



Franklin grad's no-hitter leads to offer from Madonna

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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Westland looking to rebuild ethics commission

Shelby Tankersley Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

It's not uncommon to hear "this is why we need an ethics commission" at a Westland City Council meeting.

After months of calls from council and community members to re-seat the long vacant body, officials are actively

looking to put five residents on the commission.

"It's something that I'm committed to filling if we can find the right candidates of people that want to be on the board and have the stomach for it," said Mayor Bill Wild.

Wild said people can submit or download applications online. He com-

mitted to placing a legal ad in the Wayne-Westland Observer detailing how to apply for any residents without internet who are interested. The commission is mayor-appointed.

Wild said he's gotten several applications for the commission over the years, but all were from residents Wild felt applied "for the wrong reasons."

The mayor, along with Council President Jim Hart and Councilman Jim Godbout, said they have concerns some may try to "weaponize" the commission.

"I worry that in the politically-charged climate, would it be weaponized for political gain?" Hart said. "I

See **COMMISSION**, Page 4A



Canton resident Awadhut Munj captured this image of the comet NEOWISE on July 19. COURTESY OF AWADHUT MUNJ

Canton man's brilliant comet photo caps a frenetic journey

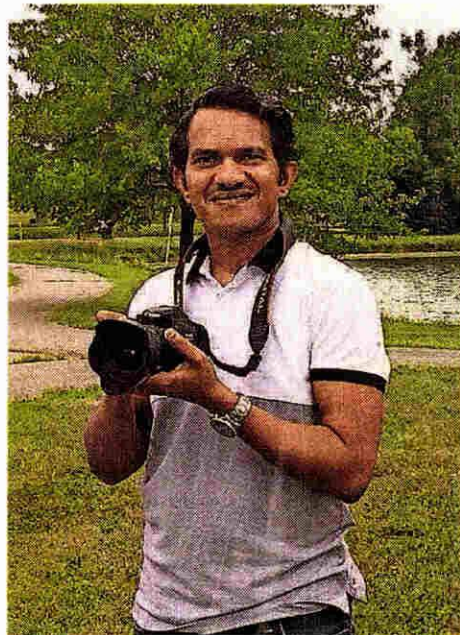
Ed Wright Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

With his adrenaline surging into overdrive, a Canton man staged a whirlwind 24-hour journey across Michigan to capture a breathtaking photograph of a celestial body that won't be visible in these parts for another 68,000 years, give or take a few years.

Awadhut Munj, a Ford Motor Company engineer whose hobbies include astronomy and photography, ultimately snapped a stunning shot of the comet NEOWISE, the brightest such object to pass earth in the past 23 years.

Munj's eye-pleasing image, taken following an adventurous statewide chase, resembles a Pure Michigan advertisement, enhanced with Ludington's Little Sable Point Lighthouse in the foreground and framed at the bottom by Lake Michigan and a golden-hued horizon.

See **PHOTO**, Page 4A



Munj traveled across the state of Michigan one night to chase down a dazzling photo of the comet.

ED WRIGHT/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

"Believe it or not, seeing the comet with the naked eye was more beautiful than the photo. It was funny because, although the comet is actually traveling very fast, it appeared to be motionless in the sky. This gave me time to try different camera settings."

Awadhut Munj
Ford Motor Company engineer whose hobbies include astronomy and photography

Parking concerns limit plans for historic Phoenix mill

David Veselenak Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

A question of parking has led Plymouth Township's planning commission to show concern over proposed plans at a redeveloped former mill once owned by Henry Ford.

The township's planning commission approved a site plan for the Phoenix Mill, located at 14973 Northville Road, during its meeting July 15 at Plymouth Township Hall.

But the recommended approval doesn't give the site the ability to move forward with all the original plans: the motion approved by the commission currently only allows for the planned restaurant to open. That's because the rest of the site is deficient in parking for the planned banquet facility as it currently stands per the township's ordinance.

Laura Haw of Northville-based McKenna Associates, who works with planning in the township, said the proposal for the property would need 229 parking spaces for full occupancy of both facilities: 420 people for the banquet facility and 117 for the restaurant. Currently, the site only has 89 parking spaces onsite, which is enough for the restaurant to operate at full capacity when open. If the restaurant were not open, the number of spaces currently would allow for the banquet facility to open at a capacity of 288 people.

To get to 229 spaces, other arrangements would be needed in the future.

"We note that there are opportunities to increase the parking total, including adding additional parking facilities on Hines Drive, parking agreements for shuttle services and even creating some onsite parking," Haw said. "However, the applicant does need some additional time to work out those agreements and additional parking perhaps in Hines Park with the county with a more coordinated approach."

Greg Donofrio of Critical Mass, the company that purchased the Phoenix Mill from Wayne County, said the way the proposed approval was written would allow some flexibility to operate at the site depending on when each separate entity opens. Allowing for smaller banquets to take place, he said, could work early on if the restaurant hasn't opened its doors.

See **MILL**, Page 4A



Wayne-Westland superintendent talks school plans

Shelby Tankersley Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

About two months into his new job, Wayne-Westland Superintendent John Dignan is going to steer the district through the most uncertain school year in memory.

Dignan said the community will get through the school year together and was encouraged so many staff and teachers took time this summer to serve on back-to-school committees.

"They're all in," he said. "They want what's best for our kids and they're working hard."

In normal and atypical times alike, Dignan thinks Wayne-Westland has a lot of good programs to build on. He said the district's diversity, William D. Ford Career Technical Center, arts and gifted programs are all assets. In a lot of ways, he said, the community reminds him of Ypsilanti, where he grew up.

"This district has so many talented people and talented students and great community support just channeling everything together," he said. "That was probably the most attractive thing. This thing is ready to take off. They say great futures start here and I really believe that."

Building community trust

Dignan said he understands there's a lot of work to be done to get Wayne-Westland Community Schools and the surrounding community on good footing again. The district's former superintendent, Shelley Holt, resigned amid controversy and settled a lawsuit against the district.

"I think the bedrock of any organization has to be trust," he said. "If you don't have that, you don't have anything. Building that takes time."

Dignan thinks his desire to help students succeed will ultimately win the day. He comes from a family of educators and said they all agree it's a calling more than a job.

"Education is a calling, and you live it 24/7 so you can't turn it off," he said. "To me, it's creating opportunities for communities. It's doing things that you really have the power and ability to change the course of people's lives."



Wayne-Westland School District Superintendent John Dignan talks about preparations for the upcoming fall semester.
JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Back-to-school in a pandemic

The school board won't approve the district's final back-to-school plans until Aug. 10, but the administration's proposal looks like those of surrounding districts. It prepares for three scenarios: online learning, part-time classroom learning and full-time classroom learning.

Right now, the state is in phase four of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's reopening plan. If classes start in phase four, students and teachers will return to classrooms in interchanging groups. The district would combine online and in-

person learning so buildings are never at full capacity.

Dignan said heavily used spaces like classrooms and buses will be regularly cleaned when people return to buildings, and his district is stocking up on things like masks and sanitation machines to prepare.

"I think at different points in time throughout the school year we could move in and out of phases," Dignan said. "So if we do that, what does that look like? These are some of the things our committees are looking at."

Should the state regress to phase three or lower, all classes would move

online. Dignan said the district would work to provide students in need with computers and internet access. Teachers likely will do more to connect socially and emotionally with students, too.

As the state moves in and out of different phases, Dignan said the district will give parents time to make needed arrangements and encouraged people to be flexible.

"You can do all the planning in the world and, prior to Labor Day, could have the rug pulled out from underneath you," he said. "That's real. You have to be able to pivot from that point and move forward."

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Mortgage rates at historic lows; is it time to refinance?



Money Matters
Rick Bloom
Guest columnist

I used to think that in my 35-plus years in the financial industry, I had seen it all. Then came the coronavirus. We have entered a new world and things will be different moving forward.

That being said, something just happened that I never thought would happen. What I'm referring to is that for the first time in history, a 30-year fixed rate mortgage was below 3 percent.

When I started my career, a 30-year fixed rate mortgage averaged between 14 and 15 percent. When I got my very first mortgage in the early '80s, I went with a 12¼ percent adjustable rate mortgage. Rates today are at historic lows.

Low mortgage rates can create opportunities for many people. However,

with opportunities also come mine fields that are important to understand before you rush to get a new mortgage.

When you hear mortgage companies advertise rates at below 3 percent, that doesn't necessarily mean you are going to qualify for that rate. One key factor is your credit score. The higher your credit score, the lower the interest rate.

