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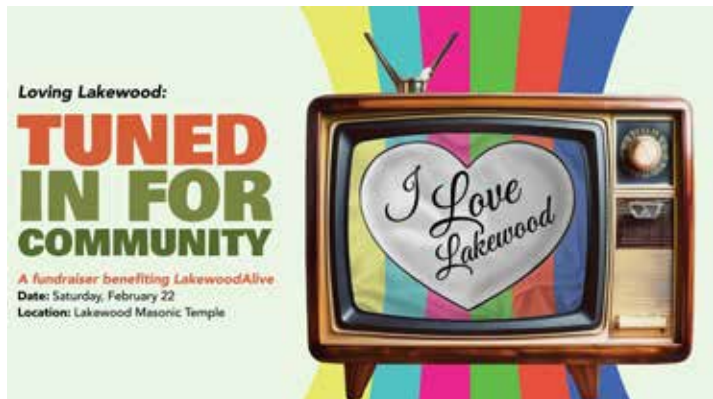
Volume 21, Issue 02, January 22, 2025

New Council-Person-At-Large Angelina Hamilton Steiner



photo by Kevin Wayne

Incoming Councilmember-At-Large Angelina Hamilton Steiner shakes the hand of Judge Tess Neff after being sworn in to her new role.



Tickets On Sale Now "Loving Lakewood: Tuned In For Community"

by Ava Olic

Loving Lakewood: Tuned In For Community tickets are on sale now! Both VIP and General Admission tickets are available for purchase through our website, so secure yours before they sell out!

Sponsored by Cleveland Property Management Group, the event will take place Saturday, February 22 at the Lakewood Masonic Temple

(15300 Detroit Ave.) from 7:30 to 11:00 p.m. The theme of our 12th annual fundraising event is classic television!

Featuring delicious food, refreshing beverages, a live auction, games and activities, a DJ, and more, it's set to be an unforgettable evening. Both VIP and General Admission tickets are available. It's all

continued on page 7

Kindergarten Parent Info Night Jan. 30

by Christine Gordillo

Lakewood City Schools' Kindergarten Parent Information Night will be held Thursday, Jan. 30, 2024, from 6:30-8 pm in the Grant Elementary School cafeteria. Students must be 5 years old on or before Sept. 30, 2025 in order to be eligible to enter

kindergarten in Fall 2025. The program will include a presentation from the Department of Teaching & Learning on details about the curriculum and the registration process. Registration for the 2025-2026 school year also begins on Jan. 30. Preschool registration for 2025-2026 is open now.

Death Of Bill Safos Driver Charged With Aggravated Vehicular Homicide

from City of Lakewood

City of Lakewood Police Department completes evidence gathering and evaluation of crash data that support felony charge in senseless death.

On Thursday January 16th, Zachary Saliba was charged in Lakewood Municipal Court with Aggravated Vehicular Homicide for causing the death of Bill Safos of Lakewood. Safos was walking at the intersection of Hilliard and Madison on December 11, 2024 when Saliba struck him while recklessly driving his vehicle. Because the crime involved is a felony, Saliba has been bound over to common pleas court. Safos, a dedicated and longtime Lakewood resident who spent his career as a beloved local broadcast journalist, died at the scene.

"The Lakewood Police Department appreciates the public's patience as we conducted



Above: Bill Safos who was killed by a truck driver. Jim Rokakis organized a GoFundMe page for the family. You can find it using QR Code on left or go to <https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-for-the-family-of-bill-safos-in-this-time-of-tragedy>

a very involved investigation into this senseless and avoidable crime," said Lakewood Police Chief Kevin Fischer. "We were fortunate to have the assistance

of the Ohio State Highway Patrol as we gathered and evaluated the evidence. We look forward to seeing justice for Bill Safos and his family in court."

Evidence gathered in the case documented that Saliba was operating his vehicle recklessly at the time he struck Safos. Video evidence shows Saliba committing aggressive traffic offenses just prior to hitting Safos.

"The death of Bill Safos was a tragic loss for his family and friends, for Lakewood, and for everyone who knew him. These charges represent an important step in ensuring justice for Bill, a longtime and deeply valued member of our community and an accomplished broadcast journalist," said Mayor Meghan F. George, who also serves as Safety Director for the City of Lakewood. "I want to commend Lakewood Police for their exhaustive investigation and analysis, which revealed additional evidence on the reckless indifference shown by the driver who caused Bill's needless death. Thanks also goes out to the Ohio State Highway Patrol for their assistance, external review, and expertise, which helped confirm key aspects of this case."

Elementary Planning Task Force FAQ

by Christine Gordillo

Over the five months that we have engaged the Elementary Planning Task Force and the community through our Community Conversations about a possible reconfiguration of our elementary schools, many questions have arisen regarding the process. Hopefully, the Frequently Asked Questions below will bring some clarity.

Our next steps include gathering input from the community survey, which is open through Feb. 2, and reconvening the task force for four more meetings beginning in February. The survey is available on our website at www.lakewoodcityschools.org or you can scan the QR code on this page. More information regarding the task force can be found on our website's Elementary Planning Task Force page.



Follow this QR Code to take the Schools Survey

FAQs:

Who makes up the task force?

The task force is made up of parents from all seven elementary boundaries, community members, city leaders, alumni, district administrators and teachers who reside in Lakewood. Community members, including District parents, make up two-thirds of the task force.

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PRESIDENT’S PAGE

Ringling In The New Councilmember

Neighbors, please join me in welcoming our newest Council-Member-at-Large, Angelina Hamilton Steiner!

On Tuesday, January 21st Councilmember Hamilton Steiner was officially sworn in to serve the remainder of the term recently vacated by now State Representative Tristan Radar. Councilmember Hamilton Steiner was selected from an impressive field of 12 applicants after extensive review and public interviews on January 6th and 13th. She holds a Masters in Public Administration and is a Director and eRA Manager for the Northeast Ohio Medical University.

