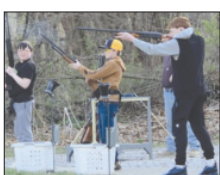




# Columbia football, soccer, volleyball rolls

High school sports kicks off in earnest - results inside



# Onsted Trap Club starts off with a bang

Shooting sports in Onsted a success so far

## Skelton back in court



Attorney William Amadeo, left, covers his mouth while talking to his client, John Russell Skelton, Aug. 26 in Lenawee County District Court during Skelton's preliminary examination. Skelton is charged with open murder and evidence tampering in the deaths and disappearance of his three young sons in 2010. See the story inside. Photo by David Panian.

## Columbia Charter Township

# Board passes short-term rental ordinance



Brittany Stein



Rick Church



Barry Marsh

## Board to consider temporary moratorium on data centers

By John Hummer  
Editor

After debating the issue for a couple of years, hearing many public comments on the topic, combing through several drafts during that time, and a review by the township's legal counsel, the Columbia Charter Township board took a major step in unanimously passing a short-term rental ordinance at its Aug. 17 board meeting.

The meeting included a second reading of the most recent version of the ordinance. The ordinance is a general/board/police power ordinance.

Under "Section 1: Purpose and Findings" of the ordinance, it spells out why the ordinance was needed. Of note, the section reads, "The Township has received concerns involving excessive noise, disorderly conduct, overcrowding, traffic, keyholing, congestion, and parking at Short-Term Rental properties, as well as the potential loss of neighborhood character due to the number of Short-Term Rentals in the township."

It also states, "The provisions of this ordinance are necessary to prevent the continued burden placed [on] county and township services and impacts on residential neighborhoods posed by Short-Term Rental homes" and, "The purpose Of this Ordinance is to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare of the persons and property (MCL 41.181, et seq., MCL 42.15, Mich Const 1963 Art 7, Sec 22) within Columbia Charter Township."

"We've heard from residents on both sides of the issue," Township Supervisor Barry Marsh noted.

In making a motion to pass the ordinance, Trustee Rick Church (former zoning administrator) said, "With the latest changes that have been reviewed for months now, we tried to address issues that came before us to the best of our ability."

See *Columbia* page 3

"I just know that it doesn't matter what you do as far as the ordinance, you're not going to solve all the problems."

Rick DeLand  
Trustee

Columbia Charter Township

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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2026

## Fun for a cause



## Eagles celebrate 50 years

Last weekend the Irish Hills Eagles 3689 in Brooklyn celebrated their 50 year anniversary. The Fraternal Order of Eagles is an international non-profit organization uniting fraternally in the spirit of liberty, truth, justice, and equality, to make human life more desirable by lessening its ills and promoting peace, prosperity, gladness and hope. And, it might be added, they have a good time doing it. Above, Cindy Hicks helped sell T-shirts during the "Eaglefest" celebration.

## On the ballot



Columbia Charter Township Police Chief Jay Niles explains a ballot proposal to the Brooklyn Village Council as trustee Phil Bliven looks on. Niles stated that Jackson County first responders will soon need to replace their inventory of 800-megahertz portable radios, which will be a ballot measure in November.



Julie Brighton, left, and Suzanne Sigg volunteered their time serving up pulled pork dinners that included all the fixins to visitors of Eaglefest.



Rollin' the dice, er, poking the balloon: Theresa White, left, and Ray Bahm sold balloons that purchasers could pop for a prize. Prizes included golf at Clarklake Golf Course and gift certificates to Jerry's Pub and The Hills Fork Oar Pour restaurant on U.S. 12.

## Jackson County 911 surcharge increase: voters to decide

Story and photos  
By John Hummer  
Editor

Jackson County voters will soon decide whether to increase the monthly surcharge to help fund 911 services and replace aging communication radios used by first responders.

At an Aug. 10 special meeting, the Jackson County Board of Commissioners voted 5-3 to approve revised ballot language that would allow the county to replace its current authorization of up to \$1.50 per month with a charge of up to \$3 per month for landline, wireless, and voice over internet protocol (VOIP) users. One commissioner was not there for the vote.

All the surrounding counties are already levying the full \$3 maximum on such communication methods.

The total cost for 641 new 800-megahertz portable radios (369 for fire; 272 for police) would be over \$5.5 million over the course of a 10-year bond. County and township officials and first responders say the current radios are about 10 years old — and outdated.

"We really pressed hard to get the county commission to approve putting this on the ballot," stated Napoleon Township Supervisor Dan Wymer, who played a lead role in the effort. "There was quite a bit of resistance."

Wymer made the case to county commissioners to put the proposition on the ballot. He made a 10-minute presentation to the commissioners on the proposed surcharge increase on behalf of a study group that worked on the issue and eventually came up with the draft ballot language. "I went through an hour of grilling — each one of the county commissioners had a bunch of questions," he said.

Wymer explained that, unlike a millage, the surcharge does not just charge property owners but rather charges everyone who uses a phone or VOIP. "It spreads the cost very equitably because everybody has access to emergency services whether you own property or not."

Columbia Township Police Chief Jay Niles urged commissioners to put the issue before voters. "We're not asking the commission to foot the bill for this," he stated. "We're just asking the commission — let the voters speak."

During public comment at the Aug. 10 meet-

See *Ballot measure* page 2



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Table for race fans



Above, Ken Frame of Grass Lake stands next to a home-made table that features a Goodyear tire as its centerpiece. The table is pictured with several items that were for sale.

Frame, an avid NASCAR fan and collector, said he purchased the tire from MIS. He had parts fabricated by Frey and Son Automotive in Napoleon, then assembled them together along with the glass top to create the unique table.

Ken was on hand at the Eaglefest anniversary celebration last weekend with hundreds of NASCAR items for sale. “And this isn’t the half of them,” Frame noted.

Frame was a big Dale Earnhardt fan, and now pulls for Chase Elliot. He said that while he loves racing, he has never been to a NASCAR event out of state, but hopes to someday change that.

“I would like to get to Talladega,” he noted.

Ballot measure . . . from page 1

ing, supporters argued reliable communication is critical for first responders, and voters should have the final say. Some naysayers questioned why local governments had not planned for replacing the radios over the past decade and raised concerns about asking taxpayers for additional money.

