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# OBSERVER

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2020 | HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

## First St. Mary Mercy staff receive COVID-19 vaccine

Shelby Tankersley Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

What many are calling the beginning of the end of a global nightmare arrived Wednesday at St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia.

The first wave of staff lined up to receive the first of two doses of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine. Linsey Lozon, a 36-year-old emergency department nurse who lives in Allen Park, was first in line.

"It feels amazing," she said. "It feels like I can finally take a breath and that, yes, the sun is going to shine again through all of this."

Lozon volunteered to be the first, saying she was willing to be the example if the hospital needed one. Between 800 and 1,000 vaccines arrived at St. Mary Mercy for the first wave of staff; more is expected to come every week.

"It really is a true and emotional turning point," Dr. Matthew Griffin, the

hospital's chief medical officer, said. "We really feel like we're now able to do something proactive. We're moving from playing defense all the time to doing something we really believe is the beginning of the end for the COVID-19 pandemic."

Across the country, health care professionals and patients in long-term care facilities will be the first to have the

See **VACCINE**, Page 5A



The JCPenney on Ford Road in Canton will close in March, according to the company.

DAVID VESELENAK/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

## Canton JCPenney to close in spring

David Veselenak Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Canton Township is about to lose yet another major retailer along Ford Road.

JCPenney announced its store at 43690 Ford Road will join 14 others nationwide in closing their doors this spring and is an addition to 150 others previously announced to close by the company.

"As part of our store optimization strategy that began in June with our financial restructuring, we have made the decision to close an additional 15 stores," reads a statement from JCPenney sent to Hometown Life. "These stores will begin liquidation sales later this month and will close to the public in mid-to-late March."

"While store closure decisions are

See **JCPENNEY**, Page 5A

YEAR IN REVIEW PHOTOS

## 2020 wasn't all COVID-19 and face masks, but mostly it was



John Heider  
Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

You could say I miss seeing and photographing people's faces and large, joyous groups together. Perhaps we all do. When I look back at the 3,500 images I submitted in 2020, as the staff photographer for Hometown Life, it all looks pretty normal for the first few months. • Last January photos taken at a Farmington High and South Lyon East basketball game showed athletes arm-in-arm, a few inches from each other, and then young fans

See **2020**, Page 3A

Susie Thurukian, left, gets a puppy kiss from Murphy held by Lauren Sumerix at the Oct. 22 Northville Farmers Market. Both women were masked up at the outdoor event, but no one told Murphy he had to wear his.

JOHN HEIDER/  
HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

## Locals share their 2021 resolutions

Shelby Tankersley Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

For many people, the start of a new year feels like a chance to start over.

After a year dominated by a global pandemic that kept many people from seeing family and friends as much as they would have liked, getting back to a sense of normalcy is at the forefront of many locals' minds heading into 2021.

Hometown Life asked members several community Facebook groups what their hopes and resolutions for the new year are. A few common themes emerged among neighbors.

(Some comments have been edited for clarity.)

See **RESOLUTIONS**, Page 5A



# Geddes Road wreck sends two to the hospital

Susan Vela Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Two people were hospitalized after a Dec. 21 head-on collision near Geddes and Beck roads in Canton Township.

A Monroe resident, 19, was driving eastbound on Geddes when his vehicle crashed into a 2012 GMC traveling in the opposite direction at about 7:45 a.m., according to township police.

The Monroe teen was transported to a local hospital, where he remains in serious but stable condition.

The other driver, 29, of Ypsilanti was taken to a hospital, too, but for precautionary measures.

Alcohol apparently was not a factor. An investigation continues.

Anyone with information is encouraged to contact the public safety department, 734-394-5400.

Contact reporter Susan Vela at svela@hometownlife.com or 248-303-8432. Follow her on Twitter @susanvela.

## hometownlife.com

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### Newsroom Contacts:

Phil Allmen, Content Strategist  
Mobile: 248-396-3870

Email: pallmen@hometownlife.com

Follow us on Facebook: @OEHometown

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# Protect yourself from COVID-19 pandemic relief package scams



## Money Matters

Rick Bloom  
Guest columnist

I first would like to take the opportunity to wish you and yours a very happy and healthy 2021. Thank you, once again, for giving me the privilege and honor to write this column and help you make better decisions with your money. My belief has been that money looks better in your pocket than it does anywhere else, and that always has been my guiding principle in writing this column.

Therefore, as we enter 2021, my commitment to you is stronger than ever to make sure I provide you with up-to-date and useful information to help you better handle your personal financial affairs.

As I write this column, Congress has just passed a \$900 billion pandemic relief package that the President is expected to sign. The legislation is over 5,500 pages long, (the longest piece of legislation in U.S. history) and contains a variety of financial relief for both individuals and businesses. As part of the legislation, most Americans will receive upwards of \$600 in direct stimulus payments, and those on unemployment will receive, temporarily, a \$300 a week supplemental benefit.

Just like with the last stimulus payment, you will not have to do anything to collect your money. According to the gov-

ernment, many Americans could begin receiving their stimulus money before the end of the year.

The purpose of the column is not to break down all the details of the stimulus plan, but to once again, remind you that just like with the last stimulus plan, the scam artists will be out in force attempting to scam you out of your money and seek your sensitive information.

We saw this type of activity with the first stimulus plan, and I have no doubt we will see it again. Therefore, I believe it is important to remind you of these scams and the importance of keeping your guard up.

First, the Internal Revenue Service, who is in charge of distributing the stimulus payments will not call, email or text you, asking you to either provide or verify information in order to process your stimulus payment. Therefore, if you get a call, a text or an email from anyone, including the IRS, requesting information, you know it is bogus and there's no reason to respond.

At the time the last stimulus payments were made, many people received emails, texts and calls from people suggesting that if people pay a fee, they will be able to get their stimulus check faster. Once again, this is not true. You do not have to pay anyone to get your stimulus money, and anyone suggesting that is attempting to scam you.

Another tactic scammers use is to contact people to tell them that even though they have received their stimulus

payment, additional information is required. The text or the email then links to a legitimate-looking website seeking a variety of sensitive information. Once again, this is a scam.

The scammers are attempting to obtain your sensitive information. If you receive an email or text like that, the only course of action is to immediately delete it.

I have no doubt that the scam artists will come up with new twists in their attempt to take advantage of us. That is why it is important that we remain vigilant. It's important to remember that scam artists are good at what they do, and they use many sophisticated tactics. However, by being vigilant, we can protect ourselves. Remember, you don't have to do anything to receive your stimulus money, you don't have to pay anyone to do it for you, and if anyone texts, email or calls you regarding your stimulus money, you know they are bogus.

Just like it is important for us to wear our masks and to keep our social distance, in order to beat the coronavirus, we also have to take precautions to protect ourselves and to beat the people who look for every opportunity to take advantage of us.

Good luck!

Rick Bloom is a fee-only financial advisor. His website is www.bloomadvisors.com. If you would like Rick to respond to your questions, please email Rick at rick@bloomadvisors.com.

# Teacher denies sexual misconduct claims

Susan Vela Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

A former Clarenceville teacher is asking a federal judge to permanently dismiss a lawsuit filed by young women claiming he sexually assaulted them as students.

Jason DeBandt is also asking for monetary compensation tied to the legal battle that began with his former students' social media campaign over the summer.

DeBandt, most recently known to be employed by Farmington Public Schools, was placed on paid administrative leave as his accusers joined forces with attorneys and local police began investigations.

The 10 young women who have banded together for the lawsuit claim their former choir and theater teacher "sexu-

ally assaulted, abused, molested and/or harassed" them between 2008 and 2018.

They are also suing Clarenceville schools and some of the district's top administrators because they say district officials should have known about DeBandt's misconduct at the middle and high schools and done more to prevent the alleged abuse from happening.

In DeBandt's response, entered into the U.S. District Court record earlier this month, his attorneys frequently state that the substance of the women's statements, claims and allegations is untrue.

Yet, he does admit to some particulars such as writing passes for a student, using the Telegram app for theater messages and writing the following in a Madison High School student's yearbook: "It's amazing how much more we can convey with a look than I could ever write with words. Talk to me soon."

One former student said DeBandt once bought her form-fitting jeans and yoga pants and asked her to wear them to school. He apparently would comment that he liked the way her body looked in the pants.

"On one occasion he replaced jeans because Plaintiff's mother expressed concern about them being damaged at the tech building," DeBandt's attorneys wrote in their client's response. "The balance of the allegations are denied as untrue."

DeBandt's attorneys also contend some of the former students' claims and allegations should be barred because of the state's statute of limitations.

No decision has been made.

Contact reporter Susan Vela at svela@hometownlife.com or 248-303-8432. Follow her on Twitter @susanvela.

## Plymouth police reviewing aborted ATM theft

Susan Vela Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Plymouth police are investigating a recently attempted theft of a Chase

Bank ATM machine.

They were dispatched to the bank at 980 Ann Arbor Road just west of Main Street just before 4 a.m. Thursday because of an alarm, police said in partial-

ly-redacted reports.

Upon arrival, police found that an ATM from the drive-thru lanes was ripped from its mooring and removed.

Someone was running away from a vehicle near the branch's South Harvey Street entrance.

The damaged ATM was on its side as

if it had been dragged. There were chains attached to the machine.

Police later learned the vehicle was stolen. There was no evidence the ATM was broken into.

No other information was available.

### Notice of Public Hearing

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF PLYMOUTH, WAYNE COUNTY, MICHIGAN  
PLANNING COMMISSION

**PROPOSED ACTION:** Amendment to the Text of the Charter Township of Plymouth Zoning Ordinance No. 99 by Amending Article 28.18: Special Provisions - MU, Mixed-Use Development  
**DATE OF HEARING:** Wednesday, January 20, 2021  
**TIME OF HEARING:** 7:00 P.M.  
**PLACE OF HEARING:** Virtual Meeting - Zoom Application

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the Planning Commission of the Charter Township of Plymouth proposes to amend the text of the Zoning Ordinance No. 99 by amending Article 28, Special Provisions to create Section 18: MU, Mixed-Use Development, at a regular meeting of the Planning Commission. The proposed text amendment would permit the Planning Commission to consider a mix of neighborhood commercial and residential uses in the R-2-A, Multiple Family Residential district. Such uses would be considered special land uses and only permitted after review and approval by the Planning Commission, in accordance with the procedures and standards per Section 2.7 of the Zoning Ordinance, in addition to other use requirements.