Angelina grew up in Lakewood, and has contributed extensively to her hometown as a volunteer, having served and led on a number of boards and commissions

by Sarah Kepple

President of City Council/Council Person-At-Large



2025 Lakewood City Council, left to right standing: Cindy Marx, Brian Evans, Cindy Strebis, Angelina Hamilton Steiner, Tom Bullock. Sitting, Council Clerk Catherine Bach, Council President Sarah Kepple, and Council VP Kyle Baker.

including the Charter Review Commission, the Community Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee and the AntiRacism Task Force. Ms. Hamilton Steiner is the co-founder and treasurer of a grassroots organization, the Madison Court Community Coalition (MC3). MC3 was formed in response to an incident of gun violence at Madison Park in 2021. Since then, MC3 has sustained a positive, proactive presence at the park, improving the safety and usability of the park for neighbors and visitors city-wide.

The letters that Council received in support of Councilmember Hamilton Steiner highlighted the depth and breadth of her impact on the City and spoke to Angelina’s strong work ethic and character, commitment to the community, and ability to bring people together

to effectuate positive change. Angelina is the mother of two current Lakewood Rangers, and she has also volunteered

with the schools and her children’s activities.

Councilmember Hamilton Steiner’s appointment marks the first time in Lakewood’s history that the legislative body has been majority female. Ms. Hamilton Steiner is also the first person of color to serve on Lakewood

Congratulations and welcome to Councilmember Hamilton Steiner!

Please join us for our upcoming Lakewood City Council meetings:

6:30pm Monday, February 3rd - Committee of the Whole

7:30pm Monday, February 3rd - Regular Meeting of Council

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

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Lakewood Observer

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THE MAYOR'S CORNER

ARPA Dollars' Long-Term Impact For Lakewood

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

The City of Lakewood has a history of aggressively seeking and leveraging external dollars from federal, state, county, and other sources. As many of you will recall, perhaps our largest single success in this area was receiving over \$47 million from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (“ARPA”) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regulations for those dollars required that they be fully allocated by the end of 2024, and I am pleased to report that Lakewood met that deadline, using these funds to benefit Lakewood for decades to come.

The ARPA dollars came with strict guidelines and limited uses, but Lakewood was able to navigate those and leverage these funds for maximum effect. Early uses of ARPA focused on the immediate crisis needs of Lakewood residents, including \$1.9 million dollars to help qualifying residents pay their rents, stay in their homes or apartments, and prevent eviction, foreclosure, and ultimately homelessness. Once crisis needs were addressed, the City of Lakewood focused on applying ARPA to address several other strategic needs.

The largest pool of dollars - over \$31 million – went to reduce the burden of repairing our aged citywide sewer infrastructure. While this may not seem like an exciting use for these dollars, this was money that otherwise would have been assessed to our ratepayers in Lakewood – homeowners and businesses that use Lakewood water and sewer. By using ARPA dollars for sewer and watermain projects, we were able to keep down costs of utilities for Lakewood for decades on work that was an absolute must. We also were able to free up our bonding capacity, which would otherwise would have been largely eaten up with these very expensive projects, thus further saving



One of the skimmers at the water treatment plant. Not glamorous, but much needed upgrades to sewage and water treatment.

interest payment expenses for the City. In many ways, these ARPA dollars were a lifeline and windfall to pay for water and sewer infrastructure costs that had been looming over Lakewood for many years.

Another key focus area for ARPA dollars was enhancing safety for Lakewood. Funds were allocated to pay for new state-of-the-art fire and police radios; the introduction of welcoming safety ambassadors in our parks; traffic calming interventions on Lakewood streets; and the initial funding for an increase in the maximum number of police officers as our department faced several retirements and a challenging hiring environment nationally in law enforcement. This approach was in line with our holistic approach to maintaining a safe and welcoming Lakewood.

While we heavily focused on infrastructure and safety, we were also opportunistic in using ARPA dollars to enhance Lakewood’s public ame-

nities and key institutional partners. That includes dollars that went to upgrades at Foster Pool, Winterhurst, and Lakewood Park parking lot; the addition of Lakewood’s first pickleball courts; the construction of our new animal shelter; improving air quality at

City Hall; and upgrades at Lakewood Library and the Beck Center.

Our overall goal at City Hall was to use our large allocation of ARPA dollars to have far-reaching benefits – projects and services for our residents and a reduction of burden to our taxpayers – while also ensuring full compliance with ARPA’s strict eligibility requirements. I believe we were able to do that – and unlike other communities in the US, we hit our deadline and left no money on the table.

My directors and I appreciated the partnership and dialogue with City Council during the process to apply the ARPA funds, especially the leadership provided by three different Council Presidents during that period – Dan O’Malley, John Litten, and our current Council President, Sarah Kepple.

The City of Lakewood will continue to aggressively seek and deploy outside resources to benefit the people of Lakewood.



Please join
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Former State Representative Mike Skindell, County Executive
Chris Ronayne, County Councilman Dale Miller, Former
Councilman John Litten, County Party Chair Dave Brock,
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Joyce, Julie Lavelle and David Semler, Erika McLaughlin,
Adam Rosen, Kevin Spellacy, Leo Spellacy, and Dave
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LAKEWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY EVENTS

Upcoming Programs

by Lisa Calfee

Besa Presentation and Documentary -
“**Besa: The Promise**” (2012) Presented by
Dr. Mehnaz M. Afridi author of “**Shoah Through Muslim Eyes**”
Saturday, January 25, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. Main Library Auditorium
Dr. Mehnaz Afridi introduces “Besa:The Promise” which follows the important stories and moving photographs in Neil Gershman’s book, “Besa: Muslims who Saved Jews During World War II.”

Meet The Author - “Petro: Cleveland’s Handsomest Public Enemy” by Allan R. May
Wednesday, January 29, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. , Main Library Auditorium
Author Allan R. May recounts the exploits and final capture of Julius Petro, known for his good looks and bad behavior. Books will be available for sale and signing at the event.

