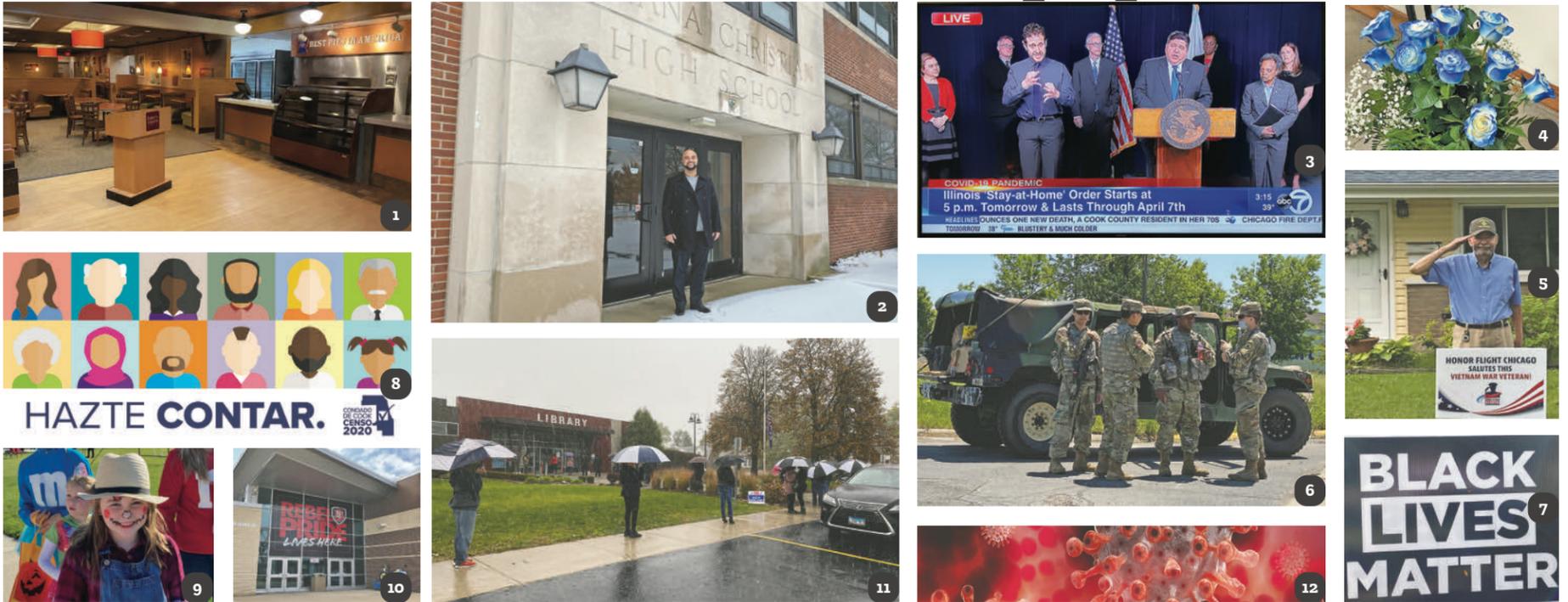


SPECIAL ISSUE

2020: What happened



A newspaper not only reports current information, it also creates a record for history. That became particularly important in 2020. The Lansing Journal first reported on the coronavirus in January of 2020, and we traced its impact in Lansing—as well as reporting other local news—throughout the year. Subscribers to our free Daily News email stayed up-to-date on stories such as those pictured above. **1**— The Bakers Square at 3545 Ridge Road suddenly closed in January. **2**— Freedom Church Ministries bought the old Illiana campus in February, and Pastor Thaddeus Searcy expressed excitement about bringing it back to life. **3**— Governor JB Pritzker announced a stay-at-home order that would go into effect on Saturday, March 21. **4**— Blue roses were part of a special ceremony at the July 14 Village Board meeting, to recognize the sudden passing of Trustee Mike Manno. **5**— Honor Flight cancelled all 2020 flights and issued yard signs to veterans who had been scheduled to participate, including Lansing resident John Bush. **6**— Following looting and destruction on May 31, some of which was conflated with protests against the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the National Guard helped manage street closures in Lansing and neighboring towns. **7**— Multiple protests and prayer meetings were held in Lansing throughout the summer. **8**— Lansing made a concerted effort to participate in the 2020 Census. **9**— After a summer of cancelled concerts, Fox Pointe opened for trick-or-treating on October 31. **10**— School District 215 undertook a process of removing “Rebels” as the TF South school nickname. **11**— Record numbers of voters participated in Early Voting at the Lansing Public Library. **12**— The Lansing Journal experimented with various ways of gathering and reporting daily COVID-19 statistics throughout the year.

Lansing residents share COVID-19 experiences

Symptoms, testing, quarantine, support

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

LANSING, Ill. (November 23, 2020) — Among the 1,684 Lansing residents (as of this writing) who have contracted COVID-19 are Tom and Krista McSwiggan, Jerry Zeldenrust, and Darvell Stinson. Each had a different experience with the virus, but they all beat it and are doing well today.

EXPOSURE AND TESTING

Tom and Krista McSwiggan >

The McSwiggans have been intentional about staying safe since COVID-19 first hit its stride in the U.S. in March. The 65-year-old couple stayed home as much as they could in their roles as Subway business consultants, they attended Trinity Lutheran Church virtually, and they didn't have anyone apart from family over to their house all spring and into the summer.

By mid-July, both Tom and Krista felt comfortable having friends come over for dinner to talk about potential 2021 vacation plans. Neither couple had experienced symptoms prior to the meeting. Two days later, Tom received a call from his friend saying he had tested positive.

"I was immediately on my cell phone finding out where we could get tested at," Krista said.

The couple made an appointment at a Walgreens in Chicago to get tested, and they had to wait about a week before their appointment date. Both tested positive, receiving their

results within 24 hours.

Jerry Zeldenrust > Village Trustee and retired Lansing police officer Jerry Zeldenrust tested positive for COVID-19 in late September. He was feeling especially tired after a busy

Sunday, so at first he thought he was just "winding down from the stress of the weekend." He got chills overnight on Monday and woke up on Tuesday with a cough, fatigue, and aches, so the 62-year-old decided to get tested. Zeldenrust went to Midwest Express Clinic in Munster a day later and received a positive test result about a day after that.

Zeldenrust said he felt guilty about the amount of people he could have potentially spread COVID to without knowing he was contagious. "I reached out to as many folks as I could think of, still not knowing where I got it or who I got it from. They were all fine," Zeldenrust said. "I even sat down with the calendar with my wife and said,

"Well, who did I interact with that you didn't interact with or the kids didn't interact with that would have caused me to be exposed when no one else in my family got it?" he said. "There's no figuring it out. ...I still don't know who I got it from."

Darvell Stinson > Darvell Stinson often gets a sinus cold in the fall, so when he started having headaches, congestion, and fatigue in mid-October, he went to the doctor assuming



Clockwise from above: Krista and Tom McSwiggan (photo provided), Darvell Stinson, and Jerry Zeldenrust (photos: Josh Bootsma) all contracted COVID-19.



In case you're new to Lansing

LANSING, Ill. (December 1, 2020) — The Lansing Journal is an independent news source covering news that impacts Lansing, Illinois, and the surrounding region. We publish local news online every day and deliver it via email each morning to anyone who signs up.

We believe local news should be accessible to everyone, so we don't charge for our services. We rely on two main sources of income to cover our costs:

1. Advertising revenue from local businesses, schools, churches, and other organizations who pay to reach our readers
2. Contributions from readers who appreciate the articles we research, write, and publish each day.

Prior to the pandemic, we published a print version of The Lansing Journal each month and delivered it free to Lansing residents. But we were forced to put the print edition on hold during quarantine because local businesses were unable to advertise. This is our first paper edition in eight months.

But we have published local news online every day this year—reporting on COVID-19 in Lansing, protests in Lansing, Early Voting in Lansing, church services in Lansing, School Board meetings in Lansing, Lansing businesses closing, new Lansing businesses opening, and much more. All that news is delivered directly to subscribers' email inboxes every morning.

Subscribing is free. Scan the QR code here and input your email address. Or visit www.thelansingjournal.com/news/subscribe. It's the only way to be

sure you get all the local news we publish, whether or not we're able to be in print again. Don't miss what happens in your c



he just needed some sinus medicine. When he told the staff at Advocate Urgent Care in Olympia Fields that he had also lost his sense of taste and smell, they tested him for COVID-19. The office used an immediate test kit, and about 20 minutes later Stinson knew he had the coronavirus.

Like Zeldenrust, Stinson has not been able to determine who he got the virus from. "That's a big question mark," he said. "It's pretty hard to say where, but I would think somewhere out in public, maybe going to the store or something. It could have slipped through the cracks that way."

Stinson works at Cook Illinois Corporation, a school bus company. He said he quickly contacted the company after his positive test and let them know he was sick.

SYMPTOMS AND QUARANTINE

Tom and Krista McSwiggan > As the couple waited for their testing appointment, Tom started to feel a sore throat, at which point he started quarantining from Krista as much as possible. The sore throat was soon replaced by heavy fatigue, which lasted over a week. Tom also said the taste and smell of hot food became "unpleasant" to him, and he ate only a cup of soup or a half sandwich every day for a few days.

Krista said she was entirely asymptomatic, with the exception of a loss of taste and smell—senses that had still not fully returned in October. The loss has not affected her



A June 5 protest in Lan-Oak Park was one of the ways Lansing responded to national issues this summer. (Photo: Melanie Jongma)

Lansing responds to national events with thoughtful complexity

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

LANSING, Ill. (November 24, 2020) – When a video emerged of a white police officer in Minneapolis kneeling on the neck of George Floyd—a Black man—for over nine minutes, causing his death, the country—and Lansing—took notice. The viral video, which emerged in late May, caused unrest across the country, some of which resulted in vandalism.

On May 31 an estimated 20–30 cars came into Lansing from Calumet City, where looting had already started at River Oaks Mall. Multiple businesses in The Landings shopping center were looted, as well as several businesses along Torrence Avenue. By 4:00 p.m. Lansing Police and Public Works were securing business entryways and blocking thoroughfares. Two officers sustained minor injuries and one arrest was made.

“I don’t believe for one minute that any of those 20 or 30 cars...were Lansing residents,” Lansing Police Chief Dennis Murrin said.

INITIAL RESPONSE

The death of George Floyd grieved Lansing residents, as did the actions of looters entering Lansing to damage businesses and incite violence. As a result, the summer of 2020 in Lansing was marked by demonstrations of prayer, peace, protest, division, and unity.

The day after looting occurred in Lansing, Pastor Leroy Childress of Grace Church welcomed more than 30 local church leaders and representatives to pray for Lansing in his church’s parking lot. The socially-distanced group prayed for humility, compassion, wisdom, and peace.

The next day, two local families used the median grass strip at the intersection of 178th and Burnham to pray and display signs supporting peace and decrying injustice.

LOCAL PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

JUNE 5 – “That’s not what we’re about”

Saddened by both the looting that occurred in Lansing, and the implications of George Floyd’s death, Cameron Sanchez, Chawn “CJ” Wilson, and Jawaan Dorch, all young Black men in Lansing, organized a peaceful protest at Lan-Oak Park that drew a crowd of roughly 200 people.

In response to the looting, Wilson said, “We were like, ‘No, that’s not what we do here. We’re not gonna do that. That’s not what we’re about.’”

The trio wanted to stage a public statement to protect the reputation of their hometown. They wanted the world to know that the damage in Lansing was done by outsiders, not locals, and they wanted to prevent misinformation and wrong assumptions from creating division in diverse communities that currently look out for each other.

“Our overall goal is to spread peace,” Sanchez said.

At the suggestion of Lansing Village Trustee Saad Abbasy, the young men connected with the Lansing Police Department to make sure the event was peaceful and protected. The organizers also asked participants to bring a mask and honor COVID-19 guidelines. The morning before the event, Mayor Patty Eidam personally visited residents living along the perimeter of Lan-Oak Park to inform and assure them of the collaborative and peaceful nature of the demonstration.

The gathering included a march around the park, spoken word poetry, personal testimonies, and a nine-minute period of kneeling or lying down—to honor and identify with George Floyd.



Businesses on Torrence put up barriers against out-of-town looters who swept through Lansing on May 31. (Photo: Josh Bootsma)

JUNE 13 – Unity Peace March

Around noon on Saturday, June 13, about 40 protestors stepped into the northbound lanes of Torrence Avenue from the Walgreens parking lot, stopping traffic as the cadence of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech filled the street. The “Unity Peace March” was organized by professional bodyguard Kevin Collinz and was done in compliance and cooperation with Lansing and State police.

The dozens of marchers were mostly silent as the voice of Dr. King rang out from a speaker before they stopped and knelt near the intersection of Torrence of 176th for a few minutes of listening. The group then marched back to the Walgreens parking lot using the sidewalk along Torrence.

Collinz recognized his unique position as a Black bodyguard, saying, “I don’t think that all officers are bad. Not only am I a voice for Blacks, I’m a voice for law enforcement because I wear the badge also.”

In a Facebook message before the event, Collinz specifically invited police brutality victims to join the march. Collinz said that in 2004, multiple Chicago police officers physically beat him, leaving him bleeding. At the hospital afterward, 16 staples were put in his head, and he was told he had broken ribs and a broken jaw, which he still feels the effects of today.

