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THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2020 ■ HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Superintendent talks about 'Titans' coach dad

Ed Wright Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

One morning approximately 20 years ago, Plymouth-Canton Schools Superintendent Monica Merritt received an unexpected phone call from her dad, Herman Boone, the real-life coach of the Alexandria, Virginia-based T.C. Williams football team made famous in the Disney movie "Remember the Titans."

A few weeks prior to the phone call, Disney announced Denzel Washington would portray Boone in a movie about the 1971 team that overcame racial tensions on the way to a 13-0 season.

"My dad said to me, 'Yeah, I just talked to Denzel and he wants to stop by the house and spend some time with me,'" Merritt recalled. "I told my dad, 'What!? You have to be kidding me! I'm on my way!'"

Merritt, a teacher in Southfield at the time, laughed as she recounted the memory.

"I go to my principal and say, 'I'm a person of integrity and I will not lie to you. I am not sick,'" she said. "I don't know what kind of leave I can take — I'll take an unpaid day if I have to — but I'm

See DAD, Page 8A



Monica Merritt and her family still keep in touch with Denzel Washington, whom she first met in 2000 while he was portraying her dad, Herman Boone, in "Remember the Titans." COURTESY OF THE MERRITT FAMILY

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY



The Peace Walkers bundled up to walk along 12 Mile Road on Monday, carrying banners and handmade posters to honor the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The walk was part of an entire day of events at the Farmington Community Library. SUSAN VELA/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Community gathers to walk together in peace

Susan Vela Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

A little bit of cold wasn't going to stop this Peace Walk from honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., nor was the chill going to rush the walkers' message of peace, love and equality back indoors.

Holding banners and sometimes holding hands, people young and old took their time walking Monday along 12 Mile Road, from the Farmington Community Library to just west of Hamilton Court, to honor King, a slain civil rights leader, and what he stood for.

"I do this out of remembrance of Dr. King and the sacrifices that he made and the sacrifices that we made with him,"

Farmington Hills resident Pearl Thomas said. "The goal right now is to continue to show that we can walk together in unity regardless of race or religion."

"There's more loving in this world than there are people who hate."

Farmington Community Library planned activities from 10:15 a.m. to beyond 7 p.m. for its Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration.

To start, participants gathered at the library to make their banners. Thomas chose the words "Just Mercy," to recognize a new film about an attorney's work to free a wrongly-accused death row prisoner.

See PEACE, Page 7A

"The goal right now is to continue to show that we can walk together in unity regardless of race or religion. There's more loving in this world than there are people who hate."

Pearl Thomas
Farmington Hills resident

Chipotle plans eatery in Livonia near Aldi

David Veselenak Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Will the smell of burritos return to the corner of Schoolcraft and Middlebelt in the near future? A recent recommended approval by the Livonia Planning Commission makes it look like it will.

The planning commission took up a waiver use approval for a proposed Chipotle restaurant planned for the northeast corner of Middlebelt and Schoolcraft during its meeting Jan. 14. The commission recommended approval unanimously, meaning the item will move on to the city council for final approval.

The proposed restaurant would be in a new building to the west of the Aldi supermarket that opened in January.

"It's a good use, a solid tenant and that's what we would like to be able to do," said Thomas Guastello, the owner of the property, during the meeting. "We like Chipotle, they're a great use."

Chipotle declined to comment on the agenda item when reached, with a spokesperson saying they could not speak about any plans in the city.

"At this point, we do not have any details we can share regarding a location in Livonia. But stay patient!" the company said in an email to Hometown Life. "We are always looking to bring our food with integrity to great new communities!"

If a Chipotle were to go in the plaza, it would be the first within Livonia. Another operates in Northville Township at the Northville Park Place shopping center at Seven Mile and Haggerty. Chipotle also operates in Novi, Canton and Bloomfield Township.

If such a restaurant were to open at the spot, it would mean a return of such food to that corner: Chi-Chi's, a Mexican restaurant, closed there in 2004, leaving the space empty until Aldi opened.

"It's kind of a mark for the former Chi-Chi's there," Guastello said. "We still kept Mexican restaurant flavor."

Contact reporter David Veselenak at dveselenak@hometownlife.com or 734-678-6728.



Stevenson Middle student approached by stranger

Shelby Tankersley
Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICH.

The Wayne-Westland School District is warning students and parents to be mindful after a student from Stevenson Middle School was approached by a strange vehicle on the youngster's way home from school Jan. 13.

The incident happened near Birchwood and Division streets, just off Middlebelt Road, in Inkster.

He reportedly drove up in a dark, new-looking Dodge Durango or sport utility vehicle, and then asked the student to get into his SUV.

According to the district, the student did not get in the vehicle and made it home safely.

In the letter sent to parents, the district rec-

ommends the following:
 ■ Always try to walk with one or more fellow students when going to and from school, the bus stop or anywhere else.

■ If a stranger approaches and attempts to have a conversation with you, do not respond. Walk or run away.

■ Do not accept anything from a stranger.

■ Do not get in the vehicle of a stranger, regardless of what they say.

"Report the incident to your parents and/or school personnel, and most importantly, the police," the district said in the letter. "Additionally, please review with students that any school bus driver, Wayne-Westland or city service vehicle may also be a safety resource during these events."

The district has been in contact with the Inkster Police Department, which is taking special care to patrol the Grandview area this week and is investigating the situation. Anyone with information should call Officer Andrea Lebo at 313-400-5387.

MSU nursing scholarship honors late Wixom Marine

Susan Vela Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Leonard Graham III served the Marine Corps honorably, receiving several citations for his years of service and time in Afghanistan.

The Walled Lake Western High School graduate returned to his parents' Wixom home more focused than when he left for boot camp.

But his plans to pursue nursing studies at Michigan State University ended with a fatal gunshot wound to the back of his head in September 2013.

Parents Leonard and Tracy Graham created a scholarship to honor their murdered son and his dreams.

Late last year, for the scholarship's five-year anniversary, they exceeded their \$50,000 "I Am Sergeant Graham" campaign goal. The scholarship is expected to be endowed eternally.

"That was our goal, to have it continue for as long as possible, even when we leave this earth," Tracy Graham said. "He will be remembered for a very long time. I think he would be really happy that we started the scholarship in his name ... to honor him ... and let him know that we loved him. We're proud of him."

The campaign has raised at least \$52,000. More than 100 donors have contributed money to the scholarship intended for MSU nursing students who are active Marines, reservists or honorably discharged veterans of any armed military branch.

So far, five students have benefited, each receiving \$2,000 to use however they would like.

The Grahams have received gifts and thank-you letters from past recipients and hope to offer larger scholarships or multiple scholarships in future years.

"I was privileged to receive your scholarship and meet you at MSU's scholarship banquet in 2018," wrote Rachel Carlock, a recipient now working at



Tracy Graham, left, and husband, Leonard, recently surpassed their goal when they raised more than \$50,000 for an endowed scholarship honoring their son, who died in 2013. SUSAN VELA/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Henry Ford Allegiance Health in Jackson. "You and your family are in my prayers. ... may you all make many new wonderful memories together this season."

Leonard Graham, a Wixom firefighter, expressed rage when Tre Devon Johnson was sentenced for shooting his son, 24, at a party in Southfield.

"It never goes away. You just put it in a different basket," Graham said. "You just find a place you can store it, where it doesn't affect you every day and become more of a negative."

He and his wife described their son as funny and quiet, with a big heart that kept him helping and looking out for others.

He was a UPS Inc. employee who was taking college classes nearby so that he could transfer to MSU.

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
COUNTY OF WAYNE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

File No. 2019-850354-DE
Estate of DAVID ANDREW
KERSH - Decedent. Date of birth:
09/12/1954.

TO ALL CREDITORS:

Notice To Creditors: The decedent, DAVID ANDREW KERSH, died 06/21/2019. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Ying Beher, named personal representative or proposed personal representative, or to both the probate court at 313 W. Kalamazoo St., Lansing, MI 48933 and the named/proposed personal representative within 4 months after the date of the publication of this notice.

Date: 01/23/2020

Attorney Name Bar No.
Robert E. McCarthy P28450
411-C.W. Lake Lansing Road, Suite 110
East Lansing, MI 48823
(517) 337-2000

Personal Representative Name
Ying Beher
740 W. Lake Lansing Rd.
East Lansing, MI 48823
517-818-5297

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CITY OF WESTLAND

INVITATION TO BID

Sealed proposals will be received by the City of Westland Purchasing Division, 36300 Warren Road, Westland, MI 48185, on **February 6th, 2020 at 10:00 a.m.** (no exceptions will be made for late filings) for the following:

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Complete specifications and pertinent information may be obtained from the Purchasing Office or at www.CityofWestland.com. The City of Westland reserves the right to reject any or all bids.

Devin J. Adams
City Controller

Publish: January 23, 2020 LO-000354915 3x2.5

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New medical building opens in Bloomfield Twp.

David Veselenak

Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICH.

