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Message from Mark



Hello and welcome to Macomb Matters. In this edition you'll find an interview with the new director of the Health Department, some interesting employee stories and updates on county initiatives. It's a great issue, so I hope you take some time to read and click through.

Before you start scrolling, I just want to again thank you all for your hard work and dedication. It's been a challenging year, but every single one of you has shown up and done your part to keep our community healthy and safe.

For instance, have you noticed the amazing job our Roads Department does staying ahead of the weather? During the big snow last week, they dispatched drivers to cover all routes around the clock to clear the roads. And did you know:

- Of the more than 4,045 miles of roadway in Macomb County, MCDR is responsible for the maintenance of 1,773 miles of county roads and more than 1,100 miles of subdivision roads.
- MCDR has more than 125 employees dedicated to keeping the roads clear, including administrative and support staff.
- MCDR has 101 snowplows, salt trucks and graders in its fleet.
- On average, MCDR uses 50,000 tons of salt each winter.
- On average, it costs \$8 million to maintain primary, local and state roads over the winter.

On that note, and perhaps best of all, spring is just around the corner. If you aren't already, I encourage you to follow Make Macomb Your Home on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) for the latest on the places and people who make Macomb a great place to call home.

Take care,

Mark

Employee Focus



Matthew Pierscinski

If you've ever encountered a Macomb County flyer, poster, logo or brochure, you've likely seen the work of Matthew Pierscinski, graphic designer for Macomb County Planning and Economic Development. Matt is part of a two-person graphics group, working alongside Jennifer Valente on the department's marketing and communications outreach team.

"I have a couple of different roles as a graphic designer for Macomb County," he said. "Jen and I provide graphic support for department initiatives and events. I am also a part of the Countywide Communications Team, which is a team that provides all types of messaging, marketing, graphic design, photography and video support for just about every county department. For the past year, I have also been a part of the Joint Information Center, which is working with the Emergency Operations Center to keep the public informed about the pandemic."

Matt started with the county in August 2016 and as mentioned, he's the person behind-the-scenes making designed materials used by various departments. This requires significant skill and creativity.

"I have always been a creative person," he said. "I enjoy drawing and have always been interested in technology and computers. So a career in graphic design seemed like the perfect choice."



Matt studied the field at Central Michigan University and received a bachelor's degree in Art with a concentration in graphic design and a minor in Advertising. This training prepared him well for the many challenges he faces with his job.

"As a graphic designer, you encounter a lot of challenges," he said. "Many of them have to do with deadlines and dealing with difficult personalities. But the greatest challenge that every creative person encounters every so often is creative block."

Matt relies on his team to overcome some of these challenges and to get work across the finish line.

"Producing graphics is definitely a team effort," he said. "The original plan or idea comes from the individual requesting the project and they will give me some copy or ideas. Our talented communications team often helps polish the message, and then I use my abilities to give the client a finished design that fits their needs, is creatively aesthetic and also follows our county brand standards and guidelines."

Matt's skills and talents are in-demand across county departments, which keeps him very busy. But he finds the work extremely rewarding.

"Many of the projects that I have worked at in my career with Macomb County have had a direct impact on the community that I live in," he said. "I've worked on projects that have benefited the schools our kids go to, the businesses we shop and support and the health and general wellbeing of the county."

Outside of work, Matt enjoys watching movies and TV shows, playing video games, reading graphic novels and spending time with his family.

"I have a beautiful wife named Melissa and three kids - Logan, Quinn (she's not the middle child because she's a girl) and Gibson," he said. "We also have two dogs - a puggle named Penny and a malshippoo named Ash."

When asked about his personal philosophy and goals, Matt's answer is simple: "I love to learn new things to continue to grow as a person and a designer," he said. "If you're not learning, you're not growing."

Employee Accolades



Vicki Wolber

Deputy County Executive Vicki Wolber was [recently appointed](#) by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer to the bipartisan Protect Michigan Commission. The appointees represent a diverse array of industries, professions and backgrounds. Housed within the Department of Health and Human Services, the commission will help raise awareness of the safety and effectiveness of an approved COVID-19 vaccine, educate the people of this state and help protect the health and safety of all

Michigan residents.

