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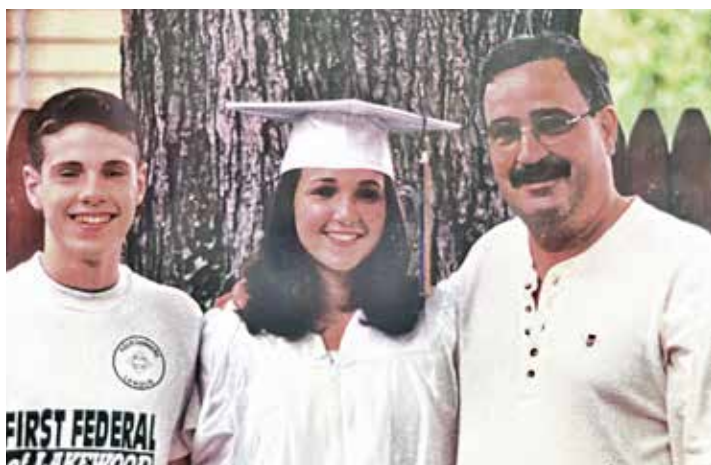
Volume 21, Issue 08, April 16, 2025

Letter To The Community Regarding The Future Of Lakewood City Schools

by Meghan George

Lakewood is a city with a high quality of life, positive momentum, and a history of providing its residents with the best in public assets and services. A bedrock of this value proposition has always been our Lakewood City Schools and their neighborhood-based model of education. In practice, that has always meant an excellent standard of learning set within walkable schools. This approach to education was the product of a long-term vision that has served our community extremely well for over a century. It is one of the primary reasons people choose Lakewood as their home.

Last year, the Lakewood Board of Education established an Elementary Planning Task Force to “explore the optimal use and maintenance of District facilities.” This task force has been provided seven scenarios for the future of Lakewood's elementary schools; however, only one of those scenarios involves main-



With my brother, Tim, and my dad, Tom (the honorable former Mayor of Lakewood) on graduation day. We all went through Lakewood schools. I'm an LHS graduate, former Lakewood City Academy school board member, mom to a Lincoln elementary preschooler, and current Mayor and Safety Director of Lakewood.

taining our tradition and core value of walkable, neighborhood-based education. The other six all suggest closing at least one and possibly even two of our neighborhood schools. For many reasons, I believe that this task force process is overly focused on shedding facilities and should instead be refocused on how to maintain our traditional approach to education in Lakewood.

For those who may not have a full history, in the early 2000s Lakewood City Schools undertook the creation of its 50 Year Committee. This plan was based in part on the assumption of a decrease in enrollment (which has come to fruition). The 50 Year Committee examined all factors and recommended an expansive overhaul of our

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Madison Park Chalk Fest Slated For May 4

by Matt Bixenstine

It's been said that everyone's an artist. Here's your chance to let your creativity shine.

Friends of Madison Park proudly announces Madison Park Chalk Fest taking place Sunday, May 4, from 2 to 3:30 pm in the center of our park in partnership with the City of Lakewood.

This free event has a singular goal: Celebrate our park and the spirit of community by filling the entire pavement area surrounding our Little Free Locker Room with chalk art.

Speaking of the Locker Room, this structure will be stocked full of free-to-use chalk for the occasion. Simply bring yourself and your artistic nature to participate.

Complimentary light refreshments will be provided, and we'll have music playing to set the atmosphere.

We hope to see you on May 4 (Star Wars chalk art welcome)! Rain date = May 18.

Matt Bixenstine enjoys all things Lakewood, especially walking his basset hound through Madison Park.

Lakewood Police Department - Blue Envelope Program

from Lakewood Police

The Lakewood Police Department is launching a new program to help residents with special needs communicate with officers during motor vehicle operator interactions. The Blue Envelope Program helps individuals on the autism spectrum or with other disabilities provide documents to officers, along with details on any communication issues they may have, especially during stressful situations.

Participants keep a copy of their driver's license/identification, vehicle registration, and current insurance card inside the envelope, and it is to remain inside the vehicle at all times. General instructions for the officer are printed on the outside of the envelope alongside the participant's name, emergency contact, and details about their specific needs.

“After hearing about similar programs, we reached out



to San Diego County Sheriff's Department and the Mahoning County Prosecutor. They were able to provide resources for us to begin building the program. We feel that this is an outstanding opportunity to do something new to help our interactions with the public,” said Officer Melissa Mazor, who serves as one of Lakewood's Neighborhood Officers in the city's Ward 4 region.

“This program is our most recent introduction in our ongoing effort to improve relations between police and the residents and visitors within Lakewood. As a department, we make sure that the safety

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Vote For Your Favorite Students Design Logos For “Meet The Trucks”

by Rachel Shurtleff

Students from Lakewood High School are putting their creativity in the driver's seat as they take on a unique community challenge — designing logos for this year's Meet the Trucks event. The art class, led by Mrs. McQuay, has been hard at work creating a variety of logo concepts that capture the fun, family-friendly spirit of the event. From fire engines to bulldozers to construction equipment, each student has put their own spin on what Meet the Trucks represents in the community.

Now, it's your turn to help steer the decision! The public is invited to view the student-designed logos and vote for their favorite. The winning design will be featured on all promotional materials and signage for the event.



Meet The Trucks, every family's favorite event for the kids, asks for your help on Page 8. Please read and VOTE!

Voting and logo previews can be found through our website at: <https://www.lecpta.com> - Meet the Trucks 2025 Logo Contest. Voting will be open from today through April 30th.

Meet the Trucks has become a beloved Lakewood tradition, marking the unofficial start of summer.

Organized by Lakewood's Early Childhood PTA, the event is scheduled for Saturday, June 7th at Lakewood Park, and promises to be a day full of fun, excitement, and hands-on experiences for kids and families alike. Children will have the chance to explore

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THE PRESIDENT’S PAGE

A is for April, Affordability & Active Transportation

Happy Spring Neighbors!
Recently, City Council held our strategic planning meeting to germinate the seeds that have been planted by our ongoing conversations with many of you as well as our own experiences living in the community we serve. Not surprisingly, two of the subjects most on the minds of councilmembers are ones very often shared by residents: Affordable Housing and Safe Streets.

Financial advisors recommend spending 30% or less of income on housing, but due to wage stagnation and rising rents, 49.7% of U.S. households are forced to spend more, according to the US Census Bureau. The City adopted a long-term Affordable Housing Strategy in 2019, and we must continue to take both ambitious leaps and many small, practical steps to address this nationwide crisis affecting our local community. I was proud to introduce one common sense action with Vice President Baker and Mayor George. Ordinance 15-2025, currently before Finance Committee, would increase the number of residents eligible for discounted water/sewer rates based on adjusted gross income, excluding non-taxable Social Security benefits.

Speaking of Social Security benefits, Lakewood is fortunate to be home to a critical SSA field office, the number of which are shrinking due to President Trump’s reduction in force orders. Trump’s proposed budget also requires huge cuts to healthcare programs. Council joined with the North Shore AFL-CIO to adopt Resolution 2025-16 advocating for the protection of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and supporting the retention and fair treatment of essential federal employees who help our residents navigate their benefits.

Council also very much shares the community’s expressed concern about multi-modal transportation—the abil-

by Sarah Kepple
President of City Council/Council Person-At-Large



On April 7th, Council was joined by members of Cleveland American Middle Eastern Organization for the adoption of Resolution 2025-14 recognizing April as Arab American Heritage Month. Lakewood is proud to be home to one of the largest Arab American populations in Ohio.

ity of pedestrians, cyclists, and assistive mobility device users to safely share the rights of way with motorists. Last year the City adopted the Active Transportation & Safe Streets for All Plans. Since then, VP Baker and I have been working with the Administration on a Complete Streets Ordinance facilitating public engagement in multi-modal infrastructure planning. We expect to introduce the ordinance at the upcoming full council meeting on April 21st as well as an ordinance establishing a Complete and Active Streets Education & Advisory Committee which would combine the lived experiences of residents with the expertise of our professional staff at City Hall to help us all be safer together.

