

# Down Syndrome Association announces campaign, new location

Leadership of the Down Syndrome Association of West Michigan Foundation Thursday announced the Connecting Communities campaign, an \$850,000 fund-

raising effort to move its headquarters to the new Special Olympics facility in Cutlerville, expand staff and programming services, and build sustainability through an en-

hanced endowment fund. DSAWMF was established in 2012 to ensure the financial sustainability of its sister organization, the Down Syndrome Association of

West Michigan. Founded in 1985 by six couples who had children with Down syndrome, the DSAWM's original aim was to provide support and share knowledge with other families.

Through the years, the goals of the organization have broadened to include regular programming for children, teens and adults with Down syndrome. DSAWM also serves as an advocacy group, raises public awareness about Down syndrome, and provides for distribution of information relevant to Down syndrome.

The DSAWM serves hundreds of local families by providing enriching recreational, social and skill-building activities for area residents with special needs and their families. These activities help build a network of support for the families and their children, leading to life-long friendships and a connected community that provides support for families raising children with disabilities.

Launched last year, the Connecting Communities campaign has raised more than \$800,000 over the past several months, 95 percent of the overall campaign goal. More than 75 community donors, local businesses and area foundations have supported the campaign, to date.

DSAWMF and DSAWM leaders already have relocated their offices to the Special Olympics campus at 160 68th St. SW. The facility, formerly South Christian High School, has been transformed into the largest Special Olympics training and inclusion center in the world. The new facility provides significantly more space for Special Olympics

and DSAWM program staff, volunteers and area youth and adults.

Jim Leach, president of Hobart Sales and Service, and Rich Kloeckner, product and operations manager at Rapidparts Inc., invite the public to join in the fundraising effort which will continue through the end of the year.

"The invitation to join the Special Olympics at this new campus was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Leach said. "As we work to provide the very best in programming for children and adults with Down syndrome, I am pleased to be part of an effort that truly gives area families a strong support network, provides children with a place where they feel like they belong, and builds partnerships with like-minded organizations."

"Demand for our programs is increasing," Kloeckner said. "Currently, we are providing support to nearly 350 people with Down syndrome in the counties we serve, and we anticipate serving many more families over the next several years as West Michi-

gan grows." Bob Boylen, DSAWMF board chair, announced that the campaign has received support from local and regional foundations, area businesses and community donors.

"We have been so fortunate to receive gifts to this important campaign. Our campaign cabinet joins me in thanking the community for their meaningful gifts," Boylen said. "We now invite the broader community to help us complete this campaign effort. We welcome gifts of all sizes."

The announcement marks the beginning of the public phase of the \$850,000 campaign.

"This is an exceptional opportunity for our community to help build a strong network of support for children and adults that sometimes struggle to find activities and opportunities that meet their abilities," Leach said. "If we can provide the venue, we know we can reach more families."

More information campaign can be found at [dsawmfoundation.org/connecting-communities](http://dsawmfoundation.org/connecting-communities).

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### NEWS BRIEFS

#### The Accidentals playing here tomorrow

Three self-declared orchestra dorks, or "ore dorks," and an ensemble of eclectic instrumentalists will wrap up the regular schedule of Hastings Live, the free summer entertainment series.

Both groups will play at Thompsonville Plaza downtown Hastings, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own chairs or blankets for seating.

The Accidentals will return tomorrow night, Aug. 20, for the Friday Night Fiasco.

This multi-instrumental trio from the Traverse City area blends indie folk, pop and rock into a sound all its own, incorporating members' interlocking-trained string-instrument skills.

An Dm plays a blend of traditional and original melodies from across the globe. They will play Wednesday, Aug. 25. Listeners will hear traditional Irish melodies, medieval French songs, Breton dance tunes, Scandinavian refrains, Appalachian influences, Andean rhythms, and African grooves all performed with joy and freshness.

The Summerfest series will fill the stage next week, with performances by Rocked Root, Zane Lane, Hord, California, Brothers Adam, Silentfall, Toppenn and Sherry When Wet (More details next week).

More information on Hastings Live can be found at [facebook.com/hastingslive](http://facebook.com/hastingslive).

#### Back to school

Teachers, students and their families are preparing for a new school year with new gear and a new, or familiar, routine. Students in the Lakeside Public School district have already found their lockers and desks, met their teachers and walked the halls again, since school resumed there yesterday.

Local public schools and their start dates include:

Lakeside - Wednesday, Aug. 18  
Hastings - Monday, Aug. 23  
Maple Valley - Monday, Aug. 23  
Thompsonville - Tuesday, Sept. 7

#### Hastings church hosting blood drive Tuesday

Eligible donors can help overcome the critical need for blood and ensure blood is readily available by making an appointment to give blood.

New Life Assembly Church east of Hastings is hosting a blood drive Tuesday, and appointment slots are still available. The drive will be Aug. 24 from noon to 5:45 p.m. The church is at 1400 E. State Road.

Individuals who are at least 17 years old, weigh a minimum of 110 pounds and are in generally good health may be eligible to donate blood. A blood donor card or driver's license or two other forms of identification are required at check-in.

Opening local drives include Grace Community Church, Nashville, Sept. 2; UAW 1002 Bradford White Hall, Middleville, Sept. 8; and First Presbyterian Church, Hastings, Sept. 10.

Appointments are preferred and may be made by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](http://RedCrossBlood.org) or calling 800-733-7327.

See NEWS BRIEFS, page 2

## Some stick up for the sheriff

Between Pierce

A highly publicized probe into allegations of fraud in the November 2020 election led some commissioners' questions at last week's meeting after Leif presented his annual report.



