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THE LAKEWOOD OBSERVER

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Volume 21, Issue 01, January 8, 2025

Potential Elementary School Closures Affect Us All

by Caitlin Solomon

The Lakewood City School District is considering repurposing 1-2 elementary schools due to low enrollment. Many parents are aware of this issue, and the community at large should pay attention as well so we can preserve the distinct assets that constitute Lakewood.

I am a 4th generation Lakewoodite. My husband and I both grew up in Lakewood and attended LHS. We invested in a Lakewood home, started our family here, and launched a small business here, putting up with the higher property taxes, headaches that old houses and small yards bring, because the reward of being in a dense, walkable community is more than worth it. Lakewood is unique in terms of an urban planning perspective. The density plus walkability are unmatched in surrounding suburbs and it would be a travesty to have school closures wear away at that fabric.

In August 2024, the district assembled a task force to study seven scenarios that would respond to the perceived issue of declining elementary enrollment. The scenarios were generated by an outside consulting firm and mostly center on keeping all four "corner" elementary schools open, leaving Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Grant on the chopping block to be

repurposed into a community rec center building or centralized preschool. Let's stop there

many families had pulled out to homeschool or make other plans due to COVID. Since then, enrollment appears to be flattening per the data

shown; however the district is moving forward full steam with the seven scenarios without having new data analysis in place.

This is too important of an issue to be glossing through with incomplete data on enrollment (while stating that enrollment decline is driving this entire repurposing study). With the task force being made up of a large number of district staff, does it truly represent the diverse needs of Lakewood's families and taxpayers?

District presentations have been centered on operating efficiency and classroom size equity with no mention of what parents are most concerned about: safety during morning commutes to school and the children's social/emotional wellbeing.

Safety: Closing a school will create longer walking distances for many. The district is not considering bussing, instead keeping all walking distances to under 2 miles to avoid that requirement. Action for Healthy Schools suggests limiting walks to school from 1/2 to 1 mile and LEED (Leadership for Energy and Environmental Design) defines walkability as being within 1/2 mile of a site. Currently there are open crossing guard positions that have remained unfilled and the need will only increase with closures. I am not confident in the promise to hire more crossing guards should school commutes change. Winter weather can also pose a safety challenge. According to GLISA, a NOAA CAP team, our region has on average 103 days that fall below 32 degrees Fahrenheit. To prevent

From 9 years ago, Lakewood parents shared facts with the community which was necessary because of the BOE's manipulation of data going on during the community meetings about school redistricting.

Follow the QR CODE to read that story and paper.



though - the enrollment data being presented to us during the community engagement meetings was taken from 2022 when

Watch For A Survey On Elementary Facilities

by Christine Gordillo

The District and the Elementary Planning Task Force are seeking the community's input on future considerations for our seven elementary buildings. A declining enrollment trend that has resulted in inequitable class sizes across the District and its related negative educational impacts have spurred the administration and Board of Education to consider some possible changes to our elementary buildings. Please watch your inbox for an email from the District later this month with a link to the survey. If you miss the email, a postcard with a link to the survey will be sent to all homes this month as well. We value your input! Learn more about the task force at the link: <https://www.lakewoodcityschools.org/find-it-fast-links/facilities-study>



This year's winner is at 1522 Coutant. You can see the top 8 homes and PEACE winner on page 8.

We Have A Winner

by Jim O'Bryan

It could have been the weather, the end of an election, who knows? but the number of entries was down, and the quality of the entries was way up.

With over \$250 in prizes up for grabs, the voting more than made up for the nominations.

Grabbing a massive share of this year's vote was 1522 Coutant. A small house that does a lot with the space they have. As with most of our

entries, it always pays to go see them in person.

The second house on the list was on Matthews; it was simple but very elegant.

What followed was a great cross section of Lakewood homes decorated in the unique way we tend to decorate.

Thank you to the businesses that have worked with us on this: India Garden, Woodstock BBQ, Carabel Salon, Root Cafe and others.

Calling All Graduating High School Seniors

by Anna Bacho

For high school seniors who live in Lakewood, Lakewood Kiwanis have scholarships to award.

The Kiwanis Club of Lakewood is proud to be offering its 2025 scholarship program to graduating high school seniors. The club's foundation increased the awards to FIFTEEN \$10,000 scholarships, \$2500 per year for 4 years each. We are approaching 3 million in scholarships awarded since 1956.

Edward Hadaway, Kiwanis scholarship committee chairman said, "Eligible applicants can be students at any accredited

high school but must be a resident of Lakewood and a citizen of the United States. They must demonstrate academic success in high school and must have applied to one or more specific college or university. Winners will be chosen based on need for financial assistance; community involvement and service; with qualities of leadership, honesty, loyalty, diligence and participation in extracurricular activities."

Applications and contact information is online at <https://www.kiwanisfoundation.com/scholarships>. Please submit by April 1, 2025.

Lakewood Kiwanis has served Lakewood youth for over 100 years. Join with us in serving our great Lakewood community.

Please use our QR code if you like to donate to our scholarship fund.

#KidsNeedKiwanis

Anna Bacho is a member of Lakewood Kiwanis.



continued on page 10

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Ring In The New Councilmember

Happy New Year Neighbors!

As we ring in the New Year, one of Lakewood City Council's first responsibilities will be to fulfill our Charter-bound duty to appoint a resident to the one year remaining on the Council Member at Large term vacated by our former colleague and now State Representative Tristan Rader.

In November, twelve candidates responded to Council's open call for applicants, and in December, six were selected for interviews to take place at the 6pm Committee of the Whole meetings on January 6th and 13th. Council is likely to make a decision the night of the 13th, with the successful candidate being sworn-in at the January 21st meeting. The six interviewees

by Sarah Kepple

President of City Council/Council Person-At-Large

are: Alexandra Bonacuse, Becky Machovec, Nicole Greenfield, Allison Urbanek, Angela Clunk, and Angelina Steiner. Interviews are open to the public and will be both live-streamed and recorded. Want to advocate for your preferred candidate? Send a letter of support on her behalf to council@lakewoodoh.gov prior to Jan 13th.

