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## FFA students to share their knowledge in Dominican Republic



Stockbridge FFA members traveling to the Dominican Republic include, front row l-r: Lucy Chapman, Daulton Diffenbaugh, Will Gancer, and Anya Harden. Back row l-r: Owen House, Taurin Phillips, and Haley Warren. Photo provided by Robert Richards

- Conduct a Remotely Operative Vehicle (ROV) Workshop for the robotics class at the Puntacana International School.
- Conduct ocean and reef monitoring off the coast of the Dominican Republic.

Stockbridge FFA members traveling to the Dominican Republic include Lucy Chapman, Daulton Diffenbaugh, William Gancer, Anya Harden, Owen House, Haley Warren, and Taurin Phillips. The team's faculty mentor is Stockbridge Jr./Sr. High School teacher and FFA advisor, Bob Richards.

See Robotics on page 13.

## Bridge to Wellness

## Village and Wellness Coalition bring area folks together this winter for fun and connection



Participants braved the cold to gather for yoga at the Village Hall in Stockbridge in January. Photo credit Rebecca Kavanagh

As an example, in January, the Village hosted weekly art and yoga classes, line dancing instruction, cardio drumming sessions, indoor pickleball and a sledding station.

See Wellness Coalition on page 18.

### Information provided by Stockbridge Jr./Sr. High School FFA program

The Stockbridge FFA Underwater Robotics Team has been invited to conduct research, test equipment, and participate in an educational outreach project in the Dominican Republic, Feb. 22-28.

This project aims to inspire, engage, and educate students while providing a unique research experience in the Caribbean islands. The project has three major goals:

- Connect with a school in the Dominican Republic to share knowledge and culture between students while conducting a STEM program.

## Stockbridge to join Cascades Conference in 2027



Graphic from SCN Media Library

by Mike Williamson

The Stockbridge Community Schools athletic programs will be moving into the Cascades Conference beginning in the 2027-28 school year. The change was approved by the district's Board of Education in a 4-2 vote taken during its December meeting.

Stockbridge competed in the Big 8 Conference for the past two seasons after joining the league in 2024. However, the long trips to competitions and games have been a constant concern. For example, Springport, the closest Big 8 opponent, is about 31 miles away, while Bronson is nearly 90 miles from Stockbridge. Union City and Reading each are about 64 miles from the high school.

As a Cascades member, Stockbridge will reduce travel times and increase the competitive level of play. The Cascades Conference is widely regarded as one of the state's strongest small-school leagues. It has multiple state-ranked programs and recent state champions, including Manchester girls basketball and Grass Lake girls basketball and softball.

The Cascades Conference currently is divided into the East and West divisions.

See Cascades Conference on page 13.

## FEBRUARY 2026 Special Features

**Stockbridge Community Schools:** See page 2 for an update on SCS curriculum and test scores.

**Matters of the Heart:** See pages 4-5 for this year's featured couples.

**Stockbridge Sports continue to dominate:** See pages 10-11.

**2025 Thank You to Donors:** See page 20.

**Woah Nellie!:** Is posted online only this month due to space constraints.

## Rural Perspectives: Great horned owls begin nesting here in early February



Diane Gray Constable

by Diane Constable

The great horned owl is found throughout North America and is the largest owl in our area. Its scientific name, *Bubo virginianus*, means "large owl first found in Virginia." Like most owls, they are nocturnal birds, and are rarely seen. But during February evenings and nights, you can sometimes hear great horned owls hooting to each other as they prepare to nest.

As with most raptors, the female is a bit larger than the male, and the male has a deeper "hoot-hoot" call than the female. They can be 18 to 25 inches long, weigh 2 to 3.5 pounds, with a 40-to-57-inch wingspan. Great horned owls are a mottled gray-brown with a red-brown face. The "horns" are tufts of feathering used to communicate with other owls. Their hearing is exceptional and they can hear sounds nearly a mile away. They can fly up to 40 mph, and their feathered talons have a holding force of about 25 pounds—



about the same as an eagle. Great horned owls can live up to 30 years in the wild.

Great horned owls begin nesting in our area in early February, often finding abandoned nests in snags and openings in trees, abandoned eagle and squirrel nests, or human-made nest boxes. Nests are mostly made of sticks. The female lays one to four dull white eggs and will incubate them for about 35 days. The chicks will not leave the nest for about six weeks. Fledglings often will be found on the ground or in nearby branches

As with all fledglings, they are perfectly safe and in no need of rescue. The great horned owl eats a wide variety of food, including small-to-medium-sized mammals, birds of all sizes, reptiles, insects, fish, and occasionally, carrion. Some of their favorites are rabbits, mice, voles, chipmunks, ducks, crows and starlings. They hunt from a perch, then swoop down to catch the prey. They usually eat the meal whole, as their digestive system is designed to gather up the fur, feathers and bones into a pellet, which is regurgitated.

**Fun Facts:** These owls fly silently because of wing shape and fringed feather edges. They have excellent eyesight. Although their eyes cannot rotate, they can rotate their heads 270 degrees to see what is around them.

*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.*

## Test scores turning a corner thanks to curriculum, policies and teachers

by Melissa McPherson

Student literacy and math test scores have been under scrutiny for several years now, especially here in Michigan where math and reading scores generally rank in the lower half nationally. Recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP 2024) places Michigan around 44th in 4th-grade reading and 31st in 8th-grade math.

Most are quick to blame the pandemic, citing a lack of, or interruption in, learning for the marked decline in scores.

*See Test scores on page 3.*



Over the last two years, Stockbridge Community Schools has adopted many changes that have had a positive effect on student test scores. Image credit Test\_(student\_assessment)-By KF-WikipediaCommons

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Clyde Whitaker

## Clyde's Corner Clyde shares a love story for Valentine's Day

by Clyde Whitaker

I know this is not my typical story, but since Valentine's Day is Feb. 14, I thought I would mix it up a little bit. I'm sure all of you have stories of your own, but here is a story that has transformed my life.

In 1978, I was working for Rockwell International in Chelsea. I lived at home in Munith and commuted to Rockwell, where I worked as a sales/service account manager. My boss was Dell White, one of the nicest men you could ever meet. At the time, Rockwell sponsored a men's basketball team in the Chelsea Recreation League. Of course, I played on the team, with a bunch of good guys.

On Feb. 14, 1978 (yes, we played on Valentine's Day, lol), I was sitting in the stands at Beach Middle School awaiting the start of my game. Little did I know my life was about to change that night—forever.

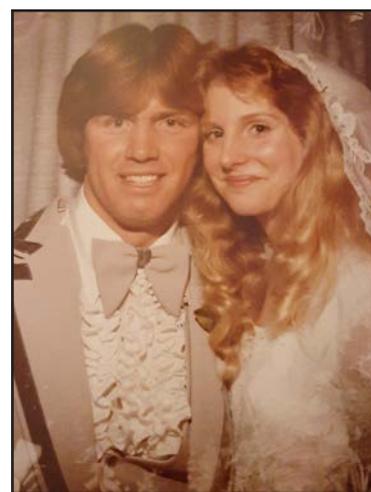
While I was watching the game before mine, I noticed a door at the back of the gym opening, and my friend from Rockwell, Janet Nicola, walking in. Behind her, coming through the door wearing a Chelsea Dance uniform, with long blond hair bouncing, looking like a New York model, was my future wife, Mary Beth McGinn.

Apparently, Janet wanted to bring Mary Beth down to the game to meet me. We did our introductions and after that I took to the floor for my game. Needless to say, I was not very focused on the game, busy taking peeks up into the stands!

After the game, I talked with Janet and Mary Beth for a few minutes, then I had to leave for home, since I had to work the next day. I was beyond excited, thinking, "I gotta ask her out!"

The next day, I was frantic trying to find Janet. I finally found her and asked her to give me Mary Beth's number because I wanted to ask her out on a date. Janet gave me her number, and I didn't waste any time. I was soon calling the girl of my dreams and asking her out.

She accepted, and a few days later we went out on our first date for dinner and



Clyde and Mary Beth "Mary" Whitaker on their wedding day, 48 years ago this Nov. 25.



Clyde and Mary Whitaker enjoying a Lugnuts game in Lansing.

dancing. That was the start of a romance that continues to this day. Imagine that, a Chelsea Bulldog and a Stockbridge Panther tying the knot!

This Nov. 25, 2026, will mark 48 years of marriage, with four children, six grandchildren, lots of blessings and some heavy sorrow. We trust that God will continue to guide us with His love and devotion.

*All photos provided by Clyde Whitaker. See additional photos at [www.stockbridgecommunitynews.com](http://www.stockbridgecommunitynews.com).*

*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.*

## Test scores page 2

While it is true that the pandemic has had a significant impact on learning for students, evidence shows the country's math and literacy scores were declining before the pandemic. Locally, some parents choose to place blame on other causes where district scores appear weak—from the district's pay scale for teachers, the effectiveness of the superintendent, or the teachers themselves.

So what really caused the decline, and how do we fix it?

Amy Hodgson, assistant superintendent of curriculum for Stockbridge Community Schools says the answer to both questions doesn't come down to one cause, or a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, it has required taking a multifaceted approach that focuses on the student, both in how they learn and the pride and responsibility they feel in the classroom.

**Curriculum updates.** Over the last two years, Stockbridge Community Schools has adopted many changes that have had a positive effect on student test scores. SCS was one of the first districts in the state to adopt a new learning approach, called The Science of Learning, that focuses on the way the brain actually learns and retains information. This method takes a hands-on, multi-sensory approach to learning and has proven to have a positive effect on test scores in many areas, including literacy, math, science and social studies.

The Science of Reading, which is a branch of The Science of Learning that focuses on literacy, is receiving a lot of national attention, and SCS is leading the charge here in Michigan.

"We were able to get a grant for every one of our teachers to be trained in Orton-Gillingham, a curriculum aligned with the Science of Reading. Now, nearly all have had that training, and we are seeing some good results," Hodgson said. In fact, the district saw an increase in scores of 12% in literacy since implementing the change. Additionally, there has been a 32% increase in math scores, a 39% increase in science scores, and a 57% increase in social studies scores.

While reading and math scores have increased across the board at SCS, the reading scores for our 5th and 6th graders are still slightly below Michigan's average.

Numerous studies and reports show the struggle to catch up is directly related to COVID-era online learning disruptions, but many parents are quick to point out that nearby districts don't seem to have the same problem.

*See Test scores on page 16.*

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# Congrats!

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We are happy  
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couples that have  
been married over  
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they enjoy many more  
wonderful years together!



## Linda and Gary Topping celebrate 50 years and a family farm legacy

by Mary Jo David

"Party at the Red Light! Be there or be square!" How many times did Stockbridge teens in the '70s utter those words?

"Mention the Red Light to anyone from our era in Stockbridge, and they'll know exactly what you are talking about," Gary Topping chuckled when he told the story.