Please join us for our upcoming Lakewood City Council meetings:

- Mon, April 21**
6:30pm Public Works and Sustainability Committee
7:30pm Regular Meeting of Council
- Mon, April 28**
6:00pm Committee of the Whole - Legal Aid

- Mon, May 5th**
6:00pm Finance Committee Meeting
6:45pm Health & Human Services Committee
7:30pm 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/>



7:00pm Joint Meeting of Committee of the Whole and Planning Commission regarding Complete Streets Ordinance



THE LAKEWOOD OBSERVER

Your Independent Source for Lakewood News & Opinion

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 **Lakewood Observer**

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THE MAYOR’S CORNER

Regarding The Future Of Lakewood City Schools

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school facilities. It called for “decommissioning” – closure in lay terms – of three elementary schools as a result: Madison, McKinley, and Taft. Other shifts in location and capacity were also undertaken. What that plan made clear was that enrollment would dip significantly in the future, and closure of these three schools was necessary to address the coming enrollment decline. As the name of the plan suggests, this plan was based on forecasting the next 50 years of our public school needs.

That planning process also coincided with Lakewood City Schools asking for and receiving an immense commitment and investment by our residents and taxpayers – the capital project that accompanied the 50 Year Committee included the complete rebuilding of half a dozen schools and vast renovations of the others.

While parents and the community were not enthusiastic about losing schools nearly 20 years ago, our Lakewood community answered the call and stood up for our children at that time. They put

their dollars forward in a major way to pay for the capital plan. In doing so, the understanding was that this reduction in buildings would be a long-term solution for future enrollment decline, one that would lead us forward for decades. It was also understood that it would protect our walkable neighborhood model while also improving the quality of our facilities to enhance learning.

Now, not even ten years after the completion of the capital plan, Lakewood City Schools is advancing multiple options to close schools that were just built. All of the previous planning and investment by this community seems to be ignored if we decide to shut down newly built schools and abandon our neighborhood model.

I have spoken to many community members over the past few months – both parents of current school children and many others who do not directly use our schools – and the consensus is clear, that Lakewood City Schools should not consider closing schools. People logically believe that this would spell the death knell for our long-held

model of neighborhood education in Lakewood and they also believe that any further closures should be the path of absolute last resort. I agree.

I also have spoken to the leadership of Lakewood City Schools and listened to their views. I want to stress that current leadership at Lakewood City Schools should be commended for maintaining a high-quality classroom education for Lakewood’s children and for continuing to navigate a challenging state and federal education environment. But at this point, they have failed to put forward a convincing rationale for the current heavy focus on closing schools.

School officials have stated to me that financial factors are not the driving force behind the current effort to evaluate school buildings. Rather, they talk about things like logistics in moving teachers year-to-year and the variety in class sizes within grade levels. These are normal challenges in any school district. They do not call for closing schools. If schools are closed, redistricting will be required regardless; therefore, the scenario that would employ redistricting to realign students should be the sole and primary focus at this point, not closing

buildings. There is nothing lost through the redistricting process, but we all know that once schools are closed, they do not come back.

We are all aware of the current chaos facing education at both the federal and state levels. This should not be a reason to throw away our long-cherished values here in Lakewood – instead, we should fight even harder to preserve them. I believe this is a time for Lakewood to keep a steady hand and not let the current winds blow us off our strongly held beliefs on education. We do not know where enrollment will be in the future – especially as Lakewood expects to add a minimum of 400 to 600 housing units in the next two to three years, and possibly many more beyond that. What we do know is that this community values our model of high quality, walkable neighborhood schools.

Lakewood City Schools must take the long view in this process. Closing neighborhood schools should be taken off the table unless or until there are no other options. We owe it to the children of Lakewood to do the right thing and keep our walkable, neighborhood school model intact and thriving.

Lakewood Police Department - Blue Envelope Program

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of everyone involved in an interaction is the highest priority, as evidenced by our Neighborhood Policing program, our officers’ de-escalation training, and our continued proactive approach to citizen encounters,” said Police Chief Kevin Fischer.

Mayor Meghan George added, “I am excited to see the introduction of this program to Lakewood. We pride ourselves as an open and welcoming community, and I commend the Lakewood Police Department on their dedication to enhancing the safety of all our residents.”

Several cities and counties across Ohio and the greater United States have adopted the program in an effort to preemptively clear up miscommunications and confusion that may occur, and to de-escalate situations that may appear to seem like a participant is purposefully resisting an officer’s directions.

Program materials can be picked up at the Lakewood Police Department (12650 Detroit Ave.), the Lakewood Public Library branches (15425 Detroit Ave. and 13229 Madison Ave.), and at Lakewood Fire Station #1 (14601 Madison Ave.). For more information on the program, please contact the Lakewood Police Department.

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SCHOOL DISCUSSION FORUM

With Better Management, Schools Can Stay Open

by Dan Kirk

The Board of Education and the district are entrusted to manage the school system. With good management, there can be seven elementary schools—preserving our neighborhood schools and safeguarding them for our future. With enrollment stabilizing, classroom sizes projected to equalize starting with the 26-27 school year, little financial benefit, and an overarching lack of transparency, our question remains: Why are we still discussing closing an elementary school?

In fact, why did we even start the discussion in the first place? We have been told by the superintendent that “nothing is on fire”, “there is no emergency”, “this process isn’t taking place because of school finances” and “the passing of a new levy will need to happen regardless”. Convening a task force and asking them to review possibilities of expanding Pre-K by closing an elementary school wastes task force members’ time and brain power because it’s unclear what the impetus was in the first place. The Lakewoodites on the task force who I have spoken to are talented, intelligent, hard-working individuals. We could be using their commitment to provide support, guidance and perspective on a specific issue or problem and to figure out a better solution. Yet, with enrollment stabilizing, nothing on fire, and a wide group

of supporters from new immigrants to Lakewood graduates extolling the virtues of preserving seven neighborhood schools at board meetings, it’s hard to understand why the task force has been asked to evaluate six predetermined options for closing and repurposing a school or schools.

Speaking of the recommendation process... how does it work? This is a question that Preserve Lakewood Schools has posed to the school board and superintendent, and spent a good deal of time trying to understand. In short... there doesn’t seem to be an established process. For example, it would seem as if the three scenarios for closing multiple schools have been taken off of the table, but the task force didn’t explicitly vote on that elimination. Who interpreted the work of the task force by removing those scenarios? The consultant? Superintendent? Board of Education? Is this the process they will follow for the final recommendation? It lacks clarity and transparency. The members of the task force and community deserve a better explanation!

Convening a task force, without clearly articulating the problem for them to solve and instead providing them predetermined solutions, is a management failure of our school district’s leadership. The parents and concerned citizens of Lakewood have

been speaking out and telling said leadership that this is not the course of action we want to see happen. When Preserve Lakewood Schools met with district leadership and two members of the board of education in person on March 11, we were hopeful to receive answers to our questions. Instead, most concerns went unaddressed as we were persuaded to stop using the word “closure” (even though they are attempting to close a school) and asked to not talk about how this process could put future funding of the school district in jeopardy. Would well-planned leadership attempt to close a school right before asking parents and citizens to vote to increase their tax rates? And why wasn’t our offer to help market the school district to attract new students acted upon? Lakewood is one of America’s most walkable school districts. It’s a slam dunk marketing strategy.

We also can’t forget the new justification that the district has started to use in an attempt to shift the goalposts. That of the federal and state funding cuts and attacks on our public education system. You see, the district’s new argument goes something like this: “The state of Ohio may in the future attempt to force Lakewood to close one of our elementary schools. So to counter them, we better beat them to the punch and close one first!” Makes little sense. Instead we should all be

united to fight against such attacks on our public schools. They say that a house divided cannot stand, so why did our school district’s leadership establish a process that is sowing division? Notably, the process began with a clear distinction that only Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Grant were on the chopping block, which essentially caused parents from the four other elementaries to disengage. The ones speaking up and holding the district and board accountable are being painted as the bad guys.