If you've never attended a Council meeting, let this be the year that you come visit us! I recommend starting with a committee meeting. Committee meetings tend to focus on one or two agenda items in more detail and are often a little less formal and a little eas-

ier to follow. Most committees are made up of three Council members, one of whom chairs the committee. Committee of the Whole is the exception, as it is made up of all Councilmembers and is chaired by the Council President. Legislation is referred by full Council to an appropriate committee for deeper exploration and discussion after which the committee may vote to refer the legislation back to full Council with a recommendation regarding adoption. While regular Council meetings are where a bill becomes a law, committee meetings are where Council, the Administration, and our community can really dig in to understand whether or not it should.

Upcoming Council Meetings:

Monday, Jan 13th 6:00pm Com-

mittee of the Whole

Monday, Jan 20 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr Day Holiday

Tuesday, Jan 21st 6:00pm Housing, Planning & Development Committee

Tuesday, Jan 21st 7:30pm Regular Meeting of Council

Sign up for our email list to receive agendas for upcoming meetings, livestream meetings or watch past meetings, submit an eComment on any agenda item, and learn more about Council on our webpage: <https://www.lakewoodoh.gov/lakewood-city-council/>

Free Rock Salt

Rock salt distribution boxes are back at Kauffman, Madison, Cove, Lakewood Park as well as the Lakewood Dog Park for Winter 2024-2025. Residents may take home up to 5 gallons of salt for personal use on driveways and sidewalks.

Interested residents must bring their own shovel and bucket and load the salt themselves.



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Lakewood Observer

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THE MAYOR'S CORNER

Reflecting On The Many Accomplishments Of 2024

by **Meghan George**
Mayor/Safety Director, City of Lakewood

Happy New Year! As we welcome in 2025, I hope that everyone enjoyed the holiday season and enters the new year refreshed and hopeful. I always look forward to this time as an opportunity to reflect on the past year's accomplishments.

For Lakewood, the past 12 months have been full of positive momentum. We continued to provide high quality services to our residents, maintain excellent fiscal stewardship of tax dollars, keep our city safe and attractive, and made strategic investments in key quality of life assets and major infrastructure initiatives. Below are some highlights for our community from 2024.

Finalizing Downtown Development Agreement: In December, the final version of the development agreement for the former Lakewood Hospital site was approved, allowing construction to break ground in the first half of 2025. The project will introduce the largest number of new housing units in over four decades to our city, while adding 25,000 square feet of retail, building a 536-space parking garage, restoring the historic Curtis Block building, and creating a new 17,000 square foot public plaza and community space where Lakewood can gather.

Safety Initiatives: The City continued to holistically invest in safety initiatives and policies. After a multi-year study, the speed limit on Lake Avenue was reduced by 5 MPH to 30, which should help with safety across the board, including cars, bikes, and pedestrians. The City purchased new state of the art radios for our fire and police departments with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars. The new devices boast advanced features facilitating seamless communication within their respective departments and with surrounding public safety agencies and bring our safety forces up to best-in-class radio equipment. The City also celebrated the graduation of its first

Citizens' Police Academy class in years. Over 20 residents completed the program, which builds bridges and fosters understanding, trust, and cooperation through immersive experiences.

Winterhurst Ice Arena: The City successfully implemented several planned repairs and upgrades to the beloved recreation asset, especially with regard to key infrastructure to the facility. With the help of Mike Skindell and Nickie Antonio, we were also able to secure \$750,000 in state capital dollars to fund work at Winterhurst. The City also teed up future work and has applied for another \$500,000 grant from the State of Ohio to complete future projects.

Refuse and Recycling Center: The City completed its upgrade and expansion project at the Berea Road facility to add 6,400 square feet of space and provide a more efficient and comfortable indoor site for resident drop-off of materials (everything from recyclables and hazardous materials to large trash items and yard waste). We also purchased a new shredder and a new cardboard baler with the help of a \$26,897 grant from the Ohio EPA. After the grand re-opening, we have seen a dramatic jump in use, with a 50% increase in recycling material drop off.

Heritage Home Program: The City re-established a partnership with the Cleveland Restoration Society to provide access to the Heritage Home Program, which allows owners of Lakewood homes built over 50 years ago or more to obtain free professional guidance on their projects as well as access to low-cost, below-market-rate financing with interest as low as 2%. In the first half of the year alone, over 750 homeowners made contact with the program staff and applied for \$1.1M in loans.

Skate Park Upgrades: The City began construction on a \$550,000

renovation and upgrade project that will upgrade the existing footprint of the skate park and an expand it to incorporate three additional sections for: 1) a hip and turnaround zone; 2) a rail and flatwork zone; and 3) a flow bowl. A grand reopening should happen in the spring, just in time for better skateboarding weather and the 20th anniversary of the skate park.

Fiscal Stewardship – State Auditor Awards, Moody's bond rating: The City once again received the highest level of fiscal awards from the Auditor of the State of Ohio for a fifth consecutive year. The Aa2 rating generally means that the City of Lakewood's bonds are "judged to be of high quality and are subject to very low credit risk." That puts Lakewood in the "high-grade" tier of Moody's rating system which allows the City to pay lower interest when we must borrow funds for high priority capital projects.

Interceptor Project / ARPA dollars: Lakewood continued to advance the

major multiyear project to replace our main sewer interceptor that spans the length of the city and runs as deep at 90 feet below ground. The project remains on pace for completion in 2025. The City also made the move to dedicate remaining ARPA funds to additional water/sewer projects to minimize the burden on ratepayers.

Summer Storm Recovery: Every year has its unexpected challenges, and 2024's biggest one was the major storm in August. That storm saw multiple tornadoes touch down in neighboring cities and forced Lakewood along with so many others to react quickly and work hard to help those in need. It was a difficult time for all of Lakewood and our region, but I remain extremely proud of the efforts of so many at the City – from police and fire to public works and human services – to keep people safe and deal with the fallout from the storm.

On behalf of all of us at City Hall, we look forward to working together to keep the momentum going and make 2025 another positive and productive year for Lakewood.



Please join
Senator Nickie Antonio, State Representative Tristan Rader, Former State Representative Mike Skindell, County Executive Chris Ronayne, County Councilman Dale Miller, Former Councilman John Litten, County Party Chair Dave Brock, Dean DePiero, Mike Graham, Paul Harris, Judy Hilow, Terry Joyce, Julie Lavelle and David Semler, Erika McLaughlin, Adam Rosen, Kevin Spellacy, Leo Spellacy, and Dave Wondolowski to support

Mayor Meghan F. George

Thursday, January 30th
The Union Club 5:00-7:00 p.m.

