your thoughts begin to be clouded with words that are not your own. Then you begin to assess yourself based off their inflictions.

You may break during this time. The pressure of so many opinions, the pressure of what others expect of you, and what others may want for you, may lead you astray from your destined identity. It may leave you missing pieces of yourself.

This is a vulnerable time.  
You may have time to think.  
You may have time to cry.  
You may have that time to recollect.  
But you must not allow yourself to wallow.  
You must not allow yourself to mourn your own identity.  
You must not allow yourself to give up.

You must turn the adversity you are experiencing, and make it your fuel.

I once asked a friend about one of the biggest challenges they faced. He told me bluntly that every challenge he had faced had often been self-inflicted.

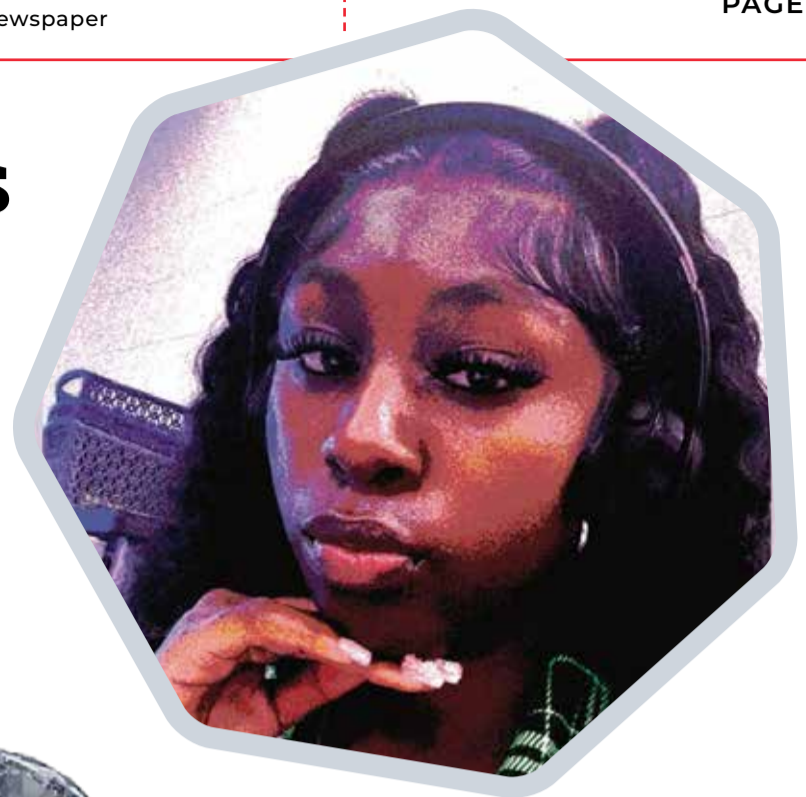
Sometimes in life we are our own enemies.

We take the pressure that weighs on us as a burden instead of a chance to prove our inner strength and wisdom.

We must take those moments where we tell ourselves how we are not good enough, or we're screw ups, or could have beens – and use them to better ourselves.

So you think you're not good enough? Work Harder.  
You think you're a screw up? Fix it.  
Some may say its not that simple.  
It never is.

The word pressure implies that something is being pushed to the point where it may crack.



You must allow yourself room to transform when pressure arrives. Push yourself to lengths you couldn't fathom before. Give into it. Find the points of yourself that are weak and strengthen them. Ask yourself what you can learn from these adverse experiences.

Use what you learn to build yourself to be better, to work harder, to grind often, and look down on those who told you that you weren't made to face the impossible.

Even if that means looking into fragments of an old mirror.

Earl Nightingale once said, "Your attitude determines your altitude". Meaning the way in which you approach your problems will determine the way in which those outcomes positively or negatively impact your life.

You cannot hide from your imperfections, as they are what make you human. You can only learn how to embrace and cultivate them. And you can not become a success story without remembering that pressure, makes diamonds.





# Latino Banner

LIDER EN LA  
DIVERSIDAD

VAMOS ADELANTE

## Cesar Chavez's legacy echoes in Michigan's migrant farmworker communities

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — The legacy of Cesar Chavez, the nationally known farmworker organizer and civil rights advocate, continues to influence labor movements and agricultural communities across the United States — including Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Region.

Chavez, who co-founded the United Farm Workers in 1962 with Dolores Huerta, became one of the most prominent voices for migrant farmworkers in the 20th century. Through boycotts, strikes and nonviolent protest, Chavez helped bring national attention to the working conditions faced by agricultural laborers, many of whom were Latino and Mexican American.

Although Chavez's organizing efforts were centered primarily in California, his influence extended across the country as migrant farmworkers moved seasonally between states, including Michigan.

### Migrant labor in Michigan agriculture

For decades, Michigan agriculture has relied heavily on seasonal migrant labor to harvest crops. Workers travel each year to fields across the state, including farms in Saginaw, Bay and Midland counties.

Historically, migrant workers have harvested crops such as cucumbers, tomatoes, sugar beets and cherries — agricultural sta-



IMMIGRANTS FROM HUNGARY WORKING ON A BEET FARM IN CORUNNA, MICHIGAN. (1917)

ples in Michigan's economy.

Many of those workers followed seasonal migration routes that brought them north each summer from states such as Texas and Florida. The same farmworker communities Chavez organized in the Southwest were often the ones working in Midwest agricultural fields.

Michigan has long ranked among the nation's leading agricultural states, producing billions of dollars in crops annually. Labor advocates say migrant workers remain a critical part of that industry.

### Midwest organizing efforts

Chavez's work helped inspire organizing efforts beyond California, including in the Midwest.

One of the most prominent groups to emerge in the region was the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, commonly known as FLOC.

Founded in 1967 by labor organizer Baldemar Velásquez in Ohio, the union worked closely with migrant farmworkers who traveled through Michigan dur-

ing harvest seasons.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, FLOC organized workers in Michigan and Ohio tomato and cucumber fields, eventually negotiating labor contracts with major food companies and agricultural growers.

The union's organizing campaigns used many of the same tactics Chavez popularized, including consumer boycotts and nonviolent demonstrations to pressure food processors and growers to improve wages and working conditions.

### Farmworker presence in the Great Lakes Bay Region

The Great Lakes Bay Region — particularly rural areas surrounding Saginaw and Bay City — has historically hosted migrant labor camps tied to seasonal farm work.

Agricultural laborers working in sugar beet and vegetable fields often lived in temporary housing provided by growers during the harvest season.

Labor historians note that the presence of migrant farmwork-

ers in Michigan dates back more than a century, with larger migration patterns developing during the mid-20th century as commercial agriculture expanded.

Advocates say Chavez's national campaigns helped raise awareness about the living conditions faced by those workers, including access to housing, health care and fair wages.

### Continuing influence

Chavez died in 1993, but his legacy continues to shape labor and civil rights discussions across the country.

Each year on March 31, communities observe Cesar Chavez Day to recognize his contributions to the farmworker movement and the broader struggle for economic justice.

Universities and community organizations throughout Michigan often mark the day with educational programs and discussions about labor rights and the role of migrant workers in the state's agricultural economy.

For many farmworker advocates, Chavez's message about dignity and fair treatment for agricultural laborers remains relevant today as migrant workers continue to support Michigan's agricultural production.

Michigan remains one of the most agriculturally diverse states in the nation, and labor leaders say the contributions of migrant farmworkers — and the organizing legacy Chavez helped inspire — remain an essential part of that story.

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# Lansing Fiesta returns to Adado Riverfront Park with carnival, music and food festival

LANSING FIESTA

Thursday through Saturday and \$5 on Sunday, while children 10 and under are admitted free. Event organizers note that attendees 17 and under must be accompanied by an adult.

In addition to music performances, the festival will include carnival rides, food vendors and local businesses. A beer tent sponsored by Piazzano's will also be featured, with proceeds benefiting Santa's Wish List.

Security will be enforced during the event, and the Lansing Police Department will be on site, according to the event flyer.

Organizers are encouraging attendees to purchase discounted wristbands in advance through the event website.

Vendor and advertising opportunities are also available. Interested businesses can contact event organizer Daniel at 517-775-8299 for more information.

The Lansing Fiesta festival is produced by Lansing Fiesta LLC in partnership with Elliott's Amusements and local sponsors and media partners.

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — Downtown Lansing will host one of the region's largest summer celebrations when the third annual Lansing Fiesta Carnival Music Festival returns June 18–21 at Adado Riverfront Park.

Organizers say the four-day event will feature carnival rides, food trucks, live music, vendors and a beer tent as part of what is being promoted as "Mid-Michigan's Biggest Party."

The festival is scheduled to take place along the Grand River in downtown Lansing and will include multiple nights of live entertainment across several music genres.

The event opens Thursday, June 18, from 4 to 10 p.m. with a country music performance by Keegan Jacko.

On Friday, June 19, from 4 to 11 p.m., the festival will feature an evening of Old School Hip Hop and R&B entertainment with Metro Melik.

The weekend continues Saturday, June 20, from noon to 11 p.m., with a Tejano Explosion concert featuring Grupo Dezeo and Tejano Heat.

The festival concludes Sunday, June 21, from noon to 7 p.m., with entertainment by DJ Sinsation.

Admission to the event is \$10

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# Celebrating WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

## Saginaw leader **Monica Reyes** builds pathways for Latino leadership

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — For more than four decades, Saginaw community leader Monica Reyes has worked to expand leadership opportunities and civic engagement within Michigan's Hispanic and Latino communities.

Through advocacy, mentorship and public service, Reyes has helped build networks of Latino leaders across the Great Lakes Bay Region while promoting greater representation in education, business and public policy.

Her contributions have been recognized by organizations across the region, including the Saginaw NAACP, which presented Reyes with its Saginaw Hero Award in 2021 during the organization's 50th Freedom Fund event.

### Early experiences shaped her advocacy

Reyes has said her commitment to education and leadership development was influenced by her upbringing in a Mexican

American family that valued perseverance and opportunity.

During her childhood, she worked alongside her family harvesting crops in Michigan agricultural fields, including cherries, tomatoes, pickles and sugar beets — experiences that exposed her to the challenges faced by many migrant farmworker families.

### Building Latino leadership in mid-Michigan

One of Reyes' most significant contributions has been the creation of the Great Lakes Bay Hispanic Leadership Institute, a program designed to develop leadership skills among Latino professionals in Saginaw, Bay and Midland counties.

The institute focuses on expanding Latino representation in civic leadership by preparing participants to serve on nonprofit boards and community organizations across the region.

### Statewide public service

Reyes has also served on the

Hispanic Latino Commission of Michigan, which advises state government on issues affecting Michigan's Hispanic and Latino residents. She was reappointed to the commission in 2019 by Gretchen Whitmer.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Reyes also served on Michigan's Protect Michigan LatinX Committee for Access and Equity, which addressed the pandemic's impact on Latino communities.

### Community impact

Reyes has also served on the board of Great Lakes Bay Health Centers, a regional health provider serving thousands of residents across mid-Michigan.

Her work comes as Michigan's Hispanic population continues to grow, with more than 564,000 Latino residents statewide, making leadership development and civic engagement in-

creasingly important.

