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“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” - Albert Einstein

THE LAKEWOOD OBSERVER

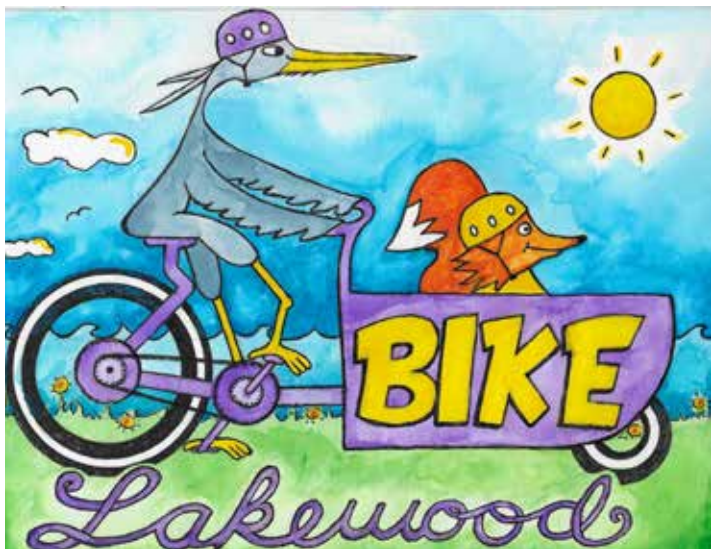
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Volume 21, Issue 07, April 2, 2025

In Case You Missed It



Lakewood Observer's April 1st Breaking News was that the city of Lakewood has placed sheep in the Holespital site in an effort to keep the grass low.



Bike Lakewood April Social Ride

by Rob Holland

You and all your friends are invited to Bike Lakewood's April Social Ride! The Bike Lakewood Social Ride is a monthly group ride sponsored by Bike Lakewood, a local chapter of Bike Cleveland, northeast Ohio's bicycling advocacy non-profit, so you know it's good. You don't need to be a member of Bike Lakewood or Bike Cleveland to come and ride. All are welcome!

This Social Ride will take place on Wednesday, April 9th at 6:00pm and begin at the Madison Park Pavilion. Riders usually assemble from 5:30 to 5:45pm. Come and partake the joyous vibe and camaraderie! If you're interested but haven't been in a bicycle group ride before, it may seem a bit daunting. It seemed that way to me on my first group ride, but you meet

so many kind and supportive and helpful souls that soon you're at ease, flowing with the pack. There is a waiver to sign, but there is no fee, and helmets are encouraged as are lights and high visibility apparel. In addition, helming the ride from stem to stern are Bike Lakewood's LCIs or League (of American Bicyclists) Cycling Instructors, riders with lots of experience and training.

The Social Ride route is an easy meander through the friendly confines of Ohio's bike capital for 6 to 8 miles ending up at Uptown Lakewood's premier neighborhood bar, Doc Lanky's, at 15609 Madison Avenue. This is a "no-drop" ride, meaning no one gets left behind whether due to a flat tire, leg cramp or anything.

continued on page 4



City Council Calls Press Conference

Safer Roads For Lakewood

by Jim O'Bryan

March 28, 2025: Lakewood City Council Members Tom Bullock and Bryan Evans had a press conference to address the need for a safety study and ideas for Lakewood streets. This comes after two different unrelated auto/pedestrian auto/bicyclist accidents happened at

Hilliard and Madison over the past month. They were joined by Council members Cindy Marx, and Cindy Strebis.

Councilman Tom Bullock addressed the need for updated and clearer safety measures in and around the streets. He said that Lakewood would work hard to keep our title as "The Most

Walkable City in America," and that Council and City Hall have dedicated themselves to looking for and finding better ways to be safe on our streets.

Then in a sobering moment, Tom pointed to the telephone pole covered in flowers from where Bill Safos was continued on page 3

Observe General Assembly In Action

LHS Students Visit Statehouse

by Christine Gordillo

Last Wednesday, 26 LHS students, accompanied by representatives from the League of Women Voters, traveled to the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus to meet with state representatives and observe the Ohio General Assembly in action.

Special thanks to the League of Women Voters and Senate Leader Nickie Antonio for generously providing transportation and meals for our students. Their support made this invaluable learning



experience possible.

This trip was part of a year-long collaboration between the League of Women Voters and the LHS Social Studies Department, focused on the theme of

Women in Politics. Through this partnership, students have engaged in meaningful discussions and hands-on experiences that highlight the vital role of women in government.

Preserve Lakewood Schools To Host Virtual Community Meeting

by Monica Bruaw

Join us on Thursday, April 3, at 6:30-7:30 p.m. to learn more information about the potential repurposing (closing) of one or even two of Lakewood's neighborhood elementary schools.

RSVP Here: <https://forms.gle/VEGzTmFMg-7m8uTt38> to receive the Zoom link emailed to you the day before the event.

Hosted by Preserve Lakewood Schools, a community

coalition dedicated to preventing the repurposing (closure) of elementary schools by Lakewood City Schools. The school board is currently considering whether or not to repurpose (close) up to two elementary schools (Grant, Lincoln, Roosevelt), and will vote as soon as late May 2025.

This zoom meeting is open to all: parents from all schools, residents, business owners, etc.

• Learn the basics of the issue

• Learn how this issue impacts all of Lakewood, not just the three schools being considered for closure (Grant, Lincoln, and Roosevelt)

- Ask questions
- Learn how you can get involved

All are welcome
Find more information at: <https://www.preservelakewoodschools.org>

Monica Bruaw is a mother of three and a lifetime Ranger.

Lakewood Public Library Events

by Lisa Calfee

Meet The Author: “Brotherhood” by Mia Jas

Saturday, April 5, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. in the Main Library Auditorium
Brotherhood is an uplifting story of loyalty amongst African American young men. Books will be available for sale and signing at the event.

Barbara Steffek-Hill Five-Star Matinee: “Dinner At Eight” (1933)

Sunday, April 6, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. in the Main Library Auditorium
The hours leading up to a lavish New York society dinner party reveal the hopes and heartaches of an all-star cast featuring Jean Harlow.