Napoleon Township Fire Chief Greg Bickford explained the need for the new 800-megahertz radios to the Napoleon Township board at their Aug. 11 meeting. “They have a lifespan on them,” he stated. “They’re very expensive, going to this new 800 system that we switched over to in 2017 and 2018.” Since the first round of 800 radios were purchased then and have an approximate 10-year lifespan, they are soon approaching obsolescence.

“The radios that are out there now are not repairable,” Bickford noted. “Whatever parts are out there is all you can get,” adding that when those are gone, there are no more in stock because parts for the older radios are no longer being manufactured.

“This [ballot initiative] was supported by all the [township] supervisors, all the fire chiefs support this, and all the police chiefs support this – it’s a defi-

nite need for the county,” he stated. Professional associations for all three groups formally voted to support the proposal, and 14 different township boards from around the county passed resolutions of support for the initiative.

Bickford explained that the study team of leaders from township and city government and police and fire agencies in the county began work in earnest in October of 2025 to address the issue. They worked very expediently and produced a study, released Dec. 3, 2025, titled “800-Megahertz Radio Work Group Investigation, Evaluation and Recommendation”. The study evaluated three alternatives and settled on the 911 surcharge ballot proposal.

“We put a lot of things together – incidents and factual data showing that we need the interoperability to continue what we have right now as we go forward,” he noted. “There are upgrades that must happen – the police radios must be encrypted. Along with that, it forces the fire radios to be encrypted as well so we’re interoperable with the federal agencies.”

Bickford stressed the quick, reliable communication that must exist among all agencies, noting recent high-profile inci-

dents such as the Napoleon Schools swatting incident that occurred this past May and the Wolf Lake drowning incident on July 10. The former required the coordination of 16 agencies while the latter had 14 agencies involved.

Wymer explained some additional details about the proposal. “Only about 20 percent of that [additional] \$1.50 is needed to buy the radios,” he stated. “Once you have a guaranteed payment stream, you can borrow money on what’s called revenue bonds. It’s based on a government entity’s ability to levy charges and fees.

“Only a small amount of that additional \$1.50 would actually need to be levied in the beginning,” Wymer explained. “The rest of it could be levied at a later date for other purposes or needs associated with the [911] call center when necessary.”

Wymer noted that work group members will be explaining to voters that this money will make it possible to replace all the radios that are about to become 10 years old. “They will no longer be able to be purchased from the vendor,” he noted. “They will begin to fail and have to be repaired, and we don’t want those failures to occur in the middle of an emergency, and a police or fire person is put at risk, or a resident’s life is put at risk because suddenly communication failed.”

Niels explained the ballot initiative at the Aug. 10 Brooklyn Village Council meeting. He showed those in attendance one of the 800-megahertz radios. “This here represents \$7,000,” he stated. “This is basically a computer.”

He noted that the FBI, which oversees anything criminal justice-related, decided radios used by police now must be encrypted. The current radios cannot be cost-effectively encrypted due to being close to end-of-life, he said. “These have to be replaced by October 2027,” he said. “Because if they’re not, I

will not be compliant.”

Niels agreed with Wymer on the surcharge equitability across all phone and VOIP users and how important the vote on the surcharge is. “They’re a very critical piece of equipment,” he said. “They have to work. You can have 911, you can have the greatest police cars, you can have the best-looking fire trucks, you can have all this stuff – but if this (pointing to the radio) doesn’t work – they’re never going to show up. I just want everyone to understand how valuable a tool this is. Keep this in mind as we come to November.”

**Revised ballot language approved by commissioners Jackson County Central Dispatch Proposition for 9-1-1 system funding**

Shall the County of Jackson, Michigan, which is currently authorized to assess a charge on all landline, wireless, and voice over internet protocol service users located in Jackson County of up to \$1.50 per month, be authorized to replace that current authorization with a charge of up to \$3.00 per month on such service users, effective July 1, 2027, to be used exclusively for the funding of 9-1-1 emergency telephone call answering and dispatch services within Jackson County, including facilities, equipment and maintenance, and operating costs?

If approved and levied, a portion of the additional funds generated will be used to equip all police and fire emergency first responders who are dispatched by the 9-1-1 emergency telephone call answering and dispatching services within Jackson County with new portable radios, replacing current 10-year-old radios.

Farm to Table 11th annual Fabulous Feast – call for volunteers

By John Hummer Editor

Volunteering at the 5 Healthy Towns Foundation’s Fabulous Feast on Sunday, Sept. 13, is a wonderful opportunity to support your local farmers’ markets and connect with the community.



Mitzi Koors

Organizers need set-up and clean-up crews, food runners, decorators, and more. This is a volunteer-run event, and they count on community members to assist with day-of activities and to solicit donations for the silent auction.

Mitzi Koors, chair of the Grass Lake Market board, is leading the planning committee to showcase all Grass Lake has to offer – including a beautiful venue on the water and a seasonal farm-inspired meal served family style.

“Volunteering at this year’s Farm to Table event is a meaningful way to connect with neighbors and support our local farmers,” she said. “Volunteers help create a sense of belonging for everyone involved.”

Volunteers receive a 2026 Farm to Table T-shirt and a fabulous meal, in addition to the satisfaction of giving back to their community.

To volunteer, visit [5healthytowns.org/farm-to-table-dinner](http://5healthytowns.org/farm-to-table-dinner) and click on “Get involved by volunteering at the Farm to Table dinner” in the upper-right menu .

For more information about the 5 Healthy Towns Foundation or the five farmers’ markets, visit [5healthytowns.org](http://5healthytowns.org).



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Stop In For A Tour

# Columbia . . . from page 1

Though he voted to pass the ordinance, Trustee Rick DeLand had mixed feelings about it. "I just know that it doesn't matter what you do as far as the ordinance, you're not going to solve all the problems," he stated. "We got township parks that we can't control that we have to close early, and there are rules and regulations on the park. We got noise [ordi-

nance language], we got parking [ordinance language], we got lots of ordinances to cover most everything."

"I think to protect us, we have to have something in an ordinance — we're never going to get one that fits all — never," said Township Clerk Cathy Hulburt before the vote.