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that persons interested may participate in the public hearing via Zoom at: <https://mcka.zoom.us/j/99489629474>

**Zoom meeting ID:** 994 8962 9474  
Or use one tap mobile:  
+13126266799,,99489629474# US (Chicago)

Or dial by your location:  
+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)  
Find your local number: <https://mcka.zoom.us/j/abmyK5mSkH>

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that Plymouth Township reserves the option of having the meeting at Township Hall Offices, 9955 N. Haggerty Road, Plymouth, Michigan 48170 depending on the regulations that may exist at that time.

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that persons interested may also mail correspondence to Plymouth Township Hall, attn. Community Development Department or send an email to: [planning@plymouthtwp.org](mailto:planning@plymouthtwp.org). Pertinent information is on file at the Plymouth Township, Public Services Department (second floor counter) and may be viewed during regular business hours from 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

The Charter Township of Plymouth will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services to individuals with disabilities at the public hearing upon one week's advance notice by writing or calling the Supervisor's Office, 9955 N. Haggerty Road, Plymouth, Michigan 48170; (734) 354-3201.

Kendra Barberena, Secretary, Planning Commission

Publish: January 3, 2021

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### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF PLYMOUTH, WAYNE COUNTY, MICHIGAN  
PLANNING COMMISSION

**APPLICATION NO.:** #2362-0620  
**APPLICATION:** 46200 N. Territorial - Cluster Housing Option (CHO)  
- Revised Plans  
**APPLICANT:** Mr. Leo Soave, Leo Soave Development  
**PROPOSED ACTION:** Consideration and Approval of a Cluster Housing Option  
**DATE OF HEARING:** Wednesday, January 20, 2021  
**TIME OF HEARING:** 7:00 P.M.  
**PLACE OF HEARING:** Virtual Meeting - Zoom Application

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the Planning Commission of the Charter Township of Plymouth has received a revised application requesting Cluster Housing Option (CHO) consideration and approval on Tax ID No. R-78-033-99-0004-000 pursuant to Zoning Ordinance No. 99, as amended. The property is located at 46200 N. Territorial Road. The site is zoned the R-1-H, Single Family Residential district. Section 22.1 of the Zoning Ordinance permits optional methods of development and arrangement of single-family structures on parcels less than forty (40) acres as a Cluster Housing Option in the R-1-S District. The applicant is proposing a residential single-family home development (9, single-family, detached homes) on approximately ±5 acres with access from North Territorial Road.

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that persons interested may participate in the public hearing via Zoom at: <https://mcka.zoom.us/j/99489629474>

**Zoom meeting ID:** 994 8962 9474  
Or use one tap mobile:  
+13126266799,,99489629474# US (Chicago)

Or dial by your location:  
+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)  
Find your local number: <https://mcka.zoom.us/j/abmyK5mSkH>

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Publish by: On, or before January 3, 2021

Kendra Barberena, Secretary, Planning Commission  
Publish: December 31, 2020

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TOP: Livonia Fire Department personnel salute during the playing of the National Anthem.

LEFT: Nada Mickels uses a bullhorn to get a call-and-response going with other protesters on June 4 in Livonia. Mickels was there with her children Natasha and Jadan. PHOTOS BY JOHN HEIDER /HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

# 2020

Continued from Page 1A

in the stands — mouths wide open in a wild cheer. Later that month it was throngs of people crowded into Novi's Suburban Collection Showplace, more than a hundred in one room, hoping to get a tryout for America's Got Talent.

Later still that first month of 2020 I photographed a bunch of Salem Rock kids crowding around Michigan's Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist II for a selfie photo. Even then I privately worried about this infectious virus radiating out from China: "should 30-some people be together in a small high school room at the same time?"

The concept of keeping six feet from one another and mask-wearing would come later and begin to infect the vast majority of photos I snapped for the rest of the year.

The first of my photos that showed the impact of the coronavirus begin in late March of this year. Images of eerily-empty school and mall parking lots contrasted with an oddly over-crowded parking lot at Royal Oak's Beaumont hospital — one of the first in the area to offer testing for this novel coronavirus.

Around that same time I photographed a novel concept whereby Plymouth neighbors got together outdoors, spaced well apart, to catch up with one another. We started calling it "social distancing."

After March 2 it was a marathon, for months on end, of photos of empty stores with encouraging signs for their customers, food distributions for those familie needing a little extra support, communities staging acts and events of appreciation for their front-liners, images of tentative re-openings, drive-up graduations and businesses adapting to, and sometimes thriving in, the new era of pandemic life.

Here is a look at some of our favorite images from 2020. It wasn't all COVID-19 and face masks and social distancing... but it was, mostly. And it wasn't all bad or sad, but honestly it wasn't that much fun either.

*John Heider is the staff photographer for Hometown Life and can be reached at [jheider@hometownlife.com](mailto:jheider@hometownlife.com) or 734-972-6545.*



As they await the flyover by the Michigan Air National Guard 127th Wing, Novi Ascension Providence Hospital nurse Gabrielle DoPico, right, takes a group selfie of some of her compatriots from labor and delivery.



Santa Claus helps to deliver some holiday cheer on Dec. 4 at Northville Civic Concern's annual holiday distribution day. Civic Concern made sure that its clients received food and essential household goods and a fair amount of gift cards to local retailers so they could shop for their own Christmas needs.

**It wasn't all COVID-19 and face masks and social distancing... but it was, mostly. And it wasn't all bad or sad, but honestly it wasn't that much fun either.**



Northville Township Precinct 12 worker David Pitcock, left, signs up voters so they can cast their ballots on Aug. 4.

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## New owners rebrand, rename popular Livonia restaurant

David Veselenak [HometownLife.com](http://HometownLife.com)  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Fans of the former House of Leon restaurant in Livonia have had quite a scare driving past the business the last few weeks.

No worries to those thinking their popular restaurant is gone, say the owners, it's just a rebrand and new name.

The restaurant at 29041 W. Seven Mile between Inkster and Middlebelt has recently gone through an identity change, but retains the same ownership and similar menu.

Goodbye House of Leon, hello Livonia Town Grill.

"We didn't see anything like that close, and we kind of liked the name," said Steve Gjura, a longtime manager of the restaurant that purchased it earlier this year with his wife, Mirela. "When we applied (to purchase the restaurant), we already had the name chosen."

Steve Gjura has worked at the family restaurant for many years, and was a manager for more than a decade. After hearing the ownership was looking to retire, he and Mirela decided it would be a logical next step to take over the space.

"I got to know all the customers and I got to know everyone, and I felt good with them, like family," he said. "And I said, 'Might as well,' since the owner was about to retire. So I said I'll take over."

The couple, who lives in Farmington Hills, made several improvements inside right after purchasing the restaurant, including redoing the bathrooms, taking out the carpet and replacing with tile; and purchasing new chairs and tables.

Of course, those indoor improvements have only been used for part of the year, as indoor dining has been prohibited by the state for several months of 2020 to slow the spread of COVID-19. The Gjuras had no idea what was in store for them when they purchased the restaurant, but said they've been prepared to weather the storm as much as possible.



The Livonia Town Grill at 29041 W. Seven Mile Road.

JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

"As soon as we bought it, the virus comes," he said. "We didn't rush making decisions."

The purchase only affects the restaurant on the south side of Seven Mile. Another similar restaurant, Leon's Family Dining at 28904 W. Seven Mile, continues to operate under the former owner. Steve Gjura said while the two had different spaces and similar names, Livonia Town Grill focuses more on lunch and dinner entrees, while the restaurant across the street focuses more on breakfast.

### Plenty of loyal customers

The menu at Livonia Town Grill features much of the same food it served as House of Leon, with a focus on homemade. The Gjuras have added some new dishes, such as Italian food like alfredo, as well as more trendy favorites such as an avocado salad. Customers have taken well to some of the new additions, Steve Gjura said.

"They try to check them out and they like them," he said.

While dine-in is currently not allowed, the restaurant continues to offer carryout to customers who come from communities such as Livonia, Redford Township and Farmington Hills.

"We've been a little steady," Steve Gjura said. "We have regular and loyal customers who support us during this time."

During more normal times, Steve Gjura said they'll routinely have customers that will drive from as far as Milford to dine in.

Hours for the restaurant's carryout are from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekends. Those looking to place an order can call the restaurant at 248-478-3710. A menu can be viewed at [livoniatowngrill.com](http://livoniatowngrill.com).

## Contract not renewed for Novi field hospital

David Veselenak [HometownLife.com](http://HometownLife.com)  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

The State of Michigan will not renew contracts that created a pair of field hospitals to treat COVID-19 patients in an overflow capacity earlier this year.

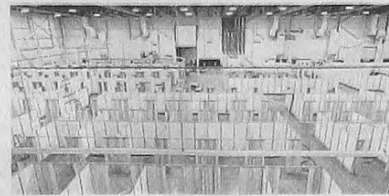
Lynn Sutfin, public information officer for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, said in an email to Hometown Life the state will not renew the contracts after they expire Dec. 31. The field hospitals were established at the Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River in Novi; and the TCF Center in downtown Detroit.

"The alternate care sites were established so that Michiganders with COVID-19 could receive high-quality care despite hospital beds filling up in southeast Michigan," she said. "The second surge of the virus in Michigan is very different than the first, which means a different approach is needed for patients to receive the care they need and deserve as hospitals experience the potential for capacity issues. There is no longer a need for regional alternate care sites in southeast Michigan, so the leases for the TCF Center and Suburban Collection Showplace will not be extended once they expire at the end of the year."

Both convention centers were tapped earlier in the spring as overflow facilities to treat COVID-19 patients as they filled hospitals across the region. TCF Center was brought online in early April and treated patients for less than a month before closing; Suburban Collection Showplace was opened in late April and closed in early June after treating 16 patients.

The original contract with Suburban Collection Showplace was in place until Sept. 30, though the state extended that contract by three months earlier in the year to keep the facility as a backup in case it was needed.