JUNE 13 – Concerned Citizens of Lansing

As Collinz’ march was nearing its end, a larger protest was starting in the parking lot of TF South High School, organized by a newly-formed group called Concerned Citizens of Lansing, IL.

The group was founded by Dan Stelfox and identifies as “a small group of concerned citizens hoping to foster meaningful change in our community.” A description of the event read, in part, “Our demonstration has many goals, but the most important is to promote meaningful change and action. We can no longer ignore the lasting and continual impact of oppression. It is our job to learn, educate, and foster an actively anti-racist village.”

The group marched north on Burnham from TF South to the Lansing Clock Tower, where it gathered in the grassy area. By this time, an estimated 300 people were part of the diverse crowd, and a handful of speakers addressed the assemblage. These speakers were TF South graduates Kimberly Luna, Tre’sean Hall, and Jady Newman, as well as Lansing resident Jennifer Cottrill and Pastor Nate Smith of Lighthouse Community Church.

“We need to stop being separated and take a unified stand, so the world will know that we value Black lives and the future of Black people is important in this country. We are so much stronger together!” said Smith, who is Black.

Hall walked the crowd through a list of demands for the Village and the Lansing Police Department. It included four action points: promote accountability, implement a “Duty to Intervene” policy, implement a complete ban on chokeholds, and promote accessibility of resources and dialogue by the Lansing Police Department and the Village of Lansing.

Hall specifically called out the Lansing Human Relations Commission, stating, “The HRC has not released a statement at all during the past few weeks, and there is no

documentation proving they’ve met virtually to provide resources to the residents of Lansing.” Due to COVID concerns, the commission’s February 21 meeting was its last meeting before it reconvened on July 16.

All of the speeches can be read online as part of The Lansing Journal’s “Local Voices” feature.

JUNE 26 – South Holland “Unity Walk”

In neighboring South Holland, roughly 150 people gathered in the parking lot of First Reformed Church to walk and lament in community. The event was organized by the Village of South Holland and the South Holland Ministerial Association, which used Bible verse Micah 6:8 as the theme for the event: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Unity Walkers were split into six socially-distanced groups and started south down South Park Avenue and gathered at Calvary Community Church for a time of prayer before returning to the First Reformed Church parking lot. A handful of speakers encouraged and shared their testimonies with the crowd, including South Holland Mayor Don De Graff, Rev. Carmin Frederick-James, and youth pastor John Purnell, who implored the crowd, saying, “I need you to act like my three little boys are your three little boys. I want you to hear the hurt and the pain from so many parents who

have lost so many little boys and little girls, and I want you to make the decision in your heart that you’re not going to let it happen again—that it will not be your silence or your inaction that causes the death of another young person.”

The “Unity Walk” ended with nine minutes of silence and reflection.

VILLAGE COMMENTS

At the first Village

Board Meeting since Lansing protests took place, Mayor Patty Eidam read a statement condemning looting, supporting peaceful demonstrators, and responding to a few comments made by protestors.

In particular, she encouraged resident participation with the Human Relations Commission and stated that an educational video titled “What To Do When Stopped By The Police” would be released for public viewing. The video was initially slated for release as part of TF South’s curriculum, but those plans were waylaid by COVID.

At the July 14 meeting of the Village Board, Police Chief Dennis Murrin updated the Board on the Department’s progress addressing protestor demands. He called the Duty to Intervene policy a “good idea” and said a new policy was waiting for formal adoption. He explained that the chokehold policy in Lansing (“Officers shall not use a chokehold in the performance of his or her duties, unless deadly force is justified”) is derived from state law. He also said establishing a citizen review board was a work in progress.

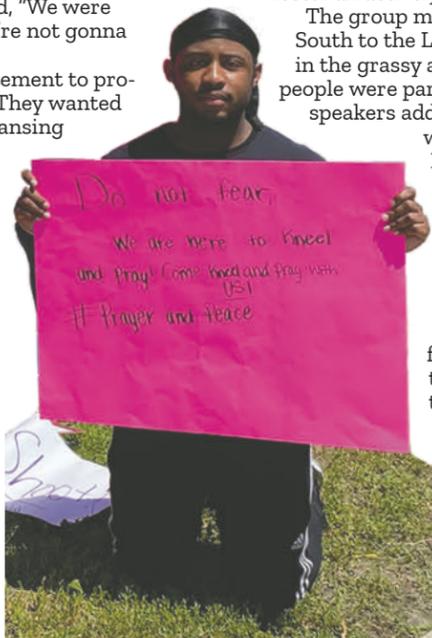
OTHER COMMUNITY RESPONSES

On July 11, Sheryl Black, the Education Chairperson of the NAACP Chicago Far South Suburban Branch, held a prayer and unity event at District 215 administrative offices and supported the District’s Statement of Solidarity which said the District would “work tirelessly to ensure the educational environment is free from racist acts, words, and policies” and commit to “listening to voices with very different lived experiences.”

District 215 later voted at its August 25 Board meeting to dissolve the “Rebels” nickname at TF South. The decision came at the heels of a student survey which revealed that 69.5% of survey respondents desired to see the name changed. TF South Principal Jacob Gourley shared that when TF South was founded in 1958, the pun was that the “South” had seceded from the “North” campus, and the imagery adopted by the new Thornton Fractional South



More than 30 people gathered for a socially distant, informal prayer meeting at Grace Church on June 1. (Photo: Ashlee De Wit)



“Do not fear, we are here to kneel and pray! Come kneel and pray with us! #PrayerandPeace,” reads the sign of a family member in Lansing in early June. (Photo: Carrie Steinweg)

Adjustments we had to make this year

And adjustments we hope you'll make too

BY MELANIE JONGSMA, MANAGING EDITOR

LANSING, Ill. (December 1, 2020) — It was February of this year when Shopper owner Arlo Kallemeyn called me into his office. "I'm resigning from the publishing business," he announced.

PARTNERSHIP ADJUSTMENTS

I was surprised of course. Arlo and his brothers spent four decades running the advertising newspaper their father Alonzo had started in the 1960s. The Lansing Journal's partnership with the Shopper allowed us to be in print immediately, reaching the same 10,000 readers who received the weekly Shopper in Lansing. Being in business without the Kallemeyns would require some serious adjustments.

The Kallemeyns had a buyer in mind for the Shopper, and that buyer was also interested in buying the Shopper's share of The Lansing Journal. After meeting him and his staff, I was excited about his interest in community news, his business acumen, and his network of salespeople and reporters. It seemed like a good opportunity for The Lansing Journal to grow.

The closing was scheduled for March 25. On March 18, Illinois' quarantine went into effect—and the Shopper's buyer asked to be released from the agreement. His other newspapers had been hit hard by the quarantine, and he couldn't take on another enterprise.

PANDEMIC ADJUSTMENTS

The pandemic hit The Lansing Journal, the Shopper, and Park Press, our printer, hard as well. We were able to pull together a print issue in April, thanks to advertisers who made adjustments and commitments. It was the last issue printed by Park Press, who closed a few weeks later. We mailed that issue to residents in Lansing, but we couldn't deliver bundles to our regular businesses because of quarantine closures. Even businesses that were open didn't need as many copies of the paper because they were no longer getting the in-person foot traffic they were used to.

So we focused on online publishing. We had always published 2–5 articles online every day, delivering those headlines to our list of email subscribers. Now we increased the daily news we provided. We upgraded our online advertising options as well, trying to find ways to help local businesses reach the community.

GROWTH ADJUSTMENTS

Even readers who had never liked computers before

began to accept that technology is a tool for connection. Our existing email subscribers thanked us for the daily updates we were reporting from local churches, businesses, schools, and government—and new subscribers began signing up. As visits to our website increased, we invested in a more robust hosting service and eventually a site redesign that would make the online experience more convenient for readers.

PERSONNEL ADJUSTMENTS

Along the way, with the Kallemeyns still ready to get out of publishing, two Shopper employees took over the Shopper, and I became the sole owner of The Lansing Journal. The Shopper and The Lansing Journal still help each other whenever possible, but we are now completely separate entities with different missions.

The Lansing Journal has always benefitted from the professional skills of freelance journalists who love this community. The bylines you see on the articles on our website and in these pages represent people with diverse interests, networks, and styles. As journalists they are essential workers, and they kept working throughout the pandemic. But they are parents and spouses as well, and most work full- or part-time for other organizations. So we are grateful for the sacrifices they make in order to report Lansing news.

As a prime example of this, in August freelance journalist Josh Bootsma accepted an invitation to join us full-time. During a summer of uncertainty in a year of crazy, he decided that community news was a risk worth investing his time and experience in.

Josh has been gradually taking over the role of Managing Editor, while I spend more and more time on business details, including communicating with advertisers and supporters. Josh and I both understand the important balance of news and advertising, of content and marketing. When we both do our jobs well, the community gets a newspaper worth reading (and supporting), and advertisers get to be included in a medium that people look forward to receiving.

PRINTING ADJUSTMENTS

In October we decided to do this December print issue. We made arrangements with LithoType, a local printer who had taken on many Park Press clients (our previous printer). Two weeks later we learned that LithoType was going out of business. They transferred their projects to Blue Island Newspaper Printing, a family-owned press in Harvey, and we worked with Blue Island to put this issue together.

These adjustments turned out not to be a big deal, but they do illustrate how precarious the print business is right now. We don't know how often we'll be able to provide a printed newspaper, so

we always encourage readers to subscribe to our Daily News email.

ADJUSTMENTS FROM YOU

We understand the attraction a printed newspaper has—it's more than simple nostalgia. The printed page feels more spacious, and printed news has a feeling of "official-ness" that daily email doesn't. There's something very satisfying about spreading out a 22x17" sheet across the table, and perusing it over a cup of coffee. There's something meaningful about clipping printed articles that mention the names of people you know, and saving them or sharing them.

We understand that, and we don't want to give up on print completely. Still, given the expense and labor of print, and the shrinking printer options available now, and the quantity of news we need to provide, and the speed at which updates happen—we hope our print-loving readers will consider ALSO signing up for our Daily News email.

The Daily News is free; all that's required is an email address. When you visit www.thelansingjournal.com/news/subscribe, you'll find a form that looks like this:

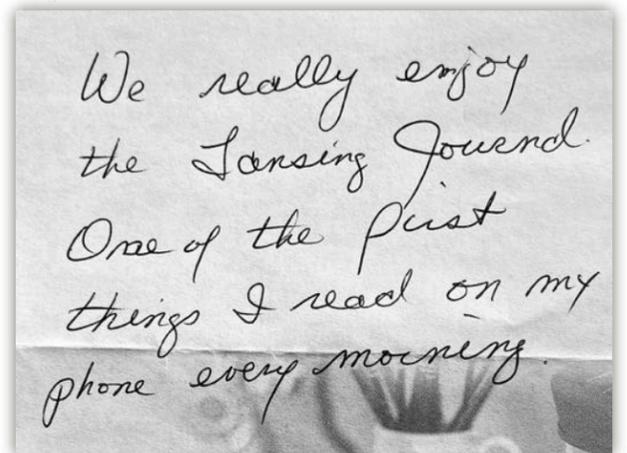
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Remember, signing up for the Daily News email does not mean you won't receive the print edition whenever it comes out. We want you to have both so that you don't miss any important news about our community.

We hope you'll make the adjustment and sign up today. You might even find yourself feeling the same way this reader does:



A job worth doing

BY JOSH BOOTSMA, MANAGING EDITOR

LANSING, Ill. (December 1, 2020) - December is often a time for looking back on the year and reflecting on all that has happened in it. This December, that's a taller task than usual for me. COVID-19 has completely changed the way all of us go about life, and will make for no small note in the history books to come. A year that started with the excitement of a new decade was within months thrown into confusion, fear, and stay-at-home orders to prevent the spread of a disease that has since killed over a quarter of a million people in the United States. It's been a time of anxiety, job loss, and disagreement about how best to respond to the virus. A time of separation from family and friends, of working from home, of cancelled trips, baseball games, theater productions, and concerts. This year has tested the resolve of so many Lansing residents, 1,800 of whom have contracted the virus and 12 of whom have died from it.

But despite—and because of—this year's difficulty, 2020 is a year worth chronicling.

Since I started working full-time for The Lansing Journal in mid-August, that's what I've been striving to do. Writing stories about local issues and topics and managing the editorial calendar is a job worth doing, especially given the ubiquity of misinformation that spreads even faster than COVID. Frankly, I look forward to impressing my grandkids someday when I tell them I started my full-time journalism career in the middle of the dumpster fire that is 2020.

In some ways my first handful of months have been difficult, as the challenges of starting a new job were multiplied by the challenges of doing so during a pandemic. And getting to know Lansing better, something I've looked forward to for quite a while, has been difficult amid so many cancellations, postponements, and virtual alternatives.

But sometimes the most difficult circumstances can bring out the best in people, and I've had the unique opportunity to get a close-up view of Lansing people, organizations, businesses, and churches that are every day devoting themselves to their employees, their families, their customers, their parishioners, and their community in ways they never have before. Even as staying apart has become the social norm in Lansing, I've seen people growing closer. COVID-19 is a thread that has been woven deep into the tapestry of our lives this year, and it's a common thread among all of us. I wouldn't dare guess what Lansing's finished tapestry will look like this year, but I have a feeling it will be as tight-knit—albeit socially distanced—as ever before.



THE LANSING JOURNAL
Every community deserves a good newspaper. Sign up for daily news at www.thelansingjournal.com

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The Lansing Journal is a community newspaper. We need help making sure our full community is represented in all its demographic diversity. If you have story ideas, photos, or articles you'd like to send us, email info@thelansingjournal.com.

