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Voices of Service

From student to protector: Officer Will Smith comes full circle in Stockbridge



Officer Ronald "Will" Smith with his best friend and retired K-9 partner Mohawk. Photo provided by Officer Smith

Officer Ronald "Will" Smith with his best friend and retired K-9 partner Mohawk. Photo provided by Officer Smith

by Melissa McPherson

Officer Ronald "Will" Smith, of the Stockbridge Police Department, knew he wanted to be a police officer in the 10th grade; that's when he began taking law enforcement classes at the career center. Despite this, Smith's path to becoming a police officer was not a straight line. A graduate of Stockbridge High School's class of 2014, he joined the United States Marine Corps after graduation, where he served for three years.

Smith became the second full-time officer for the Stockbridge Police Department in 2023 after completing police academy training sponsored by the department. In the spring of 2024, another new member of the team joined him, one who would become not only his partner, but his best friend.

Mohawk, a 3-year-old yellow Labrador retriever, joined the department in the spring of 2024 as part of the department's K-9 unit. He and Officer Smith were certified and put on patrol in the Summer of 2024. Mohawk was trained in both narcotics detection and helping to track and locate missing children and vulnerable adults.

See Smith on page 13.

Bridge to Wellness

January 20: Join for free food and fun idea sharing with the Wellness Coalition



Mark your calendar: Jan. 20 at 5:30 p.m. (Stockbridge Village Offices) for pizza, giveaways and a chance to help the Wellness Coalition brainstorm new ideas.

Photo credit Vitaly Gariev on unsplash.com

by Matt Pegouskie

The Stockbridge Area Wellness Coalition (SAWC) cordially invites those who are residents within the Stockbridge School District to join us for a meet and greet on Tuesday, Jan. 20, at 5:30 p.m. at the Stockbridge Village Offices, 118 N. Center St., Stockbridge.

Enjoy free pizza and giveaways as you help the Wellness Coalition look for new project ideas and coalition members.

Over the past 14 years, SAWC and the 5 Healthy Towns Foundation (5HT) have invested almost \$1,000,000—yes, that's \$1 million—in and Munith for community projects centered on eating better, moving more, and improving mental well-being.

SAWC and 5HT have also been critical partners in regional projects that have resulted in improvements to Mike Levine Lakelands Trail State Park and upgrades to Veterans Memorial Park in Stockbridge.

See Bridge to Wellness on page 15.

Competitive cheer team wins Concord Invitational



The competitive cheer team finished first at the Concord Invitational. Photo provided by Jessica Renthrow

by Mike Williamson

After a strong showing in 2024-25, the Stockbridge competitive cheer team picked up where it left off last season by winning the Concord Invitational Dec. 13.

Before picking up the first-place trophy at Concord, the Panthers had another strong showing with a second-place finish at the Dec. 6 Leslie Winterfest.

Stockbridge finished with 606.70 points, behind only the host Blackhawks, in the D4 standings.

The Panthers then finished third at Maple Valley's Holiday Cheer Invite Dec. 20.

Stockbridge finished with 551.8 points, to finish behind Hastings and Battle Creek Harper Creek in the final standings.



Rural Perspectives: The tufted titmouse often found at feeders in winter



Diane Gray
Constable

by Diane Constable

The tufted titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*) can be seen at local bird feeders year-round. The scientific name is very descriptive; it means "small tufted, two colors" in ancient Greek.

They can be found everywhere east of the Mississippi. Favorite spots are woodlands, orchards, parks, and suburban areas. Not being a migratory bird, they often visit feeders in the winter.

This active bird is in the same family as the chickadee and often can be seen feeding together. They are easily identified by the gray body and head tuft and the white underside. Males and females are the same color, and they weigh 6-9 ounces.



The tufted titmouse is easily identified by the gray body and head tuft and the white underside. Males and females are the same color. Photo credit Diane Constable

which are 1 inch long. The eggs are white with brown spots, and hatch within 12-14 days. With the help of the male, and often chicks from previous broods, the babies are fed until they leave the nest. The family continues to watch over and feed the fledglings until they can manage on their own. The young will stay near the parents through the winter. They will live up to two years.

The titmice eat a variety of insects, including caterpillars, stinkbugs, beetles, and wasps. They also have a specially designed bill that allows them to eat seeds and nuts. Sunflowers seeds are a favorite.

Fun Facts: Tufted titmice can hold a nut or seed in their toes, then smash it with their bill to crack the morsel open. They also will take seeds from feeders and hoard them for a future snack.

As an avid photographer, Diane Constable regularly puts her formal education in both nature and photography to good use. Diane also enjoys gardening and her dogs. She serves on the board of the Ann Arbor Dog Training Club and is editor of the club's newsletter.

They are about 6 inches long, with an 8-to-10-inch wingspan.

Tufted titmice mate for life and like to nest in tree cavities, old woodpecker holes, and birdhouses. The female does most of the work to make the nest of grass, moss, bark, leaves, and various animal fur, which the female will often pluck from a live animal. The male helps by bringing food to her while she is building. She lays up to nine eggs,

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2026
WINTER PROGRAMS

Village of Stockbridge Hall: 118 N Center St. | 517-851-7435

Cardio Dance–Drumming w/Jennifer • Mon 4:30–6:30p (1 hr class) • No fee—donation welcome	Yoga Class w/Shannon • Wed 10–11a • Jan 7, 14, 21, 28 • No fee—donation welcome	Line Dancing w/Carrie • Mon 7–8p; Jan 12 thru Mar 30 (except 2/2 & 3/2) • Drop-in; No fee
Art Basics w/Tiffany • Wed 6:30–8:00p • Jan 14, 21, 28 • No fee—donation welcome	Yoga/Vinyasa Flow w/Becca • Sat 9–10a • Jan 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 • Drop-in; No fee	Couch to 5k–Walk/Run in March
Winter Pickleball • Fri 7:00–8:30p • Heritage Elementary Gym		

• Behind Smith Elementary



Clyde's Corner

The 'crash' heard around Stockbridge, Munith and Gregory

by Clyde Whitaker

This story begins about 50 years ago, on a cold, winter night in January 1975, on the ice-covered Michigan 106 road leading into Stockbridge from Munith.

But first, let's go back to September 1974. I had a great job at Libra Industries in Jackson and was making some decent money, enough so that I felt I could sustain a car payment. So, I went to Les Stafford in Jackson and purchased my first new car—a brand-new 1974 Pontiac Ventura coupe from Bill Gaddy. It was burgundy red, with a pinstripe, and black cloth interior. It was a beautiful car that closely resembled the Chevrolet Nova in body style.

Fast forward to January 1975. I was driving my new car to go and pick up my sister, Juanita, who was working at the Hans Sausage House in Stockbridge. Just outside of Stockbridge and before the Krummrey Farm, heading north on M-106, the road on both sides was nothing but a sheet of ice. I was traveling about 40 mph, listening to my radio, loving my car, not expecting what was about to happen. Right before the Don Krummrey house, I noticed lights coming up over the crest of the hill, heading south. All of a sudden the lights went away, and my headlights shined on a car coming over the crest of the hill ... sideways ... toward me!

I tried turning the wheel, but I could not get the car to turn, it just slid, so I braced for impact. I was not wearing a seat belt. Terror-stricken, I put both of my hands on the wheel, bent over to the right, and said "Oh, Tom," because I recognized the car of my friend Tom Dickinson. When we collided, it sounded like a bomb went off. I flew up into the left corner of my windshield, leaving a large crater where my head struck. At the instant my head met the windshield, it seemed like my life flashed before my eyes, everything it seemed that happened in my life was revealed—people, places, everything.

As we separated from the crash, my car slid across the road into the ditch on the west side of the road, while Tom was thrown through his passenger window, with his car in the ditch on the east side of the road. Still conscious, I tried to open my door. It was jammed. I leaned to the right and kicked the door about three times before it finally opened. Getting out, I tried to make sense of what just happened. I called out for Tom, but never received an answer. At that point I realized I couldn't see out of my left eye! Scared out of my mind, I thought my left eye was gone. Reluctantly, I put my left index finger up to my eye, felt around it, then realized it was blood flowing down from my cut-up forehead that was filling my eye with blood.

Relieved that I still had my eye and I didn't seem seriously hurt, I walked up to the road, my face covered in blood, looking, I'm sure, like a creature from a zombie movie! Another car then stopped. It was Mr. Novak, the restaurant owner from town. He rolled his window down, took one look at me, and said "I'll call the ambulance" as he sped off.

After that I was kind of groggy, but people were stopping and the ambulance came, taking Tom and me to the hospital. My mom and dad heard about the wreck and followed the ambulance to the hospital. I waved to them through the back window of the ambulance so they would know I was OK and not worry too much. Luckily, Tom was not hurt too badly, but he did sustain a broken arm, effectively knocking him out of his senior year basketball season. I felt bad for him and the team. I ended up with cuts and bruises, and about 15 stiches in my forehead.

That night in January 1975—50 years ago—could have turned out a whole lot differently, but I'm thankful for my sake and for Tom's that it didn't.

Clyde Whitaker is a 1973 Stockbridge graduate. He and his wife, Mary, raised four children in Stockbridge, and they still reside in the Stockbridge area.

Waterloo Township public hearing notice: February 10, 2026

The Waterloo Township Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026, at 7 p.m. at the Waterloo Township Offices located at 9773 Mt. Hope Road, Munith, MI 49259. The purpose of the public hearing is to receive public comment on the entire revised text of the Waterloo Township Zoning Ordinance and the Updated Zoning Map. A copy of the proposed text updates, the updated zoning map and a frequently asked questions document may be viewed at the Township Offices during normal business hours or online at the township website.