The contract at the Suburban Collection Showplace originally called for the state to pay the center \$1.1 million per month in the first six months, followed by \$975,000 per month for the final



The Army Corps of Engineers sets up the Suburban Showplace in Novi to treat COVID-19 patients on April 11 in Novi. The state will not renew the contract to keep the facility as a field hospital in 2021.

KIRTHMON F. DOZIER/DETROIT FREE PRESS

three months of 2020 for usage of part of the center. The convention center has seen little activity since the pandemic hit Michigan in March: many of the events planned at the center were canceled, including the upcoming Southeast Michigan Auto Show originally scheduled for January.

The center did host one big name this fall: Eric Trump appeared at the center during a campaign rally for his father, President Donald Trump, in October.

While the number of cases in Michigan is significantly higher now than in the spring, the virus is more spread out across the whole state as opposed to the spring, where it was heavily concentrated in metro Detroit, Sutfin said. That geographic spread calls for a different plan for treating patients, and the field hospitals did not fit into that plan.

"With cases now spread around the state rather than mostly in southeast Michigan, the state is focusing on supporting local hospitals so that they can best meet the needs of COVID-19 patients in their local communities," she said. "Since March, the state has approved the addition of 5,261 beds at hospitals and 326 beds at skilled nursing facilities across Michigan to address COVID-19 related patient care and helped facilities address PPE needs. In addition, support is being provided to hospitals in implementing their surge control plans."

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# Livonia Ford dealership seeks to be world's best

**Slone Terranella** Detroit Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK

In a race that's neck and neck, a Michigan dealership is trailing an out-of-state one to win the title of No. 1 Ford dealership in the world.

Bill Brown Ford is second place in a national competition among Ford retailers who are battling to receive "best dealership" status. Bill Brown is a few tallies behind a Florida-based dealership that won the competition last year.

The dealership with the most reported sales will ultimately win the No. 1 title, said Robert Goodfellow, digital media director for Bill Brown.

"The race for No. 1 is a huge undertaking for any Ford dealership, but for one our size, in metro Detroit, in the middle of a pandemic, this has to be a community effort to succeed," Tom Brown, the great-grandson of Bill Brown, said. "It's also an opportunity for us to show the world that Detroit is still the capital of the auto industry."

Founder Bill Brown opened the Livonia location in the mid-'50s, and the dealership has been a metro Detroit staple ever since. This year, the dealership became the first in the world to sell the coveted 2021 Bronco, a press release said.

The dealership rolled out and deliv-

ered the resurrected Bronco to the Ghas-tin family from Canton — the first new Bronco to be sold in the U.S. since 1996.

"We were honored that Bill Brown was selected for this historical event, and for this to happen in the middle of our race for No. 1 could help us win," said Matt Garchow, new vehicle sales manager at Bill Brown Ford. "December is the final lap of the race, and we need to sell a lot of new Ford cars and trucks to win. To make sure we deliver for our staff and community, we're offering our best deals and the lowest prices of the year before Jan. 4, 2021."

Bill Brown prides itself on its year-long charity programs that support

Gleaners Food Bank, Livonia Public Schools and the Salvation Army. The dealership also offers AXZ plans, and says they "provide more discounts to Ford employees than any other dealership in the world."

"The dealership has always had a broad, integrated community approach. It's who we are," Brown said. "The big surprise is the level of support we've received in return from our community this year. The fact that we may have the unique opportunity of ending this year, 2020, on a positive note as the No. 1 Ford dealership in the world is just incredible."



The first wave of St. Mary Mercy Hospital staff received a COVID-19 vaccine on Dec. 23. ST. MARY MERCY HOSPITAL

## Vaccine

Continued from Page 1A

vaccine available to them. Other local hospitals, like Ascension Providence in Novi, have started administering vaccines to staff. According to the state, more than 26,700 Michiganders had received a coronavirus vaccine as of Dec. 21.

Griffin said he's excited to see staff like Lozon, who sees coronavirus patients everyday, get the vaccine. When all of those truly front-line staff are vaccinated, he said he'll look forward to taking it himself.

Lozon and Griffin both said they feel the vaccine is something to be celebrated. But the staff at St. Mary Mercy, are still working to treat coronavirus patients in the community to the best of their ability. The holiday season is here, and Griffin encouraged the community to keep wearing face coverings and social distancing.

"It's been an experience to say the

least," Lozon said. "But, you know, we're happy to be here and to be able to support the community through this ... Our goal is to really show everybody that we're here for them."

Moderna's vaccine, one of two currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, includes two doses taken 28 days apart. The other vaccine, made by Pfizer, is administered in two doses taken 21 days apart.

Griffin explained neither vaccine includes the live virus that causes COVID-19. Griffin said the absence of the live virus makes both vaccines safer than if they did include it.

"They used genetic research and tools that we've actually had in place for some time to replicate a strain or protein for the very outside, the spikes, of the virus," he said. "So, it's not a piece of virus at all. It's simply a trigger or signal to tell your body to make antibodies."

Contact reporter Shelby Tankersley at [stankersle@hometownlife.com](mailto:stankersle@hometownlife.com) or 248-305-0448. Follow her on Twitter @shelby\_tankk.

## Resolutions

Continued from Page 1A

### Spending more time with family, friends

"If this year has taught us anything, it should have taught us that time is precious," Sandra Key, a member of the Westland Free Community News and Events group, said. "Spending quality time with family, neighbors and friends is so important. That this world needs more kindness, more compassion, more love. So the next time you say something, say something nice."

Like Key, lots of folks are looking forward to spending more time with family, with many mentioning parents and grandchildren as people they'd like to see more. Others are hoping to make up for lost time next year. Some families are planning to actually do Christmas in July, or throw a big wedding that couldn't have happened this year.

"I want a huge family and friends get together to make up for Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas come May or June," Holly Cooke, a member of the All Things Livonia group, said. "Games, food, hot tub: Perhaps two or three days. This thought is what's getting me through the holidays."

### Hoping to bid the pandemic farewell

Seemingly everyone is ready for COVID-19 to be a thing of the past. Local health care workers said they look forward to the day their job isn't so hectic, and others said they hope their small business manages to hang on through-

out the year.

Bryan McCann, a member of All Things Livonia, said his 9-year-old daughter, Jillian, is ready "for Covid to be gone, and hope that the vaccine helps."

Others said they hope the stress of the pandemic doesn't change who they are as a human being.

"My resolution is to not let this virus change my personality and to remain calm and polite to everyone," Betty Day McNally, a member of the Wayne Neighbors Discussion Board group, said. "My hope is that we will get to be with our grandchildren next Christmas and get to hug them like there's no tomorrow because you never know, there may not be."

### Traditional resolutions still getting made

Though the pandemic was clearly on most people's minds as they eye 2021, a few more traditional resolutions were still in the mix. For instance, Kimberly Scovel, a member of the Westland group, said drinking more water and getting better at baking are on her to-do list for next year.

Others have plans to keep their lives moving forward.

Max Badynee, a member of All Things Livonia, wants "to be able to move out on my own, and to start saving up for a car," in 2021. And Vicki Brunell, a member of the Wayne group, hopes next year allows her to attend a concert and enjoy live music again.

Contact reporter Shelby Tankersley at [stankersle@hometownlife.com](mailto:stankersle@hometownlife.com) or 248-305-0448. Follow her on Twitter @shelby\_tankk.

## JCPenney

Continued from Page 1A

never easy, our store optimization strategy is intended to better position JCPenney to drive sustainable, profitable growth and included plans to close up to 200 stores in phases throughout 2020."

Canton Supervisor Anne Marie Graham-Hudak said the township just recently found out about the store's closure as well. She said they had gotten word a major retailer was planning on closing, but were not informed of which one it was. She said she realized it was JCPenney when she went to the store last weekend and saw plenty of deep discounts on merchandise.

She said it's sad to see the store close up shop.

"It's a beautiful store. It's one of our anchor stores along Ford Road," Graham-Hudak said. "They're going to be missed."

The store is the lone JCPenney in metro Detroit closing its doors as a part of the restructuring. Other stores across Michigan have already closed, including ones in Bay City, Alpena, Cadillac, Mount Pleasant and Owosso,

according to the company. The company filed for Ch. 11 bankruptcy earlier this year.

Other JCPenney stores in the area that remain open include ones in Novi, Westland and White Lake Township.

The closure will be the second major closure of a major retailer in Canton in the last year. Art Van Furniture closed its doors at 41661 Ford Road earlier this year after the company announced it was liquidating and closing all its stores.

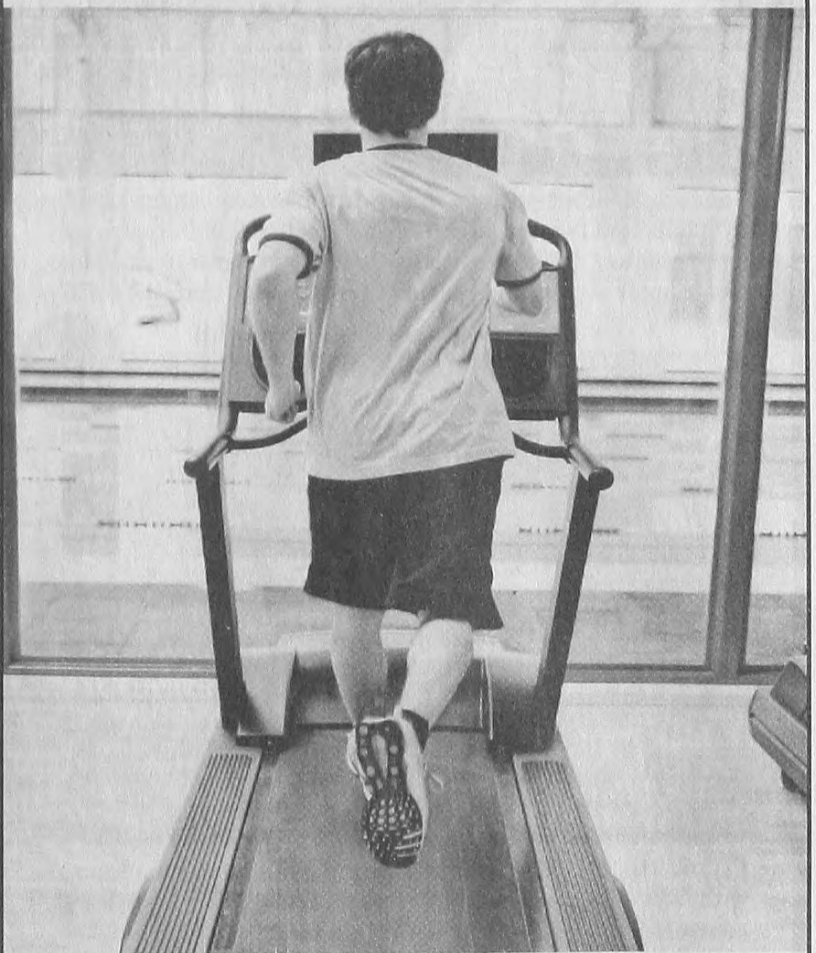
That store, which opened in 2018, was not empty long: new furniture company Loves Furniture & Mattresses moved in and opened the business back up in September.