Book Club: “All We Can Save: Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis” edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson & Katharine K. Wilkinson

Facilitated by Dr. Mike Skladany
Mondays: April 7, April 14, April 21, April 28, May 5, May 12, May 19, June 2, June 9, 2025
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m. in the Main Library Auditorium
Join the discussion

Presentation - “Kurt Cobain: A Cultural, Historical Portrait” Presented by Dr. Mike Skladany

Wednesday, April 9, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. - Main Library Auditorium
Join Dr. Michael Skladany and friends for a unique presentation on why Kurt Cobain matters. Includes readings, performance art and an interactive audience discussion.

Terry Meehan Film Noir Series: “D.O.A.” (1950)

Saturday, April 12, 2025 -6:00 p.m. in the Main Library Auditorium
A man walks through the long corridors of a police precinct until he finally reaches homicide headquarters. “I want to report a murder,” he says. “Who was murdered?” they ask. “I was,” he answers. Join Terry Meehan after the movie for an engaging discussion.
Check out our new Spring/Summer 2025 Program Guide at lakewoodpubliclibrary.org or pick one up on your next visit!

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.

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.

Bricks and Books

Main Library Activity Room - Sunday, April 6, 2025 6:00pm - 7:30pm
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.

Tail Waggin’ Tutors

For School-Age Children.
Main Library Multipurpose Room
Saturday, April 12,2025 11:00 am- 12:30 pm
Your child can bone up on their reading skills during a one-on-one session in a dog-friendly atmosphere. Students can practice reading with one of the dogs and owners that have been certified through Therapy Dogs International, an organization dedicated to regulating, testing and registering therapy dogs and their volunteer handlers. Reading to a therapy dog can provide comfort, support and happiness for self-conscious readers. No registration is required.



THE

LAKWOOD

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Your Independent Source for Lakewood News & Opinion

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Lakewood Observer

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THE MAYOR’S CORNER

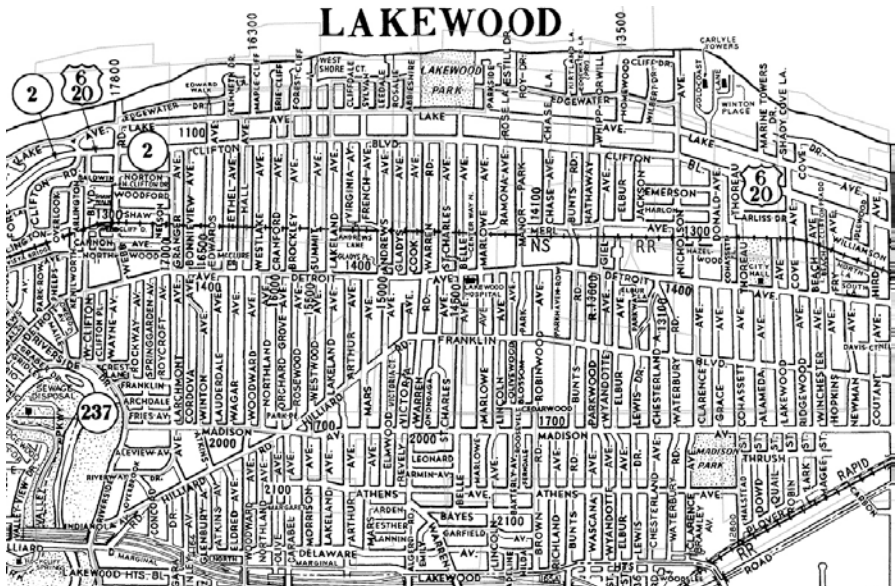
Improving Safety At Problematic Intersections

As many of you have heard, on the morning of Monday, March 24, 2025, a collision occurred at the intersection of Madison and Hilliard when a car struck a bicyclist with two children in an attached trailer. All of us are relieved and thankful that no one involved sustained severe injuries. The operator of the car was cited for Failure to Yield Right of Way and told officers that sunglare caused the driver to not see the cyclist.

This unfortunate incident serves as yet another reminder that drivers must be cautious and pay attention – especially in a dense, walkable city like Lakewood where so many get around on foot and cycle. Late last year, a pedestrian was killed near the same intersection in a felony vehicular homicide case, and many have naturally expressed concern as to how we can enhance safety for walkers and cyclists in the area. The City of Lakewood is focused on this effort and on making streets across our community as safe as possible.

The City of Lakewood consistently reviews data from traffic collisions to investigate any trends and determine if problem areas demand additional enforcement focus or possible infrastructure improvements. While the intersection of Madison and Hilliard does not rise to the top of the list of intersections where traffic collisions

by Meghan George
Mayor/Safety Director, City of Lakewood



occur in Lakewood, the City believes that this area warrants addition focus given the two incidents that have occurred over the past six months.

As an initial measure, the City will be marking the four crosswalks that span Madison and Hilliard with high-visibility striping. Additionally, green paint will be placed in all bike lanes as they approach this intersection. Bollards will also be installed at key sections of bike lanes as they approach the intersection. These measures are designed to draw the attention of motorists to bicycle and pedestrian traffic and cause

them to slow down and to more clearly separate modes of travel. The City will implement these measures as soon as weather conditions allow and materials/contractors are available.

The City also is retaining an outside engineering firm to perform further analysis on this intersection and provide any potential recommendations for

additional safety measures. This firm will work with the Lakewood City Engineer, our Planning Department, and our safety forces to ensure that proposed measures make this location safer and do not give rise to unanticipated risk. Certain aspects of the intersection design/stripping were mandated by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) when Hilliard was recently rebuilt through a County Public Works project. Now that this project is fully completed, the City has purview to update certain aspects of the intersection

Even as the City works to explore policy and infrastructure, I also share the opinion of those city council members who believe that additional public education, awareness, and focus are critical. We need all travelers through Lakewood to avoid distraction and to observe all traffic rules including posted speed limits, lane assignments, proper yielding/recognition of right-of-way, and traffic signals. Above all, we must all work together to share our travel corridors with care so that everyone can arrive at their destination safely.