Besa Presentation and Documentary - “Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust in Arab Lands” (2010)
Presented by Dr. Ori Soltes and Dr. Zeki Saritoprak
Saturday, February 1, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. Main Library Auditorium
Dr. Soltes and Dr. Saritoprak introduce the documentary and discuss Muslim-Jewish relations.

Presentation - Douglas Phillips, Cleveland’s Modern Stained Glass Artist
Presented by Jamie Miles from the Cleveland Restoration Society
Wednesday, February 5, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.Main Library Auditorium
Throughout churches in Northeast Ohio and around the world, the artistry of the Phillips Stained Glass Studio stands out for its unique use of color, shape, and movement. Jamie Miles will highlight the career of Douglas Phillips, believed to be the only African American artist to run his own stained glass studio between the years of 1952 and 1995.

Knit & Lit Book Club:
“**Now is Not the Time to Panic**” by KevinW ilson
Tuesday, February 18, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. in the Main Library Auditorium
Booked For Murder Book Club: “Those Empty Eyes” by Charlie Donlea Thursday, February 20, 2025at 7:00 p.m. in the Main Library Auditorium

Children’s And Youth Services

by Jeffrey Siebert

Family Weekend Wonders
Main Library- Fridays and Saturdays at 10:30 a.m.
Madison Branch- Fridays at 10:30 a.m.
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.

Winter Storytimes begin January 6, 2025

Just Baby ‘N Me
For You and Your Birth to 24-Month-Old Baby
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.
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.

Pre-school Story Time
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.
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.

Pajama Party
For You and Your 2 to 6 Year-Old Child
Mondays: 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Tuesdays: 6:00-6:30 p.m.

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.

Davul Drums and Albanian Music
Monday, January 27, 2025 4:00- 4:30 p.m., e Main Library Activity Room.
Thursday, January 30, 2025 4:00- 4:30 p.m., Madison Branch Youth Program Room.

For Students Second Grade through Eighth Grade. Davul drums are instruments played in the Balkans region during traditional folk songs and dances. Listen to traditional Albanian songs while making your own colorful drum inspired. No registration required.

Albanian Folk Weaving
Tuesday, February 4, 2025 4:00- 4:30 p.m. in the Main Library Activity Room.
Thursday, February 6, 2025 4:00- 4:30 p.m. In the Madison Branch Youth Program Room.

For Students Second Grade through Eighth Grade. In Albanian culture, fabrics were traditionally made by weaving clothes using looms. Albanian folk dress is often decorated with symbolic elements of Illyrian antique pagan origin, like suns, eagles, moons, stars, and snakes. Students will have fun creating a unique woven piece and learning about Albania. No registration required.

To sign up for any program, register online at lakewoodpubliclibrary.org/youth or call (216) 226-8275, ext. 140.



Lakewood Project Concert Features Women Who Rock

by Christine Gordillo
Join The Lakewood Project as they pay tribute to Women who Rock! The “Just a Girl” Concert is set for Saturday, Jan. 25 at 7pm in the Civic Auditorium. The concert will feature music by Fleetwood Mac, Blondie, Cyndi Lauper, Pat Benatar, Stevie Nicks, The Bangles, Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift, Heart, Joan Jett and the Black-hearts and more. This is a great way to spend a Saturday night with your family. Enjoying music, singing and dancing and celebrating the talented student musicians of The Lakewood Project electric rock orchestra! See ticket prices below:
Pre Sale Adults \$8.00, Pre Sale Students \$5.00, Day of Adults \$10.00
Students \$8.00
Visit www.lakewoodcityschools.org to purchase tickets.

LO SCHOOL FORUM

There Should Be A Very High Bar For School Closures - It Has Not Been Met

by Katie Slife Rustad

My name is Katie Slife Rustad and I'm a mother of four children, three currently enrolled in the Lakewood Schools and a lifelong Lakewood Resident. I'm also a product of the Lakewood Schools, as are my husband, my parents, my in-laws, our brothers and many of our aunts, uncles and cousins. My husband's grandfather graduated from Lakewood High in 1945, making our children 4th generation Rangers. To put it simply, we are entrenched in and massive advocates of the Lakewood Public Schools: our house bleeds purple and gold.

You may have seen information on the Elementary Planning Task Force that was convened earlier this year and the community meetings that were set up to communicate their findings. You may also be aware of the rumors circulating for the past couple years that the administration wants to close a school. I like to think of myself as a logical and pragmatic person - I assumed that if a school needs to be closed that's unfortunate, but that there must be sound reasoning behind it. I attended one of the community meetings with an open mind, hoping to gain an understanding.

In the 30-minute presentation we learned that enrollment is down, and operating costs have increased. The district has responded by eliminating positions through attrition, which creates the need to shuffle teachers between elementary buildings based on need. There is also inconsistency in class sizes across buildings, and some other logistical issues with operating decentralized preschools. This was all positioned as the reason to form a task force to evaluate building usage.

The task force was charged with analyzing scenarios for the buildings in the future. There was then a financial overview that told us that:

- There is no impending or forecasted budget deficit,
- State funding for the district is NOT impacted by the decline in enrollment, and
- Regardless of any changes made, Lakewood will need to pass another

levy in 2026.

This set the stage to cover the scenarios the task force reviewed, all but one of which involve closing an elementary school, several involve closing two...and this is where they lost me.

Based on the presented challenges, we're going to jump into closing buildings? There was also an expressed desire to open a centralized pre-k building in one of the closed schools which would allow increased enrollment in pre-k. There was no data showing unmet demand to justify a centralized pre-k. It felt like a very big leap of logic to me--as if the facts were chosen to back up the conclusions--and I left afterwards feeling very confused. A friend of mine on the task force encouraged me to attend another meeting - there is so much information he said, and it may take a few times hearing it to digest.