Online property tax records show the building now housing JCPenney, which occupies about 104,000 square feet, was constructed in 2007 and is leased by the department store.

Graham-Hudak said she was confident something else could occupy that space again in the future, though that could be challenging considering the challenges department stores currently face with the COVID-19 pandemic and declining sales.

"I think we're going to have to get creative," she said. "We have to think about what else we can do there."

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# Loves Furniture to close 9 more Mich. stores

JC Reindl Detroit Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Loves Furniture plans to close nine more of its Michigan stores as it struggles to keep many former Art Van Furniture locations in business and stocked with inventory.

Loves CEO Mack Peters said Wednesday that the company will be consolidating its footprint after the holidays to 13 stores — 12 in Michigan and one outside Toledo. Loves Furniture went into business in late summer with a total of 32 stores in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania, employing nearly 950 people. Other stores are either closed or slated to close.

Some of the Michigan stores it is shuttering are only about a 10-minute drive from Loves Furniture locations that are staying open, he said.

"We're not running away. We've still got 12 (Michigan) stores — our 12 best stores and most profitable stores we're keeping," Peters said.

The locations of the Michigan stores that will close are:

- Dearborn
- Waterford
- Port Huron
- Livonia
- Burton
- Saginaw
- Bay City
- Muskegon
- Petoskey

The nine closings will be in addition to the recent closures of Loves' Westland and Ann Arbor stores. Those two locations are slated to reopen as Value City Furniture stores in March.

The Loves Furniture brand and company arose out of a May deal in U.S. Bankruptcy Court that sold 17 former Art Van stores in Michigan to Texas-based US Assets Inc. plus 10 other Art Van and Levin and Wolf locations in other states. US Assets' founder and CEO is named Jeff Love.

The deal did not include the stores' underlying real estate, which was already sold off. Art Van Furniture entered liquidation bankruptcy in March, just three years

after the company's sale by the Van Elslander family to a private-equity firm called Thomas H. Lee Partners.

Peters said Loves is still facing delays in getting enough furniture inventory from suppliers to meet customer demand, which has been strong during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"That is an industry-wide problem," Peters said. "The supply chain has cut back so much due to, No. 1, COVID issues in Asia. It's just a crazy unusual situation now in the industry."

Some of Loves' vendors are owed significant sums by the company. Those vendors include Detroit-based Fairmont Sign Co., which says Loves is more than \$750,000 in arrears for its sign-making services.

"We are working on trying to pay everybody," Peters said Wednesday about the vendors. "We got a little bit overextended in some areas and we're trying to catch up with people."

Contact JC Reindl at 313-222-6631 or [jcreindl@freepress.com](mailto:jcreindl@freepress.com). Follow him on Twitter @jcreindl. Read more on business and sign up for our business newsletter.

## Michigan oversight committees subpoena Livonia, Detroit clerks

Shelby Tankersley Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Lawmakers in the Michigan house and senate oversight committees have issued subpoenas to two Michigan clerks, including Livonia's Susan Nash.

The subpoena requires Nash and Detroit Clerk Janice Winfrey to produce a number of documents related to the Presidential Election. Nash said the bulk of what she'll need to provide are lists of the city's voters, election workers and the like.

"I want everybody in the City of Livonia, in our

state, anywhere, to feel confident in their vote, and I will comply 100%," Nash said. "My hope is that a committee such as this brings confidence back to people."

The two committees voted Dec. 15 to issue subpoenas to the two Wayne County clerks as part of an ongoing effort to investigate November's election. Livonia and Detroit were singled out because they have similar rates of out-of-balance precincts, which means more or less ballots were submitted than voters recorded in poll books from Nov. 3.

"These additional measures will allow us to look at the evidence and confirm the truth," Rep. Matt Hall (R-Marshall), the chair of the House Oversight Committee, said in a statement. "That evidence lies within records, documents and communications from local officials who oversaw election processes in communities where irregularities have been reported."

Michigan's 16 electors officially cast their ballots for U.S. President-elect Joe Biden on Dec. 14.

Nash said precinct irregularities normally boil down to human error like a test ballot that accidentally ran through a tabulator, a voter putting their ballot in the wrong tabulator or a family placing their absentee ballots in the same envelope rather than the separate ones they're issued. The clerk did note not every irregularity has an explanation.

"It's human error, pure human error," Nash said. "I



Nash

wish it wasn't going to happen but we all know it isn't ever going to go away. You're never going to get human error to go away."

The clerk noted the Nov. 3 election actually had about the same number of irregularities as the city's March primary, which had fewer voters. In March, the city had 101 irregularities with fewer than 29,000 voters. In November, the city had 109 irregularities with about 64,000 voters.

"People are paying more attention to this election," she said.

Nash said she has "every intention" to comply and feels there is a possibility the committees will ask her to testify in

Lansing after the new year. The clerk said she wants people to be confident in the electoral process in the same way she is.

"I believe in the process," she said.

The office of Senator Ed McBroom (R-Vulcan), who chairs the Michigan Senate Oversight Committee, did not respond to a voicemail seeking comment.

Contact reporter Shelby Tankersley at [stankersle@hometownlife.com](mailto:stankersle@hometownlife.com) or 248-305-0448. Follow her on Twitter @shelby\_tank.

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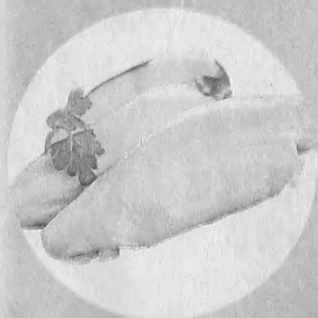
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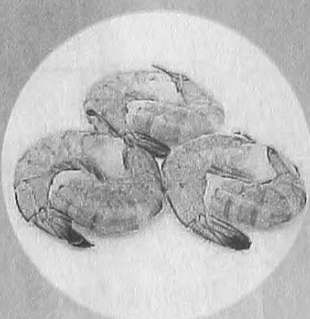


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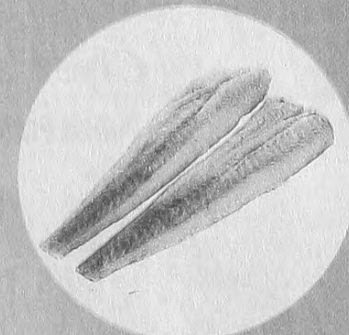
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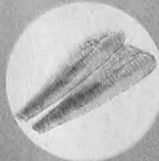
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# SPORTS

## Area playoff volleyball teams enjoy brief return to court



**Colin Gay** Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Marian head volleyball coach Maysa Cook was not able to attend her team's first practice Dec. 21. With the announcement of the return to play happening the Friday before, Cook, a nurse, could not get the time off work on such short notice.

But when she entered the Mustangs' gym the next day, she saw a team that really had not missed a beat.

She saw a resilient group united in the uncertainty, a team without a single senior ready to take the court against Macomb Dakota in the state quarterfinal and finish what it started.

Cook knows there's a year to build and knows that the pause in the post-season, along with the unprecedented

See **VOLLEYBALL**, Page 4B



**TOP:** The Novi High Wildcats varsity volleyball team hits the gym on Dec. 21 to prepare for the resumption of the state playoffs in the new year.

**LEFT:** Novi High varsity volleyball head coach Kacy Byron adjusts a net in the school's gym.  
PHOTOS BY JOHN HEIDER/  
HOMETOWNLIFE.COM



**Colin Gay**  
Columnist  
Hometownlife.com

## Athletics give high schools a chance at normality

Why do you love sports?

This is a question I asked countless student-athletes and coaches throughout 2020. There's a lot of similarity in their responses, no matter the sport they play: it's the competition, the camaraderie, the familial atmosphere, the shared experience on a football or soccer field, on the wrestling mat or in the pool.

With this, I tried to bring athletes and coaches back to the beginning, back to when they first started. I wanted to give them an opportunity to reflect on the role high school athletics plays on a micro level: what it means for the individual student-athlete or coach, and at a macro level: what it means for the school, community or even the state.

When I ask those same athletes and coaches what they have learned this year, the answer remains pretty much the same too: don't take this for granted.

That reality appeared the same day for just about everyone: March 11.

I was at Garden City High School, watching a boys district semifinal doubleheader in which Livonia Churchill and John Glenn advanced to the final. After the second game, I drove to a nearby Taco Bell, took a seat at a table nearest to an outlet — a victory for sports writers everywhere — and got to work.

By 9:45 p.m., I returned to my car and looked at Twitter: the NBA season had been postponed due to COVID-19. Less than 24 hours later, the Michigan High School Athletic Association postponed and later canceled the rest of its winter postseason and its spring season, leaving athletes without closure and without their outlet of expression.

My life as a high school sports writer quickly changed. Instead of going to games and practices, building relationships with student-athletes, coaches and athletic directors in person, my single-room apartment became my home base, conducting phone interviews day in and day out, continuing to find stories, getting per-

See **GAY**, Page 3B

## MHSAA puts fall sports back on pause

**Colin Gay** Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

The Michigan High School Athletic Association announced Dec. 23 that it would be pushing back its fall post-season dates after receiving full details from the Michigan Department of

Health and Human Services about its pilot rapid testing program.

The MHSAA has instructed schools still involved in the football, volleyball, and girls swim and dive seasons to halt practices immediately.