City Council Calls Press Conference
Safer Roads For Lakewood

continued from page 1

struck and killed. “I take my kids there to be picked up for school. We talk about safety but not about the flowers. It is too close. My neighbors and friends were in the park when the father of two was struck on his bicycle. It was terrible, we must do better.”

Members of Bike Lakewood and

Friends of Madison Park came to show support for safer streets.

While the causes of the two accidents are unrelated, we all want safer streets, and let’s be honest, it starts with all of us. Stay off your phone. Be careful of new traffic patterns. Familiarize yourself with the rules, and be safe by looking out for each other.looking out for each other.

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LAKEWOOD EDUCATION

New Welding Building At LHS



Construction is underway for our brand-new Welding Building! This state-of-the-art facility will provide our students with advanced equipment and hands-on learning opportunities to prepare them for in-demand careers. Stay tuned as we build a brighter future in Career Tech!

Harding Wins Two "Stop The Hate" Awards

by Christine Gordillo

Congratulations to Harding sixth-grader Adeline Chalker on being selected as a middle school finalist for the annual Maltz Museum of Jewish History's Stop the Hate Youth Speak Out essay contest. Essay winners will be announced April 3. Stop the Hate also includes a Youth Sing Out songwriting contest, and Harding's sixth-grade morning class choir earned runner-up with their song "Listen to Our Words." This year, 4,419 students from more than 160 Northeast Ohio schools participated in the Stop the Hate contest and workshops.

Lincoln Does It Again

Jump Rope Club Raises \$8,897



by Christine Gordillo

Lincoln Elementary students wrapped up their annual Kids Heart Challenge fundraising campaign for the American Heart Association with an exciting celebration!

The Jump Rope Club put on an incredible heart-healthy show, wow-ing everyone with their amazing jumping skills!

After the performance, the big moment arrived—the reveal of the total funds raised: \$8,897 for heart health!

To top it all off, the leading student fundraisers got a special reward—throwing a shaving cream pie at their favorite staff member!

What a fun way to celebrate an incredible effort for an important cause!

FAIR HOUSING LAW REQUIRES A LANDLORD TO GRANT A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION AND TO MAKE A REASONABLE MODIFICATION

Fair housing law requires that a landlord grant a reasonable accommodation requested by or on behalf of a disabled person. An accommodation is a change, exception, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service that may be necessary for a person with disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, including public and common use areas. An example of a reasonable accommodation would include:

1. **READING MANAGEMENT ISSUED CORRESPONDENCE TO A VISUALLY IMPAIRED TENANT.**

Fair housing law requires that, in certain situations, a landlord, make a reasonable modification on behalf of a person who suffers from physical impairments, when such a modification is necessary to provide a disabled person an equal opportunity to use and enjoy the housing. A reasonable modification is a **STRUCTURAL CHANGE MADE TO EXISTING PREMISES, OCCUPIED OR TO BE OCCUPIED BY A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY. REASONABLE MODIFICATIONS CAN INCLUDE STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO INTERIORS AND EXTERIORS OF DWELLINGS AND TO COMMON AND PUBLIC USE AREAS.** An example of such would include:

1. **MODIFYING AN ELEVATOR IN ORDER TO MAKE IT EASIER TO USE FOR PERSONS WHO ARE VISUALLY AND/OR HEARING IMPAIRED.**

A landlord's unreasonable delay in granting or a failure to grant a reasonable accommodation or modification for a person with a disability is discrimination and violates fair housing law. If you have questions about your fair housing rights and responsibilities, please contact:

FAIR HOUSING ADVOCATES ASSOCIATION
520 S. MAIN STREET #2554
AKRON, OHIO 44311-1076
(330) 253-2450/(330) 996-4264-FAX

Bike Lakewood April Social Ride

continued from page 1

Cleveland weather during springtime is contentious at best, so if the Social Ride is cancelled due to storms the ride date will be moved ahead by one week. Lakewood cyclists are a hardy bunch so if the weather is merely a cool drizzle, please remain stoic and dress the part and come ride anyway!

Here is the slate for the remainder of Bike Lakewood's 2025 Social Ride schedule:

- Wednesday, April 9th, 6:00pm
- Wednesday, May 7th, 6:00pm
- Friday, June 13th, 7:00pm
- Friday, July 11th, 7:00pm
- Tuesday, August 12th, 7:00pm
- Tuesday, September 9th, 7:00pm
- Thursday, October 16th, 6:00pm
- Sunday, November 9th, 12:00 noon
- Sunday, December 13th, 12:00 noon

All rides will begin at the Madison Park Pavilion unless noted otherwise, visit bikecleveland.org for more details. As Freddy Mercury of Queen famously said, "GET ON YOUR BIKES AND RIDE!"

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Lakewood Education

Lakewood Baseball 2025--Building On A Fabulous Tradition

by Dr. Charles Greanoff

“Versatile and focused” were the two words that emerged as Lakewood Head Baseball Coach Grant Graves (LHS ‘11) described his 2025 Ranger squad, hoping to build on the stellar 19-5 2024 campaign. Having won the GLC-West championship last year, competing for the CWC title is among the goals this year—along with consistently playing their team-first brand of baseball. They have the players and the attitude to do just that

Multiple returning starters/letter winners anchor this year's team. Seniors Logan Ellis and Leo Soneson, both Mount Union commits, will lead the pitching staff, catch, and play corner infield spots. Sophomore Riley Verderber and junior Nick Hart will also pitch/play infield, and in Nick's case, perhaps spend some time in the outfield. Junior Cooper Russell will lead off and play the all-important



shortstop position, while senior Brady Long returns at 2nd base. Senior Ronan Johnson will continue to pull outfield duty, while senior Peter Checkett will pitch and play outfield.