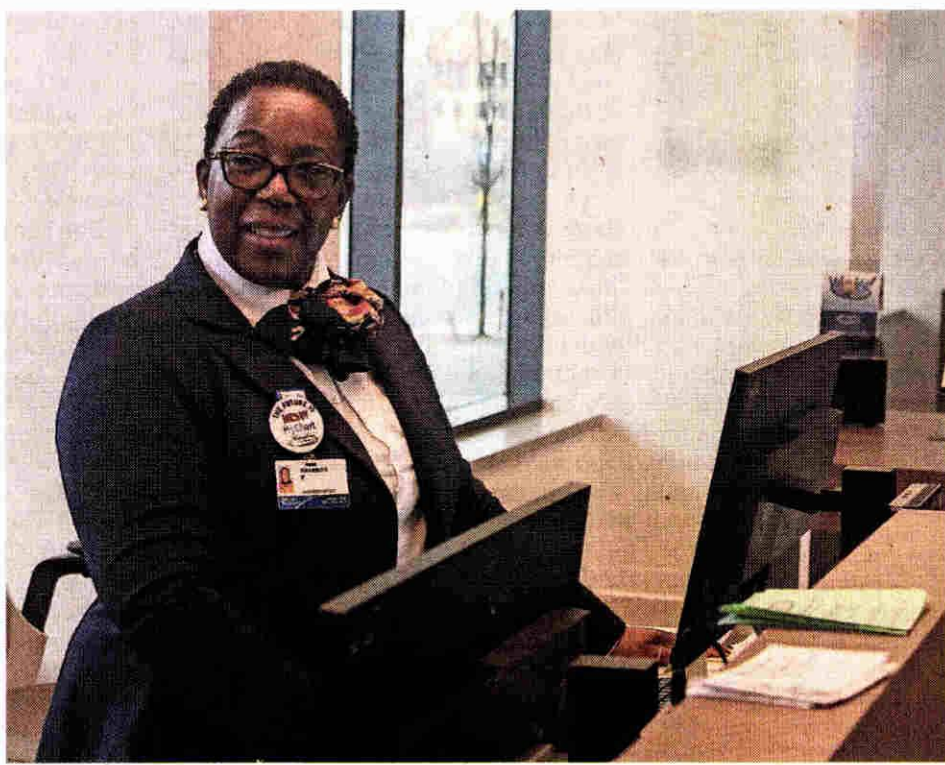
Sal LoGrasso knows how important the new Henry Ford Medical Center in Bloomfield Township is to the area.

The land on which the 83,000-square-foot facility sits was vacant for many years before shops and businesses began opening. Today, it boasts an impressive medical center for area patients to get services they need without having to drive to a Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit or West Bloomfield.

"The system recognized that there was a need out in this area, this geographic region, for services," said LoGrasso, a group practice director for Henry Ford Health System. "It also allowed for Henry Ford to be a part of this economic growth that's happening out here."

The health system opened its newest building in mid-December at the Village of Bloomfield, 1961 S. Telegraph, providing a wide array of health care services. It offers primary and specialty care services, as well as cardiology, neurology, orthopedics, women's health and more. An OptimEyes location is also open in the space, providing eye care. The building contains 85 exam rooms spanning two floors, and connects with the parking structure that was built on the site many years ago while it was in development limbo.

The medical center is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.



Clinical service representative Sharron Prather stands at a computer in the new Henry Ford Medical Center in Bloomfield Township. The facility is one of three new medical centers planned by the health system. Another building will open in Royal Oak, and the third will open on Ann Arbor Road in Plymouth Township.

PHOTOS BY DAVID VESELENAK/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

during the week and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends and holidays. Patients can sign in on tablet devices in the lobby or check in online before they arrive.

More than 100 people are employed in the building, and many of them are new hires, LoGrasso said.

The structure is a \$38 million investment and Henry Ford is leasing the property from Southfield-based REDICO, which took control of the Village of Bloomfield back in 2015.

"The Henry Ford Medical Center-Bloomfield Township, at REDICO's Village at Bloomfield development, is a great ad-

dition to the local community," said Dale Watchowski, president and CEO of REDICO, in a statement. "It's a great compliment to the other site uses, which include senior housing, a hotel and multifamily, as well as small and large retail."

The center also includes some small shops, an ALDI supermarket and a Menard's hardware store. Planet Fitness is expected to come to the site later this year.

The facility is one of three new medical centers planned by the Detroit-based health system. Another building will open later this year downtown Royal Oak and another will open at the

site of the former Kmart on Ann Arbor Road in Plymouth Township in 2021.

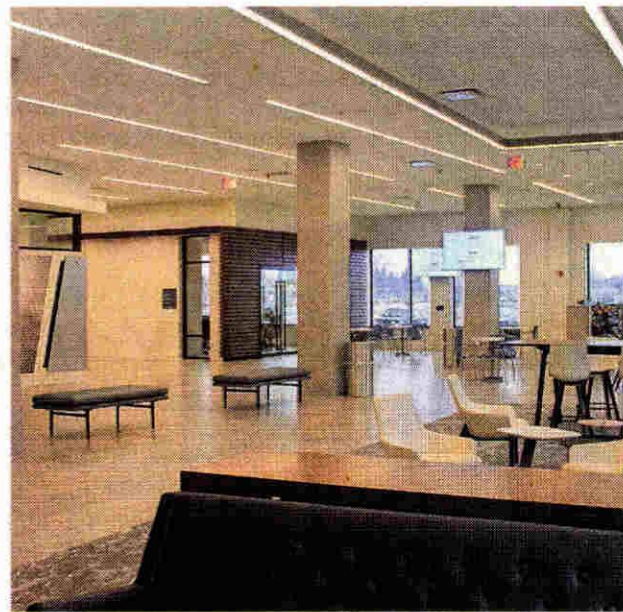
Patients who use the new Bloomfield Township facility and would use the future ones in Royal Oak and Plymouth Township can expect those new buildings to be similar in structure.

"Many of the conveniences, the technology we've put into this building, we're going to continue at the Royal Oak and Plymouth site as well," he said. "We want a consistent patient experience."

Contact reporter David Veselenak at dveselenak@hometownlife.com or 734-678-6728. Twitter: @davidveselenak.



The new Henry Ford Medical Center in Bloomfield Township will save some patients a trip to a Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit or West Bloomfield.



The health system opened its new medical center in mid-December at 1961 S. Telegraph Road.

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Laurie Smith offers help ahead of Novi Home Show

Susan Bromley HometownLife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

A well-styled home should evoke the personalities and emotions the residents seek from the space in which they live.

This is the philosophy of renowned interior designer Laurie Smith, star of the TLC show "Trading Spaces." But too often, a home reflects neither of those things, as people become overwhelmed with decorating and instead do nothing.

"People become so stifled about making mistakes, they can't make a move," said Smith, who has been an interior decorator for 20 years. "They need to release that fear and just realize, I love that fabric or color or whatever it is and use it and not get worried. Build from there and get empowered, and have fun in the process. A home should nurture you. ... My biggest goal as a designer is to help a client create a goal that nurtures and celebrates them."

Smith hopes to do just that as a featured guest at the Novi Home Show, running Friday-Sunday at Suburban Collection Showplace, where she will talk about her favorite renovations, her experience on "Trading Spaces" and share decorating tips and suggestions.

She focuses less on trends, she said, and more on the design process and how to approach your individual space: taking into account the layout and traffic patterns of a home; using rooms for multiple purposes; and thinking outside the box with color theory, textiles and accessorizing.

Smith stressed it is important to find an object of inspiration. If you've been perusing home magazines and have a page ripped out with a room that inspires, what is it in that photo that moves you? Or maybe, she added, you already have a specific object you want



Smith

to create your room around, like she did with a 1940s Murano glass, white shell bowl with burnt apricot color flowing through it. She used the colors in her own decorating palette.

One of the mistakes that people make when decorating, Smith said, is to choose their paint color first. The paint color should be the last decision.

As an example, she said, if you want a blue room, it makes more sense to start with a rug with blue in the patterning or a beautiful blue sofa, rather than literally painting yourself into a corner with blue on the walls.

Other big errors in interior design are a lack of lighting or incorrect lighting, as well as poor maneuverability in a room.

On "Trading Spaces," Smith works with a limited budget and has advice for those with financial constraints.

"Most people don't have the luxury of handing a designer a blank check and saying, 'Go for it,'" she noted, advising the budget-conscious to approach their

home like they do their wardrobe — pick a few pieces to invest in that are "beautiful and timeless," such as a high-quality, well-made sofa, area rug or artwork.

"You want to invest in a statement piece that will be an heirloom forever," she said.

Don't get hung up on trends, she added, as a home is a reflection of its people, and not a passing fad. She admitted being happy to see more people turn away from white, gray and neutral tones and back to layers, color, textures and patterns and "loves that wallpaper has had a major comeback."

"I love that homes are so personal and when someone can really find joy and be in love with their home, that is rewarding to me," she said. "A home should be a safe and nurturing place that functions well for you, a place that brings solace and embraces family."

Smith is looking forward to the home show. More information and a full schedule are at novihomeshow.com.

Bankruptcy may be necessary for fresh start



Money Matters

Rick Bloom
Guest columnist

Dear Rick:

My New Year's resolution was to get my financial house in order. Plain and simple, it's been a mess.

After reading one of your recent articles, I did a personal balance sheet and a cash flow statement. I must tell you the numbers were shocking. I have a negative net worth, and while I thought it cost me about \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month to live, it appears that it's costing me close to \$6,000. The main reason is the amount of charge card debt I have.

Currently, I have a little over \$75,000 on a variety of charge cards. I have about \$15,000 in other assorted debt.

Do you have any ideas on how I should handle the charge card debt?

Thank you, Barry

Dear Barry:

I think it is a great New Year's resolution to get your financial house in order, even though it is not always the easiest thing to do. That being said, you have a few different options.

One option that you have is to see if you can refinance the charge card debt using lower interest rate charge cards. In your situation, I think it would be difficult to do considering the size of your debt; however, it's not beyond the realm of possibility. If you could potentially reduce your interest rate, the payments may then be more affordable.