Even worse, the school district has wasted our tax dollars by hiring two outside consulting groups. One to create scenarios using outdated information, and the other to run the task force, with no specific process for how a recommendation will be made. That’s a lot of money spent on consulting for something that should be as simple as listening to our community, keeping our 7 elementary schools open, and putting more energy into marketing our great school district.

Dan Kirk is a concerned parent and member of Preserve Lakewood Schools.

Residents Want 7 Neighborhood Elementary Schools - Why Doesn't The School Board?

by Jennifer Schlosser

Over the last 8 months, Lakewood’s school board has been considering whether or not to close one or even two of our neighborhood elementary schools - some of our community’s most precious assets. We at Preserve Lakewood Schools remain very concerned about the lack of consideration for Lakewood’s broader community’s input in this conversation.

In November ‘13, an overwhelming majority of Lakewood voters approved a bond issue to fund the rebuilding of the same 3 schools that the board may now vote to close. It will take Lakewood taxpayers until 2043 to repay the nearly \$43 million left on that bond.

Yet, the district has presented the community, in the form of the invitation-only Task Force which meets behind closed doors, with information that a drastic change has to be made - closing one or even two of our neighborhood elementary schools. They have provided little data or reasoning to justify making this drastic change.

Unfortunately, the district began this process using and sharing outdated enrollment projections that were from ‘22, and shared that outdated information with the task force at its early meetings, as well as with the public at the community meetings held in Fall ‘24.

Since then, the district completed an updated enrollment study, which was released in February ‘25.

The district now projects that Lakewood will only lose 66 K-5 students over the next 10 years - that’s only 9 fewer students per elementary

With good management, we can preserve Lakewood’s neighborhood schools and safeguard them for the future.

school. The district’s own projections show a steady elementary population moving forward over the next 10 years. This could easily be recouped with renewed marketing efforts.

In a March 11, 2025 letter to the House Finance Committee regarding House Bill 96, Lakewood Schools CFO Kent Zeman wrote, “Lakewood CSD is a guarantee district with stable enrollment. Our enrollment over the last four years has remained constant at 4,200 students.”

The district held a series of open community meetings in Fall ‘24, at each of Lakewood’s seven elementary schools. The meetings weren’t recorded, no staff members were taking notes, and attendees’ frustrations mounted, as district officials provided few answers aside from the prepared powerpoint presentation.

In January, the district conducted an online community survey, receiving over 2,100 responses. Their own survey results showed that Lakewood’s residents want to prioritize safety and walkability at neighborhood schools.

Earlier this year, the district promised that the community would be invited to participate in an additional community meeting in April. At time of writing, they have yet to invite the public to provide any additional input.

The district’s stated goal - to equalize class sizes across elementary buildings - can easily be achieved by redrawing the boundary lines for the schools. With this simple solution - which has been on the table from the beginning - why would they still be considering closing a school?

The district has repeatedly said that the reasons for closing elementary schools are not financial. According to their numbers, closing an elementary school would save only \$500,000 per year - less than 1% of the their nearly \$100 million yearly budget.

Regardless of whether the district closes up to two elementary schools, they still plan to ask Lakewood voters to approve a levy in May 2026.

Read the rest of this article online at: lakewoodobserver.com

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LAKEWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY EVENTS

Upcoming Events And Movies

by Lisa Calfee

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 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

Meet The Author- “Where is the Number 2?” By Thomas Adams
Main Library Auditorium
Wednesday, April 23, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.
On Tuesday, December 7th, 1909, the railroad car ferry Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 left Conneaut, sailing into a brutal winter storm from which no one would return. The subsequent search, which has been going on these last one hundred years, has never located the sunken vessel.

Documentary- “if i scratch, if i write” (1982)
Presented by Alexander Benedict
Main Library Auditorium
Saturday, April 26, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.
Over half a century in the wake of his publishing activities in Cleveland, the legend and critical acclaim of d.a. levy continues to grow. Alexander Benedict presents the definitive documentary of the artist. Free republications of levy’s work will be available for all.

Documentary- “The Golden Age of Kid’s TV: Cleveland”
Presented by Director Dan O’Shannon
Main Library Auditorium
Sunday, April 27, 2025 at 2:00 p.m.
Join Dan O’Shannon, the six-time Emmy award winning TV comedy writer and producer of Cheers, Modern Family, Fraiser, Newhart, The King of Queens and Suddenly Susan, as he revisits our favorite childhood T.V. friends in his documentary, The Golden Age of Kid’s TV: Cleveland.

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.
Drop in to the Library’s special weekend story time. Family Weekend Wonders Drop-In Story Time is offered every weekend throughout the year and features a different theme each week followed by a craft. No registration is required.

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Just Baby ‘N Me
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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. No registration is required.

Pre-school Story Time
For You and Your 2 to 5-Year-Old Pre-schooler.
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.
Children and their parents will enjoy stories, movement and songs for thirty fun filled minutes. 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
Put on your pajamas, bring along your favorite stuffy and join us as we wind down for the night with books, movement and songs. No registration is required.

Color Our World Summer Reading Club
For All Children and Youth From Birth Up to Those Entering Twelfth Grade.
Friday, May 9, 2025 through Monday, August 11, 2025
Read for fun and rewards. Participants will be entered into weekly drawings for prizes and gift cards. Readers can check in online or in person. Come to the library and check in halfway through and receive a reward. All finishers select a new book to keep.

Madison Branch Library Renovation Receives Award



Left to right: Peter Bolek, President, HBM Architects; Persis Sosiak, President of the Lakewood Public Library Board of Trustees; James Shook, Principal, HBM Architects; Stephanie Shook, Interior Designer, HBM Architects; James Crawford, Director of the Lakewood Public Library.

by Andrea Fisher
The Madison Branch of Lakewood Public Library was awarded an Award of Excellence for Sensitive Rehabilitation at the 2025 Celebration of Preservation, presented by the Cleveland Restoration Society and the American Institute of Architects, Cleveland Chapter.
Constructed in 1929 by the renowned architectural firm Walker and Weeks, the Madison Branch has been a cornerstone of the Birdtown neighborhood for nearly a century. The renovation project, led by HBM Architects of Cleveland, focused on restoring some of the Library’s original design elements while modernizing the building.
Most noticeable is the restoration of the central ceiling area, which had been covered by a drop ceiling in the 1950s. The hidden clerestory windows were reintroduced, bringing natural light and improved ventilation to the Library. On the facade, the original sconces were restored with custom replicas created for the south side of the building as well. And in order to provide three spaces in high demand, the lower level was reconfigured to include a meeting room, study room and a youth programming room.
The Cleveland Restoration Society-American Institute of Architects, Cleveland Chapter jury, which reviewed numerous projects, praised the Madison Branch renovation for its timeless aesthetic and its capacity to meet the evolving needs of the neighborhood for years to come. The Library was one of thirteen winners recognized at the event, sharing the spotlight with other notable projects such as the Hotel Cleveland and the James A. Garfield Memorial.

LAKEWOOD SPORTS

Lakewood Football Gaining Momentum As RNFC Hosts Successful First Event

by Jim Maday

The Ranger Nation Football Club (RNFC) took another major step toward revitalizing Lakewood football with the overwhelming success of its First Annual Team Trivia Showdown. The event, attended by 150+ supporters, was held on March 1st at the Screw Factory in Lakewood and featured teams of eight players each, competing in a night of fun and competition.

The winning team took home a beautiful trophy, while the last-place team received the humorous Golden Toilet Award. The feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with many praising the event's engaging format and community spirit.

Building From the Ground Up

Lakewood High School Head Coach Mike Polevacik (known to many as "Coach Polo") delivered an inspiring speech about the importance of investing in youth football to ensure future success. He highlighted his commitment to the program by coaching youth camps, meeting individually with youth coaches and parents, and building strong relationships to create a lasting impact. "The momentum is shifting," said Polevacik. "We're seeing more engagement at every level, and that's how we build a successful program."



A handful of The Ranger Nation Football Club

Lakewood football has seen only one winning record since 2003.

