

EVERMORE JUICE
BAR OPENS IN SJ

Local, A3



Benton Harbor
native writes memoir

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BERRIEN COUNTY TRIAL COURT

Witness in Gomez trial: ‘I was terrified’

Harper takes stand, admits to hiding gun used in homicide

By JULIE SWIDWA
HP Correspondent

ST. JOSEPH — Elizabeth Harper wept in Berrien County Trial Court on Friday as she told the court how she got rid of a box containing a gun believed to be used by Rigoberto Gomez, who is on trial for allegedly shooting

Chad Medlin outside a bar in Eau Claire last November.

Medlin was shot around 1 a.m. Nov. 2, 2024, and was pronounced dead at Corewell Health Lakeland Hospital in St. Joseph. He was 36 years old.

Gomez, 47, is charged with murder and several lesser felonies. Witnesses who testified earlier this week said



GOMEZ

the two had a verbal altercation inside the bar and, when it escalated, employees decided to close the bar early. The shooting occurred shortly after that.

Harper testified Friday that while she was at her mother’s house in Coloma Township early in the morning of Nov. 2, 2024, Gomez called her and asked to be picked up from a friend’s house in Benton Harbor, and told her to “hurry up.”

Once in the car, Harper said Gomez was acting strangely

and she asked him if he was OK. She said he answered, “No.”

“He told me he’d been jumped at a local bar,” she recalled. “I went back into my mom’s house and he stayed outside.”

Harper said she was trying to help him because he was, at the time, a dear friend.

But a knock at the door changed that.

“It was the police. They said there had been a homicide. I was terrified,” she said. “I was in shock, and

I was angry. I cared about him. He was a good friend.”

Various police officers testified about arresting Gomez after talking with witnesses outside the Hometown Bar in Eau Claire, where the shooting occurred. At the time, no weapon was recovered at the scene.

Harper said the next day, as she was getting ready to leave for work, she saw a black box lying on the ground on her mother’s property. She said she knew it did not belong to her mother,

nor did it belong to her.

“I panicked. I was upset. I put it in my car and drove toward Rocky Gap Park. I stopped the car in a wooded area, and threw the box,” Harper testified.

Berrien Assistant Prosecutor Kate Arnold asked her how she felt after doing that.

“I felt awful. Days later I called police and told them what I did. I knew it was wrong,” Harper said, crying. Harper, who is from

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Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

The Harbor Impact Foundation, led by Rodney Alexander Jr., center, is bringing the Gus Macker 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament to Benton Harbor in 2026, sponsored by the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi through Four Winds Casinos. With Alexander are, from left, Brian Conybeare, a Harbor Impact board member; Linda Billups, Harbor Impact board secretary; Ron Sorce, director of sales and catering for Four Winds; and Scott Brewer, senior vice president of community relations for Four Winds.

Return of the mack

Gus Macker B-ball Tournament coming back to Benton Harbor

By LOUISE WREGG
HP Staff Writer

BENTON HARBOR — After a long hiatus, the original Gus Macker 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament is coming back to Benton Harbor in 2026.

“It hasn’t been here for about 20 years, and we’re bringing back the excitement of basketball outside,” said Rodney Alexander Jr., executive director of Harbor Impact Foundation.

He said the tournament is more than a fundraiser for his nonprofit.

“It’s also just basically getting people together and actually enjoying the river, enjoying basketball, enjoying each other. It’s all about peace, honestly,” Alexander said. “... It’s for the community.”

Harbor Impact is about supporting student athletes, which he said means grades come first.

“Everything else comes behind that,” Alexander said. “... It gives kids a chance to be great – empowering them with confidence and just the



The Gus Macker 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament is returning to Benton Harbor next summer.

will to actually get there.”

He said Harbor Impact has helped more than 30 student athletes go to college on scholarships since it was founded five years ago.

The tournament is expected to take place along Riverview Drive and Britain Avenue to show off the beauty of Benton Harbor, he said.

Harbor Impact is teaming up with the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi and its Four

Winds Casinos, along with other sponsors, to put on the event.

Scott Brewer, senior vice president of community relations at Four Winds, said the Pokagon Band and the casinos like to be philanthropic.

“Partnering with different organizations to do these things is what we’re all about,” Brewer said.

Brian Conybeare, who is

on Harbor Impact’s board, said they expect to have 200 teams of four players each at the tournament, along with their families and friends.

He said many of the teams travel around the country participating in the tournaments “because they love it – 3-on-3 basketball – and they want to play it as often as they can.”

See GUS MACKER, page A2

BCHD shows interest in program for substance abusers

State using opioid settlement money for two-year effort

By TONY WITTKOWSKI
HP Local News Editor

ST. JOSEPH — The Berrien County Health Department plans to pursue state funds to launch a two-year harm-reduction program to help substance abusers.

Health Officer Guy Miller gave a presentation Thursday to Berrien County commissioners at the Committee of the Whole meeting, which included details on the program and the benefits it could have on the county.

Miller said the initiative would include the establishment of a syringe-service program to help those using injectable substances to be safer and seek help.

“People who are in these syringe-service programs or harm-reduction programs are five times more likely to enter drug treatment,” he said. “Based off of a historical review of what happens with these programs, when you bring them in, the population is a

little bit apprehensive about accessing them. They’re not sure if this is a real resource. So, it usually takes one year to start seeing people consistently showing up at these types of programs.”

Miller said the proposed harm-reduction program would be paired with substance abuse clinics to provide referrals and incentives for treatment.

“We’ll have a lot of key performance indicators to make sure that people are accessing the programs,” he said. “The first question is, how many people are struggling with a substance abuse disorder in Berrien County? We don’t really know those numbers. We know how many people are accessing treatment. We do have a high burden of acute hepatitis C.”

With funding from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the two-year pilot program would focus on a partnership with Corewell Health.

Miller said the health department would establish locations in Benton

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GOP lawmakers ask U.S. Dept. of Justice to oversee Michigan’s 2026 elections

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — A group of 22 Michigan Republican lawmakers has asked President Donald Trump’s U.S. Department of Justice to deploy monitors to vote-counting facilities and to provide general oversight for the state’s upcoming elections in 2026.

In a letter sent Thursday to U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi, the GOP legislators said their concerns centered on the fact that Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, the state’s chief election official, will help manage the August and

November 2026 elections while “simultaneously appearing on the ballot as a candidate for governor.”

“This creates an inherent and unavoidable conflict of interest, as Secretary Benson will be administering an election in which she has a direct personal stake in the outcome,” the Republican lawmakers wrote. “Such a situation risks compromising the impartiality required for fair election oversight and demands external federal scrutiny to maintain public trust.”

However, secretaries of state, from both parties,

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