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From Snow to Safety: Winter Fall Prevention Lunch & Learn

January 9, 2025 | 11:45am Registration | Event Begins at 12:00pm

Featured Speakers:
Cassie Rainey, PT Director of Rehabilitation at O'Neill Healthcare Lakewood
Krista Weartz, ATP Director of Sales & Operations at Central HME

Enjoy lunch at O'Neill Healthcare Lakewood while learning valuable tips from Cassie Rainey, Director of Rehabilitation, on how to best prepare for staying safe in the icy winter months. Also, hear from Krista Weartz, ATP of Central HME about the essential role of proper medical equipment in navigating the challenges of the winter weather!

O'Neill Healthcare
(440) 808-5500 | O'NeillHC.com

Please RSVP to Heather at
(440) 941-3380 by January 2nd

O'Neill Healthcare Lakewood
1381 Bunts Road
Lakewood, OH 44107
(Assisted Living Entrance)



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LAKEWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY EVENTS

Children's And Youth Services

by Jeffrey Siebert

Family Weekend Wonders

Looking for weekend entertainment for the whole family? Look no further! Drop in to the Library's special weekend story time. Your whole family will enjoy these programs full of enthusiastic stories, engaging activities, entertaining music and clever crafts. Family Weekend Wonders Drop-In Story Time is offered every weekend throughout the year and features a different theme each week to keep things engaging. No registration is required.

Main Library- Fridays and Saturdays at 10:30 a.m.

Madison Branch- Fridays at 10:30 a.m.

Just Baby 'N Me

For You and Your Birth to 24-Month-Old Baby

Just Baby 'N Me is a lap-sit story time ideal for babies from birth through early walkers. The focus is on rhymes, songs, finger plays and exploring short books together. No registration is required.

Main Library - Mondays- 10:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m.

Wednesdays- 10:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m.

Thursdays-10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Madison Branch - Thursdays- 11:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Celebrating The Season:

O'Neill Healthcare's Annual Holiday Family Dinners

by Amy Reinker

Each year, O'Neill Healthcare proudly hosts a cherished tradition across all six of its locations: the Annual Holiday Dinners. These special evenings are designed to bring together our residents and their closest family members or friends for a night of joy and holiday celebration. The events reflect the welcoming, family-oriented atmosphere that O'Neill Healthcare embodies as a family-owned and operated company for over six decades.

The dinners are a true collaborative effort, showcasing the dedication and care of our staff. Upon arrival, residents and their guests are welcomed into our festively decorated facilities, where tables are reserved to provide a comfortable dining experience and residents and guests are served dinner by our staff members.

The homemade meals that are served are prepared by our talented kitchen staff at each holiday dinner location. Some of the delicious food that was served at our homes included short rib, chicken marsala, homemade cheesecake dessert, and our Lakewood location even a special carving station. The menus are thoughtfully crafted, offering delicious dishes that bring a sense of comfort and tradition to the occasion.

To add to the festive ambiance, our homes feature a variety of live entertainment throughout the evening. This year, residents and guests enjoyed performances from talented musicians, including pianists, violinists, and string instrumentalists, as well as vocalists. There were even a group of carolers from a local church at our Lakewood location who volunteered their evening. The live music creates an atmosphere of joy, filling the rooms with holiday cheer. In addition to the joyous atmosphere, the evenings are also filled with photo opportunities and interactions with Santa Claus or even the Grinch! Residents, families, and guests are delighted in capturing memories with these holiday characters.

The Annual Holiday Family Din-



ners are more than just a meal—they are a celebration of community, connection, and the holiday spirit. It is an opportunity for our residents to share an evening of love and laughter with their loved ones while being surrounded by the dedicated staff who care for them every day.

As a family-owned company,

Pre-school Story Time

For You and Your 2 to 5-Year-Old Pre-schooler. Children and their parents will enjoy stories, movement and songs for thirty fun filled minutes. The focus is on early literacy skills. No registration is required.

Main Library - Tuesdays: 10:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.

Wednesdays: 11:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.

Madison Branch - Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Pajama Party

For You and Your 2 to 6 Year-Old Child

Make the Library a part of your bedtime routine with an evening story time. Children are encouraged to wear their favorite pajamas and bring their stuffed animal friends to snuggle. Join us as we wind down for the night with quiet books, movement, fingerplays and songs. No registration is required.

Mondays: 6:00-6:30 p.m.

Tuesdays: 6:00-6:30 p.m.

Share the Dream - A Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King

For school aged children. Celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. through stories, songs and crafts. In honor of the MLK Jr. Day of Service, participants will create handmade cards to warn the hearts of nursing home residents. No registration required

Monday, January 20, 2025 in the Main Library Multipurpose Room

Bricks and Books

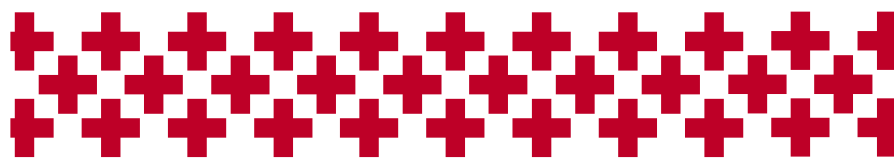
For Students in Kindergarten through Fifth Grade. In this hands-on experience, kids will use Lego building bricks, gears, and figures to design and construct amazing structures and imaginative creations. Alongside their building, we will be exploring the library's extensive collection of Lego-themed books, offering inspiration, challenges, and stories for all levels. No registration required.

Sunday, January 19, 2025 6:00pm - 7:30pm in the Main Library Activity Room

O'Neill Healthcare takes pride in hosting these events and creating moments that bring happiness to our residents and their families. The events reflect some of our core values of compassion, care, and family, and they have become a beloved tradition eagerly anticipated by all who attend. Looking ahead, our six facilities are excited to continue this tradition in the coming years. For more information about our holiday celebrations, upcoming events in 2025, or to learn more about becoming a volunteer at O'Neill Healthcare please visit O'NeillHC.com or call (440) 808-5500.

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LAKEWOOD OBSERVER



State Representative Tristan Rader is sworn in by Muni Judge Tess Neff.