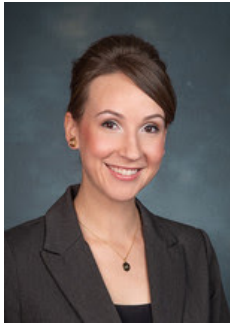


Gerard Santoro

Gerard Santoro, program director for parks and natural resources at Macomb County Planning and Economic Development, recently had two photos selected as winners in the First State Bank "As Seen in Macomb" photo contest. Gerry's images were chosen out of more than 140 entries and appear in First State Bank's 2021 Macomb County calendar. [See all the winners here.](#)

Megan Ochmanek

Megan Ochmanek, a communications specialist for Macomb County Planning and Economic Development, recently received a Professional Certified Marketer - Content Marketing Certificate from the American Marketing Association. The certification required the completion of 23 online courses, which amounted to 28 hours of learning, and passing a rigorous two-hour exam.



Click [here](#) to read more.

Is there someone in your office who deserves a “pat on the back” for an outstanding achievement? If so, please let the Macomb Matters committee know about it! Email Maria.zardis@macombgov.org with the details.

New Hires/Retirees



Retiree Spotlight: Philip Abdo

The Macomb Matters Committee would like to congratulate Sergeant Philip Abdo on his retirement, after many years of service!

Tell us about the different positions you have held during your time with the

county.

I have served as a Corrections Officer, Patrol Deputy, Traffic Deputy, SWAT Team Member, Negotiator, Motor Officer and Motor Unit Commander, Mobile Field Force Team Member and Grenadier Team Leader, Honor Guard Member and Honor Guard Commander, Shift Command Officer, Use of Force Coordinator, Rangemaster and Instructor in several areas.

What will you miss most about working for Macomb County?

I will miss serving the citizens of Macomb. It has been an honor to assist citizens when they needed help.

What are you most proud of during your career with Macomb County?

I am most proud of the actions my partners and I took on a Christmas day when someone called 911 and their father had a medical issue at their dinner. We initiated CPR and we worked as a team, EMS, Fire and Deputies, to bring this man, father, husband, and grandfather back and have him survive to see his family again. I knew that Christmas would not have to be a bad memory for this family.

What are your post retirement plans?

I will be working for police departments to assist officers with allegations of wrongdoing and help them show their innocence.

Any other words of wisdom to share?

I was told a long time ago, and it has served me well over the years, to always leave others better than when you met them. Sometimes I would meet people at the worst times in their lives, I always tried to leave them in a better position. If we all strive to leave people better than we met them, we could have a better society and world.

Click [here](#) for a list of New Hires/Retirees

A Q/A with Andrew Cox

Health Officer of the Macomb County Health Department

In January, Executive Hackel announced the appointment of Andrew Cox as the health officer of the Macomb County Health Department (MCHD). Cox, who previously served as the director of environmental health for the MCHD, replaced Bill Ridella, who recently retired.

Macomb Matters sat down with Andrew for a brief Q/A to learn more about his new role, his experience in public health and what he likes to do in his free time.



Q: How's the first month of the job? What was that transition like?

A: Anytime you step into a new role there's always a learning curve and right now, with the ongoing battle against COVID-19, it can be very challenging. But I've been with the county for eight years and I had some really good partnerships in place that have helped me. I'd also say that the people at the Health Department have been incredible and an awesome support system. And in addition to that, I've had other county departments reach out and say how can we help. So while it's been stressful, I know I've got a great team around me.

Q: Do you have a vision or ideas for the future of the Health Department?

A: What COVID has done, and what emergencies in general do, is highlight areas where we can make improvements. In the last year, we've dramatically changed our model and work mode, where we had services like WIC and environmental health move from in-person to remote work. And our teams have done an incredible job adapting to those changes. How do we move forward and build on that new system so that we can continue to be innovative in our service delivery model? The short answer is to get creative and keep investing in technology, which we will do. On top of that, we need to keep investing in our staff. The COVID response has demonstrated the importance of a great workforce, and we have that here at the Health Department. None of the work we do would be possible without them.

Q: Why did you pursue a career in public health?

A: I had planned to go to medical school, so in college, I was studying pre-med. During that time, I also wanted to do a study abroad course. Traveling internationally was always something I was interested in and MSU had a great program for students. So I went to New Zealand and Australia and while I was there, I took a course that compared the environmental systems of those countries with the U.S. That experience changed my path and I decided to pursue environmental health. After college, I started my career in the food division at Oakland County and I tried to experience as many public health programs as possible, because at the end of the day, I found that serving people and educating them about health issues was extremely rewarding. You can make a real difference in people's lives in this field. Whether you're addressing health disparities or working with the most vulnerable populations - helping people that need it the most is what drives me.

Q: Is there a stand-out moment for you at the Macomb County Health Department?