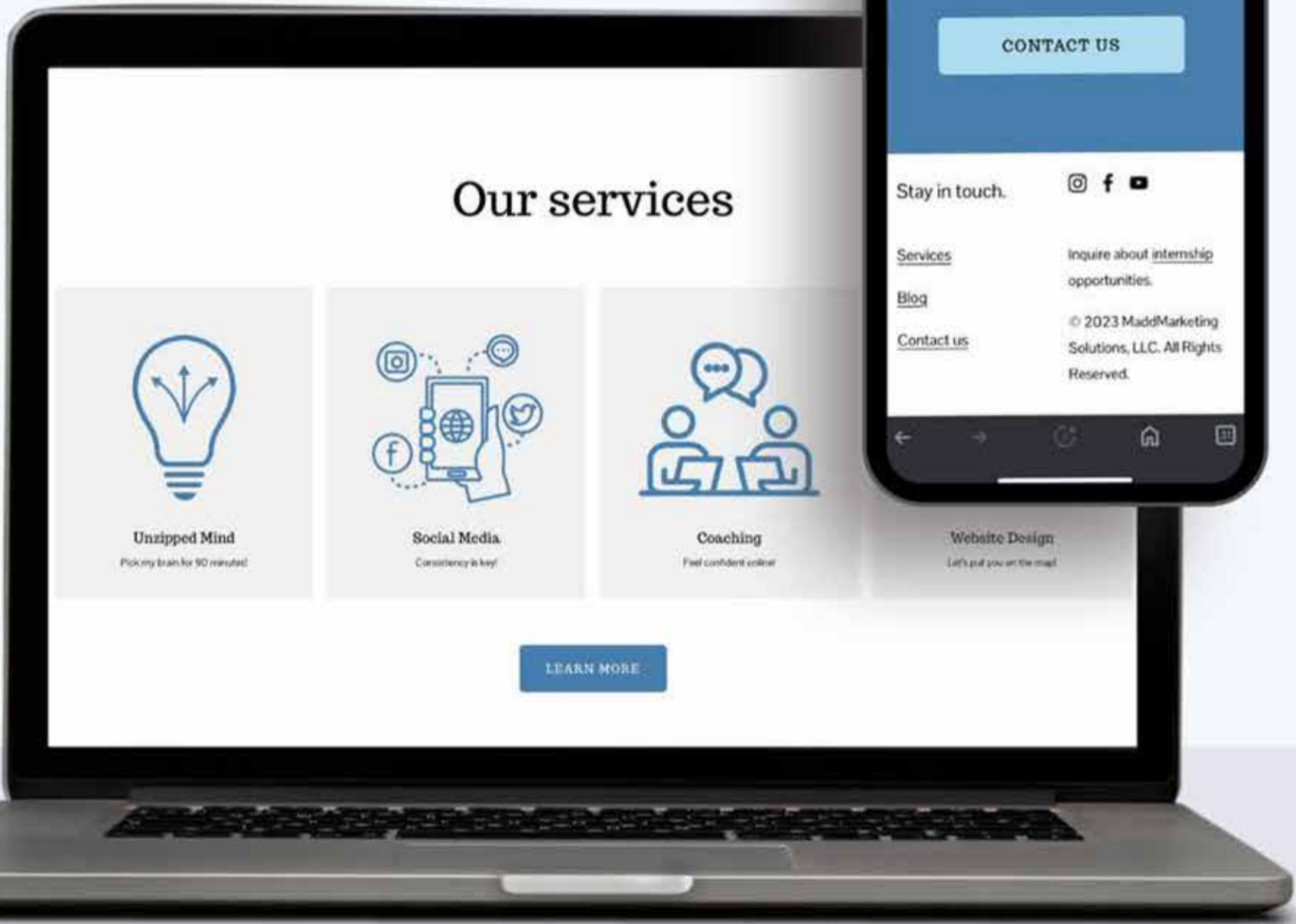
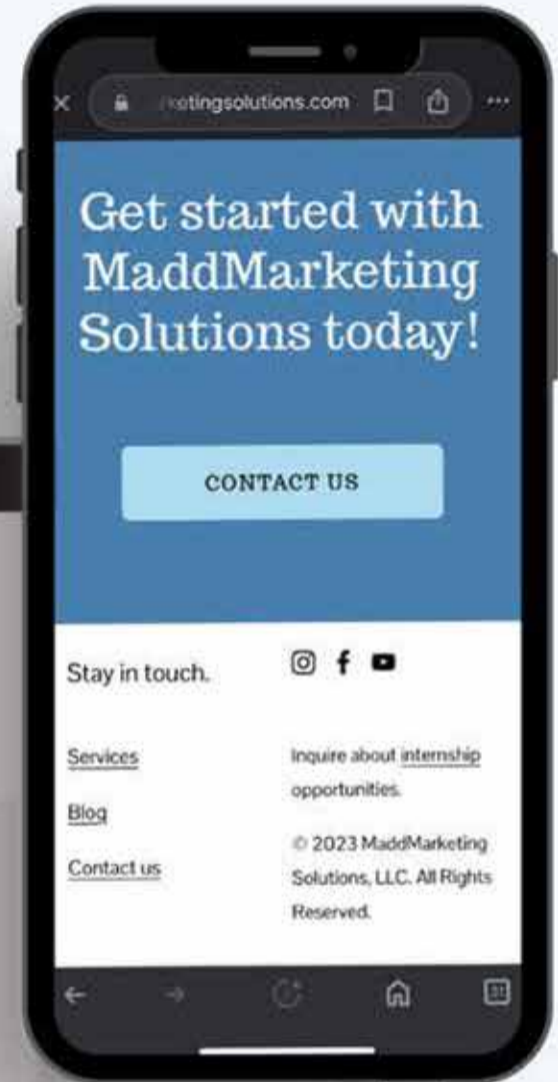
As communities observe Women's History Month, Reyes' career reflects the growing impact of Latina leadership in Michigan — helping ensure that the voices and experiences of Latino residents are represented in institutions that serve the region.





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## COMMUNITY

# Local AKA Chapter celebrates moms, students, women entrepreneurs and 64 years of service

BY MB STAFF

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated® Eta Upsilon Omega Chapter is set to celebrate a huge milestone with our upcoming 42nd Annual Hats Off to Mom Scholarship luncheon. The theme is “Sisterhood in Full Bloom: Celebrating Moms & Empowering Scholars.”

“For sixty-four years Eta Upsilon Omega Chapter has been an impactful influence in Saginaw since our inception and chartering at the Bancroft Hotel on February 10, 1962,” says Lisa Reed, President of Eta Upsilon Omega Chapter. “We strive to be a continuous source of dedication to our community through volunteering by helping those in need, positioning youth for success through scholarships, mentoring and education, political and social justice, promoting women’s health and nutrition and building our economic wealth. We are also a source of professional and leadership development for our members, some of whom will attend our Biennial Boule Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada in July, 2026.”

On May 2, 2026 at 11:00 a.m., it will be that dedication to the Saginaw community that takes center stage with this year’s celebration. The chapter is pleased to host our annual signature event in a luncheon to commemorate forty-two-years of Hats Off to Mom. It will be held at the Horizons Conference Center, 6200 State Street. The chapter is proud of its legacy rooted in Sisterhood, Scholarship and Service. Highlights of the event include the awarding of college scholarships to Saginaw-area high school stu-



dents, women entrepreneurs, and entertainment.

Our 2026 prestigious award winners will be celebrated: “Mother of the Year”, Ms. Arshen Baldwin, Saginaw United High School Assistant Principal; “Entrepreneur of The Year”, Mrs. Shortorah Carter; and Eta Upsilon Omega’s “Soror of The Year”, Mrs. Patricia Vaughn-Bady, respectively. Proceeds from sponsors, ticket and souvenir book advertisement sales will ensure the continuation of the chapter’s efforts to provide scholarships to deserving students and to give back to the community through service projects.

“Our history illustrates we are women who lead as we were the first African American Greek

Letter organization established in Saginaw, Michigan, following the unprecedented path pioneered by our illustrious national founders in 1908,” Reed continues. “We proudly stand on the shoulders of our charter members, many of whom were the first women of color to attain positions in their professions in the city of Saginaw. Our charter members (all deceased) are: Frances Elnora Moton Carter, Jacqueline M. Porterfield, Willett K.G. Johnson, Della Vaughn Smith, Margaret Griffin Brown, Lola A. Lothery Shelby, Nancy Haithco-Price, Bernadine Tivis Carter, Helen Joan Banks Turpin, Mildred Cambridge, Marie Waldon Claytor and Eva Wyche.”

Our commitment and impact

on improving the lives of others are demonstrated by our contributions of nearly \$265,000 in scholarships and community service programs. We endeavor to continue this legacy in 2026 and beyond. I am appreciative of the privilege to serve as President of this outstanding, thriving sisterhood, with leaders who make a difference in the community by providing service to all mankind.”

Tickets are \$65 and can be purchased, as well as souvenir book ads, by contacting any sorority member or online by scanning the QR code below. For questions, please contact us at [AKA1908HYOmega@gmail.com](mailto:AKA1908HYOmega@gmail.com).

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11AM-2PM

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## COMMUNITY



# Celebrating WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

## Recognizing Kimberly A. Napoleon, first female state commander of Michigan VFW

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — The achievements of Kimberly A. Napoleon are being recognized during Women's History Month as a historic milestone for veterans organizations across Michigan.

Napoleon, a Saginaw native and U.S. Army veteran, became the first woman elected state commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Michigan. She was formally installed in the role during the organization's annual convention held May 29 through June 2, 2024, in Kalamazoo.

Her election marked the first time a woman has led the statewide organization since the VFW Department of Michigan was established.

Napoleon is a 1986 graduate of Arthur Hill High School and served in the United States Army from 1987 to 1996.

During her military service, she participated in Operation Just Cause as well as Operation Desert Shield and Operation

Desert Storm, operations associated with the conflict widely known as the Persian Gulf War.

Following her military career, Napoleon continued supporting fellow veterans through leadership roles in several organizations.

She is a Gold Legacy Life Member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and a member of Wallace C. Schultz/Dwight A. McKinney Jr. Post 9931 in Bridgeport. Napoleon served as commander of the post from 2017 to 2021 and again during the 2022–2023 year.

In 2017, she also made history when she became the first Black woman to serve as commander of a VFW post in Michigan, marking a milestone for representation within the organization.

Her leadership has also extended to the district level. Napoleon served as commander of District 9 for the VFW Department of Michigan from 2020 to 2021.

Napoleon has also held leadership positions in other veter-

ans organizations. She is a life member of Disabled American Veterans and served as post commander from 2014 to 2016, becoming the first woman to lead that chapter. She is also a member of American Legion Post 439 and the National Association of Minority Veterans of America.

In addition to her work with veterans organizations, Napoleon has remained active in the Saginaw community.

She serves as a mentor with the Saginaw County Veterans Justice Treatment Court, supporting veterans navigating the legal system, and is a commissioner on the Soldiers and Sailors Relief Commission in Saginaw County. She also serves on the board of directors for the Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Saginaw County and was recently appointed to the Saginaw County Veterans Trust Fund Committee.

Napoleon is also involved in community organizations including Women of Colors and Kappa Epsilon Psi Military So-

rority, Inc., and she is a founding member and board member of Impact100 Global Veterans, a philanthropic organization dedicated to supporting veteran-centered programs.

She is also certified as a suicide prevention gatekeeper through QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer), a training program designed to help individuals recognize warning signs and connect people with support.

Napoleon is the widow of U.S. Army veteran Terrill Napoleon and the mother of Ti'Kyra Napoleon of East Lansing.

Her career in military service and community leadership reflects the growing role of women veterans in leadership positions within military and veterans organizations.

As Women's History Month is observed across the country, Napoleon's accomplishments highlight the contributions of women who have served their country and continue to lead in their communities long after their military service ends.

COMMUNITY

# Saginaw County 911 appoints Jessica Tumblin as executive director

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — The Saginaw County 911 Authority Board has appointed Jessica Tumblin as the new executive director of the county's emergency dispatch system.

Tumblin began her new role on March 5 and will oversee the county's 24-hour emergency communications operations, including dispatch services, technology systems, training and long-term strategic planning.

The executive director posi-

tion is responsible for managing the operations of Saginaw County's 911 dispatch center, which coordinates emergency response for police, fire and medical services throughout the county.

Tumblin brings more than seven years of experience in emergency communications and public safety leadership to the position.

"Our new Executive Director brings the experience, vision, and leadership needed to continue strengthening our 911 operations," Saginaw County 911 Authority Board Chair Brenda

Moore said in a statement announcing the appointment.

Tumblin had previously been serving as interim director of the agency after the previous executive director stepped down in late 2025.

In her new role, Tumblin said she looks forward to continuing the work of supporting emergency responders and ensuring reliable communications services for residents across the county.