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The Lansing Journal is a member of Local Independent Online News, Independent Free Papers of America, and the Lansing Area Chamber of Commerce.





Lansing businesses consider options as property taxes spike

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

LANSING, Ill. (November 30, 2020) – High taxes are no surprise to Illinois residents—bemoaning the government’s cut of income, sales, property, etc. is a regular part of life. But in a year full of unprecedented happenings, some Lansing businesses have seen an unprecedented spike in their property taxes, forcing them to consider what options are available to keep their businesses afloat.

HOW BAD IS IT?

The severity of the taxes—which will be billed next year—varies from business to business. Some businesses will pay the same as past years, others may pay less. Many, however, are faced with taxes that have drastically increased.

The property on the northeast corner of Roy Street and Ridge Road (3300 Ridge Road), for example, houses Mancino’s Pizza & Grinders, Ooo Wee Chicken & Ribs, the Lansing Area Chamber of Commerce, and soon The Pour on Roy. In 2019, the building had a total estimated market value of \$218,384. The 2020 assessment of the property determined the estimated market value to be \$866,572, nearly four times the previous market value. Assuming the equalized tax rate in Lansing will remain similar to what it was last year, Jim Todd, the owner of the property, will owe over \$123,000 in property taxes next year—quadrupling the roughly \$31,000 he owed this year.

HOW ARE PROPERTY TAXES CALCULATED?

The process of determining the tax owed on a property starts with the Cook County Assessor’s office. In Cook County, properties are assessed every three years, and 2020 is the year Lansing was reassessed. The property assessment determines a property’s estimated market value. The Assessor’s office then takes a property’s estimated market value and multiplies it by 25% to get the total assessed value of the property. For residences, the Assessor multiplies the market value by 10%. That Assessed Value is then multiplied by an equalizer (2.916 for Cook County this year) to get the equalized assessed value, which is subsequently multiplied by the local tax rate—including taxes for school districts, park districts, villages, townships, Cook County, and other bodies. The tax rate for Todd’s corner property at 3300 Ridge Road is 19.52%, which, at the end of the equation, yields a tax bill for that property of over \$123,000.

WIDESPREAD TAX INCREASES

Todd isn’t the only one facing a tax spike. Business owners all over Lansing are being confronted with increased tax bills in 2021. “There’s never been anything like this increase,” said Tony Rosati, owner of the

Lansing Sport Shop, located on the downtown stretch of Ridge Road (3265 Ridge Road). “We’ve had 20 and 30 percent increases and gone to the tax lawyer and gotten reductions, and paid the fees. But when you’re talking triple...there’s really something going on, something that, unfortunately, as a business owner, you have no control over.” Rosati’s increase from this year to next will not be 20% or 30%, but approximately 213%.

“I don’t know anybody that hasn’t lost 20% of their business already this year because of the pandemic, and then to have this tax bill hit you in the face in September, it’s like ‘What do you do?’” Rosati said.

A block west at Towne Interiors, owner Don Vander Zee said his property tax increase—approximately 45%—is among the highest he’s ever seen. “It’s disheartening. It’s one of those things where you just don’t understand how they can expect that,” he said. “My feeling on this is, it’s a game. It’s truly a game, and it’s sad that we elect officials that expect that kind of an increase.”

When Jim Todd saw his property assessment this year, he laughed. “I was shocked. I just couldn’t believe it, I thought there had been a mistake. But it’s clearly not a mistake,” he said.

Jim’s sister Amy Todd co-owns Mancino’s Pizza & Grinders with Jim and their brother John, and is also the Director of the Lansing Area Chamber of Commerce. “This assessment just was such a slap in the face on top of COVID, on top of the devastation that all of these small businesses, especially, have seen,” she said. “It’s devastating to people who put their blood, sweat, and tears into these small businesses. ...I can’t believe that this is happening.”

HOW CAN ASSESSMENTS BE SO HIGH?

While many business owners take care to improve the value of their businesses and property, having their property increase in value two, three, or four times over in the course of three years is extreme.

Bill Sandrick is the founder of Sandrick Law Firm in South Holland, and has spent 29 years helping businesses with property taxes. He said, “I can tell you, I’ve never seen the amount of substantial increases, increases where 100%—a doubling—of your assessment is normal. Normally, that would be an outlier.”

Sandrick said properties in the south suburbs are traditionally thought to be “undervalued, but over-taxed.” In other words, assessments may determine properties to be worth less than they actually are, but the tax rate is high, meaning the two factors balance each other out. This most recent assessment, he says, has disturbed that balance, with properties being assessed at rates

| | 2019 Assessed Value | 2019 Taxes Owed | 2020 Assessed Value | 2020 Taxes Owed (projected) | % Increase |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Mancino’s / The Pour on Roy / Lansing Area Chamber / Ooo Wee Chicken & Ribs (Ridge and Roy Street) | \$54,596 | \$31,083 | \$216,643 | \$123,339 | 297% |
| Lansing Sport Shop (3265 Ridge Road) | \$42,630 | \$24,270 | \$133,420 | \$75,959 | 213% |
| Rico’s Pizza (3561 Ridge Road) | \$14,500 | \$8,255 | \$39,677 | \$22,589 | 174% |
| Chicago’s Finest Ironworks (17564 Chicago Avenue) | \$25,839 | \$14,711 | \$67,220 | \$38,270 | 160% |
| Beggars Pizza (3524 Ridge Road) | \$51,992 | \$29,600 | \$131,144 | \$74,663 | 152% |
| B & K Equipment Company (2939 175th Street) | \$23,233 | \$13,227 | \$50,961 | \$29,013 | 119% |
| Great Lakes Hotsy (2601 Bernice Road) | \$67,905 | \$38,660 | \$122,775 | \$69,898 | 81% |
| Calumet Bakery (18349 Torrence Avenue) | \$39,067 | \$22,242 | \$64,196 | \$36,548 | 64% |
| Ted’s Pet & Feed (17950 Burnham Avenue) | \$52,864 | \$30,096 | \$86,249 | \$49,103 | 63% |
| Towne Interiors (3219 Ridge Road) | \$40,500 | \$23,057 | \$58,816 | \$33,485 | 45% |

Business owners all over Lansing are being confronted with increased tax bills in 2021. The table above shows a few of the hardest hit. The assessment values of any Lansing address can be found at the Cook County Assessor’s website.

that they’ve never been valued at before, with the tax rate not decreasing.

“There was sort of a recognition with previous assessors, that [they would] keep that balance between value and tax, but also between commercial and residential. Well, that all went out the window for 2020,” Sandrick said. Cook County Assessor Fritz Kaegi took office in late 2018, replacing Joe Berrios, who had manned the Assessor’s helm since 2010.

“It’s sort of the perfect storm,” Sandrick said. “You have assessments going up 100%, ...you have continuing tax rates that have probably doubled over the last ten years or so, and then you throw in COVID.” The assessed value of Sandrick’s own building in South Holland nearly tripled this year.

APPEAL PROCESS IS TAXING

Jim Todd is no stranger to having his property taxes increase. For over a decade, he has been using Sandrick Law Firm to file the necessary appeals to combat increasing assessment values. In fact, each business included in the above table has appealed its assessment values multiple times in the last ten years. With such high increases this year, however, it’s possible that even the appeal process could be too expensive for some businesses.

“All of this tax money that could be used

to help better our local communities is going off to attorneys that rub shoulders with the politicians,” Vander Zee said. He has not used Sandrick Law Firm for property tax appeal representation, but says the attorneys he does use have fought hard for him, and he has been happy with their results.

The standard rate for legal fees regarding property tax representation is one-third of the difference between the original assessment and the final assessment. For example, if Sandrick Law Firm were to successfully reduce Jim Todd’s assessment from \$216,643 to last year’s amount of \$54,596 (which would be unlikely), Todd would, in a typical arrangement, owe Sandrick Law Firm upwards of \$54,000—more than Todd’s entire property tax bill last year.

Understanding the traditional model to be cost-prohibitive for many clients, Sandrick said he will discount nearly all of his legal services for struggling businesses this year. “It’s not anyone’s fault they got walloped,” he said.

The appeal window closed for Thornton

See “Taxes,” page 6

Lindsey and Saad Abbasy
Karen Adams
Jane and Joe Addison
American Legion Auxiliary
American Legion Riders
Rodrigo Arceo
Kathy Arvia
Jennifer Avenatti
Nancy Bales
Lorraine Banasiak
Judith Beezhold
Maureen Behrens Moon
Priscilla Bergstedt
Barry Bergstrom
Nancy Besse
Marlene Biesboer
Phyllis Bischof
Joy and Wesley Blocker
Michael Bolz
Dan and Kristy Bootsma
Josh Bootsma
Debbie Boroviak
Susan Bovino
Geraldine Bowie
Marsha Bultema
Steven Burnap
John Bush
Linda Buteyn
Beverly Cable
Doug and Bonnie Cable
Maria Cabrera
Lynnie Cartwright
Maryann Centracchio
Patricia Chiaramonte
Laurel Clousing
Briana Clifton
Elly Clousing
June and John Cole
Greg and Jane Compeau
Marlene Cook
Diane Costello
Denise Cox
Susan Culp
Jeannine Cusson
Kerry Czarobski

Lauragene Davia
Christopher Deckinga
Patricia Deckinga
Dave and Deb DeJong
Debbie DeNardo
Deborah Dennis
Geary Depue
Sandy DeVries
Joan Douma
Phyllis Drewno

Ted Hnatusko
Helen Hnatusko
Marjorie Holme
Mark Hornung
Donna Huizenga
Carol Jabaay
Leroy Jansma
Jim Janssen
Robert Jaranowski
Jeffrey John

Tom McSwiggan
Erin Meegan-Polanski
Roberto Mendoza
Christine Merchat
Dr. Wes Molenaar
Maureen Behrens Moon
Tony and Jacqueline Mosley
Joyce Mulder
Chuck Murach
Andre and Erin Nauta

Bethany Roels
Bonnie Romanowski
Jane Roseen
Jeff Rosinia
Jennifer Saia
Dolores Samples
Beverly Sanders
Jenny Scanland
Carol Schaaap
Rich and Jan Schaeffer

Carol Taylor
Gerald and Sharon Taylor
Linda Todd
Jennifer Triesenberg
John and Virginia Ulaszek
Leo and Maria Valencia
Rita Van Drunen
Steve Van Ek
Carl and Janet Vander Molen
Gerrit Veenstra
Peg Vlietstra
Norm and Char Vugteveen
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Lansing COVID, from page 1

appetite, she said, and she can still taste spicy and sweet flavors, but not other flavors like sour things or garlic.

Tom's 92-year-old father Richard McSwiggan lives with Tom and Krista, and he also contracted the virus. The couple wanted to avoid putting him in the hospital, and they cared for him at home the best they could. Richard had shortness of breath and coughing, as well as occasional chills. He survived the virus, but Tom said his father's testing positive was "the scariest part" of their COVID experience.

Jerry Zeldenrust > "It was nothing worse than a head cold for me," Zeldenrust said of his COVID symptoms. He took NyQuil at night and Sudafed during the day to combat them.

"I would try to do a little something in the morning just to get out—you could tell that your body was under attack. You didn't have any pep," he said. "After about two hours of being up and trying to be active, you had to go lay down. ...For me, every day was like another hour to hour-and-a-half of activity that you could tolerate, without being exhausted."

Although she didn't show any symptoms at first, Zeldenrust said his wife did eventually test positive for COVID, and had minor cold symptoms and significant fatigue for a few days before regaining her strength.

Darvell Stinson > Three days before he got tested, Stinson remembers coming home from work feeling especially tired. He went to a restaurant to pick up food for himself and his wife, and he said while he was waiting for the food, he nearly called his kids to come and pick him up because "he didn't feel like moving" due to his fatigue.

"My symptoms were mild. ...My worry was, 'Will these mild symptoms go into severe or major symptoms?' It was a worry, but not because of pre-existing conditions," said Stinson, who is 50. He took pain medicine as well as congestion medicine to help with his symptoms, and tried to eat healthy foods and drink plenty of fluids.

Stinson lives with his wife, son, and daughter, who did not contract the virus. Stinson quarantined in his own room for most of his days being sick. When he did leave his room, the family wore masks and were careful to sanitize surfaces.

SUPPORT AND REFLECTION

Tom and Krista McSwiggan > "The biggest thing I got out of it was to realize the different degrees that this COVID affects people," Tom said. "You see people going to the hospital, they go on ventilators, some people are dying from it. But then there are other people like us that just go through it at home and are able to take care of themselves."

Krista said before they got the virus, they thought, "Oh we're not going to get that because we aren't around too much and we're homebodies." "But it doesn't matter," she said. "You can get it anywhere."

"I don't understand how anybody can [minimize the seriousness of COVID-19] given what you see happening to people throughout the U.S. and throughout the world," Tom

said. "How can you think that you should not be taking some sort of precaution to protect yourself and your family and your friends? It doesn't make sense to me. It does not make sense to me. There's nothing phony about this."

Jerry Zeldenrust > "Both with the Village family and the church family, as soon as anybody heard that I had it, they were making calls," Zeldenrust said, who also appreciated the many emails and texts from friends, family, and Village staff. Zeldenrust attended the October 6 Village Board meeting virtually and thanked his colleagues at that meeting for their concern.