Hearing the presentation a second time only cemented my skepticism in the logic and after reviewing the information again several times online I question the school board's decision to go through this process, especially to alter the fabric of our school district so dramatically and permanently in such a short period of time. To list what in my mind are the main, but not only, issues:

- Safety was not mentioned anywhere in the entire presentation, meanwhile we currently have a crossing guard shortage. There was no analysis of how closing a school would change walking routes, therefore impacting student safety.
- The budget savings being estimated for closing a building are nominal when compared with the size of the overall budget. \$500K annually amounts to a 0.6% annual budget savings.
- Lakewood has to put up a school levy in 2026 but we are not being told the millage increase we would need to maintain all of the current elementary schools. Costs have gone up, it would be logical to appeal to voters to increase funding in kind. The 2020 levy passed with 76% of the vote - Lakewood residents overwhelmingly support the schools.
- All of the high-quality full-time daycare centers in the area already provide

vide preschool as well as year-round full-time care. There was no data provided to show demand exists for a central preschool building that only provides curriculum during the school year. To clarify, this is NOT a proposed daycare facility.

- Enrollment decline was discussed at length, but there was a confusing mix of "projected" and "actual" that didn't appear to add up. As one parent put it "the Math isn't Mathing." There is also debate about whether the actual decline is plateauing.

- There was a heavy reliance on "birth rate" to inform the enrollment projections, with no reference to the rate of households with school aged children. My perception is that many families with children move here with school aged kids, specifically for the neighborhood schools, making the birth rate in Lakewood a less reliable basis for enrollment projections.

I learned after the meetings that all of the scenarios were provided by a consulting firm that was hired before the task force was even convened. If we truly want a community informed decision, why is a consulting firm providing a small number of choices to the task force, almost all of which involve closing a building or multiple buildings? I also learned there was an

effort by the board to close Grant elementary school in 2009 that became very contentious, was opposed by the community--including community members on the task force itself--and ultimately failed. We just spent millions of dollars to rebuild Grant because the community demanded it... and now we're talking about closing Grant, or Lincoln, or Roosevelt, or TWO of those brand-new schools?

The community has already spoken: Lakewood citizens value our unique culture of neighborhood schools.

If you recently received the survey card in the mail, you may find it vague and notice it does not ask the essential question: are you opposed to closing an elementary school?

I am not a person that believes we should keep all schools open no matter the cost, I can concede that under dire circumstances it could in fact be necessary... but the case that has been presented thus far is just plain weak. That is the feedback everyone should be providing in the comments section of the survey: there should be a very high bar for school closures, and it simply has not been met.

Katie Slife Rustad is a lifelong Lakewood resident, graduate of the Lakewood City Schools, and mother of 4 Rangers.

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LAKEWOOD EDUCATION



Mel Diemert

LHS Junior's Poem Earns NY Times Recognition

by Christine Gordillo

Congratulations to Lakewood High School junior Mel Diemert on being chosen as a runner-up in the New York Times' Coming of Age in 2024 Contest! Students were asked to submit a piece of writing or art in response to the question, “What can you show or tell us to help explain what it’s like to grow up in this political moment?” Mel’s piece of poetry was chosen from among 1,600 entries from across the nation!

Mel's entry:

Queer Kid Imagines An Alternate Reality/Politics Disguised as a Love Poem

Queer: A synonym for an absence of love
Not a new definition of love,
But its antithesis
In this world, I cannot afford indifference
I was unable to find it at Goodwill this summer
I limp through life as a statement, a red flag declaring war

In another world,
We sit on the floor of our bathroom, 25, after a long day of work
Your hair is up
The world is quiet
And softly pirouetting
I know how to make your coffee;
4 sugars, a splash of creamer
It overflows the cup and pours onto the yellowed, aging tiles
And the world is a newborn baby with jaundice
Orange, crying, glowing
Effervescent is the word carved into our skin
In this world, I don’t listen to the sirens go by
Instead, I lean my ear toward the babbling creek of your throat and tune everything else out
I trace hearts on your shoulder, smooth down a hair
Jesus died years ago, but I swear for a moment
I can see him painting us on an easel in the corner
Clementine shelters his canvas
Here, indifference was baked into my childhood brownies
I was born clutching it tight like an IV
When I lost my first tooth, I tasted it in my mouth instead of blood
Here, love and fear aren’t conjoined twins,
Split in half and told they are not the same soul
In this world, I have cried,
But never wailed

Back in reality,
I’m a cozy home for uncomfortable questions
They fester, an ineffable wound
Back in reality,
I cross my fingers every four years,
Tight, like ribbons
Meanwhile,
Love becomes silent, it shrivels
And action is a highway,
A headache
Of noise

Elementary Planning Task Force FAQ

continued from page 1

Why weren’t more scenarios created?

The District created seven draft scenarios to share with the task force. It was stated early in the process that the District is open to other suggested scenarios, whether they come from the task force or the community at large. It is also possible that any of the seven scenarios could be modified.

Why wasn’t community input sought before convening the task force?

Part of the task force’s charge was to sift through all the data provided on enrollment, finances, walking distances, etc., and determine how best to share with the community information that took hours to analyze in a 40-minute presentation. It is not the community’s responsibility to sift through all of the data, although we welcome anyone who wishes to review the data themselves to do so. No decisions were made regarding the seven scenarios in the first round of task force meetings. Now that the meetings are concluded, the task force will reconvene in February to review the input from the Community Conversations and the communitywide survey as it considers its recommendation to the superintendent.

Why didn’t the District use current data for enrollment figures?

The information shared with the task force, the community and on our website comprises years of work and data collection. The draft scenarios used the last full year of elementary student enrollment data that was available to us (2023 -2024).

Why can’t more preschool classes with before and after care be added to the buildings with excess capacity?

State licensure requires dedicated space for before and after care that is separate from the space used for our K-5 education and has specific square footage requirements. We are considering all possible avenues to be able to provide these services.