"I am honored to serve Saginaw County and look forward to working with our dedicated team and public safety partners to

continue delivering reliable, professional emergency communications services," Tumblin said.

Saginaw County 911 handles emergency calls for communities throughout the county and works closely with local law enforcement, fire departments and emergency medical services to coordinate responses to emergencies.

The dispatch center operates around the clock and serves as a critical link between residents and first responders across the region.

**Saginaw Promise**

- ▶ Since 2012, Saginaw Promise has provided over **\$1,405,747** in scholarships.
- ▶ **Big News!!!--Saginaw Promise has amended its Development Plan to broaden scholarship funding options, to fund "costs of attendance",** in addition to tuition/mandatory fees, funding can now be applied to housing, books, supplies, meal programs, transportation etc. **More support for scholars and greater impact for Saginaw!**
- ▶ **Return on Investment:** (Source: 2024 National Clearinghouse Report) Saginaw Promise Scholar persistence and attainment...

National Student Clearinghouse Report (2024)	
Saginaw Promise Scholars attainment--2012-2024.	
*Persistence of Saginaw Promise Scholars to second year of postsecondary education:	49%
Program Certificates:	13
Associate degrees:	56
Bachelor's degrees:	152
Master's degrees:	33
Doctoral Candidates:	3
Juris Doctor:	1
*Additional Degrees earned but report did not specify degree level:	65

**Total Number of program certificates and degrees earned: 323.**

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## COMMUNITY

# Michigan's oldest resident, Bonita Gibson of Canton, dies at 114



BONITA GIBSON AT AGE 13; GIBSON AT AGE 114. (PHOTO CREDIT: LINDSAY CHARLEFOUR & SARA BAILEY)

BY MB STAFF

CANTON, Mich. — Bonita B. Gibson, believed to be the oldest living resident in Michigan and one of the oldest people in the United States, has died at the age of 114.

Gibson, who lived in Canton in Wayne County, died March 10, 2026. Born July 4, 1911, she lived through more than a century of American history, witnessing events ranging from the 1918 influenza pandemic and the Great Depression to World War II and the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to her obituary, Gibson was believed to be the oldest living person in Michigan, the second oldest in the

United States, and among the seven oldest people in the world at the time of her death.

### A life spanning more than a century

Gibson was born in Missouri in 1911 and grew up on a farm before meeting her future husband, Kenneth Gibson, while they were in high school. The couple married in 1930 and spent decades living in Idaho, where her husband worked as a potato broker.

After retiring, the couple continued to live in Idaho Falls. They were married for 72 years before Kenneth Gibson died in 2003.

In later years, Gibson moved

to Michigan and spent the final stage of her life at Waltonwood Carriage Park, a senior living community in Canton.

Throughout her life, Gibson experienced dramatic changes in American society and technology. She lived through two world wars, the rise of modern aviation, the civil rights movement and the digital age.

Family members said Gibson maintained an active lifestyle well into her later years. She took her first airplane trip at age 99 and visited a casino for the first time at age 106.

She also survived COVID-19 at age 109, making her one of the oldest known survivors of the virus.

Gibson is survived by her

son Richard, as well as grandchildren Scott, Stacy and Kevin. Her family also includes several great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

### Funeral arrangements

Visitation and services for Gibson are scheduled for March 24 at the John N. Santeiu & Son Funeral Home in Garden City. Following the services in Michigan, she will be laid to rest in Idaho Falls, Idaho, where she spent much of her life.

Her passing marks the end of an extraordinary life that spanned more than 11 decades and connected multiple generations of American history.

## COMMUNITY

# Sherelle “PJ” Johnson remembered as a true angel in the Saginaw community

BY CYNTHIA ASHFORD

If Sherelle “PJ” Johnson’s life celebration was any indication of the impact she made in Saginaw, one description captures her best: she was truly an angel among us.

Many in the community remember PJ for her vibrant purple hair, radiant smile, and the warmth she shared with everyone she met. Her presence brought laughter, encouragement, and a sense of belonging. When you were around PJ, she had a way of making you feel like you were her favorite. In truth, she was everyone’s favorite.

At the time of her passing, PJ was a valued employee of Saginaw Public Schools, where she had become a beloved and familiar figure. She was also a devoted mother whose intentional parenting was reflected in the character and demeanor of her two daughters, both of whom attended Saginaw Public Schools.

PJ was known throughout the district as a supportive presence for administrators, teachers, and students alike. She could often be found cheering at school ball games, helping wherever needed, or providing meals for staff and students. Her generosity and kindness were constants in the school community.

She also shared a remarkable creative talent. Through her decorating and artistic ability, PJ helped transform school spaces into warm and welcoming environments.

“PJ was such a gifted artist that she could do more with paper and scissors than most people could do in a fully equipped art studio,” said M. Denise Baldwin, assistant principal at Saginaw Middle School.

Former Saginaw Public Schools student Sommer Frazier



SHERELLE “PJ” JOHNSON (COURTESY PHOTO)

recalled PJ’s unwavering support for students.

“She actually supported us,” Frazier said. “It didn’t matter who you were — an athlete, someone struggling, or someone shy. Miss PJ was determined to

pull out whatever you needed to survive and thrive.”

PJ’s life touched past, present, and future generations in Saginaw. Those who had the privilege of being in her presence were always left better.

Though she will be deeply missed, the love she poured into her family, schools, and community ensures that her legacy will continue to live on throughout Saginaw.

## COMMUNITY

## Medical Diamond project highlighted as key to Saginaw's future during Saginaw Future awards luncheon



SAM SHAHEEN (FB / CITY OF SAGINAW)

BY MB STAFF

FRANKENMUTH, Mich. — A major redevelopment effort known as the Medical Diamond is expected to play a central role in shaping Saginaw's economic future, a message emphasized during a luncheon hosted by Saginaw Future Inc..

The organization's Future Forward Economic Excellence Awards luncheon, held March 13, recognized more than two dozen development projects and community investments across the region while highlighting the importance of continued collaboration to strengthen Saginaw's

economy.

The event was held at the Bavarian Inn Lodge, with local television personalities Chet Walker and Meg McLeod serving as emcees.

A central theme of the event was the role of the Medical Diamond initiative in revitalizing the city and expanding opportunities for economic development.

### A strategic corridor for redevelopment

The Medical Diamond refers to a key geographic area in Saginaw that includes major healthcare institutions, cultural assets and riverfront property. The cor-

ridor is generally defined by the Dow Event Center to the north, Andersen Park to the south and hospital campuses on both the east and west sides.

Community leaders say the area represents a unique opportunity to connect healthcare, culture and economic development while encouraging new investment and redevelopment.

The luncheon's keynote speaker, Sam Shaheen, said the Medical Diamond could help unlock new possibilities for development in the heart of the city.

Shaheen is a longtime physician and healthcare leader who serves as president and CEO of Central Michigan University

Medical Education Partners, where he oversees the faculty practice plan and graduate medical education programs connected to Central Michigan University College of Medicine.

Before leading the organization, Shaheen also served as professor of surgery and chair of surgical disciplines at Central Michigan University's College of Medicine, working closely with Saginaw's major hospital systems.

Speaking at the luncheon, Shaheen said the Medical Dia-

**Continues on pg 22,  
Saginaw Future**

COMMUNITY

From pg 21, Saginaw Future



SAGINAW FUTURE AWARDS LUNCHEON (FB / CITY OF SAGINAW)

mond corridor offers opportunities to expand use of Saginaw's riverfront and create new destinations for residents and visitors.

"It's a geography that involves some of our most important health care locations as well as all of our arts and culture assets for Saginaw County," Shaheen said. "Many of them are in the Medical Diamond. Using that geography to develop further in-fill is going to be critical for our renaissance."

**Connecting healthcare, culture and the riverfront**

The Medical Diamond concept focuses on linking several major institutions and assets

that already serve as anchors in the community.

These include hospitals, cultural venues, parks and the Saginaw River corridor. Local leaders say strengthening connections between these assets could help attract additional investment, support tourism and create new economic activity.

Shaheen said the riverfront, in particular, represents an underutilized resource with potential for future development.

Efforts to develop the Medical Diamond have been discussed for several years as part of broader economic revitalization efforts in Saginaw. Community leaders say strategic investment in the corridor could help

stimulate new housing, business development and public spaces.

**Recognizing economic development achievements**

In addition to highlighting the Medical Diamond initiative, the luncheon also celebrated numerous development projects and business expansions throughout the region.

More than two dozen projects were recognized during the awards ceremony for their contributions to job creation, investment and community growth.

The event served as both a celebration of recent progress and a call for continued collaboration among business lead-

ers, developers and community organizations.

As Saginaw continues to pursue redevelopment opportunities, leaders say projects like the Medical Diamond represent a long-term vision for revitalizing the city's core while building on its existing strengths in health-care, culture and community assets.

Shaheen is scheduled to continue discussing the vision for the Medical Diamond later this year. He will serve as the keynote speaker at the Heart of the City Community Awards Banquet hosted by The Michigan Banner on June 4, where he is expected to speak on the project's potential impact on Saginaw community.

COMMUNITY

# Saginaw County asks residents to report flood damage following heavy rainfall

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — Saginaw County Emergency Management is asking residents whose homes were affected by flooding during heavy rainfall earlier this month to report damage as officials work to assess the scope of the impact across the county.

County officials said the request follows heavy rains on March 10 and March 11, 2026, which led to flooding in some homes and neighborhoods throughout Saginaw County.

Emergency management officials are working with local mu-

nicipalities and response partners to gather information about how many homes were affected and the severity of the damage.

Residents whose homes experienced flooding are encouraged to submit damage reports either by calling 211 or by completing an online self-assessment damage survey provided by the county.

The survey can be accessed at:

<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/6e1d8996f0704b9fa b5395eecd63a65e>

Information collected through these reports will help

officials develop a clearer understanding of the extent of flooding impacts across Saginaw County.

Emergency management officials said the reports will assist the county in documenting damage and identifying potential community needs following the storm.

In addition to helping officials measure the scope of the flooding event, the information may also help connect residents who experienced damage with organizations that provide assistance.

County officials emphasized that submitting a damage re-

port is primarily intended to help gather information about the event and does not guarantee financial assistance or disaster aid.

Saginaw County Emergency Management is encouraging residents who experienced flooding to report damage as soon as possible so the county can complete an accurate assessment of the event.

Officials said the agency will continue coordinating with local and state partners as additional information about flood damage is collected and reviewed.

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<b>Welcome to Summer! Field Day</b> at Fordney Park <i>Big-time recess vibes with Saginaw Public Libraries &amp; Saginaw County Parks.</i>	ROUTE 3 SATURDAY <b>05 16</b> 1 PM - 4 PM
<b>Swimming Day</b> at Saginaw YMCA <i>Make waves with Saginaw YMCA &amp; SASA Swim and take home a life jacket.</i>	ROUTE 7/8 SUNDAY <b>05 31</b> 10:30 AM - 1 PM
<b>Fishing Day</b> at Old Town Docks <i>Cast &amp; reel with Saginaw County Parks and keep the gear.</i>	ROUTE 3 SUNDAY <b>06 07</b> 11 AM - 1:30 PM
<b>Home Garden &amp; Planting Day</b> at Houghton-Jones Community Center <i>Start something growing with Houghton-Jones and see what it becomes.</i>	ROUTE 5 SATURDAY <b>06 13</b> 11 AM - 1:30 PM
<b>Tennis &amp; Pickleball Day</b> at Garber Courts <i>Serve, swing, and step onto the court with Urban Racquet Sports.</i>	ROUTE 7/8 SATURDAY <b>08 15</b> 11 AM - 1:30 PM
<b>Skateboarding Day</b> at Celebration Skate Park <i>Find your balance with Shawn Deer and roll home with your own gear.</i>	ROUTE 7/8 SUNDAY <b>08 23</b> 10:45 AM - 1:30 PM

## POLITICS

## SVSU to host Great Lakes Bay Region candidate forum for Michigan's 35th Senate District

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — Voters in Michigan's 35th Senate District will have an opportunity to hear directly from candidates seeking the seat during the Great Lakes Bay Region Candidate Forum 2026, scheduled for March 24 at Saginaw Valley State University.