Another option is to visit a credit counseling companies. These companies will work with the charge card company to try to restructure your debt. On the whole, I am not a big fan of this because even the reputable companies have a mixed rate of success. It's worth having a conversation to hear what they can do for you. However, in talking with these companies, make sure you find

out exactly what their fees are and how they can improve your situation. Too many of these companies charge high fees and accomplish very little.

The last option, and the one that I think would probably be best for you to consider, is bankruptcy. Bankruptcy would potentially allow you to wipe out your charge card debt and your other debt in its entirety, allowing you to get a fresh start.

I always hesitate to recommend bankruptcy because there can be some adverse consequences, such as it hurting your credit rating. However, the benefit is that you potentially can rid yourself of your debt. I recommend you make an appointment with a bankruptcy attorney.

Bankruptcy can give someone a fresh start and help them get their financial affairs in order. However, if that person doesn't change their spending habits after bankruptcy, they will be in the same situation a few years down the road.

I do not casually recommend going into bankruptcy because there are consequences. However, I do believe when someone is in financial difficulty, bankruptcy is an option they should consider. For individuals who are looking at getting a fresh start, in many situations, bankruptcy is the best alternative.

Bankruptcy doesn't have the same stigma it used to, and many people find that after going into bankruptcy and changing their ways, they significantly improve their financial situation.

Therefore, if you are in dire financial straits, you should not hesitate to explore bankruptcy as an option. It may be the best option to resolve your financial difficulties.

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

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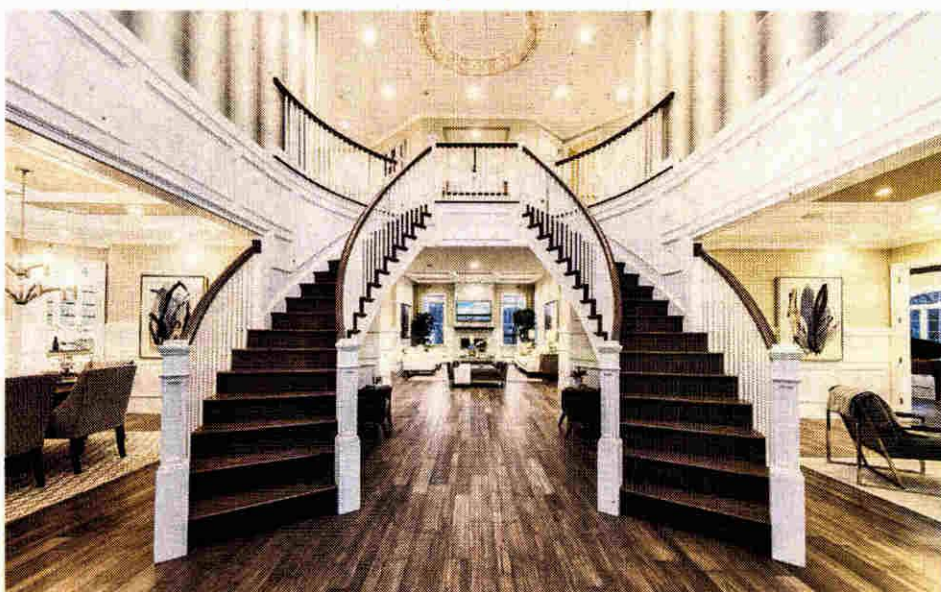
Selling Fast in Canton

Hamlet Pointe and Hamlet Meadows are located within the existing community of The Hamlet offering an exceptional location close to Plymouth-Canton schools, the Ford Road Shopping District, expressways, parks and the quaint Cherry Hill Village.

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Final Villa Now Available in Novi

Located in the heart of Novi on the east side of Novi Rd., just south of Ten Mile Rd. is Ridgeview Villas of Novi. Residents enjoy low-maintenance living and paved walking paths leading to The Sports Club of Novi, a dog park,



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and Novi Ice Arena. Pricing begins in the mid-\$400,000s. Don't wait one more day - the final home site is now available. For details, call (248) 904-8515 or visit RidgeviewVillas.com.

Luxurious Living in Northville

Now offering two amazing single-family communities in Northville. Toll Brothers at Montcaret is located on the south side of Seven Mile Road, 1/4 miles west of Beck Road just minutes from the historic downtown. Toll Brothers at Dunhill Park is on the corner of Beck Road and 8 Mile Road across from Maybury State Park. Both prestigious communities offer a range of home designs

with an exceptional list of features on grand oversized home sites. Prices start from the upper \$700,000s. Call (248) 924-2601 or visit TollBrothersAtMontcaret.com or LiveAtDunhillPark.com for details.

Popular Villas in Ann Arbor

North Oaks of Ann Arbor is the region's premier resort-class community situated in a stunning 109-acre setting. Two collections of homes are available. Townhomes from the upper \$300,000s and Villas from the low \$500,000s.

The Villas range from 2,041 to 2,631+ square feet and offer first- or second-floor master

suites, island kitchens, open layouts, loft space, and more. The Townhomes just released new exterior styles and range from 1,861 to 1,890+ sq. ft. and include a 2-car garage, finished lower level, and the option to add a rooftop deck.

A clubhouse with a fitness center, yoga room, billiards, great room with fireplace, verandas overlooking the lap and wading pools, locker rooms and a play park is now open. North Oaks is located minutes from the University of Michigan's north campus, the VA Hospital, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, and downtown Ann Arbor. Children

attend acclaimed Ann Arbor Schools with the elementary and middle schools just 3 minutes away. For details, call (734) 224-6686 or visit North-Oaks.com.

Single-Family Homes from upper \$300,000s in Ann Arbor

Trailwoods of Ann Arbor, a new community of single-family homes tucked into a gorgeous setting with Ann Arbor schools and low Scio Twp taxes is now available. Two collections of homes offer all new open-concept designs with an impressive list of included features. The Village Collection is priced from the upper \$300,000s and The Parkside Collection is priced from the upper \$400,000s. Two gorgeous models are available to tour and quick move-in homes are available. For more information, visit TrailwoodsOfAnnArbor.com or call (734) 995-5503.

Toll Brothers, an award-winning Fortune 500 Company, was founded in 1967, embraces an unwavering commitment to quality and customer service. Toll Brothers is currently operating in 22 states nationwide and is a publicly owned company listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE: TOL). For Community Information, visit TollSalesEvent.com/DetNews.

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South Lyon woman loses 135 pounds

Susan Bromley HometownLife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

As many people were making New Year's resolutions to lose weight, Christine Hoke had almost reached her goal.

After a lifetime struggling with her weight and periodically tipping the scales at more than 300 pounds, she has dropped 135 pounds.

"I am thinner than when I got married, and even thinner than I was in high school," said Hoke, a 1986 Brighton graduate.

The 5-foot-7 South Lyon resident was a size 12 in high school, but now she is a size 10 and down to 190 pounds and counting.

Hoke credits Weight Watchers for giving her the tools to finally get her weight under control, a program she began less than two years ago after her doctor told her she was turning diabetic and that because of her excessive weight and her age, her knees were going to give out.

"I thought, 'Holy crap, my mom is in the nursing home and my husband has health problems and I'm taking care of him and I'm having a hard time getting off the couch and my knees hurt,'" she said. "Who's going to take care of me?"

Most of her family is heavysset, but she was by far the heaviest. And finally, she decided no one was going to take care of her but herself.

She had reached 300 pounds a few times over the years, usually in five-year cycles, which was always her tipping point. In 2000, she lost 50 pounds and then gained it back with pregnancy. After she gave birth to her son in 2002, she thought she would lose the weight again, but it stayed. In 2008, she joined Weight Watchers and lost 88 pounds, but gained it back.

"You get down so far, start living life, and think, 'I'm happy with myself,' and you walk away," she said. "But unfortunately, I need that support."

In 2013, she decided to join her husband in getting gastric sleeve surgery, in which a large portion of her stomach was removed. The surgery forces patients to alter their eating habits, from the amount of food that can be consumed to the type of food they need to



Hoke at one of her heaviest times in 2018 when she weighed more than 300 pounds. She said she has struggled with losing weight just to gain it all back several times in her life.

COURTESY OF CHRISTINE HOKE

get essential nutrients.

"I thought, 'We'll be thin together.' I thought the surgery was a basic magic cure-all and end-all, that it would keep me from eating all this food, but it was not," Hoke said.