How will repurposing a building impact the need for a levy?

The need for a levy is not dependent on any decision the Board of Education makes regarding elementary buildings. What could change is the amount of mills the District seeks for that levy although the public should keep in mind that we would repurpose a school for primarily educational benefits, not financial.

If we were to repurpose two schools, how many students would be in a class?

Grades K-2 would range from 20-23 and grades 3-5 from 23-25. Occasional exceptions may occur.

What does being a walking district mean?

Some districts bus all their students; others only provide busing for groups of students in K- 8 who reside outside a 1-mile or 1.5-mile radius. For example, Bay Village provides busing for grades K-2 outside a 1-mile radius, grades 3-4 outside a 1.5-mile radius and grades 5-8 outside a 2-mile radius. It all depends on the district. Therefore, most schools in Ohio have a mix of students who walk/drive and students who get bused. As a dense city of only 5.5 square miles, Lakewood, per Ohio Revised Code, provides transportation to qualifying students with a disability, and all of our other students walk/bike or drive. To further understand what it means to be a walking district, refer to Ohio Revised Code 3327.01.

Will there be another community meeting once the task force makes a recommendation?

We are committed to continuing to work through our process and analyzing our survey data. We pledge to keep the community informed as we proceed. The plan is to have one final community meeting once the task force makes a recommendation. We do not have a date yet as to when that would be but will announce it widely when we do.

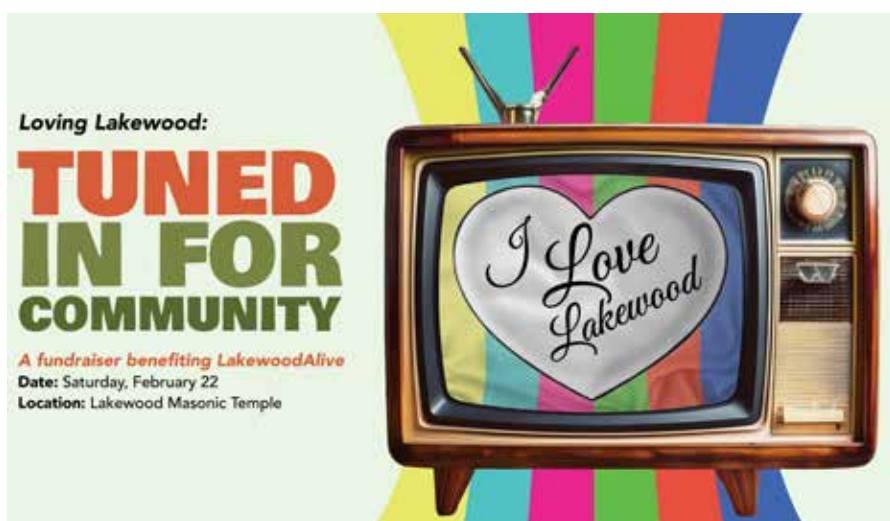
What will be done to address the social-emotional needs of those students who will need to change schools?

Once a decision is made, the District will allow an entire school year to strategize how to address all the needs arising from redrawn boundaries, including student wellness. Student Services Department staff, such as student wellness specialists, social workers, psychologists and family resource coordinators, families will be deeply involved in this process.

Note: Many online forums that discuss this topic are presenting inaccurate information or data points. Please visit our Elementary Planning Task Force webpage on our website as we will update our FAQs weekly as questions are asked.

Thank you for reading!

LAKEWOOD OBSERVER



Tickets On Sale Now

"Loving Lakewood: Tuned In For Community"

continued from page 1

about creating a sense of community—think of it as our own “studio audience” joining together for a good cause!

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Visit LakewoodAlive.org/LovingLakewood for tickets and more info!

Thank you to our amazing Loving Lakewood: Tuned In For Community Sponsors!

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Students Score In Sifma Foundation Stock Market Game

by Christine Gordillo

Congratulations to Seniors Katie Jirousek, Lauren Lange, Alex Adamov and Jacqueline Lyall on finishing 8th out of 293 teams in their region in the Sifma Foundation Stock Market Game! The team participated as part of a classroom assignment for 5th period Economics with Mr. Lewis.

The game gives students \$100,000 to invest in the Stock Market over a 10-week period and tracks their progress over that span. Teams of students from all over the state participate. Special thanks to the @LakewoooLakewood Rangers Education Foundation for providing the grant money for students to participate.

AND....

Mr. Lewis' students weren't the only stock market game winners. @

Three students, two boys and one girl, are standing side-by-side, each holding a green and white certificate. They are wearing patterned jackets. The background features the Junior Achievement logo and the text "Junior Achievement".

westshorecareertech students in Business Management 2 attended Junior Achievement's Stock Market Challenge Day at the Federal Reserve last week and the team of Aidan Smith, Chris Mathaios and Brayden McCarthy won third place! The team of Lincoln Krish, Mihai Bogdan-Chindea and Nathan Kopkoas also won an award for investing their entire portfolio in a single asset class.

Congratulations to these young financial strategists!



2025 New Year Resolution

[illegible]

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LAKEWOOD COURT

2024 Was Filled With Many Successes Toward Modernizing The Lakewood Municipal Court

by Judge Tess Neff

I am incredibly proud to share some of the amazing accomplishments that the court achieved this past year. It is challenging at times to meet our set goals, particularly with the significant increase in new case filings. For example, in March 2022, the court processed 503 new cases that month, compared to March 2023 which showed an increase to 599 new cases, and in March 2024, the new case filings jumped to 715. Despite the growing caseload, we are working harder than ever to maintain timely and efficient case flow.

In April 2024, the court launched the newly improved, modernized, and user-friendly court website after a complete overhaul. The website now provides a more mobile friendly outlook, provides more functionality for docket searches and payment of traffic tickets. Also, there is an embedded form for users to directly contact the court. Present day, individuals have better access to court information by computer or their phone if they choose not to visit in person.