The forum will take place from 6:40 to 8 p.m. at the Malcolm Field Theatre for Performing Arts in Curtiss Hall on the SVSU campus. The event is free and open to the public, though organizers are asking attendees to secure tickets in advance using a registration link provided through the event's QR code.

The event will feature Republican candidate Jason Tunney and Democratic candidate Chedrick Greene, who are running for the open seat representing the Michigan 35th Senate District, which includes Saginaw, Bay and Midland counties.

## Candidate backgrounds

Jason Tunney is a businessman and attorney who has been active in regional economic development and community initiatives. Tunney has previously served in leadership roles in the private sector and has been involved in business and civic organizations across the Great Lakes Bay Region.

Chedrick Greene is a Saginaw-based community leader and activist who has worked on issues related to economic opportunity, youth development and neighborhood investment. Greene has been involved in several grassroots initiatives in the region and has advocated for expanded educational and work-

force opportunities.

The 35th District seat became open following the announcement that State Sen. Kristen McDonald Rivet, a Democrat from Bay City, would run for Congress rather than seek reelection to the state Senate.

## Forum format

The March 24 forum will be moderated by Chad Livengood, senior political reporter for *The Detroit News*, and Zoe Clark, political director for *Michigan Public Radio*.

The moderators will guide discussion on issues expected to shape the upcoming election, in-

cluding regional economic development, education, public safety and infrastructure.

Organizers say the event is intended to give voters across the Great Lakes Bay Region an opportunity to hear candidates discuss their priorities and answer questions ahead of the upcoming election.

The forum is hosted by Cardinals Vote and Saginaw Valley State University's Henry Marsh Institute for Public Policy, with additional participation from civic and business organizations throughout the region.

Co-sponsoring organizations include the Bay County Democratic Party, Bay County Republi-

can Party, Saginaw County Democratic Party, Midland County Democratic Party, the Midland Business Alliance, Michigan Women Forward, the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce, and the Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.

SVSU officials note the university has implemented a no-bag policy for the event.

The forum is part of ongoing efforts by regional organizations to encourage civic engagement and provide voters with opportunities to learn more about candidates seeking public office in the Great Lakes Bay Region.

MICHIGAN 35TH SENATE DISTRICT FORUM

JASON TUNNEY

CHEDRICK GREENE

FORUM MODERATORS:

CHAD LIVENGOOD  
DETROIT NEWS

ZOE CLARK  
MICHIGAN PUBLIC RADIO

CHEDRICK GREENE (D) AND JASON TUNNEY (R) WILL MEET TUESDAY, MARCH 24TH, FOR A POLITICAL FORUM MODERATED BY CHAD LIVENGOOD (THE DETROIT NEWS) AND ZOE CLARK (MICHIGAN PUBLIC RADIO).

# Flint leaders debate water costs, police pay and city priorities amid recent council decisions

BY MB STAFF

FLINT, Mich. — A series of recent decisions by the Flint City Council has highlighted ongoing political debates in the city over public safety funding, rising utility costs and long-term financial planning.

Over the past week, city leaders have addressed issues ranging from police pay raises to water affordability, underscoring the challenges facing Flint officials as they balance infrastructure needs with the economic pressures facing residents.

## Police contract approved after earlier delays

One of the most significant developments came when the Flint City Council approved a new labor agreement with the Flint Patrol Officers Association, ending months of negotiations over police compensation.

The three-year contract provides a 7% pay increase retroactive to July 1, 2025, along with additional 6% raises in 2026 and 2027. The agreement also eliminates the lowest step in the wage scale to create a more competitive starting salary for new officers.

City officials said the agreement is intended to strengthen recruitment and retention within the Flint Police Department, a challenge faced by many law enforcement agencies nationwide.

The contract was unanimously ratified by members of the Flint Patrol Officers Association and later approved by the City Council, marking one of the largest pay increases for police officers in the city's history.

Flint Police Chief Terence Green said the agreement reflects the city's commitment to



FLINT POLICE

supporting officers who serve the community.

## Water rate debate sparks political tensions

At the same time, Flint officials remain divided over how to address rising water costs tied to increases from the Great Lakes Water Authority, which recently approved a nearly 6% water rate increase and more than 4% sewer rate increase that will take effect July 1.

Mayor Sheldon Neeley proposed adding \$1 million to the city's Water Stabilization Fund to offset the increase and protect residents from higher bills

through the 2028 fiscal year.

However, the Flint City Council voted 5–2 to reject the proposal, citing concerns about the cost and requesting a longer-term strategy for addressing water affordability.

Neeley criticized the decision, arguing that residents already facing economic hardship would feel the impact of rising water costs.

"Families in Flint are already struggling with rising costs, and this 'no' vote puts them at even greater risk," Neeley said following the council's decision.

Council members who opposed the proposal said they wanted additional financial de-

tails and a broader plan for stabilizing water rates before committing additional funds.

## Mayor vows to continue pushing for relief

Despite the council vote, Neeley said his administration will continue searching for ways to prevent water rate increases from being passed on to Flint residents.

The mayor has encouraged residents to stay engaged in city council discussions and attend future meetings as officials continue to debate potential solutions.

## HEALTH

# Covenant HealthCare and Henry Ford Health announce partnership to expand care in Saginaw

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — Covenant HealthCare and Henry Ford Health have announced a new clinical affiliation aimed at expanding access to specialized neurological care for patients across Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Region.

The partnership, which becomes effective April 1, 2026, formalizes a longstanding referral relationship between the two nonprofit health systems and establishes a new collaboration focused on advanced neuroscience care in the Saginaw area.

At the center of the affiliation will be a program known as Covenant HealthCare in partnership with Henry Ford Health Neurosciences, which will combine Covenant's local clinical services with Henry Ford Health's specialized neurological expertise.

The initiative is expected to strengthen Covenant's existing neuroscience services while providing patients with improved access to complex care without having to travel outside the region.

"Our two organizations have a long history of collaboration," said Beth Charlton, president and CEO of Covenant HealthCare. "This partnership allows us to build on the strength of our existing neurosciences program by leveraging Henry Ford Health's specialized expertise. By working together, we can provide more coordinated care for our patients and have the ability to treat even more complex neurological cases in Saginaw—bringing extraordinary care closer to home for patients across the Great Lakes Bay Region."



AERIAL VIEW OF COVENANT HEALTHCARE IN SAGINAW

Under the partnership, physicians and specialists from Henry Ford Health's neurosciences program will work alongside Covenant HealthCare providers to treat patients both on-site at Covenant facilities and virtually through Henry Ford's specialty center in Saginaw.

The collaboration will focus on four primary areas of neurological care: neurosurgery and spine care, stroke treatment, neurology and neuro-oncology.

Covenant HealthCare currently handles approximately 15,500 neuroscience patient visits annually and has historically referred some of its most complex neurological cases to Henry Ford Health facilities in Detroit.

With the new affiliation, many of those consultations and treatments will now be able to take place closer to home, potentially

reducing travel time and costs for patients across mid-Michigan.

Bob Riney, president and CEO of Henry Ford Health, said the partnership will help create clearer pathways for patients requiring highly specialized neurological care.

"We are extremely excited about what this partnership means for the patients in Saginaw and the Great Lakes Bay Region," Riney said. "Our experts are eager to partner with our Covenant HealthCare colleagues and to give patients in this area a clearer pathway to coordinated care for some of their most complex diagnoses, which we treat every day in our Henry Ford Health facilities."

Henry Ford Health's Detroit-based neuroscience program is widely known for treating complex neurological conditions

such as ALS, brain tumors and traumatic brain and spinal injuries. The system is also involved in clinical trials and neurological research.

As part of the new affiliation, the two organizations also plan to build a joint outpatient neurosciences facility on Covenant HealthCare's Mackinaw Campus in Saginaw Township. Eventually, the partnership's neurological services are expected to be centralized at that location.

Further details about the new facility are expected to be announced in the coming months.

Covenant HealthCare, a nonprofit regional health system serving the Great Lakes Bay Region, provides a wide range of inpatient and outpatient services including trauma care, cardiology, oncology, obstetrics, orthopedics and rehabilitation. In 2025, the health system was named among Michigan's Best Regional Hospitals by U.S. News & World Report, placing it in the top 10 percent of hospitals in the state.

Henry Ford Health, headquartered in Detroit, operates more than 550 care sites across Michigan and employs more than 50,000 team members. The health system provides services ranging from primary and preventive care to advanced specialty treatment, research and medical education. Henry Ford Health also reports providing more than \$780 million annually in uncompensated care and coverage while supporting community health programs throughout the state.

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## HEALTH

## Senate passes hospital financial aid bill to reduce medical debt

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — The Michigan Senate has approved new legislation that would require hospitals across the state to provide clearer financial assistance programs for patients struggling with medical bills.

The measure, known as the Hospital Financial Assistance Act, now moves to the Michigan House of Representatives for further consideration.

Lawmakers say the legislation is part of a broader effort to address the growing burden of medical debt faced by residents across Michigan.

The bill would require hospitals to establish financial assistance programs designed to help

eligible patients pay or reduce medical debt. If approved by the House and signed into law, hospitals would be required to have those programs in place by Jan. 1, 2027.

Under the proposal, hospitals would also be required to submit annual reports detailing the use of their financial assistance programs to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services beginning in October 2027.

The legislation is sponsored by Sarah Anthony, a Democrat representing the Lansing area, and received bipartisan support in the Senate, including backing from Ed McBroom of the Upper Peninsula.

The proposal is part of a larger package of bills addressing medical debt and hospital fi-

ancial assistance. The measures would standardize how hospitals offer charity care programs and require clear information about financial assistance to be available to patients.

Some provisions would also require hospitals to publicly post information about their financial assistance policies and report how many patients apply for and receive help each year.

Additional legislation passed alongside the measure would place limits on certain medical debt collection practices, including restrictions on interest rates and fees associated with unpaid medical bills.

State officials estimate that about 700,000 Michigan residents carry medical debt, reflecting a broader national issue that

affects millions of Americans.

Supporters of the legislation say requiring hospitals to provide transparent financial assistance programs could help prevent medical debt from becoming a long-term financial burden for families.

The bill has received its first reading in the Michigan House and has been referred to the House Committee on Health Policy for further review.

If the legislation passes the House and is signed by Gretchen Whitmer, the new requirements would apply to hospitals statewide, potentially affecting healthcare providers and patients across Michigan's communities.

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## EDUCATION

# Michigan proposes \$625 million literacy initiative to improve reading outcomes



BOY READING (FILE PHOTO)

**BY MB STAFF**

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan education leaders are promoting a major statewide effort to strengthen reading skills among students through a proposed \$625 million literacy initiative known as “Every Child Reads.”

The plan, included in Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s fiscal year 2027 budget proposal, represents the largest one-time investment in literacy in Michigan history, according to state education officials.

State leaders recently highlighted the initiative during visits to schools and community events

promoting early literacy and the state’s annual March is Reading Month campaign.

The initiative aims to ensure that every student in Michigan is able to read proficiently by focusing on early childhood learning, improved teacher training and expanded academic support for struggling readers.

The plan includes funding for additional literacy coaches, teacher training in evidence-based reading instruction and expanded tutoring programs for students who need extra help.

Michigan education officials say the strategy is built around three major priorities: expand-

ing access to early childhood education programs, strengthening classroom instruction through proven reading methods and increasing academic support through tutoring and extended learning opportunities.

The proposal also includes funding to expand Great Start Readiness Program preschool classrooms, which are designed to help children build early language and literacy skills before entering kindergarten.

The initiative comes as state leaders continue working to improve literacy outcomes across Michigan. Recent education data shows that while reading pro-

iciency has improved slightly in some grades, many students still struggle to meet state benchmarks.

Supporters of the plan say early reading skills are critical to long-term academic success, since students who fall behind in elementary school often face increasing challenges in later grades.

If approved by the Michigan Legislature, the funding would support expanded literacy programs in schools across the state, including districts in the Great Lakes Bay Region.