He and Linda Weaver (before she was "Linda Topping") both attended Stockbridge High School together so they certainly crossed paths in the hallways there. As for when they started dating, they both recall the timeframe coinciding with that special year when the Stockbridge boys basketball team made it all the way to the State Finals. Gary was on the basketball team, and Linda, who was two grades younger, was a cheerleader.

"If I was going to catch her, I was going to have to attend those parties," Gary explained innocently while Linda just laughed in the background.

Back then, the senior Toppings—Gary's parents—kept a very close eye on their teenage son and his three sisters. The farm Gary grew up on had been in the Topping family since his grandfather purchased it in 1928. With that kind of history, everyone in town is liable to know you. Linda had a little more freedom. Her family moved to Stockbridge from Plymouth and her parents were often busy running the pub they owned in Gregory.

It wasn't long after high school that Linda and Gary tied the knot, on Oct. 11, 1975, at the Presbyterian church in Stockbridge. She was 19 and Gary was 20.

"It was the most beautiful kind of fall day you could hope for," Linda recalled. "It was 70 degrees, sunny, and gorgeous with so many of the leaves changing color."

The couple raised three sons on the farm—Brian, Benjamin, and Samuel—and they are very proud of the life each has made for himself. Now all three boys are grown and have started their own families, but they haven't ventured far. Brian is a chemistry teacher in Ovid/Elsie and lives in Elsie with his family. Both Benjamin and Samuel are continuing in the family tradition of farming and live on Topping farm property: Sam lives in the home Gary grew up in and Ben is across the road in a house he acquired as soon as it came up for sale in order to get it back into the original farm.

As for Gary and Linda, they live in the home that had previously been Grandpa Topping's house. It's a comfort to both of them that the Topping farm has a future with the next generation of their family.

Linda learned quickly a lesson that her husband learned growing up: Farming is a tough way to make a living, but it can also be very rewarding.

"The stability of the farm shaped me in our early years together," Linda said. Having moved frequently in her childhood, she found the enduring nature of the farm offered her the opportunity to put down solid roots in one place.

See Topping on page 7.



Linda Weaver and Gary Topping became Mr. and Mrs. Topping in 1975. Linda was 19 and Gary was 20.



Linda and Gary Topping celebrated 50 years of marriage in 2025. The couple have lived and worked on the Hickory Ridge Farm Gary's grandfather purchased in 1928.

## Gary and Roberta Ludtke: College sweethearts celebrate 50 years of marriage

by Joan Tucker

In 1972, Roberta and Gary Ludtke met at Alma College in Michigan. Roberta majored in education and Gary in business. One day, Roberta and her roommate wanted to meet the handsome young men on the other side of the campus, so they invited them to a "Girl Bid Dance." At the time, the college had a resource called Face Book, not like our modern Facebook. It was a book with a photo of each student, the degree they were studying, and the dorm they stayed in. Today, that book would probably break privacy rules, but at the time it was very helpful to Roberta and her friend.

They wrote a note asking Gary and his roommate if they were interested in going to the dance with them and if they could meet in the union at a specific time. Thinking the note might be a prank, the boys sent out a scout to see if the girls were really there. They were. That dance started a connection between Gary and Roberta that had them dating throughout the years. Their relationship grew more serious senior year.

Both Roberta and Gary graduated in May 1975 and were married on Aug. 8 that same year. Their marriage took place in Alma's College Chapel with Roberta's father, a Presbyterian minister and Navy chaplain, officiating.

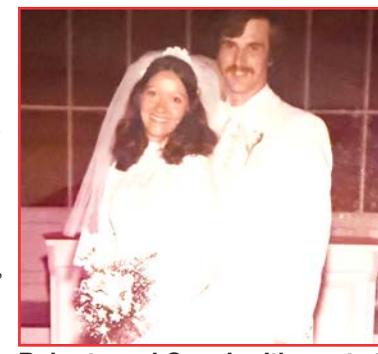
Gary had an internship with a local insurance company during school. He pursued this interest, applying to Prudential Insurance Company in Saginaw, based on a friend's recommendation. He got the job, so the couple lived in Saginaw for the next few years. No positions in education were readily available, so Roberta found a job at Saginaw Community Hospital working in occupational therapy in the Recreational Health Section. She had previous experience from summer jobs in recreational programs for a local nursing home, making her an ideal candidate.

Their son Chad was born May 11, 1979, while they were still living in Saginaw. They moved to Stockbridge the following September for two reasons: Gary graduated from Stockbridge Schools and felt connected and comfortable in the community, but most importantly, he and Roberta wanted to be close to his mother, Beth Ludtke, who lived in Gregory.

An early Christmas present arrived on Dec. 23, 1982, the Ludtke's daughter, Emily. Roberta and Gary found if they managed their money carefully, Roberta could stay home until the kids went to school. She became an active mother; early on she was a Sunday school teacher and involved in her children's school programs and classes. Later, she served as a Boy Scout leader as well as a Girl Scout leader for the six years her kids were involved in Scouts.

As the kids became more settled, Roberta started working for Goodwill, coordinating people with disabilities and the Michigan Rehab Services for job placement.

See Ludtke on page 11.



Roberta and Gary Ludtke met at Alma College. They graduated in May 1975 and were married the following August in the chapel at Alma.



During 50 years of marriage, the Ludtkes celebrate their successes together and help each other through the hard times.



**Married in October 1974, Ken and Susie Smith credit their 52-year marriage with having the sense to marry their best friend.**



**Ken and Susie Smith agree that the strength of their marriage comes from common interests and the love of doing things together.**

## From high school, to marriage, parenting and beyond The Smiths and the Crows follow similar paths during 50-plus years of happiness

by Judy Williams

*Ken and Susie (Rautiola) Smith and Dwight and Sue (Weber) Crow have been friends for years. In that time, they have played a role in each other's courtships, weddings, and lives. They double-dated in high school, stood up in each other's weddings, traveled together, and still share social activities. FUN FACT: If you have pizza delivered from Rob's in Stockbridge, chances are, Ken or Dwight could be your delivery man. They both use their delivery jobs as a way of staying connected, with each other and the community.*

### The Smiths love doing things together

Ken and Susie Smith's story started when Susie moved to Gregory from Inkster, when she was in seventh grade. Susie had beautiful waist-length, long blonde hair and was very pretty. This attracted

Ken, who was in eighth grade. During this time in Stockbridge, students wanting a hot lunch would walk across the athletic field from the high school/middle school to the Smith Elementary School Cafeteria. On one of these walks, Ken and Susie met.

A couple of years later, Ken asked the 15-year-old Susie if she would go to a football game with him. He had just turned 16 and had his driver's license. Susie's memory of this first date is arriving at the game to have Ken's mother, Barb, pressing her face up against the car window to get a look at the girl in the car with her son. This was the beginning of their long love story.

"I fell for this guy because he always kept me laughing," Susie stated. "Plus, he lived on a farm with horses, and I always had wanted a horse."

You could say Ken and Susie's marriage was double-blessed. On Aug. 10, 1974, they were married at the Gregory Baptist Church by both Susie's uncle and the Gregory minister.

(Author's Note: One wedding gift stood out from all the others, and they still talk about it today. Apparently, this author gifted them with a bullwhip, or so they say. I don't remember doing it, but will take ownership. "I've only used it sparingly," was the smart remark added by Ken.)

Another standout memory from the wedding is their car. Under the direction of groomsman Dwight Crow, the car was tightly packed full of newspapers and limburger cheese was placed on the car engine. Ken and Susie both vividly remember being at a car wash, at 2 in the morning on their wedding night, trying to get the cheese off the engine so the car would stop smelling. Of course, this was just a payback prank for the "special care" that Ken took with Dwight Crow's car when the Crows were married a year earlier.

Looking back over the years, Ken and Susie mention raising their two beautiful daughters, Kristen (Matt) Hines and Kari Smith (Jared Houghton) as their favorite memory. Two grandchildren, Hailee and Austin, have added another layer of joy to life.

When asked about Ken's special qualities, Susie stated, "I appreciate Ken for being such an excellent father. This is something I never had growing up."

Ken quickly added, "Susie is an excellent mother and homemaker. She even puts up with my jokes."

They both agreed that the strength of their marriage comes from common interests and the love of doing things together. They share the love of horse riding and, several times, have taken part in the "shore-to-shore ride" that goes across the entire state.

Susie explained, "You start with walking your horse into one of the Great Lakes and then you have 10 days to make it to the other side of the state to walk your horse in the opposite Great Lake. We would ride 25-30 miles a day."

Their other shared interests are travel, farming, landscaping, and family. Ken added "medical care" to their list.

When asked how they planned to spend Valentine's Day, Susie had a story.

"In the early years of our marriage, Ken would give me plastic flowers because real ones die. One year, I really got excited because he walked in with real flowers. They weren't for me! He bought flowers to cheer up one of our daughters, who was ill." Susie added, "I was happy to have real flowers in the house, even if they weren't for me."

Susie's advice for a long and happy marriage is, "Marry your best friend. Love is important, but during hard times, the friendship will carry you through."

Of course, Ken had to butt in then and add, "Run like hell!" This last remark earned him an elbow in the ribs.



**After tying the knot in February 1973, both Sue and Dwight Crow agree, the most special part of their marriage has been raising their family.**



**Throughout their married life, Sue and Dwight Crow have enjoyed snowmobiling, traveling and building seven (yes, you read that right!) homes together.**

### The Crows share activities and interests

Dwight and Sue Crow's story begins in Inkster when Sue was Sue Weber. She and Susie Rautiola were great friends and lived across the street from each other. Susie even stayed with Sue and her family for a month following a fire in her family's home. In seventh grade, Susie's family moved from Inkster to Gregory. Their friendship continued across the start of a new chapter as the girls stayed in contact with each other.

While on vacation with a friend's family at Oxbow Lake, Sue met Dwight Crow and one of his friends. Dwight and his friend were working as lifeguards and cleaned the rental boats. Sue was 14 and Dwight was 15 at the time.

"At first, I was more attracted to Dwight's friend," Sue said. But Dwight's Southern charm and good manners soon won her over.

"Dwight always answered the ladies with 'ma'am' and the men with 'sir,'" she said. Dwight, originally from Alabama, had moved to Michigan when he was 11. Sue eventually gave Dwight her phone number. As soon as the vacation was over, she started getting his calls.

Dwight was 15 and didn't have a driver's license, so their early dating consisted of Dwight talking his parents into driving to Inkster to pick up Sue so she could watch him play football or basketball,

depending upon the season. Dwight's family lived in Union Lake, so this was about a 40-minute drive, one way.

After Dwight received his driver's license, their dates expanded to include driving to Gregory to meet up with former neighbor, Susie Rautiola, and her boyfriend, Ken Smith. The two couples spent their free time together going to movies and just hanging out.

On Feb. 3, 1973, Sue and Dwight were married at the Garden City Presbyterian Church. Of course, Susie and Ken were part of the wedding party. Dwight gave his trusted friend, Ken, his car keys so that no one would mess with his car. BIG mistake. Ken gave the car keys to Dwight's dad, a big prankster. Dwight's dad took the groom's suitcase out of the car so he wouldn't have any clothes except for the tux he had on. Ken, not thinking about future paybacks, put limburger cheese under the car seat.