It is not unusual for credit reports to have errors, and those errors can result in you paying a higher rate of interest. If you are thinking of refinancing or buying a new home, it pays to review your credit report as soon as possible and to begin the process of disputing any errors. Typically, under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, the credit bureau generally has 30 days to investigate your claim. To get a free copy of your credit report, check out www.annualcreditreport.com. Usually you can only get a free credit report once a year; however, due to the pandemic you can now get your credit report weekly for free.

When it comes to refinancing your mortgage, you also have to focus on the costs. The costs that you pay to refinance are important in determining whether it makes sense to refinance.

Your goal of refinancing is to improve your financial position; it is not to make money for the mortgage company. Costs do matter. In that regard, some mortgage companies have gotten very creative as to their fees. That is why when you receive a bid from a mortgage company, you need to find out the total out-the-door cost of the mortgage.

My general rule is that by having lower mortgage payments, if you can recoup the cost of the refinance within a two- to three-year period, and you plan to be in the home at least five years, then it pays to refinance.

To me, a good mortgage company is one that not only explains all the mortgage options available to you, but is also transparent with their fees. Therefore, not only do you need to do your homework when it comes to rates and costs, but you also want to make sure you're dealing with a quality company.

Good luck!
Rick Bloom is a fee-only financial advisor.

hometownlife.com

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Redford Twp. clerk cleared for return to office

John Wisely Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

Redford Township clerk Garth Christie can return to office after a judge threw out a restraining order that barred him from working on the Aug. 4 election.

Wayne County Chief Judge Timothy Kenny on Tuesday overturned an order entered at the request of Redford Township Trustee Linda Jackson. She claimed Christie defamed her in newspaper advertisements and couldn't be trusted to run an honest election.

The order issued by Wayne County Circuit Judge Sheila Gibson forced Christie and his entire staff out of office.

Kenny "dissolved the restraining order appropriately because there was no basis to enter that order in the first place," said James Allen, the attorney for Redford Township. "Not only was

that order an attack on the 1st Amendment, it was a full frontal assault on democracy."

Allen said the order was entered improperly because Wayne County Circuit Court has a rule that directs all cases involving election law to the chief judge. Christie could not be reached for comment.

"His deputy is back to work. Unfortunately, Mr. Christie was hospitalized over the weekend in part due to the stress caused by this incident," Allen said. "He should be back to work after he has a follow-up examination with his physician."

"He's very happy to be able to get back to do the work that the voters of Redford sent him to do for four terms."

Christie is unopposed in his re-election bid for clerk but the trustees face competitors on the primary ballot.

"I sought judicial intervention by the

court to protect the reputation of the government of Redford Township, the electoral process from the perception of potential impropriety, and most importantly my reputation and its legacy," Jackson said in a statement. "Extraordinary measures were necessary to address extraordinary conduct."

Jackson said she understood Kenny's decision, but said she never filed the suit with the intention of closing down the clerk's office entirely.

Jackson added that she would be working with her attorney to discuss next steps.

She sought the restraining order after Christie criticized her and three other trustees in an advertisement placed in the Redford Connection, a local newspaper. Jackson told the Free Press last week that she didn't trust Christie to run a fair election, given his criticism of her and her colleagues.

"The clerk has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that he's entirely too biased to run this election," Jackson said last week. "He has orchestrated an entire smear campaign against me and three other board members and I was not going to sit still for that."

Allen wouldn't say whether Christie's criticisms were valid but said clerks have a 1st Amendment right to speak out on issues.

"I don't condone or adopt any of the sentiments that were expressed in the Redford Connection, but if we're going to have a fully functioning democracy, people are going to have to engage in debate," Allen said. "Sometimes that debate is brass knuckles, and it's gone on both ways in that township for years."

Allen said that he expects Christie's staff to be working lots of overtime before the election to make up for lost days.

PCCS task force offers options for district families

Ed Wright Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

The Plymouth-Canton Community Schools Reentry Task Force recommended families of district students should be given the choice of in-person or virtual learning once school resumes in September.

The choice, which would have to be conveyed by students' families to the district by a yet-to-be-determined August deadline, would be a five-day-a-week commitment to one of the two plans.

A hybrid learning model, which would have combined in-person (two days a week) and virtual for all students, was nixed by the task force.

The school board is expected to vote on an official reentry plan at its Aug. 11 meeting. The district must submit its plan to Wayne RESA no later than Aug. 17 and post details on the district's website.

Tuesday night's Zoom meeting started at 7 p.m. and ran into the early-morning hours Wednesday as the task force team and school board members discussed several details related to the recommendation.

The school board and task force members will reconvene for a special session workshop at 5 p.m., Tuesday to discuss results of a survey distributed to district families regarding the task force's recommended plan and to continue discussing vital details.

The board agreed to meet in person Aug. 4.

One question repeated during a community comment session was: How can families feel secure in sending their children back to in-person learning when the school board meetings are still virtual?

Attached to the task force's recommendation was a suggested phased-in safe start that would include half-day school days for at least the first couple weeks of the school year so that staff and students could get used to social



Plymouth-Canton Schools' reentry plans were discussed Tuesday. GETTY IMAGES

distancing and other related protocols. Whatever plan the district follows will be contingent on Michigan's six-phase safe start program. If the state is in Phase 4 (Michigan's current status) once school starts, the in-person-vs.-virtual option will still be viable.

However, a downgrade to Phase 3 or lower would require school to be virtual. An upgrade to Phase 5 by the state would allow for 100% in-person learning, while a Phase 6 promotion would trigger a post-pandemic return to normalcy.

Treasurer Patrick Kehoe expressed concern with the guidelines offered by the safe start program, stating the program is geared, for the most part, to the opening and closing of businesses, not schools.

Vice President Anupam Chugh Sidhu explained that local school boards do not have to use the state's phase parameters if they feel conditions warrant a shift to a virtual-only protocol.

More than 70 community members emailed comments and questions to the school board, all of which were read during the meeting.

Proponents of a plan to return to in-person learning stressed the mental-

health challenges virtual learning breeds. Virtual proponents continuously hammered home the concern that social distancing would be too much of a challenge.

Superintendent Monica Merritt repeatedly assured the school board members and the large contingent of online viewers - more than 1,400 people - that state and national safety guidelines will be strictly followed.

Kehoe's suggestion that members of the 200-member task force participate in a dry run a few weeks prior to school reopening was deemed not possible under current state guidelines. Kehoe said a walkthrough would give board members a better idea of how a school day would operate.

"I don't want to put our students and staff in a position that they're being treated like guinea pigs in an experiment," Kehoe said, explaining his walkthrough idea. "We need to get special approval from the legislature or something to make this (dry run) happen."

Kehoe later apologized for his remarks, calling them "unnecessarily inflammatory," after Merritt said she would never allow students and staff to be treated like guinea pigs.

**CITY OF GARDEN CITY
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
August 10, 2020**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Garden City Council will hold a Public Hearing at the Civic Center, 6000 Middlebelt Road, Garden City, Michigan on **Monday, August 10, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.** regarding an ordinance of the city of Garden City providing for amendments to Chapter 93: Parks And Recreation; providing for amendment to hours of operation; providing for prohibition of smoking; providing for repeal or severability; providing for publication and effective date.

**STATE OF MICHIGAN
COUNTY OF WAYNE
CITY OF GARDEN CITY
CHAPTER 93: PARKS AND RECREATION (SECTION 93.11 & CREATION OF 93.12)**

THE CITY OF GARDEN CITY ORDAINS:

SECTION I. AMENDMENTS TO SECTION 93.11 HOURS OF OPERATION AND CREATION OF SECTION 93.12 SMOKE FREE PARKS

§ 93.11 HOURS OF OPERATION.

(A) It shall be unlawful for any person, except authorized personnel, to use or be found in or about any city park between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. dusk to dawn from February through October and 6 p.m. to dawn from November through January; unless the person is attending or in the process of attending a parks and recreation sponsored event held on the premises; or unless the person has a special permit for use of park facilities during the above mentioned closed hours after hours.

(B) It shall be further unlawful for any person, except authorized personnel, those persons attending a parks and recreation sponsored event, or those persons with a special permit; to use or be found in any park except for the major City Park located at Cherry Hill and Merriman.

October 15 to March 15: 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.
March 16 to October 14: 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

§ 93.12 SMOKE FREE PARKS.