Fall teams are expected to receive the rapid antigen tests and more in-

struction by Dec. 29 — with the MDHHS conducting webinars Dec. 28-29 to train school personnel who will be involved in testing.

The first tests are scheduled to be administered Dec. 30, and then full prac-

See **FALL SPORTS**, Page 3B

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# Edwards' recruitment came down to pros, cons

In a Google doc, top recruit reveals why he picked U-M

Jeff Seidel Detroit Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A few days before Donovan Edwards announced he was going to sign with Michigan, he sent a text to West Bloomfield coach Ron Bellamy.

"Hey, check your email, coach," he wrote.

Edwards had filled out a Google document, listing the pros and cons of going to different schools and shared it with Bellamy. It's an exercise that Bellamy makes all of his players go through before picking a school.

Edwards was ranked as the No. 4 running back in the nation, according to the 247Sports Composite rankings, and he had narrowed his list to four: Michigan, Georgia, Notre Dame and Oklahoma.

When Bellamy read through the document, he noticed Edwards was far more thorough with Michigan.

"At that point, I was, 'Damn, this is where he's going to go,'" Bellamy thought.

"Do you have what he wrote?" I asked Bellamy on the phone.

Bellamy called up the document and read it to me. Under the first pro of going to Michigan, Edwards wrote something revealing.

"Number one was competition," Bellamy said while reading from the document. "He goes, 'Big Ten football. I get to play in the greatest rivalry in history.'"

Edwards is a gifted running back — strong, tough and powerful between the tackles with a surprising burst of speed in the open field.

But it's his inner drive that Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh truly appreciates. "One word to sum him up would be competitor," Harbaugh said on Jon Jansen's In the Trenches podcast. "Love that about him. And really everyone that Ron Bellamy coaches. That's a stamp I would put on them — they're great competitors."

At one point, Ohio State was the clear leader to sign Edwards. He had developed strong relationship with the Ohio State staff when Urban Meyer was the head coach, but Edwards didn't want to commit early. When he was a sophomore, he had clear vision. He told me that he wanted to take all his official recruiting visits and announce on signing day of his senior year — the last possible moment.

Ohio State wouldn't wait for him. The Buckeyes signed five-star TreVeyon Henderson from Virginia and four-star Evan Pryor from North Carolina.

"I have my reasons why I would love to play against Ohio State," Edwards wrote in the Google doc.

To Edwards, that Ohio State game is going to be personal.

Which should be great news for Michigan fans.

## 'My heart's not (in Georgia)'

Now, before I go further, I want to explain why this is a tricky story for me to write. My son, Nick, was a senior captain at West Bloomfield when Donovan was a freshman who got moved up from the JV. It was a team stacked with talent — 19 players from that squad would get Division I football scholarships — and it advanced to the state championship, losing to Clarkston by one point.

I've seen Donovan play countless times. I've watched him practice and I've talked to him off the field. I like him and his father, Kevin, a lot. They are good people.

And when Donovan lost his grandfather, I went to the funeral.

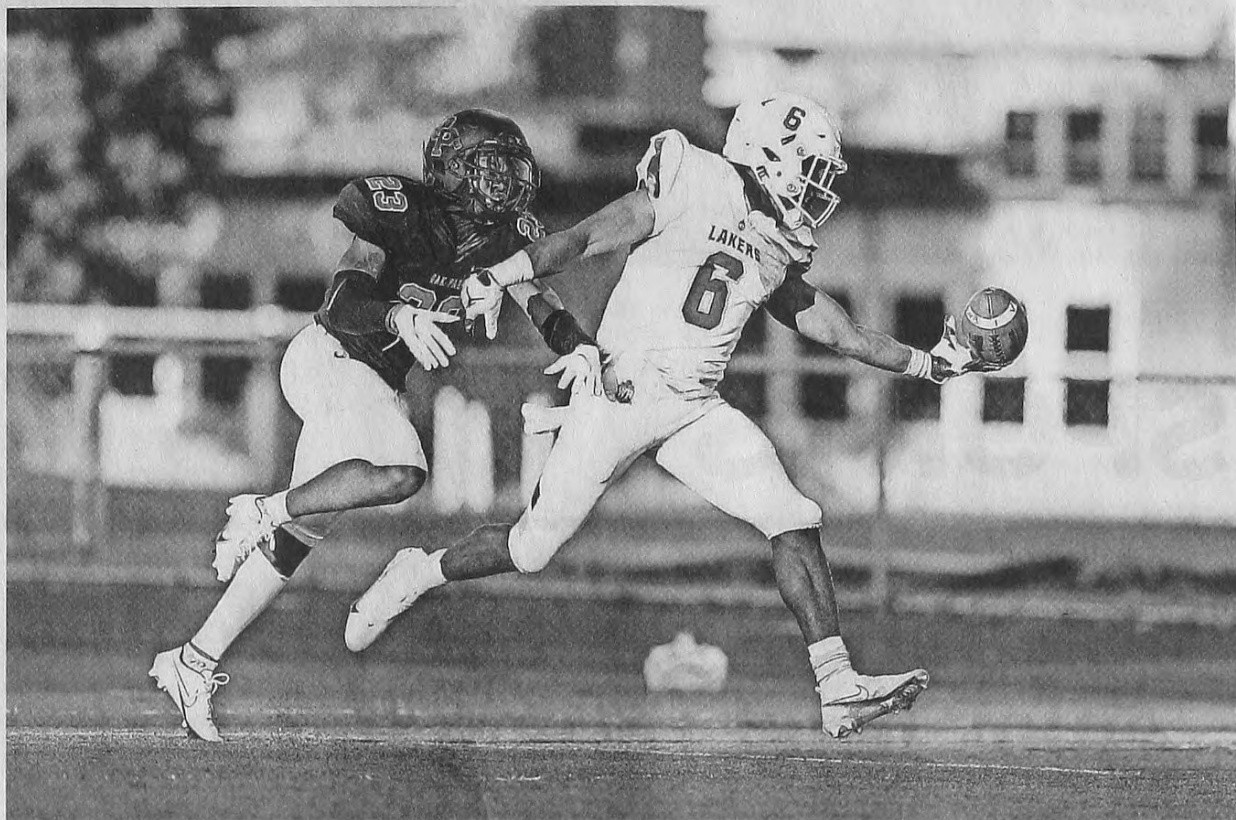
But Edwards' recruitment and his decision offers an unique perspective on how Michigan football is viewed by recruits, especially at a time when there is so much uncertainty around the program.

So I asked Bellamy to keep reading from the Google doc.

"Development of players," Bellamy said, reading from the doc. "He goes, 'They have had players like Tom Brady, Chris Perry, Charles Woodson. But recently, there haven't been those types of names doing it big. I feel like I can make a historical name for myself. The cons? I want to see more players develop in the skilled area, specifically offensively and defensively.'"

It's hard to argue Edwards' evaluation. The Wolverines didn't place a player on the first-, second- or third- team All-Big Ten offensive teams. Michigan has not had a running back drafted in the NFL since Mike Hart was taken in the sixth round in 2008 and the Wolverines haven't had a first-rounder since Perry in 2004.

Simply put, for Michigan to improve,



West Bloomfield running back Donovan Edwards attempts to make a catch behind Oak Park defensive back Emmanuel Hall during the first half of the Lakers' season opener at Oak Park High School on Sept. 18. JUNFU HAN/DETROIT FREE PRESS

the Wolverines have to do a better job developing players.

Now consider Edwards' option. Georgia wanted him desperately. And that created an alluring dilemma, considering it is a school that has produced NFL players such as Nick Chubb, Todd Gurley, Sony Michel and D'Andre Swift.

"Georgia is the best spot for me, if I want to play in the NFL," Edwards told Bellamy about two weeks ago.

"So why don't you sign with Georgia?" Bellamy replied.

"Because my heart's not there right now," Edwards said.

No, his heart was in Ann Arbor.

Edwards took a leap of faith, showing that he believes in this school and program, and picked the Wolverines.

"Love Donovan," Harbaugh continued on the podcast. "There's a guy that's a real go-getter and leader. Tremendous football player."

The uncertainty surrounding Harbaugh's future didn't play a role in Edwards' decision, in part because he had been preparing for it for years. Back in 2018, I talked to Edwards before Michigan played Ohio State.

"Does it affect you when you hear stuff about Urban Meyer? That he might retire?" I asked him when he was a sophomore.

"Not as of right now," Edwards said.

Because Bellamy has drilled an idea into his players heads: Coaches come and go. Pick the right fit, not the right coach.

And Michigan was clearly the right fit, in his eyes.

## Pros and cons

Bellamy moved down to another topic.

"Strength and conditioning staff," Bellamy said, reading Edwards' words. "I started to develop a relationship with Coach Herb (Ben Herbert, Michigan's Director of Strength and Conditioning) last week. He's going to get me right. He was excited when he answered the phone when I called. I rock with him and I know he's not going to let me be anything but great in the weight room. No cons."

Bellamy moved to another topic: Relationship with staff.

"He goes, 'I believe the staff and I are on the same page,'" Bellamy said. "I like the staff. I also think they are supportive and will do anything that I need."

Michigan gave Edwards his first scholarship offer. He developed strong relationships with current players, members of this talented incoming recruiting class and the staff.

Two of his West Bloomfield friends and teammates — Makari Paige, a safety, and Cornell Wheeler, a linebacker — are at Michigan.

"Did that play a role?" I asked his dad.

"I'm sure they did," he said.

Bellamy kept reading. "He did have a con," Bellamy said about his relationship with the staff. "Since they have recruited me, it has always been cool vibes. I want them to bring the best out of me. I know they want the best out of me. Can they get it out of me?"

Clearly, he decided yes to that question, otherwise he wouldn't have picked Michigan.

Then, he moved to another topic.

"Academic support," Bellamy said.

"He's good there. No cons."

## Fan support.

"He loved the fan support, especially with the Name, Image and Likeness," Bellamy said. "I think that was one of the big reasons why he went to Michigan. He thought, being a local kid, if he is the man, he couldn't do it bigger at any other school."

## Direction of the program.

"He said, 'It's down, but it's going to go up,'" Bellamy said.

