



December 4, 2025 || MOUNT PLEASANT, MI

A year in the LIFE



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A note from the editor-in-chief



By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz
Editor-in-Chief

Happy end of the semester and, of course, congratulations to you, graduates!

When you walk to the stage to pick up your diploma, you will finish writing a major chapter of your life, and you should be very proud of yourself.

You are walking away

from the Central Michigan University campus with academic knowledge, experiences and so many new diverse skills.

But I also hope you walk away with heartwarming and joyful memories. Take many photos with your friends around campus, grab a drink from your favorite coffeeshop and, of course, share copies of this paper with your loved ones.

When you're ready to take the next step, whether it's a higher degree, first job or travelling, I encourage you to stay open to learning new things, just the way you were on the first day at CMU.

Go on adventures, stay in touch with your college friends, show kindness to others and continue growing.

I also have a special message for two extraordinary people: Ella Miller and Jo Kenoshmeg, *Central Michigan Life* has been so lucky to have you two as its photo editors, and it has been such an honor to work with you both.

Ella and Jo, you are unbelievably talented, and no matter where you go, people are going to be so lucky to have you around. Congrats!

To students returning this January, get some rest and spend some time with your family this holiday season.

I will see you next year.

Masha Smahliuk-Bootz is Central Michigan Life's 2025-2026 editor-in-chief.

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Central Michigan Life, the independent voice of Central Michigan University, is edited and published by students of Central Michigan University the first Thursday of the month during the fall and spring semesters. The newspaper's online edition, cm-life.com, contains all of the material published in print, and is updated on an as-needed basis.

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On the cover: Design by Zoey Lawrence with assets by CM Life staff photographers

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NEWS

Multimedia: Top 5 of 2025

Video: Kitchen Central S2E1: Quick and Healthy Quinoa Salad

- In the "Kitchen Central" episode released on May 14, hosts Anna Silvia de Matta and Lexi Henderson walk us through making a quick and healthy quinoa salad.

Video: The healing of movement

- A new partnership between Central Michigan University's physical therapy program and the Isabella County Commission on Aging expanded access to safe, inclusive exercise opportunities for a dults with neurological conditions in May.

Video: A look inside the Central Michigan University Student Food Pantry's new home

- CMU's Student Food Pantry has moved into a larger, more accessible space in Robinson Hall in June, expanding its ability to support the 350-500 students who rely on it each week.

Video: Garba Night

- Chamakta Central's Garba Night brought culture, community and celebration to campus on Oct. 2, filling the Student Activity Center with traditional Indian folk dancing, colorful attire and authentic food.

Podcast: Crime Time ep1 s1

- From the explosive twists of the Pizza Bomber heist to the heartbreaking disappearance of Gabby Petito, "Crime Time" episode released Oct. 29 breaks down some of America's most unforgettable mysteries.

Scan the QR code
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multimedia projects



A look at life in 2025

This year has moved quickly, marked first by a new administration taking office both on the federal and Central Michigan University levels. It has been filled with challenges, opportunities and inspiring stories. To reflect on 2025, the *Central Michigan Life* editorial team took a look back and selected the top 10 stories of the year.

Toilet paper toss

With 13 minutes remaining in the first half of the 2025 Toilet Paper Toss game, Central Michigan men's basketball trailed by two with its offense struggling to find any consistent looks against Western Michigan's defense on Jan. 26.

That was until CMU guard Kyler VanderJagt knocked down a three that electrified McGuirk Arena and was the catalyst for a five-minute 14-0 run.

The run ignited the Chippewa offense. It continued to heat up as the night progressed, which was more than enough to dominate the Broncos 73-52.

"Your home crowd sets the environment, sets the tone, and when McGuirk Arena is like that, it's a 10-point advantage before the jump ball even happens on a normal crowd, but when it's like this, it's a 20-point advantage," former head coach Tony Barbee said.



Mark Hoover | Staff Photographer

Toilet paper is thrown from the stands for Central Michigan's Toilet Paper Toss/White Out at McGuirk Arena, Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025. This is CMU's third straight year hosting the tradition of tossing toilet paper before the game starts.

Rooted in friendship

When Ariana Light first met Michael Heldman, she was just trying to survive freshman year at CMU, 1,000 miles from her home in Florida. But fate and the university's housing assignments had other plans.

After being neighbors in Celani Hall their freshman year, both Light and Heldman quickly became close friends. But what they didn't know was that this random housing assignment would lead to their happily ever after.