May 2024 was full of excitement when the court learned it was awarded the Ohio Supreme Court’s Technology Grant for \$150,000! Cumulatively, the



Municipal Judge Tess Neff

court is now the recipient of \$575,000 in grant funding within a two-year period. Courts throughout Ohio applied for the coveted technology grant, and Lakewood Court was one of only eight courts selected to receive the maximum \$150,000 award. I am grateful to the Ohio Supreme Court for recognizing our essential need to improve technology.

You may recall from a previous article, the court was awarded a grant for \$425,000 in January 2022, which was scheduled to close on December 31, 2024. I am pleased that we strategi-

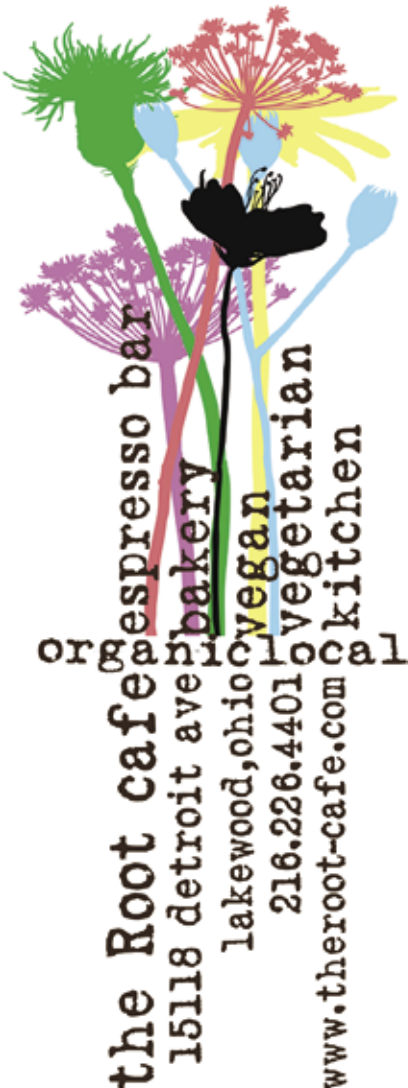
cally and wisely utilized the grant funds. Those grant monies allowed the court to purchase necessary equipment for the staff, to improve court operations, which included the cost to have the Cuyahoga County Public Defender office on site daily for indigent defendants, and to help defray the cost of a new case management system to replace the current obsolete system. The Clerk’s Office staff received individual desk scanners, and laptops were purchased for administrative staff. Then in July 2024, the self-service check-in AdGators kiosk was installed in the court lobby. This kiosk was made possible because of the grant award. Individuals that appear for their criminal, traffic, and civil cases, simply check-in at the kiosk upon their arrival; the real time notification is immediately sent to the appropriate staff. The kiosk is extremely efficient. It is a resource for users, and it eliminates staff members taking time from their daily work to conduct the check-in process.

Throughout the year 2024 the court has continued to reduce the number of physical files being stored at City Hall. In total, we have digitized eight years of civil cases files. Once the files retention is verified the paper file is shredded allowing for more storage space. 2024 was an important year for the court. It set the

foundation for a continued path to becoming a modern-day court. Together, we successfully accomplished the goals that we set for the court, and we see first-hand the fruits of our dedicated work in the people we serve daily. Today, Lakewood Municipal Court is a better place to work, a more welcoming and accessible court, and it is becoming increasingly more efficient with every improvement.

I look forward to this year and the unveiling of the new case management system during the first quarter. It will be the icing on the cake because we will have the capability for e-signature, e-filing, texting notices, and much more.

2025 kicks off my fourth year in office. I am hopeful to continue in this capacity for many more years to come. As always, I am honored to be serving as your judge in the Lakewood Municipal Court.





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LAKEWOOD CARES



Noel



Cheese

Looking For Forever Homes!

by Stephanie Jarosz

Meet Cheese! This 2-year-old girl has a warm and friendly personality, and adores having her back scratched. In fact, her name, Cheese, perfectly captures her adorable reaction when she gets a good scratch – she turns her head and reveals her teeth in delight! We want Cheese to find the perfect family to give her all the back scratches she deserves!

Meet Noel! This sweet 2-year-old girl is an American Staffordshire Mix. Noel is so full of love and adores affection. She was unfortunately found abandoned in Lakewood. She only weighed 19 pounds and was suffering from severe malnutrition and dental issues. Since she’s been at the Lakewood Animal Shelter, the team has worked to help Noel regain her strength and health. We want Noel to find the perfect family to shower her with love!

Visit Cheese, Noel, and the other animals at the Lakewood Animal Shel-

ter 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 the Citizens Committee for Lakewood’s Animals and Shelter (CCLAS). CCLAS is 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 respect and recognize that they can experience pain, suffering, and other emotions. Learn more at cclas.org.

Observations By Jeff: Bad Weather Isn't "Decent"

by Jeff Fritz

Watching the Weather Channel lately, I've noticed that the reporters keep using the word “decent” to describe various kinds of weather.

Some decent snow, some decent rain. I've even heard them talk about some decent tornadoes! What's wrong with these people?

There is nothing “decent” about tornadoes, or any bad weather.

To make things worse, local weather people have picked up on this and are using “decent” to describe what is really INDECENT weather.

I'll bet that Dick Goddard would never use the term, nor would he say “New Philly” instead of “New Philadelphia.” There is no New Philly anywhere on the globe, nor is there a Philly or an Old Philly. If you are too lazy to say “New Philadelphia” just leave it out of the weather forecast. It's barely in the viewing area anyway.

A cousin was visiting from out of town and wasn't familiar with Lakewood's pedestrian street crossing devices. She pressed the button and heard “Wait.” She replied “one-hundred-and-twenty pounds.” I thought it was funny because she's 130 if she's an ounce.