New Leadership In The 13th House District

by Kevin Young

Tristan Rader was sworn in as State Representative for Ohio's 13th District in a small private ceremony on January 1st. Known for his dedication to sustainability, healthcare equity, and community progress, Rader shared his enthusiasm for the work ahead. "Our district deserves leadership that fights for healthcare justice, environmental preservation, and economic opportunity for all," he stated.

Rader succeeds former Representative Michael J. Skindell, who admirably represented Lakewood and the surrounding communities for 22 years in the state legislature. Skindell's steadfast commitment to progressive values and his tireless advocacy for the district leave a legacy that Rader is determined to honor and build upon.

Rader has made expanding healthcare access a cornerstone of his agenda, with a vision of achieving a universal public healthcare system. He believes no one should have to choose between basic needs and life-saving care. Protecting Lake Erie, opposing fracking in public parks, and advancing renewable energy initiatives are also key priorities, driven by his extensive experience in sustainability and clean energy advocacy.

However, Rader takes office at a time when the General Assembly is expected to be particularly hostile toward the progressive values he and the district hold dear—values like social equity, climate justice, workers' rights, and reproductive freedom. In an environment where corporate interests and regressive policies often dominate, Rader is prepared to be a tireless advocate for his constituents, standing firm against efforts to roll back hard-fought



Rep Mike Skindell passes the torch to newly elected Rep Tristan Rader at swearing-in on 1/1/2025.

protections and rights.

With a proven track record as a public servant and clean energy advocate, Rader brings a wealth of knowledge and a practical, results-oriented approach to the Statehouse. From his impactful tenure on Lakewood City Council to his leadership in statewide solar energy initiatives, he has demonstrated a commitment to policies that deliver real benefits to communities. His ability to address pressing issues while championing long-term solutions inspires confidence in his leadership.

Above all, Rader is dedicated to ensuring the voices of the 13th District are heard and their concerns addressed. "Together, we can build a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable future for Ohio," he promised. His leadership marks a fresh, forward-thinking chapter for the district, rooted in progress and a steadfast commitment to the well-being of all its residents.

Kevin Young has been a Lakewood resident since 1986. He works in the music industry promoting and working with well known artists. He is currently managing the band Hooked Like Helen and Lakewood native Bob Gatewood. In 2024, he was Spokesperson for Tristan Rader's Campaign for District 13 Ohio House Rep.

Boating Classes

Do Not Become A Statistic

by Virginia Suda

According to the ODNR (Ohio Department of Natural Resources), in 2023, there were 34,431 registered vessels in Cuyahoga County. The top two causes of fatalities on Ohio waterways both in 2022 and 2023 were falls overboard and capsizing with the known cause of death being drowning: 2022, 12 drownings and 2023, 10 drownings. In Ohio anyone born on or after January 1, 1982 and operating a vessel with an engine 10 horsepower or more is required to complete a NASBLA (National Association State Boating Law Administrators) safe boating course.

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 75 is offering two upcoming safe boating courses at Lakewood High School.

Both classes will run from Thursday, January 30-Thursday, April 3 from 7:00-9:00 at Lakewood High School. Both classes include Boat America course material which will qualify students for the Ohio boater card. Possible insurance discount.

Boating Skills & Seamanship
- Thursday, January 30-April 3, 2025—materials \$45. Powerboat oriented. Boat handling skills and safety training including boating nomenclature, VHF marine radio procedures, navigation rules, etc.

Sailing Skills & Seamanship
- Thursday, January 30-April 3 ,

2025materials \$45.00 Introductory sailing course emphasizing safety, how a boat sails, sailboat maneuvering, navigation rules, VHF marine radio procedures, weather, etc.

Register through the Lakewood Recreation Dept. 216-529-4081 or <https://recreation.lakewoodcityschools.org/adult-activities> For additional information, contact V. Suda at sudav@cox.net or 216-410-1668.

Virginia Suda is a longtime Lakewood resident, who is an active member of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary in Cleveland. The Auxiliary is the all volunteer component of the U.S. Coast Guard.

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Winter Program Guide Is Out!

Indoor Track is Open!

Mondays - Fridays: 6 am - 8 am and 4:30 pm - 9 pm
Saturdays: 7am - 6pm - Sundays: 8 am - 6 pm

Track is closed when Lakewood High School is in session and for any scheduled school event

Indoor Track Facts: 10 laps = 1 mile, 3 full-size lanes
Walkers inside and runners on the outside
Elevated around the LHS Main Gym

Residents cost
60 and over \$5.00 per month
adult \$8.00 per month

Nonresident's fees: \$10.00 and \$15.00
Great way to stay in shape over the winter months.
We are located at Lakewood High School (Room 31) on the corner of Franklin and Birch

14100 Franklin Blvd.
Lakewood, OH 44107
(216) 529-4081

online at: recreation.lakewoodcityschools.org

LO's 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

by Debra O'Bryan January

Our State Representative, Michael Skindell of Lakewood decided not to seek re-election. Lakewood Councilman Tristan Rader stepped up to run for the seat. Issue 2 allowing marijuana use and regulation passed in the previous election, however it left much confusion as how to implement the law in Lakewood.



We saw the brand new expanded Refuse/Recycling Center open, making it a breeze to drive through and discard just about everything at different stations with upgraded equipment. Sarah Kepple was elected President of City Council making Lakewood the largest city in Ohio to have women at the helm of all three branches of government.

February

Our brilliant minds were once again featured on Academic Challenge. Rowan Brown, Yasmin Elhachdani, and Shannon Katzenberger revved up our Ranger Pride and went on to win! We went back down to visit East Palestine. We witnessed how the train derailment from the previous year completely devastated the town with little chance of recovery. It could happen here. The same toxic chemicals that were spilled, routinely travel through Lakewood.



March

Lakewood High School Orchestra, along with the Chamber Ensembles received superior ratings under the direction of Beth Hankins. Our LHS Varsity Cheer Squad finished in the top three at State Competition. The west side of town was alarmed at a noxious smell coming from across the border in Rocky River. Turned out it was a punctured historic oil well. The City of Lakewood secured state of the art radios for our Police and Fire, facilitating improved communications. Chief Fischer led the first Citizens Police Academy class to graduate since the beginning of COVID.