Written comments should be mailed to: Waterloo Township Offices, 9773 Mt. Hope Rd, Munith, MI 49259 or dropped off at the offices during regular business hours prior to Feb. 9, 2026.

Individuals with special needs requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the Waterloo Township Board by writing or calling the Clerk's Office, 9773 Mt. Hope Rd, Munith, MI 49259. Phone: 517-596-8400.

Ralph Schumacher, Planning Commission secretary



SAVE THE DATES
March 15-21, 2026 for the online
"Festival of Tables" auction event and
annual fundraiser for SAEF!

This festival is our annual fundraiser, with all proceeds supporting our community.

SAVE THE DATES!
March 15 to
21, 2026



The Stockbridge Area Educational Foundation serves the community of the Stockbridge School District. Our mission is to fund programs and projects that create and enhance educational opportunities available to area residents.



This is the scene of the crash on M-106 looking north. The cars collided underneath the power lines. You can see the road crest at the top of the picture.

Clyde Whitaker's brand-new 1974 Pontiac Ventura is shown in this photo taken before the January 1975 crash. Photos provided by Clyde Whitaker

Obituaries

Betty L. Cowan



Betty L. Cowan
June 13, 1928 to Dec. 7, 2025

Betty L. Cowan, of Stockbridge, Michigan, passed away at the Oakbrook Williamston Senior Living facility on December 7, 2025. She was born the daughter of Vere and Rhea (Bloom) Worden on June 13, 1928 at home in Gregory, MI. On August 14, 1948 she married Daniel Cowan in Munith, MI, and he preceded her in death in 2016.

Betty was a life-long resident of the Stockbridge area and was a 1947 graduate of Stockbridge High School. Betty was a worker at the Stockbridge Community Schools for many years. She was a long-time member of Crossroads Community Church where she taught Sunday School for many years, organized funeral luncheons and church dinners for many years, and was very involved with mission work. She also enjoyed traveling. Faith, family, and friends were very important to her.

Betty is survived by her children, David (Karon)

Cowan, Kathy (Gary) Bailey, Allan (Elizabeth) Cowan, and Sally (Donald) Walker. She is also survived by 10 grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild, along with her brother, Richard Worden. In addition to her husband, Daniel, and parents, she was preceded in death by her brothers, RV, Wilber, Raymond, and Jim.

The family received friends at the Caskey-Mitchell Funeral Home on Wednesday, December 10, 2025 from 6-8 p.m. A funeral service took place at the Crossroads Community Church in Stockbridge on Thursday, December 11, 2025, at 11:00 a.m., with Pastor Brian Johnson officiating. She was laid to rest at Fitchburg Cemetery.

Expressions of sympathy may be made to the Stockbridge Area Emergency Services Authority.

Jill Alene Bailey



Jill Alene Bailey
July 29, 1950 to Dec. 19, 2025

Jill Alene Bailey, age 75, of Stockbridge, Michigan, passed away peacefully on December 19, 2025, at the Henry Ford Hospice Home in Jackson.

Jill was born on July 29, 1950, in Stockbridge, Michigan, the daughter of Daniel and Rylma (Nelson) Owen. She spent her entire life in the Stockbridge area.

Jill was a loving, kind-hearted woman who was always in good spirits. She had a special love for children—especially her own children and grandchildren. She loved to clean, and she took great pride in her work. She was self-employed as a barber for many years and also worked in the housekeeping department at Chelsea Hospital.

Jill is survived by her three children, Stephanie (Ryan) Cornish of Stockbridge, Shane Collins of Munith, and Travis (Amber) Collins of Stockbridge; the father of her children, Stephen Collins of Stockbridge; eight grandchildren: Devin, Hana, Makenzie, Kegan, Emma, Brayden, Madilyn, and Brady; and one great-grandchild on the way. She is also survived by her brother, Ridge (Vicki) Owen of Kentucky, and her sister-in-law, Jackie Owen of Jackson.

She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Paul Bailey; and her brothers, Ned (Judy) Owen and Lynn Owen.

Visitation was held at the Caskey-Mitchell Funeral Home in Stockbridge on Monday, December 22, 2025, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Burial will take place at a later date at Oaklawn Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Stockbridge Area Emergency Services Authority (SAESA).

Arrangements by Caskey-Mitchell Funeral Home, Stockbridge.

Ted Randall Carpenter



Ted Randall Carpenter
Passed away Dec. 12, 2025

Ted Randall Carpenter, age 73, of Stockbridge, Michigan, passed away on December 12, 2025, at Trinity Health Ann Arbor Hospital.

Ted was born on the Patterson farm in Stockbridge, Michigan, the son of Willie and Virginia (Barker) Carpenter. He lived in Stockbridge his entire life and graduated from Stockbridge High School in 1970. He was also a life member of Jeruel Baptist Church.

On December 14, 1974, he married Dianna R. (Patrick), and together they made their home and raised their family in Stockbridge. Ted worked for Chrysler Proving Grounds in Chelsea, retiring in 2007 after 30 years of service.

Ted enjoyed spending time on his computer, where he combined his love of gospel music and playing the guitar by creating song printouts for church that included both lyrics and guitar chords. He also enjoyed golfing and bowling. He was a Spartan Fan through and through, an avid fan of baseball, and enjoyed watching the Detroit Tigers.

Surviving are his wife, Dianna; two daughters, Jennifer (Robert) Duncan of Gregory and Andrea (Chris) Barrett of Dexter; four grandchildren: Jacob, Liam, Avery, and Caleb; two great-grandchildren, Mason and Callan; his siblings, Vickey (Wally) Brown of Holt, and Jeff (Kim) Carpenter of Stockbridge; and a sister-in-law, Diane Carpenter of Stockbridge. He was preceded in death by his parents and two brothers, Nick Carpenter and David Carpenter.

Visitation was held at Jeruel Baptist Church on Tuesday, December 16, 2025, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m., and again on Wednesday 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Funeral Services were held at Jeruel Baptist Church on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, at 11:00 a.m., with Pastor Josh Swieringa officiating. Burial followed at Fitchburg Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be made to Jeruel Baptist Church. Arrangements by Caskey-Mitchell Funeral Home, Stockbridge.

In Remembrance

Stockbridge Community News publishes death notices and obituaries on our website and Facebook page as soon as we receive notice. This way, friends and loved ones will learn of your loved one's passing right away, so they won't inadvertently miss funeral and memorial services. All too often weekly publications circulate after services are held.

Obituaries include a color photo, print and online publication for these low prices:

- Print and online, \$110
(up to 1/4 page, 300 words or less)
- Print and online with photo, \$135
- Online only \$85

We publish death notices at no charge as a public service.



SCN's print edition circulates free of charge to every household in the local, 125-square-mile area. We print 8,900 or more copies each month, so 21,000-plus local residents receive each edition.

More than 20,000 people each month view our news and information online. It's not uncommon for an obituary to attract up to 2,000 views and receive dozens of online expressions of sympathy and remembrance.

In contrast, the former local paper no longer circulates within Ingham County, and only a small percentage of residents in the area subscribe to or read daily papers from Jackson and Lansing.

When the time comes, please send, or ask your funeral director to send, your loved one's obituary to stockbridgecommunitynews@gmail.com



2025 Award of Excellence and Readership Award winners

Congratulations Judy Brune and Melissa McPherson

by Agnes Geiger

In 2020, the Stockbridge Community News introduced two annual awards—the **Award of Excellence** and the **Readership Award**. Both awards honor dedicated people who make essential contributions to our newspaper and its mission to promote the common good of residents through publication of local news and useful community information.

Award of Excellence Winner: Judy Brune

Whether serving as a Stockbridge Community News board member, editor or writer, Judy Brune has been a dedicated and valuable member of the team. In recognition of her outstanding support and contributions to SCN, Brune was named the **Award of Excellence** winner for 2025.

This award was created to recognize unsung heroes—those who often work in the background but have a critical role in making the Stockbridge Community News a quality publication.

Brune no longer sits on the SCN board of directors but continued editing as one of a three-member team proofing the monthly print editions before the newspaper went to the printer.

“Judy Brune’s attention to detail and dedication have been instrumental in the success of the Stockbridge Community News,” SCN Managing Editor Hope Salyer said. “From carefully editing each issue to ensuring grammar and spelling are correct, her work behind the scenes has made a lasting impact, especially when it comes to correctly identifying community members in the paper.”

Besides having a keen eye for spotting spelling and grammar errors, Brune is passionate about deadlines.

“Her timely edits have helped keep our production on schedule month after month, allowing us to consistently deliver a high-quality paper on time to our readers,” Salyer said.

Brune is not only a talented professional, but a great person to work with. All board members have enjoyed her wonderful sense of humor—at meetings and via email.

This fall, Brune contributed to the editing of an SCN edition that received a first-place national award in a contest sponsored by the National Federation of Press Women, an organization for communication professionals. The entry was a first-place winner in the at-large contest to qualify for the national competition.

In addition to her work as an editor, Brune has been a prolific writer and photographer.

“I’m grateful to live in a place filled with so many wonderful people and am looking forward to sharing the many good things happening around our community and in our schools,” Brune said, in a story about her board appointment in March 2021.

Over time, Brune has been a wonderful source for stories about the schools and community events, including Reading Month (February 2022), Learning + Fun = STEM (October 2021), and SCS offering summer learning (August 2021). She also wrote about Alec Twining being selected for a fellowship in Germany (August 2021) and the InvenTeam competing in a NASA challenge (October 2021).

She used her photography skills in covering the schools’ new staff members, National Honor Society members, and student honors nights, among other events.

Judy Brune, who retired in 2018, worked in behavior support roles at Stockbridge Community Schools for 18 years. She grew up in Unadilla and has lived in the Stockbridge area most of her life. She and her husband John have two boys, Evan and Austin.