The lighting up or smoking of tobacco or any other substance, or smoking, consumption or use of marijuana products or derivatives, or use of vapor products or nicotine alternatives, is prohibited within all Garden City Parks, unless it is in the vehicle parking area and over 100 feet from the grass surface of a park.

SECTION II. SEVERABILITY.

If any clause, sentence, section, paragraph or part of this Ordinance, or the application thereof to any person, firm, corporation, legal entity or circumstances, shall be for any reason adjudged by a court of competent jurisdiction to be unconstitutional or invalid, said judgment shall not affect, impair or invalidate the remainder of this Ordinance. It is hereby declared to the legislative intent of this body that the Ordinance is severable, and that the Ordinance would have been adopted had such invalid or unconstitutional provision not have been included in this Ordinance.

SECTION III. REPEAL.

All Ordinances or parts of Ordinances in conflict herewith are hereby repealed only to the extent necessary to give this Ordinance full force and effect.

SECTION IV. SAVINGS CLAUSE.

All rights and duties which have matured, penalties which have been incurred, proceedings which have begun and prosecution for violations of law occurring before the effective date of this Ordinance are not affected or abated by this Ordinance.

SECTION V. PUBLICATION.

The Clerk for the City of Garden City shall cause this Ordinance to be published in the manner required by law.

SECTION VII. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This Ordinance, as amended, shall take full force and effect upon publication as required by law.

Matthew K. Miller,
City Clerk

Publish August 2, 2020 LO-0000369931 3x10

**CITY OF LIVONIA
PLANNING COMMISSION
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

In accordance with the provisions set forth in Section 502 of Act 110 of the Public Acts of Michigan of 2006, as amended, and Articles XIX and XXIII of Ordinance #543, the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Livonia, as amended, the City Planning Commission of the City of Livonia will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, August 18, 2020, beginning at 7:00 p.m. on the following items:

* Due to COVID-19, Public Hearings will not be held in the City Hall Auditorium
Connect on Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/182188326>
Or Phone at: 312-626-6799
Webinar ID: 182 188 326

To participate, use the 'Raise Hand' button on Zoom or press *9 on your phone to be called on.

Petition 2020-07-01-03 submitted by Leo Soave Building Company, Inc. pursuant to Section 23.01 of the City of Livonia Zoning Ordinance #543, as amended, requesting to rezone the property at 37855 Lyndon Avenue (former Webster Elementary School site) located on the south side of Lyndon Avenue between Newburgh and Hix Roads in the Southeast ¼ of Section 19 from PL (Public Lands) to R-1 (One Family Residential - 60' x 120' lots).

Petition 2020-07-03-03 submitted by Stonefield Engineering & Design, on behalf of Haggerty Square, L.L.C. and Haggerty Residential, L.L.C., pursuant Section 12.08 of the Livonia Code of Ordinances of the City of Livonia, as amended, to determine whether or not to vacate a section of the existing public utility easement at 19700 and 19750 Haggerty Road, located on the east side of Haggerty Road, between Seven Mile and Eight Mile Roads in the Southwest ¼ of Section 6.

Petition 2020-07-06-01 submitted by the City Planning Commission, pursuant to Council Resolution #170-20, in connection with proposed amendments to Sections 2.10 of Article II, 4.12 of Article IV, 5.15 of Article V, and 16.02 of Article XVI, to define "Caregiver Grow Facility" and regulate the zoning districts where medical marijuana facilities can operate.

The above-mentioned petitions will be on file in the City Planning Commission office, 33000 Civic Center Drive, Livonia, Michigan, during the period of five (5) days immediately preceding the scheduled public hearing and may be examined upon request by emailing Planning@ci.livonia.mi.us or by calling (734) 466-2290 during normal working hours, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

**CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
Ian Wilshaw, Chairman**

Publish: August 2, 2020 LO-0000369942 3x6

Theater owner offers screening rooms to schools

David Veselenak hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Cory Jacobson is the first to admit he's not an educator. But the owner of Phoenix Theatres believes he has a temporary solution to help get students back to learning in person later this year.

Jacobson is marketing his theater chain with locations in Michigan, Iowa and Massachusetts as a potential place for schools to hold classes in the fall. Given that classrooms aren't set up for today's social distancing standard in a COVID-19 world, he's offering up some of his theaters for schools to rent as a place to hold classes.

"The idea that really struck me is you have classroom made for 30 people," he said. "All of a sudden, they have a terrible space problem in schools across the country."

The idea came last week to Jacobson as he listened to a podcast hosted by NPR host Diane Rehm. She discussed the challenges schools face when trying to reopen in the fall. That got Jacobson — who currently has several movie theaters sitting empty — to think outside the box.

Holding classes inside a movie theater would allow for traditional classroom sizes to meet in person while keeping students and educators apart.

The theater screens could also be used for lectures and teaching, replacing a blackboard.

"We have a very high-tech Wi-Fi system throughout the building. You can put presentations on our screens," Jacobson said. "If it can't show movies, we can definitely teach people in the same space."

He said he's reached out to local leaders across the communities in which Phoenix Theatres operates. He said he's gotten positive reactions from the mayor in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and has reached out to local leadership in metro Detroit as well.

The offer comes at a time when debate rages about what can be done to reopen schools in the fall amid a pandemic that has infected more than 74,000 Michiganders since March. Some school districts, such as Huron Valley Schools, have begun to put together their plans for bringing students back in the fall both in-person and virtually. Farmington Public Schools have begun preparations, placing an order for masks, sneeze guards and hand sanitizer for when students come back.

No area schools have taken Jacobson up on the offer to use the theaters yet, though some districts appreciated the thoughtfulness of the approach.

"We appreciate the thought and cre-

ativity of community partners such as Phoenix Theatres at Laurel Park. It is hard to say, at this point, whether our district would be able to utilize this space, but we will certainly consider all options as we continue to plan for a safe and effective return to school for our students and staff," said Stacy Jenkins, administrator of district communications for the Livonia Public Schools.

Jenny Johnson, director of communications for Wayne-Westland Community Schools, said she had not heard of the idea but appreciated it.

"With the theaters being closed down, I can appreciate them trying to find ways to still serve their community," she said.

The offer to schools comes as movie theaters across the southern Lower Peninsula remained closed by order of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer due to the coronavirus pandemic. There was some hope by theater owners that they would be able to reopen earlier this month, though those dates came and passed without being allowed to open after the number of daily COVID-19 cases began to increase in late June, prompting Whitmer to slow down the state's reopening plan.

Couple that with Hollywood delaying the release of several major motion pictures due to a surge in coronavirus cases

in places like Florida and Texas and theaters across the region have kept their popcorn machines quiet.

While this has frustrated Jacobson and other theater owners, it's also led them to find other ways to bring in some revenue: the Emagine theater in Novi has begun showing films in a drive-in fashion in the parking lot.

Opening up the Phoenix Theatres — which operate locally at Laurel Park Place mall in Livonia, the State Wayne in downtown Wayne and at the Mall of Monroe in Monroe — to schools would be a win-win, Jacobson said: schools could continue educating students and the theaters could recoup some of the money lost since being closed in March.

Opening his theaters to educators would be one way to retain some sense of normalcy for students, he said. Even when speaking to his theater employees, Jacobson asks them who has had the most influence on their lives and many mention teachers.

"I think we're going to be a terrible loss in this country if teachers cannot be invested in their students," Jacobson said. "Where would we be without those people?"

"You're not going to get that experience through a computer. That's a person-to-person interaction."

dveselenak@hometownlife.com

Mill

Continued from Page 1A

"To be honest, we don't know which tenant will launch first. It seems the banquet space ... is going faster than the restaurant space," he said. "If our restaurant tenant delayed their buildout in the space, the way it's written, the restaurant hours don't exist."

Donofrio said they are continuing to explore additional parking options, including potential shuttle services with area hotels.

But planning commissioners balked at the parking aspect of the plan, worried about the ramifications of guests finding places to park where they shouldn't be if both the restaurant and banquet facility were open at the same time.

Planning Commission Vice Chairman Bill Pratt said if the space sees too many guests coming to it at one time, those people will not follow posted directions and begin to park wherever they can.

"You can't get people to wear a mask in public. How in the heck are you going to get them to park where you want them to park?" he said. "You're going to have people there ... that are going to park all over that place because it's their

'constitutional right' to parking."

The former mill was operated by Henry Ford in the first half of the 20th century. Wayne County then acquired the Phoenix Mill, along with the Wilcox Mill in Plymouth and the Newburgh Mill in Livonia, after World War II. The county held those sites for decades before deciding to put them up for sale, which angered some county parks supporters. Critical Mass purchased both the Phoenix Mill and the Newburgh Mill, while Plymouth artist Tony Roko's Art Foundation purchased the Wilcox Mill.