"Keep the romance alive," Light told CM Life in February. "Just because you're in college doesn't mean you're not deserving of having an adult relationship."

"I think if you really love a woman, there's a lot more you do than just hang out with her," Heldman said. "Don't leave arguments unresolved, and don't be afraid to put in the effort — it's always worth it."



Zoey Morse | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University senior gymnast Ariana Light (left) shows her engagement ring off with her fiancé Central Michigan University senior football player Michael Heldman (right) in Central Michigan Life office, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2025. Light and Heldman went ring shopping together to look for engagement rings.

'The sky's the limit'

After impressing throughout her high school and Amateur Athletic Union career, Madi Morson flourished as a basketball player in her first year playing for CMU.

Her growth throughout the season helped lead the Chippewas to their first conference tournament appearance since 2021 while also earning her numerous accolades, including Mid-American Conference Freshman of the Year.

The general consensus among her coaches and peers is that Morson may someday be good enough to play in the Women's National Basketball Association.

"The sky's the limit for her," Head Coach Kristin Haynie said back in February. "She can play pro if she keeps working and developing."

Mark Hoover | Staff photographer

Central Michigan freshman guard Madi Morson collects herself during the basketball game versus Ball State at McGuirk Arena, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2025. Morson scored a game-high 26 points.



A challenge and an opportunity

The new Division of University Engagement and Student Affairs combined the Office for Institutional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and the Office of Student Affairs in April.

The Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Belonging within the OIDEI, Shawna Patterson-Stevens, took the role as Vice President of the new division.

"We have a tremendous amount of talent here within both units, and it's my priority to ensure that we are taking care of folks," Patterson-Stevens said. "I'm seeing this as a great challenge, but also opportunity to support people that deserve nothing but the best."

Grace Walker | News editor

Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Belonging, Shawna Patterson-Stevens speaks to the Academic Senate on her new role as the Vice President of University Engagement and Student Affairs on Tuesday, April 22 in the French Auditorium.



Fired up! But at what cost?

Over the span of the 2024-2025 fiscal year, CMU Athletics has generated \$7 million in revenue, compared to its \$27.2 million expenses. With many expenses needing to be covered and not enough revenue, where does the money for the athletic budget come from?

The budget in its entirety is made up of subsidies and external revenue sources. For years, the athletic subsidy has covered approximately 4% of the university's budget, according to Director of Athletics, Amy Folan.

"Like everyone at Central Michigan, we are trying to do more with less, but we focus on providing a premier student-athlete experience, exceptional fan experience and being leaders in the MAC," Folan said.

Jo Kenoshmeg, Zoey Lawrence | Photo editor, senior designer

Photo illustration of a burning 'Action C' football taken by Jo Kenoshmeg and edited by Zoey Lawrence.



Former instructor claims CMU rifle range poisoned him with lead

Seizures, memory loss, a feeding tube — these are the results of U.S. Army Sgt 1st Class Michael Brewer's lead poisoning. He claims he received it during his work at CMU's rifle range in the basement of Finch Fieldhouse in the 1990s.

Brewer instructed classes at the range from 1996 through 1998. Shortly after he arrived on campus, Brewer began to feel ill and had to medically retire. Almost 10 years later, he learned about lead poisoning, and he sued CMU in 2011. But Brewer said he doesn't want any

compensation from CMU. His biggest worry is his students. There are about 2,500 who took classes at the gun range in the 1990s, and Brewer claims it might have exposed them to lead as well.

"I'm requesting that each one of them be found and notified about the contamination," Brewer told CM Life this summer. "What they do with it is up to them. ... I'm not stopping. This is my mission in life."



Blace Carpenter | Managing editor

Former CMU instructor and rifle range manager Michael Brewer sits for a photo on May 21, 2025.

Spotlight: Leaders on the field

Quarterbacks are sometimes seen as the spotlight of a football team. On this Central Michigan football team, the spotlight doesn't shine on just one quarterback. In a unique setup, head coach Matt Drinkall has adapted a quarterback rotation between Joe Labas and Angel Flores. Brotherhood between the two has run deep, as both Labas and Flores lean on each other to adapt to life in small-town Mount Pleasant.

"Just being away from home for one of the first times," Flores said. "These guys make it really easy on me. Just when I come to the facility and to practice ... all the worries or at school

or whether it's... family problems or anything, everything goes away, and I'm able to just focus on football."

For both of these quarterbacks, Mount Pleasant has begun to feel like home. Their ideas reflected the same themes that have defined their journey so far: people, relationships and family.