Charles Hottel



Michael Lyons

Mike Marlow of Hope Township, Michael Lyons of Delton, Don Bradstreet of Hastings, and Adam Haskins, a Hastings business owner.

The fact that commissioners asked questions about the sheriff's investigation was a problem for some.

White said, "I voted for the sheriff. I voted for the clerk. I'm concerned that the clerk has an attorney. I haven't seen this board ask the clerk any questions."

Ellen Shellenbarger said, "The sheriff doesn't have a duty to explain to you guys what's going on. He's not obligated to say anything. You should be arrested for obstruction of justice."

Don Bradstreet, who spoke from a wheelchair, pointed the table in front of him. "I'm sick and tired of elected officials not doing what they're elected to do. When I hear you are not supporting the Sheriff like you should, I feel like you should be... and will be - held accountable."

See SHERIFF, page 2

## Barry County's on the grow

Census shows what's driving development

New population figures from the U.S. Census Bureau show Barry County as one of the fastest-growing counties in the state. According to official 2020 Census figures released last Thursday, the county's population grew 4.3 percent over the past decade to 62,423 residents. The increase was the eighth largest among Michigan's 83 counties. The 2010 census showed the county at 59,173 residents.

The county's population increase reflected a larger overall migration of people to the west side of the state.

Of the four fastest-growing counties in the state in the new census, three of them (Ontonagon at 12.3 percent, Kent at 9.2 percent and Allegan at 8.2 percent) are in West Michigan. Grand Traverse was the fourth.

See CENSUS, page 2

## Barry County population changes since 2010

	2010	2020	percent
Thompsonville Township	7,884	9,331	+18.4
City of Hastings	7,250	7,514	+3.6
Yankes Township	4,065	5,222	+28.9
Village of Middleville	3,310	4,285	+29.4
Rutland Township	3,987	4,136	+3.7
Ionia Township	3,250	3,724	+14.9
Barry Township	3,378	4,417	+30.8
Orangeville Township	3,311	3,368	+1.7
Princeton Township	3,404	3,324	-2.3
Casselman Township	3,471	3,323	-4.1
Hope Township	3,239	3,154	-2.6
Hastings Township	2,848	3,013	+5.8
Johnstown Township	3,608	3,841	+6.5
Carlton Township	2,391	2,368	-1.0
Woodland Township	2,047	1,994	-2.6
Assyria Township	1,986	1,992	+0.3
Baltimore Township	1,861	1,947	+4.6
Maple Grove Township	1,593	1,599	+0.4
Village of Nashville	1,628	1,537	-5.6
Village of Freeport	483	542	+12.2
Village of Woodland	425	291	-31.3

## No mask mandate in Hastings schools when new year begins

Benjamin Simon

Hastings Area School System officials reiterated their plan to start the 2021-22 school year without mask mandates when they held back-to-back classes on Aug. 23.

Superintendent Matt Grobel began Monday's board of education meeting with a statement updating the public on the district's policies.

"We are following exactly what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services are recommending. We are recommending mask-wearing, but not mandating it, and leaving it up to the staff and parents to decide what is best for their individual situation," Grobel said.

"There will be no intended or unintended pressure, coercion, segregation or discrimination of anyone for wearing or not wearing a mask based on their choice or beliefs."

The meeting was attended by nearly 50 people, with the majority of tables in the middle school cafeteria occupied. The school district decision was met with thanks from people in the audience.

"I appreciate the board doing what they did earlier," Kelli Case said.

Case went on to add that she is fearful the mask policy may change in the future. She pointed to Grand Rapids Public Schools, where masks will be required in the fall.

"So, we are asking you... to make the choice for all of our children and our grandchildren to do the right thing," she said.

"There are so many people out here that the mask just doesn't work."

Others expressed disappointment in the decision. Sarah Barnum said she is a pharmacist and works in a hospital.

"I'm trying to understand where we're coming from if our transmission is extremely high - and it is," she said. "We are having increased hospitalizations. So I'm trying to understand why we're waiting for them to force it upon us."

During his opening statement, Grobel noted that the district will continue with several COVID-19-prevention measures, such as social distancing, contact tracing, hand washing, sanitizing, lowering lunch room numbers, draining buses and limiting visitors. A federal mandate requires children to wear masks on school buses.

In addition to the discussion about masks, several residents stood up and discussed the recently failed bond request.

School district voters turned down the Aug. 3 bond proposal, which would have generated \$19.9 million for the schools. The funding would have gone primarily to pay for maintenance needs, such as a new roof, replacing windows, renovating bathrooms, improving air quality and more. If passed, the millage rate would have leapt 0.6 mills. It will now drop to 6 mills.

With 3,200 total votes - 1,609 people voted against the bond and 1,610 voted for the bond.

In the first public comment of the evening, Ellen Shellenbarger pushed back against the district's decision to ask for the tax levy in the first place.

"You guys spent more money than you should have," she said.

See MANDATE, page 2



The current map of the Watson Drain district shows the area involved.

## \$5.5 million Watson Drain project is one for the history books

Rebecca Pierce

The \$5.5 million Watson Drain project may very well be the biggest project of its kind in the history of Barry County.

Drain Commissioner Jim Dall and Deputy Drain Commissioner Tammy Hays say, in their knowledge of the history of the county drain department, they are not aware of any other project as extensive - or expensive - as Watson.

The boundaries of the district span over Dracutite and Barry townships in south-

western Barry County, encompassing Pleasant Lake, Upper Crooked Lake and Lower Crooked Lake and involving involve 1,002 parcels, property owners and municipalities.

The multimillion-dollar cost for the extensive work will be assessed over 20 years to the parcels that derive benefits from the district.

The key phrase in determining who's assessed for the work is the term "benefits driven," Dall said.

See DRAIN, page 7

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