## EDUCATION

# Michigan considering mandatory literacy training for teachers



TEACHER IN CLASSROOM (FILE PHOTO)

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan lawmakers are considering a proposal that would require elementary school teachers and administrators across the state to complete specialized training in evidence-based reading instruction.

The proposal is part of ongoing statewide efforts to improve student literacy and ensure that teachers are trained in research-based methods commonly referred to as the “science

of reading.”

The training focuses on teaching educators how students learn to read, including phonics instruction, vocabulary development and reading comprehension strategies.

State education leaders say the initiative would help ensure that students across Michigan receive consistent, high-quality literacy instruction in early grades.

More than 6,000 Michigan educators have already completed Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training, an inten-

sive professional development program that focuses on the science of reading.

Under the proposal, similar training could eventually become a standard requirement for teachers and school leaders working in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Education officials say the goal is to ensure that educators have the most effective tools to support young readers and identify students who may need additional help.

The proposal aligns with broader efforts under the state’s

Every Child Reads strategy, which emphasizes proven literacy practices and early intervention to help students who struggle with reading.

Supporters of the initiative say strengthening teacher training is one of the most effective ways to improve reading outcomes statewide.

If approved, the requirement would be implemented over several years to allow educators and school districts time to complete the training.



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## EDUCATION

# Saginaw Promise Changing Funding Options to Increase support to Scholars!



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES (COURTESY PHOTO)

Saginaw Promise, an economic initiative working to impact the future of Saginaw, its economy, and the lives of its students through information and scholarships for post-secondary education. Since 2012, the Saginaw Promise has awarded \$1,515,062 in scholarships to 804 scholars! Saginaw Promise Scholarship Applicants number 232 for the 2026/2027 academic year!

In 2026, the Saginaw Promise is increasing support to scholars as it can now fund “costs of attendance”, in addition to tuition and mandatory fees, the Saginaw Promise scholarship can now fund housing, books, sup-

plies, food, transportation etc. Funding “costs of attendance” will increase support and assistance to scholars as they pursue their educational goals and increase persistence and attainment rates.

Who is eligible for the Saginaw Promise scholarship? The Saginaw Promise Scholarship is a benefit and an incentive for children of families who live in and graduate from a high school in the Saginaw Promise Zone (comprised of the cities of Saginaw, Zilwaukee, Kochville and that area of Buena Vista designated to the Saginaw Public School District). The organization’s goal is to impact the future of Saginaw by provid-

ing information and scholarships for postsecondary education to assist scholars to earn a program certificate or degree from a technical/trade school, community college, or university. The benefit of a postsecondary education will help retain and grow Saginaw’s population, which will support current businesses and attract new businesses with an educated workforce.

For Saginaw Promise Information or Questions: Visit [www.saginawpromise.org](http://www.saginawpromise.org) or email [dsanchez@saginawpromise.org](mailto:dsanchez@saginawpromise.org) or telephone (989) 607-3428.

SPONSORED CONTENT

## Support the Saginaw Promise 2026 Special events:

### “Swinging for the Promise” Golf Event

Saginaw Country Club  
Thursday, October 29, 2026  
11:30 AM

### “Power of a Promise” Luncheon

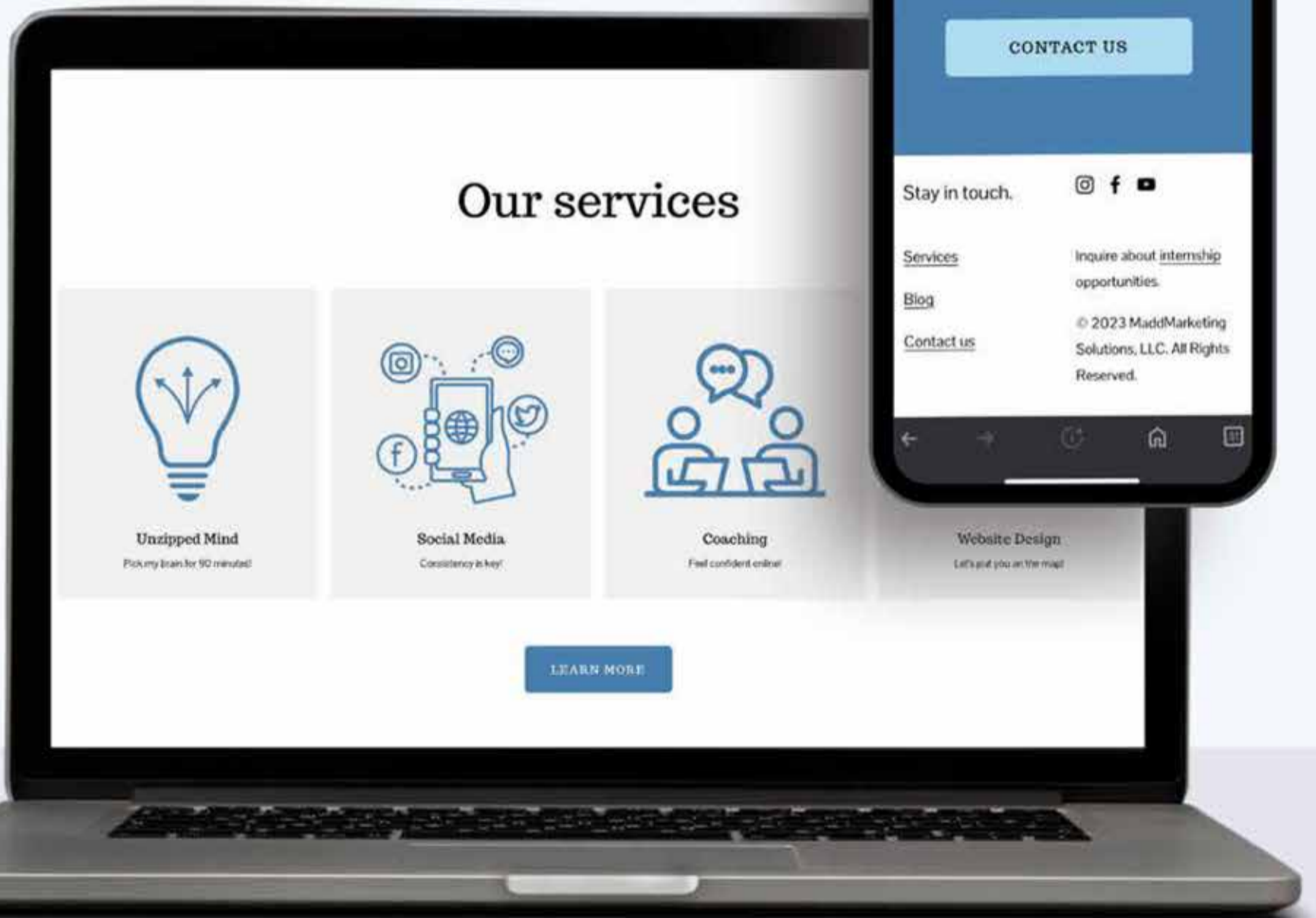
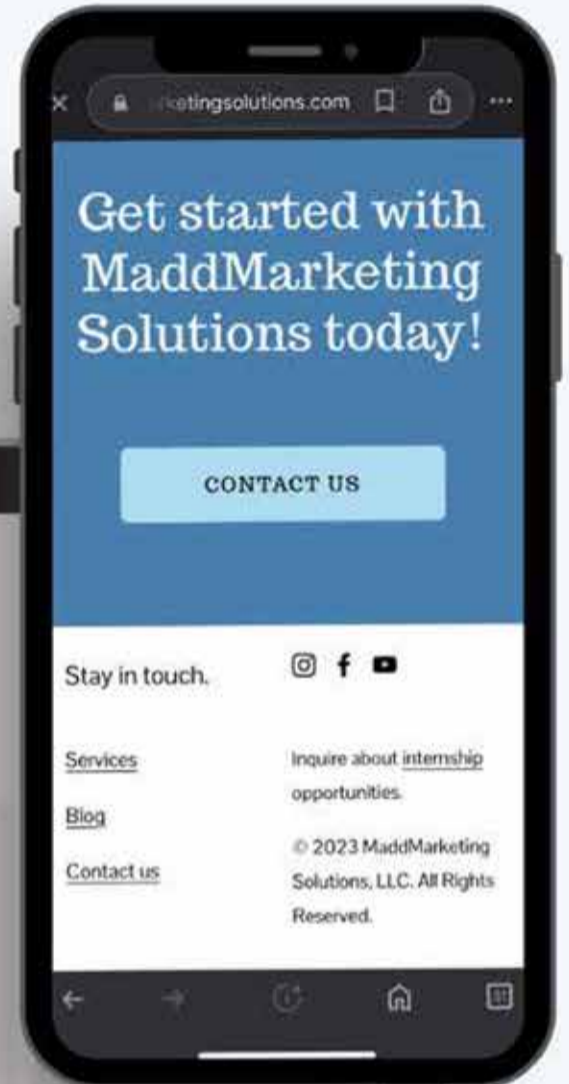
Horizons Conference Center  
Thursday, August 13, 2026  
10 AM

*\*Event details regarding golf registration, event tickets and sponsorship opportunities will soon be available for both events and included on the Saginaw Promise website.*



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## CONTACT US NOW

Erica M. Taylor, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
of Early Childhood

989-399-7423

[etaylor@sisd.cc](mailto:etaylor@sisd.cc)



### 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.
- Collect employee payments.
- Submit employer and employee payments via ACH.
- Communicate if an approved employee is no longer employed.
- Allow for flexibility as family situations and needs vary.

### MI Tri-Share Program Eligibility 2025

Household Size	Minimum	Maximum Income	Household Size	Minimum	Maximum Income
2 People	\$42,300	\$ 84,600	6 People	\$86,300	\$172,600
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

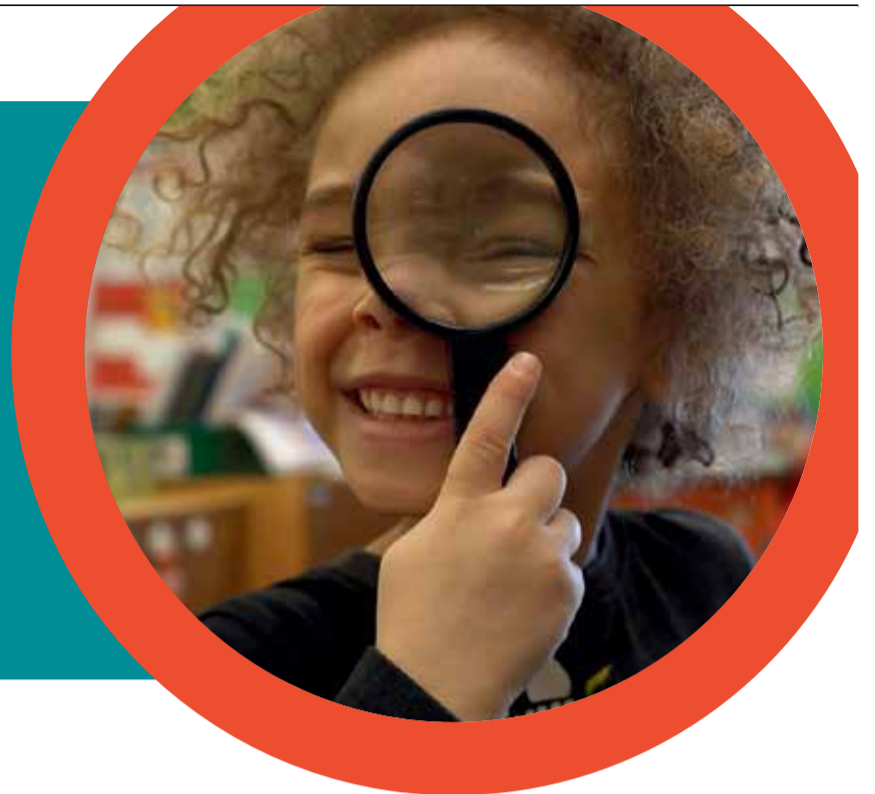
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*\*Administration for Children and Families: Children's Learning and Development Benefits from High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Summary of Evidence*



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**989-752-2193** for more information and apply today!