Time to end the yo-yo dieting

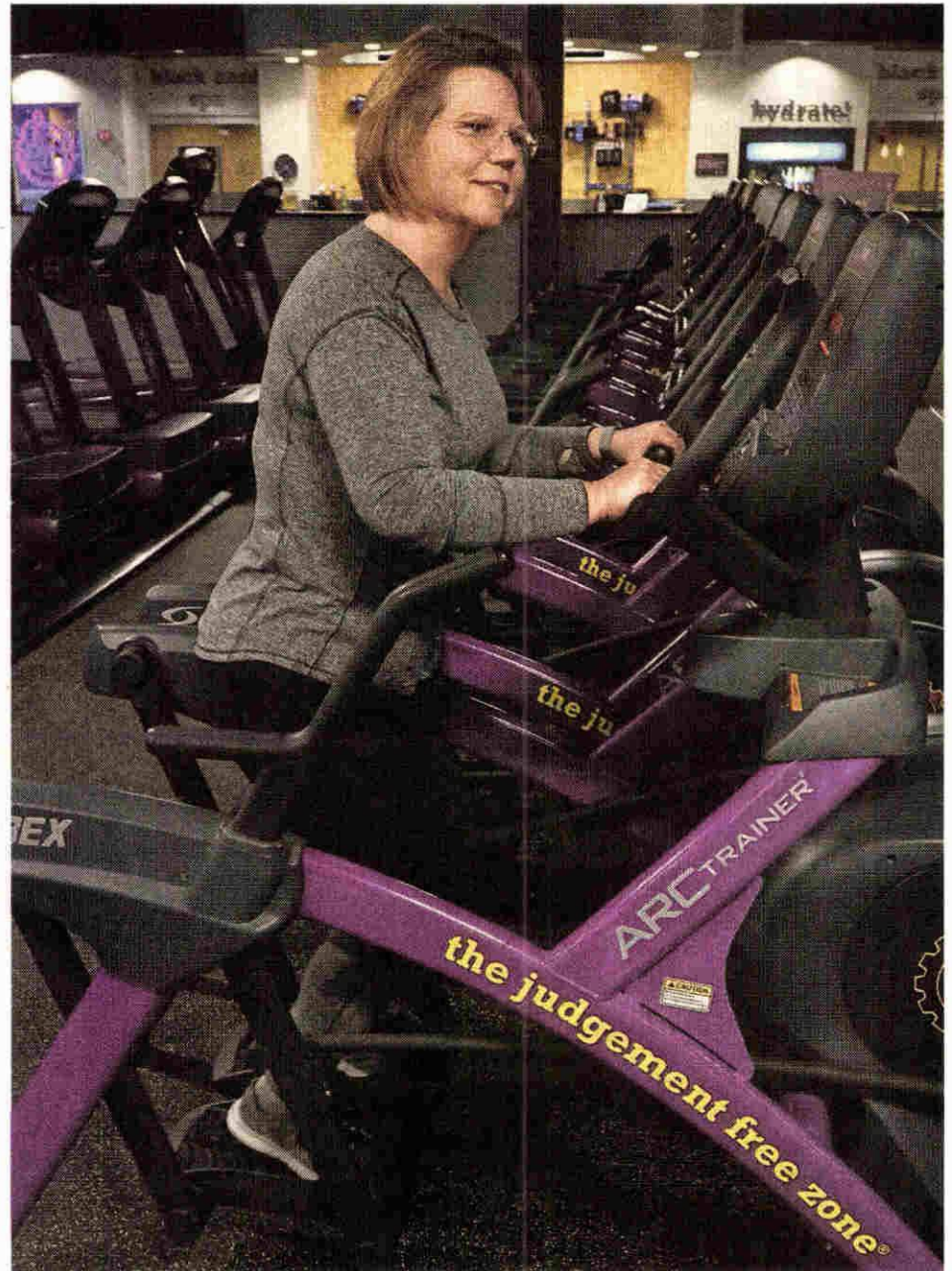
She still craved and consumed sugars and carbs, much of it in liquids, and Hoke felt ill-informed post-surgery about how to handle her cravings. The weight came back, helped from high-calorie drinks and pizza, which she called her downfall.

"Food is an addiction and when you are heavy, you can't get away from the addiction, because you need food to live," she said.

Now she's back with Weight Watchers and said she's not going back to yo-yo dieting ever again. She has a food plan for life.

In her return to Weight Watchers, she lost 11 pounds in the first week just from removing lattes and smoothies from her diet.

When she hit 85 pounds lost, she was



Christine Hoke, of South Lyon, works out at a Planet Fitness in Wixom on Jan. 10. Hoke has lost a total of 135 pounds. JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

afraid of plateauing, but she flew right past it. And the numbers kept dropping as she shed 125 pounds in a year.

In Weight Watchers, points are calculated for food, and devotees stick to one of three plans that keeps them within their point total. Hoke attends support group meetings once a week at which she weighs in, and she uses a phone app to calculate points.

An accountant, she enjoys the math, but laughed as she said her doctor told her she is the only CPA she knows who has lost weight during tax season.

Changing habits

While there are no forbidden foods in Weight Watchers, Hoke avoids pizza, which she calls her "red light" food: once she starts eating it, she has a hard time stopping, so she just doesn't go there.

She admits liking whiskey and indulged a bit in that and pie over the holidays, but said it's all about portion control and banking points for when a spe-

cial day is coming up. It's also about not beating yourself up the occasional slip-up.

Weight Watchers emphasizes forgiveness for bad days, she said, as well as self-awareness of underlying issues that may cause weight gain. Hoke said instead of turning her back on stress, she communicates her feelings more now with her husband, her co-workers, and her boss.

"People say I'm a different person, there is a light about me, I am radiant, and that is because I dealt with my issues instead of eating them," Hoke said.

She is hoping to lose 10 more pounds and get down to her ultimate goal weight of 180 for a lifetime.

Her advice to others wanting to lose weight is to find that one thing - your reason why - and write it down. Hers is to be healthy. And now she is, both physically and mentally.

All her vital signs are good, and she is taking care of herself instead of wondering who will take care of her.

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Hilary Meehan helps her children make posters before the Peace Walk on Monday. From left are Layla, 7, Shawn, 3, and Judah, 5. PHOTOS BY SUSAN VELA/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Peace

Continued from Page 1A

Others chose peace signs, messages like "peace, love, equality" and well-known messages from King. For example, one banner quoted him: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

The crowd gathered in the library's lobby for some singing before their walk outdoors. They returned with rosy cheeks and valiant spirits.

"It was a wonderful event," said Jill Farber-Bramson, of West Bloomfield. "In our country right now, our democracy really is being decimated. We have to do everything we can to make sure that our democracy is strengthened, it's bolstered and it lives on forever."

About 100 people gathered in the library's auditorium after the Pace Walk for music, poetry, and other presentations.

Paul Reinhardt and Mary Carleton moved their interracial family to Farmington Hills because of the city's diversity.

"We are a family that is the dream of Martin Luther King," Carleton said before the afternoon's activities began. "We're interracial and we're keenly aware that we have a ways to go."

"We're out just supporting it and staying aware and awake and educated."

Jaylin Reinhardt sat between his parents.

"It means a lot just to be able to see how different races of people can come together as one and not have disagreement," he said.

svela@hometownlife.com



Gertrude Croom, a retired Grand Rapids Community College professor, was the keynote speaker during the Farmington Community Library's celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Croom was active in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.



A group sings together in the library before the start of the Peace Walk.



The Peace Walkers marched from the library to west of Hamilton Court and back.

Dad

Continued from Page 1A

going to Virginia tomorrow.”

She said meeting the superstar actor, who wanted to spend time with her dad to learn his mannerisms, was “wonderful. He is such a humble, down-to-earth man.”

The anecdote was one of many Merritt shared while reflecting on the remarkable life of her father, who died Dec. 18 at age 84.

One memory triggered the escape of a tear that trickled down her cheek. Most, however, resulted in smiles and laughter.

“When you look at his portrayal in the movie, he was very stern ... and that was definitely my father,” Merritt said. “He was always a coach. But he had an incredibly soft side, too, especially when it came to his three daughters. We used to say God knew what he was doing when he didn’t give dad any boys because they never would have seen his soft side.”

“My dad couldn’t stand to see people cry, something my sister learned to manipulate. If she thought she was about to get in trouble, she’d make her lip quiver like she was about to cry and he’d turn to butter.”

Merritt said the first time she watched “Remember the Titans” was an “amazing, surreal” experience.

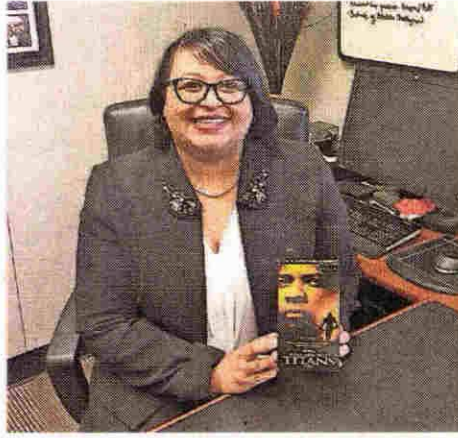
“The very first time I saw it was at the premiere at the Rose Bowl in California,” she said. “Before the movie started, my dad was one of the people riding around in cars on the track that circled the football field, waving to the crowd. Denzel was there. The movie was shown on the big screen at the stadium and as I’m watching it, I’m thinking, ‘That’s my life.’”

“It was so beautiful. I felt so blessed to be a part of it.”

Always a coach

Although teaching prevented Merritt from attending the actual filming of the movie, Boone and Merritt’s mom, Carol, were in Atlanta with an up-close-and-personal view of the proceedings.

“I’ve been told that at times my dad was actually coaching the actors on the set,” she said, smiling. “Once a coach, always a coach.”



Plymouth-Canton Schools Superintendent Monica Merritt said she has watched “Remember the Titans,” which portrays her father, Herman Boone, and his 1971 football team in Virginia, countless times.

ED WRIGHT/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Merritt said her favorite scene in the movie — although she confessed it was hard to pick just one — unfolded when her father took his team to Gettysburg before delivering an unforgettable speech about coming together, regardless of the color of your skin.

“The only thing that didn’t happen in reality in regards to that scene was that the team toured Gettysburg on a bus,” Merritt said. “My dad said, ‘There was no way I was going to make them run through a graveyard at 3 o’ clock in the morning!’”