Not sure who's going to pay for the proposed football stadium in Brook-

park, but it shouldn't be the taxpayers. There is plenty of money in football. If owners can't afford to build their own stadiums they should raise ticket prices and lower player salaries. Sign better TV contracts. Stop paying fortunes to lousy free agents. Get rid of a few hundred assistant coaches. Then pay for your own bleepin' stadium!

I know that it's better to give than to receive, but I've always had a soft spot in my heart for receiving. Now that Christmas is over I have been thinking of some of the best presents I have received over the years. At the top of the list is the Roy Rogers Chuckwagon Playset. I had it for a short time before it turned up missing. Never saw it again after the visit of a friend of a friend of my brother paid a visit. Looked up his name and found that he is still living in the area. If he is reading this, thanks alot for ruining my childhood. There is, however, a happy ending to the story. Because of EBay I was able to reassemble the entire set through several different purchases. And I now have doubles of Roy and Dale and Pat Brady's jeep, with one wheel missing.

Jeff Fritz enjoys exercise, politics, economics, writing jokes and songs, and reading non-fiction.

Valentine's Weekend Concert At Blue Cafe

by Martin Jaffe

Romance will rule at the Blue Cafe, 15715 Madison Avenue, Lakewood on Saturday, February 15th, 10am, when noted local singer/songwriter Congito Jaffe returns to the Blue Cafe to serenade listeners with soulful original music of timeless romance. Congito's melodic vision is enhanced by the enchanting lyrical poetic vision of his lyricist, the noted poet Lady Ives of Rocky River. Congito's vocal and guitar stylings bring her lyrics to life in the warm intimate setting of the Blue Cafe.



As Shakespeare noted, "Music be the food of love." Do come feast at the Blue Cafe for this much anticipated seasonal event.

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Extra Items	\$0.75	\$1.00	\$1.25	\$1.75
Chicken	\$2.25	\$2.75	\$3.75	\$4.75
Extra Cheese & Special Toppings	\$2.00	2.50	3.50	4.50

Available Items: Pepperoni, Sausage, Mushrooms, Onion, Green & Red Bell Peppers, Anchovies, Ham, Bacon, Fresh Garlic, Black Olives, Hot Peppers, Ground Beef, Pineapple, Jalapeño Peppers Special Toppings: Artichoke Hearts, Fresh Tomato, Broccoli, and *Chicken

LAKEWOOD CARES

No Basis For Repurposing Elementary Schools

by Corey Snipes

I cannot believe the district would consider these weak arguments for closing or repurposing the fine schools which the community so recently built, and which are providing an excellent education for our city’s young people.

We moved to Lakewood and chose Lakewood public schools because of the district’s excellent educational reputation, and history of commitment to our children.

While enrollment has clearly declined since the early 2000’s, recent enrollment figures (from the community engagement presentation) point to a stabilization in numbers. A careful look at the enrollment figures from 2021-2024 show a stable enrollment, and are not aligned with the (old) projection data shown for 2025-2031. The projected figures are no longer valid and should not be used as a basis for major facilities changes.

Attendance boundaries are a well-understood and common approach to addressing class size and school attendance inequity, as local neighborhood dynamics change over time. The task force should focus on the re-establishing attendance boundaries to address class size inequity and teacher travel issues.

If the district requires additional funds to continue operating at its current level, additional levees should be pursued.

The Lakewood community will gladly support additional funds, as long as we believe the district is making wise, long-term decisions for the future of our schools and our children. Closing or repurposing our excellent school buildings is short-sighted.

Corey Snipes, Edwards Ave (two kids in Lakewood public schools since 2018, Lakewood business owner)

Legal Aid May Be Able To Help Students Struggling With Schoolwork, Suspensions

by Tonya Sams

Being a parent is not an easy job, but it becomes more complicated when a child is having problems in school. If a child is struggling with schoolwork, continuous suspensions or other issues, they may need additional support. Requesting an evaluation for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) from the school can help determine what, if any, additional help a child may need.

“What we would recommend a parent do is to communicate with the school, preferably in writing with the date on it, asking that their child be evaluated for an IEP,” said Emily Adams, a Staff Attorney in the Health & Opportunity Law Practice at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. “That doesn’t necessarily mean that a child will qualify for an IEP, but a full evaluation will be able to kind of get a picture as to what’s going on with a child academically and behaviorally.”

Under Ohio law, a school has 30 days to respond to an IEP evaluation request. Because many parents find it hard to get a response to an evaluation request, keeping a dated copy of the written request for an evaluation would prove that a request was made and how long it’s been since it was requested.

An IEP evaluation looks at the child as a whole. It tests all the areas of a child’s suspected disability. This could include evaluating the student’s cognitive performance, reading, writing and math skills, as well as social and emotional skills. The IEP evaluation could also include testing a student to determine if they need occupational, speech, or physical therapy. Once it’s estab-

lished that the student needs additional support, the school would be able to provide it. The IEP is designed to fit the individual educational needs of the student.

“Let’s say a child is behind in math or reading and their disability is making it harder for them to learn those subjects. If the evaluation reveals that the student qualifies for an IEP, the school will implement one with targeted interventions for the child in reading and math. This means that the child will receive specially designed instruction tailored to address the specific things they are struggling with,” said Emily. “The IEP could also provide accommodations if a child needs it, such as the teacher giving the student more time to complete a test or homework.”

A disability does not have to be academic. It could be identified as anything that interferes with a student’s performance at school, including mental health or behavior problems.

“If a child has multiple behavior referrals, suspensions or expulsions, it could signal that an evaluation is needed and that the student might be eligible for an IEP,” Emily said. “The IEP could then provide specially designed instruction for the student to learn things such as coping skills or executive functioning skills.”

Do you have a student that is struggling at school? Legal Aid may be able to help! To apply for assistance, call 888-817-3777, or complete an online intake 24/7 at laslev.org.

Tonya Sams is the Development & Communications Manager at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

Rotary Awards \$77,896 In Grants

by Lynn Donaldson

Grants totaling \$77,896 from the Lakewood-Rocky River Rotary Foundation will provide scholarships, encourage student achievement, fight hunger, and foster programs for community health and wellness.