Despite this challenging history, progress is evident. Coach Polevacik doubled the team's win total from year one to year two, and the 2024 season saw several school offensive records shattered. Several players signed letters of intent to play college football next season, and the Rangers return several All-Conference players from their four-win campaign, setting the stage for continued improvement.

Making a Tangible Impact

In just one year since its formation, RNFC has raised over \$30,000 for the football program, purchased new jerseys for youth players, provided sweatshirts for all players in the program, and upgraded equipment to enhance player safety and performance.

RNFC President Mike Bentley

emphasized the broad support the club has received. "We have met with stakeholders and continue to receive overwhelming support from Mayor George, Lakewood City Council, the superintendent, Lakewood Rec Department, Lakewood Police Department, local businesses like Geiger's, and, most importantly, the football coaches, parents, and players. We have a unique opportunity with Coach Polevacik to finally turn around Lakewood football, and RNFC is doing everything possible to support that effort."

Bentley reinforced that all proceeds from this event will go directly toward improving player safety and development, game-day experience, and ensuring Coach Polevacik has the necessary resources to compete with other schools in the Cleveland West Conference. "We need the community to continue to rally behind this movement," Bentley added.

The next RNFC event will be a youth football camp in June, with dates to be announced soon.

Community members interested in volunteering or contributing can email rangernationfc@gmail.com in addition to following @rangernationfc on Facebook and Instagram for updates..

Jim Maday is a Board Member of the Ranger Nation Football Club.

Church Of The Ascension Flea Market, Bike Rodeo, And Lakewood Bike Registration

by Keira Dodd

Join Church of the Ascension on our beautiful grounds, Saturday, May 17th from 11 am to 4 pm (table set-up 10:30 am) for a spring fun-filled day, including Bicycle Safety, Playground and Art Activities, Flea Market, and an inexpensive Grilled Lunch. Bring your children (grades 1 – 6) and their bikes to participate in a safety riding course (1-3pm), sponsored by Bike Lakewood. A bicycle inspection and simple repairs, (courtesy of Beat Cycles) are available for anyone, including adults, who brings a bike. Meet the Lakewood Police to register your bike. Bring your spring cleaning treasures to sell on our

front grounds.

Call 216-521-8727 to reserve your Ascension Market Table. A free will offering (\$20 suggested) is appreciated but not required. Come and enjoy the Lakewood Community, and even check out the Heirloom Plant Sale from 2 - 5 pm at the Lakewood Garden Center next door. Enjoy a Saturday of spring fun at Church of the Ascension. 13216 Detroit Ave. Lakewood. 216-521-8727

Keira Dodd is an English teacher, a mother of two girls who attend Lakewood City Schools, and a member of the vestry at Church of the Ascension in Lakewood.

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LAKEWOOD SCHOOLS

Harding Student Shines In Stop Hate Contest

STOP THE HATE
by Adeline Chalker

Our world revolves around hierar-
chy, prejudice, and inequality. I'm not
quite sure how or why it got to be like
this, but now we are here in it, just sitting
around watching TV shows on Netflix,
waiting for it to get better. But quick news
flash, that's not going to just happen. So
that is why I am going to try to convince
our world that we need a change, but not
just for us, for transgender people whose
rights are revoked and are made fun of.
So in this essay, you will see how our
world needs to change from rude and

unjust to kind and useful.
I first noticed this unfair treatment
towards transgender people when my
mom's friend's son transitioned to a
female. I still remember how supportive
my whole family was that night when
my mom told me what it meant when
someone was trans, and ever since then,
I have heard and seen people do noth-
ing but be rude to trans people and even
try to make laws about their freedom.
To give substance to this, SB 14 is a law
that was passed and signed by Texas
Governor Greg Abbott on June 2, which
stopped allowing transgender minors

from receiving hormone therapies and
puberty blockers. It goes into effect next
month. And these horrible laws have
caused trans people to take their own
lives because they can't be who they
are. And It took so long for my mom's
friend's daughter to be able to use her
correctly gendered bathroom, that is
just horrible! Now you see why we need
a change, so let's make one.
We need to be kind. Not just to trans-
gendered people but to all of us. You see,
if every day we all could say at least three
kind things to people, our world would
become so much better. But especially
to people who transitioned their gender,
if we strive to not make fun of them and
just act the same, no matter what gender
they are, we all would feel welcome in this
world. Also if we started to write peaceful
petition papers to our government saying
anything along the lines of how unfair it
is to trans people who are trying to get sex
change surgeries and can't because they
may be under 18 or how it's illegal to have
that surgery where they live, we could
start to make a change. Also, if we all do
a little research and find out about the
restrictions that trans people have, we can
further understand their pain and share
that with the world to make more people
see the change we will and can make. So
if we act on this and do what is right, our
actions will inspire change. I'll be a force
for good change and not just sit around
when people can't become who they truly
are. We only have one world, so let's make
it a good one.

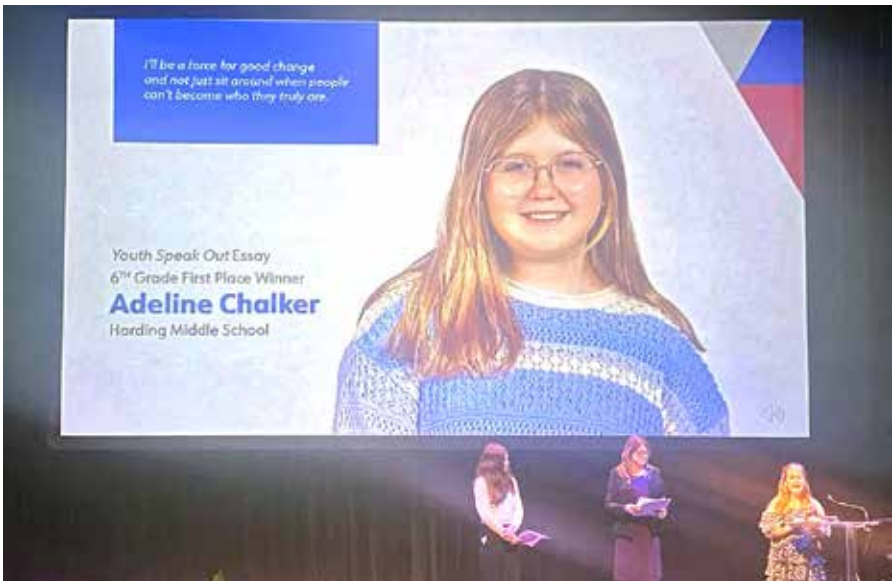


"Everybody But The
Senior" Art Show
by Christine Gordillo

So much amazing and creative art
was on display yesterday at the high
school's Everybody But the Senior
Art Show! From textiles to ceramics
to painting and drawing, the pieces
showed our competency of creative
thinking is thriving among our stu-
dents! Special shout out to our teachers
in the Art Department for guiding
these young minds.

Four Juniors Honored
In New York Times
Photo Essay Contest

Congratulations to four of our
LHS AP Language & Composition
students who received Honorable
Mention in The New York
Times' photo essay contest! Students
Cooper Russell, Hazel Redmon and
project partners Maya Trempe and
Gwendolyn Hongosh had their work
recognized from more than 600 sub-
missions from across the country.



Reading my essay at the "STOP HATE" Conference.

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Lakewood Child Care Center
Publishes Annual Report

by Holle Brambrick

For over three decades, Lakewood
Child Care Center (LCCC) has been a
trusted cornerstone for families in
Lakewood and the west side of Cleve-
land. Having served more than 3,000
families, we take pride in our expe-
rienced team, whose average tenure
spans 17 years. LCCC consistently
achieves Ohio's highest Step Up To
Quality rating, a recognition we've
upheld for 18 years by exceeding state
standards. This year alone, our dedi-

cated teachers completed 670 hours of
training—far surpassing state require-
ments—to deliver the exceptional care
your children deserve.
With a combined 145 years of
service, our team is committed to
nurturing a supportive and enriching
environment where every child can
flourish. We invite Observer readers to
explore our full 2024 Annual Report
and discover how we make a difference
in early childhood education: <https://bit.ly/4kf6I2C>

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Early Childhood Education
is an Investment in the Future

The National Education Association – along with
researchers and universities across the world – agree
that providing a high-quality education for children
before they turn five yields significant medium- and
long-term benefits for students.