Readership Award Winner: Melissa McPherson

Melissa McPherson, a talented contributor to the Stockbridge Community News, has been awarded the **2025 Readership Award**. This award recognizes an SCN writer who, through the written word, regularly touches the hearts and minds of area residents. The award also recognizes professionalism of the writer in terms of initiative and deadlines.

While new to the paper this year, McPherson’s articles have been very popular with readers. In fact, most of her stories have been ranked as Top 10 stories online for the months they were written. (Readership statistics combine SCN website views and Facebook views).

After learning about McPherson’s experience as a novelist, the Stockbridge Community News board was thrilled when she agreed to join the pool of SCN writers. She jumped right in and began writing informative news articles and engaging profile pieces for the newspaper.

Mary Jo David, SCN’s editor-in-chief, works closely with McPherson to determine story direction and later to edit her stories.

“I was especially pleased with work Melissa did on her second article about the transportation services, the one titled ‘Understanding changes to Stockbridge area transportation services,’” David said. McPherson researched and wrote it after the sudden announcement about the transition from WAVE to CATA transportation services for Stockbridge residents (November 2025).

The story involved reaching out to contacts for three transportation services, each in a different county. After attending a local meeting on the issue, McPherson contacted and asked some tough questions of the folks who represented the transportation services in order to write the story.

“This is a very important topic to local seniors and those who depend on public transportation, including Melissa,” David said. “But she managed to do an excellent job setting her emotions aside and writing an objective story.”

McPherson’s first article was a profile piece she wrote for SCN’s Voices of Service column that featured Shannon Beutler, a Unadilla Township emergency medical responder. Other articles included introducing SPD’s most recent interim police chief (December 2025) and a feature story on Mike Williamson for the annual “Celebrating Men of the Hour” series (November 2025).

Away from SCN, McPherson had her third novel “The Lesser Remain” independently published in December 2024. At melissamcpherson.com, the book is described as “a survival story for those of us who would typically be left for dead.”

A teaser on her website describes the story’s protagonist: “Eric was the last person anyone would expect to survive a zombie apocalypse. Born with cerebral palsy, he was used to fighting for a place in a world that didn’t want him. Now, he is faced with the end of that world and an even bigger problem—the dead.”

McPherson, who was born with cerebral palsy, “has always used her writing to share her unique perspective with those around her.”

Melissa McPherson graduated from Grand Valley State University in 2005 with a degree in creative writing. She lives in Gregory with her husband Tom and two sons.

Judy Brune, Award of Excellence 2025



Brune, a dedicated and valuable member of SCN’s Support Team, has been a prolific photographer and writer in addition to her impeccable work as an editor. Her attention to detail has been instrumental in making SCN a quality publication.

Melissa McPherson, Readership Award 2025



McPherson, an experienced novelist, writes informative news articles and engaging profile pieces for SCN. She is a talented, objective contributor who shares her unique perspective and touches the hearts and minds of our readers.

Faces of Addiction

From a drug court to a culture of recovery



Tina Cole-Mullins

by Tina Cole-Mullins

(Editor's Note: Faces of Addiction is a continuing series about people who experience drug addiction and the difficulty of recovery. By telling their stories, they hope to help others who are struggling and encourage them to seek treatment and healing.)

Last month, we revisited the Wright family, reflecting on how recovery is measured, not just in years, but in seasons—each with its own challenges and gifts. As the new year begins, that truth feels especially clear. Recovery, like turning a page of the calendar, calls for reflection, renewal, and the courage to keep moving forward.

Cody Wright carries the loss of his brother Eric, who died in 2013. That grief reshaped Cody's understanding of addiction. He now sees addiction as an illness that can devastate families across generations. His own recovery is deeply personal, yet part of a broader movement that honors pain, perseverance, and the ongoing work of healing.

This month, we widen the lens to explore what many call the Culture of Recovery. From the first thought of sobriety to long-term healing, each journey is its own mosaic piece. Together, these pieces form a tapestry of community. Recovery is not a single moment, but a series of choices made again and again, rewiring the brain and rebuilding a life.

Cody and his wife Marissa's paths began separately. Cody entered Dawn Farm's residential treatment programs, while Marissa found stability through intensive outpatient care and regular meetings. Different structures, different environments—yet both were rooted in commitment, accountability, and persistence.

Marissa's journey carried its own challenges. She hid her addiction from her family, trying unsuccessfully to get clean on her own.

"Getting arrested was the best thing that ever happened to me," she said. "I was denied rehab, but I had meetings, therapy, and recovery court."

As it happened, what truly sustained her was the unwavering support of family. A cousin helped her rediscover joy in simple things—the slow relearning of life without substances. Her mother-in-law offered her a safe space when she had none, reminding her that family can be chosen as well as inherited.

"Recovery court was central to me getting sober, but I owe so much to this family," Marissa shared. "Their freely offered love was healing in a way you can't understand unless you've received it. Every day I choose not to use is another day I show others it's possible."

Today, Cody and Marissa walk recovery together. For them, healing looks like accountability, communication, and gratitude. Their stories show recovery is not one-size-fits-all. Cody's path emphasizes structured residential support; Marissa's reflects outpatient discipline and peer accountability. Both rely on connection—through transitional housing, meetings, and shared commitment—fully joining the Culture of Recovery.

Loretta Wright, Cody's mother, has lived in the long shadow of addiction. Over time, her perspective shifted. She learned that love alone could not save her sons. Her hardest truth became her clearest wisdom: "Love has no power over addiction. Addiction has the power the addicted give to it."

This time, she placed her faith in the court system and treatment.

As of 2024, Michigan has more than 130 drug/sobriety courts, acknowledging that accountability and compassion can coexist. Depending on the year, graduation rates exceed 60%, with recidivism nearly cut in half. According to "Solving Problems, Saving Lives. The FY2024 Problem-Solving Courts Annual Report," published by the state of Michigan, in fiscal year 2024, the graduation rate at adult and juvenile drug/sobriety courts and family treatment courts was at its highest at 72%.

These outcomes are not abstract—they show up in real communities, like Andy's Place in Jackson, where judicial oversight is paired with supportive housing so families can heal together. From courtroom to community, a Culture of Recovery is taking root—one where hope is shared and second chances become possible.

For Cody and Marissa, Andy's Place wasn't yet available; it was still in the planning phase. Therefore, this couple's journey unfolded without that resource, relying instead on the programs and people who stepped in when they needed structure, accountability, and belief.

See Culture of Recovery on page 7.

Superintendent's Desk

Schools made great progress on goals in 2025



Brian Friddle

Dear Panther Families,

Happy New Year!

As we welcome 2026, we are excited about the opportunities ahead and the continued growth of our students. With the start of the second semester, students have a fresh opportunity to refocus on academics and deepen their engagement in learning. As we return from the holiday break, our continued priorities remain academic achievement, student growth, and improved attendance.

In 2025, we made great progress on our goals. Student assessment scores showed significant improvement; most assessments increased by double-digits. Additionally, chronic absenteeism was reduced by 2.8%. Daily attendance continues to be a key focus

across our district, as being present directly impacts learning, growth, and achievement. Thanks to the collective efforts of our students, staff, and families we have seen increased student participation, which has contributed to strong academic gains across grade levels. These improvements highlight the importance of showing up, staying engaged, and prioritizing learning.

Engagement in education goes beyond attendance alone. We encourage students to take an active role in their learning by remaining curious, asking questions, participating in class, and challenging themselves academically.

See Superintendent on page 15.



Following the death of Cody Wright's brother Eric, in 2013, Cody and his wife Marissa's recoveries were built on individual courage and the systems and communities that stood in support of the couple. Photo provided by the Cole family

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Reading Between the Lines 'The Wide Wide Sea': Cook expands England's knowledge of Pacific Islands, Arctic Circle

by Don Porter

In his book "The Wide Wide Sea: Imperial Ambition, First Contact, and the Fateful Final Voyage of Captain James Cook," author Hampton Sides paints an interesting picture of Cook, who was renowned for his seamanship, and as a scientist and excellent cartographer (aka: mapmaker).

Highly respected in England, by the Royal Navy and the Crown, on July 12, 1776, Cook set off on his third and final voyage on his ship, the HMS Resolution. Captain and ship were accompanied by the HMS Discovery under Captain Charles Clerke (pronounced "Clark"), Cook's second in command, who was 16 years younger than Cook. The full journey lasted almost four years and neither Cook nor Clerke would return to England alive.

Although Cook was very interested in learning about the indigenous people he encountered on the expedition, it would be a clash of cultures that would be his undoing in the Hawaiian Islands. It was reported that during this third trip, Cook had changed. He seemed tired and often in discomfort. He had always demanded cleanliness and the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables to help curb disease, but on this voyage he was much tougher with punishments doled out among his crew.

In "The Wide Wide Sea" it's apparent to the reader that author Sides did extensive research on Cook and the preparations he undertook for such a difficult trip. The complexity of providing for his crew and planning the navigation, including to some parts that were yet unknown, were Cook's responsibility.

His charge by the British Admiralty was to discover a Northwest Passage between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Coast of North America. Dedicated to that end, Cook attempted to find something that we now know did not exist. But in doing so, he discovered the Hawaiian Islands that other explorers had missed. He named them the "Sandwich Islands" in honor of a one of his supporters in England—Lord Sandwich.

It was Cook's return to the Big Island of Hawaii on his way back to England that led to the violent end of his life in 1779. A monument in Kealakekua commemorates the location of his death. Captain Clerke took command of the expedition upon Cook's death, but died from tuberculosis later that year. (He had contracted TB in a debtors' prison in England prior to this journey.)

The book "Wide Wide Sea," published in 2024, was chosen as a Best Book of the Year by the New York Times, Time Magazine, NPR and The Smithsonian Institution.