“We want to compete 9-1, to have strong hitting through the whole lineup—offering no breaks for opposing pitchers--and putting forth consistently effective pitching,” Coach Graves said, pointing to the depth of talent and especially the hard work

his team has put in during the off season. Graves credits senior leadership and Strength and Conditioning Coach Jimmy Gajewski (LHS '10) with helping to transform a highly skilled squad into an even stronger, quicker group. These players have really gone after it in the weight room.

Many players will see their first extensive varsity action this year. Transfer junior Drew Jones will pitch and play 3rd base. Sophomore Luke Legato can and likely will play both outfield and infield, and along with Cooper Russell provides speed on the bases. Sophomore southpaw Jackson Comer will pitch in a variety of starting and relief roles, as will senior Chris Hanna-Kotula. Juniors Tyler Laidley and Jack Dowell will also pitch for the Rangers. Junior Louis Franz and sophomore Finn Schroeder add needed depth to the catching position, senior Justin will catch, senior Justin Lacquement will play outfield and junior Kenny Laidley will push for time in the infield.

Every season is different, and with an even tougher schedule than ever, it will be quite a challenge to best last years' 19-5 record. For the first time ever, the Rangers--courtesy of an effective fundraising campaign--will be traveling for Spring Break (Myrtle Beach) to take on strong squads from

Virginia, North Carolina and New York. The new Cleveland West Conference is strong, and the non-conference schedule includes traditional powerhouses Avon Lake, Avon, St. Edward and St. Ignatius.

According to Coach Graves, the consistent success of Lakewood Baseball doesn't start at pre-season practice or even in off season workouts, vital as they are. It starts with a tradition, built by coaches like Mike Ribar and the late Ken Ciolek, of commitment to getting better every day in all facets of the game. It is fed by the Lakewood Community Baseball Association, which has sparked interest in a sport that has seen numbers dip elsewhere. This year, 127 kids from 1st to 8th grade attended the LHS Baseball summer camp, staffed by our players. From fundraising, to youth sports, to parent volunteers and a supportive school district, Lakewood Baseball is a true community effort.

As a Ranger Baseball alumnus, it is gratifying to know that these guys from 44107 like and value being Lakewood Rangers. For the most part, they have grown up together, celebrating wins and enduring losses as a team for many years. The players and coaches are excited about the season ahead, with good reason. They have put in the work, and now is the time to play ball. Long Live Lakewood.

LHS Track & Field Alumni Legends Dave Mills & Michelle Sikes To Attend 45th Annual Ranger Relays!

by Charles Moore

Friday, April 11th will mark the 45th running of the Lakewood High School Track & Field RANGER RELAYS!

This proves to be a very speical event with the addition of LHS Hall of Fame Alumni Captains Dave Mills & Michelle Sikes.

Dave Mills (LHS '58), "...winning the OHSSA state title in the 440-yd. dash as a sophomore in 1956 and defending his title as a junior, also finishing second in the 100 and 220-yd dash that year. Then, as a senior in 1958, he turned in one of the most memorable performances in Ohio state meet annuals, winding up an undefeated scholastic career in the 440 by running the fastest schoolboy time (46.5 sec.) ever recorded in he U.S. and capturing the 100 and 220 titles to pace Lakewood to the state crown."

(Source, Greater Cleveland Sports Hall of Fame)

Michelle Sikes (LHS '03), "...qualified for the State Cross Country meet four years in a row. During those four years, her star continued to rise as just a few of her stats indicate. She was OHSAA 3200 meter State Champion in 2000, OHSAA Div. 1 Cross Country Champion (17:48) in 2001 and OHSAA Div. 1 3200 meter State Champion (10:49) in 2002. As a Ranger, Michelle earned All-American honors in outdoor and indoor track and cross country, as well as eight varsity letters between cross country and track."

(Source, Lakewood City Schools)

Dave & Michelle will be recognized at Lakewood High School Stadium at 5:15pm on Friday, April 11th!

All Lakewoodites are encoraged to attend!

Coach Moore is Lakewood High School's Boys Head Cross Country Coach, Boys Head Indoor Track & Field Coach, Boys Assistant Outdoor Track Coach (Distance)

Rangers Earn Top All-Conference Honors

by Christine Gordillo

Congratulations to our varsity winter sports Rangers who were named to their respective sport's Cleveland West All-Conference teams! The Rangers were led by five 1st Team honorees, including three Player of the Year and one Coach of the Year awards!

All-Conference Selections:

Basketball: First Team - Ariana Hueter, Lucas Seguine, Luke Vannucci;

Second Team - Elizabeth Doup, Charleigh Doxley, Riley Verderber;

Honorable Mention - Luke Bonvissuto, Ava Cuffari, Addison Garrett, Brady Long

Bowling: Honorable Mention - Anajd Dajlanaj, Hailey Ellis

Diving: Second Team - Rian Fetting;

Honorable Mention - JP McManamon, Riley Stallbaum, Drew Wallen

Hockey: First Team - Ronan Johnson, Tyler Volcansek;

Second Team - Gavin Beisel, Ryan Sterling;

Honorable Mention - Camden Fegely

Swimming: Second Team - Henna Memaj, Piper McElfresh, Ava Watts (400 free relay), Riley Swift (400 free relay, 500 free);

Honorable Mention - Shane Lindsay (200 free relay), Grace Lowmiller (100 backstroke), Henna Memaj (50 free, 100 butterfly, 200 free relay), Graham McAlvey (400 free relay, 100 butterfly, 100 backstroke), Piper McElfresh (200 free relay), Mia Resto (100 breaststroke), Caden Sandoval (200 & 400 free relay, 50 & 100 free), Gavin Stimac (200 & 400 free relay, 50 free), Riley Swift (50 free, 100 butterfly, 200 free relay), Ava Watts (200 free relay, 100 & 200 free), Daniel Azgrebin (200 & 400 free relay),

Player of the Year & Defensive Player of the Year: Lucas Seguine (basketball)

Offensive Player of the Year: Ariana Hueter (basketball)

Coach of the Year: Alex Cammock (basketball)

NOW HIRING LIFEGUARDS (will train)

The Winter booklet is now out

Adult Activities

Swim Lessons

Youth Activities

Driver's Education

Youth Baseball

Registration:

https://lakewoodrecreation.activityreg.com/selectactivity_t2.wcs

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School Discussion Continues

Planning Today Ensures The Best Outcomes For The Future — For Everyone

by **Nora Katzenberger**
President, Lakewood Board of Education

In Lakewood, our schools have always been the heart of our community. We pride ourselves on the fact that, on any given school day, our sidewalks are occupied by parents walking their children to their neighborhood schools.