"We do not have anything

on the books to address use — there is simply nothing," Marsh stated. "If this was just about bonfires, if it was about people being noisy from dusk to dawn, we do have something for that. As far as use, there is nothing for this particular topic. That's kind of the driving factor for having something in the toolbox... We can look at character and the health and safety of the neighborhoods in the community. It is all tied [together], in my opinion.

Marsh then spoke about the ordinance being just the beginning of more to come on the issue. "We would look toward future amendments to address [specifics like] owner-occupied, or owner-present — something that really spells out if the owner is there, making sure that there is not going to be any trouble, there is not going to be a need for police and fire to be involved — what can we do? How do we build it? It's going

to take time to build it, but I still believe we need a tool in the toolbox now."

Marsh agreed with Deland and Hulburt that the ordinance is not an end-all, be-all. "Please don't think for any reason that this ordinance is going to be a silver bullet to solve disputes — it will not," he stated. "That will happen, and those people will likely end up in civil court. There is nothing we can do for that."

The new short-term rental ordinance will become effective 30 days after publication of a Notice of Adoption in the Exponent.

In addition to the ordinance, the board also unanimously adopted a resolution approving fees for short-term rental permit applications — for both original (first) permits and renewal permits, as well as for additional inspections.

**In other notable news,** the township heard from Planning & Zoning Manager Brit-

tany Stein on the possibility of a temporary moratorium on data centers for the township.

"As we all know, this is being talked about everywhere," she said. "It's our turn to adopt a temporary moratorium for data centers. We, the township, should consider some ordinance language that we need to set in place so that we are ready if something comes to us."

A "Draft Ordinance to Enact a Temporary Moratorium on Data Centers in Columbia Township" was included in the board packets.

"I have not received any applications or any indication that this will come to us, but we need to make sure that our ordinance is ready," Stein continued. "This essentially gives any data centers a pause — they can't submit an application until we adopt an ordinance. This gives us time to do that. This is for discussion tonight; this will be in the paper, and we will review it

again at the September board meeting in hopes of adopting it then."

## Next steps

• The Draft Ordinance to Enact a Temporary Moratorium on Data Centers has been posted at the Township Offices for public viewing and is on the Columbia Charter Township website.

• A Notice of Ordinance Posting & Introduction will be in the Exponent.

• At the next regular Township Board of Trustees meeting on Monday, September 21, the board may take action to adopt the ordinance.

• Then, a copy of the Ordinance to Enact a Temporary Moratorium on Data Centers will be published in the Exponent.

• Once published, the ordinance will then be effective immediately.



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## Norvell officials pause power generation applications

By Christine MacIntyre

Norvell Township officials approved a job description and pay rate for a code enforcement officer during the township August 17 meeting. However, an upcoming staffing change could alter how the position is structured.

The board approved the code enforcement position at 10 hours per week with a pay rate of \$21.50 per hour, supervisor Andrew Haystead said.

However, Haystead noted circumstances changed shortly after the meeting



Haystead

when the zoning administrator announced plans to leave at the end of September.

"We had a little hiccup [when we learned that]," Haystead said. "So, we don't know if we will keep the zoning administrator job and the code enforcement administrator job separate or go back to combining them as one."

The board also discussed how the township should handle applications for power generation facilities amid the rising demands for data centers and the increased

demand for electricity to support them.

Haystead said township planner Scott Pacheco recommended temporarily postponing applications for power generation facilities while the township reviews its ordinance.

"With new data centers popping up to try to keep up with consumer demand, DTE and Consumers are building power generation centers," Haystead said.

The board approved a resolution establishing a temporary moratorium on applications for power generation facilities.

"We put a 12-month hold on applications," Haystead

said. "The fear was that they could use a loophole in our ordinance where they would consider this an essential service."

During the moratorium, the township will work to make its ordinance more specific about what qualifies as an essential service and how power generation facilities are addressed.

"Our planning commission and Scott Pachenco will be working on updating the ordinance for clarity regarding essential services," Haystead said.

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Residents are invited to discuss "Safe roads for Jackson County" on Thursday, Sept. 10 from 4-6 p.m. at American 1 Credit Union Event Center in Jackson. The event starts at 4:15 p.m.

Discussion will include detailing the Safe Roads for Jackson County Plan. The plan's priority goal is to improve roadway safety throughout the county. Questions will be taken. Free, on-site parking is available.



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Letter to the editor

‘Loving your neighbor’ should include Canada

As women of faith, our two Gospel imperatives are love of God and love of neighbor. The trade war that the Trump Administration has launched against Canada, imposing 50% tariffs on billions of dollars of goods, is not only harming Canadian producers but also American consumers who will be bearing the increased cost of Canadian products that are exchanged daily across the world’s longest border. Even more devastatingly, the imposition of tariffs represents a shocking declaration of economic war against one of our nation’s most reliable friends and allies – a trade and global security partner and a dear neighbor whose

residents are our family and friends. We are appalled – and ashamed – by this egregious and dangerous abuse of power. As Rev. Cameron Trimble so aptly wrote in her Piloting Faith Mediation on August 25, 2026: For most Americans, Canada has always been a constant presence.... Families travel back and forth. We help each other fight fires. We share rivers, lakes, power grids, industries, defense agreements, sports leagues, music, culture, and even have friendly debates over which celebrities belong to which country. Canadians came to our aid after September 11. When

American airspace suddenly closed, the small town of Gander, Newfoundland, welcomed thousands of stranded passengers into homes, schools and churches. People cooked meals, offered showers, handed strangers the keys to their cars and made room for people they had never met. That’s what neighbors do. Trade differences among friends are negotiated as partners – not as adversaries. We call on Congress to exercise its constitutional authority to lay and collect tariffs, and its power to check abuses of executive power. We invite all Americans, especially those who live along the border, to join us in this

call. Let us not abide this appalling breach of our long-standing and honored bonds of friendship with Canada. Dominican Saint Catherine of Siena urged us always to “walk on two feet: one with love for God and the other with love for neighbor.” Let us walk on those two feet, with love for God and our neighbors – Canada on our northern border and Mexico on our southern. Sisters Elise D. García, Frances Nadolny, Lorraine Réaume, Corinne Sanders, Mary Soher, Members of the Adrian Dominican Sisters General Council