The Wilcox Mill and Newburgh Mill sales were approved by the Wayne County Commission last fall. The Plymouth Township Planning Commission first reviewed some plans for the site last year.

Donofrio said while the parking arrangement for the two entities still remains in limbo, he wanted to begin moving forward in order to keep the project on track to begin operations. He proposed options of how to deal with the issue to allow the space to function, and said he wasn't interested in having unauthorized vehicles parked along Hines Drive that could cause danger to both drivers and those using the road, including cyclists.

"We can require the restaurant to give passes to those people who are allowed to park," he said. "There would be



The Phoenix Mill at 14973 Northville Road is beginning to get some attention from a team of renovators. JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

a lot of coordination that would need to happen between the banquet space and the restaurant.

"My expectation is that this would not be the last time I'm up here talking about parking."

The planning commission voted unanimously to approve the site plan, but just for operations of the restaurant.

That item will get taken up by the township board of trustees and the project is expected to eventually return to the planning commission for more consideration.

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

Commission

Continued from Page 1A

worry that, and this is not to say I don't want to fill it because of this, but I have a concern that next thing I know there's political agendas.

"This ethics commission is there to go through legitimate ethics concerns."

But all agreed the commission would likely be a "value added" to the city.

"It is another key piece to holding elected officials accountable in our positions to make sure we are staying above board and doing what is just on behalf of our residents," said Councilwoman Tasha Green.

Commission members would serve

three-year terms. However, the initial group would have two three-year members, two two-year members and one one-year member.

Members would meet at least once a year and cannot be city officials or employees.

The commission would submit written opinions on ethical concerns brought forward by community members or city employees. The written opinion would then be forwarded to the mayor and the city department involved in the complaint.

"I think having an ethics commission is definitely a value added," Hart said. "There's a lot of different instances where they exist, right? Even on the professional side, in the private sector."

"It kind of gives a third party or a

third group the opportunity to weigh in on some things that might be questionable."

Green said one issue that an ethics commission may be helpful lending guidance on is the city's relationship with its trash hauler, Midwest Sanitation. The company's president, Paul Ruthenberg, has made campaign donations to Wild and every member of council with the exception of Green and Mike McDermott in the last few years according to campaign finance reports submitted to Wayne County.

"I believe an ethics commission is another layer of protection for voters to make sure that we as human beings and also as elected officials are not violating the oath of office we took," Green said.

While council members are in favor

of the commission, some worry it will be hard to fill.

"I think it's important," Godbout said. "I also think it's extremely difficult to get people that are unbiased and want to look at it from that perspective. ... There's an environment out there where people don't want to put themselves out there because the minute they sit on the commission, people will start picking them apart."

Wild, Green and Hart all said they have received interest from community members recently. Godbout said he has mentioned to the committee several people he thinks would be a good fit.

Contact reporter Shelby Tankersley at stankersle@hometownlife.com or 248-305-0448. Follow her on Twitter @shelby_tankk.

Photo

Continued from Page 1A

"Once I saw a preview of the image on my camera, I was just amazed ... so happy," said Munj, whose quest to capture the comet commenced days before he finally secured the elusive image.

Once posted on a Canton Township community Facebook page, the image generated hundreds of reactions and dozens of comments in less than 48 hours.

One admirer posted: "Awesome. Looks like a painting."

Creating the masterpiece was anything but easy for Munj, who initiated his photography adventure by setting his alarm clock for 4 a.m. one mid-July morning and walking outside his Canton apartment near Palmer and Morton

Taylor roads.

"I knew which direction to look, but the comet was visible near the horizon and there were too many trees blocking my vision," he said.

After an unsuccessful early-morning attempt less than a mile away from his residence the following night, Munj and his wife drove to Canton's Independence Park, which is located in a more rural setting, away from bright lights.

"The only problem with that," Munj shared, is that the park closes at 10 p.m. and the comet isn't visible until around 4:30 a.m. So that location didn't work."

With the assistance of bloggers who shared Munj's passion for photographing the comet, he and a friend packed a few essentials on the morning of July 18 and made the nearly three-hour trek to Port Austin, a city in Michigan's thumb that sits near Lake Huron.

"All of the information we had col-

lected said that Port Austin would be an optimal location to photograph the comet," Munj said. "However, it turned out to be a disappointment with a less-than-desirable view of the comet."

Undeterred, Munj returned to Canton that night before turning to Plan B, which required another three-hour drive the following morning, this time to Michigan's west coast.

"I was determined to get a decent photo of the comet, and another three-hour drive wasn't about to stop me," he said.

On July 19, not long after sunset, with the horizon blazing in all its orange glory, Munj and approximately 15 other comet chasers discovered they had hit the mother lode of NEOWISE photography locations.

"Believe it or not, seeing the comet with the naked eye was more beautiful than the photo," he revealed. "It was

funny because, although the comet is actually traveling very fast, it appeared to be motionless in the sky.

"This gave me time to try different camera settings."

With his image secured on a memory card, Munj drove back to Canton that night and was in his Ford Motor Company office the next morning.

Munj said he is ecstatic with his accomplishment, adding that he is not going to rest on his laurels.

"In 2024, there will be a total solar eclipse with the optimal viewing location near Dayton, Ohio," he said. "I missed out on the partial eclipse in 2017, but I'm not going to miss the one in 2024."

He'll be in Dayton, camera in hand, adrenaline pumping in overdrive.

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

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Civil Litigants Sent to Jail While Judge:	✓ Zero	21¹
Tenure of Office:	✓ 11½ years as Prosecutor	Entry level on and off 4 years, 20 years ago
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¹ Civil contempt: no jury, no presumption of innocence, no proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

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SPORTS



Michigan Hawks' Michele Krzysnik serves as the only female director of coaching soccer in the state of Michigan.

Michigan Hawks promote girls youth soccer in major way

Colin Gay
Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Michele Krzysnik grew up playing for a lot of female coaches.

Along with her time with the Michigan Hawks girls recreation league in the fall, she played for Mary-Kay Hussey at Livonia Stevenson, winning a state title with the Spartans in 1990.

To Krzysnik, these coaches helped her find ways of holding herself to the highest standards. She held herself accountable because she had others holding her accountable. She was shaped by women soccer coaches, molding her into an eventual two-time team captain at Michigan.

But for Krzysnik, Hussey was also the first one, during a freshman year practice, to develop an inkling of interest into what she would dedicate the rest of her life to.

"I remember one day when she was talking, I was thinking to myself, 'You know what, I could see myself doing this someday,'" Krzysnik said.