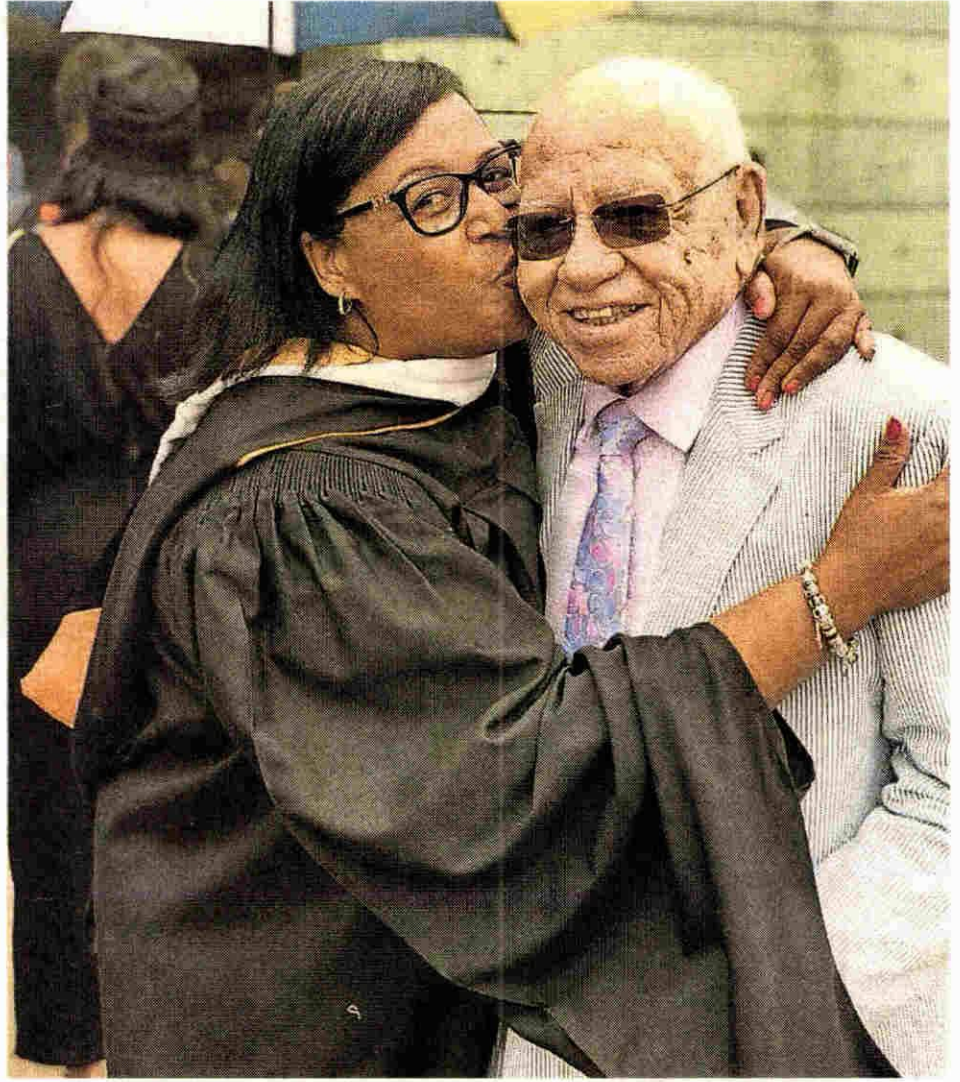
Merritt confirmed that a brick was thrown through the front window of the Boones’ Alexandria home, as depicted in the movie, “but my dad didn’t run out of the house with a big rifle in his hands,” she said.

A malicious, racially-motivated act against the Boone family that didn’t make the film, Merritt remembered, was the placing of a toilet seat on their front yard with feces in it.

“My parents did a great job of keeping their kids insulated from the racial tensions at that time,” Merritt said. “It wasn’t until I watched the movie that I realized just how tense the situation was.”

Boone’s pride in his daughters was never doubted, Merritt said. But the depth of her dad’s pride was repeatedly confirmed during the services that led up to the widely-beloved educator’s funeral.

“I had so many people approach me



When Merritt was asked what her dad taught her about leadership, she replied: “Everything. ... He had a way of uplifting people, getting the absolute best out of them.” Boone died Dec. 18 at age 84. COURTESY OF THE MERRITT FAMILY

and say, ‘So you’re the schools superintendent from Michigan,’ and they’d tell me details about my job and my life that my dad shared with them,” she said. “Just hearing that from people I didn’t even know showed how much our dad talked up my sisters and I to his friends.”

Importance of respect

When Merritt was asked what her dad taught her about leadership, she replied: “Everything.”

“He could bring out qualities in people that they didn’t know they had,” she said. “He had a way of uplifting people, getting the absolute best out of them.”

“Of all the gems my father left me with — including the value of humility, integrity and giving back — I think that

respect was the most important. He’d tell us you must respect everyone as human beings and that you’re no better than anyone else. Period.

“We all have a role to play to make this world a better place.”

A short time after the movie debuted in 2000, representatives of Disney warned Boone and his family that the limelight would probably last a year, at most, Merritt said.

“And now look, it’s 20 years later and people are still talking about my dad and his team,” she said.

Anyone who has watched the movie will likely never forget Herman Boone and his Titans.

Contact reporter Ed Wright at edwright@hometownlife.com or 517-375-1113.

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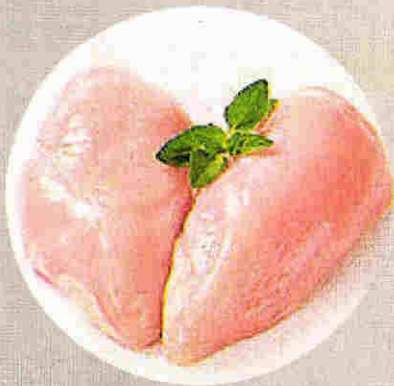


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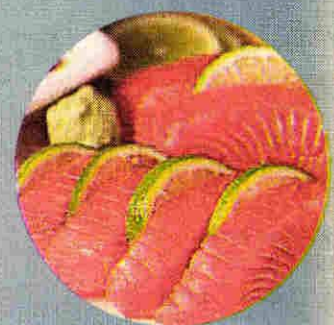
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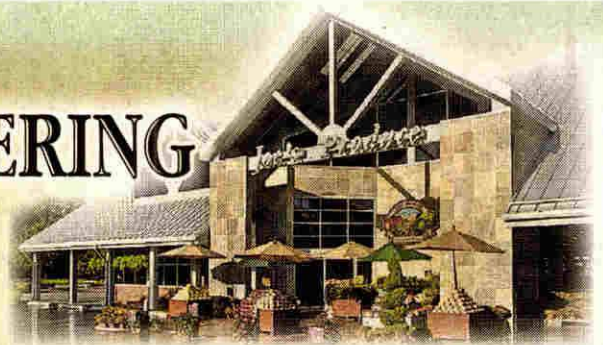
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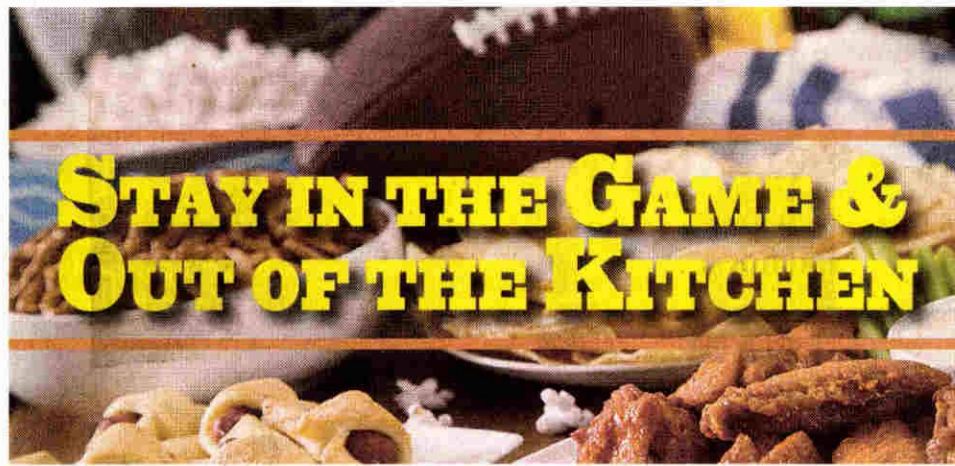
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SEE THE BACK PAGE FOR THEIR WEEKLY SPECIALS

Sports



North Farmington High weightlifting coach Billy Slobin, center, supervises a training session for athletes Jan. 13. PHOTOS BY JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Slobin lifts the culture of North Farmington sports

