FEBRUARY 22, 2013

NOTICE OF MEETING

There will be a meeting of the BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS on Thursday, February 28, 2013, at 7 p.m., on the 9th Floor of the County Administration Building, in the Commissioners’ Board Room, Mount Clemens.

(Invocation this month is by Commissioner Marvin Sauger)

PRELIMINARY AGENDA

1. COMMITTEE REPORTS:
   a) Government Operations, February 25 (to be provided)
   b) Ad Hoc on Board Rules, February 25 (to be provided)
   c) Economic Development, February 28 (to be provided)
   d) Finance, February 28 (to be provided)

2. Correspondence from Executive

3. Board Chair’s Report (page 1) (attached)

Corinne Bedard
Committee Reporter
RESOLUTION TO receive and file report from Board Chair for February, 2013

INTRODUCED BY: Dave Flynn, Full Board

The following is a report on activities within the Board Office which do not usually appear on committee agendas.

Meetings with OCE:
02-01-13: Contracts, process
02-05-13: MOU, Budget
02-08-13: Intergov Agreements, Budget
02-14-13: Contracts, process
Update on MOU

Other:
Commissioner meetings
Broadcast Work Group formed
Leadership Macomb – Roy Rose and Karen Smith
District Demographic Profiles provided; District Maps coming soon
MCWRAC – Commissioner Boyle and Vosburg
PACE – Commissioners Carabelli and Mijac
BOC Job Posting – Director of Legislative Affairs

Upcoming Board Events and Activities:
Macomb County Green Schools Program
- Sponsorship funds are being raised; thanks to Prosecuting Attorney Eric Smith for sponsoring the banners that will be awarded to schools and to IBEW for funds to be used for the Awards Ceremony (Tuesday, April 16, 2013 at MISD)
- Update from Commissioner Moceri

National County Government Month
- NACo has dedicated April as National County Government Month and encourages counties to educate and raise awareness about county government to public
- Theme has been identified as “Smart Justice: Creating Safer Communities”
- JPS Committee will take under consideration

Volunteer Recognition
- The Board will accept nominations for outstanding volunteers in March and April with the annual recognition program at the May Full Board meeting.

Events-Meetings in Macomb:
Home in Macomb Business Awards took place on February 12th
- BOC represented by Commissioners Boyle and Flynn

All About Food: Farm to Fork Conference took place on February 14th
- Summary from Commissioner Moceri

State of Macomb Township Address: February 22, 2013
- BOC represented by Commissioners Miller and Sabatini

Martha T. Berry Legislative Update/Breakfast: March 1, 2013, 8-9:30am
- RSVP to Jennifer Morgan
Region:
Meetings:
- Gary Russi, Oakland University
- Mike Gingell, Oakland County Board Chair

Events: National Association Regional Councils, Feb. 11-13th, Macomb County BOC was represented by Commissioner Kathy Vosburg.

SEMCOG Open House, Feb. 22nd, BOC represented by Commissioners Vosburg and Moceri
Upcoming: Mackinac Policy Conference, May 29-31

Media:
See attached articles.

**BOC – Independent Counsel:** Expenditures for Outside Counsel Professional Services

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Child poverty in Macomb County rises dramatically

By Maryanne Kocis MacLeod
Maryanne.macleod@macombdaily.com

Thursday, January 31, 2013

Child Poverty in Macomb County increased 50 percent, between 2005 and 2011, according to the latest Kids Count in Michigan Data Book, part of a national effort to improve conditions for children and their families.

“We clearly see a connection between higher-income communities and better outcomes for kids,” said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, Kids Count in Michigan project director at the Michigan League for Public Policy. “But even in more affluent counties, child poverty and the need for food assistance jumped dramatically.”

The rate of young children in the county qualifying for food assistance increased 83 percent, compared to a statewide rise of 55 percent.

“The number of children eligible for food assistance doubled to include 17,000 children,” Zehnder-Merrell said. “At the same time, the number of children who qualified for free and reduced cost lunch jumped from 22,000 to 32,000. That’s a pretty significant increase.”

In the New Haven school district, 52 percent of students at the elementary level, and 47 percent in high school qualify for free and reduced lunches, said Superintendent Keith Wunderlich. “That number has leveled off in the last couple years, but yes, we did see big increases between 2005 and 2011.”