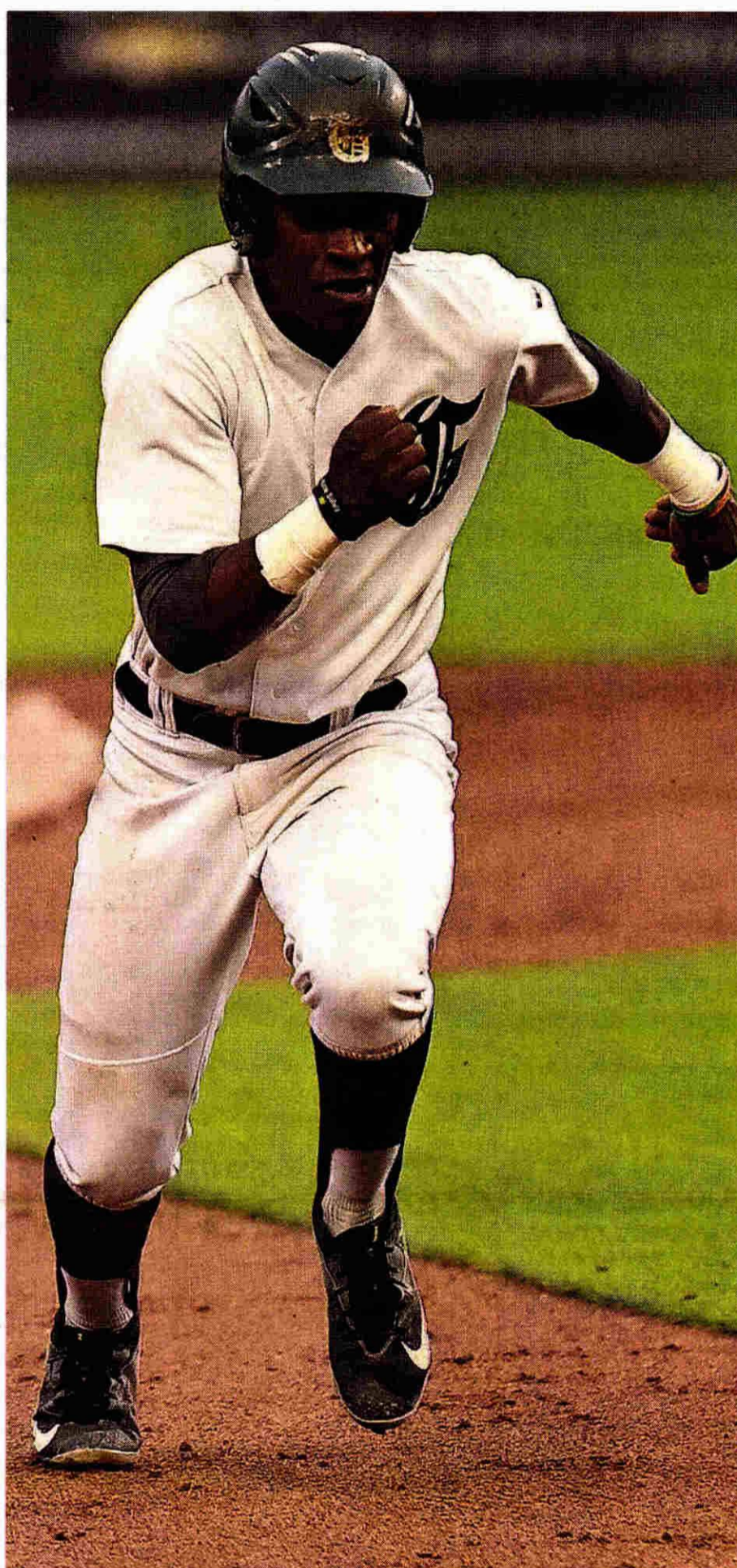
Now, Krzysnik's life's work is to develop that into the players she coaches, working as the director of coaching for the Michigan Hawks, a girls recreational soccer league that has been a staple in Livonia since 1974 with the goal of developing not only good athletes, but good people through the sport of soccer.

It's a work that Catholic Central head soccer coach Gene Pulice has seen from afar, something that mesmerized him each season he coached with Krzysnik - the only female director of coaching in the state - and the Michigan Hawks.

"We produce these kids, we develop these kids through seeing qualities that other people don't see," Pulice said.

See HAWKS, Page 2B

HOPING TO CATCH ON



Birmingham Groves graduate and Central Michigan alum Zavier Warren signed with the Brewers for \$575,000. JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Groves alum Warren drafted by Brewers in third round

Andrew Vaillencourt
Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Zavier Warren should be playing minor league baseball right now.

The Birmingham Groves graduate and Central Michigan alum was selected by the Milwaukee Brewers in the third round (92nd overall) of the MLB Draft this summer after another strong season with the Chippewas.

However, with the minor league season canceled due to COVID-19, Warren is on a different path and is playing in the Utica-based United Shore Professional Baseball League (USPBL).

Instead of being on one of the league's four teams, he is a member of the league's taxi squad - meaning he can play with any team on any given day. This has allowed him to play in as many games as possible and continue to improve after being drafted.

Warren primarily played shortstop at CMU, but was drafted by the Brewers as a catcher after starting a handful of games there in college. In 17 games this spring as a junior, he hit .328. Last year, he hit .363 with eight home runs, 68 RBI, 22 doubles and 14 steals. Playing in the USPBL has given him the chance to work on his defense as he adjusts to catching. He puts in work at the position every day during batting practice.

"It's worked out perfectly because in this league I can work on catching defense every day and am also able to catch some games," Warren said. "It's been a smooth transition because I'm not jumping right into minor league ball and having to catch back-to-back-to-back-to-back days. I'm easing back into it and getting more reps, getting my practice work in and hopefully when spring training comes around I'll be ready to go and in shape to be an everyday catcher."

He's played in the infield as well, allowing him to maximize his versatility - one of his strongest traits. At the plate, Warren is a switch-hitter.

"I like to play as much as possible, so I'm fine with bouncing around," Warren said. "Switch-hitting, you don't have to worry about the lefty-righty matchups with me either so that adds more versatility to the lineup."

On June 11, the second night of the draft (rounds 2-5), Warren settled in to

See WARREN, Page 2B



Livonia Franklin graduate Jacob Cox will pitch for Madonna next year after throwing a no-hitter in a summer league game. COURTESY OF JACOB COX

Cox heads to Madonna after summer gem

Colin Gay
Hometownlife.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Each time Jacob Cox takes the mound, he has control. He chooses when the play starts. In a way, he chooses how the ensuing play is going to go. The game waits on him.

"Nothing can happen until you throw the baseball," Cox explained.

Coming into his second travel baseball tournament of the summer, Cox's mindset was focused on having fun. The 2020 Livonia Franklin graduate viewed these games as his "last go-around" playing baseball, knowing this fall he would be a journalism and broadcasting student at Central Michigan University.

When Cox took the mound at 8 a.m.

The plan to have a "last go-around" playing baseball and become a journalism and broadcasting student at CMU changed after June 25.

June 25, he did not feel he had that same level of control he normally does. But it was still working.

"I usually pound the zone, I usually get ahead of the batters, throwing strikes early in the count. In that game, I didn't," Cox said. "In that game, I came from behind a lot, but I was able to change up the speeds very well: my change-up was dropping, I got them off balance a lot."

Cox continued to set hitters down, one-by-one, until the seventh inning.

He took the mound for the final time with nervous energy. In the back of his head, he knew what was on the line.

Again, Cox changed his mindset. "I knew it was only a 2-0 game, so I walked out there and told myself, 'Just don't blow the lead,'" he said.

After setting the first two in the inning down, Cox fired a pitch to the plate. He watched as the ball flew in the air toward the center fielder. He watched his teammate move under the ball and secure it.

Cox smiled. His teammates smiled. No-hitter.

Leaving the Total Sports facilities in Wixom, Cox thought he had just created a lasting memory of a fleeting baseball

See COX, Page 2B

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Marathon goes virtual due to virus concerns

Anthony Fenech
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

DETROIT — For the first time since 1978, the Detroit Free Press/TCF Bank Marathon will not take place in person this year.

Race weekend, which was scheduled for Oct. 16-18, will not take place downtown because of the coronavirus pandemic.

“Detroit’s Marathon Weekend is not just any weekend. It’s a celebration of athleticism, perseverance, community and the best Detroit has to offer. In March when our world as we knew it seemed to change, we were hopeful that we would be able to run together in October. As time has gone on, it has become clear to us that this will not be the case. It is with a heavy heart that we are announcing we will not be gathering together at the start line this year,” the Detroit Free Press/TCF Bank Marathon staff said in a released statement Friday.