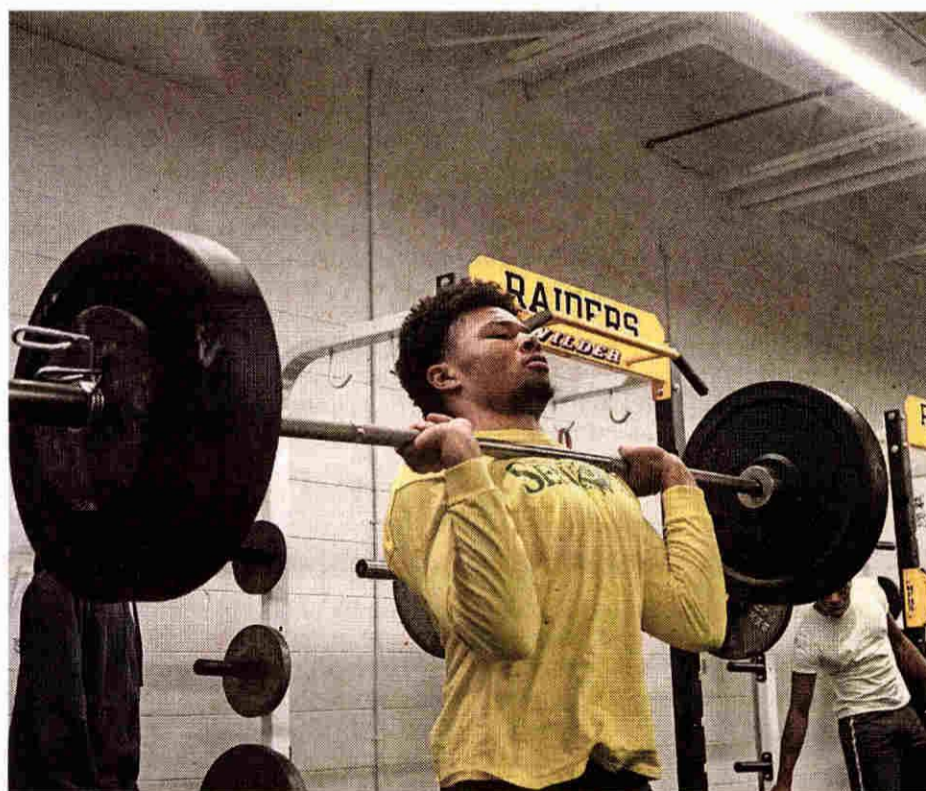
Colin Gay Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

When Billy Slobin entered North Farmington High School on Jan. 4, 2019, he had something he did not have 34 years prior: a plan.

After playing for the Harrison High School football team from 1977-79, Slobin slowly developed a weight-training program for his alma mater as a strength and conditioning coach, growing and growing until it became ingrained into the team's culture.

Todd Negoshian watched this build up from when he was young as his father taught for 35 years in Farmington Public Schools when he was growing up. The current North Farmington head boys basketball coach had known many members of the Harrison football coaching staff for a long time, including Slobin.

When the closing of Harrison led to the football staff transitioning to district rival North Farmington, Negoshian had



North Farmington High student Andrew Pooley lifts during a training session.

See SLOBIN, Page 2B

Salem hockey shines in mercy win

Colin Gay Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Salem hockey head coach Ryan Ossenmacher thought his team did some good things its last time out against Trenton. But he acknowledged that teams are judged based on results, and the result was not good enough, falling to the Trojans, 3-2.

But the Rocks had a chance last Thursday to right the ship against Livonia Franklin, a team that has not won a game since Dec. 14.

And 10 minutes, 38 seconds into game play, the rout began, as the Rocks (11-4) scored four first-period goals, leading to the 8-0 mercy win against Franklin (1-13).

After a scoreless five minutes, Ossenmacher was thinking that he was in for another "dogfight." However, after the first of two goals by forward Alex Schaumburger, answered shortly by a goal from forward Dylan Enszer 42 seconds later, the Salem head coach knew momentum had shifted.

See HOCKEY, Page 3B

Northville hoops beats Canton to complete comeback

Andrew Vaillencourt
Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Faced with arguably its most challenging opponent yet, the Northville boys basketball team was able to surge past Canton to keep its perfect record intact.

It was Northville's first road game of the season, but that didn't slow down the Mustangs, who beat the Chiefs 60-51 at Canton High School Tuesday night.

Northville goes to 7-0 overall and 3-0 in the KLAA with the win, while Canton drops to 5-2 and 2-1.

"We don't win over there very often," Northville coach Todd Sander said. "We had six in a row at home to

See HOOPS, Page 2B



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Hoops

Continued from Page 1B

start, so this was our first road game. To come out on top, we feel pretty good about ourselves."

Canton had the edge early, taking a 26-16 lead midway through the second quarter, but Northville closed the gap and trailed by one at halftime.

Northville broke out in the third quarter, outscoring the Chiefs 17-5 in the period. That included a buzzer-beating three-pointer by senior guard Grant Mathiesen, who made six triples on the night. He finished with a career high 25 points and grabbed six rebounds.

Mustangs senior Zach Shoemaker added 17 points and eight boards.

"Grant certainly stepped up and answered the challenge," Sander said. "We need other guys to step up. Zach was

drawing two or three Canton defenders at times, so that's going to leave opportunities for other guys to knock down shots."

Canton was led by senior Ben Steiak, who scored 14 points, and Cole Vickers, who scored 13.

"The way we battled back after getting down 10 in the second quarter to really not get fazed, they punched us pretty good in the mouth," Sander said. "We did a good job responding and an-

swering their run."

Canton's star big man Jake Vickers did not play in the first half, but notched nine points in the second half. Sander felt his team did a good job of limiting the Chiefs in the post.

"We really collapsed our defense and did a better job of keeping them out of the paint through the second half," Sander said. "We rebounded pretty darn well too because they're a good team." availlienc@hometownlife.com



North Farmington High weightlifting coach Billy Slobin, left, gives some advice to a student-athlete during a Jan. 13 training session. PHOTOS BY JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Slobin

Continued from Page 1B

a proposition for Slobin.

"(Negoshian) said, 'Will you train my team?' Slobin said. 'I said, 'Hell yeah, bring them.'"

"Bring me all the kids."

For the first time in his life, Slobin was not wearing green and white, and he was now coaching more than just football players.

But with a loud voice and a white tank top, printed with the brown and gold Raiders logo on it, the expectation remains the same: to never be out-worked.

"Listen, do what I say, do it every day with me," Slobin tells his athletes. "I'm going to make you a man, and it doesn't mean what your bench press will be."

Little by little

Jon Brunette remembers that first workout.

Coming off a 3-6 season with the North Farmington football team, the then-junior was in the middle of basketball season.

Slobin had an all-encompassing workout to open his tenure with the Raiders, what Brunette considered as one of the hardest workouts he has ever been a part of.

"The first time I worked out with him was harder than the first three years of my high school, and I had basketball practice after," Brunette said. "At basketball, I couldn't dribble, I couldn't shoot. I was so sore."

Slobin remembers that workout, too. He said he remembers Brunette saying in the last year of Harrison High School, when the Hawks opened up against the Raiders, he thought North Farmington had a legitimate chance.

From the first play of what ended up being a 41-0 loss for the Raiders, Brunette realized what set Harrison apart.

"(Brunette) goes, 'After the first workout, we knew why,'" Slobin said.

In the weight room, Slobin's aim is to develop a level of explosive strength.

It's focusing on the lower body, not just focusing on the outward results. Slobin uses the example of using the bench press to gain a large chest — something he said North Farmington uses, but it's one of the least important aspects of the training.

In football, Slobin equates it to how he trains and "builds" offensive and defensive linemen, turning 5-foot-11, 180-pound players into, 5-foot-11 205-pound players.

"In the history of Harrison football, you can count on one hand how many Division I-size linemen we ever had," Slobin said. "Other schools seem to have these 6-foot-4, 290-pound guys. Never had hardly any of them. Very few, so we made them."

That mentality translated onto the basketball court.

Brunette said this increased weight training regimen has helped him fit more of the trap defensive approach North Farmington likes to run, allowing him and his teammates to take contact better in the open floor.

Negoshian said he could see, little-by-little, a physical change in his players, watching as his players became more athletic, coming to the court with increased stamina and a level of physical strength they did not have before.

"It is the first thing that anyone who comes in and notices right now, watches our team play or film that I send to guys to get opinion," Negoshian said. "They say, 'Wow, you guys are a lot stronger. You don't get knocked off the ball, you attack the rim harder.'"

This is a response that Slobin has been used to getting in his 35 years of training.

At Harrison, he said coaches would come in to watch him train and work out players, applauding that those recruits come in already knowing how to navigate a weight room.

"You know what, everybody else's freshmen come in like kittens," Slobin said the coaches would say. "Yours are lions."

'It's not Texas'

When asked if other schools have caught on to the trend of weight training at the level Harrison and now North Farmington has, Slobin said many schools in the area don't have the resources to do so.

"It's not Texas, it's not a full-time job," Slobin said.

Instead, Slobin said it takes something that he says is unique: adult commitment and continuity.

"It's because you love it and you are not doing it for the five grand," he said.

But for him, the actual weight training is not what has kept Slobin around for the past 35 years. And it's not winning, even though that has been a major result of the training.

He said it's the lessons he is able to teach through the weight-training process, the relationships he has created and has continued to foster even when the player's four years with him are complete.

For Slobin, there is a method to his madness.

First, he said, you have to get a player to believe in himself, teaching him the techniques of how to work out on a regular and consistent basis.

"They lift, they learn and it flows back up," Slobin said. "It goes from that new body they have created to their brain and now they have confidence that they can't be stopped. They are not going to get out-hustled."

This is something Negoshian has seen in his basketball team this season, a fierce confidence, a mental upgrade that time in the weight room created.

It's something that the North Farmington head boys basketball coach trusts Slobin to accomplish with his players.

"We don't have to be here to supervise," Negoshian said. "We can just show up every couple times to make sure guys are here. Just be a cheerleader a little bit because Billy handles all of it."

Culture develops

Slobin knows what he does is not

normal.

"The day our season ends, whether it was with a state championship or whether it ended how we didn't want it to end, we're in the weight room the next week," Jake Slobin, Billy's son and a Harrison football alumnus, said.

Billy Slobin knows what he expects of players is not normal.

In the transition between Harrison and North Farmington, the best way he could explain the impact he wants to have is through one player: Brunette.

"If Harrison never closed, I would have not had the opportunity to coach Jon Brunette," Slobin said. "There's always a silver lining. We have new children."