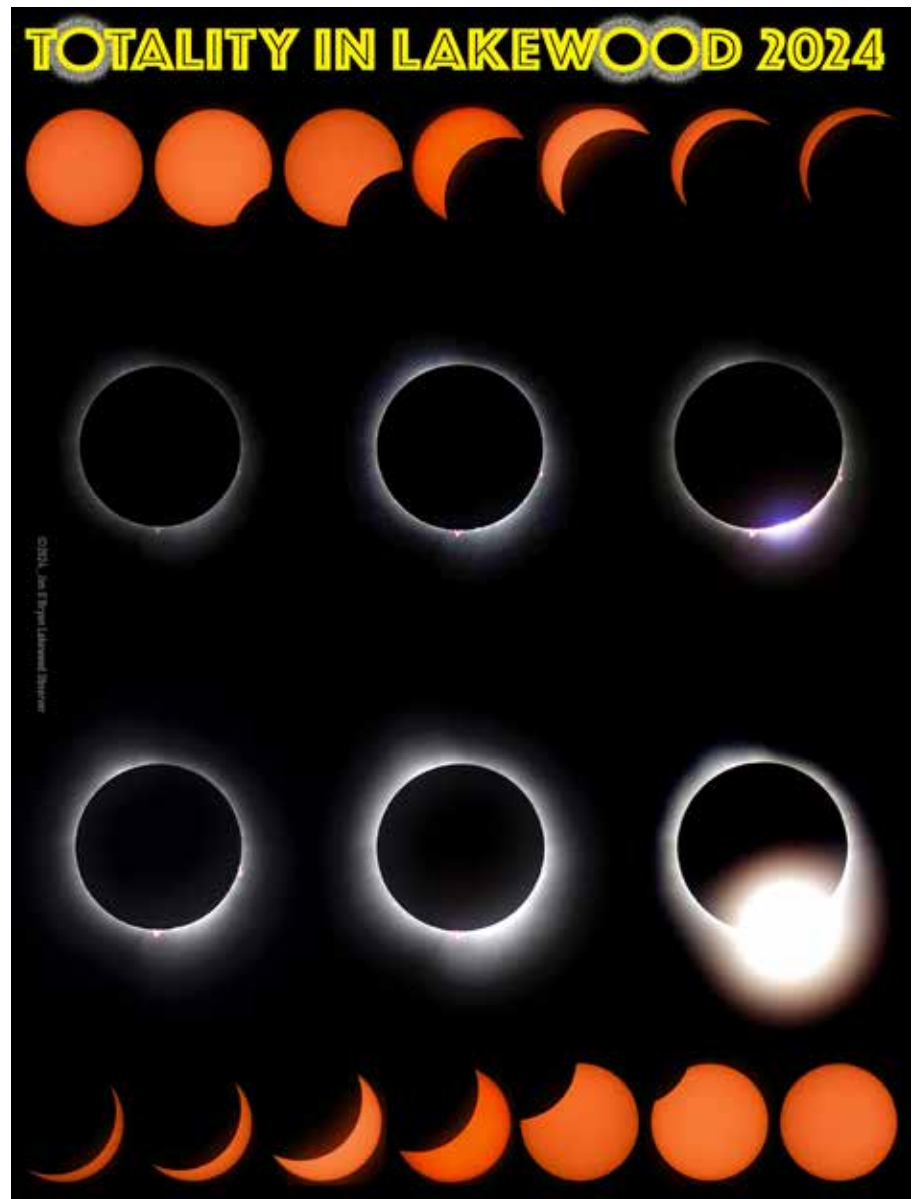
April

Lakewood braced itself for the influx of southerners to invade our town for the Total Solar Eclipse. On April 8th, Totality was visible for the first time in Lakewood since 1806. The cosmic show left everyone in awe. The crowds never materialized as the swath of the view was quite wide and residents simply could just walk outside to see the stunning celestial event. What a calm and magical few moments as the area went dark and quiet. Our Senate Minority Leader, Lakewoodite Nickie Antonio condemned the passage of Anti-Trans Administrative Rules that were based on mis-truths. Gender reassignment surgery has never been done in Ohio, yet the ban was placed to confuse and stigmatize marginalized Ohioans.



May

Hollywood came to play once again in Lakewood. The old vacant Steve Barry lot was transformed overnight into a production hub. Sightings of Steve Zahn fueled the excitement. I believe this may have been the tenth movie filmed, at least partly, in Lakewood. Lake Avenue's speed limit was reduced to 30 mph from 35 mph to protect residents from commuters using Lake Avenue as an Autobahn to the western suburbs from Cleveland. Dr. G, LHS's wonderful history teacher, was deservedly awarded Educator of the Year by the Lakewood Council of PTA. Dr. G not only teaches, but advocates for his students in many ways. He attends and supports ALL sports, music and theater events and performances, embodying his tag line of "Long Live Lakewood." The Sun brought us another celestial event on May 10th when the



For the special occasion of the eclipse, the LO Issued FREE eclipse posters of the event, to remember the day. In 2025 we have a couple great FREE Posters of Lakewood coming out, featuring the work of our artists and photographers.

Aurora Borealis showed up to dance in our night sky and brought the community outside on a chilly night to revel and share in the beauty of nature rarely, if ever, seen on the North Coast.

June

As a bike friendly community, we started to learn more about the relevant laws from Kenneth Knabe who started an educational series of articles. Lakewood Municipal Court launched a new website www.Lakewoodcourtoh.gov that implements new software to easily access and collect data. A new kiosk was added to the lobby to simplify the check-in process for the probation department. Lakewood City Council finally passed Ordinance 42-2023 which allows adult use marijuana, along with the passage of 40-2023 de-criminalizing possession and consumption.



July

We turned our eyes upward to celebrate the canopy of trees and to promote continual plantings with our third annual Distinguished Tree Contest. In collaboration with the City of Lakewood and The Tree Advisory Board, we saw a record number of trees planted in 2024 to replace fallen and aged trees. Political turmoil unfolded as neighbors took opposing views on candidates and platforms for the upcoming election. Kamala Harris was officially appointed as the Democratic Presidential Candidate as President Biden stepped out of the race. She became the first Black woman and first Asian American to win the nomination. The Israeli/Hamas War continued and brought protests here calling for ceasefire and the stop of genocide in Gaza.