As members of the Board of Education, working with Superintendent Niedzwiecki, Treasurer Zeman, and other District leaders, our job is to preserve what is best about our schools and pursue excellence in the education of our students. At the same time, we need to be aware of potential challenges to the things we hold dear.

One such issue is declining birth rates. Like other school districts in our region, state, and across the country, we have witnessed a decline in our enrollment resulting from an overall decline in population. Lakewood has experienced a decrease of roughly 1,600 students across all grade levels since 2013. The capacity utilization – the number of students in a building versus the maximum number of students that building can hold – of our elementary schools has dropped to an average of 68%, with a low of 62% for one school. These percentages use class sizes of 22 students as a target, which is below the State of Ohio’s standard of 25 students.

Due to this drop in enrollment, the distribution of students across our elementary schools has become unbalanced, leading to a wide variation in class sizes and the number of classes in each grade. We have had to move teachers between buildings to address these imbalances, which disrupts continuity and reduces their ability to collaborate effectively with colleagues. Our buildings are not being used as effectively as they could be.

If we take action to balance class sizes across our elementary buildings, we would enable more equitable attention to student learning needs, more opportunities for peer interaction, and more collaborative learning.

In fact, many class sizes would actually be smaller. These factors would help educators in every building achieve the level of excellence we demand of ourselves for our most important job: educating our children.

To address this challenge, in August 2024 we convened our Elementary Facilities Task Force, composed of 50 Lakewood parents, teachers, community members, District leaders, and others, representing a wide range of viewpoints. The purpose of this active, knowledgeable group is to provide informed guidance and strategic recommendations to the Superintendent on optimizing the use of District facilities, particularly where there is excess capacity. We provided them with an enormous amount of data about enrollment, building capacities, District history and finances, teacher movement, and much more. (You can view these materials on the Task Force page of lakewoodcityschools.org)

We also provided the Task Force with seven initial scenarios to consider, some of which involved repurposing one or two elementary buildings. All scenarios involve redrawing District boundaries. It is important to note that these were developed using parameters we provided that included: preserving walkability, minimizing crossing major roads, minimizing walking distances (well under a mile for most students), holding building capacities above 60%, and keeping neighborhoods together. Safety was a vital consideration throughout.

The Task Force has analyzed these scenarios, evaluating the financial, educational, and logistical impacts of potential changes, while incorporating feedback from the community. They have processed data, asked questions, reviewed community survey results, and engaged in detailed discussions. They have suggested modifications to scenarios and, over the coming weeks, will be narrowing the list of viable options. Task Force members have been able to put their personal interests aside to focus on what is best for the District

as a whole. They don’t always agree in the discussions, but that honesty is what will lead to a good outcome.

Those of us on the Board of Education know that effective leadership involves asking tough questions and having difficult conversations. If we waited until dire circumstances were at hand to have these conversations, we wouldn’t have time to convene a task force, analyze data, and involve the community. Frankly, it wouldn’t be a conversation. Change would be swift, and options would be severely limited. That is not a

circumstance any of us wants.

In the coming months, the Elementary Facilities Task Force will complete its work, Superintendent Niedzwiecki will make a recommendation to the Board, and we on the Board will come to a decision that we feel will be best for all of our Lakewood elementary students. Whatever plan we settle on, we will work together as a community to preserve all that we love about our schools and provide the best outcome for all of our children, now and in the future.

For Potential Elementary School Closures, “Fiscal Responsibility” Is Missing the Mark

by **Caitlin Solomon**

There has been much back-and-forth discourse on the topic of potentially repurposing (closing) 1 or 2 of Lakewood’s elementary schools. In the messaging of the Lakewood City School District (LCSD), the term “fiscal responsibility” has been repeatedly used in their reasoning for considering closures. This is presumably to try to best position themselves for upcoming levy support and show the community that they are being good stewards of their funds. I believe it to be well-intentioned, but omits too many community-held values.

In Community Conversations in fall 2024, **the district presentation included crystal clear statements that to potentially repurpose (close) schools, is not financially driven.** Presentation slides showed that **closing one elementary school would save \$500,000 which is roughly 0.6% Of the annual operating budget. That’s right, we are considering uprooting some of our youngest students and eroding the walkability of lakewood over fractional savings. This, to me, is not demonstrating fiscal responsibility, but rather the exact opposite** - not recognizing what is valued. It is alarming that in recent closed Task Force meetings, Treasurer Zeman has reportedly increased the estimated savings to \$1 million for closing a school. Are we spitting off figures in the dark? How were these figures not carefully calculated BEFORE we started considering closing schools and surveying the community about it? Fiscal responsibility means accurate numbers and an awareness of how these figures transfer to community impact.

To refresh the memory of Lakewoodites, back in Nov. 2013, a \$49,950,000, 30-Year Bond issue was approved by 70% voting in favor of rebuilding 3 new elementary schools (Grant, Lincoln and Roosevelt) and

then replacing the older half of the High School. Notably, those are now the three elementary schools on the chopping block. There is still \$42,122,692 outstanding with a final maturity of 11/1/2043. Regardless of if the District vacates or sells the buildings, the District is still responsible for repaying the bond. Given the overwhelming majority of community support in favor of the bond in 2013, I dare to say that the District should honor our collective funding of the new schools through at least 2043 when the bond is paid off. That would certainly show fiscal responsibility.

Personally, myself and my family vote in support of (and will continue to vote in support of) school levies because we value our community and we value quality education. My impression is that this is a heart-centered decision for most, and not one that can be quantified with data. I don’t believe that people are Googling building capacity or expenditures when deciding how to vote. We simply want to trust that we are funding the school system for the well-being of our kids and the greater community.