Regional as well local unemployment, in particular, the closing of the foundry about 11 years ago, has had a sweeping effect on the financial viability of his district.

“Much of what was downtown, where the factory workers spent time and money, is no more,” Wunderlich said.
Three additional areas of concern healthwise in Macomb County include:

A 10 percent increase in the infant mortality rate, in which Macomb placed 27th of 49 counties ranked.

A 13 percent increase in the number of low, birth-weight infants, in which Macomb County placed 70th of 81 counties ranked, with 8.6 percent of babies born too small, compared to 8.5 percent statewide. “This statistic is really out of whack,” Zehnder Merrell said.

A 6 percent increase in the child/teen death rate, in which Macomb placed 23 of 56 counties ranked.

“The health of the mother is a key influence in regard to infant mortality and low birth-weight babies,” Zehnder Merrell said. “One of four mothers giving birth in Macomb County does not have adequate health care.”

The report also indicated the rate of confirmed victims of abuse and neglect, linked to poverty, increased by 41 percent in the county, compared to a statewide increase of just 28 percent, Kids Count report.

Karen Olsen, Great Start Collaborative Coordinator for the Macomb Intermediate School District, said the MISD has analyzed past Kids Count data and implemented programs to address key areas of concern.

Overall, Macomb County ranked in the top 25 percent of the state. The report indicated an overall improvement in the area of education. “We’ve implemented several early literacy workshops and trainings for professionals,” Olsen said. “In addition, (our team) works with parents of children, birth to age 5, to strengthen literacy skills. We’ve also greatly increased the number of children’s books and resources to parents.”

Statewide, the biggest improvements include the decline of kids in foster care, which fell by 6,000 between 2005 and 2011, from 17,000 to 11,000; as well as a decrease in fourth-graders not proficient in reading from 40 percent to 32 percent of test takers in the Michigan Educational Assessment Program.
Vosburg looks back on county board power struggles

By Chad Selweski
chad.selweski@macombdaily.com @cbsnewsman

Sunday, February 3, 2013

After enduring two years of tumult as the first Board of Commissioners chair under Macomb County’s new charter/executive form of government, Kathy Vosburg cringes when reflecting on the battles between the board and County Executive Mark Hackel, and she flashes a bemused smile when told that officials on both sides have pledged to “hit the reset button.”

The power struggle that emerged in late 2011 grew into very public, ugly fights over budgets, ethics, personnel appointments, purchasing policies and approval of government contracts.

The contracting issue led to an intense court fight between Hackel and the commissioners — with Vosburg as the point person for the board, refusing to give an inch.

When the board emerged victorious at the Court of Appeals, winning the right to play a role in contracting and purchasing, an uneasiness simmered just below the surface.

Five weeks into 2013 the numerous efforts by the executive office to marginalize the commissioners — and the board’s eagerness to fight back — seem to have ended in a cease fire.

The new board chair, Sterling Heights Democrat Dave Flynn, was selected for the top spot on a partisan 9-4 vote in January. Though Vosburg lost, she stressed that no partisan divide exists when the issue is the balance of powers within county government. “I’d say right now he has 13 votes,” said the Chesterfield Township
Republican.

Vosburg recalls that the commissioners were united throughout the court fight over contracting and purchasing policies. And the unity only grew stronger when petty fights between the board and the executive reached the point where the only communication between the two branches of government was via voice mail and email.

"One commissioner making one negative comment at a committee meeting would cause the entire board office to be shut out of all communication," said Vosburg, who was easily re-elected to another 2-year term on the board in November.

Hackel and his top aides have repeatedly said that the commissioners were in denial, resisting the fact that they no longer hold the executive powers, the control of day-to-day management, within the new system.

But Charter Commissioners who wrote the voter-approved county charter have expressed to Vosburg their disappointment with the rough start for the new government. And some in the business community who supported the charter/executive format have been dismayed that they still have to deal with various departments to win approval for certain projects.

"That reflected the view of his (Hackel's) advisers who thought the executive office would be this one-stop-shop," she said.

Going forward, Vosburg advocates some technical changes to the budget and to the purchasing process.

"There are no glaring holes, we just need to have some things fixed," the former chair said.