A: Rolling out our youth preparedness program was incredible. We partnered with first-year medical students to build a curriculum and then go into 5th grade classrooms where we educated students on things like smoke detectors and fire plans. Ultimately, the goal was to have them take our lessons home and share them with their families so entire households could be better prepared for emergencies. We had great feedback from students and teachers - so it's probably one of the things I'm most proud of in my work here.

Q: When you have any downtime, what do you do for fun?

A: Traveling. My wife and I have four children and we love to travel. Obviously we haven't been able to since COVID, so when we get the chance, we are looking forward to going to Disney World. One day we'd love to go to Europe or other areas too. Both children and adults gain so much from traveling and seeing new places. It makes you appreciate your home and where you live, but it also makes you

appreciate other cultures too. Outside of travel, and when I have time, I love playing hockey and fishing.

Q: What are you reading?

A: Right now, I mostly read The American Journal of Public Health, The Journal of Public Health Management Practices, and pieces from the CDC and the National Institutes of Health. It's not the most entertaining, but it's important and the information is timely, sourced and relevant. Outside of that, I enjoy listening to NPR or reading in-depth articles in The Atlantic. Those are some of my go-to's.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

A: I'd just like to once again include a huge shout out to the Health Department staff. I want to say thank you for your hard work. You are the unsung heroes of this pandemic. From our call takers to those working testing and vaccination to others keeping the rest of our programming running, you are incredible. This has been challenging, but you have all remained professional and courteous and so just a huge thank you from me.

Vaccinating Macomb County



The Macomb County Health Department has been hard at work providing the COVID-19 vaccine to the community. In December, the MCHD began preparing for its first shipment of vaccines from the state. More than two months later, the county has administered over 40,000 doses to emergency service workers, first responders, municipal employees and senior citizens, among others. According to Executive Hackel, elderly residents are a main focus for the county.

"Seniors are an at-risk population for COVID-19," [he said](#). "They are one of our top priorities and we continue to look for innovative and safe ways to vaccinate these individuals while keeping them safe."

Some of the county's senior-focused initiatives include:

- A partnership with SMART and Richmond/Lenox EMS, which created a drive-through vaccine program available to any resident aged 65 or above. Interested seniors should call the SMART Macomb Vaccine Hotline at 586-421-6579 to register for the county wait list between the hours of 3 p.m. – 7 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Saturdays, and 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Sundays. Seniors can also email the SMART Macomb Vaccine Hotline 24/7 at macombvaccine@smartbus.org and include their name, address, phone number and date of birth. Macomb County will contact individuals from the wait list as appointments become available.
- A partnership with Meijer Pharmacy, which allows individuals to register in the Meijer system for vaccination at Macomb County stores. To register, individuals can text COVID to 75049, [go online](#) or simply visit a local Meijer pharmacy and ask to register.

Making all of this possible is the hard-working staff at the Macomb County Health Department. Every employee has stepped up to do their part. From manning phone lines to managing the vaccine site at the Verkuilen Building, this team has gone above and beyond for their community. And residents agree. Countless individuals have shared positive feedback about their experience receiving the COVID-19 vaccine through the MCHD. For instance, one individual shared the following:

"Thank you to the staff today who made having my 86-year-old parents vaccinated a great experience. The entire operation is very well organized and the staff went above and beyond. They provided wheel chairs and staff to make it more accessible. I appreciate your help."

So again, thank you to the MCHD team for making the county's vaccination program possible.

Please note: County employees are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. For those having difficulty scheduling an appointment, please be patient. As additional

vaccines are made available, more people will be able to be vaccinated. The Macomb Matters team asks you to check MacombGov.org regularly or follow the Macomb County Health Department on Facebook for updates. Additionally, for individuals you know that are not yet eligible for the vaccine, stay tuned in for new information.

And finally, a reminder for everyone that even with the vaccine in place and available, we still need to continue to follow safety guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Continue wearing a mask, wash your hands and practice social distancing. The fight against the coronavirus is not over yet, and we need to remain vigilant in our health and safety efforts.

For Your Benefit: A Message from Andy McKinnon



Enough already! We have had enough!

This is the thought that continues to go through my head day after day as this pandemic rolls on and we limp ever so slowly toward an end goal of having community protection against the scourge that has visited itself upon the entire world. It almost feels like an Old Testament plague in its scope and impact on us all.