See *Two couples on page 11.*

## ADVERTISEMENT

I am excited to announce Dr. Grace Dahl continuing our practice.



After many wonderful years of practicing dentistry and getting to know each of you, I am retiring.

This decision was neither casual nor hurried, as the goal has always been to find the right person to care for our dental family.

After over two years of searching for a provider who will carry on our tradition of dental care with kindness and excellence, it is my pleasure to announce that Stockbridge's own Dr. Grace Dahl is assuming leadership of the practice.

Dr. Dahl completed her undergraduate work at Eastern Michigan University and earned her Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) degree from the University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry. She grew up in Stockbridge at her father's dental practice north of town and worked as a dental assistant with her dad for many years before pursuing a career as a dentist. When Grace is not in the office she juggles a busy family life with her husband and seven kids. Dr. Dahl enjoys running, hiking, and exploring the beautiful landscapes of Michigan. We look forward to Dr. Dahl heading the practice starting January 7th.

Dr. Dahl is a competent, caring, and compassionate clinician; she and I are like-minded in our professional history and practice philosophies. We both worked as associate dentists in other practices before deciding to serve the Stockbridge community. In doing so, we learned valuable lessons regarding the various ways dental care can be delivered. Both Dr. Dahl and I believe in providing personal and proactive dental care with kindness in an environment that is calm, comfortable, and personal without pressures or influences of "corporate dentistry."

I thank you for allowing me to be part of your lives. It has been my honor to serve you. I retire with gratitude, fond memories, and full confidence that you will be well cared for in the years ahead.

*Dr. Paul*

To view a video of Paul and Grace, visit the Facebook page: "Paul Dobos DDS."

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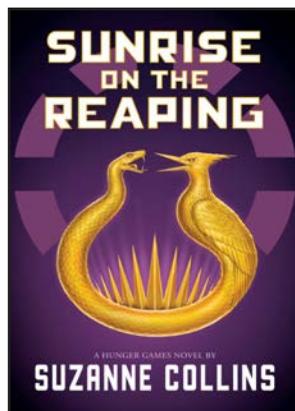
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## Reading Between the Lines 'Sunrise on the Reaping': A prequel done right

by Jessica Martell



In this prequel to "The Hunger Games," Suzanne Collins manages to build a lot of suspense around the fate of a character many readers already know well. Image credit Scholastic.com

inevitable rebellion.

Collins pulls off a pretty neat trick in "Sunrise on the Reaping": She manages to build a lot of suspense around the fate of a character many readers already know well. What follows aren't exactly spoilers—this is simply the nature of a prequel. Fans of "The Hunger Games" first met Haymitch as a mentor to new tributes in the first book. All mentors are previous victors of The Games; therefore, it is generally understood from the beginning that Haymitch will survive the events of this prequel. Additionally, while participating in The Games, Haymitch is focused on trying to break the arena and put an end to The Games. Considering the original book takes place 24 years after "Sunrise on the Reaping," readers can deduce the outcome of these efforts.

Throughout "Sunrise on the Reaping," the reader is caught up in the tension of knowing Haymitch will win The Games and fall short in his attempt to end them. This duality is suggested in the title and the opening scenes: Sunrise typically evokes positive feelings of possibility in what lies ahead; the Reaping, in contrast, is the name of the ceremony in which the tributes' names are selected. Add to that the fact that Haymitch's birthday falls on Reaping day, and Collins has created a complex juxtaposition of positive and negative emotions from which to launch her story.

While the reader might have some insider knowledge going into this book, Collins uses this story as an opportunity to add texture to the nuanced roles of other characters from the series, such as President Snow and Plutarch Heavensbee. Further, as we learn more about Haymitch's experiences in the arena and in the aftermath of his victory, readers gain insight into the broken man presented as mentor to Katniss and Peeta in the 74th Hunger Games.

The graphic violence of this book might not be for every reader, but for fans of dystopian fiction in general, or "The Hunger Games" series in particular, this one is a must-read.

*Jessica Martell spent 17 years as a high school English teacher before accepting her current position as an educational consultant. She and her husband live in Munith with their cat, Scootie.*

### Topping page 4

Farm life is, of course, quite different than city life. "Farmers are tied to a timeline that we really have no control over," Gary said. "That's one of the biggest challenges when nonfarm people move here and marry. They aren't always ready for the time commitment. I give Linda credit. She went from being a city girl to being a girl who had to care for 60 calves every day, and it didn't phase her."

But you learn when listening to this couple that stability is different than security.

"Farming is one of the few businesses where you're at the mercy of weather and the economy—two things we have no control over," Linda pointed out.

In 1983 when Gary's grandfather passed away, the family had to buy out his grandfather's brothers and sisters. Interest rates were horrible and they had to repurchase the farm. In the 1970s, it wasn't unusual for farm wives to have to take on outside work to help make ends meet. Linda spent almost 30 years working in various capacities at Chelsea Hospital. Often, she'd work midnights and then come home to get the kids off to school and help with the calves. She'd sleep while the boys were in school and be up again when they returned home. She has also served for 38 years as the Unadilla Township Clerk.

*See Topping on page 11.*



### 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](http://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.

### Our Board of Directors

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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.

### Editor-in-Chief Emeritus

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### We would love to hear from you!

Please share any article ideas or community events you think SCN readers would be interested in. You are also encouraged to contact us with your advertising questions or for information about volunteering.

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## Outreach in Action

# There's more to Stockbridge Outreach than 'please' and 'thank you'

by Jo Mayer and Paul Crandall

Take the zillions of words written in the last couple of decades about corporate culture and put them on a roll of paper and that scroll might extend to the moon and back.

Core principles, how people act, how they communicate and handle conflict, how they treat customers and each other—these are topics of interest from boardrooms to factory floors. And they're not just important in the corporate world; they're just as critical to nonprofit organizations.

Much of the culture at Stockbridge Community Outreach boils down to a single quality: compassion. As part of that emphasis, a lot of the work done by Outreach staff and volunteers is encompassed in four often used words and phrases:

- How can we help you?
- Please.
- Thank you.
- I'm sorry.



**Volunteer Rebecca Houtsma holds a client's baby while the client shops the Outreach pantry.** Photo credit Jo Mayer

**How can we help you?** This question opens the door to countless contacts over the phone and in person. It might lead to helping area residents who find themselves moving or clearing out a loved one's house, or with redundant or obsolete things, calling Outreach to ask what we can productively take off their hands.

Or it may be folks looking to shop our pantry, needing help with paperwork, or needing assistance with a seemingly endless list of other needs.

In a way, the "how can we help you" query applies to our own volunteers. While Outreach relies for its very survival on volunteers, the volunteers themselves also get something out of the bargain. These people have time, energy and social needs, and volunteering at Outreach can help fill those. Matching Outreach needs with the desires, schedules and skills of our volunteers is an art, and when it is done well, everyone wins.

**Please.** Perhaps no single word is more used than "please." Outreach operates within an environment of goodwill, supported by donations large and small. "Please help" applies to everything from donations of personal care items, to money, to food, to clothing, to small household items and more.

**Thank you.** Then there's the counterpart to please: Thank you. We say it in so many ways and for so many gifts, and yet we don't say it enough. Everyone who donates money, time, clothing, food, space or expertise is so vital to our continued success.

We have about 30 regular volunteers we see at least weekly who help keep the pantry stocked, the Tide Me Over bags packed, the clothing room full and attractive, pop-up food distributions running smoothly, plus so much more. The 11 members of our board do lots of thankless behind-the-scenes work such as keeping meeting minutes or balancing our accounts or keeping up our Facebook page or website, while also meeting monthly to help steer the ship. We are grateful.

We are also thankful to generous community members for the many ways they help, whether bringing in clothing and household items, buying food, giving money, or any of so many generous acts.

Monetary aid to Outreach helps us maintain our two-person part-time paid staff, our accounts, and our space and operations. It also enables us to help our community pay bills and get food.

*See Outreach on page 9.*



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# Community Calendar

## Everyday

– Sledding station: Behind Smith Elementary. Weather permitting. Free.

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

## Mondays

– Craft Drop In (Ages 8 and up) at the Stockbridge Library.

– Cardio dance, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.

– Cardio drumming, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.

– Line dancing, 7 to 8 p.m. at Village Hall. Free\*. No class Feb. 2 or March 2.

– First Mondays: American Legion Meeting, 7 p.m. at the Stockbridge American Legion Post.

– Second Mondays: Book discussion, 11 a.m. at the Stockbridge Library.

## 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

– Yoga, 10-11 a.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.

– 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

– Guided hands-on art projects, 6:30-8 p.m. at Village Hall. Register to reserve materials. Email Debbie at [stockbridgeparks@vosmi.org](mailto:stockbridgeparks@vosmi.org)

## 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 (free) is at 6 p.m. Large Group at 7 p.m. Open Share at 8 p.m.

## Fridays

– Discovery Storytime (For Babies, Toddlers, and Children), 10:30 to 11 a.m. Stockbridge Library

– Keep Calm and Carry Yarn, 1 to 2 p.m. at the Stockbridge Library (Occasional Fridays. Call Library for dates.)

– Cardio drumming, 7-8 p.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.

– Indoor pickleball, 7 to 8:30 p.m. at Heritage School. Free.. No session Feb. 13.

## Saturdays

– Vinyasa Flow Yoga, 9-10 a.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.

**Feb. 2** - Ground Hog Day

**Feb. 3** - Intro to Sock Knitting, 2-4 p.m (4 weeks). Stockbridge Library. Registration required.

**Feb. 11** - Student Count Day

**Feb. 13-16** - Stockbridge Community Schools Mid-Winter Break

**Feb. 13** - Family Movie and Craft Night, 4-6 p.m. at the Stockbridge Library.

**Feb. 14** - Valentine's Day.

**Feb. 16** - President's Day.

**Feb. 18** - Music with Ms. Beth, 10:30-11:30 at the Stockbridge Library. (Ages 0-6).

**Feb. 21**- Read to Remington, 11-noon at the Stockbridge Library. (Ages 0-6).

**Feb. 22-28** - Stockbridge High School Dominican Republic Trip.

**Feb. 23-27** - FFA Spirit Week.

**Feb. 23** - Read to Remington, 4:30-5:30 at the Stockbridge Library. (Ages 0-6).

*\*Where indicated, gratuities are welcome but not required.*

For an online calendar of more community events visit: [www.stockbridgecommunitynews.com](http://www.stockbridgecommunitynews.com).

To add your community events to our free community calendar, email submissions to [stockbridgecommunitynews@gmail.com](mailto:stockbridgecommunitynews@gmail.com).

For a full list of library events, visit [cadl.org](http://cadl.org) and select the "Events" menu.

## Outreach page 8

In 2025, we spent over \$30,000 to keep our neighbors' heat and lights on, over \$12,000 helping our neighbors stay housed, and over \$16,000 buying food.