LO's 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

August

Bad news hit homeowners as proposed county home values went through the roof. The county has decided to allow additional time this year to dispute your assessment. The good news for homeowners was that Accessory Dwelling Units are now permitted in Lakewood. Depending on your lot, additional free standing housing may be built to accommodate multi generational or rental housing. City Hall welcomed three additional women to fill open positions: Renee Mahoney as our new Finance Director, Angela Byington as the Director of Planning and Development, who will work closely with Jill Barlotta, our first Climate Action and Sustainability Coordinator. August 7th, severe storms toppled trees and took out power lines, plunging us into darkness and no power for days. A ridiculous amount of food waste was reported by our Refuse Dept., making us all rethink our consumption and storage practices. We're still grateful to our Public Service Workers for the concern and care they provided that week.



September

We celebrated with lifelong Lakewoodite Mickey Krivosh and his family as his business "Around The Corner" had its 50th anniversary. We also had another opportunity to voice our Ranger Pride and cheer as former LHS grad Evan Suttell appeared and won over \$20,000 on Jeopardy.

October

We said goodbye to retiring Fire Chief Tim Dunphy who grew up in Lakewood and celebrated a career of over 30 years with the Lakewood Fire Department. We then welcomed Ryan Fairbanks who stepped up from Fire Marshall to become our new Chief. Bryan Evans was elected by City Council to replace the vacant Ward 2 seat, formally held by Jason Shachner.

November

After a tumultuous election season... President Donald Trump is the first convicted felon and formally-impeached in his first term president, to be re-elected to the highest office in the country. Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown loses his seat to Trump-backed Bernie Moreno. Our own Tristan Rader wins the State Representative seat for District 13 and goes on to Columbus to represent Lakewood and Cleveland.



December

The city enters into a formal agreement with CASTO Communities and North Pointe Realty to finally redevelop the prime piece of land formally occupied by the city owned Lakewood Hospital which was closed in 2016 by former Mayor Summers after a battle that divided the city. Construction is expected to start the first half of this year. Stay tuned.



As we embark on another journey around the sun, the Lakewood Observer will be celebrating its 20th year of producing a free community written newspaper. Local Civic Journalism was started here in Lakewood to bring attention to matters that were being glossed over and not accurately covered by other media outlets. We fought for the residents then and we do now.

We have always sought to amplify individual voices that need to be heard. We remember the many "observers" who have passed and made a difference in our community. We are grateful to the multiple thousands who have participated, written and supported the paper, and continue to do so after so many years. We welcome new writers and advertisers every day who understand the importance of true civic journalism and the strength that comes from speaking truth to power. Isn't it time you joined us and shared your story?

Happy New Year Lakewood! Hang on to your hats, 2025 is going to be a wild ride. Let's go.

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2024 HOLIDAY WINNERS



photos by Jim O'Bryan

2nd Place, 1305 Mathews



photos by Jim O'Bryan

3rd Place, 1353 Edanola



5th Place, 1202 Ethel



photos by Jim O'Bryan

4th Place, 1223 Gladys



photos by Jim O'Bryan

6th Place, 1258 Edwards



7th Place, 1303 Nicholson



photos by Jim O'Bryan

8th Place, 1212 Hall



Best use of a message of peace, 1211 Cook.

LAKEWOOD FORUM

What Can We Do To Make Our Streets Safer In The Wake Of Bill Safos' Death?

by Robert Organ

What makes Lakewood so great?

I'd argue that the reason so many people love living in and visiting Lakewood is our close proximity to nearly everything you'd need or want in your daily life. Lakewood was incorporated as a village in 1889. Streetcars came to Lakewood in 1893, 1903, and 1916. Long before the advent of the personal automobile, Lakewood was developed and built out as a walking, biking, and transit-oriented community. While the streetcars are long gone, the legacy of pre-automotive America still has a profound impact on the city's layout and the quality of life for all who call it home. Our business corridors allow small, local businesses to thrive while other municipalities are dominated by big box stores, chain restaurants, and strip malls. From nearly any point in Lakewood, a person can walk or bike to a myriad of unique shops, delicious restaurants, and cozy watering holes. Our city's schools are touted as a walking district with elementary schools generally being no more than a mile from their students with a complete lack of school buses. We have plenty of barbers and salons, healthcare and dentistry, convenience stores, and grocery stores all at our fingertips. I'm not sure there's a better place to live car-free or car-light in all of the midwest.

However, Lakewood isn't perfect. As with most of North America and Europe in the post-war era, Lakewood fell victim to car-first planning and redevelopment. Clifton Boulevard went from a peaceful, tree-lined boulevard with a streetcar in the median to a seven lane monstrosity often mimicking a freeway. Drivers today routinely exceed sixty miles per hour along Clifton with very few points for pedestrians to safely cross. Detroit Avenue has up to five lanes – two lanes for travel, one for turning, and a lane for parking on each side – through our busiest commercial corridor. Madison Avenue has seen some positive changes in recent years, thankfully gaining a painted bicycle lane on each side. However,

this is also a busy commercial area, yet there are 28 intersections between Riverside Drive and West 117th that do not have a marked or signalized crossing for pedestrians. Further, our bicycle lanes and sidewalks are unmaintained through inclement weather, further prioritizing personal automobiles as the primary means of transportation.

On December 11, 2024, Bill Safos was killed by the driver of a luxury SUV while crossing Madison Avenue at Hilliard Road. The driver was traveling an estimated 47 miles per hour, nearly double the posted speed limit of 25. For anyone that walks or bikes regularly in Lakewood, especially at this intersection, this isn't particularly surprising. At the December 16, 2024 City Council meeting, there was an outpouring of complaints about traffic safety and the need for changing traffic patterns in Lakewood as well as support for Bill Safos' friends and family. During the nearly 20 public comments, Mayor George didn't appear to look up from her computer or phone a single time to acknowledge the requests and interests of her constituents. Yet, when Councilperson Tom Bullock commented that the current 2025 budget does not allocate funding for intersection improvements, she interjected that there is funding for intersections through the Bunts Road rehab project.

Looking at the Bunts Road rehab, it is set to completely redesign Bunts Road with curb extensions, a ten foot multi-use path on the west side, and major improvements to the utilities infrastructure underneath. It will also encompass additional on-street car parking, better signals at intersections, and planting more trees. More trees, a multi-use path, curb extensions, and improved signaling at intersections are all objectively good things for Lakewood. However, this accounts for only 7 intersections along an ~1.5 mile stretch of road in Lakewood. Further, it will not be completed until at least the end of 2027.

