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The Herald-Palladium

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HAGAR TWP.

Residents voice drain district concerns

Approach county commissioners about Koranda, Perry & Beach Drain work

By DEBRA HAIGHT
HP Correspondent

BUCHANAN — Over a dozen Hagar Township residents attended Thursday night’s Berrien County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Buchanan Senior Center to voice their concerns about two drain projects in the township.

The meeting was one of four night meetings being held by the county board at locations around the county this year.

Residents are concerned about the Koranda and Perry and Beach Drains in Hagar Township. Property owners in those special assessment districts have received notice of how much the intended drain work will cost them.

The first drain district petitions were initially received in 2019 for the Koranda Drain and 2022 for the Perry and Beach Drain, with the actual work and assessments on property owners just coming about now.

The Koranda drain work,

as of May, is expected to cost more than \$800,000. Perry & Beach is estimated closer to \$450,000.

Costs are split among the property owners in the special assessment districts, the township’s municipal budget, the county and the Michigan Department of Transportation.

“We fought a war 250 years ago because of taxation without representation,” resident Michael Ashbrook said. “I received a \$24,000 bill on my land which only has an \$18,000 taxable value.”

Resident Thomas Goodman has property in both drain districts. He said his tax liability will increase by 28 percent over the next 15 years.

“What kind of inheritance is that for my heirs?” he asked. “We are the only state with drain commissioners and I don’t understand that. They can levy taxes without a vote and without oversight.”

Resident Michael Staschull asked county commissioners to get to the bottom of the situation which he said he and other residents only became aware of recently when they

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Don Campbell / HP staff

Fred Leitz, right, shows off tomato fields to Department of Agriculture Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden and Rep. Tim Walberg during a tour of Leitz Farms in Sodus Thursday.

‘We do feed the world’

Rep. Walberg, Deputy Ag. Secretary Vaden visit Leitz farm

By LAUREN RICE
HP Staff Writer

SODUS — A Sodus Township farm hosted U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg and U.S. Deputy Agriculture Secretary Stephen Vaden this week as part of a Michigan farm tour.

They started in Jackson and ended the day Thursday at Leitz Farm to talk about specialty crops and the industry in this part of the state.

“Michigan’s agriculture is so diverse,” Vaden said. “The congressman just noted that all the issues we see nationwide are really present here in this one state of Michigan. So we heard about how our labor reforms, through reforming the adverse effects wage rate, has really made a difference for specialty crop operations like this.”

Adverse effect wage rates are the minimum wages paid to workers with an H-2A visa – workers from other

countries temporarily employed in agriculture.

The Securing Agriculture’s Workforce Act was passed in congress and signed into law this year.

According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, H-2A visa use has increased over time, and SAWA includes reforms aimed at streamlining the process and controlling unpredictable costs.

Increased H-2A visa usage comes at the same time as the Trump administration’s policies intended to reduce the presence of undocumented immigrants who have historically made up a significant portion of the workforce.

Walberg said they’re also looking into workforce stability long-term.

“... We’re also looking, as we go back next week, at things that bring H-2A programs up to speed (and) will assist farmers like these here today to make sure we have a stable workforce,” he said. “Make it more flexible, and

See FARM, page A6



Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Tim Godfrey checks a sample of chardonnay in the barrel room at Lake Michigan College’s Welch Center in Benton Township. Godfrey is the program chair of agriculture, culinary and wine at LMC.

Sipping on Southwest Michigan

Godfrey aims to make Berrien County an agri-tourist destination

By CATE CHRISTINIDIS
HP Focus Editor

Editor’s note: This is part three in a 10-part series The Herald-Palladium is publishing for its Spotlight section, which highlights local residents and their impact in the community.

BENTON TOWNSHIP – Friday and Saturday afternoons at Lake Michigan College’s Welch Center Tasting Room showcase education in action.

Students of LMC’s Wine & Viticulture program are involved in all aspects of the winemaking process. They plant and manage the grape vines at Michigan State University’s Research and Extension Center in Benton Harbor, harvest the grapes and make the wine.

Then, from noon to 6 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, they exercise their hospitality skills, selling the student-made wine to the public.

This display of student work stems from the time and effort put in by many, especially Tim Godfrey – who has been LMC’s program chair of agriculture, culinary and wine



Tim Godfrey, Program Chair of Agriculture, Culinary and Wine at Lake Michigan College, talks about the wine and viticulture programs at LMC’s Welch Center.

since 2022.

“What we do really well here is we help supplement, like these are the facts of being a winery, now here’s the experience of what it’s like to actually do those things, whether it’s making wine or we have a winery operations management course, which is essentially like the business of winemaking,” he said.

For Godfrey, wine isn’t just a palette-pleaser or conversation companion, it’s an art – and a highly scientific one at

that.

“Wine’s all about the story,” he said. “If we don’t tell the story of wine, it’s just alcohol on a shelf. Things are special because we make them special.”

Godfrey’s path to wine making and instruction was by no means linear. He majored in cellular molecular biology at Grand Valley State University, jumping into a Ph.D. program after graduation.

See GODFREY, page A6

Highlights

Name: Tim Godfrey

Title: Program chair of agriculture, culinary and wine at Lake Michigan College

Hometown: Lincoln Township

Fun fact: He’s a passionate apple aficionado, growing 25 varieties of historic and heirloom apples on his farm.

Sturgis closure may be ‘first of more’ hospitals

By ELI NEWMAN
Bridge Michigan

Beth Kelley spent most of her life working at Sturgis Hospital. For 32 years, the nurse said it was “unusual to walk down the hall and not recognize somebody.” The independently owned hospital had served its community in rural St. Joseph County for more than a century.

“I like the small hospital atmosphere,” Kelley, 56, told Bridge Michigan. “I know this is maybe a little cliché, but it’s like family.”

When administrators held a town hall last month to tell staff the hospital would close about 70 hours later, Kelley said the room filled with “shock” and “devasta-



Photo provided / Robyn Krawczak

Sturgis Hospital closed June 19, citing “years of ongoing financial challenges” facing rural health care providers.

tion.” The decision left many long-serving employees like herself “scrambled trying to find a job” while they worked their remaining shift

hours.

Sturgis Hospital shuttered its doors June 19, citing “years of ongoing financial challenges” facing rural

health care providers. The facility had 84 licensed beds and about 300 associates working, according to the hospital.

There were warning signs. The facility had been winding down services in recent years, even as it obtained a city-issued pandemic relief loan, a state lifeline and new federal status – Sturgis Hospital became Michigan’s first designated rural emergency hospital in 2023, which allows for increased support from the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

It’s not the only rural hospital in Michigan to be impacted by a shifting health

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Sunday Weather

High 86 Low 69