Children in early childhood education programs are:

- Less likely to repeat a grade
- More prepared academically for later grades
- More likely to graduate from high school
- Higher earners in the workforce

"Our kids love going to Lakewood Child
Care Center and I have complete peace
of mind while at work each day. That is
truly the best gift you can give a parent."

- Shannon, LCCC parent

Expenditures

- Payroll (teacher/school administrator salary, training and benefits)
- Facility, Equipment, and Improvements
- Administrative and Contractor Expenses (includes fundraising costs)
- Program Services (includes field trips, classroom supplies)

Revenue

- Tuition and Fees
- Government Programs
- Business/personal contributions and fundraising/fall festival
- Interest
- Grant Revenue

112 children
served in 2023-2024

33 years
in the Lakewood community

17 years
average experience
of our teachers

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“MEET THE TRUCKS” LOGO VOTE

Vote For Your Favorite

Students Design Logos For “Meet The Trucks”

continued from page 1

and climb aboard a wide variety of trucks and vehicles, meet the people who operate them, and enjoy a wide variety of food and activities. Visit the LECPTA Facebook Page @2025 Meet the Trucks for additional event details.

Be sure to cast your vote to support local student talent and help choose the face of this year’s celebration. And don’t forget to mark your calendars for Saturday, June 7th for Meet the Trucks—a day of big wheels, big fun, and even bigger community spirit. We’ll see you there!

VOTE HERE



MTT Logo Option 1



MTT Logo Option 2



MTT Logo Option 3



MTT Logo Option 4



MTT Logo Option 5



MTT Logo Option 5



MTT Logo Option 6



MTT Logo Option 8



MTT Logo Option 9



MTT Logo Option 10

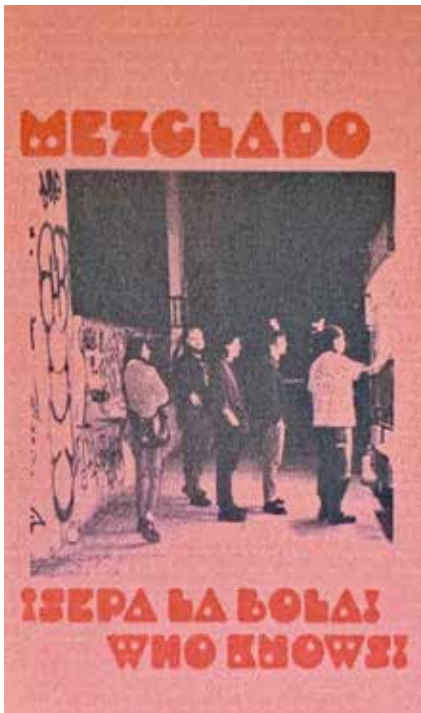
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Who Gave You Permission?:
Reviews Of Recent Releases
By Local Bands, Pt. 141

by Buzz Kompier

Mezclado - ¡Sepa La Bola! / Who Knows! - self-released - 8 songs - cassette, digital

No sophomore slump for Mezclado! Perhaps I was primed to like this tape because I've heard them doing this material live for the past year or so, but hey, it's a good tape regardless. "American Communion," which starts things off here, is a good indie psych tune with a slightly menacing vibe. It's appropriately noisy with a great chorus and lots of good guitars. Wyatt (one of the band's three frontpeople and the one who sings this song) also takes the lead on "Record & Rewind" which kicks off the second side and shares with "American Communion" that sort of ominous mood— that's not to say the two songs are samey, though, because they're not, they're just both good songs that share that vibe. "Rocket Man" is a great garage-y punk song that Joe (the next Mezclado member to step up to the mic here) really yells. I think he's saying, "Watch out, it's the big cheese coming!" though I am not 100 percent certain. Nico (the third Mezclado singer to appear on this tape and the one who sings the most songs) comes through on "Narcolectico" with a punk track to rival "Fed Up" from the first album— it's a very good track ("Muerte," on side two, is also a good punk track). I also quite enjoyed the alt-psych jammer "Disillusion Man," which I think is spiritual kin to the previous record's "Sunday Dread" (perhaps it's a similar disaffected vocal style from Nico). Something about it, as someone (hi, Nathan) pointed out at the release show, is certainly influenced by Neil Young. At the same time, it doesn't really sound like Neil, there's just a Neil sort of feeling (Billy Talbot would never play a bass line like that). The tape closes with two tracks that I think sort of sum up all of Mezclado's strengths: "Spit On Me," which



is largely a slower reverb and guitar-heavy psych number (and also has an ominous atmosphere— perhaps that's just the times), does a cool rest moment before jamming out into the coda, which then speeds up massively. Everyone knows I like songs that speed up! Finally, there's "Ya Me Voy," which is Mezclado at their most musically Latin, but never loses the psychedelic mood nor some of the punk aggression (and there's lots of great guitar on this one, too). Overall, I think this album is really good. It's a solid collection of songs and I think it captures some of their live energy slightly better than the last album. If you're not into Mezclado yet, perhaps now is the time. Who knows! 4/5

(available on streaming platforms; maybe hit up the band for a tape?)

Are you a local-ish band? Do you have a record out? Email vaguelythreatening@gmail.com or send it directly to the Observer: PO Box 770203, Lakewood, OH 44107.



Don't Miss The HOTTEST
Event Of The Summer

by Christina Stover

Get ready for one Hel-en of a night of fun, laughs, and a whole lot of caftans at the Mrs. Roper's Romp Bar Crawl Fundraiser to support Barton Center!

When: Saturday, May 17 from 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.

All proceeds from this spirited event will go toward our programming here at Barton Center, so grab your Janet, Jack, and Chrissy's and get ready for a fun night out while celebrating a great cause.

Dress in your best retro Mrs. Roper and Stanley-inspired outfits (think bright-colored caftans, flowy dresses, flower print, and leisure suits) and get ready to party for a cause!

Here's what you can expect: We will begin our Romp at McGinty's at 1 p.m. and crawl our way down to Mahall's Pins & Needles, known as the Regal Beagle during the Romp, at

4 p.m. for raffles and fun. We will also stop at Iggy's, Lakewood Village Tavern, and more! Check back for more Romp Stops as we get closer!

Bonus: The first 50 ticket holders will receive a FREE pair of authentic Mrs. Roper's sunglasses at the event!

Location: From Bunts to Clarence on Madison Avenue, Lakewood

Mark your calendars, grab your Helens and Stanleys, and let's make this bar crawl one to remember!

If you have any questions or are interested in becoming a sponsor, please contact Allison at aurbaneke@bartoncommunities.org.

All sales final. No refunds.

Christina Stover is the Lead Activities Coordinator for Barton Senior Center at the Westerly Apartments. We are hosting a Mrs. Roper's Romp Bar Crawl Fundraiser for our older adult residents, and would love to have you join us!

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LAKEWOODITES ABROAD

Medical Tourism: My Solution To Expensive Healthcare In The United States

by Rachel Ogilby

We flew to Paris, France for a week for our son’s heart scan because the whole trip was still cheaper than the insured scan in the United States. I know, it sounds ridiculous. That’s because it is.

“Merci, madame. Au revoir!” The secretary handed me a few documents. I slipped my son’s heart images and impressions into a folder and neatly tucked it into the stroller. I made a mental note to reach out to the doctor again in a few days if I hadn’t received the English version yet. While I could understand the French description of the heart scan, I knew that our American cardiologist would appreciate a version that didn’t require him to translate.

We left the office building and walked down the charming avenue, dotted with cafes and shops, black iron flowers swirling on the residential balconies. We passed two flower shops and a small park. The metro whooshed overhead, the iconic line 6 which had an incredible view of the Eiffel Tower when you rode over the Seine river.