At a January meeting with several commissioners, both sides agreed that a top priority is a need for better communication. Flynn wants twice-monthly meetings but Vosburg would be pleased if the new chair could simply manage a basic monthly get-together.

Promises of monthly meetings between the board chair and Hackel lasted just two months after the executive first took office in January 2011.

Hackel told reporters in December that his New Year's resolution was to take a much more cordial and cooperative approach with the commissioners. At a Macomb County Chamber of Commerce forum last week, the executive emphasized that the fighting is over.

"It was obvious that we'd have issues in a new form of government with dividing legislative and executive responsibilities," Hackel said. "The ... problem was: Who's responsible for what?"

Flynn said he and Hackel have "hit the reset button" and have promised a new era of cooperation and collaboration between the executive and legislative branches.

"In the beginning it was somewhat rocky, but it was not personal, it was about substantive issues," Flynn said. "My ... pledge to the executive office is that we will work things out in an adult way."

Vosburg remains skeptical.
"I don't think the tone (set by Hackel) has ever helped him," Vosburg concluded. "I think the public is sick of it. They voted for the charter and they want it to work."
County honors leaders for shared services

by CHRIS GRAY
Observer Staff Writer

An early lesson learned is that sharing is caring, and even today communities are recognized for that practice.

Eleven communities in Macomb County were honored by county government for their efforts to share resources as a way of keeping costs down while enhancing services for residents.

During a ceremony on Jan. 31, County Executive Mark Hackel said county government credits the communities for making the decisions to share services, adding that recognizing them also gives the leaders a chance to see what their local and county neighbors are doing.

"There’s much more to southeast Michigan than just our individuality," he said. "We need to come together as a region so we can be much more competitive with other regions throughout this country and that’s exactly what we’re seeing."

The Village of Romeo as well as Bruce and Washington townships received recognition for participating in Parks and Recreation as well as STAR Transportation. STAR is a transportation service for senior citizens and disabled residents.

Washington Township Supervisor Dan O’Leary said alongside Parks and Recreation and STAR, the local communities also share cable, sewer, libraries and administrative services.

"We do not together people don’t even realize we do," he said. "Behind the scenes, there’s a lot of talk between the towns."

In terms of future shared services, O’Leary said firefighting and finding ways to attract more businesses to the area could be examined.

Bruce Township Supervisor Richard Cory said one of the important factors provided by shared services is the quality of life it provides to present and future residents.

"We can show these new businesses that are coming out here. . . that we can sell a really nice way of life for their workers," he said. "They’re going to get good schools, good Parks and Rec and a lot of opportunities."

Clara Russell, director of Parks and Recreation, accepted the award on behalf of the Village of Romeo.

The townships of Armada, Bruce, Lenox, Ray, Richmond and Washington were all recognized for their combined participation in the Macomb Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights Committee (MAPDRC).

The program assists residents who wish to keep their property as farmlands by landowners selling the developmental rights to the state. An easement is placed on the property that prohibits the land from residential, commercial or industrial uses.

Armada Township Supervisor John Paterek credited Ken DeCock, a farmer and member of MAPDRC, for his work in making the committee successful.

"I would be remiss if I didn’t include Ken in accepting this presentation to the township because he’s definitely a very important part of the PDR committee and I’m proud of that," Paterek said.
Ray Township Supervisor Charlie Bohm spoke highly of the efforts Hackel is putting forth to bolster agriculture, saying it is a major part of Macomb County.

"We've had some meetings with Hackel and we're working toward getting agriculture toward the forefront and letting everybody in Macomb County know how nice it is to have roadside stands and whatever else it might be," Bohm said.

Other communities that received recognition included the following:

- Lenox and Richmond townships for joint emergency medical services
- Eastpointe for leasing office space that serves as a satellite office for Macomb County
- Centerline for cross-training Department of Public Works employees as firefighters
- New Baltimore and Chesterfield Township for an integrated public safety records management system

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If I say 'Macomb County, Michigan', what comes to mind? Maybe you think of Reagan Democrats, sprawl, Mile Roads, growth, the third most populous county in the state, or the defense industry. What about traditional downtowns located along unique bodies of water? Few of us identify Macomb as home to home of some of the most impressive water resources in our region.

Gerry Santoro, Program Manager of Land and Water Resources at Macomb County’s Planning and Economic Development Department says, "We’re trying to change the image. Let’s realize and celebrate what we are."