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# Attic & Hearth

*A Look Back*

By Michelle A. McLemore

Bargains, all around



Once upon a time, the dog days of summer led into the excitement of back-to-school sidewalk sales. Even in the big malls, rack after rack of clothing was pulled out in front of the stores with a great slashing of prices. For a family on a tight budget, it was a glorious day of adventure, being towed along behind Mother as she shopped for best prices for “classic styles that would never go out of fashion.” (Outfitting five kids took shopping savvy and a self-taught seamstress’s eye.) Van’s store at the east side location of Brooklyn’s downtown operated from 1961 into the 1980s. Today, the site operates as Atlas restaurant. This walk down memory lane is one of many in The Best of the Exponent Attic, Volume 2 which was compiled by historian Dan Cherry and The Exponent in 2016. It covers highlights from Brooklyn, Clark Lake, MIS, Hidden Lake Gardens, Walker Tavern, Cambridge Junction, the Irish Hills, Sand Lake, Vinyard Lake, Wamplers Lake, Norvell, Napoleon, Tipton, Onsted, Frontier city, Cement City, Somerset Center, Addison, Manitou Beach, and Devils Lake. Copies are available at The Exponent office for \$10 each.



If you have photos, scrapbooks, postcards, or other historical items that may be shared, we would love to see them. Contact The Exponent office to arrange a time or email unique photos with any information you have about the content to [exponews@theexponent.com](mailto:exponews@theexponent.com). In the subject line, please note for “Attic & Hearth” or “For Michelle” and include your name and contact information in the message.

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# Napoleon schools Szymke to lead both Napoleon and Ackerson high schools



Melissa Szymke

By John Hummer  
Editor

As the 2026-27 school year gets underway, Napoleon High School and Ackerson High School have a new principal, and she's no stranger to the area. It is Melissa Szymke who spent many years in the Columbia School District with Columbia Options High School.

"We're excited to welcome Melissa to Napoleon Community Schools as our high school leader," stated Superintendent Patrick Dillon. "She brings 11 years of classroom experience, along with recent leadership experience in an alternative education setting. I think she brings an interesting perspective to the principalship, having come to education as a second career, and that life experience can be a real asset when working with students, staff, and families. While she is new to the principalship, she has a strong foundation and a genuine commitment to students. We're looking forward to supporting her as she takes this next step and grows into the role. We know she is very enthusiastic about joining the Pirate family, and so are we."

"Part of the reason I was so excited to apply to Napoleon was that they are already so strong of a family and community," Szymke shared. "By coming here, I'm going to be able to embrace that and continue to support what is an excellent program."

Szymke says she is looking forward to working with all the students at both Napoleon High School and Ackerson High School. "I'm excited to be working with Napoleon High School and supporting all the students – from the ones that struggle to the ones who excel. But I'm also looking forward to working with Ackerson High School and supporting those students. All the students in Napoleon deserve the best start to their adult lives that we can all, as a team, give them. I'm coming into a place that has such a strong foundation for that already."

"That's what's wonderful about Ackerson," she noted. "[Students] can come in and work with certified teachers or they can work at home. The students are offered adults who support them and care, and they know there is someone in their corner." Szymke noted that Ackerson will have two full-time teachers as well as support staff, as well as access to the district's counseling staff.

Interestingly, Szymke started as a Pirate – not a Napoleon Pirate – but a Pinckney Pirate in kindergarten. Then her family moved to Ann Arbor, where she graduated from Huron High School. She then attended Northern Michigan University in Marquette for two years while she was trying to decide her future career field.

She came home and worked as a camp counselor at Camp Algonquin before returning to college at Eastern Michigan University, where she majored in psychology and had aspirations of becoming an adolescent child psychologist. Szymke then decided to get her teaching certification so she could continue to work while pursuing her Ph.D.

She started teaching in Ann Arbor for a couple of years. "I fell in love with it," she shared. "Working with kids and getting to know them was a passion of mine."

Life then led her to Brooklyn, where she started a family while running the equestrian program at YMCA Storer Camps in Napoleon Township.

She was then a stay-at-home Mom for a couple of years. "I ended up taking care of my kids before they went to school," she noted. "I had my teacher certification, so I started subbing in Columbia mainly. I loved subbing at [Columbia] Options."

Szymke was then offered the job of adult education coordinator with Columbia School District at the start of the 2012-13 school year.

**In other Napoleon Community Schools news,** Robert (BJ) Gerlach is the new facilities director role and Leif Borreson is taking on the role of director of transportation. Shawn Murphy, who previously directed both departments, left the district and went to Quincy.

# Relatives, pastor, police testify during Skelton murder hearing



Above: One of the first missing posters for the Skelton boys — Andrew, Alexander and Tanner — is shown on a Lenawee County District Court monitor as the boys' mother, Tanya Zuvers, testifies Aug. 31 as the preliminary examination of the murder and evidence-tampering charges against the boys' father, John Russell Skelton, begins.

Story and photos by David Panian  
Tecumseh Herald

ADRIAN — Witnesses described interactions they had with John Russell Skelton around the time his three young sons disappeared at Thanksgiving 2010 as a preliminary examination began last week in Lenawee County District Court.

Skelton, 54, of Morenci is charged with three counts each of open murder and evidence tampering in the deaths of Andrew, Alexander and Tanner. The boys were 9, 7 and 5 years old, respectively, at the time. He was charged in November 2025, just before he was to be released from prison after serving 15 years on the three unlawful imprisonment charges to which he pleaded no contest in 2011.

Despite wide-ranging searches in the area in the days following their disappearances and nationwide media coverage since, the boys have not been found. A Lenawee County judge declared them legally deceased in 2025.

Lenawee County District Judge Laura J. Schaedler, who will decide whether the prosecution has shown enough evidence for the case to be bound over to circuit court for further proceedings, heard from the boys' mother and Skelton's second wife, Tanya Zuvers; the Rev. Donna Galloway, the family's pastor at Morenci United Methodist Church; former co-workers and a friend of Skelton; some of Skelton's relatives who live just outside Morenci; Skelton's first wife; a Michigan State Police detective; and a former FBI cell phone data analyst. Prosecutors also played a video of an FBI interview of Skelton that was conducted in January 2011.