Of course, those who have lost the most are those who have lost family members and friends to this terrible disease. For them, there will not be a simple moving beyond this and our deepest condolences and sympathy go out to them.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on how you look at it, we cannot say: "We have had enough." We must find ways to move forward and it requires small movements. It requires small kindnesses to yourself and to others. Humanity has faced terrible long-term adversity in the past and we have always moved forward. With each trial we learn more and attempt to not repeat our mistakes.

In [this article](#) from Marsh Group, a local mental health provider, they describe strategies to get us moving forward, including:

Move-- Move your body in some way. Getting out and moving releases endorphins that help improve mood. This can even be chair exercises if that's all you can do.

Gratitude-- Reflect on something to be grateful for, even in the darkest night there are lights. (Currently, I am grateful for the blessing of having Jodi Dix back in our office.)

Censor-- Watch what you say as others are watching and listening to you too. (After typing this I should probably call Steve Smigiel, I think I owe him an apology.)

Connect-- We are social creatures who are bolstered by our relationships with others.

Talk-- If you feel like you are totally drained and nothing will work, reach out to a trusted health professional, a friend, a member of the clergy or our Employee Assistance Program ("EAP") at 800.448.8326.

Finally, and this isn't in the above article, I think it helps to know that you aren't alone. I don't believe there is a person among us who could honestly say that this has been a breeze, that they aren't frustrated, angry, spent, etc. It's okay to be in that place. What's not okay is wallowing there for too long before taking steps to make it better for yourself. After all, you are the only person who has such power over yourself and who can make it better.

Now, does anyone know where that groundhog lives, I have a score to settle with him about extending my winter!

Perks at Work



Your financial health matters

Macomb County Government Perks at Work is here to help with tax season this year. Take advantage of negotiated employee pricing and tax savings tips to help make this tax season smooth.

Click [here](#) to see our recommendations for a stress-free tax season. And make sure to take advantage of tax preparation software available through Macomb County Government Perks at Work by visiting www.perksatwork.com and clicking on the "Taxes" category.

Casual Day Program embraces selected charities



The Board of Commissioners Casual Day Program continues in 2021, but with an additional emphasis on charitable organizations.

The BOC recognizes each organization fills a specific need in the community and that certain organizations hold a special place with county employees. To recognize this and to further encourage donations, the Board has asked each county department to choose one of the 12 selected Casual Day organizations and to serve as an ambassador for it. The organization which a department chooses will receive all the donations earned on the four Special Casual Days in 2021.

It is within the discretion of each department to select which charity they choose to champion. Each department is encouraged to disseminate information on the charity throughout their office and in the community, allowing awareness and donations for the charity to be raised. Our communications team will provide each department with information on the monthly charities to be shared via social media, newsletters and other forms of communications each department utilizes, further encouraging others to embrace the charity as well.

At the end of the year, collection totals for each charity will be announced at a special Full Board meeting where the charities and department representatives will be invited to share information on each organization and its meaning to each department and the community. Please join us as we take steps to deepen the impact of the Macomb County Casual Day Charitable Collections Program.

The Casual Day program was first adopted by resolution of the Board of Commissioners in 1994 and it has continued to grow thanks to Macomb County employees' commitment to helping others. Since the program's inception, nearly \$707,000 has been donated by generous employees to various charities.

The Casual Day Program recipients for 2021 are:

- February: Care House
- March: Clinton River Watershed Council
- April: Community Housing Network
- Special Casual Day: April 30
- May: Families Against Narcotics
- June: Humane Society of Macomb
- July: I Heart Dogs

- Special Casual Day: July 30
- August: Marty's Place
- September: The Rainbow Connection
- October: Samaritan House
- Special Casual Day: October 29
- November: Sandcastles (Henry Ford)
- December: Turning Point
- Special Casual Day: December 29

Macomb County Animal Control Adoption of the Month



Tucker

Congratulations to Tucker, who was recently adopted, and his fur-ever family! Is your companion waiting for you? Pay a visit to Macomb County Animal Control and find out! Visit the [website](#) for more information about pets available for adoption, information about the adoption process and for hours of operation.

MMYH Ambassadors



Tax Preparation Assistance

Welcome back to the MMYH Ambassadors column! This edition will feature an important service offered by Macomb Community Action and Macomb County Veterans Services: Tax

preparation assistance. Let's get started.

Macomb Community Action is partnering with the Accounting Aid Society and Macomb County Veterans Services to offer income eligible Macomb County residents free tax preparation and filing services at IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites. If your total household income is below \$57,000 you may be eligible for free tax preparation and filing. [View tax preparation schedules and services here](#). To schedule an appointment with Macomb County's VITA program or for further tax information, please call 586-463-2537. To schedule an appointment with the Accounting Aid Society please call 313-556-1920.