The Clinton River, whose headwaters are in Oakland County, meanders through Macomb County, providing 40 linear miles of coastline. And of course there’s Lake St. Clair, a massive lake that separates Michigan from Ontario, Canada and provides Macomb County with 32 miles of coastline.

With these assets, it’s no wonder that Macomb
Developing Macomb's Blue Economy

County has one of the highest concentrations of marines and registered boaters in the United States.

Historically, Macomb County, specifically the city of Mount Clemens, was a destination for its famed mineral baths, which drew visitors from near and far to soak in its supposedly curative mineral-rich waters. While the fever surrounding mineral baths died out in the 1940s, there is a new-found excitement in harnessing the economic development potential of the County's unique freshwater assets.

Key political leaders, foremost among them being County Executive Mark Hackel, have realized the importance of Macomb's water assets and united behind a strategic development plan for an initiative they are calling the "Blue Economy."

The plan looks at Macomb's water resources as critical to economic development efforts and improving the quality of life in the County, but it also recognizes the importance of good environmental stewardship of those assets in order to ensure their sustainability.

Recreational use of water assets is a key component of the Blue Economy initiative, and they're not just talking about the Jobbie Nooner. Macomb sees lots of potential in Lake St. Clair's status as a fishing destination. Kevin Van Dam, one of the most decorated sport fisherman in the world, proclaims Lake St. Clair the "best smallmouth fishery on the planet." Nineteen naturally occurring species of fish are open for recreational fishing.

Perhaps even more exciting is the emergence of the Clinton River Blue Way Water Trail, which has been under development for about six years. The Blue Way traverses the entire county, from Lake St. Clair to Mount Clemens to Clinton Township to Romeo and Utica. We often hear about greenways like the Dequindre Cut in Detroit, but a blue way is a newer concept in Michigan, allowing public access to the river all along its banks. The Blue Way is intended to encourage paddling hobbyists in kayaks and canoes to get out on the river and create recreational opportunities previously unknown in Macomb County, such as public camping. Additionally, the County believes that the Blue Way "present[s] many opportunities to educate the public about their role in protecting water quality and wildlife habitat" and boost tourism in the County's towns.

"Every single community along the Main and North Branches of the Clinton River are recognizing the benefits of having a river flow through their..."
Basin), they can...well, water the seeds of regional cooperation.

"It can't be any other way," says Varra. "If there is anything I can emphasize, it's that partnership is critical. We have a wealth of talent in this region. This a great time for us to be doing what we're doing."

Matthew Lewis is a special project editor for Issue Media Group.

All Photos by David Lewinski Photography
communities," notes Santoro. Sterling Heights is rezoning its land abutting the Clinton River to make more optimal use of the river resource. Schools are beginning to make use of the river for educational opportunities.

Anne Varra, Executive Director of the Clinton River Watershed Council, whose mission is to enhance, protect, and promote the Clinton River and Lake St. Clair, says, "The goal is to get people to the water and understand the resources around them."

CRWC does this by promoting a spirit of volunteerism around water resources. "One of the best things we do at the Watershed Council is enriching the volunteerism of this community. We attract an average 10,000 volunteers each year," says Varra.

Events like the recent Stonefly Search on the Clinton River are examples of this. The stonefly is an insect active in the winter whose presence indicates high water quality. Increased visibility and access to St. Clair and Clinton River can increase residents' attachment to these bodies and inspire them to protect the waters. Water can be a pillar of community building.

Access to water resources is a key component of the Blue Economy, but it is something that has been elusive in the past. The County admits in its Strategic Development Plan that "too few Macomb County residents regularly have a chance to see and access Lake St. Clair or the Clinton River."

The plan is to change this by acquiring waterfront lands through the foreclosure process, as well as changing land use policies to encourage the development of walkable public access sites. Whether or not the foreclosure process, as opposed to eminent domain, is robust enough to assemble access sites to waterways is a matter for debate, but land use changes and utilization of funding from tax capture districts are underway to make access a possibility.

Many take for granted that Macomb County is home to several traditional downtowns, such as Utica, Mount Clemens, Romeo, New Baltimore, and St. Clair Shores.