Slobin said every team should have a player like Brunette, who has a giant heart, great ability and will be someone "I will be talking to until I'm old and dead."

This is what keeps Slobin around. It's more than just lifts. It's more than just getting physically and mentally tougher.

It's the culture that Slobin built with each rep taken, a culture which did not end when Harrison closed its doors.

He said the process of "molding men" does not stop after four years of high school.

Slobin still talks to Harrison alumni every day, while some come to North Farmington to help current players, giving back to those in their shoes.

It's a constant process.

It's the secret sauce Brunette saw from the North Farmington sideline when Harrison defeated the Raiders in the 2018 season opener.

"The culture changed when Billy arrived," Brunette said.

And that's why Slobin said has no intention of stopping anytime soon.

"I will die either printing up a workout, running a workout or with my calculator and phone in hand. I'm not going anywhere," Slobin said. "I love every minute of it."

"What else would you want to do? I don't want to golf."

Contact reporter Colin Gay at cgay@hometownlife.com.

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Stevenson hockey player's hat trick puts him ahead

Andrew Vaillencourt
HometownLife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

The first Hometown Life Athlete of the Week of 2020 has been crowned.

Stevenson hockey player Seth Lause scored three shorthanded goals recently in a 5-2 victory over defending state champion Hartland. That was more than enough to get him nominated for the poll, where Lause took first place by receiving 17,848 votes (41.65 percent).

He beat out Northville basketball's Brady Withey, who finished second with 13,862 votes (32.35 percent), and Livonia Franklin bowler Ian Wright, who got 7,735 votes (18.05 percent). Mercy basketball's Julia Bishop placed fourth with 1,982 votes and South Lyon basketball's Quinn Fracassi was fifth with 1,428.

We caught up with Lause and asked him some questions:

You did something very few players have ever done, scoring three shorthanded goals in a game, what was the game like for you and how special was that hat trick?

"The game for me was the type of environment that I love to be in. Being able to compete against such a high-end program, like the one Hartland is, is what made the game a blast. It was very eventful up and down the ice and the atmosphere was second to none. ... It was also a very rewarding game because our team was able to come out with the win over one of the best teams in the state. ... The hat trick was obviously a



Lause

special moment for me because it's something unique in the game of hockey collectively and being able to share that moment with my teammates made it that much better."

Who is your favorite athlete to watch (in any sport) and why?

"My favorite athlete to watch would have to be Austin Matthews from the Toronto Maple Leafs. I've always admired the complete 200-foot game he plays as a center. He's dominant all over the ice and his release is one of the best in the National Hockey League. The details and habits he possesses is something I look up to and try to replicate in my game to the best of my ability."

What is your favorite TV show and why?

"My favorite TV show currently would have to be the Netflix original se-

ries YOU. I've always been a fan of any sort of thriller or crime fiction. ... Getting the perspective from the mind of the serial killer, the main character, Joe, is something I found really interesting too."

Outside of hockey, what are some things you like to do for fun?

"... I like to spend time with family and friends, work out, fish, golf and play video games from time to time."

What year in school are you and what are your future/college plans? Are you hoping to play hockey after high school?

"I am a senior in high school and currently I am undecided. ... I would love to have the opportunity to play juniors after high school. I also want to pursue a career in psychology or study other sorts of medicine."

Hockey

Continued from Page 1B

Defensively, Salem continued to shine.

Led by sophomore goalkeeper Andre Generaux, the Rocks recorded its third shutout in their past four games and its fifth of the season.

While Ossenmacher said shutouts start at goal, he said guys up front blocking shots and not allowing second opportunities is a major factor in keeping the opponent scoreless.

To Schaumburger, this is an aspect that Salem is now more committed to.

"A lot of the guys are more committed to blocking shots, getting pucks out, grinding in the corners, doing all the little things," Schaumburger said. "The little things that we are doing well this year is leading up to the big things, which is producing success for us and it's making it more fun to be out there."

With a power-play advantage, Salem scored its third goal of the first period, as Schaumburger attempted a shot from 15 feet outside of goal, with junior forward Matt Rochna tapping the puck in.

After capitalizing again with 25.8 seconds left in the first period, Salem left the ice for the first time with a four-goal advantage, with senior Aiden Powers setting the tone in the second period with a goal of his own.

Ossenmacher's goal is to get to four goals. In each of Salem's losses this season, the Rocks have averaged only two goals per game.

Holding a five-goal lead heading into the third period, Salem put the finishing touches against the struggling Franklin defense.

The Rocks added three more goals — scores from Schaumburger, senior forward Mitchell Patrick and senior defender Anthony Gattoni, who ended the game with 3:04 left in the third period — to secure their 11th victory of the season.

Franklin allowed its first mercy of the season. The Patriots have lost by a shutout in four games this year, averaging 1.6 goals per game.

Coming into Saturday's game against Brighton, Salem has outscored KLASA West opponents 20-1 in five games.

Generaux said the mercy win against Franklin will provide the boost the Rocks need to be successful against the 9-4-1 Bulldogs.



Salem forward Alex Mazzuca, right, skates in on Franklin goalie Steven Hicks. JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

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Gymnastics gyms battle over clients in lawsuit

Kayla Daugherty Livingston Daily
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Two competing gymnastics facilities are battling in court after one of the owners accused a former coach of conspiring to steal clients.

Jonathan Conrad, owner of Bounce Gymnastics in Hartland, filed a lawsuit against GymTactics' owner, Jason Mortimer, and three former employees in August.

Conrad alleged Mortimer abused his position as a coach at Bounce Gymnastics to sabotage the gym and steal nearly \$200,000 in client fees.

Mortimer said that never happened.

In a counterclaim, Mortimer claims Conrad refused to return more than \$100,000 in medications he uses to treat his cystic fibrosis.

Conrad said in his response he never withheld Mortimer's medication and mailed two boxes of medication to Mortimer following his resignation.

The lawsuits

Mortimer started in 2011 as a coach for Bounce. In the lawsuit, Conrad claims Mortimer lied to him in 2016 about gym equipment and flooring for sale that he was asked to inspect.

"Mortimer falsely reported equipment/flooring was not in good condition and instead purchased it for himself," Conrad wrote.

Mortimer told the Livingston Daily he was asked to inspect a spring board but when he called a Linden wrestling coach selling the equipment, the coach wasn't selling a spring board but rather a board of springs used to create 40-foot square spring floor.

Bounce did not have room for another spring floor, Mortimer said, so a gymnastics parent ultimately purchased the flooring for his son to practice on.

When Mortimer decided to open GymTactics, in Highland, three years later the child was no longer active in gymnastics and the father sold Mortimer the flooring.

"The dad bought the floor. I bought it from the dad," Mortimer said.

While still an employee of Bounce, Mortimer signed a lease on behalf of GymTactics six miles from Bounce in April, Conrad claimed in the lawsuit.

Conrad said Mortimer then sent an email to parents to put 30 days notice to terminate contracts with Bounce.

Another gym owner called Conrad in May, telling him Mortimer was buying equipment, something Mortimer denied when confronted, according to the complaint.

Records indicate Mortimer resigned as a coach for Bounce on June 6. Later that month, Conrad said, Mortimer sent an email canceling a week of practices, stating there were no coaches available.

Days later, Conrad alleges, Mortimer used the same list to email all parents and guardians soliciting GymTactics.

Mortimer told the Livingston Daily he used his personal email to communicate with parents, not a corporate account.

According to the lawsuit, 84 gymnasts left Bounce and joined GymTactics, a move that cost Bounce approximately \$197,000 in tuition for the 2019-20 season. Conrad is asking for approximately \$592,000 in damages.

Conrad is accusing Mortimer and GymTactics of statutory and common law conversion, inducement of breach of fiduciary duties, breach of contract, fraudulent misrepresentation and business defamation and slander.

Brittany Smith, Kristopher Reilly and Kelsey Reilly, former coaches at Bounce, are named in the lawsuit and Conrad claims they conspired with Mortimer to sabotage the gym.

All deny the accusations in their responses to the lawsuit and Smith was ultimately dismissed from the case.

Mortimer claims he never signed a contract with Bounce and isn't prevented from opening a gym six miles away, nor recruiting other coaches.

"All of this comes down to the parents made the decision that they did not want to be at Bounce. They, in their own free will, made their decision to leave. I told the parents what I believed the gym should do, and what a coach should do," Mortimer said.