## BUSINESS + FINANCE

# Michigan Cream and Sugar reopens Bay City and Saginaw locations for 2026 season



MICHIGAN CREAM &amp; SUGAR SAGINAW LOCATION

BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — A popular Great Lakes Bay Region ice cream company has reopened its seasonal locations in Bay City and Saginaw as it prepares for another year of serving handcrafted

desserts and expanding its menu.

Michigan Cream and Sugar Ice Cream Company began its 2026 season on March 3, reopening shops in Uptown Bay City and Old Town Saginaw.

The Bay City location is entering its seventh season, while the Old Town Saginaw shop and

production facility is beginning its second year of operations.

Founded in 2019, the company specializes in small-batch, handcrafted ice cream made with locally sourced ingredients, often highlighting Michigan agricultural products.

This year the business has ex-

panded its menu offerings. The number of signature flavors has increased from 12 to 16, while eight rotating limited-edition options remain available, bringing the total selection to 24 flavors at any given time.

Among the signature flavors offered this season are varieties such as Birthday Cake, Strawberry Cheesecake, Double Stuffed Oreo Cookies, Mixed Berry Crisp and Legendairy Vanilla.

The company's locations operate on the same seasonal schedule until Memorial Day weekend. Hours are 2–9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 2–10 p.m. Friday, noon–10 p.m. Saturday, and noon–9 p.m. Sunday, with both shops closed on Mondays.

Michigan Cream and Sugar opened its first scoop shop in Uptown Bay City before expanding its operations to Saginaw with a new location and production facility in Old Town. The company produces its ice cream in small batches, focusing on quality ingredients and regional sourcing.

Local businesses such as Michigan Cream and Sugar are a growing part of the Great Lakes Bay Region's downtown revitalization efforts. Seasonal attractions like ice cream shops, restaurants and retail stores often help draw residents and visitors to districts such as Uptown Bay City and Old Town Saginaw during warmer months.

With the start of the 2026 season, the company expects to welcome customers from across the region as temperatures rise and outdoor activities return to mid-Michigan communities.

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## BUSINESS + FINANCE

## Six Flags to sell Michigan's Adventure as part of \$331M deal

BY MB STAFF

MUSKEGON, Mich. — Six Flags Entertainment Corporation has announced plans to sell Michigan's Adventure, the state's largest amusement park, as part of a \$331 million deal that includes six other parks across the United States and Canada.

The West Michigan park, located in Muskegon County, is among seven properties being sold to Kansas City-based real estate investment trust EPR Properties. The transaction is part of a broader strategy by Six Flags to streamline its port-

folio, reduce debt and focus on higher-performing attractions across North America.

Along with Michigan's Adventure, the sale includes Valleyfair in Minnesota, Worlds of Fun in Missouri, Six Flags St. Louis, Six Flags Great Escape in New York, Schlitterbahn Waterpark Galveston in Texas and La Ronde in Montreal.

Six Flags officials said the parks collectively draw about 4.5 million visitors annually and generated roughly \$260 million in revenue in recent years.

Under the agreement, EPR Properties will own the parks while operational responsibilities will be handled by Enchant-

ed Parks Holdings for the six U.S. locations. The Canadian property, La Ronde, will be operated by a separate local entity.

Despite the ownership change, park operations are expected to continue without interruption. Officials said Michigan's Adventure and the other properties will remain open for the 2026 season, and all previously purchased season passes and memberships will still be honored.

The deal follows a period of restructuring within the amusement park industry, including the 2024 merger between Cedar Fair and Six Flags that created the current Six Flags Entertainment Corporation.

Michigan's Adventure traces its roots back to 1958 when it opened as a small attraction called Deer Park. Over the decades it expanded and was eventually rebranded as Michigan's Adventure in 1988. Today the park includes dozens of rides and the adjacent WildWater Adventure water park, making it one of the state's most prominent seasonal tourist destinations.

The sale is expected to close in early 2026 pending final approvals. After the transaction, Six Flags will continue operating more than 30 parks across North America as it focuses investments on properties with greater long-term growth potential.

## Michigan outdoor recreation industry reaches \$15.1 billion

BY MB STAFF

LANSING, Mich. — Outdoor recreation continues to play a significant role in Michigan's economy, contributing \$15.1 billion in economic value in 2024, according to new federal data.

The figures come from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and highlight the growing economic importance of outdoor recreation activities across the state.

The industry's economic contribution increased from \$14.6 billion in 2023, representing about 3.5% growth year over year.

Outdoor recreation in Michigan supports nearly 125,000 jobs and generates approximately \$6.9 billion in employee compensation, according to industry data.

The sector includes a wide range of activities and industries such as boating, fishing, camp-



KAYAKING (FILE PHOTO)

ing, hunting, hiking, snowmobiling and outdoor tourism. Manufacturing tied to outdoor recreation — including boats, recreational vehicles and equipment — also contributes significantly to the state's economy.

Michigan ranks among the top states nationally in several outdoor recreation sectors. The

state places fifth in the nation for recreational vehicle manufacturing and eighth for boating and fishing economic activity, according to industry data.

Despite the growth, Michigan's outdoor recreation sector expanded slightly slower than the national average, which grew about 4% during the same period.

State officials say the diversity of Michigan's outdoor recreation industry — ranging from tourism and retail to manufacturing and guiding services — helps support economic activity in both urban and rural communities.

Across the state, more than 7,000 companies operate in industries tied to outdoor recreation.

For communities in regions such as the Great Lakes Bay area, outdoor recreation remains closely connected to tourism and local economic development. Activities like boating on Saginaw Bay, fishing, camping and park visitation attract visitors each year and support businesses ranging from equipment retailers to restaurants and lodging.

Economic development leaders say continued investment in parks, trails, waterfront access and tourism infrastructure can help strengthen the outdoor recreation economy while improving quality of life for residents across Michigan.



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## SPORTS

# East Lansing's K.J. Torbert makes history with Michigan Mr. Basketball win



SAGINAW NOUVEL DEFEATED SACRED HEART ACADEMY

## BY MB STAFF

EAST LANSING, Mich. — East Lansing High School senior Kelvin “K.J.” Torbert Jr. has been named the 2025–26 Hal Schram Mr. Basketball award winner, marking a historic milestone in Michigan high school basketball.

Torbert’s selection makes him the first player in the award’s 46-year history to follow a parent who also won the prestigious honor. His father, Kelvin Torbert, earned the Mr. Basketball title in

2001 before going on to play at Michigan State University.

The Mr. Basketball award, presented annually to the state’s top senior boys basketball player, is voted on by members of the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan and the media. The recognition places Torbert among the most accomplished high school players in the state.

Torbert, a 6-foot-4 guard at East Lansing High School, has been a central figure in the Trojans’ success. He helped lead the program to a Division 1 state

championship during the 2025 season and entered his senior year as one of the state’s top-ranked prospects.

Known for his scoring ability and all-around play, Torbert averaged around 25 points per game during the season while drawing statewide attention as a leading candidate for the award.

Beyond his high school accomplishments, Torbert has already committed to continue his basketball career at Bowling Green State University.

His Mr. Basketball selection

adds another chapter to a family legacy in Michigan basketball. With both father and son now holding the title, the Torberts have secured a unique place in the history of the state’s most prestigious high school basketball honor.

Torbert’s recognition also reflects the continued strength of East Lansing’s basketball program, which has re-emerged as one of Michigan’s top teams in recent seasons.

## SPORTS

# Former Saginaw High standout Sir'Real Smith leads nation in scoring, earns MCCA Northern Player of the Year at Delta College



SIR'REAL SMITH (FB / SIRREALSMITH12)

**BY MB STAFF**

SAGINAW, Mich. — Former Saginaw High School standout Sir'Real Smith has completed

one of the most prolific seasons in Delta College men's basketball history, finishing the year as the NJCAA Division II national scoring leader and earning Michigan Community College Athletic As-

sociation Northern Conference Player of the Year honors.

Smith, a sophomore guard for the Delta College Pioneers, averaged 30.3 points per game during the 2025–26 season, leading

all players nationally in scoring at the NJCAA Division II level.

The former Saginaw High Trojan also averaged 9.4 rebounds and 2.7 assists per game while shooting 52% from the field and 38.6% from three-point range, producing one of the most statistically dominant seasons in junior college basketball this year.

Over the course of the completed season, Smith totaled 697 points, along with 216 rebounds, 63 assists and 33 blocks, highlighting his ability to contribute in multiple areas while serving as the Pioneers' primary offensive leader.

Smith delivered several standout performances throughout the season, including a 46-point game in a 115-75 victory over North Central Michigan, one of the highest single-game scoring totals recorded in the MCCA Northern Conference this year.

His production helped power Delta College's offense throughout conference play and earned him multiple MCCA Northern Conference Player of the Week honors during the season.

The MCCA Northern Conference Player of the Year award recognizes the top player in the conference based on performance throughout the regular season. Smith's scoring production and overall impact made him a clear selection for the honor.

By finishing the season as the nation's leading scorer in NJCAA Division II, Smith delivered one of the most productive offensive seasons in Delta College men's basketball history and established himself as one of the top junior college players in the country.

## SPORTS

# Freeland wins first boys basketball state championship in school history



FREELAND DEFEATS UNITY CHRISTIAN IN MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL DIVISION 2 CHAMPIONSHIP

BY MB STAFF

EAST LANSING, Mich. — The Freeland High School boys basketball team captured the first state championship in program history Saturday, March 14, defeating Hudsonville Unity Christian 42-32 in the Michigan High School Athletic Association Division 2 state final at the Breslin Center.

The victory capped a historic season for the Falcons, who finished with a 26-3 record and secured the school's first boys basketball state title.

Freeland relied on strong de-

fense and balanced scoring in the championship game, holding Unity Christian to just 32 points while controlling the tempo throughout the second half.

Senior guard Wilson Huckeby and senior forward Tristan Comer each scored 12 points to lead the Falcons. Comer also pulled down 10 rebounds, recording a double-double in the title game and helping Freeland control the boards.

Unity Christian entered the finals with a 25-4 record and remained within striking distance early in the game before Freeland gradually pulled away. The Falcons' defense limited scoring

opportunities and forced several key stops in the second half to maintain their lead.

Freeland advanced to the state championship after defeating Romulus Summit Academy North 57-47 in the Division 2 semifinal Friday, March 13, also at the Breslin Center. Comer led the Falcons with 20 points and 13 rebounds in that game.

The Falcons' tournament run included victories over several strong opponents throughout district, regional and quarterfinal rounds before reaching the state's final weekend in East Lansing.

The MHSAA boys basketball

state finals bring together the final four teams from each division after weeks of postseason play across Michigan. Games are held annually at Michigan State University's Breslin Center.

For Freeland, the championship represents a defining moment in the history of the Saginaw County program. The Falcons had previously made deep tournament runs but had never captured a state title.

With the victory over Unity Christian, Freeland secured its place in the MHSAA record books and concluded one of the most successful seasons in school history.

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## 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.

SPONSORED CONTENT

## FAITH IN FOCUS

# Bishop Ronald Chipp, founder of Faith Harvest Church in Saginaw, dies at 69



BISHOP RONALD CHIPP

## BY MB STAFF

SAGINAW, Mich. — Bishop Ronald Eugene Chipp, founder and senior pastor of Faith Harvest Church in Saginaw and a longtime Christian leader with international ministry outreach, died March 4, 2026, at Covenant Hospital in Saginaw. He was 69.

Chipp was born Oct. 20, 1956, in Brunswick, Georgia, and later moved to Michigan, where he attended Cass Technical High School in Detroit. He later earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Detroit and worked in research

and development within the defense and automotive industries, earning several patents in electrical engineering design before entering full-time ministry.

Before becoming a pastor, Chipp served in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam era, reaching the rank of corporal and qualifying as a sharpshooter in marksmanship.