Appointments are subject to change with no notice due to COVID-19 orders. The following documents must be presented:

- Identification
 - Valid driver's license or state ID for each adult on the return
 - Social Security card for each adult and child on the return
- Income Documentation
 - All W-2s
 - All 1099s
 - DHHS assistance
 - Child support/Alimony
 - Letter from Social Security for SSI Income
 - 1095s for Marketplace Medical Insurance and employer insurance
- Proof of Expenses
 - Any and all childcare expenses
 - Property tax statement
 - Mortgage interest statement
 - Monthly rent amount (if applicable)
 - January gas bill for heating credit
 - Student loan interest or tuition and course materials
 - Itemized car insurance policy that shows PIP
- Direct Deposit Information
- Past Year's Completed Tax Returns

Now - think you're ready to complete the ambassador quiz? [Click here](#) to get started and stay tuned for the next issue, where we'll cover a new topic.

Paw Print



A message from Chief Randazzo

At this time a year ago, Macomb County Animal Control (MCAC) was rolling out our partnership with PetHub, and announcing we were the first animal control agency in the state of Michigan to offer digital license tags. Just a few weeks later, our lives would be upended by a virus. 2020 presented numerous challenges to our physical and mental wellbeing, financial stability, relationships, careers, education – the list could go on. One often overlooked – and heartbreaking – challenge has been the impact this pandemic has had on pets and the people who love them. It is an unfortunate reality that more and more families, faced with reduced income or changes in housing, have made the difficult decision to surrender their pets because they are no longer in a position to care for them responsibly.

MCAC is committed to preventing that tragic outcome and is proud to introduce the Pet Retention Program. This program is made possible through a substantial gift from a generous donor who wishes to remain anonymous. The funds are earmarked to assist pet owners who, as a result of this pandemic, are struggling to keep their pets with them. These pet owners can qualify for up to \$500, which can be used to subsidize an animal's medical care, provide items for the animal's wellness, or for training. The program is open to all Macomb County residents.

MCAC also extends a helping hand to families and their pets through our Pet Food Pantry. The Pet Food Pantry is stocked with pet food and other items, donated by generous residents and organizations of Macomb County. The food is available to pet owners who need help feeding their pets.

Anyone interested in applying for the Pet Retention Program, or who would like more information about the program, should contact our office directly, at 586-469-5115. Individuals who would like to donate to or request assistance from our Pet Food Pantry should do the same. And if you know of a family in need, or at risk of having to surrender their pets, please refer them to us, and share our phone number with them.

Stay safe, and very importantly, stay together.

If you'd like to assist us in our mission to protect the health and safety of our residents, and to protect animals and promote their humane treatment. You can donate through our [website](#). You can also shop our [Amazon Wish List](#).

Recipe Corner - White Chicken Chili

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut bite-sized
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 ½ teaspoons garlic powder or 6 cloves garlic
- 2 cans (15.5 ounces each) white beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 cups (or 14.5 ounce can) chicken broth (see notes)
- 2 cans (4 ounces each) chopped mild green chilies
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano leaves
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper or chili powder (optional)
- 1 cup sour cream or plain yogurt
- ½ cup nonfat or 1% milk



Directions

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan; sauté the chicken, onion and garlic until chicken is no longer pink.
2. Add the beans, broth, chilies and seasonings.
3. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer uncovered, for 30 minutes.
4. Remove from the heat; stir in sour cream and milk.
5. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Notes

- Broth can be canned or made using bouillon. For each cup of broth use 1 cup very hot water and 1 teaspoon or 1 cube bouillon.
- Instead of chicken use turkey or an additional 2 cups of cooked beans.
- Cook your own dry beans. One can (15 ounces) is about 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 cups drained beans.
- Serve with hot sauce or black pepper. The Macomb Matters Committee would like to thank the hard-working staff at MSU Extension for their recipe contributions. For more information about the programs MSU Extension offers, please visit <https://msue.macombgov.org/MSUE-Home>

This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. SNAP can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact Oregon SafeNet at 211. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. 2017 Oregon State University Extension Service offers educational programs, activities, and materials without discrimination based on age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran's status. Oregon State University Extension Service is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

SOURCE: <https://www.foodhero.org/recipes/white-chicken-chili>



www.macombgov.org
(586) 469-7001