This excites Gerry Santoro. "We've identified five nodal areas for walkable, new urbanist communities on Lake St. Clair. New Baltimore can be the Saugatuck of Eastern Michigan." Utica's dedication of its riverwalk last year is a testament to a changing culture in Macomb that is embracing its natural resources and increasing residents' ability to access them.

Of course, to ensure the Clinton River and Lake St. Clair's capacity to provide the population with recreational opportunities, environmental stewardship of these resources is critical. In order for the Blue Economy to function, the waters must remain safe for swimming and healthy enough to support their fish populations. Reconciling increased access to Macomb's waters with care for the health of the waters is key.

"A lot of local governments have gotten really serious about spending the money to separate combined sewers to promote water quality," Santoro notes. "Are we there yet? No. We still have beach closures from time to time, but we are re-learning how to be effective."

Because water systems know no boundaries (the Clinton River spans Oakland and Macomb Counties and it and Lake St. Clair belong to the larger Great Lakes Water
Wayne State University plans to turn the former Farmer Jack building on 12 Mile Road in Warren into a facility offering engineering, computer science, business, advanced manufacturing and other programs. (Macomb Daily staff photo by David Dalton)

Expanding its presence in Macomb County, Wayne State University plans to build a facility in Warren offering engineering, computer science, business, advanced manufacturing and other programs.

The Advanced Technology Education Center would be on 12 Mile Road, by Macomb Community College’s south campus. The 3.5-acre site includes a 40,000-square-foot building formerly occupied by a Farmer Jack grocery store.

The project cost is estimated at $12 million and would be funded partially by bonds to be issued by the university. A date for the start of construction and renovations has not been set but officials have targeted autumn 2014 for classes to start.

“We are very excited about the program and the project several years in the works. It’s really building on our education strategy for Macomb County,” said Ahmad Ezzeddine, Wayne State’s vice president of educational
outreach and international programs.

Initial design phase efforts are under way. University officials have selected the NORR architectural/engineering/planning firm for the project. Bids from construction general contractors are under review.

Design and budgetary details will be submitted to the Board of Governor for final approval in May, Ezzeddine said.

While significant, the Warren project is only part of much wider construction and renovation plans by Wayne State.

The WSU Board of Governors on Wednesday approved the sale of $92 million in bonds to finance several building projects. That includes $32 million toward a new $93 million Multidisciplinary Biomedical Research Building on Cass Avenue, at the former Daldgeish Cadillac building; $23.5 million in funding for an estimated $33.5 million for new laboratory classrooms and renovated research labs in the Physics, Engineering and Shapero buildings; $18 million to renovate the Student Center Building; and $8.5 million for improvements at Manoogian Hall.

The 30-year bonds are underwritten by Bank of America and will be sold at a public offering in the spring, Ezzeddine confirmed. They will be paid off through future tuition collections, “cost recovery” research funds and other revenue sources outside of the state government’s allocation to the university.

At ATEC, Wayne State and MCC faculty will team to research and develop electric vehicle technologies and automotive battery technology. The researchers will work together at both institutions.

The joint research was a driving factor in Wayne State’s purchase of the former Farmer Jack property 2011.

“This was by design,” Ezzeddine said. “We look at them as a strategic partner in this. We probably are going to have joint programs delivered out of that facility.”

“It’s exciting and I am certainly thrilled we’re going to get our first four-year university in Warren,” Mayor James Fouts said. “We have a high caliber community college and now we have a high caliber university.”

Fouts hopes the ATEC will attract high-tech companies to Warren and home buyers.

“Anytime when you have... a higher university setting, it adds some status,” he said.

The ATEC facility in Warren marks the third phase of expansion by Wayne State in Macomb County. The university was one of the original partners in the University Center at Macomb Community College in Clinton Township. Wayne State expanded programming there in 2006.

In 2010, it opened its Macomb Education Center at the former Macomb County Library on Hall Road, west of Garfield Road.

WSU currently offers 27 degree programs in Macomb County. The total would jump with the opening of the ATEC center.
7 cities sue to keep part of DIA, zoo taxes

By Chad Halcom

Seven suburban cities and 12 local finance authorities in Wayne County want a judge to hold a hearing in the next few weeks to determine whether they can hold onto some property taxes they collect for the Detroit Institute of Arts and Detroit Zoo.