**I'm sorry.** Finally, there's the hardest phrase: "I'm sorry." Outreach can't help with everything for everyone. Sometimes we've reached our budget limits and can't help a client as much as we'd like. Sometimes people have a really great appliance or couch, but we just don't have the space to accommodate it. Sometimes we overlook writing a thank-you note.

In the course of our work, we hear heartbreaking stories of illness, loss of employment, and sometimes just plain bad luck. The worst is when one of our clients or supporters dies or suffers the loss of a loved one. At times, "I'm sorry" may seem inadequate, but it is always said with empathy and true compassion.

That's who we are.

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](mailto:Outreach49285@gmail.com), 517-851-7285, or find us on Facebook.

# STOCKBRIDGE SPORTS

## Competitive cheer team rolling over competition



The competitive cheer team finished second at Chelsea's Blizzard Blast. Photo provided by Dawn McCann

Stockbridge had another strong showing with a second-place finish at Chelsea's Blizzard Blast Jan. 17. At the event, the only team the Panthers finished behind was six-time state champion Hudson.

## Lady Panthers improve to 8-3 on the season



Melina Sayre drives to the basket against Pinckney. Photo by Mike Williamson

Zoe Buddenburg four each, Makenna Porter and Payton Hernley two each.

**Onsted.** The Panthers dropped a tough non-league contest to Onsted, 47-31, at the Runway Classic at Jackson College Jan 3.

Topping led the Panthers with 10 points and six rebounds. Bella Pybus added six points and Melina Sayre two.

**L'Anse Creuse North.** Stockbridge took down L'Anse Creuse North in a battle at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit Jan. 5.

Sayre had a big game with 16 points to lead the Panthers.

Topping was a force underneath with nine points and 10 rebounds, while Monaghan chipped in with nine points. Pybus finished with four points and eight boards, and Buddenburg four points.

**Union City.** The Panthers got by Union City 46-38 in a Big 8 battle on Jan. 6.

Sayre had another big night with 16 points.

Pybus chipped in with 10 points and six rebounds, while Monaghan added nine points. Topping finished with five points and seven rebounds. Porter, Hernley, and Buddenburg scored two points each.

**Concord.** The Panthers had a rough go of it in a 46-25 loss to D4 fourth-ranked Concord, Jan. 9.

Buddenborg and Topping led the Panthers with seven points each. Monaghan finished with six points and Pybus five.

**Webberville.** On Jan. 13, Buddenburg hit a jumper at the buzzer to lift Stockbridge past Webberville 55-53 in overtime.

Stockbridge was led by Buddenburg with 14 points.

Topping had a huge night with 12 points and 13 rebounds, Sayre 10 points, and Monaghan three.

**Bronson.** Stockbridge improved to 4-1 in the Big 8 with a 68-48 win over Bronson Jan. 13.

Topping finished with a double-double of 14 points and 13 rebounds to lead the Panthers.

Buddenborg scored a team-high 19 points, while Monaghan added 12 points, and Sayre seven.

by Mike Williamson

The Stockbridge competitive cheer team is having one of its best seasons ever.

The Panthers set record-high scores in competitions, as well as scoring records in each round they take part in at a meet.

Stockbridge picked up three first-place finishes and two second-place finishes to start the season.

The Panthers took first in the Springport Spartan Snow Invite Jan. 5, and followed that up with a second-place finish at the Leslie Blackhawk Invitational Jan. 10.

## Stockbridge wrestlers finish sixth at Napoleon



Klara Hays is shown in a wrestling match during an early season meet. Hays finished first at the Owosso Girls Tournament Jan. 18 with three pins. Photo by Dawn McCann

by Mike Williamson

**Napoleon.** Stockbridge wrestlers put together a gritty, points-on-the-board performance Jan. 10 at Napoleon, finishing sixth overall behind a string of place winners and bonus-point efforts that kept the Panthers in the mix throughout the day.

Jayson Conant delivered one of the highlights of the tournament at 132 pounds, battling his way to a third-place finish and 14 team points. After dropping a tight semifinal decision to Dundee's Joshua Foster, Conant rebounded in the consolation bracket with a pair of falls — pinning Napoleon's Tristan Taylor before closing his day by sticking Cayden Wright to claim third.

At 144, Aiden Flore turned in Stockbridge's biggest individual point total, scoring 19.5 team points on his way to a third-place finish. Flore opened with a fall in the quarterfinals, then answered a semifinal loss by tech falling teammate Bradley White in the consolation semifinals before pinning Dansville's Uriah Orr in the third-place match.

White also placed at 144, finishing fifth and adding 14 points to the team total. After a first-round setback, White worked his way through the consolation bracket with a fall and two forfeits to secure his spot on the podium.

Reid Royal placed fourth at 106, scoring four team points despite a tough draw that included losses to wrestlers from Dundee and Grass Lake. Kaleb Regan added six points with a sixth-place finish at 126, highlighted by a fall in the first consolation round.

At 165, Klara Hays placed sixth, while Kameryn Gross finished second at 190 after opening the tournament with a first-round fall. Domenic Ciminelli rounded out the Stockbridge placers at 215, earning a fifth-place finish and five team points.

**Maple Valley.** The Panthers defeated Maple Valley in a Big 8 match 48-35.

Picking up wins for Stockbridge were Reid Royal, Aiden Flore and Colin Stacey.

**Girls tournaments.** Klara Hays has vastly improved in the girls wrestling side of the Panthers.

Hays finished 3-0 and took first place at 165 pounds at the Owosso girls tournament Jan. 18. She picked up three pins on the day.

She also earned a third-place finish at the DeWitt tournament Jan. 2.

Hays went 3-1 on the day with three pins.

## Boys basketball team on way to winning season



**Evan Lockhart battles for a rebound against Pinckney.** Photo by Mike Williamson

by Mike Williamson

The young and gunning Stockbridge boys basketball team continues to impress in the early season with a 10-3 overall record and going 5-1 in the Big 8.

**Homer.** The Panthers defeated Homer over the holiday break 64-58 on Dec. 22.

Stockbridge used a big 14-4 run in the second quarter and held off Homer in the fourth for the win.

Jay Crow had a big game with a team-high 24 points and grabbed seven boards.

Noah Sandecki added eight points and eight assists, and Remington Christie had seven points.

Evan Lockhart finished with six points and 10 rebounds, while Bradley Buddenborg and Koen Griffith scored four each. Tucker Lott chipped in with four points and Brendan Cordero three.

**Pinckney.** On Dec. 30, the Panthers were handed their first loss of the season on a last-second 3-pointer by Pinckney for a 50-47 loss.

The Pirates hit a 3-pointer at the buzzer to send the game into overtime, and won it with another buzzer beater in the extra session.

Buddenborg led the Panthers with 12 points and seven rebounds, while Christie had 12 points and four boards.

Lockhart added 11 points and four rebounds, and Crow finished with six points, seven rebounds, and five assists. Sandecki added four points, six rebounds, and five assists, while Griffith scored two points.

**Crestwood.** The Panthers bounced back with a 50-47 overtime win over Dearborn Heights Crestwood in a Jan. 5 game played at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit.

Crow hit a 3-pointer at the buzzer to send the game into overtime tied at 39.

The game was still tied with 10 seconds left when Lockhart stepped to the line and made three of four free throws to give the Panthers the win.

Crow led Stockbridge with a double-double of 21 points and 10 rebounds.

Lockhart finished with 14 points and seven rebounds, while Sandecki added five points and six assists. Christie finished with four points. Griffith, Lott, and Kam Gross had two each.

**Concord.** On Jan. 8, the Panthers gave D4 fifth-ranked Concord a battle but came up short in a 60-56 loss.

The Yellowjackets outscored the Panthers 26-18 in the fourth to rally for the win.

Buddenborg had a big night with a team-high 26 points. Crow added 17 points and Christie nine. Lockhart and Sandecki two each.

**Leslie.** The Panthers rallied from 19 points down to send the game to overtime but fell to archrival Leslie 50-49 on Jan. 12.

Crow hit six triples and finished with 23 points to lead the Panthers.

Buddenborg added five triples and scored 16 points, and Sandecki had five points and seven rebounds. Lockhart and Lott scored two points each, and Christie one.

**Bronson.** On Jan. 13, the Panthers used a 22-13 run to snap a two-game skid and defeat Bronson 58-47.

Crow led the Panthers with 17 points and six rebounds.

Buddenborg added 16 points, five boards, and four assists. Lockhart scored nine points and six rebounds. Christie had five points and Lott four points. Sandecki added two points and five assists, and Gross two points.

**Reading.** On Jan. 15, Buddenborg tied the school record with eight 3-pointers in a game and led the Panthers to a 72-61 win over Reading.

Buddenborg finished with 28 points and seven rebounds to lead the way. Christie finished with 13 points and Crow added 11 points. Sandecki had seven points and eight rebounds, Lott six points, Lockhart had four points and six rebounds, and Griffith three points.

## Ludtke page 4

During this time, she went back to get a master's in counseling, psychology, and education. This commitment resulted in some long days, but Roberta stated that this time was an example of why they have a strong marriage. Gary supported and cheered her on as she achieved her degree. She worked in special education at Vandercook Lake and later in Stockbridge Community Schools. She retired after 20 years of teaching and supporting students.

The like-minded Ludtkes embraced the community and participated in many activities during their children's growth. Gary coached the kids' sports, such as soccer, Little League, and basketball. Both Gary and Roberta were involved in the Lions Club, among other local organizations.

*See Ludtke on page 13.*

## Two couples page 5

**Crows (cont.)** Both Dwight and Sue agree the most special part of their marriage has been raising their family, daughter Tara Crow (Kirk Lubahn) and son Dwight. Through the years, their family has grown to include grandchildren Jonathan, Alex, Jenna and Laura. The proud grandparents enjoy attending all the grandkids' activities.

When questioned about what keeps their marriage solid, they had a simple answer. "Shared activities and interests," they said.

Throughout their married life, Sue and Dwight have enjoyed snowmobiling, travel and building seven homes together. Five of the homes they built themselves with husband/wife teamwork, and two they contracted.

Sue explained, "We just enjoy being together and anything we can do together."

"Dwight is ambitious, hardworking, thoughtful and kind," voiced the adoring Sue. "After all these years, he's still romantic."

"Sue is a people person and I admire that about her," Dwight said.

When asked if there was anything they were still trying to teach their spouse, they both had something to add. It was no surprise that both their pet peeves corresponded.

"I consider Dwight three-fourths of the way trained in trying to get him to pick up after himself," declared Sue.

Dwight added, "I'm trying to get Sue not to worry so much about cleaning. She's constantly picking up and cleaning."

Sue's advice to others for a long and happy marriage is to, "Never go to bed mad." Dwight quickly added, "Take time to work out your issues and then compromise."

The couple plan to celebrate their Valentine's Day before the 14th to avoid the crowds. Their plan is to do a combination wedding anniversary and Valentine's Day weekend getaway.