Edwards listed another con: the negative attitude swirling among some Michigan fans, who are down on the program. Bellamy stopped reading and injected his own opinion. "Fans don't understand how it affects recruiting," Bellamy said. "When you start talking crazy, these kids read that stuff and they see it."

Then, Bellamy ripped off several topics.

## Distance away from home.

"He said 42 minutes, there are no cons," Bellamy said.

## Chance to play early.

"He said, 'I understand nothing is guaranteed but if I showcase the talent God has given me and if I continue to work hard, not only do I feel I will play, I will make a huge impact,'" Bellamy said. "He did list a con about playing early. He said, 'I want a chance to have an opportunity to start and be the man Day One, regardless of my age. Will I get that opportunity?'"

## Weather.

"He goes, 'It's Michigan, the weather sucks,'" Bellamy said, laughing. "He knows. Whatever. He's from here."

## Finally, there was another positive.

"He likes the idea of games on TV for friends and family to watch," Bellamy said. "Every game is broadcast on national television by Fox, ABC, ESPN, BTN."

## Ready and fresh

### So what is Michigan getting?

A running back who is fresh. Donovan has little wear and tear on his body because of how Bellamy has used him. After Edwards broke his ankle during his sophomore year, Bellamy has limited his carries — and limited his hits — with the long-term, big picture in mind. "Your body is like a piñata," Bellamy told Edwards. "It can only take so many hits."

I watched most of West Bloomfield's games this fall online. After the number of fans in the stands was allowed to increase because of COVID-19, I went to a game and Edwards hardly touched the ball. He was a glorified decoy.

Bellamy was setting him up for long-term success.

Edwards does have areas he needs to improve. He has not been asked to do much pass protection, so that will need to improve.

But Edwards is a tremendous threat as a receiver. The most amazing thing I ever saw Edwards do was catch a simple pass on the sideline, after he lined up like a wide receiver, and he took off like a blinding flash. Whoosh. He was gone.

He looked like a sprinter, not a football player.

## No place like home

Several schools recruited Donovan until signing day.

"I talked to (Georgia coach) Kirby

## Smart on Monday," Kevin Edwards said.

"I told him that I love the way he interacts with his players. I told him, 'You're an awesome coach. The way you build rapport with the kids. How you do team building with the kids.'"

Kevin Edwards had already thought through how he would travel to Georgia for games. Because he wasn't sure where his son would pick. Over the last four years, Donovan bounced back and forth. "I mean, he was crazy about Oklahoma," Kevin Edwards said.

But Donovan never visited Oklahoma because of COVID-19. "He's still crazy about Georgia," Kevin Edwards said. "Crazy about Notre Dame."

But in the end, it was Michigan.

"When he goes up to Michigan, he knows everybody," Kevin Edwards said. "Everybody knows him. The players. The coaches, the trainers. He has a good rapport with Michigan."

## 'Historic' role in a comeback

The night before Donovan announced his decision, he went through a series of mock interviews to prepare for the media onslaught.

The announcement was going to be broadcast live on ESPN. And Bellamy didn't want Edwards to get stumped on national TV.

During the mock interviews with Bellamy's wife Aamira and one of the West Bloomfield coaches, Edwards was asked what positives he saw in his new school.

"It's 42 minutes from home," Edwards said.

"That's when I knew he was going to Michigan," Bellamy said.

Getting Edwards was a tremendous get for Harbaugh. There was a desperate need to inject offensive talent and that's what he did with this class.

But this was bigger than Harbaugh. It was a program win. Every aspect of U-M pulled Edwards to Michigan.

Because of the elite education.

Because of Paige and Wheeler.

Because he felt so close to the coaching staff and the current players.

Because he already felt a tight bond with J.J. McCarthy, the five-star quarterback from Illinois. Donovan feels all of them — the incoming players, the current players, the coaches and the staff can make Michigan a winner again.

But most of all, Donovan picked Michigan because it felt like what he had at West Bloomfield, a place where former players come back and hang out together during the summer, and the players respect each other, and Bellamy treats everybody like his own kids, and Mike Stone, from 97.1 FM, is up in the press box screaming: "Touchdown L-A-A-KERS!!"

Still, that Google doc shows that Edwards is going to Michigan with wide-open eyes and clear understanding. He knows this program has struggled. He knows it hasn't produced many NFL running backs. He knows there is uncertainty.

But he has this vision. He is confident enough in himself to think he can play, in his own words — a "historical" role — in bringing it back.

Contact Jeff Seidel: [jseidel@freepress.com](mailto:jseidel@freepress.com). Follow him on Twitter @seidelf. To read his recent columns, go to [freep.com/sports/jeff-seidel](http://freep.com/sports/jeff-seidel).

# Gay

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spectives on what could have been for these teams.

As spring turned to summer and summer to fall, those interviews and conversations blossomed into more than just about what could have happened on the field. It was talking to people about the emotional toll this pandemic took, asking about the people they had lost, the loneliness they felt, the uncertainty and anxiety people felt, being bombarded by COVID-19 and a slew of other events that defined our world in 2020.

Sports became a much bigger conversation: it was a conversation of normalcy. It was a conversation of unity: people of different backgrounds coming together to play the game they love, loving your brother or sister next to you on the bench, "regardless," in the words of Wayne Memorial head girls basketball coach Jarvis Mitchell.

That's why the MHSAA brought back fall sports in the first place: to give student-athletes a chance to do something normal in a world that just was not. State champions were crowned, tears were shed after victories and defeat, I was logging late nights in McDonald's parking lots.

It was normal. But it was so much bigger. There was a distinct level of gratitude in each moment, seeing the smiles, the intensity, the tenacity in the eyes of players with the rest of their faces covered with a mask.

Was it perfect? Absolutely not. Every time I stepped onto a football field or into a gym, COVID-19 was the elephant in the room. There were moments of blatant disregard for social distancing and mask wearing by players, coaches, fans in the stands, sometimes in the middle of a gym filled more than it should have been.

With the year coming to a close, the miscommunication between the MHSAA and its member schools still participating in a fall postseason tournament was palpable, pausing practices for yet a third time as they wait for rapid COVID-19 tests to come in from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, causing even more



Churchill Charger teammates had about a month off with no practices or games until they got together at the school on Dec. 21. JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

confusion and frustration among all parties involved.

2020 was an emotional roller coaster. And heading into 2021, there are questions still to be answered:

Will fall teams actually have an opportunity to finish what they started? Will winter and spring teams have a semblance of normalcy as they prepare for their seasons?

But the question I have thought of more and more as the season has gone on is this: What is the importance of high school athletics?

With this, I think of Cranbrook Kingswood head football coach Ben Jones, who died in a car accident in August, right as practices were ramping up for a fall season.

His mantra was "Get to."

You get to practice, get to play with

your friends on a football field or a golf course. You get to have the opportunity to rally a community around 60 minutes of play, to feel joy after wins and sadness after losses. You get to cement your legacy with a banner on the ceiling of your high school, like Northville girls golf did, like Detroit Catholic Central boys soccer did, like Marian or Novi volleyball hope to do.

You get to be remembered.

"Get to" is the answer to the question of why do you love sports.

And heading into 2021, I hope that we don't take that for granted if given the chance.

Contact reporter Colin Gay at [cgay@hometownlife.com](mailto:cgay@hometownlife.com) or 248-330-6710. Follow him on Twitter @ColinGay17. Send game results and stats to [Liv-Sports@hometownlife.com](mailto:Liv-Sports@hometownlife.com).

# Fall sports

Continued from Page 1B

tices may begin again. If schools are delayed in the start of testing, teams may start practice after one negative test.

With teams not permitted to start practices until Dec. 30 at the latest, postseason competitions could be rescheduled. Confirmation will come from the MHSAA at a later date.

The MHSAA and the MDHHS announced Friday that fall postseason teams would have the opportunity to finish their seasons after being postponed due to state guidelines combating the spread of COVID-19.

The rapid tests will be provided to schools by the MDHHS at no charge and will be added to the safety protocols already in place, and if teams or players refuse to participate, they will not be able to compete in their respective fall tournament event.

The high school football season will begin in the regional round, the volleyball season will start in the state quarterfinal, while girls swim and dive is schedule to host its state meet.

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## Volleyball

Continued from Page 1B

nature of the 2020 season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has accelerated this team's potential and chemistry to unmatched levels.

"I think this is going to be one of those moments that build character, resiliency and if they find themselves in a tough position next year, they'll say, 'We got through COVID last year, this is nothing,'" Cook said.

Hours after Cook returned for her first practice, the postseason was halted once again.

The Michigan High School Athletic Association suspended practice again Dec. 22, awaiting more information from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services about the rapid antigen COVID-19 testing fall postseason teams would be receiving prior to the restart of competition.

According to an announcement made by the MHSAA, teams are expected to receive tests by Dec. 29, and will be permitted to return to practicing Dec. 30, after the first round of testing is complete. With the postseason being pushed back again, the MHSAA said competition dates could be rescheduled for a later date.

But Marian and Novi were in the gym Tuesday afternoon — unaware of another postponement coming that evening — preparing for Battle Creek, awaiting that Jan. 5 state quarterfinal game, that final week of play that will crown a champion.

They were both trying to regain that chemistry that they had before the first pause, one that takes time to rebuild.