We walked towards Champs de Mars, the park which also led to an impressive view of the Eiffel Tower.

“Eiffel Tower now!!!” my three year old demanded, his little voice punctuated by the emotion that came with a time zone change, a complete transformation in scenery and routine, and his recent requirement to sit still on grandma’s lap for thirty minutes while his little brother received an echocardiogram.

“Yes baby, we’re about to see the Eiffel Tower!” I said back, relieved that we would finally scratch his itch to see this national monument. In lieu of a TV, we had a large piece of artwork in our living room with the Eiffel Tower on it. Lady Eiffel, baguettes and croissants were some of our most common talking points leading up to our trip to Paris.

We were living in the US now, but had lived in France for the past three years. Both our babies were born there, and during my second trimester we discovered our youngest son, Robert, had Tetralogy of Fallot. He received amazing care at Necker Hospital and had corrective open-heart surgery when he was 6 months old. Robert required heart scans frequently after surgery while we were living in Paris. The scans cost us 170 euros, or about 180 US dollars. These were reimbursed fully while

my husband was an employee in France, partly by the social security system and partly through the private insurance (“mutuelle”) legally required to be offered to all French employees.

Fast forward to a year later, and we were back living in the United States. The transition had been difficult, with the cost of living making it impossible to survive on one paycheck (as we did in France) and the food made us feel sluggish and arthritic. However, we were thrilled to be near family and friends and even back in our own walkable city.

During our transition back to the USA, we were often asked what we

loved the most about France. They were always surprised to hear me respond, “The healthcare system.”

We’ve been influenced (dare I say manipulated?) to believe that the United States is the best at most things. Many of us have been led to believe that a socialized healthcare system would result in delayed care, long waits, or suffering. However, I experienced the opposite – I had amazing, preventative prenatal and postnatal care, two births, pelvic floor therapy, mid-wife visits, pediatrician appointments, dental care, eye care, and more in France.

We were in for a rude awakening when we made our first appointment with our American cardiologist. Due to the No Surprise Act, hospitals in the US are required to notify you of an “estimate” before receiving care. On our way to our first appointment (which included

a visit with the doctor, an echocardiogram and an ECG), I received an email from the hospital with an estimate.

“\$3600?!?!?!?” I yelled out loud to my husband, who was driving. “This can’t be right.” Upon arriving to the appointment, we expressed our dismay at the bill we were anticipating. Our team of providers were sympathetic and understanding – they offered to delay the scan and ECG until we could talk to our insurance and find out why the costs were so high. We all wondered if there had been a mistake.

Weeks later, after making hours and hours of phone calls, it was determined that there was no mistake. Even though we were fully insured, and paid for health insurance, our out of pocket expenses for the required testing of our 18 month old would cost \$3600. We could try going to another

health care system, but we wanted to keep our provider. We could try keeping our provider and getting the scans elsewhere, but the amount of phone calls and discussions I had about this made it feel impossible. It seemed unlikely this was a sustainable option. If we wanted to keep our provider, we were stuck with these costs. We felt we had the best provider in our area, and wanted to stay with him.

I cried out of frustration, feeling angry that the system was so expensive. I knew it didn’t have to be like this. My son’s entire open heart surgery in France cost us... nothing.

I became particularly infuriated during one specific phone call with financial services. I explained our predicament, and that we would require these scans twice a year for the next 18

continued on page 11



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LAKEWOOD CARES

HELP Foundation Celebrates 60th Anniversary
Ribbon Cutting Of New
Expansion In Lakewood

by Melissa Kocher

HELP Foundation kicked off its 60th anniversary with the grand opening of its expanded and renovated facility at 18228 Sloane Ave. in Lakewood. This \$2 million project enhances Adult Day and Vocational Programs for individuals with disabilities, reinforcing HELP’s mission of empowerment and inclusion.

Founded in 1965 by two Lakewood mothers seeking support for their sons with disabilities, HELP has grown into a leading organization serving nearly 600 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout Northeast Ohio. Today, HELP provides residential services, adult day support, vocational training, and employment assistance.

The Lakewood project will double the capacity of HELP’s Adult Day Program and enhance programs such as HELP Harvest, an innovative seed-to-table vocational training program.

“This expansion represents more than just a renovation—it’s a commitment to ensuring individuals with disabilities have access to meaningful opportunities, resources, and support,” said Tamara Honkala, HELP President



L-R: HELP Board President Peter Henry, Cuyahoga County Councilman Dale Miller, HELP President & CEO Tamara Honkala, Lakewood Mayor Meghan George and State Representative Tristan Rader.

& CEO. “For 60 years, HELP has been dedicated to empowering people with disabilities to live with greater independence, and this project allows us to expand our reach and deepen our impact in the community.”

The grand opening event gathered community leaders, supporters, and individuals served by HELP to celebrate this milestone. With its expanded Lakewood program, HELP continues its legacy of empowering individuals with disabilities to live their best life.

For more information about HELP services, visit www.helpfoundationinc.org or call 216-432-4810.



Cook Avenue block party, 2024

Want To Plan A Block Party?
This Workshop Will Tell You How

by Kaitlin McCready

Block parties are part of the culture of Lakewood. Growing up in Parma where they weren’t as common, I day-dreamed what it would be like to have open streets for a day, committed to neighbors having fun, however they defined it.

So when I moved to Cook Avenue in Lakewood in 2020, I wanted to make it happen—except it was much more logistically challenging than I expected. We hadn’t had a block party on our street in more than 25 years, which meant we had to do a street survey to make sure people wanted a block party. And the survey had to show that 75 percent or more of residences said “yes.”

We had more than 115 residences on our street—including several three-family homes. How was I going to achieve that, even if I enlisted other neighbors to help?

This is one of the many questions I want to demystify at the free work-

shop “How to Plan a Block Party in Lakewood,” May 6, 2025, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Lakewood Public Library main branch. Because yes, I eventually figured out a solution, and we had an awesome first block party. But it took way too much time and personal energy to get it off the ground.

Block parties should remain part of the Lakewood culture (there’s evidence that communities with community gatherings like block parties have lower crime rates). This workshop aims to cement it by sharing best practices from streets like mine and providing a step-by-step guide with everything from hosting a planning meeting to enlisting city resources.

For more information and to register, visit <http://bit.ly/4jmcAFM>.

Kaitlin McCready is a communications and marketing consultant. She proudly lives on Cook Avenue with her husband and two kids.

Medical Tourism:
My Solution To Expensive Healthcare In
The United States

continued from page 10

years. “I can’t afford to pay \$3600 twice a year for the next two decades,” I said. The financial planner’s advice was... unexpected. She offered, “Oh, you know you can just not pay the bills, let them build up, and then apply for charity!” I was so dumbfounded I didn’t know what to say. “Wait.. this is Patient Advocate

Services, right? Are you telling me that my plan for affording my son’s healthcare should be simply not paying for it and then applying for charity?!”

Our cardiologist was patient, understanding, and thorough. We felt that he was a great physician, we just couldn’t figure out how to remain under his care with the costs.

Incredibly, he eventually found a way for us to receive a complimentary scan by bringing our situation to his board of directors. It was a one-time exception, but offered us some breathing room while we tried to figure out a sustainable method for the next scan. In my most critical moments, I wondered how it was possible that the scan could cost so much money, and yet the healthcare organization could just “waive” the fee. Clearly, it didn’t need to be so costly.

We needed another scan in the spring, and again, I received emails with cost estimates. “\$3400,” I read out loud. “You know, this costs less than 200 dollars in France?!”

Suddenly, I had an idea. After going back and forth about our

options, I reached out to our cardiologist back in France. “I know this might sound crazy... but can I just fly back to Paris and pay the 170 euros out of pocket?” I asked. “Oui, madame, pas de problem.”

This became the new plan. If I was going to spend \$3400, I might as well enjoy a week in Paris with it. I hatched the plan, drew up a rough budget and presented it to my husband. “Flight, hotel, food, and entertainment included, it’s all less than the price of the scan here in the US,” I said.