In thinking about social restrictions that have been imposed because of COVID-19, Zeldenrust said he personally did not agree with some of them because of his "sense of freedom and independence," and not wanting to "hunker down and go into panic mode." As a Trustee, however, he understood the importance of setting a good example and complying with guidelines.

"It's important to have a balanced view of not only COVID-19 but life in general," Zeldenrust said. "To understand that you don't believe everything you read or see on the TV news, but that you do follow the science. ...[It's important] when you're being told to be responsible for yourself and others that you take certain precautions like a mask, and social

distancing, and washing your hands, that you do that. Not because you're afraid you're going to die, but because you're responsible for other people as well."

Darvell Stinson > "The most remarkable part about [my experience] was the overwhelming support," Stinson said, who was "bombarded" with texts, emails, and Facebook messages from friends, family, coworkers, Village staff, and others after his positive test. "I wouldn't even know where to begin to try and repay everybody that has reached out to me and wished me well and kept me in their thoughts."

"If I didn't have the family support or the support from the community and coworkers and stuff like that, I would honestly say I probably would have had a moment of depression or anxiety going through this," Stinson said.

Having COVID has made Stinson more sympathetic to other people who have contracted the virus. "It wasn't easy [for me], but I wasn't hospitalized, I wasn't in an induced coma, I wasn't on a ventilator. My level of sympathy and care goes a long way for those who have experienced it on those levels, and even on a mild symptom level," he said.

"[COVID-19] is serious. But not to the extent where we really just have to shut the world down," said Stinson. "Whatever you're doing to be safe, take a little extra step and be even more safe."

Living Word Church keeps Dressemer tradition

BY JAMILYN HISKES

LANSING, Ill. (November 30, 2020) — For most people, deciding what clothes to wear every day is a personal choice. People dress for comfort, for work, or for a specific activity, and those styles of dress don't always intersect.

But what if the choice is taken away?

DRESSING FOR DRESSEMBER

According to the Dressemer Foundation, an organization that advocates for awareness about human trafficking worldwide, choosing to give up that choice for one month of the year is one way to show solidarity with the victims of this crime. And anyone can participate—including Lansing residents.

Living Word Church (2248 186th St.) has been participating in Dressemer for the past two years. They're planning to do it again in 2020. "This is one thing we decided to not cancel this year," said Stephanie Jansma, the spokesperson for the annual Dressemer fundraiser at Living Word.

Participation in Dressemer involves choosing to wear a dress, a tie, or other formal clothing every day—or a set of

specific days, such as weekends or certain days of each week—in December. Setting up a fundraiser for the Dressemer Foundation is also easy to do through the Dressemer website.

A HEAVY ISSUE

Human trafficking affects more than 40 million people worldwide, 1 in 4 of whom are children, according to the Dressemer Foundation. It's an issue Living Word Church was learning about and fighting against before they discovered the foundation.

"Normally our church does something called Freedom Sunday, which is a Sunday to bring awareness about human trafficking," Jansma said. "Three years ago, the idea of Dressemer was proposed as a tangible thing to actually do in the face of such a heavy and hard issue."

A CONVERSATION STARTER

It might feel strange or even uncomfortable to dress up every day for a month, especially when millions of people are working from home and going out less in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. But Jansma believes that

could make Dressemer participation a more obvious conversation starter.

"It's more of a sacrifice of freedom," said Jansma. "I have a million choices throughout the day, and this one choice I don't have helps me remember I'm standing in solidarity."

A WAY TO HAVE AN IMPACT

Jansma said Living Word Church raised between \$1,000 and \$1,500 for the Dressemer Foundation in 2018 and 2019, with about 10 church members starting fundraisers and another 20 participating through donations and dressing the part. Jansma hopes the participation will be the same or greater this year.

"This year has been hard on everyone, so donating might be difficult," Jansma said. "So this might be the year to do something with it that you haven't before. ...[D]ressing up might be making that difference for yourself every day."

The National Human Trafficking Hotline is 888-373-7888. You can also text "HELP" or "INFO" to 233733.

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Massage business special use permit comes before Village Board

Trustees ask questions in preparation for Dec. 1 vote

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

LANSING, Ill. (November 24, 2020) – The Lansing Village Board is considering granting a special use permit to Healthy Foot Spa at 3319 Ridge Road.

The massage business, which is currently called Health Foot Massage, is now owned by Lina Dong. According to Lansing’s Code of Ordinances, foot and body massage businesses must acquire a special use permit before beginning operations or as a result of a change in ownership. Dong also wants to change the business’s name to Healthy Foot Spa.

According to Dong’s attorney Jun Wang, Dong began the process of changing over ownership in December of 2019. Wang said that although Dong “took over” the business in 2017, she was unable to start the ownership process at that time because she did not have a license for massage therapy. Wang said Health Foot Massage has been in business in Lansing since 2014.

LICENSURE QUESTIONS

Trustee Brian Hardy started questions on November 17 by asking Dong about the licensure of her employees.

Illinois requires massage therapists to have a license, and discussion at the Planning and Zoning Board’s August 12 meeting raised questions about licensure. At that time, it was determined that two massage therapists working at the spa were not licensed. Dong said those therapists were in the process of getting their licenses and were not actively involved in massage duties.

At that meeting, Commissioner Grace Bazylewski said she had visited the business and had seen someone other than Dong working. She asked if that person had a massage license. Dong’s attorney Wang conferred with Dong and said, “What you saw today, they don’t have a license. The girl who was working didn’t have a license.”

At the end of deliberation, the Planning and Zoning Board voted 5-1 in favor of a resolution, stating, “We recommend to the [Village] Board that they grant a special use for a foot and body massage parlor—and all workers will be state-licensed in six months—to be located at 3319 Ridge Road.” Commissioner Cathy Hallow provided the dissenting vote.

At the November 17 Village Board meeting, Dong’s son, speaking on Dong’s behalf, said the unlicensed employees were laid off and replaced by a new employee who is properly licensed. Village Trustees indicated they had information about three licensed employees—Dong, another licensed therapist, and the newly hired therapist.

RENEWAL QUESTIONS

Hardy also asked about the renewal process for the three licenses on file for Dong and her employees, all of which are set to expire at the end of the year. The licenses renew every two years, a process which Dong’s son said takes ten days.

Dong’s son said Dong plans to submit her renewal in mid-December, allowing for a ten-day turnaround. The Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation’s website says that a renewed applicant’s license will be mailed “a few days” after completion of online renewal.

NEXT STEPS

The Board will vote to approve a special use permit for Healthy Foot Spa at its meeting on December 1. Contact information for Village Trustees is available on the Village website.

Trustees will vote to approve or deny the special use permit request of Lina Dong for her massage business at 3319 Ridge Road. (Photo: Melanie Jongsma)



Taxes, from page 4

Township businesses on September 25 and for Bloom Township businesses on November 12.

LOOKING TO THE BORDER—AND THE FUTURE

Although Class 8 tax incentives are an effective boon for businesses looking to move to, or start in Lansing, such incentives are not accessible for existing Lansing businesses.

Sandrick said multi-use buildings, like some in downtown Lansing, are assessed at a 10% rate instead of 25% because they have residential spaces in them. This is generally not permissible in Lansing, however, and the existing buildings that have such arrangements have been grandfathered in.

Given the lack of good options for many Lansing businesses, some are looking to seemingly greener pastures in Indiana. Lansing Village Trustee Brian Hardy owns Chicago’s Finest Ironworks in Lansing, and is facing a property tax increase of approximately 160% next year. Although he’s been in business in Lansing for 33 years and his heart is in Lansing, he’s being forced to consider alternatives. “I still feel obligated, honestly, to stay here because this is where I started my business,”

Hardy said, “but if my taxes continue to keep going the way they do, I have no choice. It’s a financial choice that I would have to leave. I financially would not be able to stay.”

Vander Zee, whose tax increase next year is not as drastic as Todd’s, Hardy’s, or Rosati’s, says he plans to keep fighting, though he acknowledged he’s entertained thoughts about a border-crossing. “I plan on being here [in Lansing], and I just fight it and do it. That’s just how I operate, but never say never. I’ll fully commit until I don’t,” he said.

Lansing’s proximity to the neighboring state makes property tax spikes especially difficult, as some businesses just a stone’s throw across the border are bound to a much lower tax rate. For example, Strack & Van Til, a large grocery store in Munster, owed less than \$100,000 in taxes this year. That means Strack & Van Til paid tens of thousands of dollars less in taxes than what Jim Todd owes in 2021—for a property that is 13 times larger than Todd’s in square footage.

Todd said he and his siblings have no intention of paying the quadrupled property tax next year, and he has chosen to not restart an appeal process. “We’ve made a conscious decision that we’re not

going to pay the property taxes going forward which will, of course, put the property into a tax lien,” Todd said. “We’re prepared to walk away if we have to, or move the business. If we move the business, of course it’s going to be across the border.”

“I think this reassessment is going to devastate Lansing in the next couple years,” Todd continued. “Unfortunately, we’ve been here for 22 years in this location and our days are numbered.”

“What options do we have?” said Tony Rosati of Lansing Sport Shop, which has been in Lansing since 1954. “I thought I, at least, would be here for at least several more years, but I just can’t see, under these circumstances, this being something that we’ll be able to hang onto for more than a few years.”

“Over the next three, to five, to ten years, if I had a crystal ball, what is it going to look like here?” Hardy said. “I don’t want it to look like a ghost town. I want this to still be a very viable place for people to live, shop, and everything else. So I’m hoping that this is a way for us to get started to say, ‘What do we really need to do?’—you know, all the politicians in Cook County to start saying, ‘Let’s look at the long-term progress and what can we do to keep businesses here?’”

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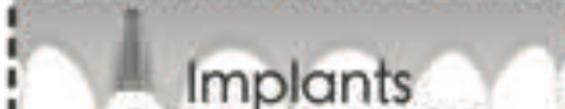
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Lansing Blacks, Whites, Latinos find Common Ground

New program provides structure for healthy conversations about race

BY JOSH BOOTSMA AND ASHLEE DE WIT

LANSING, Ill. (November 20, 2020) — Common Ground: Lansing Edition launched on a Thursday evening in August, with most of the participants gathering in-person to meet their partners, introduce themselves to the group, and learn some best practices for their one-on-one monthly meetings. The launch event was held in the courtroom of the Lansing Police Department and was led by Melanie Jongsma, who has participated in a similar program at her church.

PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE

During the launch meeting, the 44 participants were paired with their partners, some of whom were unable to be present at the meeting or were watching via a live video stream.

Each Common Ground participant is paired with someone from a different ethnic background. Each month for a year, the partners meet one-on-one and use questions sent by Jongsma to generate conversation and explore differences.

"The whole purpose of the program is to create a framework for these relationships to happen," Jongsma told participants at the launch meeting in August. "Most of the program happens with you and your partner wherever you want to meet, whenever you want to meet. Those conversations are what Common Ground is all about."

Jongsma laid out guidelines for participants to do the program well, including the importance of honesty, balancing when to listen and when to talk, and understanding that there isn't a "wrong" and "right" to every difference. She also asked participants to remember that their partner's attitudes and beliefs do not reflect those of their entire race.

Another ground rule is simply logistical: "Check your email at least weekly!" Because information and updates are distributed via email, participants commit to checking email even if texting or phoning is a preferred means of communication.

AFTER LAUNCH

Following the launch meeting, partners were encouraged to schedule their August meeting right away. One pair—Tiffany Wells and Missy Krygsheld—met immediately because they didn't want the month to get away from them. They sat on a bench outside the police station and went through the Month 1 questions that had been provided.

On September 1, a new set of questions was emailed to participants. And later in the month Jongsma emailed information about the Human Relations Commission meeting on September 17, inviting them to attend as an "extra-curricular



Marvin Rogers (standing) introduces himself to his fellow Common Ground participants at the August launch meeting. (Photo: Josh Bootsma)

activity." Common Ground-ers are also encouraged to patronize local restaurants for their monthly meetings if possible, as another way of building community in Lansing.

TENSION AND GROWTH

"I heard about how my mom was meeting with someone, and I was interested in joining," said Dorelle Scheeringa, daughter of Missy Krygsheld. Scheeringa joined the program after it started. "I'm not really immersed in different cultures; to hear the truth from someone who is in a different culture is really important; it's really important to be able to hear those stories, to hear about the different life she [Scheeringa's partner] has led because she's a different color."

Scheeringa's partner, Shauna Small-Craib, has experienced a few different cultures in her life—she is from Jamaica and lived in Florida before moving to Illinois. She and her husband purchased a house in Lansing five years ago.

"I'm going to be very candid, because that's who I am—and that's why I'm good in the program," Small-Craib said. "I see people in Lansing that are still a little racist. People have told me, 'Lansing is getting quite dark.' ...A lot of people don't understand minorities, and there are a lot of stereotypes that people actually believe."

"This is a very good educational program," she added. "People who come into it have to be open-minded, and a lot of people in it that I've met seem to genuinely want to learn."

That learning is encouraged by the monthly questions, which have become slightly more probing as the program has continued, in the hope that the developing relationships are able to handle deeper discussions. The November questions tackled issues of politics and religion. One participant admitted, "The questions about politics really led us into more, shall we say, 'tentative' conversations. The political climate has made all of us a little shy about discussing these things."

But, she added, "It definitely was not enough to derail our Common Ground relationship."

become best friends in that time, but if they stick with it, they can figure out how to at least disagree respectfully."