Don Porter is a former Stockbridge Schools deputy superintendent. He also served as assistant principal at the Jr./Sr. High School, and then principal at Smith Elementary, Katz Elementary, and Heritage School. He and his wife, Tammy, live in Stockbridge and enjoy fly fishing, golf, traveling, and working in the yard.

Culture of Recovery page 6

As we close this chapter of the Wright family's story, we're reminded that recovery is built not only on individual courage, but on the systems and communities willing to stand beside those rebuilding their lives. Michigan's Culture of Recovery continues to grow—rooted in accountability, compassion, and the belief that families deserve more than survival. They deserve dignity, stability, and a chance to heal together.

Next time, we'll take you inside Andy's Place in Jackson, where supportive housing, treatment, and judicial partnership come together under one roof—offering families what Cody and Marissa never had access to: a home designed for recovery, not just sobriety. The Wrights' story shows us where we've been; Andy's Place will show us where we're going.

Resource: Andy's Place, Jackson. Individuals must be part of the Michigan Drug Court System to apply for residency at Andy's Place. andysangels.net/about-us/



Who We Are

Founded in 2016, the Stockbridge Community News is a Michigan nonprofit organization, IRS-licensed to operate as a 501(c)(4) organization (# C4-4001565).

An unpaid, volunteer board of directors oversees all SCN operations.

Our monthly, printed newspaper is free and mailed at no-cost to members of the local community. Complementary printed copies are also made available at strategic locations in the community. Print subscriptions are available for a fee to those outside SCN's postal distribution boundaries.

Articles are posted online throughout the month and are available to view for free at stockbridgecommunitynews.com

Our Mission

To promote the common good and shared well-being of residents in the greater Stockbridge area through the collection and publication of local news and useful community information.

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Our Writers

Stockbridge Community News depends on our team of talented, local writers who regularly volunteer their time to ensure we deliver newsworthy content each month. Writer names are reflected in the bylines that appear with each story.

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Patrice Johnson, an SCN founder and first editor-in-chief (2016-2021)

We would love to hear from you!

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Outreach in Action

Outreach is even cooler thanks to grant from multiple Michigan entities

by Jo Mayer and Paul Crandall

Stockbridge Community Outreach is rather like a revolving door—donations of food, money, clothing and household goods tend to circle in and then right out again, sometimes within minutes. But one recent donation will be sticking around for a long while—our new, grant-provided, glass-door dairy cooler.

The cooler arrived in mid-November as part of a collaboration between several entities: the United Dairy Industry of Michigan, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, Blue Cross Complete, and Partners for Good.

And even better, it came with a \$250 check to help fill it!

"It is so bright, easy to use and it's on wheels, so it's easy to move, too!" said Outreach Director Gwen Reid, who wrote the grant that landed the cooler.

"We will make good use of it, particularly on

Wednesdays when we get the Pop-Up food from Greater Lansing Food Bank. And it gives us a place to put other donations from area businesses who share their excess with us, like the Unadilla Store or DG Market."

According to Reid, Outreach regularly gets a pallet full of milk on Wednesday mornings from GLFB for a weekly Pop-Up Food Distribution. Outreach has often struggled for space to store dairy before handing it out in the afternoon.

"Now it will be easy to keep it cold until it's time to go into client cars," Reid said.

Look for United Dairy Industry handouts. Along with the refrigerator, the United Dairy Industry of Michigan sent all sorts of helpful information, including handouts about healthy eating; handy, easy-to-store recipe books; coloring books; pencils; squeezable cows; fun sunglasses; and hair ties. To help Outreach visitors make use of all these offerings, a new information area now displays these items just outside the Outreach office.

Featured below is one of the quick, simple, and kid-friendly recipes from the United Dairy Industry of Michigan.

Recipe: Carousel-Colored Overnight Oats

Ingredients

- 1 (4-6 ounce) container fat-free yogurt, any flavor
- 1/4 cup old-fashioned or quick-cooking oatmeal
- 1/4 cup fruit

Directions

In a container with a tight-fitting lid, mix together yogurt, oats and fruit. Cover and refrigerate at least 8 hours. Top with additional fruit before serving, if desired.

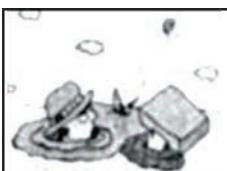
Another handout, "Milk is Local," highlights information about milk production in Michigan, noting that 97% of Michigan dairy farms are family owned. The handout explains that every container of milk is identified by a five-digit code, with the first two numbers referring to the state.

See Outreach on page 9.



An information area now displays the new dairy-related handouts, among other information, just outside the Outreach office in Stockbridge.
 Photo credit Jo Mayer





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Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays – Prepared Meals for Seniors, noon to 2 p.m. at the Stockbridge Area Senior Center

Mondays

- Craft Drop In (Ages 8 and up) at the Stockbridge Library
- Walking Group meet-up, 6:30 p.m. at Veteran's Park in Stockbridge
- First Mondays: American Legion Meeting, 7 p.m. at the Stockbridge American Legion Post

Tuesdays

- First Tuesdays: Sons of American Legion Meeting, 7 p.m. at the Stockbridge American Legion Post
- Fourth Tuesdays: Legion Auxiliary Meeting, 7 p.m. at the Stockbridge American Legion Post

Wednesdays

- Discovery Storytime (For Babies, Toddlers, and Children), 10:30 to 11 a.m. at the Stockbridge Library
- Pop-up food distribution for anyone in need, 1 to 3 p.m. at Stockbridge Community Outreach
- Bingo, 6 p.m. Doors open at 4:30 p.m. at the Stockbridge American Legion

Thursdays

- Coffee chats, 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the Stockbridge Library
- American Legion Thursday meals, 4:30-7 p.m. Open to the public
- Ladies Night, 6 to 9 p.m. at Trillium Gardens
- Celebrate Recovery, Stockbridge at Crossroads Community Church. A welcoming, community-focused format. Dinner (meal is free) is at 6 p.m. Large Group begins at 7 p.m. Open Share begins at 8 p.m. Fellowship and coffee immediately after. c3michigan.com/celebrate-recovery

Fridays

- Discovery Storytime (For Babies, Toddlers, and Children), 10:30 to 11 a.m. at the Stockbridge Library
- Keep Calm and Carry Yarn, 1 to 2 p.m. at the Stockbridge Library (Occasional Fridays. Call Library for dates.)

Jan. 1 - Stockbridge Library closed for holiday.

Jan. 4 - Indoor Farmers Market, 1-5 p.m. Trillium in Stockbridge.

Jan. 9 - Family Movie and Craft Night, 4-6 p.m. at the Stockbridge Library. Movie: "Cars"

Jan. 12 - Stockbridge Library Book Group (Adults), 11 a.m.-noon. Book: "The Frozen River"

Jan. 14 - Garden Club at Trillium, 6 p.m.

Jan. 17 - Read to Remington the therapy dog, 11 a.m.-noon. Stockbridge Library

Jan. 17 - Cash Bash, 6 p.m. at American Legion in Stockbridge. Tickets available at L&B, through Legion bartender, or call 517-712-4854

Jan. 18 - Indoor Farmers Market, 1-5 p.m. Trillium in Stockbridge

Jan. 19 - Stockbridge Library CLOSED for MLK Jr. Day.

Jan. 20 - Idea sharing for new SAWC community projects, 5:30 p.m. at the Stockbridge Village Offices, 118 N. Center St.

Jan. 21 - Music with Ms. Beth, 10:30-11:30 a.m. at Stockbridge Library

Jan. 21 - Craft Night at Trillium, 6 p.m. "Herbal Skin Salve"

Jan. 26 - Read to Remington the therapy dog, 4:30-5:30 p.m. Stockbridge Library

Jan. 27 - Intro to Sock Knitting for adults and teens, 2-4 p.m. Stockbridge Library

Jan. 28 - Garden Club at Trillium, 6 p.m.

For an online calendar of more community events visit: www.stockbridgecommunitynews.com.

To add your community events to our free community calendar, email submissions to stockbridgecommunitynews@gmail.com.

For a full list of library events, visit cadl.org and select the "Events" menu.

Outreach page 8

Michigan's number is 26, so if the milk code starts with 26, it was bottled in Michigan.

Fun facts:

- Michigan became the 26th state on Jan. 26, 1837. See page 12.
- Coming up on Jan. 11 is National Milk Day—a good day to wear any new dairy swag you find in Outreach's display!



A new, grant-provided dairy cooler and useful dairy-related handouts arrived at Outreach in mid-November as part of a collaboration between several entities. Photo credit Jo Mayer

This column is sponsored by Stockbridge Community Outreach. Our local food pantry, crisis, and referral center is located in the Stockbridge Activity Center (old middle school) near Cherry and Elm streets in Stockbridge. Office hours are 1-3 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday and by appointment. Contact us at Outreach49285@gmail.com, 517-851-7285, or find us on Facebook.

STOCKBRIDGE SPORTS

Stockbridge wrestlers off and running



Kameryn Gross works toward a pin for Stockbridge.

Photo by Dennis McCann
was fourth at 113.

Brennan McCalla went 2-2 and finished fourth at 150, while Colin Stacey went 2-2 and finished fourth at 157. Marcus Pikur also finished fourth at 165 with a 4-2 record.

Kameryn Gross picked up two wins at 215, Bradley White two wins and 144, and Aiden Flore one win at 150.

The Panthers dropped a pair of matches at the Lumen Christi quad, falling to the Titans and Marshall.

McCalla, Gross, Ciminelli, Pikur, and Stacey all earned wins for the Panthers.

Stockbridge went 1-4 at Pinckney's Seasons Beatings tournament. The Panthers defeated Fraser, but fell to Greenville, Manchester, Anchor Bay, and Howell.