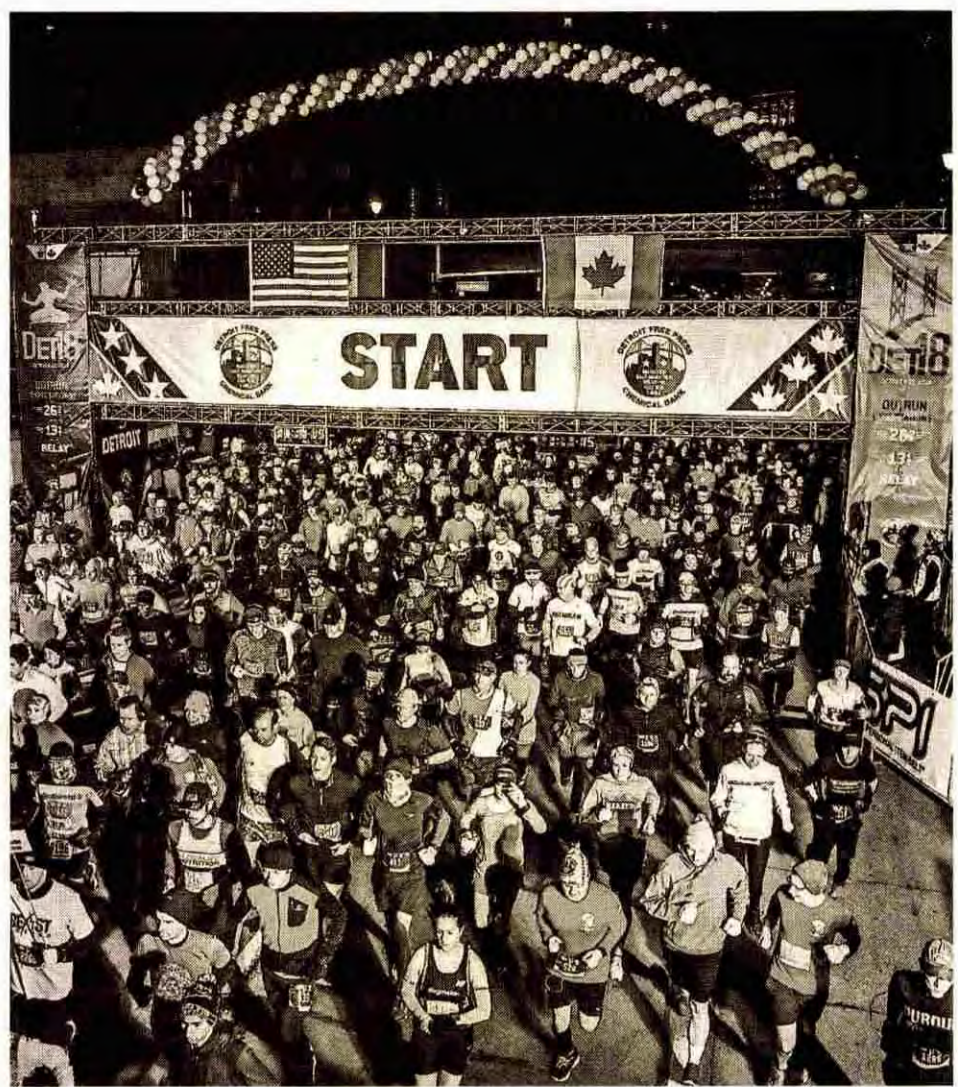
“After considerable consultation with public health and safety officials as well as discussions with our staff, volunteers, sponsors and, most importantly, our participants, we are announcing that the 43rd Detroit Free Press/TCF

Bank Marathon will be run virtually due to COVID-19.”

Registered participants will have the option to participate in our virtual event, defer your registration to 2021 or 2022 at no cost or get a 50% refund on this year’s event. Details of the virtual races will be available in a July 30 email with further instructions.

Until then, registration is closed. “We are heartbroken and disappointed. However, we are working to create the most engaging and collective virtual experience possible — there are celebrations still to be had this year! If we’ve learned anything from our community, it’s that the only way we persevere is together. So even if it’s virtually from our own start lines, we look forward to commemorating our achievements together, even if we’re apart.

“When we are able to return to the streets of Detroit in 2021, our race will not just be a run. It will be a celebration of our participants, supporters, volunteers and more. And celebrate, we will.”



Runners take off for the first wave of the half and full marathon during the 2018 Detroit Free Press Marathon. This year’s event has gone virtual due to COVID-19. KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/USA TODAY NETWORK

Hawks

Continued from Page 1B

“There may be someone who is viewed as an underdog or whatever, but we see qualities in them, they nurture them and help them develop into really quality athletes and really quality people, secured, empowered young women.”

Setting the tone

After a college experience of studying engineering, Krzysnik, much to her mother’s chagrin, found her way back to the youth fields.

“My mom thought it was crazy,” Krzysnik said. “I went to Michigan and she was like, ‘Why are you coaching soccer?’”

Taking a job as an assistant coach at Oakland, the Michigan graduate found she had a knack for coaching youth soccer, taking her first head coaching job for a team of 8 year old girls in the “Little Hawks” program, returning to the league where she got her start.

From that point forward, Krzysnik has helped the Hawks become a hotbed for girls soccer talent across the country. The Hawks are in the Top 20 of girls soccer clubs around the country — finishing as high as third in 2017 — and is currently No. 12.

Krzysnik has been a major part of this development, earning the National



Adil Salmoni, right, plays a major role in keeping a positive environment as a head coach in the Michigan Hawks program. COURTESY OF MAC MIDDLEY

Coach of the Year from both the United Soccer Coaches organization and Michigan State Youth Soccer Association in 2014, and having coached three Gatorade Players of the Year and two Miss Soccer Players of the Year.

Pulice said the prestige of the Hawks makes college coaches notice, creating opportunities for youth players from Livonia and the metro Detroit area to continue their soccer career at the next level, providing the next step for many female athletes.

With the emergence of Title IX in 1972, along with the increase in popularity of girls soccer over the past 20 years, Krzysnik said that opportunities and scholar-

ships are there for the taking for many youth and high school players.

“Once you have the talent and are able to play at a certain level, there is a certain thought that like, ‘Hey, I can do this at the next level, and I might even be able to get some of my education paid for,’” Krzysnik said.

Now, Krzysnik said it is her job to create an environment that is promoting what the club has always promoted.

“I think it’s an environment that’s supportive,” Krzysnik said. “I think it’s an environment that promotes strength of character, strength of will, just getting out there making sure that you are feeling confident about what you are doing, which helps you in all areas of your life.

“For me, being part of a team and being in that environment, I think, just helps you become a stronger person.”

Devotion to the girls game

Adil Salmoni plays a major role in keeping that environment alive.

Serving as the Hawks technical director and a coach, Salmoni preaches to the players on his team the core values that should guide their behavior and action.

On the field, he tells them to be aware, conclusive and efficient. Off the field, he says it’s about attitude, competitiveness and effort: each simply remembered as ACE.

Salmoni’s journey to coaching was much like Krzysnik’s: playing soccer from

an early age, helping out in a coaching role as a graduate engineering student at Michigan.

However, he was drawn to the girls game by a high school athletic director in Ann Arbor, simply asking him, ‘Do you want to coach the girls?’

“The reason why they asked me, and I didn’t realize it, but there is not a lot of people who wanted to coach girls in high school, coach girls in general,” Salmoni said. “A lot of the coaches were not really interested in doing that.”

But when he came to the Hawks, joining Krzysnik and Doug Landefeld, he saw a club that was entirely devoted to the girls game, people devoted to making the experience of the players better.

He saw devotion to a game that he had never seen devotion toward before.

And this remains Krzysnik’s continued goal: to help female athletes find their voice, to gain confidence within sports.

“It’s really about the full scope of trying to create an environment to push them to be good people, to give back to everyone in society and to be accepting of people, yet find a way to find themselves and be who they are in a safe environment and not be afraid to speak their mind,” Krzysnik said.

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

Warren

Continued from Page 1B

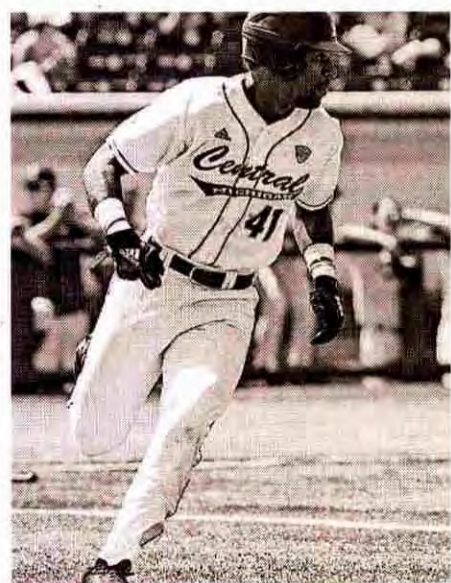
watch with family and friends at home. He got a call from his agent saying Milwaukee was interested in taking him and had a number in mind for a contract. Warren approved and moments later saw his name announced on TV.

“It was really exciting, it happened really fast,” Warren said. “I literally hung up the phone with my agent and the pick was announced very shortly after. It was a fun day.”

Warren signed with the Brewers for \$575,000, just under the slot value of \$637,600 for the 92nd overall pick. It’s more than the slot value of the top pick in the fourth round, which was 10 picks later. He wanted his name to come off the board and wasn’t ready to risk having to take less money by being taken in the fourth round.

Last summer, Warren boosted his draft stock with a standout showing in the Cape Cod League. He hit .315 over 42 games, backing up his college numbers. He is Central Michigan’s highest draft pick since 1977, when the Los Angeles Dodgers took Doug Harrison and the Chicago Cubs took Dave Pagel, both in the third round.

“I put in a lot of work toward this, it’s something that we’ve been talking about for a long time,” Warren said. “When I reflect back on it, coming from the smaller schools and stuff, I just have to thank my coaches and teammates and everyone that pushed me to be the player that I am today and put me in this position.”