The exam is scheduled to continue until Friday, Sept. 4.

### Boys' disappearance

Galloway's testimony described conversations she had with Skelton in the hours immediately after Zuvers reported the boys missing. Skelton was located at the Fulton County Health Center in Wauseon, Ohio, where he was being treated for an injured ankle. Skelton claimed he fell off a ladder while doing a home improvement project, but Zuvers said a nurse told her he appeared to have tried to hang himself.

Skelton tried multiple times to call Zuvers, who wouldn't take his calls. Instead, Zuvers had Galloway, who was their pastor at Morenci United Methodist Church, talk to him.

Before describing the phone calls, Galloway explained that her theme at church for the holiday season that year was "Come Home for Christmas."

"The Scripture tells us we're all strangers and aliens in a strange land, and that's because we don't belong here," she said. "We belong in heaven, and heaven is our home."

One of those calls came while she and Zuvers were at the downtown Morenci municipal building. Galloway told the court she was standing against a wall where she could look into the police station and the city hall offices, which share the building. An FBI agent was standing to her left as she took the phone.

"Why won't Tanya talk to me?" Galloway recalled Skelton asking.

"And I said, 'She will talk to you if you're going to tell her where the boys are,'" Galloway said. "...She wants to know where her boys are, and she wants them home, and they're not home."

"And he said to me, 'Pastor Donna, you of all people should understand what I mean when I say that they're home.'"

"I just kind of slid down the wall and sat on the floor. 'I knew at that point when he said, 'You of all people should know what I mean when I say I sent them home.' I knew that they were dead.'"

Zuvers testified about her relationship with Skelton leading up to that fall, when what had been a good marriage fell apart as Skelton told her he wanted to move the family to Florida. Zuvers did not want to move.

Skelton eventually managed to take Andrew and Alexander



The fourth day of the preliminary examination of the murder and evidence-tampering charges against John Russell Skelton of Morenci took place Aug. 27 in Lenawee County District Court. Skelton is accused of murdering his three young sons, Andrew, Alexander and Tanner, and hiding their bodies at Thanksgiving 2010.

to Florida, leaving on Sept. 13. They called her the next day from their grandparents' home in Jacksonville. Zuvers told the court about contacting an attorney in Adrian, filing for divorce and having custody paperwork drawn up, and driving to Florida with her mom, one of her daughters from her first marriage, and a friend of her daughter. They arrived in Jacksonville and went to the police, who directed her on how to get the custody paperwork converted to Florida legal terminology. She took the paperwork to court there on a Friday, and a hearing was scheduled for the following Monday. The result of the hearing was that they all were to drive back to Michigan where they would start the divorce and custody proceedings.

For Thanksgiving, Zuvers said, she and Skelton worked out a schedule where the boys would spend Thanksgiving Day with him and then the rest of the weekend with her.

Before the scheduled 3 p.m. exchange time on Friday, Nov. 25, Zuvers heard from Skelton, who told her he was in the emergency room in Wauseon. She asked where the boys were, and he told her they were with a Joanne Taylor who would drop them off at 3. Zuvers called the hospital asked if the boys were with Skelton. They were not. She later called back and spoke to the nurse in charge of his care who told her about the suspected suicide attempt.

Zuvers called the police shortly after 3 p.m. At Skelton's home, officers found "mass destruction." Zuvers didn't go into the house until Nov. 27. She said furniture had been smashed, cords to electrical appliances and lamps had been cut and the mattress in the master bedroom had been slashed multiple times. A rope was tied to the stairway banister and piled on the upstairs floor. Items such as cookbooks, photos and yearbooks with sentimental value to Zuvers were missing, but the boys' snow boots were still there.

Investigators later found a letter in the house that Skelton had written to Zuvers. Replying to a question from Lenawee County Prosecutor Jackie VanWoert, she said she hadn't seen the letter, which VanWoert asked her to read. In it, he expressed his love for her and apologized for hurting her "yet again."

"This time it was on purpose and to kill my pain of losing you," Skelton wrote. "...I guess my actions today will guarantee you won't have to see me again or in heaven. I pray God will forgive

See Skelton trial page 7



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Bikers bounty!

Charity ride poker run raises \$6,000 for Camp Liberty



Camp Liberty Executive Director Melinda Schwyn had the opportunity to pose for this photo during the recent charity ride/poker run fundraiser for the organization. The event netted \$6,000 for Camp Liberty. PHOTO COURTESY CAMP LIBERTY



Johnathan Willoughby and Michelle Shadley are both Camp Liberty volunteers who helped make the charity ride/poker run fundraiser a success. PHOTO COURTESY CAMP LIBERTY

**By John Hummer Editor**

Although it was a rainy day for most of the event, the dedication and support of over 130 motorcyclists brought about the true sunshine for Saturday's charity ride/poker run to benefit Camp Liberty. The event raised over \$6,000 for the organization. There were nearly 200 people total at the event. The charity ride started at 11 a.m. in the parking lot of Town & Country Sports Center at the corner of U.S. 12 and 127. It included five stops along the route in Lenawee, Hillsdale, and Jackson counties before finishing at Camp Liberty, a nonprofit organization for veterans and first responders in Norvell Township.

The event was complete with food trucks, a DJ, 50/50 raffle, and baskets of gifts given away to lucky ticket winners. Donations of prizes and money came in from many different organizations and individuals. The much-needed funds will help Camp Liberty to continue to provide outdoor recreation programs for veterans and first responders in Michigan and across the nation. Camp Liberty provides therapeutic scenery in a beautiful natural setting on the banks of the River Raisin. The facility includes a new fishing pond, archery activities, four deer hunts, two pheasant hunts, and a turkey hunt throughout the year. Veterans (active and retired) and first responders apply for these hunts. Hunters are selected via a random lottery drawing and awarded a three- to five-day stay at the beautiful onsite lodge, including all meals during the hunt at no charge. Camp Liberty also provides resources to veterans and first responders in need and is happy to support them in any way it can. The next event at Camp Liberty, open to all, is the annual Fall Festival and 5k Run/Nature Walk on Saturday, Sept. 26 beginning at 10 a.m. For more information on everything Camp Liberty offers, visit their website, [camplibertymichigan.org](http://camplibertymichigan.org), or contact Executive Director Melinda Schwyn at 517-206-8633.