Ciminelli picked up four wins on the day to lead the Panthers.

Stacey and Kaleb Regan had two wins each, while Conant, Grant Howlett, Gross, and Royal each had one win.

The Panthers went 2-3 at the Jackson Area Wrestling Showdown with wins over Grass Lake and Ypsilanti Lincoln.

Regan led the Panthers with three wins on the day.

Stacey, Gross, and Conant won two matches each, while Howlett and Pikur won one each.

The Panthers split a pair of matches at a home quad, beating Webberville and falling to Poterville.

Conant led Stockbridge with two wins, while Ciminelli had one.

Boys basketball off to perfect start in season



Bradley Buddenborg works by a Union City defender.

Photo by Mike Williamson
Conference play.

Coach Nate Lott returns just one starter in Noah Sandecki and has started his own version of the 1990s University of Michigan Fab Five with four freshmen starting throughout the first six games, and five being on the court at one time as well.

See Boys Basketball on page 12.

by Mike Williamson

The Panthers wrestling team has had a busy start to the season, which included a fifth-place finish at its own Stockbridge Invitational.

Stockbridge finished with 92.5 points and had six wrestlers finish in the top four places.

Domenic Ciminelli led the Panthers with a second-place finish.

Jayson Conant was 3-1 on the day and finished third at 132, while Reid Royal

Lady Panthers start basketball season by going 3-1



Emma Monaghan applies some defensive pressure against Maple Valley. Photo by Mike Williamson

by Mike Williamson

The Stockbridge girls varsity basketball team is off to a strong start in the new season with a 3-1 record after the first two weeks.

Jackson Northwest. The Panthers opened the season Dec. 9 with a tough 51-33 loss to a strong Jackson Northwest team.

Melina Sayre led Stockbridge with nine points and four steals.

Emma Monaghan added eight points and four steals, while JayLee Chapman and Madeline Topping scored four each. Bella Pybus chipped in with three points, and Chyanne Lindquist two. Makenna Porter, Payton Hernley, and Tayla Trapp had one point each.

Mason. The Panthers bounced back with three straight wins, starting off with a 47-35 victory over Mason, Dec. 12.

Pybus led the Panthers with 15 points and five rebounds.

Topping had a huge night with a double-double of 13 points and 15 rebounds, while Monaghan added six points, five assists, and five steals.

Chapman and Hernley scored five each, while Porter added two, and Lindquist one.

Maple Valley. On Dec. 16, Stockbridge then took down Maple Valley 60-12.

Sayre led the Panthers with 14 points and five steals.

Chapman added 10 points, while Pybus had nine points and five rebounds.

Monaghan chipped in with eight points, five rebounds, five assists, and four steals. Hernley added five points, Topping four points, Lillian Topping three points, Linquist and Trapp two each, and Porter one.

Springport. On Dec. 19, the Panthers headed into the break after a 44-27 win over Springport to move to 2-0 in the Big 8.

Madeline Topping had a big night with a team-high 14 points to lead the Panthers.

Sayre chipped in with nine points, while Hernley and Monaghan scored six each. Pybus added five points, while Chapman and Trapp finished with two points each.

Boys Basketball page 10

Dansville. The young Panthers opened the season with a 65-35 thrashing of Dansville Dec. 3.

Stockbridge started slowly, leading the Aggies just 8-6 after one period before they started heating up in the second with a 16-8 run for a 24-14 halftime lead.

Dansville kept things close in the third with the Panthers leading 36-25 heading to the fourth, when Stockbridge exploded for 29 points to pull away for the 30-point win.

Freshman Jonathan "Jay" Crow led the Panthers with 18 points, while Sandecki finished with 14.

Freshmen Remington Christie chipped in with 12 and Bradley Buddenborg added nine points. Evan Lockhart finished with four points and Tucker Lott three. Brendon Cordero chipped in with three points and Koen Griffith two.

Crow led the team in rebounds with nine, while Buddenborg had eight, and Christie seven. Sandecki dished out five assists and Crow led the team with five steals.

Vandercook Lake. The Panthers did not let up in their second game with a 69-26 rout of Vandercook Lake, Dec. 8.

Stockbridge put four scorers in double figures with Buddenborg leading the way with 14 points.

Sandecki collected a double-double of 12 points and 10 steals, while Kam Gross had 11, and Crow 10.

Cordero added seven points, Lockhart five points and six rebounds, Lott four points, Brandon Hamlett three points and Christie two. Griffith one point and eight rebounds.

Maple Valley. The Panthers pulled away in the second half to take down Maple Valley 59-50 in the Big 8 opener, Dec. 9.

Buddenborg had a big night with 21 points and five steals to lead Stockbridge.

Lockhart had a double-double of 14 points and 10 rebounds, while Crow added 13 points. Christie chipped in with six points, and Gross four. Sandecki had one point, eight assists, and six steals.

Springport. The Panthers passed their first big test of the season, Dec. 12, when Stockbridge beat Springport in an early Big 8 showdown 48-34.

Stockbridge outscored the Spartans 29-19 in the second half to pull away for the win.

Crow had a huge night with 24 points and nine rebounds to lead the Panthers.

Sandecki added six points and five assists, while Buddenborg had six points, six rebounds, and four assists. Lott chipped in with five points, Lockhart four points, Griffith two, and Christie one.

Fowlerville. The Panthers blew open a 10-point halftime lead with a 22-8 run in the third to beat Fowlerville 56-34, Dec. 15.

Crow led Stockbridge with 19 points and eight rebounds.

Buddenborg finished with 14 points, while Lockhart had seven points and six boards. Lott and Griffith scored four each, Christie and Gross three apiece, and Sandecki two points.

Union City. Stockbridge built a 19-point lead in the third quarter but had to hold off a big Chargers rally for a 56-45 win, Dec. 18.

Crow had a huge first half and finished with a team-high 24 points and six rebounds to lead the Panthers.

Buddenborg had 13 points and six assists and Lockhart six points and four assists. Christie chipped in with five points, Hamlett and Cordero three each, and Gross two.

2026

Event Sponsorship Opportunities in SCN

Sponsorship opportunities are now available for 2026 through the Stockbridge Community News, offering local businesses and individuals a meaningful way to support beloved community events while gaining visibility. Sponsorships are available for events/stories listed below, with additional opportunities available as features pop up through the year. Sponsorships are \$150 per page and include a banner prominently displayed at the top of the page, putting your name directly in front of readers throughout the community. It's a simple, affordable way to show support, celebrate local traditions, and keep your business top of mind with Stockbridge-area families.

COMING HOME COURT AND HALFTIME CEREMONY

MATTERS OF THE HEART FEATURE (Local couples married 50+ years)

WOMEN OF NOTE FEATURE (Local women making a difference in our community)

HONORS NIGHT (Student awards and scholarships coverage of the award ceremony)

MEMORIAL DAY VETERANS LIST (List of local veterans deceased)

PROM (Coverage of prom meet-up on the Stockbridge Township Square)

TOP TEN SENIORS (Photos and information about the top ten graduates of the class of 2026)

GRADUATION (Coverage of the graduating class of 2026)

CLASS OF 2026 PHOTOS (Complete photos of the class of 2026)

4TH OF JULY (Coverage of the Gregory parade)

A DAY IN THE VILLAGE (Photos of various events throughout Father's Day Weekend)

MEN OF THE HOUR FEATURE (Local men making a difference in the community)

HOOTONING COURT, PARADE, AND HALFTIME CEREMONY

HALLOWEEN LAMP POST DECORATIONS

MUNITH HALLOWEEN PARADE COVERAGE

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS PARADE

SPORTS PAGES (Coverage of the 2026-2027 Panthers sports teams)



Email us if you're interested in a sponsorship opportunity!

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Happy 189th Birthday, Michigan! Celebrating a number of state 'firsts'

by Ron Kaiser

The following Michigan "firsts" were accumulated in notes over time by Ron Kaiser, with technical assistance from Arlene Kaiser and Tracy Collier.

Michigan is celebrating its 189th birthday on January 26, having achieved statehood in 1837. Let's honor the Mitten by celebrating some noteworthy firsts in our state's history.

1835: Michigan was the first state to provide for the establishment of public libraries in its constitution. After Michigan achieved statehood in 1837, Michigan's territorial library became the state library.

1849: The Michigan State Fair was the first state fair in the United States. It was held in Detroit.

1874: Michigan was the first state to guarantee every child the right to a tax-funded high school education.

1879: Detroit telephone customers were the first in the nation to be assigned phone numbers to facilitate handling calls.

1891: The St. Clair Tunnel, the first international underwater railway tunnel, was completed by the Grand Trunk Railway Co. under the St. Clair River between Port Huron, Michigan, and Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. The project, costing \$2.7 million, was constructed under the guidance of Chief Engineer Joseph Hobson.

1909: The first rural mile of concrete pavement in the U. S. opened in Wayne County. It was constructed on Woodward Avenue between McNichols Road (aka: Six Mile Road) and Seven Mile Road, at a cost of \$13,534.59.