Birmingham Groves and Central Michigan alum Zavier Warren was picked 92nd overall in the 2020 MLB Draft by the Milwaukee Brewers. CENTRAL MICHIGAN ATHLETICS

Warren is the highest MAC position player selected since 2016, when Ball State outfielder Alex Call was taken in the third round (86th overall) by the Chicago White Sox.

“The Brewers have a great organization and are on the come-up, so I’m excited to be a Brewer,” Warren said. “I felt ready to go as soon as they picked me.”

Contact reporter Andrew Vaillencourt at availlenc@hometownlife.com or 810-923-0659. Follow him on Twitter at [@AndrewVcourt](https://twitter.com/AndrewVcourt). Send story ideas to LivSports@hometownlife.com.

Cox

Continued from Page 1B

career. But someone in attendance made sure that the pitcher who just threw a no-hitter would get an opportunity for it to continue.

That night, Cox received a direct message from Anthony Lim, the hitting coach for Madonna. Already knowing the former Livonia Franklin pitcher’s college path, Lim just wanted to know if there was an inkling of interest in playing college baseball.

Cox agreed to a bullpen session, quickly realizing his path may be changing. As a left-handed pitcher, he was viewed as a hot commodity with a good chance to produce innings — at least out of the bullpen — from the very start of his career.

Madonna wanted him, and eventually got him.

“When I looked at it, I just kind of thought, ‘You know, it’s an opportunity to play a game I love and still be home-ish and go to school on a discount, pretty much,’” Cox said. “It made the decision easier.”

While Cox had talked to schools before about playing baseball at the next level, it was nothing really serious.

It was never a path the left-hander thought he would be on after high school.

Starting his high school career with a two-year stint on the junior-varsity team, Cox worked his way up, playing a major role for the Patriots in his junior season.

And even though his final high

school season was canceled due to the coronavirus, Cox found a way to get noticed, to get that offer, to change his trajectory.

“It’s still quite shocking, to be quite honest with you,” Cox said. “Our summer league’s over, so the next game I play in will be a college baseball game, which, honestly, doesn’t seem real.”

Each time Cox takes the mound, he wants to feel he is in control.

And while that did not seem to happen during his no-hitter, his performance seemed to control something much bigger in his seven innings of work: his baseball future.

A future he hopes leads to a Wolverine-Hoosier Athletic Conference title and a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics championship. He hopes to show what he can do, building off the performance from that 8 a.m. game June 25.

For Cox, all it takes is a change in mindset.

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



Jacob Cox pitched one season for the varsity team at Livonia Franklin, his junior season, after two years on the JV team. COURTESY OF JACOB COX



Zach Sieler of Pinckney played three games at the end of the 2019 season with the Dolphins, who re-signed him in March. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIAMI DOLPHINS

Sieler looks to build off strong 2019 finish in 3rd NFL season

Bill Khan
Livingston Daily
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Established veterans who have proven themselves over the years in the National Football League aren't bemoaning the absence of exhibition games this year.

But the opportunity to face live bullets from an opposing team during seemingly meaningless preseason games can mean everything to players looking to impress coaching staffs.

It was his play during the 2018 preseason that landed defensive lineman Zach Sieler of Pinckney a place on the Baltimore Ravens' roster as a seventh-round draft pick who wasn't guaranteed a thing coming into his first training camp.

Entering his third NFL season, now with the Miami Dolphins, there are still no guarantees for Sieler. It's a familiar position for someone who walked on to NCAA Division II Ferris State after being lightly recruited out of high school.

Sieler will have to secure a spot with the Dolphins without the benefit of exhibition games. The NFL originally cut the preseason from four games to two, but eliminated them altogether Wednesday to limit possible exposure to the coronavirus.

"It's great to have those few games to get rolling again and showcase yourself and really get yourself prepared for the season," Sieler said. "But it's the circumstance, the hand we were dealt. You've got to make the best of the situation."

Teams also didn't have the normal mini camps and in-person organized team activities during the offseason. Learning took place off the field via video meetings.

When Sieler reported to training camp July 28, it was the first time he's seen teammates he barely got a chance to know since the end of the 2019 season. He spent the final three weeks of the season with the Dolphins after being waived by the Ravens.

"It was a brief time, just three weeks and out," he said. "It was good, hopeful, exciting. They were kind of, 'Hey, we saw what you did. We look forward to seeing what you can do next year. Just capitalize on that and show us what you can do in OTAs.'"

"Obviously, with COVID, we didn't have OTAs. That was kind of a bummer. I was looking forward to being in the facility and being with the guys again. I was there so briefly at the end of the season before the offseason hit. I'm excited to get down there this upcoming week."

With Baltimore, Sieler struggled to get on the field for a team with a quality veteran defensive line. He got into six games of the Ravens' 29 games, making four tackles, before he was waived.

"I didn't see it coming," he said. "But it was definitely a blessing to be able to go down to Miami and show what I can do. I loved my time with the Ravens. I



Sieler tackles Joe Mixon of the Cincinnati Bengals while playing for the Dolphins on Dec. 22.

With Baltimore, he struggled to get on the field for a team with a quality veteran defensive line.

very much enjoyed them and I'm very excited for my time with the Miami Dolphins."

Sieler finally got an opportunity to showcase himself once he got to Miami. He played in all three of the Dolphins' remaining games, making seven tackles, one sack and batting down two passes. The sack and pass breakups came against Andy Dalton of the Cincinnati Bengals on Dec. 22.

"My No. 1 goal is to capitalize on the last few games of the year that I had while I was in Miami, take what I did on the field and just grow and learn and work off that," Sieler said. "Keep that rolling."

"It felt good to get out there and make some plays and just play football."

Sieler is listed as a defensive tackle, but can also play on the end. Among defensive tackles, Davon Godchaux made 75 tackles last season and Raekwon Davis is a rookie second-round pick out of Alabama. At end, former Buffalo Bill Shaq Lawson signed a three-year, \$30 million free agent deal in March and Christian Wilkins is a 2019 first-round pick out of Clemson.

The Dolphins signed Sieler to a one-year, \$660,000 contract in March as an exclusive rights free agent.

Playing for Miami means Sieler is closer to home. He was already planning to live in Florida, where he has relatives. He bought a home in Sebring, Fla. in May and opened a hunting ranch. Sebring is two hours from Miami.

"I've had family here my entire life," he said. "My grandparents have had a condo since the late '90s. No matter where I'm at, this is definitely going to be my offseason home."

Contact Bill Khan at wkhan@gannett.com.

NFL may hinge on self-discipline



Jarrett Bell
Columnist
USA TODAY

Personal responsibility looms as perhaps the ultimate X-factor as the bulk of NFL teams opened training camps last week in preparation for a season unlike any other.

With COVID-19 spreading, there are protocols and checkpoints. Daily testing and the ubiquitous presence of hand sanitizers.

Warnings and more warnings. What's good for NFL players is good for all of us: Wear a mask. Wash your hands.

Yet as the nation's most popular sports league ramps up with a massive effort to fight the coronavirus pandemic, the chances of the NFL pulling off its season could come down to how diligent hundreds of young men are at minimizing risk.

Not to say that the pro football lifestyle depicted on HBO's fictional series "Ballers" represents the bulk of NFL players, but the temptation of the fast lane is hardly fiction.

Given the buzz last week following the revelation that Los Angeles Clippers guard Lou Williams visited a famed Atlanta strip club, Magic City, while granted permission to leave the NBA's bubble in Orlando, there's fresh material for NFL coaches to use in their typical camp-opening monologues about behavior.

Then again, with this coronavirus, a person can flow in the slowest lane possible and still get stricken because they ventured to the wrong place — a grocery store, bank, fast-food restaurant, dry cleaners or any mundane location that can be frequented on a ho-hum day — at the wrong time.

The threat in an NFL context is that an infected person, maybe asymptomatic, somehow slips through the cracks of the virus safeguards and ignites an outbreak.

"It's hard to say what it would take to shut everything down, but I'd imagine if you had a mass breakout, you're going to have some big questions," Washington coach Ron Rivera said Tuesday as he christened the opening of camp. "We'll have to see. In the meantime, we've got to make sure we're following all the protocols that have been set forth by the CDC and by the NFL and (NFL Players Association)."

"We've got to be really careful with this and be smart."

An ominous warning sign has come from Major League Baseball, forced to postpone several games and suspend the Miami Marlins' season after more than a dozen players and staff tested positive for COVID-19.

The specific source of the Marlins' outbreak is unclear, though Jill Roberts, an infectious disease expert at the University of South Florida, told USA TODAY's Gabe Lacques, "Chances are really good this came out of Miami."