Officials in those communities filed a joint lawsuit late last week against Wayne County Treasurer Raymond Wojtowicz as well as the Wayne County Zoological Authority and Art Institute Authority, both of which were created to collect regional millages.

Suing are Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Belleville, Wyandotte, Romulus, Northville and Taylor, along with some local district authorities for downtown development, brownfield redevelopment and other local tax capture in those cities and in Van Buren and Plymouth townships.

At issue in the lawsuit are tax capture districts such as tax increment finance authorities, created by legislation dating from the 1970s. Such tax districts capture a share of property taxes levied in a defined district to fund capital improvement projects there, except for certain taxes that are exempt.

In 2008, voters in the region approved a 10-year, 0.1-mill tax levy for local authorities -- in this case, the Wayne County Zoological Authority, which in turn supports the Detroit Zoo. A similar 10-year, 0.2-mill levy passed at the ballot last year for county authorities to collectively fund the DIA.

But since 2008, various Wayne County communities have held back a small share -- nearly $800,000 to date -- of the tax revenue for the zoo on the theory that it was captured to fund those local authorities. The rest is forwarded to the county.

Wojtowicz has contended that the zoo and DIA revenue is not subject to authority tax capture and relies in part on a legal opinion from then-Attorney General Mike Cox in 2009 regarding the zoo millage. The communities contend in part that the new authorities are not one of the exemptions carved out of the original tax increment finance laws.

Wojtowicz has said he's "convinced ... these taxes should benefit the zoo and the art institute." The art museum millage was approved in November by voters in all three counties.

The communities in the lawsuit want a Wayne County Circuit Court judge to convene a hearing soon to consider their argument due to impending tax collections.

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The Associated Press contributed to this report.
First-ever Macomb Business Awards an Oscar-worthy event

By Chad Selweski
chad.selweski@macombdaily.com @cbsnewsman

Tuesday, February 12, 2013

It wasn’t the Grammy’s or the Oscars, but the first-ever Macomb Business Awards on Tuesday offered many of the same stylistic trappings – big-screen video clips introducing the nominees, audience anticipation as the winner’s name was announced, and acceptance speeches expressing surprise and humility and “what an honor,” plus numerous people to thank.

Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel demonstrated his usual panache by putting on a big show for the hundreds gathered at the Sterling Inn to learn who among the 49 nominees won the four awards for “Best in Business.”

And the winners were:
• For Energy Efficient Expert, General Dynamics Land Systems of Sterling Heights. The mega-defense contractor, which employs 2,000 workers at its Macomb County facilities, assembled a “Green Team” to accomplish energy savings through improvements to air compressors and heating and cooling systems, and installation of LED lights, induction lighting technology and motion-sensor lights.

The result? A savings of $1.4 million a year for GD by relying upon green efficiency and renewable power sources.

“This is very important work for us because one of our No. 1 priorities is environmental health and safety,” said Richard Gillette, a GD senior vice president.

• For Corporate Citizen, Omega Plastics of Roseville. The 180-employee firm stresses charity work outside of the factory and has frequently assisted the March of Dimes.

Demonstrating their “better to give than to receive attitude,” the company management donated extra space on their second floor to a counseling center that has since seen its clientele grow to 150.

“We are so honored and humbled by this award,” said Mike Pavlica, company vice president “We want to make a difference in the community and I am so honored to be part of a company that really cares.”

• For Diversification Leader, Fori Automation of Shelby Township. The auto-related firm recently built a new 15,000-square-foot building solely for the purpose of diversifying their customer base. The hiring of new
employees is expected to follow.

Fori’s new specialty is in automation-guided vehicles that allow for a moving assembly line. As a result, the company’s high-tech products assist with the manufacture of commercial airliners, the Pentagon’s new F-35 fighter jet, agricultural machinery, and motorcycles.

Paul Meloche, a company vice president, with a tip of the cap to the keynote speaker at the awards ceremony, Detroit Tigers broadcaster Mario Impemba, told the crowd: “Like the Detroit Tigers and Mike Ilitch, we have a team and an ownership that works together and supports diversification.”

* For Champion of Workforce Development, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union, which operates an extensive training center in Warren.