Each year, the Rotary Club of Lakewood and Rocky River seeks grant applications from non-profit organizations that serve our youth, adults and community within Lakewood and Rocky River. Since its creation in 1952 by then-Club President Carl Dryer, the Foundation has enabled the club to provide over \$1.25 million in student scholarships and grants, accomplished due to the generosity of the club’s philanthropic membership.

This year, the club will award \$15,000 in scholarships to high school seniors and present \$7,100 in prizes to student winners in the club’s annual speech, music, and art competition.

A grant of \$2,592 was used for the club’s annual literacy project, purchasing dictionaries for over 600 third grade students in Lakewood and Rocky River.

Trials for Hope received a \$5,000 grant to support its community meals and market in Lakewood. West Shore Meals on Wheels was awarded \$4,500 to subsidize home-Grants of \$3,500 which delivered meals for 19 people per month. A grant of \$4,000 each went to the Rocky River Assistance Program for gift cards, holiday food and school supplies, and to Elle’s Enchanted Forest for ADA playground equipment, including an embankment slide and platform.

Three grants of \$3,500 were awarded to Lakewood Community Services Center to purchase a walk-in cooler for its new pantry location; to LakewoodAlive, for beds and air

conditioners for seniors; and to H2O (Help to Others) to provide a stipend for summer camp counselors.

Neighborhood Family Practice received \$3000 for phone interpretation for its non-English speaking clients, and Lakewood Charitable Assistance Corp \$3000 to purchase groceries for those in need.

Colors+ Youth Center, Twice Blessed Free Store (RRUMC), and the Beck Center will each receive \$2,500; Colors+ to start a new teen program at Cove Center, Twice Blessed to purchase towels, socks, undergarments, and bedding, and Beck Center to fund disabled students performing a theatrical show.

Youth Challenge was awarded \$2,000 to fund supplies, transportation, wages, and programming for disabled youth. The Rocky River Senior Center will receive \$1,704 to fund a three-day emergency food supply for senior citizens with no stoves.

The Rocky River Parks and Recreation Foundation was awarded \$1,500 for its outdoor summer concerts and activities.

Six grants of \$1,000 each will go to Rock-It-Out for QuickBooks and Microsoft software and personnel costs; the Lakewood Family YMCA for adaptive swim lessons for special needs youth; Lakewood Community Recreation Department to certify adaptive swim instructors; the Lakewood Public Library, Read-Along audio books for literacy development; Connecting For Kids, a family resource specialist; and the Lakewood Historical Society for its Ohio Heritage hands-on program for grades three through six.

The Lakewood Ranger Educational Foundation was awarded \$500 for healthy snacks for its kids’ clubs, activities, and field trips.

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COVE COMMUNITY CENTER

Meet Me At Cove: Oliver Harper, Neighborhood Paramedic, Lakewood Fire Department

by Nancy Feighan

Oliver has been a dedicated paramedic with the City of Lakewood for the past five years. Originally from Stowe, Ohio, his path into the medical field wasn't something he planned but rather a career he "fell into." With a master's degree in exercise physiology from Kent State University, Oliver's background as a strength coach, personal trainer, and boxing coach has shaped his compassionate, preventative approach as a Neighborhood Paramedic.

What stands out about Oliver's work with the Lakewood Fire Department is his passion for serving seniors in the community, particularly at Cove Community Center. As a Neighborhood Paramedic, he focuses on preventing emergencies before they happen, with the aim of improving overall health and reducing the need for emergency care. He finds this preventative approach especially rewarding when working with seniors, who often face social isolation. One of his core principles is collaboration with the Department of Human Services, a key resource for those in need. For Oliver, it's not just about responding to emergencies—it's about building a support network that can make a lasting difference in people's lives.

In addition to his paramedic duties, Oliver has spent the past four years working with individuals living with Parkinson's disease at Rock It Out, an exercise therapy program in Lakewood. This research-based boxing program provides tailored physical exercises for Parkinson's patients, and Oliver finds it especially fulfilling to help people achieve what they once thought impossible. He is a firm believer in the power of movement and exercise, even for those with Parkinson's, and takes pride in the positive

impact it has on his patients' lives. Outside of work, Oliver's personal life reflects his caring nature. He has a dog named "CC," who recently celebrated her fifth birthday on New Year's Eve. His family plays an important role in his life as well: his brother, Mario Joyce, is a successful oil painter in Los Angeles, and his sister, a retired detective, lives in Columbus. Despite the distance, Oliver visits his brother 1-2 times a year and stays connected with his family.

Oliver also has a passion for cooking, which he incorporates into his work by preparing meals for his colleagues during shifts. Cooking is more than just a hobby for Oliver; it's a way to express his care and appreciation for others.

Most recently, Oliver participated in delivering gifts from the Giving Tree to seniors in need. He found great joy in the experience, seeing the excitement of seniors receiving not only gifts but also the opportunity for meaningful interaction. "It was extremely rewarding to be involved with the small gestures that mean so much to the residents. It's nice to make people feel important during the holidays," Oliver said.

For many seniors he works with, isolation is a significant challenge, but Oliver and the Human Services team at Cove are working to address this by fostering connections and creating opportunities for socialization.

As a Neighborhood Paramedic, Oliver's role goes beyond responding to emergencies. He is committed to making a lasting impact on the community, particularly for those lacking social support. Whether through preventing emergencies, improving quality of life through exercise, or offering a friendly face, Oliver is dedicated to serving his community in meaningful ways.



Oliver Harper with helpers around the holidays.

Correction for Save the Date

In the last issue, the Lakewood Black Caucus Kwanzaa Celebration article stated that the next community event would be on February 22nd. The actual date of the LBC Black History Month Celebration is Saturday, February 15th. For more information email: shirley.nelson@live.com or **Call 216-978-2626**



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