Tampa Bay Buccaneers coach Bruce Arians downplayed concern that his team could be victimized by a certain kind of outbreak: "I don't think our guys are going to get sick in the locker room. I don't think they'll get sick in our facility. Everybody here is tested, they're clean. If it's going to happen, it's going to happen outside the facility."

Surely, that's what the NFL is waging high stakes on, with daily testing for at least two weeks and perhaps longer. The threat, however, could escalate with, say, a faulty test result.

Perhaps it is only a matter of time before the NFL is addressing an outbreak of its own.

League officials are mulling several factors that could prompt postponing or canceling games, or even suspending the season, a person with knowledge of discussions told USA TODAY Sports.

The person did not want to be identified because plans have not been finalized.

Factors that could prompt the application of the league's Emergencies and Unfair Acts policy include postponing a game because an entire position group was stricken by COVID-19.

If 10 or more games in a given week cannot be played, the NFL could reschedule the entire slate of games for a week.

Also, if six or more clubs can't play for multiple weeks, it could potentially prompt the NFL to suspend the season.

None of the factors are etched into stone as policy at this point, but the markers give an indication of how the league might address COVID-19 outbreaks during the season.

It's clear, though, that regardless of the contingency plans, the onus on players to reduce risk is significant.

The Bill Belichick mantra "Do your job" means more than holding a block.

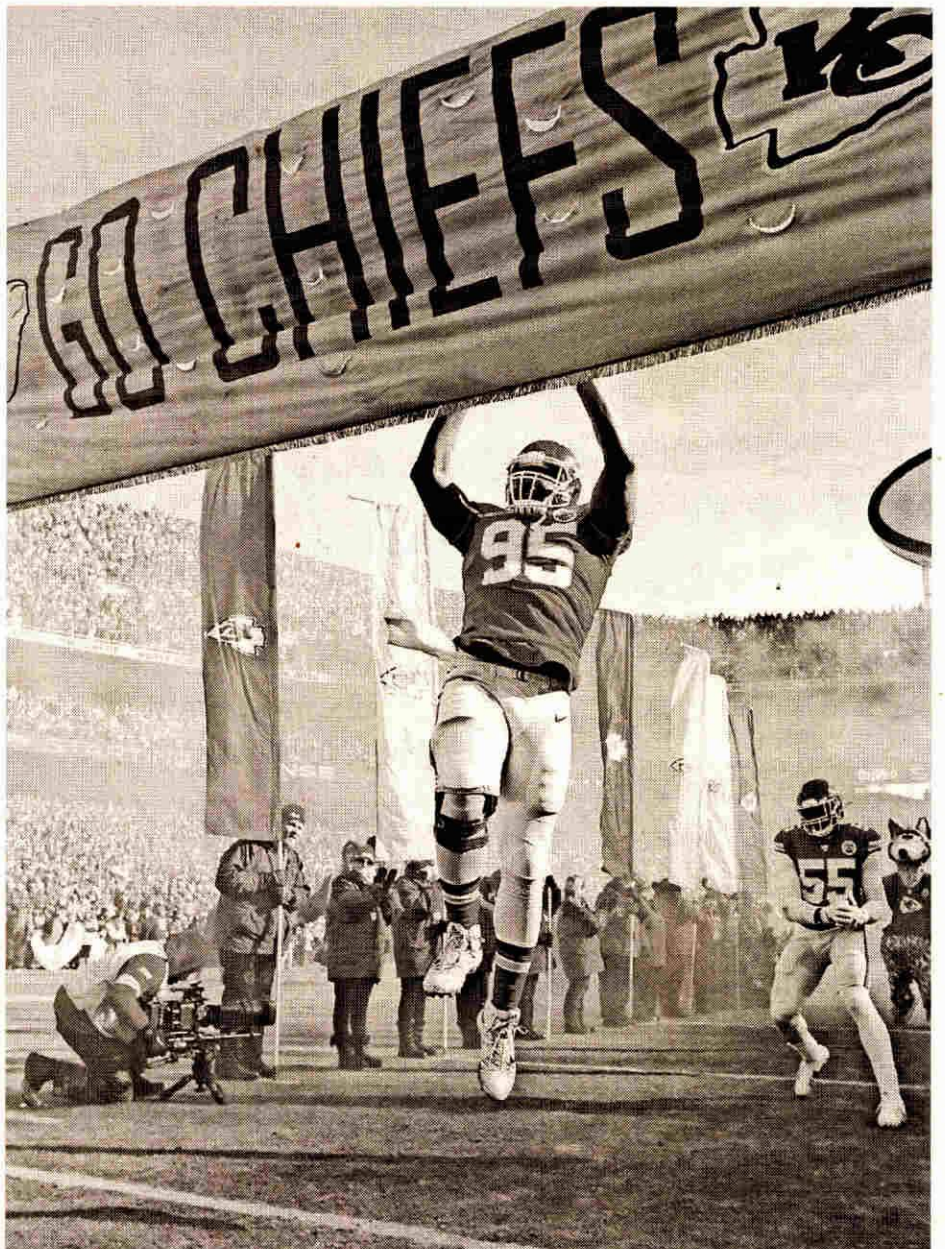
When the Detroit Lions reported for camp, they were greeted by signage at their COVID-19 testing trailer that included: Do your part. Protect yourself. Protect your team.

Such expectations are also spelled out in the COVID-19 labor pact struck recently between the NFL and NFLPA.

Players are subject to discipline if it is proved they contracted the coronavirus by engaging in "high-risk" behavior that includes presence at nightclubs, bars, house parties and religious services that include more than 15 people.

Seems the NFL and the proactive players union have covered it all.


The COVID-19 playbook is rolling with self-discipline. Now we'll see just how well the human element can match up in fighting the coronavirus.



Chiefs defensive tackle Chris Jones runs onto the field before the 2019 AFC championship game against the Titans. JAY BIGGERSTAFF/USA TODAY SPORTS

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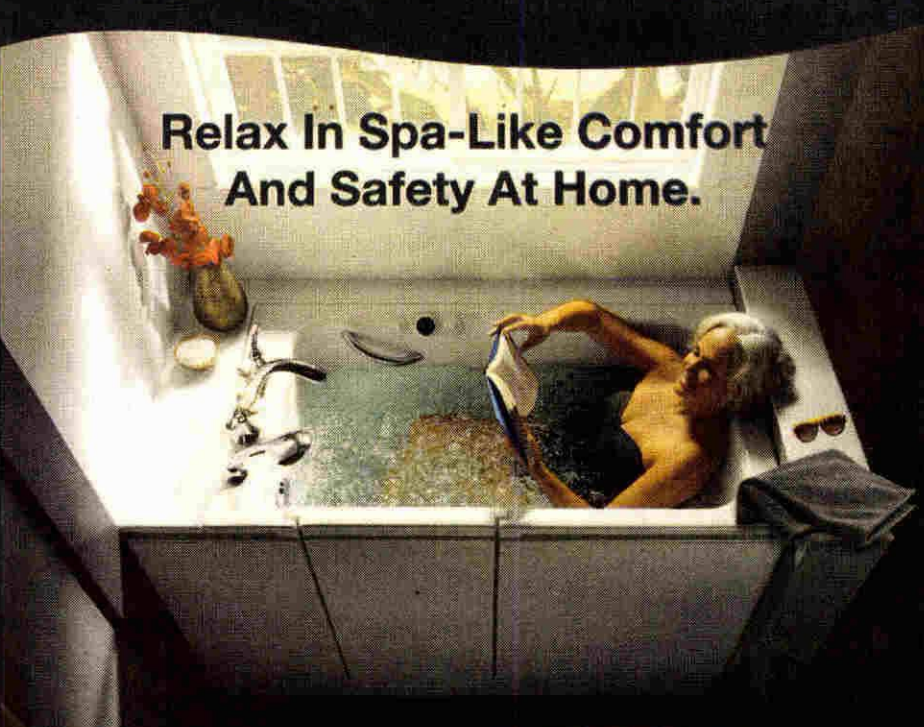
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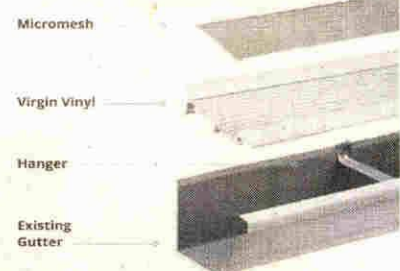
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