After leaving the engineering field, he pursued theological training at the Word of Faith School of Ministry in Southfield, graduating as salutatorian of the school's charter class. He later served as an assistant pastor

at Word of Faith International Christian Center under Bishop Keith Butler.

Chipp went on to establish Faith Harvest Church in Saginaw in 1995 as a Bible-teaching and missions-focused congregation. He and his wife, Pastor Phyllis M. Chipp, also founded Faith Harvest Christian Centre in Kampala, Uganda, expanding their ministry beyond the United States.

Through his ministry, Chipp preached and conducted outreach efforts internationally, including evangelistic events and missions work in several African nations, as well as in Europe and South America. He also helped establish churches in Uganda and Tanzania and founded the Faith Harvest Medical Clinic in Kampala to support medical mis-

sion work.

Chipp is survived by his wife of 48 years, Phyllis Chipp; his parents, Donald and Elouise Chipp of Detroit; his children, Aaron Chipp and Autumn Curran; three grandchildren; and extended family members.

Visitation is scheduled for 9 to 10 a.m. Friday, March 20, at Faith Harvest Church, 1734 N. Mason St. in Saginaw. A celebration of life service will follow at 10 a.m. Burial is planned for 2:30 p.m. at Great Lakes National Cemetery in Holly.

Faith Harvest Church, located at 1734 N. Mason St. on Saginaw's west side, continues to serve the region through weekly worship services, Bible study and mission outreach programs.



BISHOP RONALD CHIPP MINISTERING IN NIGERIA IN 2012

## FAITH IN FOCUS

## SERMONETTE SERIES

## Stop Reading Yesterday's Headlines: God is Printing a New Story

*"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"*



BY MINISTER CAROLYN  
CARTER TOWNSEL



In a world obsessed with yesterday's news, Heaven is issuing a bold comment; Stop rehearsing the past. The prophetic declaration in the Book of Isaiah 43:18-19 reads like a divine front-page headline:

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"

God is not interested in recycling old pain, old labels, or old limitations. And if we are honest, many people are still emotionally subscribed to expired headlines:

**"Failure"**  
**"Rejection"**  
**"Lost opportunity"**  
**"What used to be."**

But Heaven's newsroom just released breaking news; God is doing something new. Not recycled. Not refurbished. New. And according to the prophet Isaiah, this new move of God doesn't politely knock - it springs up. Suddenly. Powerfully. Right in places people thought were barren.

The Scripture goes even further. God declares He will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Let that sink in. When others see drought, God

sees design. Where others see emptiness, God releases overflow. So, if your life has felt like a desert season, here's the bold truth; God specializes in impossible landscaping. He plants miracles where people expect memorials. Which means the breakup wasn't the final chapter. The setback wasn't the closing statement. And the silence wasn't the end of the story. It was simply the setup for the new thing.

But here's the catch-many people miss the new move of God because they keep rereading old headlines. God said "Forget the former things." Not because they didn't happen. But because they don't get to define what happens next. So today, Heaven's editorial message is simple - Close the archive. Cancel the subscription to yesterday's pain. And pay attention, because something new is already breaking through the ground. You just have to perceive it. And trust this: If God can make rivers in the deserts, He can absolutely rewrite your story.

Beloved, lift your head. Stop staring at what was and start expecting what God is doing right now. The new thing isn't coming someday-it's already springing up. Do you see it?

Blessings to All,  
Carolyn

# Women in Power: Faith, Leadership, and Purpose at Greater Believing Faith Outreach Ministry

BY MB STAFF

ATLANTA — During Women in Power Month, the strength and faith of women who lead and serve in their communities are recognized and celebrated. At Greater Believing Faith Outreach Ministry in Atlanta, Georgia, that strength is reflected through the leadership and spiritual commitment of Saginaw native Pastor Sharron Carter Bacon, a woman who stands firmly in the power of God's Word.

Greater Believing Faith Outreach Ministry is a small ministry, yet it is a powerful one built upon the promises of God. The ministry stands on believing, trusting, and living by the Word of God, knowing that what God has spoken will come to pass. The mission of the ministry is centered on sharing the love of God, encouraging others in faith, and reaching out to help people experience hope, strength, and spiritual renewal.

The ministry was founded by the late Elder Arthur L. Bacon, whose vision and dedication to God's Word helped establish a foundation rooted in faith, service, and love for the community. His commitment to the promises of God continues to inspire the work and mission of the ministry today.

Now under the leadership of Pastor Sharron Carter Bacon, the ministry continues to stand firmly on the Word of God. As a woman of faith, Pastor Bacon shares that it is the Word of God that has strengthened and guided her to stand boldly as a woman in power through faith. Through prayer, obedience, and trust in God,

she continues to lead with the belief that God's Word provides the strength, wisdom, and direction needed to serve others.

One of the ministry's most meaningful events each year is its Annual Women's Conference, held during the sixth month of the year. The conference is designed to bring women together for a time of spiritual refreshing, renewal, and restoration. Through fellowship, encouragement, and the sharing of God's Word, women are uplifted and reminded of the power they possess when they stand firmly in their faith.

The purpose of holding the conference during the first six months of the year is to help women be spiritually renewed so they can continue the rest of the year strengthened, encouraged, and empowered in their walk with God. It is a time where women come together to share the spirit of love, support one another, and grow stronger in their faith.

For Pastor Sharron Carter Bacon, the message of Women in Power Month is clear: true power comes from standing on the Word of God. Through faith, perseverance, and a heart devoted to God's calling, she continues to encourage women to recognize their strength in Him. As women of faith walk boldly in God's promises, they become living examples of the power, grace, and love that God places within those who trust Him.



PASTOR SHARRON CARTER BACON

FAITH IN FOCUS

# Saginaw Valley Baptist District to host annual District Congress in Bay City

BY MB STAFF

BAY CITY, Mich. — The Saginaw Valley Baptist District will host its District Congress on Saturday, March 7, at Historic Second Baptist Church in Bay City, bringing together clergy, church leaders and congregants from across the region for a day of worship, teaching and fellowship.

The gathering is scheduled to begin at 11 a.m. at the church, located at 1770 W. Youngs Ditch Road. A continental breakfast will be served beginning at 10 a.m.

The congress is part of the Rev. Dr. Roosevelt and Dr. Nurame Austin Lecture Series and will feature several speakers and facilitators addressing this year's congress theme, "We've Got Work to Do." The theme is based on the scripture John 9:4.

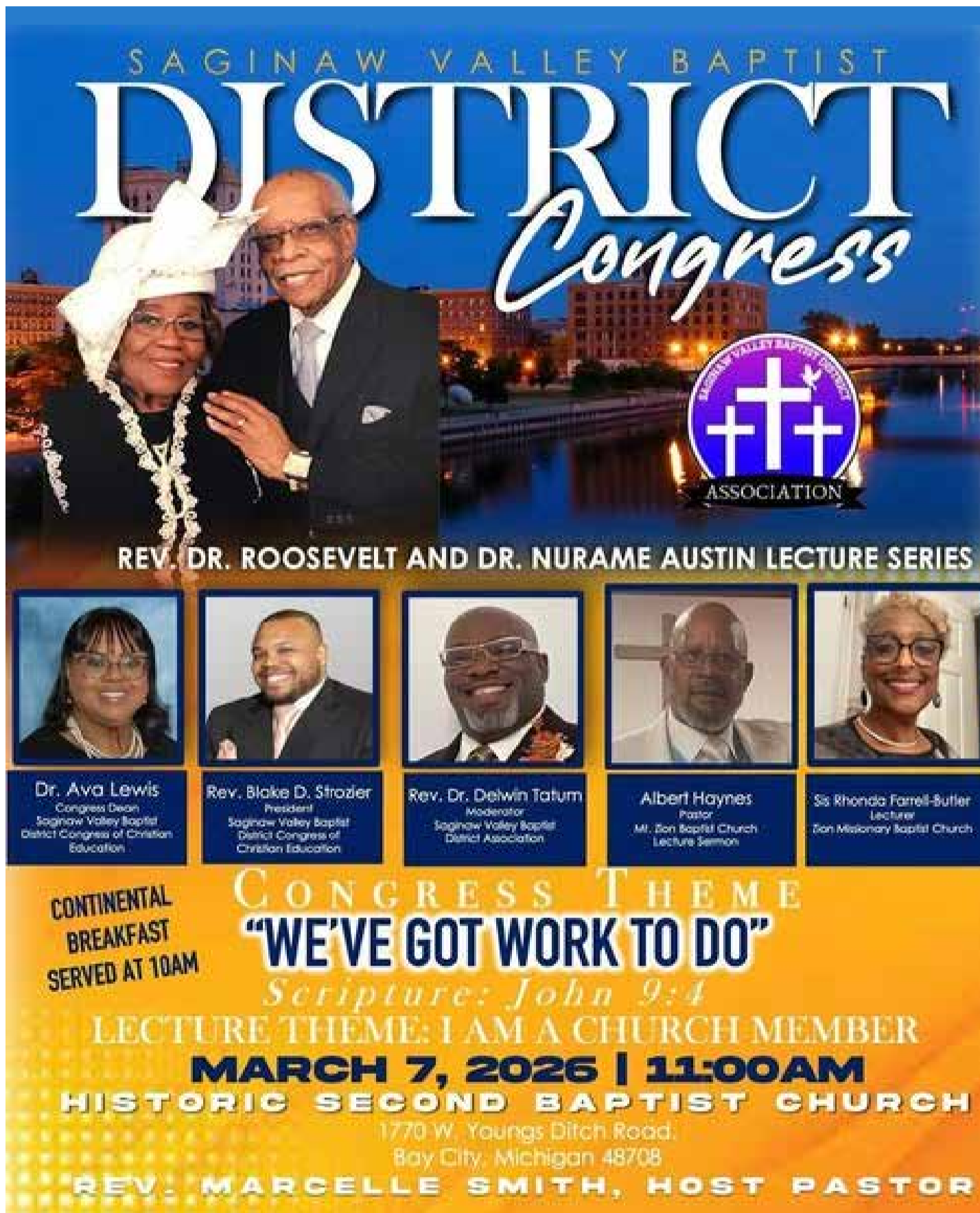
Rev. Dr. Delmon Tatum of Second Missionary Baptist Church will serve as moderator for the event.

The program will include lectures and presentations by several faith leaders from across the district. Scheduled speakers include Dr. Ava Lewis, senior pastor of Saginaw First Baptist Church and congress dean; Rev. Blake D. Strozier, senior pastor of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Bay City and district evangelist; and Albert Haynes, pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

Sis Rhonda Ferrell-Butler of Zion Missionary Baptist Church will also serve as a lecturer during the congress.

Organizers said the event will focus on strengthening the work of local congregations and encouraging church members in their service and ministry.

Historic Second Baptist Church, led by host pastor Rev. Marcelle Smith, will serve as the



The flyer features a central image of Rev. Dr. Roosevelt and Dr. Nurame Austin. Below them are five portraits of speakers: Dr. Ava Lewis, Rev. Blake D. Strozier, Rev. Dr. Delwin Tatum, Albert Haynes, and Sis Rhonda Ferrell-Butler. The text on the flyer includes the congress theme "WE'VE GOT WORK TO DO" with the scripture John 9:4, the lecture theme "I AM A CHURCH MEMBER", the date and time "MARCH 7, 2026 | 11:00AM", the location "HISTORIC SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH, 1770 W. Youngs Ditch Road, Bay City, Michigan 48708", and the host pastor "REV. MARCELLE SMITH, HOST PASTOR". It also mentions a continental breakfast served at 10AM.

SAGINAW VALLEY BAPTIST DISTRICT CONGRESS EVENT FLYER (COURTESY PHOTO)

site for the gathering.

The Saginaw Valley Baptist District Congress brings together

er churches from throughout the region for teaching sessions, fellowship and spiritual develop-

ment centered on the mission of the church and the responsibilities of its members.