QUARTERLY CHECK-UP

Before COVID restrictions ramped up again, Common Ground participants managed to fit in another large-group meeting in November. This meeting was hosted by Faith Church in Munster. Members of the church's leadership team sat in on the meeting and were impressed with how openly the participants were able to talk about race.

November marked Month 4 of the program, and the large-group meeting revealed that only a few partners had met four times. A variety of factors impact the success of a partnership, including schedules, personalities, and, this year, COVID. Meeting as a large group provided an opportunity for participants to ask questions and get ideas. In addition, the group reminds each pair of participants that they are not alone. The shared laughter and judgement-free conversation that comes as a fruit of a deepening relationship gives life to the monthly meetings.

LOOKING AHEAD

Jongsma is hopeful that Common Ground will continue even as COVID increases and busy holiday schedules make meetings more difficult for partners. If the November group meeting was any indication, it seems most partners' relationships are already strong enough to weather the winter and stay immune to rising COVID cases.

The program's promising start has sparked an interest beyond Lansing. Faith Church in Munster hopes to launch a Common Ground program in 2021. And Unity Christian Academy in South Holland has already taken steps to pair up students for a high school version of the program. The interest is a testament to how, even amid a year where racial, political, and ideological differences have reached a national fever pitch, local people are nonetheless interested in meaningful conversations with people who look different but share a common ground.



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Youth Center celebrates 2020 graduates with drive-thru parade

BY CARRIE STEINWEG

LANSING, Ill. (May 28, 2020) – When the Patti Leach Youth Center arranged for a drive-thru graduation parade to take place on May 27 to celebrate 8th graders and high school seniors, it rained on the parade. It seemed completely appropriate, though, given all that the graduating class of 2020 had been through. Due to COVID-19, graduates saw their school year fizzle without all the pomp and circumstance.

True to the spirit of these resilient students, they didn't let a little rain dampen their fun or their enthusiasm. Car after car pulled up with kids emerging in caps and gowns to accept a gift bag and take a picture in front of a "Class of 2020" sign affixed to an outdoor wall of the center.

Tamara Morgan arrived with her son Antoine in a maroon cap and gown that he was supposed to wear to graduation on Thursday at Memorial Junior High. (The school planned a virtual graduation in lieu of the traditional ceremony held at the Serbian Social Center.) Although they were disappointed at not being able to participate in a traditional graduation, Tamara was glad that youth center staff had planned a way to recognize the graduates. "It's really nice of them to do something like this," she said. "It was very thoughtful."

Aneisha Titsworth, Director of the Patti Leach Youth Center, and her staff welcomed grads and presented them with a bag of gifts and candy. "With all schools closing and social distancing in place, graduation celebrations have been cancelled. I wanted to still celebrate our graduates, both eighth and twelfth grade. It's important to me to let the youth know how proud of them we are," she said. "These are moments that they won't ever get back, and unfortunately

their school year has been cut short, and they've missed out on so many celebratory events, so I thought this was the least I could do."

During the stay-at-home order Titsworth said the youth center held online parties using Google classroom, and used social media to connect with members. "Our social media team of Trelissa Moses and Daybreon Thighpen has been awesome with interacting with the youth. We also created a social distancing scavenger hunt where we challenged youth to find items in their homes," she explained.

Titsworth knows firsthand how the pandemic has affected graduates. Her daughter, Anijsha, was an eighth grader this year at Memorial Junior High School.

TF South graduates and brothers Brandon and David Denard also participated in the youth center's drive-thru celebration. David expressed that he wished he had been able to see his friends more at the end of his senior year. He said



Event organizer Aneisha Titsworth (right) poses with her daughter, Anijsha, who was a graduate of Memorial Jr. High School. Anijsha's father, Russell Harty (left), also attended the celebration. (Photo: Carrie Steinweg)

that means reading more, exercising, trying a new hobby, or anything that adds to them holistically, I hope they enjoy the break from society and have clear minds and spirits so they can welcome the next chapter of life with open arms."

that at first he liked the e-learning and staying at home, but it got old quickly. "I really wish I could have said goodbye to my friends," David said.

Brandon's thoughts on the way school ended were summed up in one word: "Unexpected." Brandon planned to attend South Suburban College and will likely study theatre. David will be attending Southern Illinois University and majoring in psychology or music.

"My hope for the graduates during the pandemic is that I hope they will practice self-care. We are experiencing times that have never happened before," said Titsworth. "How often is it you get time to spend learning yourself on a deeper level or even connecting with your family? Whether

Thornton Township Assessor wins 'Elected Official of the Year'

BY ERNST LAMOTHE

SOUTH HOLLAND, Ill. (October 26, 2020) – During property tax season, one woman traverses through close to a dozen communities, educating citizens on how to petition and challenge their assessments. For her work helping residents as they sift through their frustrating property tax bills, Thornton Township Assessor Cassandra W. Holbert-Elston has been awarded Township Officials of Illinois Elected Official of the Year.

"Cassandra has always put serving the community as her most important priority. People contact her at all hours of the night, and she serves with pleasure, and I am happy that people are finally recognizing what we already know. She is incredible," said Frank M. Zuccarelli, Thornton Township Supervisor.

Elston, who has served as township



Cassandra Elston, Official of the Year (Photo provided)

assessor since 2013, represents 17 distinct municipalities with a combined population of more than 168,000. The role requires a combination of diligent work, years of experience, and a heart for community advocacy. One of her key initiatives is hosting live—and this year, virtual—property tax assessment workshops. She gives a presentation and answers residents' questions, and her team looks through resident tax assessment bills. She works with elected officials, clergy, and homeowner associations.

Elston's office and staff have been available virtually to the public throughout the pandemic. She has hosted over 15 seminars yearly, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. The seminars are not limited to property tax, exemptions, and the appeal process. Information is also shared on property after death, property fraud, first-time home buyer programs, and

property redemption for those who have lost homes. More than 500 individual households have been helped by the assessor's staff since mid-July.

"I'm completely stunned by receiving this award. When you look to serve the community, especially if you are doing it for the right reasons, you certainly don't do it for attention or awards," said Elston. "But I am honored by the award and I will continue serving the community in any way it needs."

Elston received recognition for youth mentoring from the late Alderman Bennett M. Stewart of the 21st Ward in Chicago. She was awarded the key to the City of Chicago for outstanding leadership and community involvement under the late Mayor Harold Washington. She was recognized for outstanding achievement in organizing block clubs and community organizations in the 6th Ward under the late Mayor Eugene Sawyer. She was also honored as "Woman of the Year" by the Society of Mannequins in 2017.

"I just feel so blessed to be able to help individuals and whole communities in need," said Elston.

Thornton Township's main office is located at 333 E. 162nd Street, South Holland, IL.

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LCS parent

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LCS parent

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Lansing responds, continued from page 2

campus was that of a Confederate soldier, the Confederate battle flag, and the nickname "Rebels." Gourley also noted that the Confederate flag was removed in the mid-1990s and the Confederate soldier mascot was eliminated by the mid-2000s. The student-driven process of choosing a new nickname began in late October.

The month of August also saw the launch of Common Ground, Lansing's first race relations program, designed to bring people of different racial and cultural backgrounds together to have honest conversations about similarities and differences. (See story, page 7.)

COMPLEX CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPLEX PROBLEMS

So often in 2020, Lansing residents have been asked to take one side or the other on a host of issues: Do you support Black people or the police? Do you believe Black lives matter or all lives matter? Do all protests lead to looting or are all protests peaceful? Do you want to defund the police or support them? These questions are binary, with answers that are only polar opposites.

In 2020, the Lansing community rejected black-and-white answers in favor of the gray area in-between:

- Young residents felt offended by both the killing of George Floyd and the rampant looting that resulted from it.
- Protestors routinely contacted Lansing police before demonstrating, and the police took the necessary steps to keep them safe.
- Invested community members demanded change of the Lansing Police Department, and within a month the Lansing Police Chief reported on progress on each of the demands, mentioning them by name.
- Lansing students started a process to change the nickname of their high school, submitting the initiative to the School Board, who based its decision to do so entirely on a student survey.
- Dozens of Lansing residents committed to meeting monthly with someone who is racially different than they are to better understand differences.

Most visibly, Lansing people of all races and ages joined to march, pray, kneel, listen, and sometimes shout in support of their community—a community that in 2020 has shown its desire to forego simple answers in favor of complex conversations.



Lansing's Kevin Collinz (center) personifies the complexity of race relations. "Not only am I a voice for Blacks," he said, "I'm a voice for law enforcement because I wear the badge also." (Photo: Josh Bootsma)

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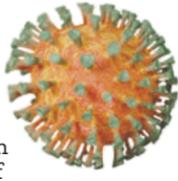
- ★ Debut of new official Village Christmas Tree
- ★ View holiday decorations throughout Fox Pointe
- ★ Photo OP with vintage Santa sleigh
- ★ Holiday Music
- ★ Trees can be viewed Dec 7-23 and Dec 26-30 from 3-8PM

Remembering 2020: A Lansing COVID-19 Timeline

COMPILED BY JOSH BOOTSMA

January

- 24** First case of coronavirus reported in Illinois, second in the United States.
- 30** First person-to-person spread of coronavirus in the United States is announced.
- 30** The World Health Organization declares coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency.



- districts in Lansing begin preparing for e-learning.
- 13** President Trump declares the coronavirus outbreak a national emergency.
- 15** The Patti Leach Youth Center announces it will close in tandem with the school closings mandated by the Governor.
- 15** Governor Pritzker orders that all restaurants and bars close their dining rooms. Lansing eateries expand their take-out and delivery options.

February

- 11** World Health Organization gives the novel coronavirus a name: COVID-19
- 28** The first COVID-19 death occurs in the U.S. outside of Seattle, WA.

March

- 5** The fifth Illinois case of coronavirus is confirmed after a man returns from Italy.
- 9** Illinois Governor JB Pritzker declares a state of emergency in Illinois as a result of COVID-19 spread.
- 11** The World Health Organization declares the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic.
- 13** Governor Pritzker announces statewide school closures from March 17–30. School

- 17** The first Illinois COVID-19 death is announced.
- 17** Primary elections in Illinois: Polling places in Lansing work to ensure equipment is sanitized for voters.
- 17** Lansing Mayor Patty Eidam delivers video address to Lansing residents overviewing closures and promising "We are all in this together."



- 18** The Lansing Public Library building closes.

- 21** Governor-mandated stay-at-home order goes into effect in Illinois.
- 21** The Illinois Department of Employment Security sees a 1,400% increase in calls compared to the corresponding week last year.
- 22** Many Lansing churches start worshipping virtually.
- 24** Lansing Deputy Fire Chief John Grady picks up three gallons of hand sanitizer from The Well in Thornton, which had switched production from alcohol to sanitizer.



- 25** One Trick Pony Brewery in Lansing starts offering same-day home delivery for "to-go" beer orders.
- 26** The United States becomes the country with the most COVID-19 cases with over 86,000.
- 27** Munster's Theatre at the Center and The Center for Visual and Performing Arts announce suspension of all events.
- 30** Lansing Good Friday Prayer Walk is replaced by virtual prayer walk.

- 31** Governor Pritzker announces stay-at-home order and K–12 on-site learning suspension will extend through April 30.
- 31** District 215 Superintendent Teresa Lance releases statement on remote learning and priorities moving forward.
- 31** The Lansing Area Chamber of Commerce announces the Good Neighbor Day Parade—originally scheduled for May 2—will be postponed.

April

- 1** Lansing residents participate in "Shine a Light on Lansing" event to show support for medical professionals, first responders, and local businesses.
- 3** School District 215 Superintendent Lance releases revised class schedule for remote learning to take effect on April 13.
- 5** More than 90 cars join a caravan starting at Bethel Church to drive around three area hospitals and pray for first responders, medical workers, and patients.
- 11** The United States becomes the most COVID-19-caused deaths in the world, with over 19,500 fatalities.

- 17** Governor Pritzker orders all Illinois flags to be flown at half-staff to honor those who have died of COVID-19.
- 18** The Village adapts Community Clean-Up Day by providing trash bags and pick-up services to residents wanting to do their own clean-up.



- 24** District 171 teachers and staff parade through 10 miles of Lansing and Lynwood neighborhoods to greet students during quarantine.



- 24** The Center for Visual and Performing Arts in Munster holds the first of three blood drives in its ballroom.
- 30** Minuteman Press on Torrence Ave. closes after 14 years of serving Lansing's printing needs.



- 30** Governor Pritzker extends stay-at-home order through May 29.

May

- 1** Governor Pritzker extends stay-at-home order through May 30 and makes masks mandatory in public spaces.
- 6** The presses stayed silent as The Lansing Journal did not print a monthly issue for the first time since 2017.
- 23** We Win Foundation hosts a food donation event in the American Legion parking lot.
- 27** The United States exceeds 100,000 COVID-19 deaths.
- 27** Patti Leach Youth Center holds a drive-thru graduation parade.
- 28** Memorial Jr. High holds a virtual graduation ceremony
- 29** Illinois moves from Phase 2 to Phase 3 of the Illinois Resurgence Mitigation plan, allowing some businesses to reopen with restrictions.
- 29** Lansing parks re-open.

Happy Holidays

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June

- 1 COVID-19 testing facility opens at South Suburban College.
- 1 Lansing pastors and church members gathered for outdoor prayer in light of racial unrest in the area.
- 1 Lansing Municipal Center reopens lobby.
- 2 Lansing Library starts offering curbside services.
- 11 Honor Flight Chicago announces postponement of all 2020 flights. About a dozen Lansing veterans were scheduled to fly to Washington D.C. for the honor, and received a yard sign as consolation.
- 12 Temporary COVID-19 testing facility opens in Lansing Walmart parking lot.

and allowing many businesses to reopen or expand.