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By Cindy Hubbell, President/CEO  
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**Johnnies Bar and Grill—Onsted** holds DJ Trivia on Tuesdays from 7:30 to 9 pm. There are prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place.

**Brooklyn Big Boy** holds their Car Shows on Wednesdays through September from 5 to 8 pm, weather permitting. Enjoy food, fun, and music with a live DJ and driver prizes.

**Shady's Tap Room** is having Piano Bar Wednesdays with Grant Reiff on September 2 and 16 from 6 to 9 pm. Go to [shadystaproom.com](http://shadystaproom.com) for more information.

Join **WellWise Services Area Agency on Aging** for Silver Sneakers Yoga in their lower-level Fitness Room on Mondays and Thursdays from 1 to 2 pm, and Fridays from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. For more information, call 517-592-1974 or email [livingwellprograms@wellwiseservices.org](mailto:livingwellprograms@wellwiseservices.org).

Bike Night is still taking place at **Artesian Wells Sports Tavern** on Thursdays through September 24. Enjoy live music, rain or shine, under the Pavillion. Go to [thewellstavern.net](http://thewellstavern.net) for more information.

**The Hills Fork Oar Pour** will have live music on September 3, 5, and 17. Watch their Facebook page for events and specials.

**Beach Bar Band Nights** will be September 4 and 6 in September from 6 to 9 pm. Join them on the patio overlooking beautiful Clark Lake. Go to [beachbarclarklake.com](http://beachbarclarklake.com) for more information.

**Chateau Aeronautique Winery/Blue Skies Brewery** throughout September for DJ Bingo on Wednesdays beginning at 7 pm, DJ Trivia on Thursdays starting at 7:30 p.m. and Live Tribute Bands on Fridays and Saturdays. Go to [chateauaeronautiquewinery.com](http://chateauaeronautiquewinery.com) for details.

**The Manitou Beach Farmers and Crafters Market's** last days of the season will be Saturday, September 5 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. They are located in **Manitou Beach Village**.

**Manitou Beach Marina's** annual Kids Day will take place on Sunday, September 6 from 12 to 3 p.m. Enjoy free lunch, ice cream, inflatables, crafts, games and prizes. Go to [manitoubeachmarina.com](http://manitoubeachmarina.com) for more information.

**Cherry Creek Cellars** will be holding their Winemaker's Dinner on Thursday, September 10 at 6:30 p.m. Join them for an intimate dinner showcasing Michigan's finest seasonal ingredients paired with their wines. Tickets are \$100 and are limited. Go to [cherrycreekwine.com](http://cherrycreekwine.com) for more information.

**Irish Hills Eagles' Annual Scholarship Charity Golf Outing** is taking place on Saturday, September 12 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Hills' Heart of the Lakes Golf Course. Enjoy raffles, 50/50, prizes and dinner at the Eagles following.

**Visit Lenawee** presents the River Raisin Wine Trail Fall Fare & Pair: A Vertical Tasting Experience taking place on Saturday, September 12 from 11 am to 6 p.m. A vertical tasting allows you to sample the same wine from multiple vintages side by side. Enjoy your vertical tasting with a unique food pairing. Purchase tickets at [visitlenawee.com](http://visitlenawee.com).

For more Irish Hills happenings, go to the community calendar at [irishhills.com](http://irishhills.com).



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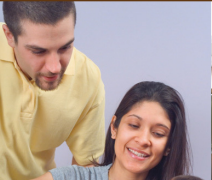
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## Obituaries

### Carole J. (Smith) Hartsuff

Carole J. Hartsuff (Smith) passed away on August 23, 2026, at age 94.

Carole was born February 2, 1932, to Willis and Clarissa (DuBois) Smith, and was raised on a farm in Liberty Township.

She is survived by two daughters, Deborah Hartsuff of Jackson, and Beverly Jones of Vicksburg, Mich.; three grandchildren: Nathan, Francisco, and Sansaray; and two great-grandchildren, Jeremiah and Stephen.



Carole Hartsuff

Carole was preceded in death by her husband of 52 years, Maurice Hartsuff, who passed away in 2004; she was also also preceded in death by her daughter, Amy Whiteaker; one brother, Wesley Smith; and six sisters, Marilyn Frederick, Frances Schafer, Margaret Johns, Dorothy Kerr, Roseann Wittenberg-Pelham, and Ruth Davis.

She retired from Jackson County Intermediate School District and enjoyed

gardening, raising horses, antiques, and annual vacations to Paradise, Michigan.

Carole was a lifelong member of Universalist Unitarian Church of East Liberty, where a celebration of her life will take place on Saturday, Nov. 7, 2026 at 1 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, charitable contributions can be made to the Universalist Unitarian Church of East Liberty Endowment Fund or St. Jude Children's Hospital. Please express condolences to family and friends at [www.watson-funeral-chapels.com](http://www.watson-funeral-chapels.com)

### Cheroyl Jean (Shoop) Johanson

Cheroyl Jean (Shoop) Johanson, 78, of Tecumseh, (formerly of Brooklyn and Lansing, Michigan) passed away on Aug. 23, 2026.

She was born on Jan. 29, 1948 in Findlay, Ohio, the daughter of Sam Shoop and Sara McClain who precede her in death.

Sherry graduated from Addison High School in 1966 and moved to East Lansing to graduate from Lansing Business University, and also attended Michigan State University. She worked at Michigan State University from 1968-1971, then was employed by the State of Michigan Department of Education from 1971-1973, transferring to State of Michigan Department of Treasury in 1973 where she retired after 34 years in 2005.

Prior to retiring, she moved to the Irish Hills in 2002 and purchased Hideaway Cove Log Cabin Resort on Evans Lake



Sherry Johanson

with her best friend and business partner, Renee Smith. They sold the resort in 2021 and built a large condo on the river in Tecumseh.

Sherry has been a realtor since 2004 most recently with ERA Reardon Realty.

She loved her family and many friends, and was very involved in the community. Sherry was a member

of Oh These Irish Hills!, the Brooklyn Irish Hills Chamber of Commerce, the Moose Club, and the Eagles. She was honored to be the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce "Citizen of the Year" in 2023.