My husband couldn’t make the trip because of work, but my mom was game. Our American cardiologist was also on board with the plan, and just requested that he received the physical images of the scan along with the impressions.

On March 5th, we boarded the flight, taking the 8 hour overnight, non-stop trip to Paris from Detroit. Robert sat in my lap, our three year old in his seat between my mom and I.

A new email pinged through my phone; I must have forgotten to turn it on airplane mode. “Oh, a new estimate,” I read to my mom. “Looks like if Robert was going to get his heart scan in the US, it now costs \$3700, not \$3400.”

I rolled my eyes, then closed them, dreaming of my next croissant, just a mere 8 hour plane ride away.

Rachel Ogilby is a doctorate prepared nurse. She lived in Paris for three years, and had two babies. Their youngest child had open heart surgery.

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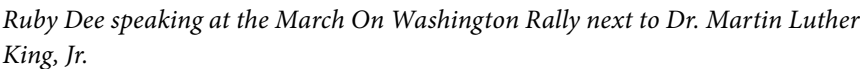
Lakewood Black Caucus

Community Gatherings And Events

LBC meets on the third Saturday each month from 1-4:00 pm at Lakewood Presbyterian Church. When it's a community event, everyone is invited, and that means white folks and People of Color. When it's a Black Room Saturday, those gatherings are specifically for People of Color. Our next community event will be "Juneteenth" on Thursday, June 19th.

Rev. Shirley Nelson is President of the Lakewood Black Caucus.

A fine business owner, who had a wonderful staff here. He will be greatly missed.



During her time at the American Negro Theatre, Ruby began to realize how she was treated differently from some of her peers due to her race. She acknowledged that she may have different experiences and harder challenges in comparison to white individuals, but she never let that stop her. Even though Ruby worked to appear on film during a time of segregation in most of the United States and was treated as a second-class citizen as a Black actress, she continued to push forward. Ruby began to advocate for change in any way she knew how, emerging as a trailblazer during the civil rights movement. She marched alongside Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for equity and justice for African Americans, becoming personal friends with them both over their mutual passion

Senator Nickie Antonio serves as Highest Ranking Member on the Senate Health, Transportation, and Rules and Reference Committees. Additionally, she is a member of the Ohio House Democratic Women's Caucus, previously as chair, and is the State Director for the National Women Legislators' Lobby.



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LAKEWOOD OBSERVER

Let's Build The Right Wall: Handball In Lakewood

by Patricia Neligan Barley

Mr. Cesar Vargas, a twenty-five-year resident of Lakewood, has been the art teacher at Harding Middle School for seven years. He and his wife raised three boys here and taught art for eighteen years.

My son Emmet Barley was fortunate to be introduced to the game of handball by Mr. Vargas three years ago when he was in sixth grade when Mr. Varas started a handball club.

“I was introduced to handball in high school and was immediately hooked. Whenever I found the chance to play I would, as much as I could. Fast forward to three years ago, I introduced the game to our middle school students, and like me, they were hooked. Between the LHS and Harding, we have about 25 to 30 players. These kids wait patiently for me to come down to play during lunch and recess. Many of them show up on the weekends on their own to use the mediocre court we have in our back parking lot at Harding. It’s really cool to see as I drive past on an unrelated errand and catch them out there getting it in.”

Handball, a game that originated in Ireland, was introduced to the U.S. by Irish immigrants in the 1800s. New York is now the mecca of handball. This past August, the World Handball Championship was held in Limerick, Ireland. The U.S. won the men’s competition, and Ireland won the women’s championship.

Handball is popular in Ireland and is an official sport of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The GAA is an international amateur sporting and cultural organization focused primarily on promoting Indigenous Gaelic games and pastimes, including the traditional Irish sports of hurling, camogie, Gaelic football, Gaelic handball, and GAA rounders.

This past February, junior players from New York and from Belfast, Ireland, ages 14-18, faced off in a tournament in the Bronx. Each team had eight boys and four girls.

I brought my son Emmet to speculate, and he was asked to play against a player from Belfast. Emmet led

Handball Camp For Adults

Learn this easy, fun, and inexpensive game. All you need is a wall, a ball, and some friends! Classes begin on April 29th and continue through May 27th (no class on May 6th). 6:00-7:30 PM Facilitated by HMS’s art teacher, Cesar Vargas, and his handball club at Harding School Gym, 16601 Madison Ave.



Mr. Vargas and Emmet are representing Lakewood and Harding in NYC for a handball tournament.

the whole way but fell short by just one point. It was an excellent way for Emmet to gauge the competition and where he was as a handball player.

Mr. Vargas is deeply committed to helping these kids continue their passion for handball beyond middle school. He recognizes the current limitations, with Harding being the only place to play in Lakewood if the gym isn’t booked for other activities. This situation is not conducive for students at LHS, and the prospect of handball dying out for them due to the lack of a dedicated playing space is unacceptable. Mr. Vargas firmly believes that we can do better, and he is advocating for establishing a dedicated handball court at LHS, ensuring that the sport can continue to thrive at the high school level.

Ideally, Vargas would like LHS to designate a space for a handball court and possibly even set one up at one or two of our parks, which Vargas said he guarantees will be used. We have

reached out to the high school’s girls’ and boys’ tennis coaches, and they are both on board with helping to support finding a space for these kids to play and possibly take an interest in playing for the high school tennis team.

We are meeting with Mr. Mark Walter, the Director of Community and District Activities. He supports bringing a handball court to a park or the schools. The biggest challenge is finding adequate space. Mr. Vargas has submitted measurements and ideas to make this possible on one of the high school courts.

“Our students were able to play in a tournament this past summer in Cleveland and in Toledo, where several top players, who our students are familiar with, in the world took some time to give our students a pretty cool handball clinic and something they will remember.” Mr. Vargas led the charge in getting students to attend this event. Emmet had a great time and came home with all kinds of handball

swag. The players and event coordinators are passionate about this sport and want to encourage these kids to keep playing.

Emmet loves handball, and I want to encourage this passion for him. He used to be a soccer player, and I tried encouraging him to play lacrosse, but he said he wasn’t interested in a contact sport. He said he would be on the tennis team and had started taking lessons to prepare for next year when he was in high school.

“It’s the perfect game and has a low cost attached to it, unlike many other sports offered to our Lakewood kids.” Vargas plans to continue introducing and helping to develop this great sport to his middle school students for as long as possible. I genuinely believe we are onto something good and can surely use help to grow it further.” He is pursuing a coaching certification from the United States Handball Association (USHA) and has received support from this organization at the Cleveland Handball Association.

Benefits of Handball:

- Mental wellness and social get kids off screens and outdoors
- It’s a full-body workout: cardiovascular, agility
- Hand-eye coordination
- Lifelong sport, not demanding on your body
- Low-cost, everyone is welcome

If you are interested in helping us grow this sport in Lakewood, please reach out to Patricia at pneliganbarley@gmail.com or Cesar at cesar.vargas@lakewoodcityschools.org

Patricia is a freelance travel writer and a resident of Lakewood. Her three boys attend(ed) Lakewood City Schools: a recent LHS graduate who is at OSU, an eighth grader at HMS, and a sixth grader at GMS. She has volunteered at all the schools her children have attended and other organizations in Lakewood. Most recently, Be SMART. She aims to continue to help maintain a safe, healthy, and stable community for her family and neighbors.



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LAKEWOODITES ABROAD

A Visit To Cairo

by Robert Blum

My wife Molly and I, proud Lakewood residents, embarked on a thrilling adventure to Egypt in February and March of this year. Cairo, with its inexplicable magical and enchanting atmosphere, captivated us from the moment we arrived.

Let me paint a picture of the bustling streets of Cairo for you. Picture quirky three-wheeled tuk-tuks zipping around, motorcycles carrying not just one, but three adults, and sometimes even entire families! And let's not forget the carts pulled by horses or donkeys, loaded with fresh produce and sometimes even a family. It was a sight to behold!

In Cairo, you won't find any large grocery or drug stores. In fact, large superstores are a rarity in this region. But shopping in Cairo is a unique experience, with storekeepers who know their products inside out and are always willing to go the extra mile to help.