With 4,500 members, IBEW Local 58 provides an extensive apprenticeship program for electricians that leads to journeyman status. Continuing education follows, allowing union members to master electrical work specialties based on the evolving marketplace.

“Wow … it’s an honor to even be considered for this award. This is very humbling,” said Gary Polulak, training director at the National Electrical Contractors Association facility.

A panel of judges from various sectors of the business community chose the winners.

In a separate award presented by the staff of the county Planning and Economic Development Department, Macomb Community College received the Economic Development Partner of the Year Award for the college’s efforts to customize job training programs to business needs and to place more than 1,000 retrained workers into new jobs in 2012.

The Macomb Business Awards were presented by County Executive Mark Hackel, right, to (left to right): Mike Pavlica of Omega Plastics, Paul Meloche of Fori Automation, Richard Gillette of General Dynamics, and Gary Polulak of IBEW.

URL: http://www.macombdaily.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20130212/NEWS01/1302199895&template=printart

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Velocity Center Hitting Its Stride In Defense, Manufacturing
February 12, 2013 5:32 PM

STERLING HEIGHTS — A former child care center in the heart of Macomb County’s defense and automotive belt is getting busier and busier as a business incubator.

The Macomb-OU Incubator at Velocity Center, a branch of Oakland University’s business incubator, is now working with 24 business accelerator clients, six of which are based at the center, 6633 18 Mile Road.

"We provide comprehensive development support to startup businesses and entrepreneurs in the form of incubation and acceleration services," said Joel Carleton, marketing and communications manager, who joined the incubator in November 2011. "We provide support to the Macomb County region mainly, but also to clients in Oakland County and Wayne County."

Carleton said those incubator services consist mostly of low-rent office space (as low as $185 a month for an office or cubicle) and access to office equipment.

Acceleration services, she said, "have a very wide range," and include business advisory boards tailored to the individual client from a field of more than 70 subject matter experts who have volunteered for the task.

The incubator has also added two recent services, an executive in residence program, and a new defense program, led by Larry Herriman, assistant executive director and director of the Michigan DARPA Matching Event of Program.

DARPA is the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, a privatized defense tech skunk works created by the federal government in the wake of being blindsided by Soviet space superiority with the launch of Sputnik in 1957. DARPA-sponsored research is in part responsible for technical advances like unmanned vehicles, satellite communications, the Internet and more.

The incubator won a competitive bid process to be a statewide consultant at boosting Michigan's share of DARPA's $3 billion a year
in funding, getting a two-year, $766,000 grant.

The effort will consist of four initiatives — a baseline assessment of Michigan DARPA activity, DARPA education and training for Michigan small businesses and universities; sponsoring Michigan universities and businesses that compete in DARPA technology competitions; and a matching grant program of up to $50,000 for each company in Michigan getting a DARPA award.

Carleton said the center also sponsors dozens of events a year, including “launch and launch” learning programs and a “capital of raise meetups” to help them seek funding.

The incubator’s executive director, Julie Gustafson, said the center is “still pretty much bringing clients in,” but predicts that “in another year or two we’ll have some good graduate stories.”

Current clients include a wind turbine company that the accelerator assisted in getting a state Business Acceleration Fund investment, and an LED lighting company that needed help getting certified for the auto industry, an effort that culminated in a $4.3 million order and the creation of more than 200 jobs.

Oakland University established its first incubator in 2005. In 2008, Macomb County approached the university to start a satellite incubator in the county. It’s a separate incubator with its own Michigan SmartZone designation.

More at www.oakland.edu/macombouinc.

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Macomb Business Awards winners: Macomb College, training center, 3 firms

By Chad Helcom

Three local companies, a Warren union training center and Macomb Community College took top honors among more than 40 nominees at the inaugural Macomb Business Awards, presented Tuesday in Sterling Heights by the Macomb County Planning and Economic Department.

Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel told an audience of more than 250 at the Sterling Inn Banquet and Conference Center that the companies were examples of an increasingly diverse employment base in the county, which ranges from having 600 contractors and suppliers with 10,000 defense contracts since 2002 to having 475 farms that generate a $52 million in economic impact.

"But there are also more than 2,400 places to shop in Macomb County and 1,300 places to eat and sleep. It’s incredible what we have here in Macomb County, and we’re finally beginning to tell our own story," he said.