It is challenging to extend that trust when the process has been opaque (see my earlier article “Inside the Elementary Planning Task Force”).

To the members of the Board of Education and the district administration: We want to see responsibility for safety, social-emotional wellbeing, and an honoring of the walkable fabric of Lakewood that we have overwhelmingly supported for years. Let’s collaborate on budgetary ideas that would result in savings with minimal student impact. Then, and only then, can we trust that our dollars will be spent responsibly and in line with our community values.

Caitly Walsh Solomon, LHS ‘05, is a member of Preserve Lakewood Schools.

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PUBLIC FORUM

Well-Managed Enrollment -- NOT Building Closures -- Will Best Serve Our Students

by Katie Slife Rustad

I have written two prior Observer articles covering the many issues that call the process surrounding, and the data provided to the Elementary Planning Task Force into question. The one issue that has been in the news lately is capacity. The administration claims schools are being under-utilized and has presented capacity numbers to back up that claim. But what do those numbers mean, exactly?

The capacity percentages initially shared by the district are a function of state defined maximum student capacity per square foot. They are NOT a reflection of how the schools are being functionally used. The takeaway: Lakewood Schools have class sizes well below the State Maximum. For example, my daughter's first grade classroom at Lincoln with 18 students, is – according to the state of Ohio – at 72% capacity. The current overall capacity for Lincoln is listed at 71%. Rather than a problem, this seems to be a really great selling point to prospective parents.

The original capacity numbers that were presented to the task force were artificially deflated – they included the square footage of rooms like STEM and Music that do not have permanent classes attributed to them. They also based the CHAMPS and Rise & Stars classrooms on the state max capacity, rather than the actual capacity of those modified special needs rooms which are actually 8 and 10, respectively. Updated capacity numbers were shared with the task force on February 19 that counted actual classrooms, excluded STEM, Art, Library, Gym and Music rooms as well as administrative space, and assumed a max class size of 22 students per classroom.

The updated capacity numbers paint a much brighter picture – the elementary schools are at an overall capacity of 68%, and none of the schools fall below 60% capacity. The updated enrollment projections are

also much more promising, showing an expected decline to only 66% overall capacity in the next 10 years. That's only one less student per classroom, on average. The fact that enrollment is leveling off, and projections continue to improve makes a strong case for maintaining all seven elementary schools at this time. There is nothing lost by waiting, and if projections are rerun in 3-5 years they may improve further.

Given capacity appears to be leveling off, should we simply redraw the district lines and hope for the best? I believe the answer to our enrollment uncertainty lies in a more dynamic districting process going forward. If we take incoming Kindergarten class sizes into account during enrollment, and redirect students from over-populated schools to less populated ones, we could mitigate some of these class size discrepancies. For example, that same first grade daughter of mine is in a peer group of 56 students across three first grade classes. This is a bit of an anomaly – every other grade has only two classes. Had there been flexibility built into the districts, some of those students could have been directed to Horace Mann which has only 27 first graders in their peer group. Instead, the district tried to encourage families to move AFTER KINDERGARDEN. This was, understandably, met with backlash from Lincoln parents. Getting ahead of these discrepancies before kids are entrenched in a school community is essential. And having the three centrally located elementary schools offers the greatest amount of flexibility to shifting kids between schools, while maintaining the shortest walks to school.

There is currently legislation in the state house that would force public schools to offer a building at less than 60% capacity for charter school use. But is this a justifiable reason for closing a school when no other measures have been taken to address it? If there is a need for "recreation space" why doesn't the district rent out unused

classrooms to the rec, therefore reducing that square footage from capacity and offering rec programming in those spaces? What else can be done to work within these confines? Threats like the state house legislation need to be viewed as opportunities to get creative, rather than the boogeyman scaring the public into reducing the number of elementary schools.

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: as a community, do we value our neighborhood schools as an institution, or do we want to roll over and consolidate like the State House wants us to? If we look to the past, Lakewood has a history of thumbing its nose at outside government intervention and paying more in taxes to preserve our cherished institutions. Look no further than our world class library system, which notably is NOT run by the Cuyahoga County library system. In the early 2000s, the County Library teamed up with the old [corrupt] Cuyahoga County commissioners and attempted a forced takeover of the 8 independent library systems citing cost savings and efficiencies. The independents, led by the Lakewood Public Library director and Board of trustees, as well as concerned

Lakewood citizens, gained public support to stop this takeover. Then in 2003 Lakewood passed a new levy to secure additional operating revenue and a building bond that funded the renovation and expansion of the main library branch. Lakewood citizens rejected consolidation and cost savings, and then turned around and raised our own taxes, in order to preserve our independent library system. This is the spirit of Lakewood we now need to harness to preserve and protect our unique neighborhood schools.

The Lakewood City Schools, including all seven elementary schools, are a public institution. Once we lose an elementary school the odds of getting it back are slim to none, there is no going back. It is the public whose opinion matters most in the decision to make any seismic changes to our public institutions. Doing so under the directive of a single administration and without objective benchmarks, nor equally seismic financial or educational benefits, would be a huge mistake.

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

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BUSINESS NEWS

Sacred Hour Spas Relocating To Historic Building In Lakewood

by Mary Kate Meals

Sacred Hour Wellness Spa, a renowned Cleveland staple since 2004, will open its new 10,000-square-foot Lakewood location on April 26, 2025. Located just 1,000 feet east of its current site, the new spa located at 17514 Detroit Avenue, is designed to be a premier wellness destination in the area.

The new space will feature a range of state-of-the-art amenities, making it one of the largest spas in the region. Guests can enjoy 11 dedicated treatment rooms, a custom 20-person Dry Sauna, cold plunges, a Korean Scrub Suite, a Salt Therapy Lounge, and a Nail Studio. The spa’s social lounge will include a bar, while private men’s and women’s locker rooms offer a seamless experience of comfort and convenience. An outdoor oasis adjacent to the bar provides a tranquil escape, further enhancing the overall experience. There is also a expansive top-floor Recovery Suite offering a private, luxurious retreat with an advanced sauna, cold plunge, Moen Smart Shower, private dressing area, and a comfortable lounge, providing an ideal environment for relaxation and rejuvenation for guests who want to spa but also want privacy.