## Topping cont. from page 7

But that wasn't even the toughest time for this strong couple.

"The toughest time for us was after my dad passed away in 2002. He was only 72 years old," Gary explained. "I was tied up on the farm for 365 days for two years with really no breaks. It was a hard few years until we sold the dairy cows."

With three boys to raise and a husband tied to the farm, Linda said, "It's a good thing I enjoyed sports! I spent my summers coaching T-ball and baseball and getting the boys to their games."

It was Linda who forced Gary to loosen up a little during the toughest years. Around about the time their kids were in middle school, Linda packed up the car one day and told Gary, "We're going to Florida for spring break. You can get in the car—or not!" Gary is no dummy—he got in that car! After that, they continued to travel to Florida annually, usually with a whole crew of family and friends.

The Toppings have maintained strong friendships over the years. Some of their favorite times were the many years spent snowmobiling with a large group of Stockbridge folks and celebrating at Houghton Lake's Tip-Up Town.

Currently, the Topping family farms 1,800 acres—370 acres are their own. But it's their grown adult children and their 10 grandchildren—five boys and five girls—that they are the most proud of. And while they love them all equally, it was that moment when they found out they were going to have a granddaughter that they both recall as one of their most special memories.

"Finally, after raising three boys, Linda could go out and buy some baby dresses," Gary said, smiling. But truth be told, it was Gary who recalled the memory first!

*Photos provided by Linda Topping.*

## Obituaries

### Lenore Alta (Monroe) Rogers



**Lenore Alta (Monroe) Rogers**  
May 11, 1934 to Jan. 8, 2026

**Lenore Alta (Monroe) Rogers** went peacefully to her heavenly address at 11 p.m. January 8, 2026 surrounded by her family and under the caring guidance of Mercyhealth Hospice, Rockford, IL.

Born May 11, 1934, on the dining room table of her cherished family home, 520 N. Putnam St., Williamston, MI, Lenore was brought into the world by O.S. Hendren, MD, in the era when doctors made house calls.

In high school, Lenore worked at her father's business, Monroe Pharmacy, 'The Friendly Corner Pharmacy,' gift shop and ice cream parlor, where she became reacquainted with her future husband upon his return from military service in Japan.

Many are the romances which have bloomed over

ice cream! Lenore graduated from Williamston High School, class of 1952, and attended University of Michigan dental laboratory program, where she received high praise from her professors.

Lenore's focus was family, raising her daughter and three sons and serving her Lord Jesus at Jeruel Baptist Church, where she was a founding member. Lenore wore many hats, including pianist, alto singer in the choir, Sunday school teacher, Vacation Bible School volunteer, and church greeter. She derived much joy from helping people feel welcome at church.

Lenore enjoyed arts and crafts and teaching craft classes to senior citizens through the local college. She was a talented seamstress, capable of drawing a sketch and completing a beautiful garment from her sketches. She was a member and secretary of the Waterloo Needlework Club for 50 years. A love of fashion and 'dressing to the nines' were passions of Lenore's. She loved outfits in every color with coordinating shoes and accessories. Lenore's dream-come-true was to have a family cottage on Lake Huron which she was able to enjoy for 20 years, often proclaiming that Lake Huron was her heaven on earth.

The last 10 years of her life were spent living in Illinois with her daughter and son-in-law, which she greatly enjoyed. Nevertheless, she always wondered why anyone in their right mind would live anywhere other than the great state of Michigan. Lenore's friends remember her heart of gold, kindness and smarts, and even though plagued late in life with dementia, her hilarious one-liner sense of humor.

Lenore was preceded in death by her husband of sixty years, Russell L. Rogers; her parents, Jeff and Albertine Monroe; her son, John Russell Rogers, and her 'perfect' cocker spaniel mix-rescue dog, Holly. She is survived by her daughter, Debra Lynn Powers (Tim); son, Bruce Monroe Rogers (Linda); son, Craig Brian Rogers (Lisa); grandchildren: Gabe Powers (Dana), Gina LENORE Powers (Ron), Grant Powers (Kristen), Jeff Rogers, Mandi 'Sunshine Girl' Makowski (Derek), Nicole Johnson (Andy), Angela Rogers, Brian Rogers; seventeen great-grandchildren ages four months to 24 years: Jeffry, Hailey, Sydney, Ellie, Merilee, Jovee, Kerstee, Jakob, Tenley, twins Hadley and Kyley, Nick, Frank, A.J., Ava, Ali, and Annalise; and a niece, Aloise Bachelder (Mike).

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be directed to Jeruel Baptist Church of Munith; Waterloo Needlework Club, or Dementia Society of America, [www.dementiasociety.org](http://www.dementiasociety.org).

Visitation was held at Jeruel Baptist Church, 11400 Plum Orchard Rd., Munith, MI, on Thursday, January 15, 2026, from 5:00-8:00 p.m. and Friday, January 16, 2026 from 10:00-11:00 a.m. Funeral services were held at 11:00 a.m. on Friday, January 16, 2026, at Jeruel Baptist Church.

Arrangements by Caskey-Mitchell Funeral Home, Stockbridge.

### Sharon F. Bellers



**Sharon F. Bellers**  
June 26, 1947 to Jan. 14, 2026

**Sharon F. Bellers**, age 78, of Grass Lake, Michigan, went home to be with her Lord and Savior on January 14, 2026.

Born on June 26, 1947, in Stockbridge, Michigan, Sharon was the beloved daughter of Jack and Carol Frinkel. She graduated from Stockbridge High School in 1965 and spent most of her life in the Stockbridge area before moving to Grass Lake in 2018.

On May 11, 1980, Sharon was united in marriage to the love of her life, Clifford Bellers, in Pinckney, Michigan. Together they shared more than 45 blessed years of marriage.

Sharon faithfully served others through her work as an administrative assistant at Chelsea Hospital in the admitting and scheduling department, where her kindness and gentle spirit touched many lives.

Sharon had a joyful heart and a love for dancing and music. She cherished time spent with her family and rarely missed an opportunity to cheer on her loved ones at their sporting events.

Sharon and Cliff also enjoyed traveling together and especially treasured their winters in Florida. Above all, Sharon's life was marked by her faith in Jesus Christ and her love for her family. Her legacy of compassion, grace, and steadfast faith will continue to live on through all who knew and loved her.

Sharon is survived by her devoted husband, Cliff Bellers; her children, Jeff Myers of Lansing, Nikki (Eric) Eldridge of Lansing, Amanda (William) Watson of Indiana, Pam Mason of Manchester, Susan (Mike) Miller of Kalamazoo, and Jill (Mike) Croghan of Manchester; 18 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren; and her sister, Debbie Kurzynowski of Texas. She was welcomed into Heaven by her parents and sister, Diana Stephens.

A Celebration of Life was held at Crossroads Community Church in Stockbridge, MI at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, January 19, 2026, with visitation beginning at 10:00 a.m.

Memorial contributions may be made to the American Diabetes Association or Crossroads Community Church, where Sharon found great joy and fellowship.

Arrangements by Staffan-Mitchell Funeral Home, Chelsea.

## Stockbridge Police Report

The Stockbridge Police Department responded to 248 calls for service over the past four weeks, ending Jan. 12.

113-Stockbridge Township calls for service.

135-Village of Stockbridge calls for service.

Officers investigated the following calls for service:

- 1-Attempt to locate.
- 6-Animal.
- 13-Business checks.
- 1-Noise complaint.
- 3-Family trouble.
- 1-Domestic violence.
- 17-Traffic stops.
- 7-Suspicious situations.
- 8-Admin duties.
- 2-Reckless driving.
- 2-Unwanted subjects.
- 10-crashes (PDA, PI).
- 1-Alarms.
- 9-Citizen assists.
- 1-Fire-related calls.
- 3-Special assignments.
- 2-Motorist assist.
- 2-Fraud.
- 15-Crossing guard details.
- 10- School-related calls.
- 5-Trouble with subjects.
- 3-Warrant arrests.
- 1-Child abuse.
- 1-Fight.
- 36-Medicals.
- 3-Welfare check.
- 1-MDOP.
- 2-Hazards.
- 8-Follow ups.
- 2-CSC.
- 2-Trespassing.
- 5-VIN checks.

This past month has been an especially busy one for the Police Department, with an increase in traffic accidents and a significant number of mental health-related calls for service. Our officers have handled these situations with professionalism, compassion, and dedication, often going beyond enforcement to provide assistance and support to those in need. Despite the challenges, we have continued to make positive progress as a department, and I am proud of the strong working relationships we are building with our community partners and residents. I look forward to continuing this momentum as we move forward together in support of the Stockbridge community.

Respectfully submitted

John J. Tyler, Interim-Chief of Police



"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,

**I occasionally post on a community-wide Facebook page, but it always seems as though someone sends the discussion off the rails by turning it hateful. How can we keep online discussions constructive?**

Signed,

**Tired of Trolls**

Dear Tired,

In Michigan, we are lucky to have plenty of good trolls—I'm referring, of course, to those of us who reside in the lower peninsula, below the Mackinac Bridge! But then there are those pesky online trolls, they exist on both peninsulas—and around the world, actually. These are people who can take a constructive online discussion and ruin it for everyone.

For some reason, the internet gives many people the idea that they can say anything without consequences. Is it right to tell the person in front of you at the grocery store that they are too fat to wear that outfit? Of course not. The same principle is true online; people should think twice before giving voice to unconstructive thoughts.

So how do you stop people from hijacking or derailing online discussions? If you're only seeing an occasional sentence here or there—ignore the troll and maybe they'll go back under the bridge. But if they become overbearing, insulting or inappropriate, it might be time to make your presence known.

Take a few minutes to decide how important it is to you to jump into the fray. If you have the option to block them, do that. But if the situation requires more from you, try to make your point calmly. Even better, try gentle humor. But make sure you're able to handle any risks involved with speaking up. Even the most carefully worded reply can spark an online confrontation, but don't let it. Say your piece and move on. Most importantly, whatever happens, don't take it personally.

If the troll's comments are really hateful or inappropriate, consider reporting them to a moderator or administrator. Look for a "Report to" option either within the troll's comment or somewhere else on the webpage.

For all their attempts to get noticed, online trolls get their name from dim-witted, pitiful creatures in folklore. Remember that the next time they get under your skin.

*Gabbie*

## Ludtke cont. from page 11

Roberta is a charter member of Stockbridge Area Garden Club and the Stockbridge Community News. Roberta and Gary are proud of one another's involvement and achievements, which they believe have strengthened their relationship.

Gary did very well at Prudential and won multiple awards and trips, allowing the family to travel to places such as Florida, Nashville, California, even Monte Carlo.

Often, Gary would have to qualify for company conferences. They would all go and make a vacation out of the trip. For instance, when they traveled to Scottsdale, Arizona, for Gary's conference, they explored the Grand Canyon, Sedona and other local attractions.