Sherry's family was very special to her and she always looked forward to the family reunion every summer. She was close with all of her siblings and their families, getting together frequently during the year. She had many close friends and valued each one.

Sherry is survived by her son, Brad (Jacqueline) Johanson and daughter Angela (John) Deppe. She cherished her four grandchildren, Anna and Laura Deppe and William and Amelia Johanson. She is also survived by three sisters, Annette (Jim) Mattison, Diane (Danny) Gattshall, Amanda (John) Labun, and one sister-in-law, Cindy Eddy. She was preceded in death by her brother, Larry Eddy.

Memorial contributions to Brooklyn Food Bank and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital are appreciated.

Please leave a message of comfort and memories for Sherry's family at [www.EinederFuneralHomes.com](http://www.EinederFuneralHomes.com).

She will be interred at Norvell Township Cemetery next to her mother Sara.

Funeral arrangements are pending. Please leave a message of comfort for Sherry's family or sign her guestbook at [www.EinederFuneralHomes.com](http://www.EinederFuneralHomes.com).

### Columbia Charter Township Police Report

**August 20**  
**General Assist:** Brooklyn Road, Napoleon Township; Clark Lake Road, Napoleon Township; **Personal Welfare:** North Main Street; Marshall Street; **Property Security:** Hyde Road (2); **Abandoned Vehicle:** North Main Street; **Disorderly:** Marshall Street; **Suspicious Situation:** North Main Street; Monroe Street/Sherman Street; **Inspect Vehicle:** Eagle Point Drive; Bedford Drive; **Found Property:** Jefferson Road; **General Non-Criminal:** Claremont Circle; Lane Street; **Conservation:** Crego Road/Clark Lake Road; **Malicious Destruction of Property:** Daugherty Road;

**August 21**  
**General Assist:** Brooklyn Road/Wheaton Road, Napoleon Township; **Property Security:** Hyde Road (2); **Suspicious Situation:**

Irwin Street; **Civil Dispute:** School Street; **Conservation:** Cement City Road; **Found Property:** Jefferson Road; Jackson Street; **Accident:** Perrin Street/Main Street, Woodstock Township;

**August 22**  
**Field Contact:** Jefferson Road; **Property Security:** Hyde Road (2); **Parking:** Nicole Drive; Monroe Street; **Accident:** South Main Street; Jefferson Road/Ocean Beach Road; **Disorderly:** Lansing Avenue; **Peace Officer:** Potter Street, Woodstock Township; **Larceny:** Oakwood Beach Drive;

**August 23**  
**Obstructing Police:** North Main Street; **Property Security:** Hyde Road (2); **Parking:** North Main Street; **General Non-Criminal:** Camelot Court; River Street/Tecumseh Street; **Suspicious Situation:**

Golfview Drive; **General Assist:** Brooklyn Road, Napoleon Township; Ladd Road, Norvell Township; **Personal Welfare:** Hayes Road; Ivanhoe Drive; **Field Contact:** Jefferson Road; **Disorderly:** Taylor Road;

**August 24**  
**Property Security:** Hyde Road (2); South Meridian Road; **General Non-Criminal:** Crego Road; **Personal Welfare:** South Main Street/Irwin Street; **VCSA:** Brooklyn Road; **Larceny:** Perrin Street, Woodstock Township; **Abandoned Vehicle:** Palmer Road; **Domestic:** Lori Lee Lane; **Accident:** South Main Street/Wamplers Lake Road; **Operating While Intoxicated:** Brooklyn Road/Riverside Road; **Suspicious Situation:** Marshall Street;

**August 25**  
**Property Security:** Hyde

Road (2); Marshall Street/Ernest Street; North Shore Drive; **Accident:** Jefferson Road; **General Non-Criminal:** Andover Lane; Jefferson Road; **Found Property:** North Shore Drive/Pleasant View Drive; **Peace Officer:** Irwin Street; **Domestic:** Wamplers Lake Road;

**August 26**  
**Property Security:** Hyde Road (2); **Trespassing:** White Road; **General Non-Criminal:** Hewitt Road; Woodstock Street, Woodstock Township; Hewitt Road; **Fraud:** Hayes Road; **Warrants:** Jefferson Road; **Personal Welfare:** Mill Street; Jefferson Road/Eagle Point Road; **Alarm:** Bingham Drive; **Accident:** Riverside Road/Peterson Road;

### Skelton murder hearing continued from page 5

me, but I know it won't happen. I would ask your forgiveness, but maybe I can't have that either."

#### Co-worker, friend testify

Frank Kramic, who was a driver with Skelton at Three D Transportation in West Unity, Ohio, said one time he told a group of drivers that he was planning on going bow-hunting at Lost Nation State Game Area in Hillsdale County. He didn't realize Skelton was behind him.

"The comment that he said was, 'Lost Nations, if you have

to bury a body out there, between the swamp and the quicksand no one will ever find the body,' and then he walked" away, Kramic said.

Mark Pilbeam, a friend of Skelton, said Skelton shared with him that "the best place to hide bodies would, if you never wanted to have somebody get found, put them in a hog barn and the hogs would eat them, which was kind of an off-the-wall conversation."

Skelton worked at State Line Farms near Morenci at the time, Pilbeam said. State Line has hog barns.

Pilbeam also told the court about Skelton telling him about the custody situation with Zuvers and contacting an underground organization that allegedly protected children from abusive situations. Skelton made allegations that Zuvers was molesting the boys.

"He wanted the kids with him and he told me that if he couldn't have them with him that Tanya wasn't going to have them either," Pilbeam said.

Skelton had told Pilbeam that the organization was supposed to pick up the boys on the Wednesday before

Thanksgiving then return them on Friday afternoon.

"Did John have a reaction to the boys not being returned at that time?" VanWoert asked.

"Yeah, he seemed pretty upset about it that the boys weren't returned when they were supposed to be," Pilbeam said.

#### MORE ONLINE

Find daily updates to this story online at [mylenaweenews.com](http://mylenaweenews.com).