The college, with campuses in Warren and Clinton Township, was named 2013 Economic Development Partner of the year, in part for its entrepreneurial training programs to help new businesses and for working with the county to identify and develop training programs that assist local employers.

In other awards Tuesday:

- Sterling Heights-based defense contractor General Dynamics Land Systems was selected among nine nominees for the Energy Efficient Expert award, based on a sustainability program that includes reducing consumption 20 percent through renewable resources.

- Clinton Township-based tooling an injection molding company Omega Plastics was selected among 14 nominees for the Corporate Citizen award, for allowing local nonprofit organizations to use its facilities and for community service efforts.

- Shelby Township manufacturing supplier Fori Automation was selected among 12 nominees for the Diversification Leader award, for recent efforts to broaden its customer base outside the automotive industry to supply aerospace, agriculture and recreational vehicle makers.

- The Electrical Industry Training Center in Warren, operated by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 58 and the Southeastern Michigan chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association, was selected among 10 nominees for the Champion of Workforce Development award.

Crain's executive editor Cindy Goodaker was among the judges selecting the honorees, along with MCC President Jim Jacobs and Gene Lovell, president of First State Bank.
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News » Local »

Macomb board signs 911 deal

By Chad Selweski
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Tuesday, February 19, 2013

In a move that may signal a widespread consolidation of government services under a countywide umbrella, Macomb County commissioners Tuesday approved a pact to handle 911 police and fire calls for two of Macomb’s biggest communities, Sterling Heights and Clinton Township.

The cost-saving merger agreement, already approved by city and township officials, will move police and fire dispatchers to the county’s upcoming $11 million high-tech communications center. The consolidation is expected to save money for Sterling and Clinton Township without adding costs for the county.

“The law enforcement community benefits and the city and township benefits,” said county Sheriff Anthony Wickersham.

Through streamlining and cost-benefit management, Sterling Heights is expected to save about $700,000 a year through the 3-year agreement and Clinton Township’s savings will mean more than $400,000 annually.

Under the new system, Sterling Heights’ 20 dispatchers will apply for 16 new dispatcher positions at the Sheriff’s Department. Due to retirements and attrition, officials anticipate that no job losses will occur over time.

In Clinton Township, where substantial personnel cutbacks have taken place, it appears that nearly all 11 dispatchers will likely transition to Sheriff’s Department status. The process of interviewing and hiring Clinton Township personnel is on a fast track, as they will begin working in the current Sheriff’s Department dispatch center on a temporary basis on April 1.

The transition for Sterling Heights will take place when the Communications Center, which will be located within the Department of Roads facility on Groesbeck in Mount Clemens, is completed. Bids for the renovation project were received last week and officials expect construction to be finished late this year or in early 2014.

County Executive Mark Hackel has made the Communications Center, the first of its kind in the state of Michigan, a high priority. The center, populated with computers and communications equipment and a video wall that keeps tabs on real-time happenings, will serve as a dispatch headquarters for law enforcement plus a command center in the event of natural or man-made disasters.

Wickersham said Clinton and Sterling will benefit from a reduction in legacy costs for pensions and the elimination of overhead costs such as utilities and equipment.
The dispatcher pact will be handled in an identical manner to the Sheriff’s Department’s law enforcement service contracts with communities such as Mount Clemens, Macomb Township and Harrison Township. Monthly payments will be made to the county and the municipalities’ savings will accrue over time.

Some local law enforcement officials believe countywide services delivered by the Communications Center may be the wave of the future, particularly under a reality in which municipalities suffer from a dramatic drop in property tax revenues. Incentives created by Gov. Snyder to encourage consolidation, which boost state revenue sharing payments to cities and townships, are also a major factor.

The sheriff acknowledged that veteran dispatchers face a “tough transition,” working for the county rather than for their community. Yet, Wickersham said he has two municipalities contemplating joining the Communications Center and many others will be taking “a long, hard look” at how Clinton and Sterling fare.

“I think local officials see it as a win for their community,” he said, “because we can provide a level of service that is the same or better than what they’ve had in the past.”

The county board’s Public Safety Committee unanimously approved the intergovernmental agreements on Tuesday. The Sterling/Clinton plan faces final approval on Thursday morning from the Board of Commissioners’ Finance Committee, followed by approval, as a formality, from the full board that night.

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