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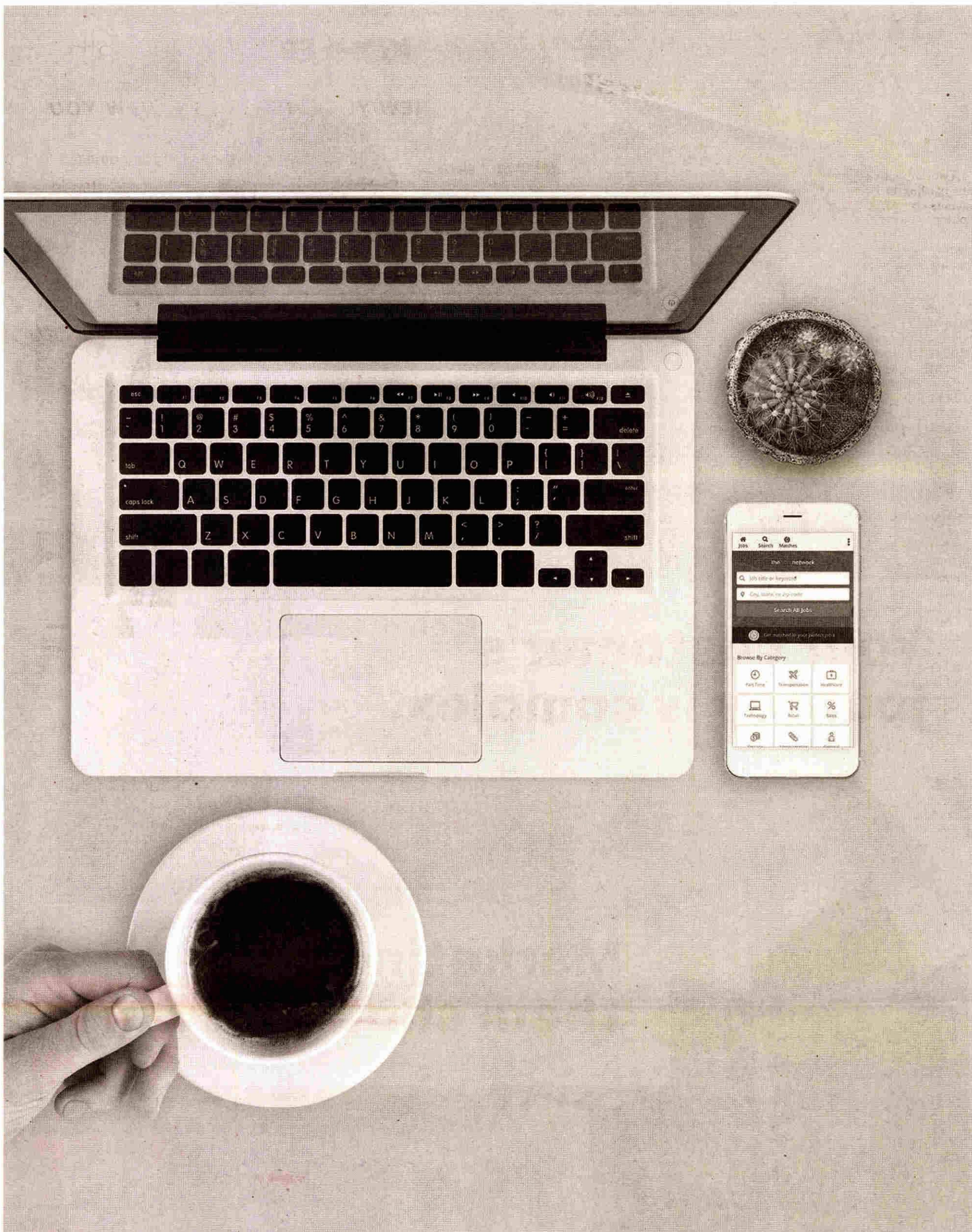
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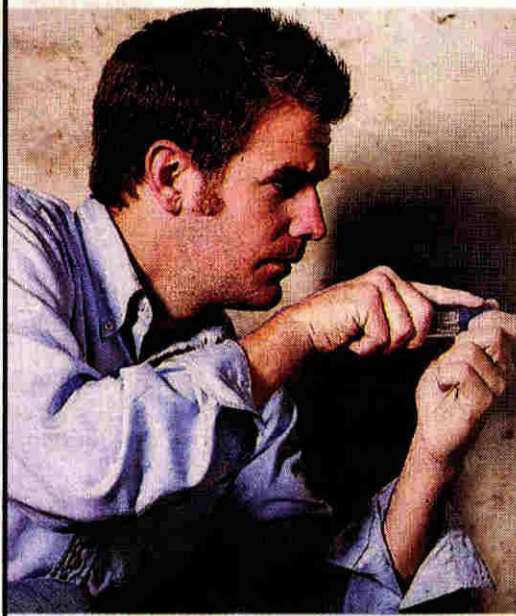
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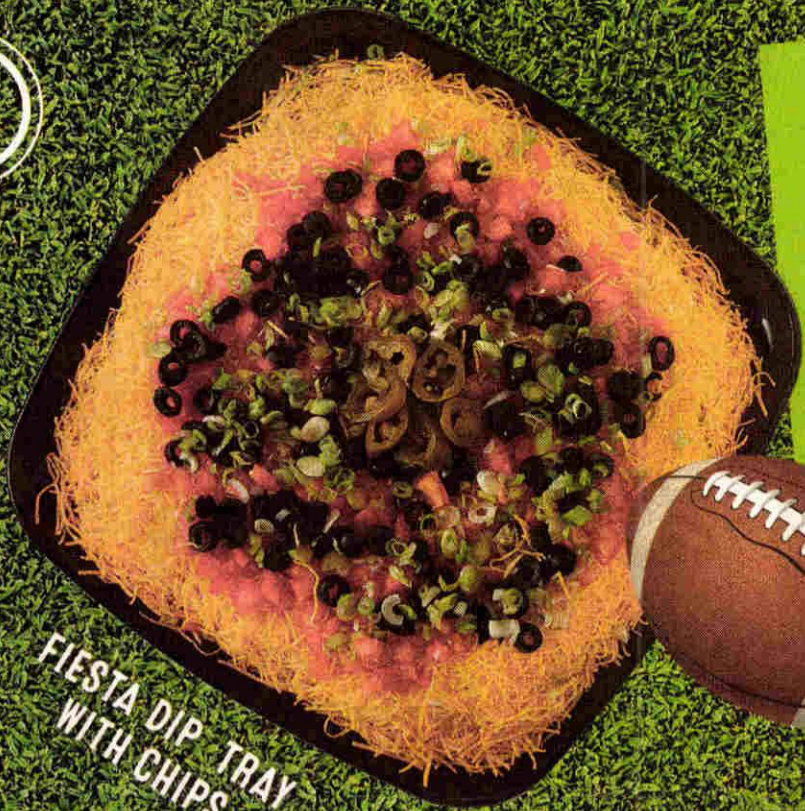
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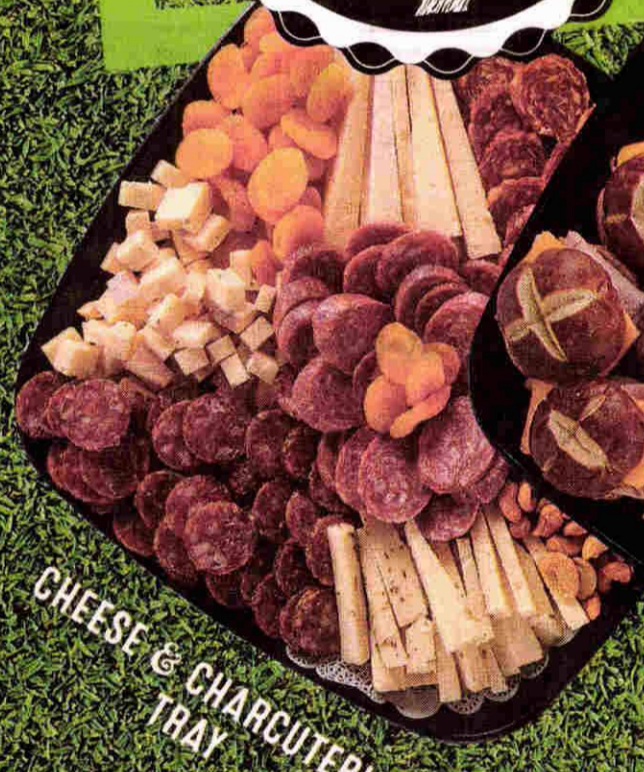
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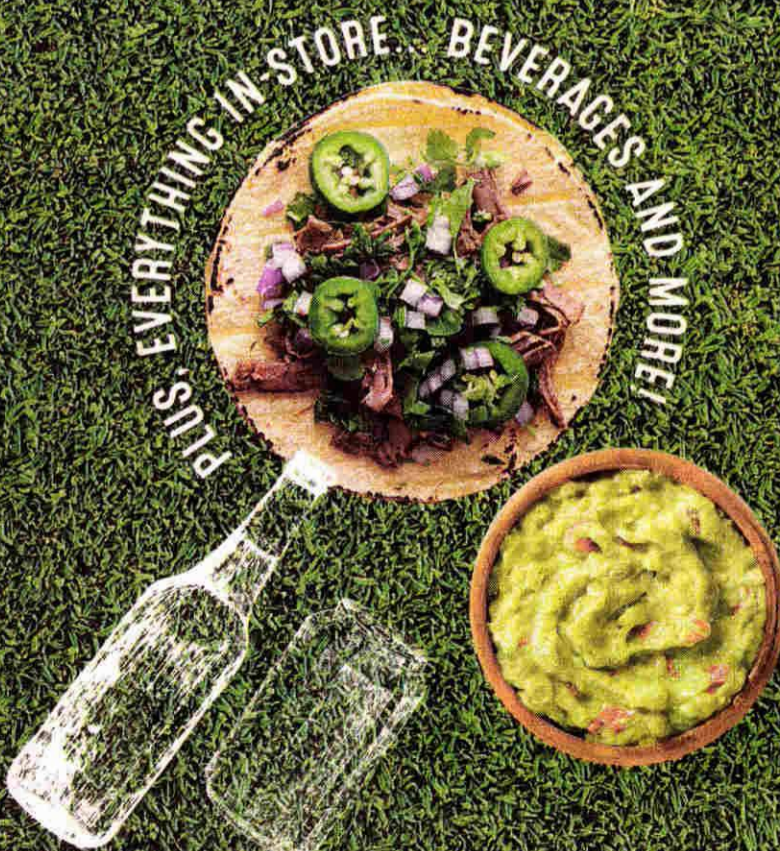


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