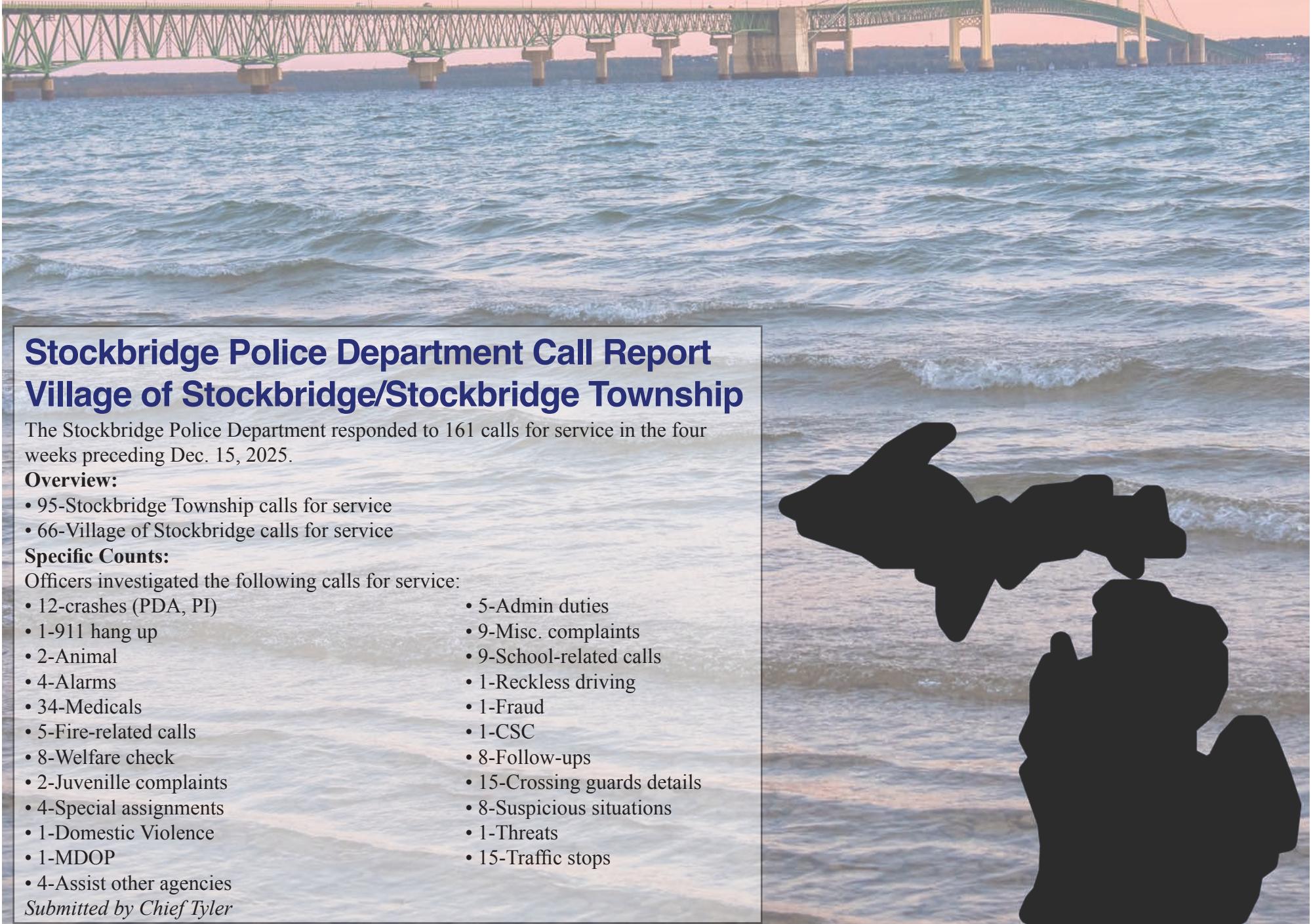
1920: Radio station WWJ in Detroit began commercial broadcasting of regular programs, the first such radio station in the nation.

1926: The nation's first regularly scheduled daily air passenger service, operated by Stout Air Services, began on July 26, with daily round-trip flights between Grand Rapids and Detroit. Stout produced the all-metal Ford Tri-Motor Aircraft used for these flights.

1927: Daniel F. Gerber, of Fremont, Michigan, invented the first commercially prepared baby food.

1928: The Detroit Police Department pioneered the first police radio system, becoming the first in the nation to dispatch patrol cars by radio on a dedicated frequency.

1930: The first auto traffic tunnel between two nations, the mile-long Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, opened. It was built by private financing, primarily secured through the engineering firm Parsons, Klapp, Brinckerhoff and Douglas, at a cost of around \$23 million.





Dear Gabbie:

"Dear Gabbie" is written with the simple hope of bringing a few smiles to your day and is not meant to replace the advice of professionals ... especially your mom!

Dear Gabbie,

It drives me crazy when people chew with their mouths open. Am I being too picky? Should I tell my friend to stop doing this?

Signed,

Mouth Closed in The Mitten

Dear Mouth Closed,

You are right to be put off by someone who chews with their mouth open, especially if it is a constant habit.

Unfortunately, not all of us were raised with the same manners growing up. Speaking of which, Gabbie and siblings were raised on a game called "Manners" at the dinner table. On occasion, at dinner, Mom would say, "Let's play Manners" and for the next 10 minutes or so, we'd each keep an eagle eye out for anyone putting their elbows on the table, chewing with their mouths open, whatever. There was no prize for finding the most infractions, but you can bet it drilled some good manners into all at the table.

For those who were raised playing Scrabble or Monopoly instead of "Manners," they may never have learned that chewing with your mouth open is considered a bad habit and in most circles downright rude. If your friend is a good friend, I would suggest you find a time—in private—to mention this in the nicest way possible.

It's always gentlest to address a peeve by putting the problem on yourself. Maybe say, "I know I'm being picky, but I have a thing about seeing people's food when they chew. Would you mind chewing with your mouth closed."

Do be prepared for the possibility of hurting the person's feelings, but know that, in the long run, you really are doing them a favor.

In the meantime, remember to keep those elbows off the table!

Gabbie

THANK YOU

The Stockbridge Community News thanks those in the community who continue to send donations. Special thanks to those listed here whose donations were received in the mail between Nov. 25 - Dec. 24. We truly appreciate the support of our community, and we look forward to continuing to provide a quality, local paper. Donations can be sent to Stockbridge Community News P.O. Box 83, Gregory, MI 48137

- Bruce and Michelle Ferguson
- Dale and Eileen Conti
- Corey and Greg Peña
- Denise and Larry Allen

To donate, visit

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Smith page 1



The second full-time officer hired by the SPD, Officer Ronald "Will" Smith has served in the K-9 unit and is now representing the department as the school resource officer in Stockbridge.

Photo provided by Officer Smith

"Luckily," Smith said, "Stockbridge isn't really a crime-ridden place, so we didn't have much opportunity to use those skills. I count that as a blessing." Mohawk and Officer Smith were deployed on several calls to aid in areas outside of our community and were often seen at local events.

A few weeks ago, Mohawk retired. He is now enjoying life as Officer Smith's pet instead of his partner.

"He loves the snow," Officer Smith said, "And now he just gets to play in it all day."

Officer Smith's career however, is just getting started. Now that he is no longer with the K-9 unit, Smith works as the school resource officer. He spends his day making sure the students at Emma Smith Elementary, Heritage School and Stockbridge Jr./Sr. High School are safe and that the buildings are secure. He makes himself available to both students and staff should a problem arise, helps mitigate the chaos that is lunchtime, and patrols the parking lots and crosswalks before and after school.

When asked what it is like to work in the same school he attended, Officer Smith said, "It's odd. I never imagined I'd be back. Everything is the same but I'm seeing it through different eyes. There's quite a bit of nostalgia, too."

According to Smith, Stockbridge Police could possibly have another K-9 Unit in the future, but for now he is enjoying the work he does at the schools. Although some of the kids can be a bit challenging, Smith says he tries to approach every student with grace and understanding.

No matter the assignment, Officer Smith loves his work and is committed to protecting and serving the men, women and children of our community.

Staff Spotlight: Media center specialist Debby Lopez's creativity, commitment shape culture of Student Success Center

by Mary Jo David



Mary Jo David

Nowadays, if you visit the Jr./Sr. High School and want to see the library or speak to a counselor, you'll find them in a very appropriately named "Student Success Center." As media center specialist and mentor for Michigan Virtual High School, Debrielle "Debby" Lopez played a key role in naming the center.

"The name is more than just a plaque on the wall," Lopez explained. "We house the library but also counseling, tutoring, SpringMath, and more, so the name 'Student Success Center' just seemed very fitting for the whole culture of what happens here."

Lopez began working at the high school just after the COVID pandemic hit. She began as a long-term building sub and reported to wherever she was needed. Her time as a long-term English 9 sub left the biggest impact on her from that subbing experience.

"Before she left, Jessica Martell shared with me that, at different times, she liked to write supportive notes to hand off to students." That prompted Lopez to do the same thing.

Lopez shares, "I remember back then, one student in particular who was having a bad day. He was not one to show his feelings, but I noticed and passed him a nice note that day. I'm amazed because, it turns out, the student, who is now a senior, still has the note and tells me he looks at it about once a week!"

Not surprising, this media center specialist is an avid fan of libraries or anywhere where kids can find books.

Her advice to parents is, "Encourage reading from early ages; it will be instrumental in your children's long-term success. Take your kids to places where reading is celebrated—the library, a bookstore, wherever."

Lopez coined a new term during this interview: genre-fied! As an indication of her dedication to expanding the reading habits of SHS students, this summer, Lopez, with the help of her husband (and Google), "genre-fied" all the books in the Student Success Center. Think of it as the 2025 answer to the Dewey Decimal System (which is still used in the library). Now, when a student is looking for a particular type of book they can use the genre to help find it.

As a youngster, Lopez moved from Monroe, Michigan, to Stockbridge when she was in middle school. She graduated from Stockbridge High School, after which she took classes at Lansing Community College and online at Arizona State University. In 2024, she married her husband, Ricky, and

together they are raising Lopez's son Calvin, who is almost 6 years old and also attends Stockbridge schools.

During high school, she was the varsity soccer captain, bowling captain, and vice president of her senior class.