July

- 13 Lansing Masons present \$5,000 donation to Shriners Hospital, the Arcadia Palace Lodge No. 765's first charitable gift after COVID delays.



- 23 Lansing Good Neighbor Day Parade is cancelled after attempts to reschedule.
- 26 Illinois moves from Phase 3 to Phase 4 of the state's Resurgence Mitigation Plan, increasing gathering limits from 10 to 50,
- 14 A socially-distant Village Board Meeting begins with a somber roll call remembering recently-passed Trustee Mike Manno.
- 15 The window for tax filing closes after being extended from April 15 due to COVID delays.

- 26 Marian Catholic High School holds commencement ceremony outdoors in its Spartan Stadium.

August

- 18 Mayor Patty Eidam and Village Clerk Vivian Payne hold outdoor celebration of the 19th Amendment's 100-year anniversary.
- 20 Lester Crawl receives school supply donation from Enchanted Backpack, delayed from original April date.
- 21 Lansing race relations program Common Ground holds its launch meeting with limited numbers and social distancing. The program's start was delayed from earlier in the year.
- 29 "We Are Lansing" drive-thru food drive occurs in parking lot of First United Methodist Church, giving away 350 bags of food.

September

- 2 Unity Christian Academy in South Holland starts its fall semester using a hybrid model of three days in-person and two days remote.
- 8 Marian Catholic High School starts using a health assessment app to collect daily student and staff health survey data to keep the school healthy.
- 19 Eighth Annual LOOP Bike Ride staggers start times and gives away goodie bags instead of

hosting a post-ride barbecue.

- 19 Illinois surpasses 5 million COVID tests.
- 22 The United States exceeds 200,000 COVID-19 deaths.

October

- 2 President Donald Trump announces he and his wife Melania tested positive for COVID-19.
- 9 Illiana Cat Project starts hosting its Fall Fur Festival in virtual format.
- 15 LARC offers carry-out version of annual Fall Feast.
- 15 Lansing ends the last day of the 2020 Census with a 75.3% response rate, marking the end of a counting process complicated by COVID-19.
- 19 Early Voting begins at the Lansing Public Library, breaking previous Early Voting turnout records. Some voters said COVID uncertainty prompted them to vote early.



over an hour of public comment detailing issues, frustrations, and challenges of students, parents, and teachers.

- 24 Second drive-thru food drive takes place in First United Methodist Church lot, providing 1,000 boxes of food.
- 24 Bishop Noll Institute presents an outdoor concert.
- 31 Fox Pointe hosts hundreds at Trick-or-Treat event. Village-wide trick-or-treating takes place under safety guidelines.

- 7 Two blood drives are held in the Lansing area to supply blood during COVID-related shortage.

- 19 Glenwood Academy hosts its annual gala virtually.
- 20 Illinois enters Tier 3 of Phase 4 of the state's Resurgence Mitigation Plan.
- 26 CDC Director Tom Frieden suggests, "Better to have a Zoom Thanksgiving than an ICU Christmas." While millions of Americans choose to travel and gather with family for the holiday, social media posts from Lansing residents feature nostalgic photos, health updates, new traditions, and invitations to post comments about things to be thankful for in a year of COVID-19.

November

- 2 South Suburban College announces its virtual classroom model will extend into the spring semester.
- 3 After record Early Voting turnout, Lansing sees moderate turnout at all poll locations on a socially-distant Election Day.



- 21 District 158 Board Meeting opens with

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The Lansing Journal



Gatlinburg, Tennessee

From left: Paul Reese, Carol Willmes, and Joe Dubczak, all from Lansing, recently traveled to the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee and took a printed copy of The Lansing Journal with them. This photo was taken in front of the Gatlinburg Convention Center in Tennessee, where they attended the Gatlinburg Craftsmen's Fair in late October. The photo was taken by a friendly passerby. ("We don't know his name," said Joe.)

ABOUT THE LANSING JOURNAL JOURNEYS

The Lansing Journal Journeys is an award-winning feature that showcases people displaying The Lansing Journal in creative locations.

Most participants prefer to use a printed copy of the newspaper in their Lansing Journal Journeys entries, but printed papers are not a requirement—the digital version works just as well.

Need some photo ideas?

- Take a photo of your kids reading The Lansing Journal as part of their e-learning experience.
- Walk along one of Lansing's bike paths, and have a passerby snap a photo of you with The Lansing Journal on your phone.
- Visit one of Lansing's restaurants for take-out, bring up The Lansing Journal on your phone, and have the waiter snap a photo of you in front of their sign.
- Have a family member take a photo of you next to your computer as you catch up on the morning news.
- Did you remodel your kitchen or update your landscaping during quarantine? Pull up The Lansing Journal on your tablet, prop it up on the counter or among the perennials, and snap a photo.
- Do your pets read? Get a photo of them with The Lansing Journal.

Send photos to info@thelansingjournal.com and include the names of anyone in the photo, some information about the location or occasion, and the name of the person who took the photo.

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Random acts of kindness in Lansing

Residents find ways to help others during pandemic

BY CARRIE STEINWEG

LANSING, Ill. (November 25, 2020) - There's an amazing thing about the human race: the worst of times brings out the best in people. As we wade through this trying year of a devastating global pandemic, social unrest, natural disasters, wildfires, financial uncertainty, and business closures, so many around us are doing their part to make the world better.

Groups and individuals have fed first responders. Neighbors have helped take care of elderly neighbors. Emergency food assistance is being organized. People have made and donated masks.

Here are a few examples of the kindness that's been shown in our own community during 2020.

ANONYMOUS DO-GOODER

Jen Arnold got a mysterious envelope in the mail in April. She still doesn't know the origin of it. The envelope contained four gift cards for Aldi and a letter with some instructions to attach a little saying to each card, go to Aldi and hand them out to some shoppers.

"That was a huge task, and a lot of pressure, but I was ready and excited for the mission. It was around April 24. It was raining and cold, but I was so excited to go and help someone," said Arnold. "So I went and stood in line at our Lansing Aldi, waiting to get in. Once in, I was able to start making people happy in a time where everyone was anything but happy. I spent about 45 minutes handing out the cards, and it was so much fun."

The instructions also asked Arnold to post her experience on social media. "So I reported back, but then was thinking I could have done more or I was second guessing my choices," said Arnold. "But then in August I received another letter and two more missions [and a check]. One-third was for husband and I to go out to dinner and celebrate. We are both essential workers and were literally passing each other as we would come and go from work, so that was a great night out. Another one-third was to buy more gift cards from a store of my choice and hand them out. So the kids and I went on this mission together, and we went to Meijer."

Arnold enjoyed having her kids get involved and thinks it was a great lesson for them. "I picked Meijer because you can buy more than groceries. Each kid got a card and picked a person to give it to. My son, Mason, gave it to an elderly lady, and she was so shocked," Arnold explained. "Jasmine gave it to a younger looking mom, and she cried. Then we all cried. I gave mine to another lady who had medicine in her cart. It was such a great feeling."

The directions were to take the other third and buy what was what she thought would be best. "This one took time. So I thought about what was needed most. We took the rest of the money and donated school supplies to Coolidge School



Above: Dressmaker Auriga Cohran is making masks for people who need them. Right: The Arnold family served as "delivery angels" for an anonymous do-gooder. (Photos provided)



and we donated food to the Lansing Food Pantry," she said. "The kids were able to take part in all of this with me. It really taught them that not everyone has the basics and to be thankful for what we have."

TUTORING

Barb Dust, a retired first grade teacher from Nathan Hale School in Lansing got an email back in the spring from the Illinois Retired Teachers Association. They were requesting volunteers to tutor kids because school was being shut down. Dust answered the call and was matched up with a student—a six-year-old girl in Chicago. For weeks Dust did online tutoring with her in reading and math.

"Her mom and I emailed back and forth, and her mom told me what she needed help with," said Dust. "There was good communication. It was enjoyable. I sympathize with the teachers. It is hard to keep the kids' attention."

Dust planned to keep going all summer even after school ended. "We even did Zoom long distance when she went on a family trip," said Dust.

It was a challenge for Dust, who has been retired for the past decade, to get back into the teaching routine. "It was a fun experience for me. I'm glad I could help and at least try and help her from backsliding over the summer, too," she said. "The program did end at the end of the school year, but we kind of bonded and decided to keep on going."

From her generous spirit of helping a student and a parent at a time of need, Dust experienced the benefit of a new friendship. "The mom and I became friends," she said.

"It was just the girl and her mom in Hyde Park in a high rise. The girl didn't get outside much. It was very new to her. She needed really needed the social call."

MAKING MASKS

Lansing resident Auriga Cohran is a dressmaker. But during a pandemic people aren't dressing up much. With proms and weddings canceled this past spring, Cohran used her talents to make masks to donate to those in need. With lots of fabric to use, she started sewing and giving away face masks wherever she was. "I've them away everywhere—on the streets, in the Walmart line, to different organizations," she said. The masks are high quality and made of three layers for extra protection.

Cohran's seamstress skills run in the family. Her mother was a custom apparel designer, and her grandmother made costumes for the Ice Capades back in the 1940s and 1950s. Cohran has now spent four decades working with a needle and thread.

She has done some fundraising in order to continue making her masks. You can donate at: fundrazr.com/71hRr3. You can also purchase a mask on her Etsy page at www.etsy.com/shop/atelierveiga. She is using proceeds to help provide more masks in the Roseland area of Chicago where people are in need of Personal Protective Equipment. Auriga Cohran aims to get her homemade masks onto the faces of those who need to them to help keep them safe as the pandemic continues.



Jay Johnson (left) with his wife Danylle. Jay and Danylle were married in February of this year. Jay passed away in April. (Photo from Fine Tune Auto website)



Johnson's Snap-on toolbox sold new for \$17,000. The cost of the toolbox and tools, when purchased new, would likely have been valued around \$50,000. (Photo from Fine Tune Auto website)

Toolbox raffle to benefit widow of Fine Tune Auto mechanic

Drawing to take place December 18

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

LANSING, Ill. (November 12, 2020) – The tools in Jay Johnson's toolbox have helped fix hundreds of cars, and put many car owners' minds at ease. Now, Fine Tune Auto Service is hoping his tools can help ease the financial burden that Johnson's death has placed on his wife, Danylle.

Jay Johnson passed away on April 7, 2020, after a multi-year battle with cancer. He had worked at Fine Tune Auto Service in Lansing for about three years, where he served as a technician.

"He was just one of those guys that would be at work every day on time, working as hard as he could," said Fine Tune Auto Service owner Jason Brennan. "He would do a lot of things to help people. He was a great technician, a great person."

Shortly after Brennan hired Johnson a few years ago, Johnson mentioned his then fiancée Danylle had customer service skills and was looking for a new opportunity. Danylle is currently the service manager for the auto shop, and married Johnson in February of this year.

"Even though he had health issues, he would be at work as much as he could. He was just a super hard-working guy," Brennan said.

According to a GoFundMe page for Johnson's medical expenses set up by Danylle, Johnson was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer that spread to his liver in May of 2018. He completed 12 rounds of chemotherapy, nearly 60 sessions of radiation, and 23 surgeries, according to the website.

A MEANINGFUL RAFFLE

The idea to use Johnson's toolbox as a way to raise funds was Brennan's. He said Danylle approached him and asked advice on what to do with Johnson's toolbox, and Brennan suggested using it as a way to raise money to offset medical and funeral expenses. He thought selling it outright would raise less money than a raffle, and a raffle would allow people who might not otherwise be able to afford an expensive toolset to have a chance at winning it.

Though he worked at Fine Tune Auto for only three years, Johnson's robust collection of quality tools spans much longer than that. When purchased new, the toolbox alone was worth \$17,000, according to the Fine Tune Auto Service webpage explaining the raffle. Brennan said the cost of the toolbox and tools, when purchased new, would likely have been valued around \$50,000.

"It's really a top-of-the-line Snap-on toolbox. ...It's pretty much one of the best ones you can get, and all the tools in it are the best you can buy. It's a journeyman-level technician toolbox to where, if somebody were to get that toolbox full of tools, they wouldn't have many more tools they'd have to buy," Brennan said.

The raffle drawing for Johnson's tools and toolbox will take place on December 18 at 5:45 p.m. at Fine Tune Auto Service. More photos of the tools in the toolbox can be seen here. (Photo from Fine Tune Auto website)

The raffle drawing will take place on December 18 at 5:45 p.m. at Fine Tune Auto Service. Tickets are available to purchase on Paypal, where one ticket is \$20 and six tickets are \$100. If less than 1,000 raffle tickets have been sold by the date of the drawing, the drawing will likely be delayed to make sure enough tickets are sold to lift Danylle's financial burdens.

"The fundraiser is mainly to help Danylle pay for expenses for health and funeral costs, but also, we decided to do 5% toward the [American] Cancer Society because Danylle thought that's what Jay would have wanted, to help anyone in that kind of situation," Brennan said.

Visit Fine Tune Auto's website to purchase raffle tickets, or call Fine Tune Auto at 708-418-5000 with questions. Fine Tune Auto Service is located at 17546 Chicago Avenue, Lansing, IL.