Last year, to celebrate the Ludtke's 50th anniversary, the entire family went to Scotland. Emily and Chad along with Chad's wife, Lindsay, and their two children—Kaiden (13) and Elise (11)—explored Scotland's historical sites. Traveling with the family is one of the great joys that bind Gary and Roberta together.

The sense of adventure, fun, and laughter they shared on that trip will last forever, even the scary weather. Storm Floris, with winds of over 100 mph, hit while they were crossing the Skye Bridge on the way to the Isle of Skye. Needless to say, that put them on edge. Thankfully, they made it over before the bridge was closed. Trees and campers were falling over, and the nervous travelers were thankful to get to their inn. Even on a cold night with no power, they were happy to be inside, out of the storm. The weather cleared the next day and the sightseeing continued.

Gary was reflective during the interview about what made their relationship strong. He said it was an

## Robotics page 1

The Dominican Republic is a vibrant Caribbean nation on the island of Hispaniola, known for its beautiful beaches, rich culture, and tropical climate. Its capital and largest city is Santo Domingo. Two countries share the island—the Dominican Republic to the east and Haiti to the west. The Dominican Republic offers diverse geography—from mountains to arid valleys—and a unique blend of history and modern life.

As mentioned above, Stockbridge students will be working with students at the Puntacana International School. The school's mission is "To provide learning experiences to enable students to reach their academic, leadership and entrepreneurial potential through critical thinking and to encourage a socio-ecological consciousness."

The Stockbridge FFA students who will be traveling to the Dominican Republic will have spent two months preparing for this international travel experience and learning how to teach the technical skills necessary for students in the Dominican Republic to build a new ROV.

## Cascades Conference page 1

Stockbridge is expected to be placed in the East Division, which includes Grass Lake, Manchester, Michigan Center, Napoleon and Stockbridge's longtime rival Leslie.

In this division, travel times will be significantly shorter for the Panthers. Manchester, at 25 miles away, and Napoleon, at 23 miles away, will be the longest trips.

The West Division includes Addison, Columbia Central, Hanover-Horton, Jonesville and Vandercook Lake. Hillsdale also received an invitation to join the conference, although a decision has not been finalized.

The change also shifts Stockbridge from being one of the larger schools in the Big 8, to one of the smaller programs in the Cascades, where enrollments range from about 488 students at Michigan Center to 178 at Vandercook Lake.

Stockbridge received a formal invitation to join the Cascades Conference, but the Panthers must complete the final year of a three-year agreement with the Big 8, so the change will occur in the fall of 2027.

Openings in the Cascade Conference were created after the Homer and East Jackson districts agreed to join the Big 8, beginning in the 2026-27 school year. The Big 8 then will be expanding to 10 schools.

This will be the sixth different conference affiliation for Stockbridge since 2000, when the Ingham County League disbanded. Stockbridge also competed as an independent for one season during the 2023-24 school year.

"honor to witness my spouse's life," celebrating their successes together and helping each other through the hard times. Roberta was right there agreeing to everything Gary said.

Later, when asked what advice they would give other couples thinking about marriage, Roberta had an immediate answer. Her father's advice was, don't marry just for love. Marry for compatibility in these five areas: economics, religion, intellect, social ideas, and sexual compatibility. Not that there can't be differences, but couples need to be willing to respect each other's choices. This is definitely something to think about, and it really makes sense.

For this couple, their compatibility has allowed them to celebrate 50 years of marriage, and they look forward to many more years to come!

Congratulations!

*Photos provided by the Ludtkes.*

# Staff Spotlight: Music is a joyful experience for Jenny Laveirge's kindergarten through fourth grade students



Mary Jo David

by **Mary Jo David**

Imagine teaching and never having to struggle to get your students to engage. For that matter, imagine being a student in a class where pretty much every student wants to be there. From the sound of it—and sound is the operative word here—that's what it's like to be in Jenny Laveirge's music classes.

Laveirge teaches music to students in kindergarten through grade four at Heritage School. She began teaching in Stockbridge in 2012 after teaching in Bay City and then Trenton.

Reflecting on why her students always seem happy to be in music class, Laveirge said, "I think the reason my students are such willing learners is that I try to create a classroom environment where it is a safe place to just be themselves. I try to make music accessible to all of these kids despite where their skills are."

Laveirge emphasizes doing music—singing, moving, dancing, playing instruments.

"The goal is to make music class a joyful experience and to speak to the whole child so they will want to come to class," says Laveirge. She does this through play-based instruction that relies on imagination.

Music has been a focal point in her own life since she was young. She began Polish dance when she was only 3 years old and continued the lessons until she was 18. She still enjoys celebrating this special talent; the highlight for her is performing with her dance troupe on the field for Polish Night at Comerica Park in Detroit.

Also when she was young, her grandmother began teaching her piano. Later, while attending Milford High School, Laveirge participated in the symphonic band and marching band. The latter afforded her the opportunity to compete in statewide competitions and also Nationals every year. Her senior year of high school, she had the honor of leading the band as the school's drum major.

From playing school with her two younger sisters as a child to working as a camp counselor for 10 years, there's really never been a doubt that she wanted to become a music teacher.

The next logical step in pursuing that dream was attending Michigan State University. There she played the alto saxophone in the Spartan Marching Band and the clarinet in the Symphony Band while earning her degree in music education. Later, at Madonna University in Livonia, she earned her master's in educational technology.

**Jenny Laveirge teaches music to students in kindergarten through fourth grade at Heritage School.** Photos provided by Jenny Laveirge

in Livonia, she earned her master's in educational technology.

Over time, Laveirge learned to play 12 musical instruments, many when she was majoring in music at MSU. One of these was the stand-up bass—no small feat considering this music teacher stands about 5 feet 1 inch tall and most stand-up basses range from 5 feet to almost 6 feet tall! Nowadays, she focuses on piano, guitar, ukulele and the recorder.

Just as she suspected when she was young, Laveirge loves her job as a music teacher.

"I have fun making music with my students every day," she said. "It's the best. I feel like I have an 'ah-hah' moment with them daily."

One example of the joys of teaching is when she describes a student in her class who is nonverbal in all of his other classes. Laveirge had no idea at first because in her class he opens up.

"He started with singing music patterns and the resting tone [the home pitch] for a song. All of the kids in the class were ecstatic. Many of them chimed in with, 'You did it!' What a win it is to get to see what he is capable of through music," she exclaimed.

Every December, this energetic music teacher pulls together a Smith Winter Concert for her students in kindergarten through second grade.

"For so many kids this is their first experience going on a stage, and they're looking out at hundreds of people in the audience. Many have to overcome stage fright. It's such a treat to see them so proud and beaming when they are on that stage," Laveirge said.

Her co-worker Jaclyn Lennemann, an art teacher at Heritage, commented on Laveirge's school programs. "The concerts and special music and dance events Jenny organizes multiple times throughout the year are nothing short of magical!"

Laveirge compares her job to organizing five performances every day. When she comes home at the end of the day, she's been known to tell her husband, Brian, "I feel like I put on five birthday parties today!"

And it's not like Laveirge just goes home after work and puts her feet up. She and Brian have two young children, Dominic (8) and Mary (6). Both kids are involved in extracurricular activities like mountain biking and wrestling, and LaVeirge also participates on a mountain-biking race team.

As a parent, she reminds other parents: "The most powerful learning happens through connection. Read and sing with your children, even if you don't think you're good at it. Play games. Be silly. Dance in the kitchen—because all of these moments build confidence, creativity, and joy!"

She also has advice for new teachers just starting out: Know that there are ups and downs but the job is fun and rewarding, so stay on the ride!



Laveirge emphasizes *doing* music. Here, she models playing a xylophone. Additional photos available at [stockbridgecommunitynews.com](http://stockbridgecommunitynews.com).

## MY BODY SHOP

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BAD DRIVERS**



Bad drivers are everywhere. Should you have a run in with this particular breed, remember My Body Shop. We'll get your car back to its original condition and get you back on the road. No bones about it.

## Faces of Addiction

# From ashes to action, when pain becomes purpose



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.)*

Michigan has been quietly reshaping how communities understand addiction and support long-term healing. What's emerging is a broader Culture of Recovery—rooted in accountability, compassion, and the belief that people deserve more than a short-term fix.

Building on the Wright family's story from previous issues, including last month's "Faces of Addiction: From a drug court to a culture of recovery," we see how this statewide shift takes shape locally. What were once isolated efforts have become a coordinated movement—driven by people who refuse to let addiction define their communities.

This month we focus on a father who was not going to let addiction have the final word. In Jackson County, that commitment took on a deeply personal form. In 2010, the Hirst family's loss became the spark that gave this growing culture a local voice—one that would reshape the landscape in a remarkably short time.

That voice belongs to Mike Hirst. Before his son Andy's name became attached to a nonprofit or a housing community, Andy was simply Mike's son—a young man whose struggle began quietly, as it does for so many families.

"We never had any problems with Andy growing up—the funniest kid I ever met at a young age," Hirst recalled. "He always did what he was told. I don't ever remember him being in trouble. I told my wife, 'Something's not right with Andy—he's 16 years old and never been in trouble.' Boy, I ate those words later."

In July 2007, Andy began showing signs that something was wrong—missing work, unpredictable moods, and aggression that didn't match the son Mike knew. When asked if he was using drugs, Andy denied it, but soon after admitted he was hooked on OxyContin. Hirst remembered thinking, "Here I was worried about you being hooked on that drug 'heroin' the kids are using these days." He did not realize how similar the substances are.

On May 19, 2010, Andy lost his fight with addiction. His fourth overdose claimed his life. The senior Hirst allowed himself three days to grieve. Then he "came out swinging."

At Andy's memorial service, Mike stood before family, friends, people in active addiction, a community stunned by the loss. In that moment of grief, he spoke plainly about what needed to change. That speech became the catalyst.

"A young man who had everything going for him, every opportunity in the world, and he died sitting in an outhouse at the age of 24," Andy's father recounted.

Together with his wife and daughters, Hirst decided Andy's story would not end there. They would build something in his honor—something that might spare another family the same heartbreak.

Out of Andy's ashes arose Andy's Angels, a small nonprofit focused on support and awareness. And it soon grew into something larger. Through partnerships, persistence, and a belief that recovery deserves dignity, Andy's Angels laid the foundation for Andy's Place—Michigan's first long-term recovery housing community built specifically for individuals in drug court.

Today, Andy's Angels and Andy's Place stand as central pillars in a growing community where healing is possible, families are supported, and hope is rebuilt one life at a time. Hirst's guiding philosophy is "take away reasons why one can't do something." He believes in removing obstacles like unstable housing or lack of transportation, both of which can often derail recovery. Those efforts continue to strengthen a sober, supportive environment across Jackson County and beyond.

Inside Andy's Place, the next story begins, one that shows what this recovery culture looks like day by day. That story belongs to Edward "Eddie" Forbes and his wife, Katrina.

Eddie grew up in Stockbridge, where his addiction began early—first with drinking and marijuana, then cocaine, and eventually methamphetamine. His use stretched across more than 20 years, escalating until it left him homeless. In an ironic twist he still reflects on, "I was homeless on the lot where I became resident manager." Let that sink in.