"I mainly loved art," Lopez recalled. "I had Mr. Langone, who is still teaching at the high school, and he really inspired me to pursue art. I also loved English courses, and I'm good with technology."

After years as a busy barista and then as a substitute teacher and someone with a flower business on the side, Lopez has managed to find the perfect place to blend all of her talents and skills. Last year, she painted the Student Success Center, and students arriving at school this past fall probably noticed the new decorations Lopez added to the center. Even before "genre-fication," since Lopez took over as media center specialist, book checkouts have doubled and are on pace to continue increasing this school year.

According to JayLee Chapman, who is a senior at the high school, Lopez is the definition of selfless.

"[Ms. Lopez] brings service and love to the Student Success Center. She consistently finds new ways to improve students' days. She makes sure that every student feels wanted and accepted for who they are. ... She pays for supplies and other items for students out of her own pocket. She has a snack basket for students who aren't able to get food outside of school."

Through the Michigan Virtual High School, which is offered in the Student Success Center, students can take courses like Career Readiness, American Sign Language, Learning in a Digital World, or even Japanese. The program is intended to complement the courses offered at the high school. Student support advisor, Sara Oesterle, oversees grading of these students, and Lopez assists in holding MVHS students accountable.

The way Lopez describes it, the Student Success Center team—which includes counselors Oesterle and Kelly Carling, Mike DeMint's SpringMath, and Lopez—is relationship-driven and truly focused on student success.

Day-to-day, the center's team tackles what seems like a revolving door of student issues and achievements. But according to Lopez, "When students feel seen and encouraged, they are more likely to be successful. That's the kind of culture we've built into the Student Success Center, and it is making a difference."

See additional photos at www.stockbridgecommunitynews.com.



Debby Lopez, media center specialist and mentor for Michigan Virtual High School, played a key role in naming the Student Success Center.

Photos provided by Debby Lopez



A Stockbridge High School alumnus, Debby Lopez, along with her son, Calvin, and her husband, Ricky, make the most of a fall day together.

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Bridge to Wellness page 1



SAWC is composed of a volunteer, nine-person board, and everyone in the community is welcome to attend meetings, participate or propose projects, and help us make Stockbridge a place where it's easier to eat well, be active, and find the support you and your families need to be successful.

Have happy, fun holidays, and we will see you on Jan. 20!



This column is sponsored by the Stockbridge Area Wellness Coalition (SAWC). Matt Pegouskie is the community investment manager.

Superintendent page 6

In 2025, we also implemented a districtwide phone-free policy for all students. We have received a lot of positive feedback about increased student engagement, stronger peer interactions, and improved focus in the classroom. We believe this policy will continue to support future academic success.

Student health and safety remain essential to our success. As we begin the new year, staff will continue reinforcing our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) expectations to promote positive behavior and responsible engagement. These efforts help ensure our schools remain safe, welcoming environments where students can focus on learning and growth.

As we move forward in 2026, we encourage every student to set a personal academic goal and commit to active participation in our school community. We look forward to continued collaboration among students, staff, families, and community members as we build a strong foundation for success.

We wish everyone a year filled with growth, achievement, and opportunity. Best wishes for a happy, healthy, and successful new year!

Sincerely,
Brian Friddle
Superintendent of Schools

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LIGHTS OUT

THE DECLINE OF HOLIDAY SPIRIT

When I was growing up, Christmas wasn't perfect, but it was ours. It was me, my mom, my brother, and her best friend, our little team. My Mom made the season warm when life wasn't always easy; she took whatever she had and turned it into a magical time. That means an old tree filled with older ornaments, sharing hot chocolate out of one big pot, and late-night laughter that made the world outside these walls seem safe. I didn't then really catch the underlying stress in that smile, just a mom bound and determined to keep the magic alive.

Later on, when a father figure did come into my life, someone who chose to stay a piece of stability I had

“ The Christmas spirit is different now-quieter, softer, more fragile-but it's also more real. Perhaps growing up means learning that joy still finds its way in, even through the rush and the stress. It may look different than it once did, but it is still warm, still present, and still ours. ”

not realized I was missing and was introduced into my life. Now, surrounded by a stronger family, I see more clearly the weight my mom carried and the love she gave. That perspective has changed how I see Christmas entirely.

For most of my childhood, the holiday has felt so effortless, so easy. The lights feel magical. Movies feel warm. December moves slowly enough for me to breathe it all in. But as a teenager, the season feels like something I'm constantly chasing rather than experiencing naturally.

I walk through the halls all December, remembering when we were in elementary school, when snowflakes were hanging from teachers' hats that would shine as bright as their smiles, reading Christmas books, laughing till your little chest could not get air in. What happened to that? We are expected to grow up with the pace the world is spinning. I'm tired, we're all tired.

Days are too short, and I don't know how to grasp

them. Mornings launch into math, hurling equations at me when my brain is half-asleep and begging for a break, sleep, or even just to watch a movie like we did when we were younger. Band rehearsals clamp onto all the concentration and energy that I'm often not sure I have. The government teacher hands notes and terms to be memorized into my lap. In journalism, I'm supposed to make sense of a world that's so chaotic and loud. When I don't even know where I am in the journal of papers, deadlines, and being told "only a few more days, you got this." English adds in essays and discussions, and biology rounds out the day with labs and vocab words clinging to my head like static.

When the final bell rings, December seems to slip right through my fingers. The Christmas spirit doesn't vanish. Instead, it hides beneath exams, concerts, quizzes, and the constant pressure to perform. Some days, it feels so sad, like I'm losing a version of myself that I didn't know was slipping away.

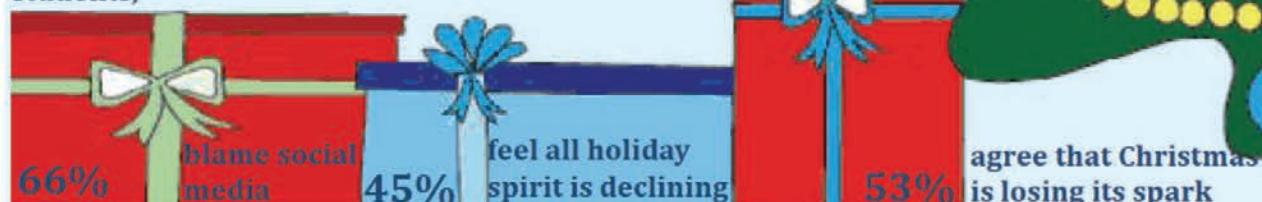
But then there are the moments that tug me back in-small, quick, and yet potent. A teacher handing me hot chocolate in class when we are all going gray from stress, a joke cracked in journalism when everyone is stressed, a song in band that suddenly feels like breathing again. Those tiny sparks remind me of the magic my mom worked so hard to create when I was little. Those are the moments that make me want to keep pushing on into the snow coming down.

I just went to the mall with my friends for a field trip. We had so much fun, we were interviewing, having heart-to-heart conversations with people who would not even remember us. We were kids for once in a long time; we were making jokes, shopping, laughing at each other's different tastes in clothes. Expecting that Christmas joy with the holiday songs playing in the background, and thinking, is this the 100th time this song has played? You know that song.

The Christmas spirit is different now-quieter, softer, more fragile-but it's also more real. Perhaps growing up means learning that joy still finds its way in, even through the rush and the stress. It may look different than it once did, but it is still warm, still present, and still ours.

by Tori Tolbert, Reporter

In a survey of over 75 students,



ILLUSTRATIONS MELINA SAYRE



Active Aging Black-eyed peas and greens for New Year's resilience, growth, renewal

by Alexa Ten Eyck

Black-eyed peas and greens are often linked to the start of a new year, a tradition born in American agricultural and rural communities out of necessity. Both foods are valued for affordability and reliability. Black-eyed peas thrive in tough conditions. Cold-hardy greens, like collards, kale, and spinach, return early after winter. Their return signals soil health and marks the start of a new growing cycle.

No surprise, then, that black-eyed peas and greens are traditionally incorporated into New Year's celebrations. Often served in a side dish or added to soups and salads as an accompaniment to the first meals of the year, they are associated with good fortune, prosperity, and a positive beginning. For many, the savory tradition sets an intention, one that begins a new year with sustenance reflective of resilience, growth, and renewal.

Such an intention is essential to communities like Stockbridge in many ways. In a fitting example, the Stockbridge Area Senior Center (SASC) begins the new year with its own intention of resilience, growth, and renewal through the appointment of Rachel Stanley as the new SASC director. Her leadership reflects the same values represented by the black-eyed peas and greens tradition.



Introducing Rachel Stanley, the new SASC director. Photo provided by Alexa Ten Eyck

The following Q&A serves to officially introduce Rachel to the community:

Q: What drew you to the SASC and this role?

"I was initially invited to cardio drumming. ... The great music, amazing members that gather, and the magic that happens each day kept me coming back. ... After my 35-year career, I always knew I was destined for a nonprofit position, and here I am!"

Q: What excites you most about collaborating with seniors and their families?

"Getting to know the members, instructors, volunteers, donors, and community who have seen the life-changing benefits brought forth by the SASC. Everyone has come together from vastly different lives. Seeing fascinating people

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and hearing about their paths into our Senior Center is an eye-opening journey."

Q: What do you hope the community comes to see the Senior Center as?

"I want the Stockbridge area to know they are welcome to enjoy our facility and that SASC is a pillar of the community! Lunches are available on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Activities such as fitness and art classes enrich bodies, minds, and souls. They fill a broad spectrum of needs. The community needs to see our fantastic existing programs and embrace the benefits of being a member for only \$25 per year!"

Q: What would you like the community to know about you?