Since Bill Safos' death, there have been at least two additional crashes near the same intersection. Both of

these crashes involved drivers ignoring clearly established and posted laws that are easily preventable through better street design. There are several quick, low-cost techniques the city could use to make our streets safer for all road users. Installation of curb extensions using flex posts, rubber curbs, or planters could make crossing distances shorter and clear line of sight for drivers at intersections. These methods would also visually narrow the street, causing drivers to slow down. Installing speed tables near known high speed intersections such as Madison and Hilliard would reduce the possibility of drivers racing to beat a yellow light and slow down traffic overall. Swapping car parking and the bike lane, so that bike lanes are "protected" by parked cars and removing unnecessary turn lanes such as those along Franklin would allow for wider, safer bike lanes and lead to more people biking and fewer people driving, alleviating congestion while increasing safety.

I live in a one car household, driving less than 5 days per month, on average. I have been regularly attending City Council meetings, engaging with Mayor George's administration, and joining local organizations attempt-

ing to raise awareness for street safety in Lakewood. My friends, family, and myself have publicly praised Mayor George's administration and City Council for the adoption of the new Active Transportation Plan, for the excellent work in planning and implementing a multi-use path along Bunts Road, and for the recently proposed Lake-Clifton connector. However, for all the praise we've given, there is still a great deal of work ahead of us if Lakewood is to truly be a city that is welcoming to people that choose to travel without a personal automobile. The administration is more concerned with people driving through Lakewood than the people that live here, work here, and play here. They seem to be more concerned with the "Pavement Condition Rating" than people being injured or dying in the street.

There is no amount of enforcement, signage, or public education that will substantially change the safety of our streets. The only thing that will make streets safer is better, safer street design. We need change NOW.

Robert Organ is interested in transportation that happens outside of a car, in Lakewood and surrounding communities.



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LAKEWOOD CARES

Potential Elementary School Closures Affect Us All

continued from page 1

frostbite, which occurs due to exposure to temperatures below 32 degrees Fahrenheit, the Cleveland Clinic recommends trying to limit exposure to 10-15 minutes before going back inside. Yet, it takes approximately 20 minutes to walk one mile according to Google, and so bumping the walk up to 2 miles or 40 minutes (the maximum distance for the district to avoid bussing expenses), would pose a danger to families walking to school. My family would likely end up driving to school due to the lack of safety, and therefore the whole reason we live in a walking community is no longer valid. Increasing walking distances for young children and adding traffic congestion contradicts Lakewood's commitment to being a walkable community for residents and students.

Social/Emotional Wellbeing: The children currently in mid-elementary wore masks for their preschool experiences at Lakewood City Schools. Necessary at the time, yes, but these children are still recovering from the social-emotional impacts of the pandemic and beginning to solidify friendships and sense of community. To make a change midway through their elementary careers would simply be devastating. It doesn't appear that the district has given much consideration to the specialized care that would be needed to assist students with this major change in buildings and peer groups, particularly students with disabilities, on 504 plans, IEPs, and otherwise.

In the increasingly isolated digital era, there is something indescribable about walking our children to school in the morning and feeling part of a community. It allows us to get out in the fresh air, see a parade of familiar faces, and get to know other parents to facilitate playdates. Walking/biking to school provides elementary students a practical way to demonstrate sustainability in action. It inspires students and families to adopt sustainable lifestyles thus supporting the Global Awareness/Citizen Vision of a Lakewood Ranger competency by allowing students to engage in activities that promote sustainability and a more promising future. Young children who walk or bike to school are more likely to continue the habit as they age. Biking to school supports a Growth Mindset, as it provides opportunities to learn from our failures and persevere in the face of obstacles, like when your water bottle falls out of your backpack, you forget to wear gloves, or the bike rack is full, and you need plan B. For those in upper elementary school, walking independently to school promotes risk assessment, environmental knowledge, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities notes Mariah G. Schug, Associate Professor at Widener University. These skills enhance the Critical and Creative Thinking Competency. This is the "soft" side of the school

closure decision that is impossible to quantify in charts and data. I cannot underscore this intangible benefit of the walkable proximity of the public schools enough - it is a major draw when families are deciding to move into Lakewood. The mayor and city council should take note.

Even if you don't have children in public schools, closing schools can have far-reaching effects, including permanently changing neighborhood dynamics, potentially lowering property values, increasing traffic congestion and making Lakewood less appealing to families due to reduced walkability. If walking distances increase past 1 mile, there will be longer lines of traffic congestion near schools, as families idle in line until they can drop off their children at school. No one wants to get stuck behind one of these drop-off lines on their commute to or from work. Yet, it's understandable that many parents will not be able to walk their children more than 20 minutes one way to school.

The district has decided to proceed with redistricting the boundaries of all elementary schools, disrupting students and families, and is considering repurposing buildings as I describe above. Additionally, the district is planning to propose an increased levy on the ballot in 2026 after fellow residents just saw their property taxes increase at least 30%. Taxpayers will be asked for more money and it is important that our voices are heard on how the schools should be serving the needs of Lakewood's families. The superintendent will make her final recommendation to the Board of Education in May 2025. If you are passionate or curious about this issue, please join the Facebook Group "Save Lakewood's Elementary Schools" for further discussion. Emailing the Board of Education with concerns is another actionable step.

Caity Solomon, LHS '05, is a Lakewood homeowner, business operations specialist, and mother of three in the Lakewood City Schools.

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Lakewood Black Caucus Kwanzaa Celebration

by Shirley Nelson

The Lakewood Black Caucus Kwanzaa celebration was held on Saturday, December 28th, which was the third day of Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is a secular celebration of heritage based on seven principles founded by Dr. Maulana Karenga. Kwanzaa began the day after Christmas on December 26th and ended on January 1st. Families and communities came together to share a feast, to honor the ancestors, affirm the bonds between them, and to celebrate African and African American culture.

We began with an opening song, Lift Every Voice and Sing, by James Weldon Johnson. The lyrics of Lift Every Voice and Sing serve as a reminder for Black Americans that each generation has had to lift their voices, along with those within their community, to demand and protect their human rights. The celebration ended with a raffle and prizes and a community meal consisting of traditional African American soul food and desserts.