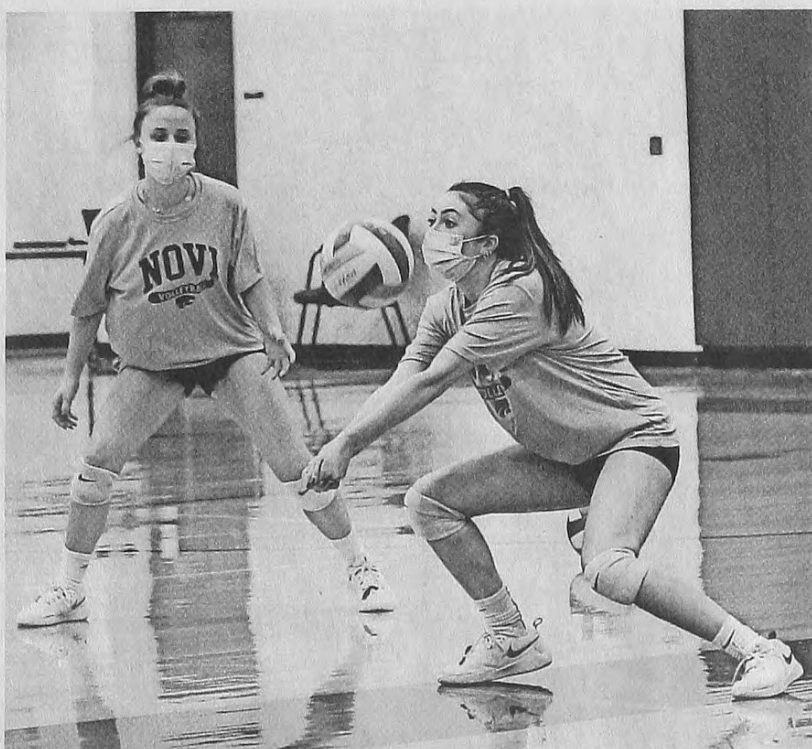
### Start to rebuild

Novi head volleyball coach Kacy Byron knew that her team was going to finish. And when she heard Friday's announcement that a return was imminent, she and the rest of the coaching staff sent a three-word text message to the team:

"We're back baby."

"The energy in here was just so exciting," Byron said of the first day of practice. "It was great to see them, and you could tell, they were so excited to be back to be able to finish."

Many girls on Novi's team, similar to



Novi High varsity volleyball practices in their gym on Dec. 21 after taking about a month off from competition due to the pandemic. JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWN LIFE.COM

other teams around the state still in contention, reverted to practicing with their club teams over the month-long pause. And while players continued to work on skills, they knew it takes time to get back to where the team was before.

Marian sophomore setter Ava Sarafa knows this better than anyone. Playing with her club team, she was working with other people who have different qualities and characteristics she likes to exploit. So in those first days of practice back at Marian, she was working on location and consistency, putting hitters like junior Ava Brizard and Sarah Sylvester in the best position to succeed.

At Novi, prior to even taking the court for the first practice, the team gathered together, talking about just where they were at and where they were going.

"We just talked through our feelings," sophomore outside hitter Sarah Vellucci said. "Everyone is obviously so happy to be back playing with each other, but we also realize that we only have three weeks as a team left with each other. So we just want to soak up all we can and just really focus on these practices."

Novi senior libero Rachel Jennings said the first set of practices back showed that everyone has the skills, but it does take awhile to get back into the swing of things, back into the Wildcat system of play, similar to every team in their same position.

But as Novi left the court, they were still confident with where they are at.

"As a team, our first practice yesterday really showed us that we are still in it. We didn't even have a bad practice," Jennings said. "Everyone was training for the past month, so everyone just kind of came back and really clicked. There is pressure, I think, but I think we can use these practices to alleviate the pressure."

### Shared adversity

Marian and Novi are in completely different spots as a team, but are striving for the same goal.

Novi is an experienced team — carrying seven seniors and five juniors on its 16-person roster. They have been in a similar place before: ending its 2019 sea-

son in the regional final in a three-set sweep to Ann Arbor Skyline, their upcoming opponent in the state quarterfinal.

Byron knows what the Eagles are going to do. But she is more focused on her team and their experience.

"We're all on the same page, and that, as a coach, is really the difference maker when you are going into these final games is 'Is everyone together,' or are you riding off of one, two, three hot players?" Byron said. "I think right now, we have a whole team that wants to get, definitely, to the final four if not further."

Cook's team is not as experienced: carrying a roster of three juniors — Sylvester, Brizard, Janiah Jones and Sophia Treder — with the rest sophomores and freshmen. A five-set win against defending Division 1 state champion Mercy in the regional final brought a level of expectation to this young group.

"Especially since we have no seniors and we are such a young team, we wanted to do this two years in a row," Brizard said. "We wanted to do this twice and we just kept up that hope that we could play again because we worked so hard for the season. We know how many challenges we had to overcome to get to this moment, and we didn't want it to go to waste. We didn't want it to, poof, out of thin air."

But both teams can unite on the fact that they have something special going on in their respective gyms. Both have a chemistry that has only been upped through shared adversity, through the experience of almost losing what they had worked so hard for. For Cook, that's the purpose of practicing: to play the game itself, to compete.

"You come to practice because you want to play," Cook said. "To have five weeks where, yes, you might be training two, three times a week and you are getting reps, and yes, you love volleyball, but you want to compete. Who knows, maybe they will play a lot better because they have been starved for five weeks."

After a taste of normalcy back in the gym for two practices, both Marian and Novi leave the gyms, waiting for Dec. 30, waiting for that chance to finish what they started.

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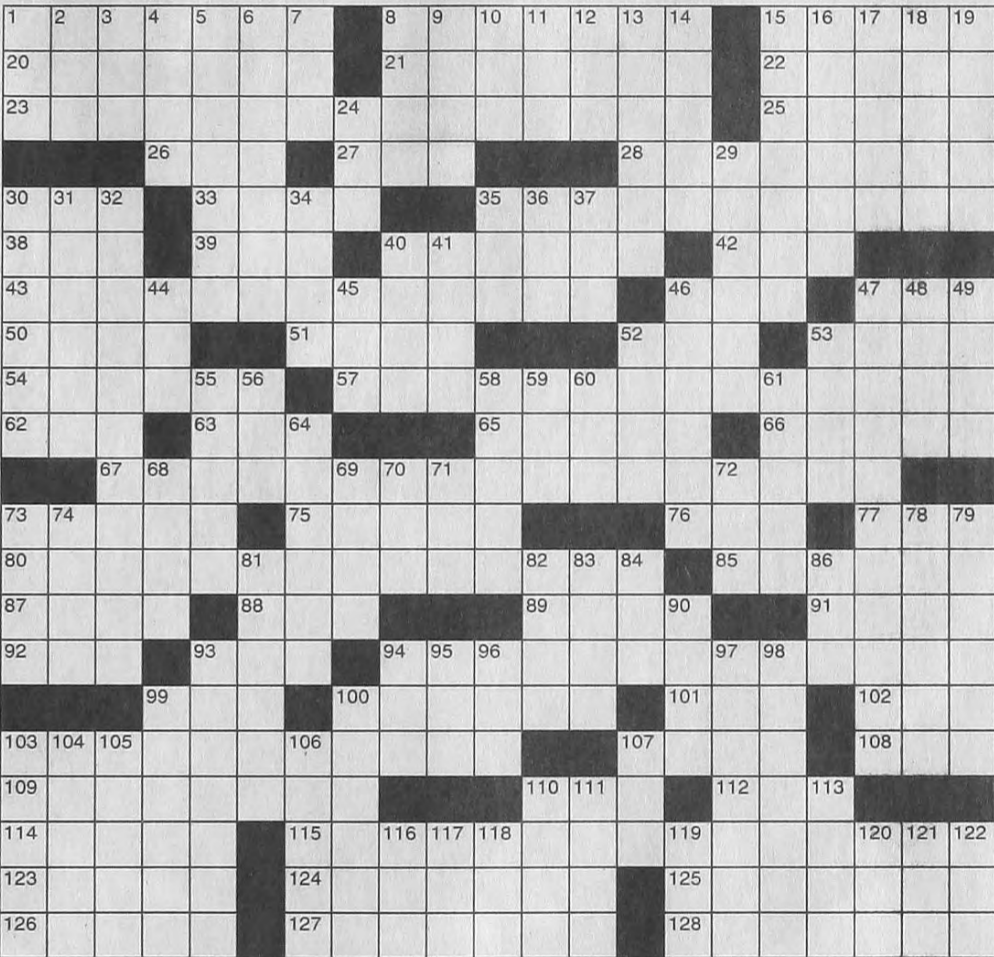
# THURSDAY PUZZLE CORNER