"As I have only been in the area for two years, I have a lot to learn from folks. ... I am a lifelong learner. I know I will be challenged by holding this position, but I learned resilience from my parents! I'm grateful to be part of an amazing, respectful, and non-judgmental community that supports me as I continue learning. ... I channel my fiber interests through Spinners Flock, knitting, crochet, and spinning. My darling husband and I have a hobby farm with chickens, goats, sheep, and Kune Kune pigs!"

Q: Is there anything you'd like to say to the Stockbridge community?

"Every day at the SASC has been a Gold Star Day. I am truly amazed by how our community shows up to support at every turn. From the library, American Legion, and the Township to local businesses and individual supporters, each cares about our members. They eagerly ensure our continued success. I feel deeply blessed to be part of this community, and I am profoundly grateful for all the support we receive."

Looking ahead, Stanley's leadership in the new year will reflect the traditional values of black-eyed peas and greens. The Stockbridge Area Senior Center enters the New Year with savory-inspired intentions and encourages Stockbridge-area residents to carry them forward in their own way. Join Rachel Stanley and the SASC team to welcome a new year shaped by resilience, growth, and renewal.

Alexa M. Ten Eyck is the president of the Stockbridge Area Senior Center (SASC)—a great place to spend time. All residents of the Stockbridge area have a place to go that is accessible, welcoming, and responsive to community needs. Experience firsthand a sense of connection and well-being. Visit stockbridgeareaseiors.org, call 517-480-0353 or stop in at 219 W. Elm St. for information.

STOCKBRIDGE TOWNSHIP MEETING MINUTES

December 15, 2025

Stockbridge Township Supervisor CG Lantis called Stockbridge Township Regular Board Meeting to order on December 15, 2025 at 7:04pm at the Stockbridge Township Hall. Members present at the Stockbridge Township Board Meeting: Supervisor CG Lantis, Clerk Becky Muraf, Trustee Ed Wetherell, Trustee Terry Sommer Member absent Treasurer James Wireman, Pledge of Allegiance Moment of Silence

Wetherell motion to accept the Stockbridge Township meeting agenda as printed Sommer Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Citizen's Comments Discussion

Sommer motion to approve Stockbridge Township Board Meeting Minutes from November 17, 2025, as printed with the correction to remove the double zero in the 7:001PM to 7:01PM Wetherell Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Sommer Motion to approve the Stockbridge Township Financial Report as printed Wetherell Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Police update.

Old Business

Muraf motion to table Hall Rental until January 19, 2025, Stockbridge Township Board meeting Sommer Second All in Favor Motion Carried

219 Elm/Rental Discussion Stockbridge Area Senior Center is interested in renting out 219 Elm Stockbridge Mi Stockbridge Area Senior Center will go to their board come up with a rental agreement and then have the Stockbridge Township Lawyer and Board Approve it.

Muraf motion to pay \$30,832 for Stockbridge Township insurance for Stockbridge Township for the upcoming 2026 Year Wetherell Second Roll Call Vote Muraf yes, Wetherell Yes, Sommer Yes, Lantis Yes All in Favor Motion Carried

New Business

Muraf motion to hire Meredith McManaman to take over cleaning the inside of Stockbridge Township Hall for \$500.00 a month with pension per agreement with John Hancock Sommer Second Roll Call Vote Wetherell Yes, Sommer Yes, Muraf Yes, Lantis Yes All in Favor Motion Carried

Muraf motion to update Stockbridge Township Planning Commission update for Ordinance amend Section 4.11 CSC, Community Service Commercial District Section

4.11.2 Permitted Principal Special Uses by adding: J. Marihuana Processor, subject to Section 7.02.23. M. Marihuana Secure Transporter, subject to Section 7.02.23.

and re-lettering the remaining sections. Along with amend Section 7.02.23 Medical and Recreational Marihuana Facilities by removing:

B. 11. Hours: Hours of operation for a Marihuana Provisioning Center or Marihuana Retailer shall be Monday – Friday 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Saturday 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Sunday 12:00 noon – to 5:00 p.m. and renumbering the remaining sections.

Sommer Second Roll Call Vote Sommer Yes, Muraf Yes, Wetherell Yes, Lantis Yes All in Favor Motion Carried

Muraf motion to allow up to \$10,000.00 for classes and hotel for Stockbridge Township elected officials, employees and board members who want to go to MTA Conference in April 2026. Sommer Second Roll Call Vote Wetherell Yes, Muraf Yes, Sommer Yes, Lantis Yes All in Favor Motion Carried

Sommer Motion to pay the Stockbridge Township monthly bills in the amount of \$51,454.32 Wetherell Secon All in Favor Motion Carried

Citizen's Comments Discussion Lantis adjourns the Stockbridge Township regular board meeting at 7:56 pm
BM



Positive Parenting

Recognizing creativity and the impact of 'mind energy' on shared tasks

by Tiffany Snyder

The last time this column focused on creativity (SCN, October 2018 edition), we debunked the myth that creativity is inherited. Practicing a growth mindset, persevering through feelings of incompetence, and investing time in any pursuit will improve skills. Modeling use of our creativity develops self-directed, emotionally regulated, engaged, and connected children.

Using our creativity is almost as important as breathing! Fortunately, it is just as available, but we need to reconsider what creativity is before we can take advantage of its benefits in our lives as parents. You will be happy to know creative thinking can happen during daily tasks, and not only with crayons, markers, paint, clay, etc. The key is knowing how to initiate it and that it takes practice.

Creativity is essentially "mind energy." Everyone's body is a bottomless, regenerative vessel for this energy. It can flow in and out of us depending on our state of mind and body. These states fluctuate based on our reaction to outside stimuli or things we can't control. Thankfully, we can create our choice of response.

Being bored or limited by supplies actually stimulates our creativity. Think of a caveman, inventing a wheel. Simply ask yourself, "What can I do with what I have now?" Have you experienced the magic of your child having more fun with the box than with the toy hidden inside? Take this as a sign to get rid of extra stuff.

Worrying about what people may think of us or worrying about things out of our control can result in an imbalance of our being. Without limits, our mind, body and most visibly, our home, can end up looking like a chaotic mess. When we pay full attention to what we're doing—even mundane things like folding laundry or cutting vegetables—our mental energy is expressed. Finding our sweet spot is part of the fulfilling challenge!

Think about all the laundry and dishes and diapers that take up our time? When we are mindful, paying attention to the sensory details and the individual process of a mundane task, it becomes an intentional, regenerative, creative act.

Sadly, multitasking is a bragging right and many of us have the TV or social media apps influencing us during our tasks, which programs our response to outside stimuli instead of the task at hand. Essentially, in both cases, your "mind energy" is turned off. When we only consume, we miss the opportunity to use our own creativity!

You are the creator of your perspective and choices! Choose your belongings and commitments wisely. You have power over setting the constraint of time. If you feel frazzled, downsize the task. Choose to do mundane tasks mindfully, and you'll be surprised how your mood improves and you have more energy.

Your kids may notice and imitate you. If your kids are consuming their electronics in excess, turn off the devices and, together, clean out a junk drawer, take a class or go for a walk. Together, set the constraints and the power of creative response is yours for the taking!

Activity Highlight:

Choose one small area of your house, like a junk drawer, toy box, closet, or even a purse, and do a thorough sorting and purge with your child/ren. Keep it fun, lighthearted and mindful. Set a limit you can both agree on ahead of time, like "Let's pick 10 toys to keep" or "Let's pick 5 toys that we can part with." Allow them to investigate the contents and play with the odds and ends. Most importantly, model the behavior of organizing and recognizing clutter.

Another creativity booster is to consider keeping an invention box of bottle caps, small containers, tubes and trinkets at the ready for a boredom busting activity.

Tiffany Snyder is a returning resident of Stockbridge. She taught K-8 art in West Michigan for 15 years and now enjoys being a toddler-mom and teaching "Art for Your Mind" classes.

STOCKBRIDGE COMMUNITY NEWS Pop Quiz!

What does writing for the Stockbridge Community News provide? Check all that apply.

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- Opportunities to meet people and businesses in the community.
- Opportunities to make a difference in the community.

Writing is a skill where practice makes perfect. If you're interested in volunteering to expand your writing horizons, contact us now! Send an email to stockbridgecommunitynews@gmail.com with "Interested writer" in the subject line. Remember to include your contact information and the topics you're interested in.

We look forward to hearing from reading you!



Choose one small task with your kids, like organizing a toy box. Together, set a time limit and initiate a thorough sorting and purge. Photo credit Antonino Visalli on unsplash.com

of the fulfilling challenge!

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Christmas on the Farm 2025

Waterloo Farm and Dewey School
Museums, Grass Lake

Photos by James Clark-Swalla, DigitalCrumbs Photography





Top Ten Stories of 2025

January



Stockbridge community helps 2 local students battling a rare form of cancer
by Mike Williamson

February



Women of Note: Bonnie Davidson ensures Stockbridge teens and tweens have a place to thrive
by Mary Jo David

March



Happy 100th birthday to Jane James
by Amy Haggerty

April



Local kickball group gets the ball rolling for 2025 season
by Diane Constable

May



Bond Update: A vision for our schools' future
by Brian Friddle

June



Farewell to retiring Stockbridge Schools staff members
by Mary Jo David

July



Ericka Cole, fondly known as 'Sergeant Mayhem' takes over as American Legion Post 510 commander

by Chuck Wisman

August



Pilot injured in small, single engine plane crash at Richmond Field

by Unadilla Township Police Department

September



Sunshine and smiles pave the way for 2025 Stockbridge Homecoming Parade
by Judy Williams and Mary Jo David

October



The 2025 Munith Halloween Parade was a hit today on Main Street
by Hope Salyer

November



Season of recovery: A home for the holidays

by Tina Cole-Mullins

December



Staff Spotlight: First Grade Teacher Corinne Clouse helps her students turn pint-size wins into big wins

by Mary Jo David