In partnership with Cleveland Vegan, Sacred Hour Spa will offer fresh Grab n’ Go options, juices, cock-



tails daily, and and a catering menu for larger events. Whether for a quick refreshment or an intimate gathering, guests will have access to high-quality food and beverages to complement their visit.

Sacred Hour’s Lakewood location will continue to offer spa parties for groups of 2-50, making it an ideal venue for private celebrations and gatherings. Gift cards from the existing Lakewood location will be honored at the new spa, and operations at the Rocky River location will remain unaffected.

With its thoughtfully designed spaces and comprehensive wellness offerings, Sacred Hour’s Lakewood location is poised to become the premier destination for relaxation and wellness in Cleveland. Memberships to enjoy the new spa are now available and can be found on our website www.sacredhour.com.



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Nicole and Seth Andregg present a check to the class of VernaAnn Kotansky, Barbara Wolansky and Ceil Kroszkewcz. Thank you to all of our sponsors: Chris O’Malley, LMT, Geiger’s, GreenRoom Vintage, SCA Painting, Pet Supplies Plus, Dairy Queen, Pier W, SLATE Studio, Italian Creations, Brewella’s, Akron Pest Control, Cozumel, Raising Cane’s, Lion & Blue, SKNLab, Barrio, Despina’s Bakery, Blossom Flower Bar, Phoenix Coffee, Two & Company, Hammer & Nails-Grooming for Guys, Lakewood Truck Park, Giant Eagle, Lakewood Art Supply, Hako Sushi, STEM Soap, Revival Bodycare, Sacred Hour Spa, Mars Bar, Blair Ritchey-Functional Luxury, The Studio Cleveland/Lakewood Yoga, and Lakewood Observer.



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LAKEWOOD CARES

Beware Of Possible Scams When Filing Tax Returns

by Tonya Sams

Have you received strange text messages from someone claiming to be the IRS? Or seen ads for tax preparers making promises that are too good to be true? Beware! Tax season is here, but so is tax scam season. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland has a few suggestions to help you avoid being a victim of a tax scam.

“The typical scams involve either identity theft or attempts to intercept refunds,” said Patrick Miller, Staff Attorney in Legal Aid’s Economic Justice Practice Group. “These scams include somebody who’s advertising that they are a tax preparer on social media. For instance, you may be used to getting a certain amount, but they will promise you that they can get you a larger return. The fraudulent tax preparer will prepare the tax return and claim credits that the taxpayer is not entitled to.”

If the IRS catches the errors in the filing, the taxpayer will be audited and must explain why they have claimed credits they are not entitled to. At this point, the refund is gone because the fraudulent tax preparer might have had the refund automatically deposited into their own bank account.

“Scammers may not do anything nefarious with the actual return itself but use the information that they're getting from taxpayers to prepare fraudulent returns in the future, beating the real taxpayer to the punch,” said Patrick. “The IRS is mandated to accept the first filing. The scammer will file the fraudulent return with a taxpayer's personal information, get the refund and then when the real taxpayer files their actual return, they end up getting rejected by the IRS because there's already a filed return.”

To avoid being scammed, it's best to be proactive. One way is to analyze

the tax preparer advertisements.

"The way tax law is set up, unless someone's situation changes, like adding or deleting dependents, or a dramatic change in income, their income tax refund will be relatively consistent year to year," Patrick said. "It could be a scam if someone is promising they can get you a lot more, that they know special secrets, that they have gotten thousands of dollars more for their clients or if they are promising something they can't deliver. If you receive something and are not completely convinced that it is from the IRS, you can go to their website. They have samples of all the forms that they

send to taxpayers so you can compare what you received with what is on the website.”

To avoid being a victim of tax fraud, go to www.irs.gov/help/tax-scams/recognize-tax-scams-and-fraud and www.irs.gov/help/how-to-know-its-the-irs.

If you have been a victim of tax fraud, don't panic – Legal Aid may be able to help! To apply for assistance, call 888-817-3777, or complete an online intake at lasclev.org/apply.

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

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ARIES: It’s your time to shine Ram, & there’s no better place than to do it in your local community. If there’s an Easter Egg hunt in town, you’ll be the first one there.

TAURUS: The Bull prefers to stay in his Bull Pen this Easter, counting his Golden eggs, because Jupiter, benefic of the Zodiac, is in the Bull’s house of finances, share the chocolate.

GEMINI: The Twins are planning to invite the whole gang this Easter, the more the merrier, whatever group you belong to is about to have some fun, double the pleasure, hippity-hop.

CANCER: The Crab’s career is getting its share of golden rays this Easter, & the goodies are coming from behind the scenes, thank the lucky rabbit’s foot & share the glory.

LEO: The Lion/Lioness is thinking of celebrating Easter overseas this year, bringing along a couple of its friends from the Jungle. Go right ahead, some-

one will man the throne while you’re gone.

VIRGO: Virgos, you’re about to get a payday from other people’s resources, maybe the fat income tax refund has arrived, you’re also getting bonuses from the career field, thanks to Jupiter.

LIBRA: Libra, you must be playing your cards right, you’re going to be joining the Lion on an out-of-town trip, since the Sun is shining on the relationship sector, looks like you’re bringing your other half.

SCORPIO: The Sun is shining on the Scorpion’s house of health, and Jupiter has landed in your house of other people’s money, smile & say thank you to the Easter Bunny & company.

SAGITTARIUS: The Centaur’s bow & arrow is aimed right at romance, and Jupiter is throwing some extra fairy dust on your relationship sector, both business & personal, go to the parade.

CAPRICORN: The Easter Bunny is showing up at your house, but Jupiter (expansion) is in the house of health, moderation is key, save some of those chocolate bunnies for the office staff.