## CROSSWORD PUZZLER

### PREMIER CROSSWORD/ By Frank A. Longo

### PUTTING IN OVERTIME

- |  |  |   |   |                                    |   |
|--|--|---|---|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>ACROSS</b>  | 47 Giant bird of lore  | 92 Mao — -tung  | <b>DOWN</b>   | 35 Give gas to                     | 82 Been abed                              |
| 1 Many musical mélanges                                | 50 Rock concert gear   | 93 Coll. dorm monitors  | 1 Buddy   | 36 Valuable strike                 | 83 "It's either you —"                    |
| 8 Modular homes  | 51 Dog command   | 94 High rubber footwear item worn while catching crustaceans? | 2 Gardner or DuVernay of the screen                 | 37 Gin mill                        | 84 Bit of advice                          |
| 15 Two-time Washington senator                         | 52 Python's kin  | 99 Jan. preceder  | 3 Dog command                                       | 40 Hershiser of the diamond        | 86 Yank's foe                             |
| 20 Airplane flier                                      | 53 Je ne sais —  | 100 Food scarcity   | 4 "Funny!"  | 41 Tylenol unit                    | 90 Name in frozen waffles                 |
| 21 Cannes area   | 54 War general   | 101 High no. for a valedictorian                              | 5 Ladle, for one                                    | 44 Part of i.e.                    | 93 See 119-Down                           |
| 22 Relaxes   | 57 Apportion something erroneously?  | 102 Suffix with pay   | 6 Colonnaded entrance                               | 45 Drug bust gp.                   | 94 — Remo                                 |
| 23 Wife of Henry VIII who was always mimicking people? | 62 Glam rocker Brian   | 103 Wine with a childproof lock on its bottle?                | 7 — Lanka   | 46 Scale starter                   | 95 Med. plan                              |
| 25 One of five womb-mates                              | 63 XI less IV  | 107 Get really wet  | 8 Get set, for short                                | 47 Liquid carpet cleaners          | 96 Household dye brand                    |
| 26 Cookout pest  | 65 Actress Esther  | 108 Knight's title  | 9 Splits  | 48 — and aahs                      | 97 In heaven, say                         |
| 27 Photo — (PR events)                                 | 66 Young girl  | 109 Primitive calculators                                     | 10 Actress Mendes                                   | 49 Dot on a map                    | 98 Go toward                              |
| 28 Ripen   | 67 What Archie Bunker said when a discriminatory comment got him in trouble? | 110 Valuable strike   | 11 Pine relative                                    | 52 Nut go-with                     | 99 Subterfuge                             |
| 30 Suffix with govern                                  | 73 Up until now  | 112 Parlay, say   | 12 — Lingus   | 53 Conk out                        | 100 Did some angling                      |
| 33 Computer game family                                | 75 Stood up  | 114 One staring   | 13 Fizzy stomach settlers                           | 55 Female organ                    | 103 "Cosmos" author Carl                  |
| 35 Guy who directs films in a very mechanical manner?  | 76 Auditing gp.  | 115 Actress Brigitte  | 14 Occupied, as a booth                             | 56 Diarist Anais                   | 104 Drop off                              |
| 38 Bashful   | 77 Year, in Rio de Janeiro   | 116 Hatchlings' hangouts                                      | 15 Films with a "II" appended                       | 58 Balcony window                  | 105 Unsettles                             |
| 39 Intensely cold                                      | 80 Walk around with a voting slip?   | 123 Didn't dine out   | 16 "House" actor Hugh                               | 59 Dress smartly, with "out"       | 106 — dish                                |
| 40 "Falstaff" and "Fidelio"                            | 85 Einstein's language   | 124 Subscription extension                                    | 17 Chinese, e.g.                                    | 60 "Alice" spinoff                 | 107 — -pitch                              |
| 42 Madrid cheer  | 87 War deity   | 125 High-fat fruit  | 18 Al — (pasta order)                               | 61 Tickle                          | 110 Using speech                          |
| 43 King Arthur's chauffeur?                            | 88 Reel go-with  | 126 Hatchlings' hangouts                                      | 19 Aromatic compound                                | 64 Popular potatoes                | 111 In a lazy way                         |
| 46 Pro song selectors                                  | 89 Singer India —  | 127 In the optimal case                                       | 24 Rejections                                       | 68 Acoustic pair                   | 113 Tortilla snack                        |
|  | 91 Omar of "Juice"   | 128 Made a duplicate of, in a way                             | 29 "Iliad" figure                                   | 69 TV horse of the '60s            | 116 Ethyl ending                          |
|  |  |   | 30 Bust out of                                      | 70 Age-revealing stat              | 117 TV's Arthur                           |
|  |  |   | 31 Tribal healer                                    | 71 Troop gp.                       | 118 Piercing tool                         |
|  |  |   | 32 Enjoying the benefits of an effective medication | 72 Pt. of NOW                      | 119 With 93-Down, many mid-April mailings |
|  |  |   | 34 Folklore tale                                    | 73 Sing jazzily                    | 120 Preventive shot, for short            |
|  |  |   |   | 74 Boat movers                     | 121 Lofty verse                           |
|  |  |   |   | 78 Port of Italia                  | 122 Drop off                              |
|  |  |   |   | 79 GM assistance system            |   |
|  |  |   |   | 81 Actor Morgan and singer Chapman |   |

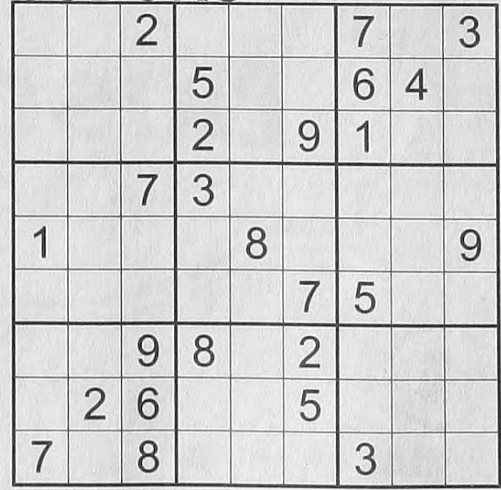


#2,019

Average time of solution: 67 minutes

For assistance or suggestions on the Puzzle Corner, contact Steve McClellan at (517) 702-4247 or [smcclellan@michigan.com](mailto:smcclellan@michigan.com). Want more puzzles? Check out the "Just Right Crossword Puzzles" books at [QuillDriverBooks.com](http://QuillDriverBooks.com)

## SUDOKU



Difficulty Level ★★★

12/31

Here's How It Works:

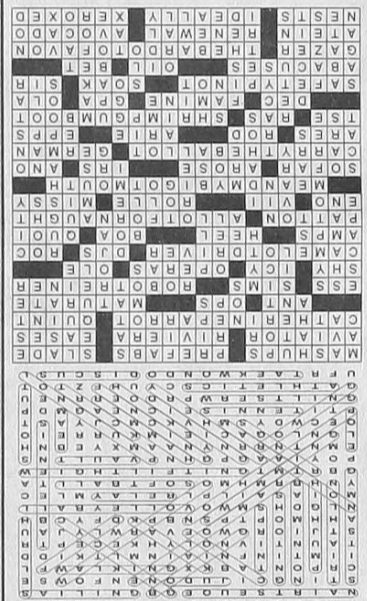
Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

## OLYMPIC EVENTS

Can you find all the words hidden in the grid? Read backwards or forwards, up or down, even diagonally. The words will always be in a straight line. Cross them off the list as you find them.



- ARCHERY
- ATHLETICS
- BADMINTON
- BEAM
- BOXING
- CANOE
- CYCLING
- DISCUS
- DIVING
- EQUESTRIAN
- FENCING
- FIELD
- GYMNASTICS
- HAMMER
- HIGH JUMP
- HOCKEY
- HURDLES
- JUDO
- KAYAK
- LONG JUMP
- MARATHON
- PENTATHLON
- POLE
- RELAY
- RINGS
- ROWING
- SAILING
- SHOOTING
- SHOT PUT
- SOFTBALL
- SPRINT
- SWIMMING
- TABLE TENNIS
- TAEKWONDO
- TENNIS
- TRACK
- TRAMPOLINE
- TRIATHLON
- VAULT
- VOLLEYBALL
- WALKING
- WATER POLO
- WEIGHTLIFTING
- WRESTLING



## OLYMPIC EVENTS

6	2	3	4	9	8	1	5	7
8	1	9	7	3	5	6	2	4
7	4	5	6	2	9	8	1	3
8	6	4	9	2	7	5	3	1
1	3	5	4	8	6	9	2	7
2	9	7	3	5	1	8	6	4
6	7	3	2	4	9	1	8	5
9	8	1	5	7	3	6	4	2
5	4	2	6	1	8	7	9	3

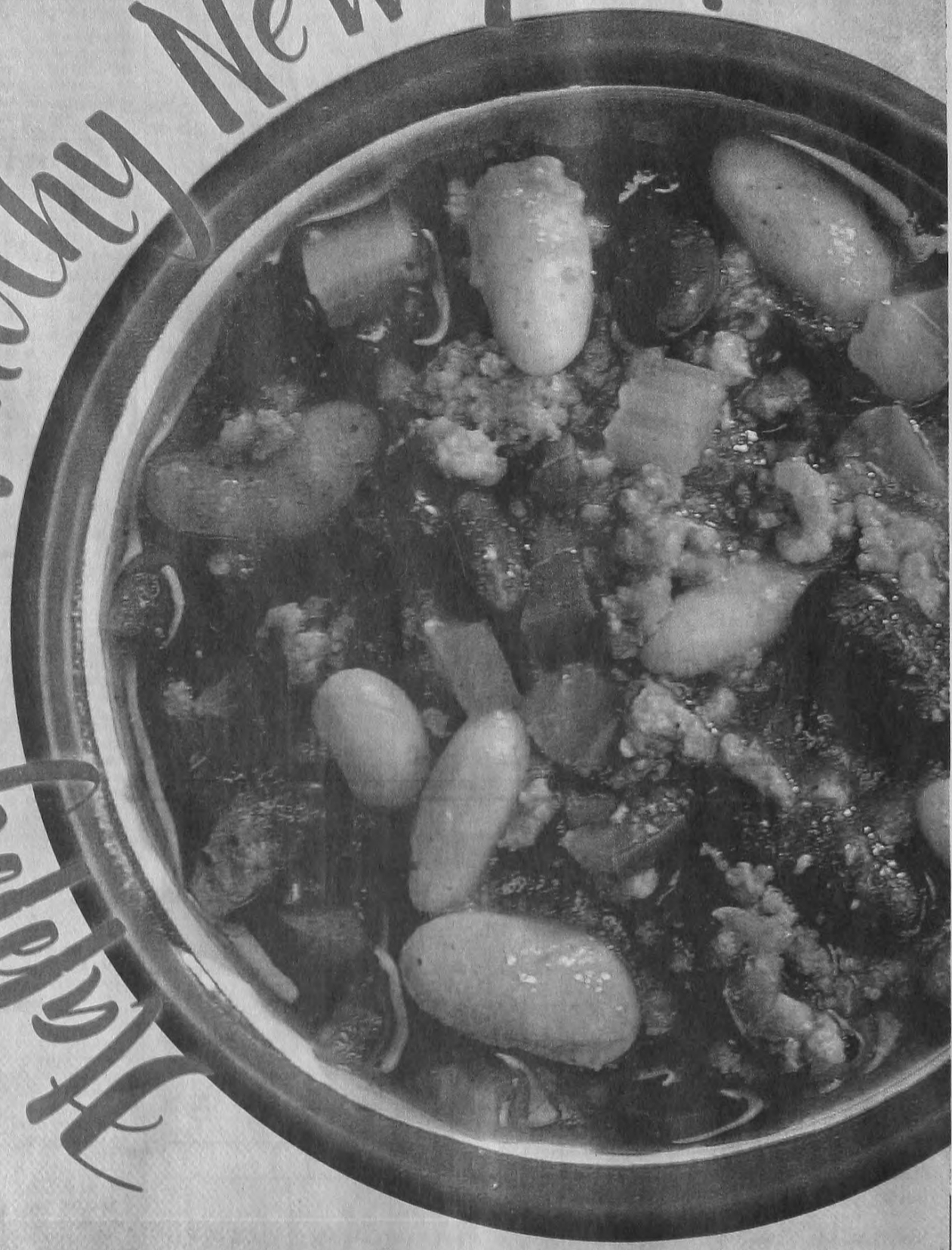


**SELL YOUR CAR**  
**ADOPT A PET**  
**GET A JOB**  
**FIND A HOUSE**  
**BUY A BOAT**  
**FIND A TREASURE**  
**GET A MASSAGE**  
**HIRE A HANDYMAN**

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