In our next issue, we'll continue the Hirst family's story and share Eddie's journey—how he found his way to Andy's Place and what finally clicked for him.

**Resources:** Andy's Place, Jackson. Individuals can now apply through a referral from a recovery specialist or program. To apply for residency at Andy's Place: [andysangels.net/about-us/](http://andysangels.net/about-us/)

## Superintendent's Desk

# Early learning opportunities expanding for Stockbridge's youngest students



Brian Friddle

Dear Panther Families,

Stockbridge Community Schools is proud to share exciting updates about the continued growth of our Early Childhood Program. Our PreK For All program, formally known as the Great Start to Readiness Program (GSRP), has expanded significantly over the past several years to better serve our students and families.

Historically, the PreK For All program operated on a shorter schedule, beginning after the start of the K-12 school year, ending earlier in the spring, and meeting only four days per week. Two years ago, we extended the length of the school year, and last year we expanded even further. Today, our PreK for All program begins alongside our K-12 program at the start of the school year and continues through June 1. The first few days in June are used for staff to meet with families. At this time, staff share information on student growth and partner with parents in planning next steps for their child.

We also are pleased to report that last year we doubled the size of our program, expanding from

two sections to four. This growth has allowed us to make PreK For All available to all interested families in our community. This year we also added a fifth instructional day, with students now attending school on Friday as well.

Over the past three years, our Early Childhood Program has been in a period of positive change and growth. Under the leadership of our new Early Childhood director Amanda Mathews, we have focused on staff recruitment, professional development, and program quality.

Collaborations between classrooms, including our Curious Cubs tuition program for 3-year-olds, also have been a focus this year.

This has allowed us to align curriculum to best support our young learners as they move through our programs and build academic and social emotional skills to support school readiness.

*See Superintendent on page 19.*



On May 19, 2010, Andy Hirst lost his fight with addiction. His fourth overdose claimed his life. Photo from Andy's Angels Facebook page

## Test scores cont. from page 3

It's true that while reading scores among students are, in some cases, lower than those of state and nearby district averages, SCS's math scores, in most grades, are higher—by as much as 13 percentage points in some cases.

Studies have shown test scores are impacted by a number of things, including socioeconomic factors, test-specific skills and student well-being, but it's also important to recognize that test scores are only one indicator of learning success.

"I don't like to put a lot of stock in one day of testing," Hodgson said, "You just never know all the different circumstances that come to the table for families and students on that one day of testing."

Instead of relying solely on test scores to see if the new approach is working, SCS is focusing on overall growth, using benchmark assessments to track the progress of each student throughout the year. According to Hodgson, these assessments show our students are making gains across the board. Hodgson expects to see continued growth, especially in our 5th and 6th graders as they experience this new approach throughout their schooling. Also worth mentioning: Academic grade performance in the higher grades is experiencing the lowest percentage of failure that the district has seen in years.

**Policy changes.** Although her specialty is curriculum, Hodgson is quick to point out that increases in scores are not just about curriculum. "We've started over with something called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and implemented attendance initiatives that motivate students to get to school. And frankly, it's about the new policy on cellphones; we have already seen a big impact on behavior and academic engagement."

The district is also working to build a sense of personal pride on the part of the students with regard to behavior and academic performance. Kids should feel the same kind of pride for academics and school, in general, as they do for their accomplishments in extracurricular activities. By celebrating their successes, big or small, and helping them track their progress, the district is hoping kids will be motivated to do their best.

Stockbridge must be doing something right, they are receiving national attention for their success, not just in increasing test scores, but in decreasing chronic absenteeism, which is down by 12.2% since last year alone.

"Michigan Department of Education has reached out, and they're talking about doing a spotlight on the district," Hodgson said. In fact, Stockbridge Community Schools has been featured in both state and national news outlets, including "The 74," a nonprofit news organization covering America's education system from early childhood through college and career. Hodgson says, as a result, she has been contacted by the governor's senior literacy advisor to talk about what the district is doing.

**Outstanding teachers.** Despite all the recent attention the district has received, Hodgson is quick to point out where the credit for student success truly lies.

"None of this happens if you don't have outstanding teachers."

After all, it is the teachers who deliver the new curriculum and enforce new policies with their students, and it's the teachers who personally support the students in their day-to-day learning.

"The single greatest impact on student outcomes is the teacher in the classroom." Hodgson said.

And in the lead-up to this story, talking with teachers in the district and beyond, most feel strongly that testing is only one aspect of the learning experience and is often overrated.

Despite test scores still coming in below where they were pre-pandemic, it is clear things are beginning to move in a positive direction. As our teachers continue to implement positive changes and our students continue to improve, the community can look forward to seeing the impact all of this will have on our schools and, most importantly, on our students, in the years to come.

**NOTE:** Results on state testing by district are freely available at [bridgemi.com/talent-education/see-how-your-local-michigan-school-district-did-in-the-2025-m-step](http://bridgemi.com/talent-education/see-how-your-local-michigan-school-district-did-in-the-2025-m-step). A word of caution, as mentioned above, testing scores are only one indicator of how students in a district are performing.

Published in Uncaged, December 2025

## Choir honors retiring board members

by Elio Wells, Reporter

On Monday, December 8th, the Stockbridge High School Choir performed at the school board meeting to honor two retiring board members: Kary Gee and Cindy Lance.

Kary Gee has served on the school board for twelve years and originally joined because she wanted to see the school bring back the agriculture program.

"When I graduated in 1987, the ag program was about done with its very low enrollment but I knew how important it was for our kids to learn what the program had to teach," Gee said.

Gee has chosen to retire because her parents are aging and she is training the next generation to take on her duties at her family farm, as well as because her husband has retired and would like to travel.

Similarly, Cindy Lance has served on the board for sixteen years with the goal of ensuring that every child educated at Stockbridge Community Schools has the same opportunity for a bright future after getting their high school diploma, as well as to provide a safe and welcoming place for kids to learn and grow.

"The best gift we can ever give a child is safety, inclusion, and an education," Lance said.

When asked why she decided to retire, Lance said, "My youngest child Isaac is a Junior at MSU, and I feel that someone with children in the district should help to guide the future of SCS. I want to explore other ways to give back to the community we love so much."

Teagan Patterson, a sophomore and member of the high school choir, shared about her experience performing at the board meeting, saying, "It was cool, I enjoyed it."

Waiting for our last person to show up was a little stressful and nerve-wracking, but otherwise I had fun."

According to Mr. Gilbey, the choir director and vocal music teacher for Stockbridge Community Schools, many board members and people who attended the board meeting were impressed with the high school choir's performance. Gee and Lance complimented the choir similarly.

"The choir last night brought tears to my eyes and made me wonder if I was really ready to go," Gee said.

See *Uncaged* on page 17.

# Free 2026 STOCKBRIDGE PARKS & REC WINTER PROGRAMS

Most classes held at Village Hall: 118 N Center | 517-851-7435

Thank you Stockbridge Area Wellness Coalition and 5 Healthy Towns.

February	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	Sledding Station	1 Cardio Dance@ 4:30-5:30p		3 Yoga Class 10-11a		5 Drumming 7-8p	7 Yoga Vinyasa Flow 9-10a
	Behind Smith Elementary, daily, sunrise to sunset, weather permitting	2 Cardio Drumming 5:30-6:30p		10 Yoga Class 10-11a		12 Drumming 7-8p	14 Yoga Vinyasa Flow 9-10a
		6 Cardio Dance@ 4:30-5:30p Cardio Drumming 5:30-6:30p LineDance, 7-8p		17 Yoga Class 10-11a		19 Drumming 7-8p IndoorPickleball 7-8:30p, Heritage	21 Yoga Vinyasa Flow 9-10a
		3 Cardio Dance@ 4:30-5:30p Cardio Drumming 5:30-6:30p LineDance, 7-8p		24 Yoga Class 10-11a		26 Drumming 7-8p IndoorPickleball 7-8:30p, Heritage	28 Yoga Vinyasa Flow 9-10a

Find class details on Village Parks & Recreation Facebook & website.

# Active Aging The everyday practice of adoration: At the senior center and in the community

by Alexa M. Ten Eyck

Cards paired with flowers or sweet treats have long been a part of Valentine's Day celebrations. These symbols offer a visible expression of a deeper idea: adoration. Adoration is the intentional practice of noticing people and responding with care and appreciation. While it is often framed as a personal or romantic sentiment, adoration extends far beyond individual relationships.

Adoration lives in everyday moments. Ones that are often easy to overlook because they feel ordinary. A task done carefully. Time given patiently. Effort given without request. Over time, these moments accumulate. Trust grows. Connections deepen. People feel seen.



**The presence of SASC administrative assistant, Lisa Cornish, empowers the center's ability to operate as a place where people feel adored.** Photo provided by Alexa Ten Eyck.

Within communities, it becomes a shared practice, shaping how people treat one another and how effort is recognized to sustain connections. When practiced collectively, adoration instills belonging, by providing the sense that each person's presence matters. Specifically at places like the Stockbridge Area Senior Center, adoration is visible through daily action. This month the center focuses on the positive impacts of adoration by recognizing one of its most adored, our administrative assistant, Lisa Cornish.

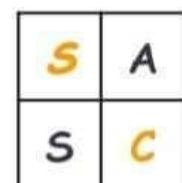
Lisa exemplifies adoration in the Stockbridge area. Over the past year, her presence empowered the center's ability to operate as a place where people feel adored. She notices people and that leads to understanding what is needed. Her response to those needs never fails to come from a place of care and appreciation. From rekindling relationships within the community to simply being present, she goes above and beyond.

Her ability to exude adoration in all things ensures those around her know their presence matters. With Lisa on the team, adoration is an inherent part of SASC's culture. People and spaces are treated with care, responsibilities are carried forward no matter what challenges are present, and people willingly support one another.

Her impact is so powerful that it extends beyond the center's walls into the broader Stockbridge community. As an ode to Lisa, for her one-year work anniversary, the culture she perpetuates will be shared outwardly with a cherished local business on Valentine's Day. Through a volunteer collaboration, SASC will help Country Petals Florals and Gifts, Inc., meet its annual Valentine's Day demand by assisting with flower prep and order delivery.

By blending Valentine's Day symbols with everyday moments that make people feel adored, these two teams encourage the Stockbridge community to stop in and take part in practicing adoration by recognizing someone like Lisa—someone to be adored in their own corner of the community.

*Alexa M. Ten Eyck is the board president of the Stockbridge Area Senior Center (SASC)—a great place to spend time. Experience firsthand a sense of connection and well-being at SASC. Visit [stockbridgeareaseniors.org](http://stockbridgeareaseniors.org), call 517-480-0353, or stop in at 219 W. Elm Street for information.*



## Uncaged page 16

"It brings me so much joy to see you kids and the amazing things you are accomplishing, and to think I may have had a small hand in your futures."