# CHURCH DIRECTORY



### Faith Ministries Church

Rev. Dr. Anthony Revis  
Prophetess Linda J. Kemp Revis  
3420 E Ashman St.  
Midland, MI 48642  
989-837-7777  
faithministrieschurch.org



### Ministry Without Walls

Pastor, John Dunn  
3783 Mannion Road  
Saginaw, MI 48603



### New Life Baptist Ministries

Dr. Craig Tatum  
1401 Janes Ave.  
Saginaw, MI 48601  
989-753-1151  
newlifelcm.com



### Glory House Ministries

Pastor Jim House  
3660 Hermansau Rd.  
Saginaw, MI 48603  
(989) 752-4769



### World Outreach Campus

Bishop Hurley J. Coleman Jr.  
2405 Bay Road  
Saginaw, MI 48602  
989-752-2955  
worldoutreachcampus.com



### New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church

Pastor Rev. Corey Clay, Jr.  
3610 Russel St.  
Saginaw, MI 48601  
989-754-0801



### Holy Communion Gospel Center

Pastor Charlene Washington  
1245 E. Genesee  
Saginaw, MI 48607  
989-752-3993



### New Beginnings Ministries

Pastor Augustine Delgado  
701 Hess Avenue  
Saginaw, MI 48601  
newlife3881@gmail.com



### Saint Paul Baptist Church

Rev. Dr., Vincent D. McMillon  
120 North 15 St.  
Saginaw, MI. 48601  
stpaul2@yahoo.com



### Jacob's Ladder

Pastor Dennis Barlow  
1926 Fairfield Street  
Saginaw, MI 48602  
989-799-6601



### New Birth Missionary Baptist

Bishop Larry D. Camel  
3121 Sheridan  
Saginaw, Michigan  
989-327-1755



### Victorious Belivers Ministries Church

Pastor Chris V. Pryor  
624 S. Outer Dr.  
Saginaw, MI  
989-755-7692  
victoriousbelievers.com



### Bridgeport Community Church

Pastor Rob Ashmall  
3821 State St.  
PO Box 541  
Bridgeport, MI 48722  
989-777-1840



### New Covenant Christian Center

Pastor Ron Frierson  
2395 S. Outer Drive  
Saginaw, MI 48601  
989-752-8485



### Anointed Temple Ministries

Bishop Tim D. Holden, Sr.  
612 Millard St.  
Saginaw, MI 48607  
901 Melbourne  
Detroit, MI 48211



### Bethel AME Church

Rev. Dr. Dennis Laffoon  
535 Cathay St.  
Saginaw, MI 48601  
(989) 755-7011  
bethelame-saginaw.org



### Zion Missionary Baptist Church

Pastor Rodrick A. Smith  
721 Johnson Ave  
Saginaw, MI 48607  
989-754-9621  
zmbc-saginaw.org



List your Ministry  
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## FUNDRAISING GOOD TIMES

## NFL Player to Nonprofit Leader



BY MEL AND PEARL SHAW

There's something for each of us to do, a calling. But we have to listen for that calling. This is the story of Ervin "Blue Print" Parker, NFL player and founder of the Blue Print Leadership Academy, celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

Born and raised in rural Georgetown County, S.C., Parker's NFL career began in 1972 as a high school waterboy. He played for South Carolina State University, who recognizes him as one of the greatest players of the century, and is a member of their athletic Hall of Fame. In 1976, he got the name Blue Print from his coach after an intense practice: "You leave a print on everyone because you hit them so hard." He was drafted into the NFL in 1980, joining the Buffalo Bills, later playing for the San Diego Chargers and the Seattle Seahawks.

After the NFL, he was a successful sports agent and talk show host. But his greatest calling has been the Blue Print Leadership Academy (BPLA). We talked with Parker, asking him what motivated him to start the academy.

## A talk with God

"It started with a conversation I had with my higher power who I call God. I asked, "Well, God, what do you want me to do?" He said, "You're not ready to do what I want you to do." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "When you're ready to do what I need you to do, you will know." And that's what happened. About a year later, I ran into a professor at the University of Washington, an older Black man, who didn't



ERVIN "BLUE PRINT" PARKER

know my name was Blue Print. He shared with me that a blueprint is about changing from one type of mental aspect to another. He said that a blueprint is about building lives, building life skills. From there, everything started falling into place, and we began building the academy from that moment forward."

"Today we serve the young men and young ladies of Georgetown. When I say rural, I mean rural. We have a lot of young people who come from places where they have no running water. They have outhouses. It's about 90%-to-98% Black. For the past 25 years, we've been providing these young people with enrichment and knowledge of life skills tools they can apply to day-to-day goals, in order to accomplish long-term goals. We've also brought the BPLA to Ghana through the work of my sister, Dr. Carrie Brown. That is work that's been going on for three years now."

## Fueled by mentors

Mentorship is at the heart of the BPLA. Parker and his team are always demonstrating leadership, character, unconditional love, and acceptance. The academy is all about mentorship because it is Parker's mentors who have helped him become the man

he is. "I was blessed to have three powerful mentors in my life, and I strongly believe mentors are needed. They guide you, correct you, and help shape your character and direction."

First, there was John Spears, my high school coach, who set me straight in the 10th grade when I was misbehaving and thought I was a "cool guy." That moment changed my path. Second, the legendary Willie Jeffries, my college coach at South Carolina State University and the first African American head coach at a Division I school. He showed me what leadership and excellence truly looked like. Lastly, the late Chuck Knox, former head coach of the Buffalo Bills. He drafted me in 1980 and later brought me out of retirement to play for the Seattle Seahawks. His belief in me made a lasting impact. Their influence and mentorship stay with me, and our hope is that we can offer similar meaning and

impact to today's young men and young ladies of Georgetown."

## Guidance for those new to the nonprofit world

While Parker is quick to credit others for his success, he is equally quick to share his guidance with others who want to start a nonprofit. "If you're not 100% committed, don't start. You have to put money into what you are trying to do. A lot of people are not committed to their foundations – they use it as a tax shelter. Answer the question: what are you trying to do? Be legitimate and be committed." He also has guidance for professional athletes wanting to invest in an emerging charity. "Make sure the nonprofit you are dealing with is a clean organization and that they are doing what they say they are doing. Make sure that you know the money is going where you want it to go."



BPLA CLASS



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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

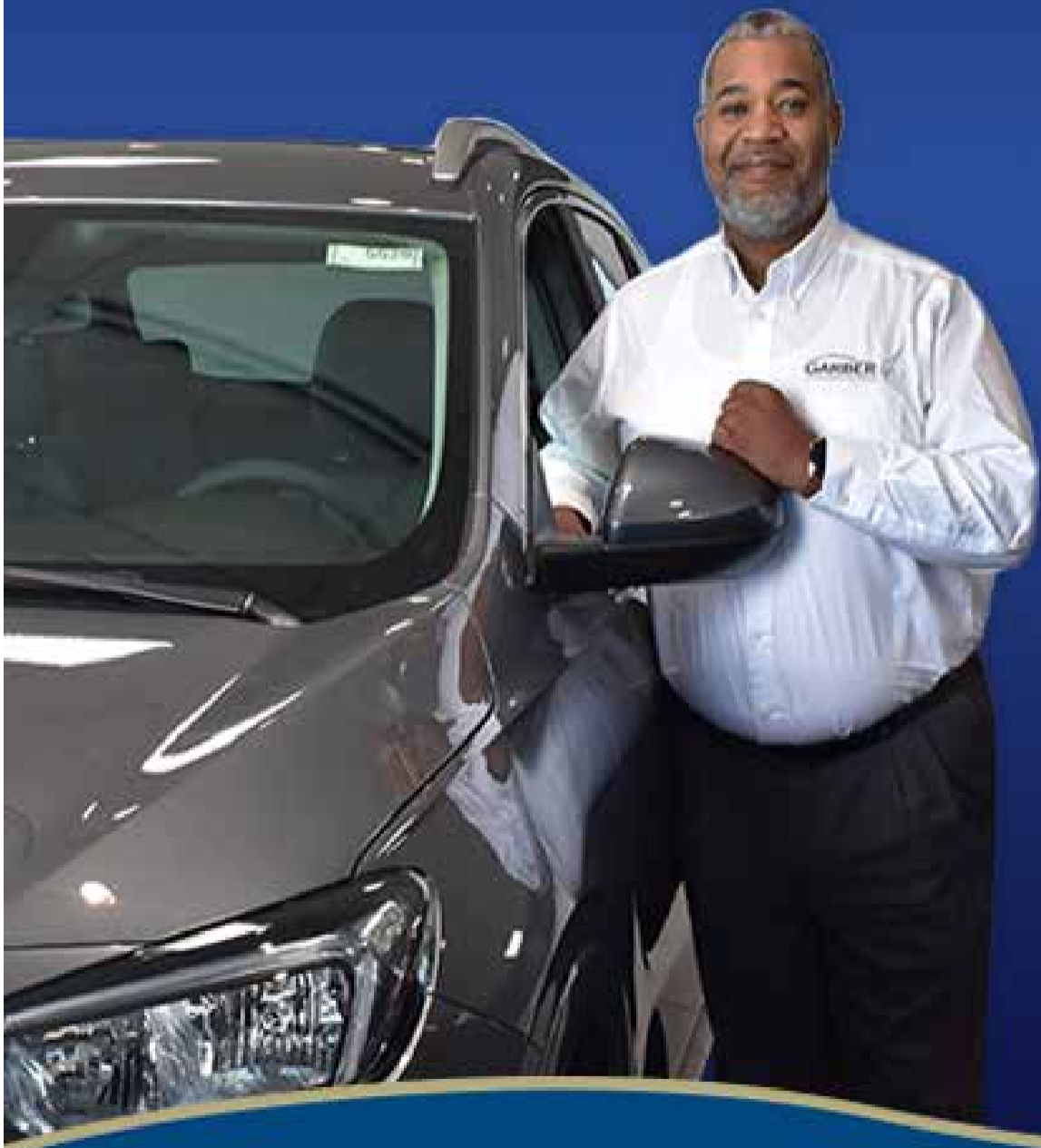
More images from Saginaw Future awards luncheon on March 13, 2026. Read coverage on the event in **COMMUNITY**, page 21-22.



PHOTO CREDIT: FB / CITY OF SAGINAW

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# Theodore Roethke

## POETRY AND ARTS FESTIVAL

March 20-25, 2026

### EVENTS

#### Poetry Slam

Friday, March 20

6:30-9:00 p.m.

SVSU, Whittaker Lecture Theatre  
Brown Hall 106

Participate in a poetry slam open to adults, college students and high school students. Prizes will be awarded to the top three winners. Live music by the SVSU Jazz Combo and refreshments will round out the evening.

#### Roethke Home Tours and Poetry Readings

Saturday, March 21

10:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Theodore Roethke Home Museum  
1805 Gratiot, Saginaw

A guided tour will take attendees through the childhood home of Theodore Roethke. Then, from 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., the River Junction Poets will read some of their original work and discuss the influence Roethke had on the region's longest-standing poetry group.

#### Ted (Roethke) Talk and Brew

Sunday, March 22

6:00-8:00 p.m.

Oracle Brewing  
122 N. Michigan Ave., Saginaw

Local writer Jeff Vande Zande will speak on "Theodore Roethke and the Making of an American Poet." Three special craft beers related to Roethke's poems will be available for purchase.

#### Roethke Musical Tribute

Monday, March 23

7:30 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church  
121 S. Harrison St., Saginaw

This musical tribute to Roethke features acclaimed soloist and Saginaw native Emily Marvosh, an original composition by Michigan resident Collin Whitfield, and the voices of the SVSU student choir Cardinal Singers. Made possible through a Saginaw Community Foundation grant.

## MEMORIAL POETRY PRIZE

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 7:00 P.M.

RHEA MILLER RECITAL HALL

Join us in honoring LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, the 2025 winner of the Roethke Memorial Prize Poetry. Diggs was selected for her collection "Village," described by the judges as "a song to survival and persistence." Named for the late Saginaw poet who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1954, this distinguished prize has been awarded since 1968. A poetry reading and book signing will follow the event.



LEARN MORE AT  
[svsu.edu/roethke](https://svsu.edu/roethke)

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