AQUARIUS: The Sun is shining in your neighborhood, do something eccentric, throw a street party, Jupiter is in your 5th house (romance & children), you may just fall for the Easter Bunny.

PISCES: The Fish’s Pond is definitely filled with golden eggs this Easter, the Sun is shining on your finances, and Jupiter is hanging out at your Pond, filled with jellybeans & colored eggs.

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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Seeking Forever Homes!

by Stephanie Jarosz

Meet Lucky! He's a charming 2-year-old boy seeking a loving forever home. Lucky is a very loud purrer, a sign of his happiness! He loves to curl his paws when he's lying down comfortably (it's very cute!). He's a true treasure and deserves to spend his life with a family that adores him.

Meet Teddy! He's an adorable 4-year-old boy who enjoys being petted, especially a good chin scratch. Teddy likes following his humans around and is always seeking affection! He's quite handsome! Just take a look at his stunning eyes—they're simply irresistible!

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

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This message is shared by the Citizens Committee for Lakewood's Animals and Shelter (CCLAS), an all-volunteer nonprofit dedicated to protecting and improving the lives of Lakewood's companion animals. CCLAS provides financial aid and resources to the Lakewood Animal Shelter, ensuring quality care for abandoned, orphaned, sick, and injured animals. We also promote pet adoptions and advocate for animal welfare through community outreach and education. CCLAS is committed to treating animals with empathy, kindness, and respect, recognizing their capacity to experience pain, suffering, and a range of emotions. Learn more at www.cclas.org.

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COVE COMMUNITY CENTER

Meet Me At Cove: The Inspiring And Multifaceted Tony Vazquez

by Nancy Feighan

When Tony Vazquez first passed by Cove, he had no idea it would soon become an integral part of his life. Now a proud member, Tony’s story is one of transformation, connection, and joy.

A Lakewood resident for the past 15 years, Tony has led a full and diverse life. For 12 years, he worked as a general practice attorney in Cleveland. Afterward, he spent four years in ministry in Lorain before transitioning to teaching Spanish for 13 years at Cleveland Public Schools (now known as the Cleveland Municipal School District). His classroom was a bustling environment with an average of 30 students, and he thrived on helping them learn. After years of serving others in various roles, Tony retired and found a new home at Cove—an experience that’s been truly life-changing for him.



Tony Vazquez (Pronounced Bah-Skehz)

A Serendipitous Visit to Cove

One fateful day, as Tony was driving past Cove, he was struck by the transformation of the building. Curious about what the space had to offer; he stopped in to learn more. It didn’t take long before he signed up, eager to join a community that seemed to prioritize fellowship, fun, and health. Initially, Tony was a little hesitant about participating in activities. He came for the food and fellowship, but as time went on, he couldn’t help but get more involved.

A Journey of Strength and Health

Tony’s Cove experience quickly expanded beyond just enjoying delicious meals and great company. He began to participate in a range of activities that piqued his interest, including games, Jazzercise, Tai Chi, and Silver Strength classes. With each session, he noticed an improvement in his strength, flexibility, and balance. The more he attended, the more his overall well-being transformed—he felt stronger, slept better, and grew more energized.

The Silver Strength classes, in particular, became a favorite. Designed for individuals looking to improve their physical health in a supportive environment, the classes have helped Tony see tangible results. It’s not just about

physical strength—it’s about feeling better and living better. The improvements he’s experienced are undeniable, and Cove has truly become a place where he continues to grow both physically and mentally.

Tony’s Creative Side: Play-Reading and Karaoke

But Tony’s talents don’t stop at fitness. He has an artistic side that comes alive at Cove, particularly during the play-reading sessions. Tony and fellow members pick out a play, divide up the roles, and read their parts around a table. No acting or performances—just pure fun and creativity. It’s a light-hearted way to explore the world of drama without the pressure of standing on stage.

Tony is also renowned as one of the Karaoke Kings at Cove. With a voice described as golden, he’s earned a reputation as a crowd favorite whenever he grabs the mic. Whether it’s a lively sing-along or an emotional ballad, Tony’s karaoke performances are always a hit. And it’s no surprise—he’s been a proud member of the Barbershop Society for 15 years, most recently with the Tower City Barbershop Chorus and as the lead singer of the “Remember When” quartet for five. These groups perform at local civic functions, nursing homes, and even private parties. Recently, Tony

sang at a special 101st birthday celebration, delighting the birthday honoree with her favorite tunes. His dedication to keeping his voice in top form means weekly rehearsals with both the chorus and the quartet.

A Family Man

Tony is also a proud father of two grown sons. One of his sons lives in northeast Ohio, while the other is based in Denver, Colorado. Tony has visited Denver once and fell in love with the city. But despite the allure of the Mile-High City, he proudly declares that Lakewood will always have his heart.

Giving Back: Volunteering at Cove

Despite all the fun and activity, Tony still finds time to give back. He volunteers at the front desk, greeting visitors and helping make everyone feel welcome. It’s a job that allows him to connect with others, learn names, and share in the camaraderie of those who visit Cove. His friendly nature and enthusiasm are part of what makes Cove such a welcoming place.

A Life Transformed

For Tony, the quality of life has improved significantly since joining Cove. It’s not just about the physical

benefits, although those are certainly important. It’s about the community, friendships, and the opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. He loves meeting new people, participating in events, and especially going on trips like the Trinity Brown Bag Concerts, where music and culture come together in a joyous celebration.

Tony’s story is a testament to the power of community and the personal transformation that can come from engaging in new activities, meeting new people, and taking care of both mind and body. Cove has not just been a place for Tony to hang his hat—it’s been a place where he’s flourished, strengthened, and found a true sense of belonging.

So next time you’re at Cove, be sure to look for Tony—you might just catch him belting out a karaoke tune or helping a visitor feel at home.

If you’re interested in volunteering with the Division of Aging at Cove, please contact Barry Wemyss at 216-529-5005.

Nancy Feighan is Project Specialist II, Department of Human Services, City of Lakewood.



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