Lansing micro pantries: an emblem of 2020 food generosity

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

Korey Ziemkowski poses by the micro pantry at First United Methodist Church. (Photo provided)

LANSING, Ill. (November 25, 2020) – Food generosity has been a theme in Lansing this year. Special drive-thru food donation events and Thanksgiving food drives accompanied the usual generosity from organizations like the Lansing Community Food Pantry. People bought meals for medical personnel and first responders, often from local restaurants reeling from pandemic restrictions.

Additionally, two new micro pantries came to Lansing this year, making for three total in the village. The small wooden boxes serve as storage units for people in need of food and other basics to anonymously pick up items for free. They are open to donors who want to leave food and other materials for others. Signs on the pantries read, "Take what you need. Leave what you can."

ACCESSIBLE, FREE, AND ANONYMOUS

The three micro pantries are in Lansing are located at Mt. Zion UFL Ministries (2340 177th Street), First United Methodist Church (18420 Burnham Avenue), and Bethel Church (3500 Glenwood Lansing Road).

The Mt. Zion micro pantry opened in the spring of 2019, and has served many people, according to Mt. Zion secretary Betty Burley. "Micro pantries are really important. ...These are emergency food situations, open 24 hours a day, and they're anonymous," Burley said in October of this year. She said Mt. Zion Ministries used to make a couple dozen peanut butter and jelly sandwiches daily to put in the micro pantry, and they were always gone at the end of the day.

The other Lansing micro pantries were started by TF South student Korey Ziemkowski, with collaboration from her mom Colleen Ziemkowski and First United Methodist

Church and Bethel Church.

The pantry at First United Methodist opened in early October after Korey Ziemkowski participated in the We Are Lansing drive-thru food giveaway on August 29. Ziemkowski, who has donated to micro pantries in neighboring communities before, met Pastor Dave Price of First United Methodist at the giveaway, and he was open to the idea of a micro pantry.

"I had asked him about it and he loved the idea," Ziemkowski said. "Then I talked to the [church's] board members and got it all set up ...I found out that we do have a church in town that loved the idea as much as we did and would be willing to help us in any way we needed."

The third Lansing micro pantry is located at Bethel Church, and opened in early November after Bethel Church Head Custodian Dave Schurman built it, and the Ziemkowski family stocked it.

NON-CONTACT GENEROSITY

"With COVID happening and not being able to be in direct contact with people, this a way that people can still help one another, but not be in the same room as them and not be exposed to anything," Ziemkowski said in October. "I can't wait for more people to learn about it and be able to go there as much as they need to."

The three micro pantries are open 24 hours every day for donors and those in need. Pick-ups and donations are anonymous. A fourth Lansing micro pantry is being considered at Cornerstone Church, according to Ziemkowski.



Mt. Zion UFL Ministries is located at 2340 177th Street. First United Methodist Church is located at 18420 Burnham Avenue. Bethel Church is located at 3500 Glenwood-Lansing Road.

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The other elections

LANSING, Ill. (December 1, 2020) - Lansing residents and aspiring office-holders have started preparing for the other elections—local municipal elections on April 6, 2021. Voters will have the opportunity to cast ballots for Mayor, Village Trustees, Park Board Commissioners, Library Board members, and School Board members for Districts 215, 171, and 158, as well as other positions with significant local impact.

Many potential candidates have already circulated their petitions, collecting the signatures needed in order to be certified by the Cook County Clerk's office. The ballot is officially set at the end of January.

The Lansing Journal will keep local voters informed by gathering information from candidates, explaining the function of various offices, and reporting election night results. Because of the uncertainty in the print industry right now, The Lansing Journal cannot predict when the next print issue will be published. Readers are therefore encouraged to sign up for the free Daily News email in order to receive reports on local candidates. Scanning the QR code at right will open a subscription form where an email address can be entered. Subscribers can also visit www.thelansingjournal.com/news/subscribe to sign up for local news.





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From stealing to sharing, Julian Sherman uses bikes to make a difference

BY JENNIFER YOS

LANSING, Ill. (September 26, 2020) – Although Lansing residents may have seen “Ju Sherman” advertise free, refurbished bikes on social media, few know the backstory of Lansing resident Julian Sherman, who grew up in the projects of Altgeld Gardens.

“Back then...I was less fortunate...me and my friends, we were less fortunate. We really didn’t have bikes, and I hate to admit it, but we did go out and steal bikes,” Sherman said. “And that actually led us into a life that we shouldn’t have been a part of...I ended up going to jail. And this one particular time I went to jail, a chaplain handed me a flyer for a welding program.”

The life-changing flyer Sherman received that day was for Chicagoland Prison Outreach (CPO), a Christian ministry based in South Holland. CPO reaches out to both incarcerated and previously incarcerated men, women, and their families and provides services such as in-prison discipleship and educational programs. It also provides post-prison mentoring, accountability, life skills, and vocational training, and it has several outreach programs through partnerships with local churches. CPO ministers at Cook County Jail, Westville Correctional Facility, and River Valley Juvenile Detention Center. Their Fellowship and Career Center, which houses

the welding workshop, is located at 407 W. 104 St. in Rose-land, not far from Altgeld Gardens where Sherman grew up.

CHANGING GEARS

“At that time [of receiving the CPO flyer], my bond was \$10,000. I didn’t have it, but when I reached out to my family, I told them, ‘Hey, there’s a welding program right on the south side of Chicago.’ At that point I didn’t know what welding was, and I’ll tell you how God works—God made a way for me to learn what welding is, my family came up with the bond money, I was out, and I called the number for the program, and the following week, I was in,” Sherman said.

When he entered the welding program in 2015, it was a four-month program. Now it is a three-month program and is free to trainees, funded entirely by private donors. Every year CPO hosts a large fundraising banquet, but this pandemic year they are relying on online funding.

Sherman finished the program, started welding regularly, and in 2017 was contacted by CPO and invited to return to the organization and become a welding instructor. He agreed, and is now an instructor in both the classroom and the workshop, working 30–40 hour weeks and teaching as many as twelve former prisoners at a time.

“We try to incorporate the Bible—we try to give them positive direction. We have Bible studies for them, and we try to give them a different outlook on life. It’s not about the quick money and just the streets. ...The director feels as though I’m the perfect example for the guys that are taking the course because I’ve been where they are,” Sherman explained.

“I took the class, and now I’m well off. I’m doing welding side jobs that are \$8,000 or better. I’ve experienced everything

that I could with welding, and I could take it a whole lot farther, but I really enjoy doing this, where I’m giving back to the neighborhood—you know—trying to get these guys off the street, give them a different mind frame,” he said.

FULL CIRCLE

Through his work at CPO, Julian Sherman met Al Schroeder, a Mokena resident who is locally known as “The Bike Man.” Schroeder refurbishes donated bicycles at his home and then distributes them to various charitable organizations, including CPO. Because Sherman owns a large vehicle and trailer, Schroeder often asks him to assist in transporting the bikes that are to be distributed to CPO.

However, this year CPO could not accept any additional bikes because they were housing about 300 bikes that could not be distributed during the usual summer bike giveaways due to the pandemic. Schroeder called Sherman, asking him to help him find a place for the additional bikes.

“Now when [Al] called me, I had just noticed on the Facebook page that someone posted about kids staying in Lansing that are stealing bikes. So, I figured, you know, ok, this is right on time. Al has bikes. I could give them away to the kids in the neighborhood. Then we won’t have to worry about bikes coming up missing,” Sherman said.

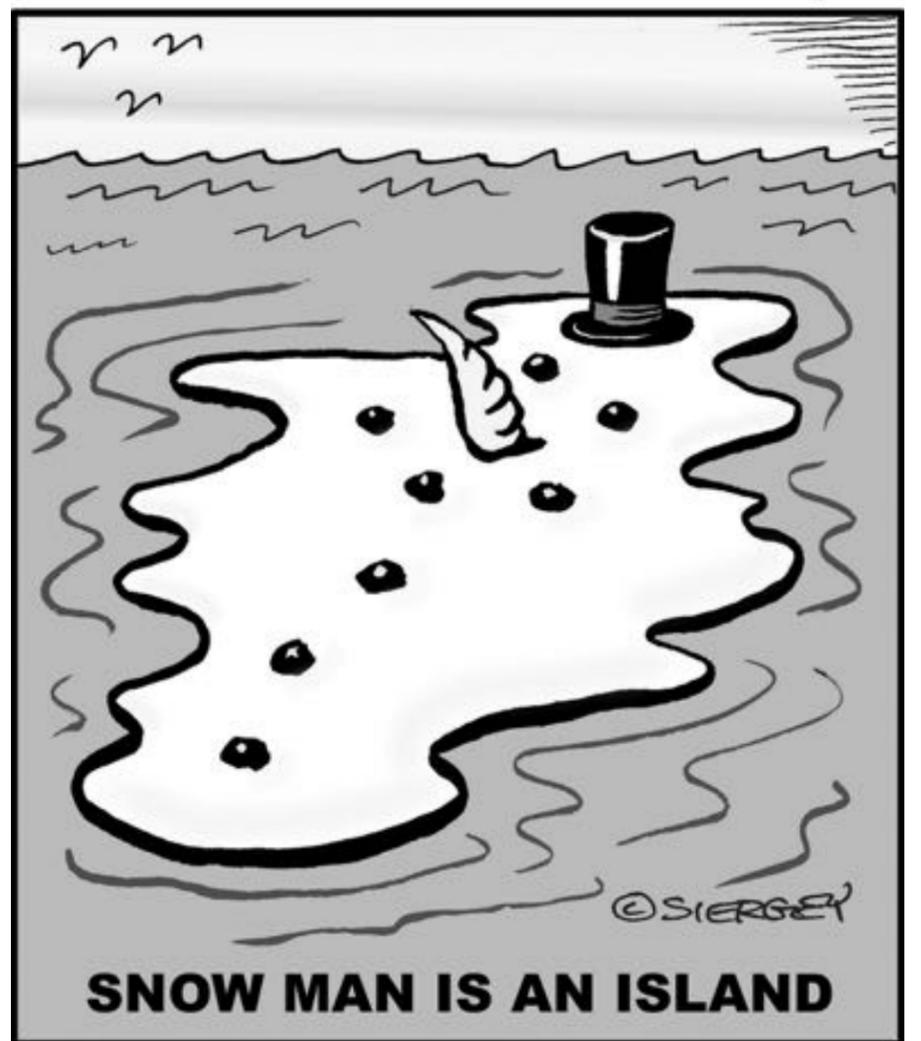
In addition to providing free bicycles to Lansing residents, Sherman returned to Altgeld Gardens—the very neighborhood where he once rode bikes he had stolen—and he informally announced to kids on the street that he would be handing out free bikes at a local storefront. By the time he finished making the rounds and showed up at the storefront, a crowd of kids and their parents were waiting. He told them, “Take your pick!” and in five minutes they were all gone. “As I was pulling out of the parking lot, there were kids to my right, kids in front of me, kids to my left, everywhere riding on the bikes.”

More information about Chicagoland Prison Outreach is available at cpoministries.org.



Julian Sherman went from stealing bikes in Altgeld Gardens to delivering free bikes there to children who need them. (Photo: Mary Compton)

nartoon by Jim Siergey



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Lansing authors release new books in 2020

Carrie Steinweg, David Masciotra, Jan Horner, Elvis Slaughter publish and self publish

BY JOSH BOOTSMA AND MELANIE JONGSMA

LANSING, Ill. (November 18, 2020) – Lansing is home or formerly home to at least four published authors whose newest releases were recognized during the past year. To read the full articles about each of these recent works, enter the author name or book title in the search field at thelansingjournal.com/news.

CARRIE STEINWEG

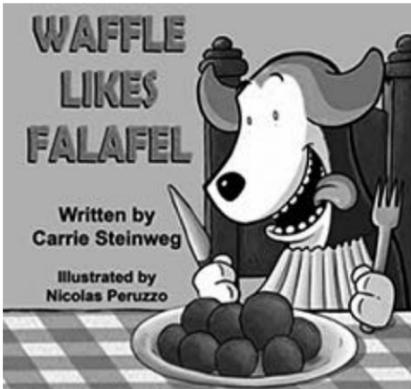
Author, reporter, blogger, photographer, and Lansing resident Carrie Steinweg became a multiple-award-winning writer this summer, netting honors for her work in the Northwest Indiana Times and The Lansing Journal, as well as for her most recent children's book, *Waffle Likes Falafel*.

Steinweg submitted five entries to the Illinois Woman's Press Association Mate E.

Palmer Communications Contest and was awarded for each of them. Three of the pieces were articles for the NWI Times—two travel articles and a news article. Steinweg also won second place for her Lansing Journal article, "White Sox organization hosts birthday party for Lansing's CP Crawford," which was used by multiple larger news outlets, including ABC 7 Chicago and People.

Her third-place award for her children's book *Waffle Likes Falafel* is the one Steinweg is proudest of, however. "I was really excited to get one for the children's book," she said.

Waffle Likes Falafel is the third children's book Steinweg has written, and it tells the story of a dog named Waffle—the name of Steinweg's own dog—who is hesitant to try new foods until he encounters falafel, a food that sounds so close to his name that he's willing to try it. It turns out he likes falafel, and his life and palate become more adventurous as a result.



The book was published in 2019, and Steinweg made visits to schools, libraries, and other venues to read *Waffle Likes Falafel* and her other books to kids. "That's what I really love," she said, "I love to go read to the kids and see them get excited."