### Death notices

Cierra Sowle, Jackson County Clerk, reports the following recent recorded deaths:

Joseph Patrick Feege Jr., 59, Grass Lake Township; Donald Eugene Peterson, 102, Summit Township; Ann Marie Webb, 85, Rives Township; Richard Howard Chamberlain, 83, Jackson; Gerald Willard Cornell, 80, Leoni Township; Leonard Wilson Shuster Jr., 54, Blackman Township; Jason Mitchell Snell, 55, Napoleon Township; Charles Edward Shepherd, 86, Pulaski Township; Sylvia Allen Burton, 74, Columbia Township; Ronald Theroux, 64, Summit Township; Calvin John Tillie, 47, Blackman Township; Brigit Eileen Kilpatrick, 82, Blackman Township; Robert James Chrisman Sr., 87, Waterloo Township; Joseph Allen Howard, 57, Jackson; Timothy Judson Turvey, 65, Norvell Township; Bonnie Marie Hendrickson, 82, Spring Arbor Township; David Scharphorn, 92, Leoni Township; Mark Charles Richardson, 67, Summit Township; Kenneth Martin Jackson, 66, Summit Township; Sandra Kaye Baxter, 75, Sandstone Township; Diana Sue Howard, 76, Leoni Township; Carole Jen Hartsuff, 94, Blackman Township; Mary Louise Clark, 78, Hanover Township; James Marston Berlett, 69, Blackman Township.

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Open house Saturday!



Fifty years of research by the Lenawee County Family Researchers was recognized by the Michigan Genealogical Council on May 15, at the MGC Delegates Meeting in Lansing. Onsted's Cathy Tervol, shown center, accepted on behalf of the LCFR. Photo and information courtesy of the Family Researchers' Facebook page.

Story & Photos  
By Michelle McLemore  
Staff writer

Lenawee County Family Researchers (see photo above) will be the guest presenters at Wooden Old Stone Schoolhouse Open House, Saturday, September 5. In addition to exploring the school and site, if visitors bring family members' names, birth/death dates, locations, or other information, the researchers will help them navigate resources to build their family tree and find family history. A family tree activity will be onsite for youngsters to explore the idea. The school will be open 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

New volunteers to the school association are always welcome. For more information, please email [woodenoldstoneschoolhouse@gmail.com](mailto:woodenoldstoneschoolhouse@gmail.com) or call 517-270-0986.

Grass Lake to celebrate heritage

By Michelle McLemore  
Staff writer

Coe House Museum is hosting Heritage Day in Grass Lake on Saturday, September 12, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. In conjunction, the veterans with the American Legion and VFW will host a car show and have arranged for Michigan Avenue to be closed to traffic in front of the museum. The fun begins with music on the front lawn of Coe House at 11 a.m., provided by Kelly Trudell Bracy.

Around the yard will be traditional archery lessons for ages five and up by Roger Cook and Linda Hutchinson. Hutchinson shared that she is looking for donated archery equipment, recurves and long bows, "so we can teach on other occasions as well." In addition to archery, 'Trapper Jim' (who is also a Civil War collector) will have items on display and for sale. There will be a rabbit fur spinning demonstration and traditional children's games.

Out back in the barn, vintage tools and farm items that have been donated over the years will be on display. Moving into the house, volunteers will help visitors try their hands with quilting, sewing, embroidery, and knitting. Enjoy the rich history at the museum and hear the Grass Lake Ukulele Band at 1 p.m. on the lawn.

Parking is limited at the museum, so patrons are encouraged to park in town and take a stroll. In addition to Coe House Museum Heritage Day, the "Let Freedom Ring Car Show" will be ongoing.



Jane Wooden Wiley snagged home-baked goods at the 2025 Wooden Old Stone School fall festival and in doing so helped support the non-profit to keep her relatives' school open for the public and ongoing living history. The 2026 event is set for Saturday, Oct. 3 with many activities for all ages. Photo by Lisa Cyrus.

Pepperoni/Mozz rolls • Sausage/Mozz rolls • Cookies



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Marriages

Cierra Sowle, Jackson County Clerk, reports the following recent recorded marriage license applications:

Morgan Lin Markus, Brooklyn, and Derek Scott Schiel, Brooklyn;  
Bailee Ann Brooks, Brooklyn, and Hunter Alexander Pizzo, Brooklyn;  
Mariah Nicole Dufek, Jackson, and Mark Leon Dufek, Jackson;  
Brandie L.A. Breton, Parma, and Victor Alfred Gene Stevens, Parma;  
Carlee Jean Lally, Jackson, and Charles Brian Radford, Jackson;  
Emily Rae Sherwood, Grass Lake, and John Michael Howe, Grass Lake;  
Jennifer Lynn Fiddler, Jackson, and Durwin Lynn Gilbert, Horton;  
Abigail Rose Potter, Michigan Center, and Thomas Charles Gilmore, Michigan Center;  
Cody Douglas Black, Jackson, and Elise Marie Donahue, Jackson;  
Austin William Renteria, Cement City, and Erin Nicole Uleck, Cement City;  
Meghan Christine Neuland, Jackson, and Simon Aleno Mata, Jackson;  
Cooper Douglas Soltis, Jackson, and Hannah Lakin Roe, Jackson;  
Luke Edward Siefken, Jackson, and Molly Katelynn Devins, Jackson;  
Easton Garrett Morehouse, Jackson, and Samantha Jacqlene MacLean, Jackson;  
Makenzie Ann Collier, Jackson, and Gabriel Tal Vowles, Jackson;  
Andrew Keith Jordon, Horton, and Lily Grace Smith, Concord, NH;  
Rebecca Angelina Kurzynowski, Jackson, and Bryce Alan Venneman, Jackson;  
Trevor Paul Harner, Jackson, and Audrey Ann Young, Jackson;  
Jessica Marie Lietz, Jackson, and Derek James Mason, Jackson;  
Mallory Lane Combs, Jackson, and Brennan Christopher Dinnan, Jackson;  
Taylor Lee Harris, Jackson, and Tyler Anthony MacLachian, Jackson;  
Shelby Jane Caudill, Parma, and Caleb Daniel Kiselica, Parma;  
Sierra Nicole Marsh, Munith, and Joshua James Ottobre, Munith;  
Alaina Marie Wilson, Spring Arbor, and Owen Michael Farr, Jackson;  
Emily Colleen Betkey, Jackson, and Nicholas Godfrey Cozart, Jackson;



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