Now, let's dive into some of the incredible places we visited. One of our favorites was the Coptic St. Mary's Church in the Zeitoun district. This magnificent church holds a special place in history, as it is believed to be the spot where the Holy Family sought refuge from King Herod. And in the late 60s and early 70s, an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary herself appeared on a regular basis atop the church's dome, witnessed by hundreds of thousands, including President Nasser and representatives from the Vatican. It's a testament to the contemporaneous unity



between Muslims and Christians that exists in Egypt today.

Our adventures didn't stop there. We hopped on a horse and buggy for a thrilling tour of the iconic Giza Pyramids and the vast Sahara Desert. We marveled at the grandeur of the brand new Grand Egyptian Museum, attended a mesmerizing performance of Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty Ballet" at the fabulous Cairo Opera House, and wandered through the historic and mind-boggling Khan el-Khalili bazaar. Experiencing all of this firsthand left an indelible impression on us, one that we will indeed cherish forever.

There is one more delightful detail I must share with you. Throughout our time in Egypt, we were consistently amazed by the warmth and generosity of the local people. Without any prompting, they would guide us through bustling streets and assist us with our shopping bags.

Our accommodations were in a lovely late 19th century apartment building where we were greeted daily by a friendly live-in doorman named Arabi. His entire family, including his wife, son, and grandchildren who lived there too, quickly became our buddies and went above and beyond to help us in any way they could. It truly made our stay in Egypt even more memorable and enjoyable.

In closing, Egypt is often referred to as "The Gift of the Nile," and it truly lives up to its name. There are so many incredible sights to see that we didn't have a chance to visit the first time around. We are already dreaming of the day when we can return and explore all that this amazing country has to offer.

Robert Blum is a lifelong Lakewood resident whose interests include running, hiking, camping and traveling.

Historical Society's Annual Meeting Open To The Public



The Lakewood mansion home built between 1899 and 1903 on the north side of Lake Avenue was part of the five-acre Kundtz family estate, which stretched to Lake Erie. It included elaborate woodwork carved by Theodor Kundtz.

by Corky Thacker

Historical Society's annual meeting at Church of the Ascension features Lakewood's Kundtz family. John Kundtz, great-grandson of renowned carpenter, inventor, and businessman Theodor Kundtz, will be the guest speaker at the Lakewood Historical Society's Annual Meeting on Wed., April 30 at 6:00 p.m.

He will discuss "The Kundtz Family in Lakewood." The event will be held in the nave of Church of the Ascension, an Episcopal Church located at 13216 Detroit Avenue.

In addition to Ascension's hav-

ing the longest church history in Lakewood, continuous since 1875, it is one of the few whose furnishings created by the Kundtz company remain in use. The church's pews, pulpit, lectern, bishop's chair, and choir stalls feature the Kundtz hand-carved artistry.

Part of a series of historical lectures celebrating Church of the Ascension's 150th Anniversary, the event is free, and the public is invited. For more information about Church of the Ascension and other upcoming activities, please visit www.ascension-lakewood.org.

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COVE COMMUNITY CENTER

Meet Me At Cove: Kristen Bindel, Nurturing Families Every Step Of The Way

by Nancy Feighan

When a new parent or caregiver welcomes a baby, it's a monumental life change. Whether you're embarking on this journey alone or with a partner, the transition into parenthood can be overwhelming. Kristen Bindel, a Lakewood native and owner of Bamboo Birth, is here to help you navigate every step of the way. As a birth doula, postpartum doula, and certified lactation counselor, Kristen is dedicated to offering unwavering support, compassion, and expertise to guide you through this life-changing experience.

A Deep Connection to Lakewood

Kristen's journey to supporting families started in the heart of her community. She began attending the Lakewood Family Room with her youngest child, now 11, where she discovered a wealth of early childhood resources and, more importantly, a sense of community. It was here that Kristen began to understand the importance of a supportive network for new families. She even brought her nanny family along to experience this nurturing environment for their children.

From Personal Experience to Professional Passion

Kristen's path into birth work was sparked by her own childbirth experience. Feeling a lack of autonomy and compassion during her pregnancy, she realized that many families face similar struggles. This motivated her to research doulas—non-medical professionals who provide emotional and physical support before, during, and after childbirth. Her desire to offer better support for families led her to become a certified lactation counselor in 2019, broadening her ability to assist families through breastfeeding, newborn care, and postpartum challenges.

Supporting Families During Isolation

When the pandemic hit, many families were left isolated with limited



Kristen Bindel

support. Recognizing this urgent need, Kristen and Jessica Parker, the program manager for Early Childhood, came together to create a solution. They organized socially distanced outdoor meetups at Merl-Bunts Park, offering postpartum, newborn, and feeding support. What started with just four families quickly grew to more than 10, fostering a strong community of parents who supported each other during a difficult time.

Cove: A Place of Connection and Support

In the spring of 2022, Cove Community Center opened its doors, and Kristen's program found a new home within the Lakewood Family Room. Initially volunteering her time, Kristen's passion for supporting families led her to take on the responsibility of running the program. Thanks to a generous grant from the Healthy Lakewood

Foundation, they were able to offer valuable programming to families in need.

Kristen loves the blend of generations at Cove—where parents, grandparents, and even kids connect, share stories, and learn from one another under one welcoming roof. For Kristen, walking into Cove always feels like a reunion, as she frequently sees familiar faces from her own childhood and the growing families she's supported over the years.

Birth & Beyond: Offering Education and Ongoing Support

Kristen's dedication to families goes beyond hands-on support. She also offers free educational resources to expecting families through her Birth & Beyond series. Every Wednesday, she's at Cove from 9:30 AM to noon, offering postpartum, newborn care, and feeding support. The first hour is dedicated to babies under eight weeks old, with the rest of the time open to families with babies under one and is supportive and nurturing of all the ways parents feed their babies.

Kristen's Birth & Beyond series, held on Wednesday evenings, provides valuable birth and newborn education at no cost to attendees. In 2024, the program expanded to meet with families before the birth of their child to ensure they have access to all the resources and support they need. The program, which is funded by the Healthy Lakewood Foundation, will continue to grow, with eight three-week sessions planned for 2025.

Bamboo Birth: Growing Through Challenges

Kristen's husband came up with the name Bamboo Birth, inspired by the bamboo plant's resilience. Just as bamboo grows steadily and pushes through challenges, Kristen's work mirrors that same strength and adaptability. Bamboo Birth represents her commitment to learning and growing alongside families as they navigate the

unpredictable journey of parenthood.

Baby-Wearing: A Personal Touch

Kristen also offers hands-on guidance for baby-wearing, helping parents find the right carrier and teaching them how to use it safely and comfortably. Baby-wearing creates a special bond between parent and child, all while allowing parents to keep their little ones close and have their hands free. Kristen offers baby wearing carriers and wraps for families to try, and brings in a baby wearing educator on the third Wednesday of every month to provide guidance. Carriers and wraps can help families create special bonds while staying hands-free.

Get in Touch with Kristen

Whether you're expecting, navigating feeding your baby, or simply seeking a supportive space to guide you through early parenthood, Kristen is here to help. With her extensive knowledge, compassionate care, and commitment to building community, Kristen is a valuable resource for parents in Lakewood and beyond. Reach out to her today at Kristen@bamboo-birth.com.

Kristen's work isn't just about providing support—it's about creating a community where families can grow, learn, and nurture one another through every stage of their early parenting journey. So, if you're in need of support, come meet Kristen at Cove—she might just be the guide you've been looking for.

COVE CENTER BOCCE BALL COURTS NOW OPEN



Mosaic Art Class At Cove

by Nancy Feighan

The mosaic art class at Cove is off to an incredible start! Local artist Martha Cliffl, a well-known Lakewood resident, is guiding participants through four creative sessions. The class is full, but we'll keep you updated on everyone's progress. So far, they're doing great!

Stay tuned for more updates as these artists bring their mosaic masterpieces to life!

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