Steinweg was able to hold a book-signing event in February of this year at The Simple Greek in Munster, Indiana. Attendees met Steinweg, purchased *Waffle Likes Falafel*, and enjoyed complimentary samples of The Simple Greek's falafel, a staple on their menu. "It's one of my favorite local eateries," said Steinweg.

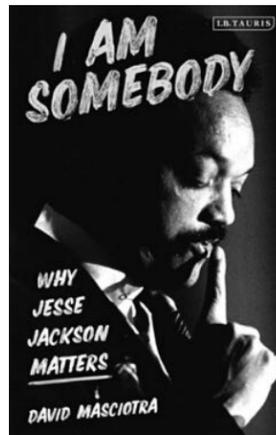
DAVID MASCIOTRA

Born and raised in Lansing, David Masciotra has used the skills he developed in his hometown to propel him to success as a professional writer. He's written five books and numerous articles for national publications.

His Lansing upbringing influenced the subjects he cares about. About seven years after writing his last article for the school newspaper at TF South, Masciotra published his first book, *Working on a Dream: The Progressive Political Vision of Bruce Springsteen*, a study of Bruce Springsteen's music and its political and ideological progressiveness. Masciotra also felt a strong identification with John Mellencamp, who grew up in a small Indiana town, and who expressed many of the feelings Masciotra felt about Lansing. *Mellencamp: American Troubadour* is Masciotra's biography of Mellencamp. In 2017, Masciotra wrote *Barack Obama: Invisible Man*, an examination of President Barack Obama and his legacy.

Masciotra's newest book, *I Am Somebody: Why Jesse Jackson Matters*, was released in October and examines the political legacy of civil rights activist and politician Jesse Jackson.

"I've admired Jesse Jackson for many years, since I was a child, since I grew up in Lansing and in my home, there was consistent endorsement of Jackson's work. His work on racial justice really resonated with my mother and my grandfather," Masciotra said.



In addition to his writing, Masciotra also teaches writing and literature courses at St. Francis University and Indiana University Northwest.

JAN HORNER

Former Lansing resident and Illiana Christian High School alum Jan Horner wrote *A Parent's Guide to Raising Learning-Disabled Children*, and since it was published she has also spoken to school systems and teacher training institutions, trying to help them understand what school can be like for a child who learns differently from most.

The mother of five children, four of whom are learning-disabled, Horner found she had to become an advocate for them at school. Having navigated her own way through school with Attention Deficit Disorder and dyslexia, she was able to serve as a bridge between her kids and their teachers and administrators. In doing so, she also learned she was not alone. She became a resource for other parents who didn't know how to help their children.

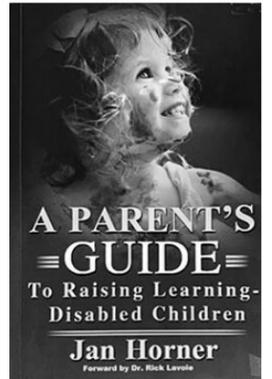
A Parent's Guide is not a polished, professional publication, and some readers will notice the grammar and layout flaws. But partly because of those flaws, the book has the personality of a fervent mom who has learned to turn uncertainty into scrappiness and conflicts into teachable moments. The book is available in paperback and Kindle edition from Amazon.com, and Horner is available for speaking engagements.

ELVIS SLAUGHTER

Lansing resident Elvis Slaughter released his new book, *SPECTOR*, in November. The book retells a personal memory through the eyes of the main character, William Washington, a young boy in Mississippi.

Slaughter describes the book as "a must-read memoir for anyone having to steer through the healthcare system and a wakeup call for healthcare service providers."

SPECTOR is available as a paperback from Amazon.com.



A PARENT'S GUIDE
To Raising Learning-Disabled Children
Jan Horner
Foreword by Dr. Rick Lavoie



Based on a true story
ELVIS SLAUGHTER

Lansing Police Chief Dennis Murrin to retire in January

35 years of service; 30 full-time; 11 as Chief

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

LANSING, Ill. (September 15, 2020) – Lansing Police Chief Dennis Murrin has announced his plans to retire on January 13, 2021, ending three and a half decades of work with the Lansing Police Department.

Murrin joined the police force as a cadet, and became a telecommunicator and part-time officer before being hired as a full-time police officer on January 13, 1991. His January 13, 2021, retirement date will mark exactly 30 years of full-time service. Murrin has been chief since 2009.



In 2018, Chief Murrin (center) and the Lansing Police Department were recognized for success in a new overdose prevention program in Cook County. "Everything that you are doing—it makes it all worthwhile," said Dr. Eric Edwards (right) founder of a company that makes and donates an overdose prevention product. Lansing had double the success of any of the 53 police departments who participated in the program. Edwards attributed that success to Murrin's leadership. (Photo: Melanie Jongsma)

"It's been a wonderful career, and I've loved every minute of it," Murrin said. "I know this is cliché but it really is time to step aside and pursue some other interests in life and enjoy more time with my family."

Murrin's replacement has not yet been determined.

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Ford Hangar freed to serve as event venue, museum

Long restoration ahead for 94-year-old building after federal release

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

LANSING, Ill. (October 15, 2020) – When his airplane hangar was completed in 1926, Henry Ford probably never imagined a wedding reception or concert taking place in the state-of-the-art facility. Over 90 years later, that’s one way the Village of Lansing wants to use it.

As the Village emerges from a long process of working with different agencies that have a stake in the Ford Hangar, the path is clearer than ever before to rehabilitate the historic building into a space that’s more public-friendly. This includes restorations to allow the hangar to be used as both an event venue and a transportation museum.

HISTORIC FORD HANGAR

According to the Lansing Municipal Airport’s website, Henry Ford built the Ford Hangar to “connect his Ford Motor Company manufacturing plants in southland Chicago with his factories in Detroit and to produce and display Ford Trimotor airplanes.” The brick and limestone structure, which is on the southeast corner of Glenwood-Lansing Road and Burnham Avenue, was designed by renowned architect Albert Kahn. Kahn’s design was remarkable in its time, as he placed emphasis on natural light, built a structure that did not need internal columns to support itself, and installed hangar doors that could be opened and closed by just one person.

John DeLaurentiis is the former Lansing Municipal Airport manager who now serves in a consulting capacity for the Village. He says: “There are people who want to come and see [the hangar] because it’s an Albert Kahn design, and there are people who want to come and see it because it’s a Ford building and part of his story.”

Charles Lindbergh and other notable aviation figures visited the hangar throughout its years. The Village of Lansing acquired the hangar and the airport in 1976, and it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. The structure served as an operational hangar until 2011, when it was vacated in the name of preservation.

THE PROCESS: A FORD HANGAR FLY-OVER

The hangar’s identity as both a historical building and an



The Village of Lansing hopes to turn the Ford Hangar into a transportation museum for the public as well as rent out the space for events. (Photo: Josh Bootsma)

aviation-related structure has made maintaining the nearly century-old building difficult. With regulations from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) regarding the hangar’s use and funding, as well as considerations regarding the National Historic Preservation Act, the Village of Lansing has largely had its hands tied when it comes to the Ford Hangar.

With the Ford Hangar set to be released from federal grant assurances, and the Village of Lansing entering into a Historic Preservation Covenant with the FAA, the Village will no longer have to jump through hoops to use the hangar for events, and will have a new level of control over use of the hangar.

According to DeLaurentiis, the Historic Preservation Covenant serves to assure federal powers that the Village of Lansing will not “visibly alter the historic character of the original design.” This means as the Village does work on the Ford Hangar to bring the building into compliance with modern standards (fire codes, ventilation standards, Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, etc.), it must do so in a way that does not significantly harm the historical aspects of the hangar.

“We finally have a path for the Village of Lansing,” DeLaurentiis said, who has played a large role in freeing the Ford Hangar from federal restraints. Lansing first

submitted its release request to the FAA in August of 2017.

FUTURE PLANS

The Village of Lansing hopes to turn the Ford Hangar into a transportation museum for the public as well as rent out the space for business, personal, and Village events.

During the September 1 Village Board Meeting, Village Administrator Dan Podgorski said the Village had developed a “destination-driver mentality over the last few years” when it comes the Ford Hangar. He mentioned that Fox Pointe is not able to hold events year-round due to weather, something the Ford Hangar would be able to do.

DeLaurentiis said once the building is renovated under the “adaptive reuse” guidelines in the Historic Preservation

Covenant, the venue could host at least 500 people for an event. He mentioned a twice-annual convention where airports from the midwest gather. “They’ve never been able to meet here, but maybe once we get the building up and running in a good way, we could have the convention here,” he said.

There is no set timeline in place for when the Ford Hangar will be finished with renovations, as the uncertainty of the federal release process multiplied by the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic has made planning difficult.

Podgorski estimated that restoration costs would be “easily upwards of two to three million dollars.” DeLaurentiis said grant money has already been secured to stabilize the hangar’s roof, and other grants would be pursued as part of the restoration process.

“We want to be able to move forward, raise the funds necessary to restore it, and then get on with the business of hopefully turning it into an indoor venue that can benefit not only the airport but all of Lansing,” Podgorski said, “[It’s] something so unique that nobody else has. No other south suburban municipalities have an airport and they certainly don’t have a structure such as this.”

The Ford Hangar is located at 19507-19539 Burnham Avenue in Lansing.

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**Trustee
Lionel "Leo" Valencia**

Lansing hopes to connect Pennsy Greenway and Thorn Creek Trail

BY JOSH BOOTSMA

LANSING, Ill. (October 19, 2020) – The Village of Lansing received a grant to begin engineering work to construct a multi-use path connecting the Pennsy Greenway and the Thorn Creek Trail, linking two popular south suburban trail systems.

THE MULTI-USE LANSING TRAIL

The grant was obtained through the Invest in Cook program and will cover the engineering work required to begin the trail creation process. According to the Invest in Cook 2020 program booklet, the path will be 10 feet wide and run 2.4 miles from where the Pennsy Greenway intersects with Wentworth Avenue (at Legion Drive) south to a ComEd easement just north of 190th Place, where it will run west to the Cook County Forest Preserve and then south to connect with the Thorn Creek Trail. The path will run directly past Nathan Hale Elementary School, according to the Invest in Cook materials, and will link two large trail systems, the Pennsy Greenway, which stretches from Calumet City to Schererville, IN, and the Thorn Creek Trail, which runs from Lansing to Park Forest.

Village Administrator Dan Podgorski said although the parameters of where the new path would be are roughly in place, the engineering work funded by the grant will help nail down the specifics, taking into account right-of-ways, property ownership, and easement agreements.

Podgorski said the project is not yet guaranteed, and construction may be a couple years away. The Village of Lansing will be responsible for completion of the trail, and will eventually go out to bid for construction estimates, assuming the engineering work goes well.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE

Cook County Commissioner Donna Miller came before the Village Board on October 6 and congratulated the Village on the receipt of the grant. She said, "Not only will this path have regional significance, there will also be local benefits to the residents and nearby subdivisions, and students of adjacent schools as well."

Commissioner Miller's office said in a later statement, "This project prioritizes transit and other transportation alternatives by linking existing bike trails, and promotes equal access to opportunities for an economically disadvantaged community."

Administrator Podgorski said, "We're always pleased upon hearing our requests for grant funds have been approved, because it means we've convinced other agencies and units of government that we have a project worth completing. There are many trail enthusiasts pulling for this spur to be constructed."

YEARS IN THE MAKING

The process was first started by the Lan-Oak Park District, the public body that oversees parks and recreational facilities in Lansing. According to longtime Lan-Oak Park District Board member Jim Long, the Park Board was responsible years ago for constructing the current stretch of the Pennsy Greenway in Lansing, which connects the path in Calumet City to the path in Munster. When that project was finished, there was thought given to connecting the Pennsy Greenway to the Thorn Creek Trail, but the Park Board decided to use the money elsewhere, according to Long.

"We believe construction grant funds are still available," said Podgorski, "and that is why we sought to restart the process via the engineering grant request through Invest in Cook."

"This is great news," said Lan-Oak Park District Senior Superintendent Sharon Desjardins. "If there is another connection that enhances [the trail], we're thrilled to have that done for the community. ...If it's an enhancement to it, if it's something the community will enjoy and benefit from, we're thrilled to have anyone do it—us, the Village, anyone at all that can."

There is no timeline currently set for when construction on the trail might start, pending the results of the engineering work.



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Season's greetings to you and yours.

At this time of year, we're reminded of what's truly important. Sending warm thoughts to you and those you care about.

Third Coast Group

3546 Ridge Road, Ste. 2B, Lansing, IL 60438
708-474-6015



Doug V Horne
BFA™
Financial Associate



Jason R Gena
FIC
Financial Associate



Eric R Himmel
MBA, FIC, CLTC®
Financial Consultant

Thornton Township Wishes You



Happy Holidays & a Prosperous New Year

Joyce M. Washington
TRUSTEE

Gerald James
TRUSTEE

Norbert Cichowski
TRUSTEE

Stafford Owens
TRUSTEE



Frank M. Zuccarelli
SUPERVISOR

533 E. 142nd St., South Holland, IL 60473
Phone: 708-344-1000 • Fax: 708-344-3207 • www.thorntontownship.org

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MAYOR
COMMISSIONER

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Excludes Steaks And Specials. Must Present To Server
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Purchase Any Entree & Two Beverages
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Second Entree of equal or less value Free
Valid Monday - Friday Only

DINE IN ONLY
*Excludes Breakfast Combos, Steaks and Specials.
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