Guest speaker, Vince Robinson, is a multi-disciplinary artist and TV



Vince Robinson

and radio talk show host and owner of Larchmere Arts, Cleveland. Vendor and artist, Alsie Clay, owner of Artisan's Treasure, Euclid, provided a stunning piece of art to one of the raffle winners.

Our next community event is February 22nd.

SAVE THE DATE! February 22, 2025 – LBC Black History Month Celebration

For more information email shirley.nelson@live.com or phone 216-978-2626.

Seeking Forever Homes!

by Stephanie Jarosz

The Citizens Committee for Lakewood's Animals and Shelter (CCLAS) is hoping to find a loving home for an adorable dog named Noel.

Noel is a 2-year-old American Staffordshire Mix who is full of love and enjoys affection. She was found abandoned in Lakewood and has come a long way thanks to the care of the team at the Lakewood Animal Shelter. She's regaining her health and ready to find her forever home. Noel is a sweetheart and would be a wonderful pet!

Visit Noel, and other adoptable animals at the Lakewood Animal Shelter, located at 1299 Metropark Drive, just past the Dog Park. Contact the shelter at (216) 529-5020.

Lakewood Animal Shelter hours: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday, closed on Sundays.

This message is shared by CCLAS, an all-volunteer nonprofit organization committed to safeguarding and enhancing the lives of Lakewood's companion animals. We provide financial assistance and other resources to the Lakewood Animal Shelter for the quality care of abandoned, orphaned, sick and injured animals. In addition, we promote adoptions and advocate for animal welfare through community outreach and education. We treat animals with empathy, kindness, and



Noel

respect and recognize that they can experience pain, suffering, and other emotions. Learn more at cclas.org.

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COVE COMMUNITY CENTER

Meet Me At Cove:

Ron Blondeaux - A Story Of Service, Love, And Community

by Nancy Feighan

Ron Blondeaux, a longtime Lakewood resident, has lived a life rich in service, love, and community. He and his twin brother, Don, moved from farm country in Pennsylvania to Cleveland, eventually settling in Lakewood at age 13. After graduating from St. Edward High School, Ron was drafted into the Army. He and Don ended up in basic training together, with Don stationed in Germany while Ron served in Vietnam, overseeing security for a transportation company during a challenging time.

In 1969, Ron met his wife on a blind date arranged by Don's then-girlfriend. They married soon after and have lived in the same Lakewood home for 55 years, raising three children and now enjoying two granddaughters. Their son and his wife also foster three young siblings, further strengthening the family bond.

Ron spent his working career as a millwright apprentice at Alcoa Aluminum before transitioning to a forklift road mechanic, covering the northeast region of Ohio. After retiring, he returned to work as a bus driver for Lakefront Lines. For two years, Ron drove 48 kids on a West Coast tour, starting in Colorado, traveling through the West, up to Canada, and down to San Diego. He'd drive from Cleveland to Colorado, pick up the kids, and continue the journey. The kids affectionately nicknamed him the "Best Grandpa Driver." Later, he worked as a truck driver for Margus Construction Co. and served as the mechanic for their equipment and tools.

Outside of work, Ron enjoyed building trailers from discarded parts and helping neighbors with projects like rebuilding decks and porches. His craftsmanship and generosity can be seen in many homes along his street.

A passion for cars, sparked by a car show, led Ron to restore a 1949 Willy's Jeepster, which he plans to sell. His interest in vintage vehicles grew when he met his best friend, Frank, who



Ron Blondeaux displays photos of his family.

introduced him to the Jeepster Club.

Five years ago, Ron discovered he had a half-brother in the Philippines. He and Don traveled there to meet their long-lost sibling, and the emotional reunion was the beginning of a lasting connection. The brothers were welcomed by a large, loving family, and Ron has since returned for more reunions, with plans to visit again next year.

Throughout his life, Ron has remained deeply connected to his community, frequenting Cove Community Center for great food and conversation with friends. His generosity, kindness, and dedication to helping others have made him a cherished figure to all who know him. Ron's story is one of strength, love, and lasting relationships, demonstrating the true value of family, friendship, and community.



ARIES: The Ram focuses this month on careers; for 2025, let's focus on finishing something. You know you're great at starting things but not so good at follow-through. Just Do It!

TAURUS: The Bull is looking to move out of that damn Bull Pen this month. Good for you; the Sun is shining on that overseas trip you've had your eye on. Go for the Gusto Bull.

GEMINI: The Twins got some resources coming to you this month from other sources; keep your eyes & ears open. Slow the hell down for 2025; you move too fast, or you might miss it.

CANCER: It's time for the Crab to come out of its shell this month; romance awaits you. However, if you stay in the damn house all the time you're going to miss opportunity knock!

LEO: Lion/Lioness the focus is on your House of Health, moving into 2025, give your diet a make-over & start moving that body, take a Zumba class...the Jungle needs you to Roar like the King/Queen you are.

VIRGO: Virgos, the focus is on creativity & children this month. It'd do you some good to hang out with the younger people who still have no clue what all the worry about is. Play & Laugh.

LIBRA: The Sun is shining on your lovely abode this month. Spend time with family & spruce up the abode

during the cold, wintry months. Make your own sunshine, & then sing in it.

SCORPIO: The neighborhood is calling you to come out of your cave this month Scorpion. We know you like to live like Dracula, but there's always time for that when the Sun goes down.

SAGITTARIUS: The Centaur is pointing its bow & arrow at finances this month. It's time to examine how you're spending the dough for 2025 seriously. Make a plan to increase your \$.

CAPRICORN: This month, the Sun shines all its golden rays on you, Goat. Yep, it's time to get away from the office, & show the world what you've got. You'll have the energy to step it up.

AQUARIUS: The Sun is asking the Aquarian to take a break & make some time for reflection this month. Some things are going on behind the scenes you'll need to ponder. Solitude.

PISCES: The Fish is swimming from the pond to the Lake this month. It's time to widen your circle of friends, & organizations & get out & about. No excuses; the lake is big enough.

Eva Starr, the local astrologer, has been studying the moon & stars since she could read. You can reach Starr at evastarr@evastarr.com & her website evastarr.com



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Are you facing a legal problem that impacts Health? Housing? Family? Money? Employment?

Contact Legal Aid!

Browse legal information or apply for help 24/7 online: www.lasclev.org

Or, call 888.817.3777 during most business hours.

Legal Aid thanks the Healthy Lakewood Foundation for its outreach support!