"The choir was just absolutely amazing," Lance said. "My oldest daughter sang in the choir from middle school through high school, and the arts—band, choir, and Mr. Langone's art studies—have always held a special place in my heart."

*Published as-is from the original page in Uncaged. For more information about Stockbridge's award-winning student newspaper, go to <https://uncagednews.com>. Uncaged articles are sponsored by The Stockbridge Area Educational Foundation. For more information on SAEF, visit [www.panthernet.net/our-district](http://www.panthernet.net/our-district).*



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### STOCKBRIDGE TOWNSHIP MEETING MINUTES

#### January 19, 2026

Stockbridge Township Clerk Becky Muraf called Stockbridge Township Regular Board Meeting to order on January 19, at 7:01pm at the Stockbridge Township Hall. Members present at the Stockbridge Township Board Meeting; Clerk Becky Muraf, Treasurer James Wireman, Trustee Ed Wetherell, Trustee Terry Sommer Member absent Supervisor CG Lantis

Pledge of Allegiance  
Moment of Silence

Wireman motion to accept the Stockbridge Township Board Meeting agenda as printed Wetherell Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Citizen Comments discussion

Wireman Motion to accept the Stockbridge Township Board meeting minutes from December 15, 2025, as printed Sommer Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Sommer Motion to accept the Stockbridge Township Financial report as printed Wireman Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Stockbridge Township 4th quarter building department report  
Zoning new permits 4, Building new permits 6, electrical new permits 7, mechanical new permits 9, plumbing new permits 2, driveway new permits 1, address new permits 1

Stockbridge Township had 138 calls for service for December 2025 Chief Tyler presented a Life Saving Award to Officer Ezekiel Allen along with the following letter  
To: Officer Ezekiel Allen  
From: Chief John J. Tyler  
Reference: Friday, December 12, 2025 – Motor Vehicle Crash with Fire On Friday, December 12, 2025, while on routine patrol in Stockbridge Township, you were flagged down by a concerned citizen who reported that a vehicle had just struck a tree a short distance from your location. Without hesitation, you immediately responded to the scene. Upon arrival, you observed a vehicle that had sustained extensive damage and was emitting smoke from the engine compartment. The sole occupant was trapped inside the vehicle and was attempting to escape as conditions rapidly deteriorated. Recognizing the imminent danger posed by the growing fire, you acted decisively and without regard for your own personal safety. You ran to the partially burning vehicle and forcefully assisted the victim from the wreckage. Moments later, Ingham County Sheriff's Deputy Labeling arrived on scene and assisted you in dragging the victim to a safe location away from the vehicle. Shortly thereafter, the vehicle became fully engulfed in flames. Your immediate and courageous actions unquestionably prevented a tragic loss of life. Based on the observations of other first responders on scene, as well as my review of the body-worn camera footage, it is clear that had you not acted with such speed, bravery, and determination, the victim would have perished. Your actions exemplify the highest traditions of law enforcement service and reflect great credit upon yourself, the Stockbridge Police Department, and the entire Stockbridge community.

Your willingness to place yourself in harm's way to save the life of another person demonstrates extraordinary courage, selflessness, and dedication to duty. You are an exemplary officer and a true asset to this department. On behalf of the Stockbridge Police Department and the citizens we proudly serve, thank you for your heroic actions and unwavering commitment to protecting life.

It is with great pride that this Life Saving Award is presented to you.

Respectfully,  
John J. Tyler  
Interim Chief of Police

Old Business  
Muraf motion to table 219 Elm/Rental until the next Stockbridge Township Board meeting on February 16, 2025 Wireman Second All in Favor Motion Carried

New Business  
Wireman motion to approve the following dates 2026 Stockbridge Township Meeting Dates  
3rd Monday of each month at 7:00PM February 16, 2026, March 16, 2026, April 20, 2026, May 18, 2026, June 15, 2026, July 20, 2026, August 17, 2026, September 21, 2026, October 19, 2026, November 16, 2026, December 21, 2026, January 18, 2026, Wetherell Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Muraf motion to have the Stockbridge Township budget meeting on March 23, 2026, at 4pm at the Stockbridge Township Hall and the Budget hearing on March 25, 2026, at 6pm Sommer Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Muraf motion to table Spartan Irrigation until February 16, 2026, meeting Wireman Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Sommer Motion to pay the Stockbridge Township monthly bills in the amount of \$ 179,923.38 Wetherell Second All in Favor Motion Carried

Citizen Comments None

Muraf motion to adjourn the Stockbridge Township Regular board meeting at 7:33pm on January 19, 2026  
BM



Kelsey Rasmussen

## Positive Parenting

# A love note to parents: Your best is good enough

by Kelsey Rasmussen

In July, sun-kissed children ride bikes, splash in pools and lakes, and run with the fireflies until it finally gets dark. In July, we don't bother with a Hallmark holiday to remind us of warmth and love. But this is February, and February is different. We're doing our best. Sometimes our best doesn't feel good enough. In this cold, dark month—deep into winter—let me tell you: Your best is good enough.

Let this month's column serve as a love note to you mamas and papas who need a boost. Who need to hear that all those little things you do, day in and day out, matter. That your sacrifices, willpower and generosity are what love looks like. You're doing it right:

- Every time you show up.
- Every time you take that deep breath and try again.
- Every time you say thank you...Or hear it.
- Every time you dig so deep you discover just enough patience and grace.
- Every time you tuck them in. Again. And again.
- Every time you rise to the challenge when you'd rather stay in bed.
- Every time you find a way to redirect instead of yell.
- Every time you get vomited on and help the child before changing your own sweatshirt.
- Every time you let go of the little things for the sake of what really matters.
- Every time you set down the phone and listen.
- Every time you prepare a hot meal...Or a cold one.
- Every time you read them a book.
- Every time you tell them the story. Again.
- Every time you play.
- Every time you make a joke.
- Every time you laugh at their joke.
- Every time you model forgiveness.

Spring will come again, mama or papa. In the meantime—you're crushing it!

**Activity Highlight:** Make Valentine's cards for teachers, grandparents, or siblings, using a potato stamp. It's easy with these instructions from TheSpruceCrafts.com.

1. Cut a potato in half.
2. Draw shape on the potato.
3. Cut away the potato around the shape so that the shape is sticking out from the rest of the potato.
4. Dip the shaped part of the potato in water-based paint.
5. Stamp potato on the paper.
6. Let the paper dry and decorate the stamped shape or write names and a poem with markers or crayons.

NOTE: For younger kids, use safety scissors to cut a heart of out of a sponge instead of a potato to make a stamp.

*Kelsey Rasmussen is a local resident and full-time parent of preschool-aged twins.*



Let this month's column serve as a love note to all of you mamas and papas who need a boost. Photo credit Kelsey Rasmussen



Make Valentine's cards for teachers, grandparents, or siblings, using a potato stamp.

## Wellness Coalition page 1

"We're thrilled to offer these programs to our community. Winter can be a challenging season to stay active and social, so this funding allowed us to provide a variety of free or low-cost activities that are simple to join and accessible to everyone," said Heather Armstrong, Stockbridge Village manager. "Whether it's yoga, pickleball, painting, line dancing, or sledding, there's something for people of all ages to enjoy, and it's a great way to stay connected with neighbors and friends!"

Classes continue as the calendar turns to February, and it's never too late to join the fun. Sessions are free, with the option to tip teachers or contribute to their equipment funds. Following is the schedule through the end of March, as it stands now:

*\*Where indicated, the program is free; gratuities are welcome but not required*

- Cardio dance: Mondays, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.
- Cardio drumming: Mondays, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.
- Line dancing: Mondays, 7 to 8 p.m. at Village Hall. Free\*. NOTE: No class Feb. 2 or March 2.
- Yoga: Wednesdays, 10-11 a.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.
- Guided hands-on art projects: Wednesdays, 6:30-8 p.m. at Village Hall. Please register in advance to reserve your materials. Email Debbie at [stockbridgeparks@vosmi.org](mailto:stockbridgeparks@vosmi.org).
- Cardio drumming: Fridays, 7-8 p.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.
- Vinyasa Flow Yoga: Saturdays, 9-10 a.m. at Village Hall. Free\*.
- Indoor pickleball: Fridays, 7 to 8:30 p.m. at Heritage School. Free.

NOTE: No session Feb. 13.

*See SAWC on page 19.*

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## SAWC cont. from page 18

- Sledding station: Located behind Smith Elementary. Always open, weather conditions permitting. Free. A few loaner sleds are available at the hill on a first come, first served basis.

Those interested in an early spring challenge can look forward to the Couch to 5K session coming up in March. Follow the Village of Stockbridge on Facebook at facebook.com/StockbridgeMI for more information about classes as well as schedule updates.

Funding is provided by 5 Healthy Towns Foundation as part of its support of Wellness Coalitions in Dexter, Chelsea, Grass Lake, Manchester, and Stockbridge (which includes Munith and Gregory). The foundation made \$90,000 available to Stockbridge and the other 5 Healthy Towns in April 2025. Funding decisions are made by SAWC on programs that address eating better, moving more, and improved mental well-being. As of mid-January, the coalition has \$62,900 left for its grant allocations; the funding expires in March 2028.

Stay tuned for our March article to see a recap of the Coalition Open House that was held on Jan. 20 and to take a look at some data from the 5 Healthy Towns Survey conducted in late 2025.



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

## Superintendent page 15

The results of this work are evident in our fully staffed dedicated preschool teams, and are showing in our literacy and observational data. The children already have shown large growth in alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness, and are continuing to build key social emotional skills daily.

Our Early Childhood staff play a critical role in helping our 3- and 4-year-olds learn how to be students, developing social skills, learning through play, building strong relationships, and becoming comfortable in our school environment. These foundational experiences support a smooth transition through our Early Childhood programs and into kindergarten. When students begin their kindergarten journey, there is a noticeable difference between those who have participated in our Early Childhood program and those who have not. Our district is proud to offer programs for both our 3- and 4-year-old learners. Our Connect 4 Learning curriculum and Letter Lesson small groups provide early learning experiences that are helping prepare students to read and progress at grade level when they enter our K-12 program.

We are excited about the growth in our program, and are looking to further strengthen our Early Childhood program in years to come. Currently, we have enrollment open for this school year, as well as the 2026-2027 school year. Families can find the application on our district webpage under our Early Childhood Department. For more information on our Early Childhood programs, we

encourage families to reach out to Amanda Mathews through email at amathews@panthernet.net; or call 517-851-7735.

Go Panthers,  
Amanda Mathews, Early Childhood director  
Brian Friddle, Superintendent of Schools

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The board of the Stockbridge Community News would like to thank the people who have sent us donations during 2025. We appreciate each donation, regardless of the amount. Every donation is put to good use to cover the costs of printing, mailing, and posting the Stockbridge Community News.

We are grateful for the encouragement and support of all who have helped bring the Stockbridge Community News to light. While those who have contributed their time and effort are too numerous to mention here, SCN will be forever grateful to our Charter Sponsors (those who donated start-up funds, Nov. 2016 – May 2017) for their generous donations.

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