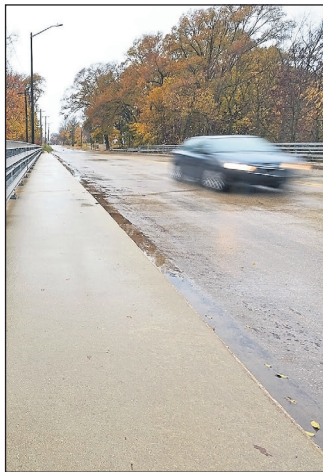


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Local, A3



BERRIEN COUNTY TRIAL COURT

Gomez takes the stand in murder trial

Defendant claims self-defense in shooting of firefighter

By JULIE SWIDWA
HP Correspondent

ST. JOSEPH — Rigoberto Gomez appeared poised and remained adamant Tuesday as he testified in

Berrien County Trial Court that he had no choice but to shoot an off-duty Eau Claire firefighter last November.

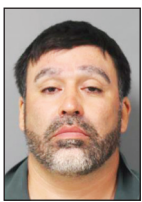
Gomez, 47, is on trial and charged with open murder in connection to the Nov. 2, 2024, death of Chad Medlin, 36, outside the Hometown Bar in Eau Claire.

His fate is expected to be in the hands of a Berrien County jury later this week.

Gomez was the only witness

called by his lawyer, Caleb Grimes, after Berrien Assistant Prosecutor Kate Arnold rested her case Tuesday afternoon.

Seeming to mount a self-defense case, Grimes took Gomez through the events leading up to the shooting, and Gomez ultimately said he felt trapped and in the moment, be-



GOMEZ

lieved he had no choice but to fire his gun.

Trial Court Judge Gary Bruce said lawyers are expected to give their closing arguments Wednesday, followed by instructions to the jury.

Under questioning by Grimes, Gomez told the court he arrived at the bar in Eau Claire about 10 p.m. Nov. 1, 2024, by himself.

"I ordered a drink, then sat down at a high-top (table) alone," Gomez

said.

He said a woman approached him and said, "I know you. What are you doing here?"

Gomez said he did not speak to her, and she walked away, but kept coming back. He said when she walked away, she sat down with a man who yelled across the bar, "I'll beat your ass."

Witnesses who were at the bar

See GOMEZ, page A2



Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

From left, Club Ambassadors Deontae Patton, Ashlee Rainer, Samari Adams and Rhyli Pritchard demonstrate the recording studio during the grand opening held Monday night for the Best Buy Teen Tech Center powered by Whirlpool Foundation at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Southwest Michigan Joel E. Smilow Teen Center in Benton Harbor. The new tech center hub provides students with opportunities to work with the latest technology, under the guidance of mentors, to prepare themselves for future careers.

Discovering a new passion

Best Buy Teen Tech Center debuts in Benton Harbor

By LOUISE WREGG
HP Staff Writer

BENTON HARBOR — Dreams are coming alive in the basement of the Joel E. Smilow Teen Center of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Southwest Michigan in Benton Harbor.

On Monday night, the facility and its members held a grand opening to welcome the Best Buy Teen Tech Center.

"We all know that talent is universal, but opportunity is not. So today,

we close that gap," said Di'Andre Hureskin, director of the center.

He said the center may have officially opened Monday, but he's been working with teens using his own equipment to help them develop their skills since he was named the director on July 15, 2024.

One of those teens who Hureskin helped has been JaKayla Scott, a 10th-grader at Berrien Springs High School.

"Before coming here, I knew I liked taking pictures, but I didn't understand photography," Scott said. "I didn't think of myself as an entrepreneur, but the teen center changed

See CENTER, page A2



Ja'Daveon Williams models a new line of sportswear by student designer Brian Duncan during the grand opening held Monday night for the Best Buy Teen Tech Center powered by Whirlpool Foundation at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Southwest Michigan Joel E. Smilow Teen Center in Benton Harbor.

SJ approves DDA TIF, development plan

30-year program to fund downtown improvements

By LAUREN RICE
HP Staff Writer

ST. JOSEPH — The St. Joseph City Commission finalized its approval of the Downtown Development Authority's tax increment financing and development plan.

A first reading of the plan was reviewed last month, and a second reading was approved unanimously Monday night.

"The DDA has prepared this over the last few years, working on the TIF to get it through," St. Joseph Downtown Development Director Kelly Ewalt said. "This amendment lays out several key components of the plan: it updates the list of development projects, adjusts timelines and estimates costs, and shows the TIF capture schedule."

With this approval, a baseline rate for tax collection can be set and incremental growth will be captured starting in 2026.

"In short, these changes ensure the plan continues to respond to the community's needs, today's economic conditions and our long-term goals for downtown revitalization," Ewalt said.

The DDA TIF and development plan is intended to use the gradual growth in property tax revenue within the downtown district to make improvements to the same area.

Because property values typically increase about 2 percent per year, incremental growth will stay with the DDA. This is accomplished by setting a baseline rate for tax revenue, which will continue to be distributed to taxing authorities like the city, library and Lake Michigan College.

Funds generated by the

See TIF, page A2



Don Campbell / HP file photo

The Holtec International Palisades Power Plant in Covert Township is pictured in 2024.

Groups sue to block Palisades plant reopening

By CAROL THOMPSON
The Detroit News

COVERT — Environmental groups opposed to the reopening of Palisades Nuclear Plant in Covert Township have filed a federal lawsuit seeking to block the plant owner's moves to resume generating nuclear power there.

The groups — Beyond Nuclear, Don't Waste Michigan and Michigan Safe Energy Future — say the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission violated the Atomic Energy Act by granting Palisades owner Holtec exemptions that would allow the

company to resume power production at Palisades even though the NRC had previously approved its former owner's request to close and decommission the plant.

"When those certifications were provided in connection with the decommissioning of a reactor, they legally prohibited any further operation of the Palisades reactor or replacement of the fuel into the Palisades reactor vessel," the groups said in their lawsuit.

The groups filed their complaint against the NRC and Holtec Decommissioning International, the company that purchased Palisades

in 2022 and transferred ownership to affiliate Holtec International, which aims to restart the plant. They filed the suit Monday in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan and asked the court to block the NRC's approvals of exemptions that will allow Palisades to resume generating power.

"Holtec's hiding behind decommissioning phase regulatory relief and waivers, and NRC compliantly allowing and enabling it, has resulted in serious, negative safety consequences, which could lead to

See PALISADES, page A2