"For me, it's the relationships I've built," Labas said. "It feels a lot like where I grew up, which is pretty cool. When I first went to Iowa, that was way different. Then coming back here in the Midwest, it's just home away from home."



Soli Gordon | Staff photographer

CMU Redshirt senior quarterback Joe Labas, left, and junior quarterback Angel Flores, right, jump for a photo in Kelly/Shorts Stadium on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2025.

Cancer, Crown and Cause

At 19 years old, Eliy Simmer is already many things: a nonprofit founder, a cancer survivor and now, Miss Michigan Teen USA 2025. But the work that makes her proudest isn't walking across a pageant stage, it's her nonprofit.

She assembles and delivers "teen kits" to hospital floors filled with comfort items. Each kit includes a card with her story and an invitation to reach out.

At 14, Simmer was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma, a rare and aggressive cancer that forms in bone or soft tissue. What doctors initially dismissed as a volleyball injury turned out to be a tumor on her scapula.

"I want to inspire anybody, whether

they're going through a life-threatening illness or not," Simmer said. "You can still do great things no matter what ... and you're not alone."

Now a freshman at CMU, Eliy is using her platform to spotlight an overlooked group in pediatric cancer care: teenagers.

"Don't give up," she said. "It's hard to stay positive. It's okay to have your bad days ... just know you're not alone in your fight."



Courtesy of Eliy Simmer

Photo of Eliy Simmer by Capture by Cassie. Simmer is a CMU freshman, cancer survivor and founder of Eliy's Sunflowers. She was crowned Miss Michigan Teen USA 2025 and advocates for teen cancer patients through her nonprofit.

The value isn't just the money

Central Michigan University is home to fewer international students this semester. The international enrollment is down 27% from last academic year.

"Anytime you're down in enrollment, there is a budget impact," President Neil MacKinnon said. "Generally, international students ... would pay higher tuition as well. So, when you're using one international student, the budget impact actually is higher than one domestic student."

This semester, CMU welcomed 1,210 international students. In comparison, there were 1,659 international students in 2024 and 1,726 in 2023, according to the enrollment report data.

Jennifer DeHaemers, vice president of Student Recruitment and Retention, told CM Life last month that some of the reasons for the international student decline were outside of the university's control, such as increased wait times for visa appointments and changes in procedures.

"But the biggest problem for

international students is just their ability to get that appointment to get their visa and then actually receiving it," DeHaemers said. "Just because they apply, just because we admit them and give them the appropriate documentation, it doesn't mean that ... the consulate would give them the visa to come here."

Joe Garrison, the executive director for the Financial Planning and Budgets Office, said the big question is whether this decline is an isolated incident this year or not.

"A budget is a plan," he said. "Every year, no matter the situation, we actively monitor how did things occur against the plan. ... I don't think that we will ever see a year where we have a budget of x, and our actuals come in exactly what the budget was."



Nash Fulgham | Staff cartoonist

CMU receives \$80 million in gifts to move its College of Medicine to Saginaw

CMU's College of Medicine announced two gifts from its healthcare partners, Covenant HealthCare and MyMichigan Health, on Nov. 21.

These gifts totalled \$80 million and would support the development of the college's new medical education building in Saginaw. The College of Medicine name will also be changed to Covenant HealthCare College of Medicine at Central Michigan University.

This February, the expenditure for this project was approved by the Board of Trustees. In July 2024, Central Michigan University announced the move of its College of Medicine to Saginaw.

"This will allow us to bring all of our students together in Saginaw,

where we also have our hospital partners and our medical residency programs as well," President Neil MacKinnon said. "So, to have this in one location will help with education, will help with research, and just hopefully provide better quality education."

He said CMU hopes to break ground on its new campus in 2026 and will continue with fundraising efforts to reach its goal of \$100 million for the building.

MacKinnon said these gifts are the two largest in the university's history.

"But even more important than that, they will have a profound and meaningful impact on our College of Medicine," MacKinnon said. "On our university and on this region for generations to come."



Mark Hoover | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University President Neil MacKinnon smiles as he walks into the CMU College of Medicine atrium, in the College of Medicine building, on Friday, Nov. 21, 2025. MacKinnon was announcing new information regarding partnerships with Covenant HealthCare and MyMichigan Health. "Today, we are thrilled to announce a new step in this partnership," MacKinnon said. "Today, we can share that both of our hospital partners, Covenant HealthCare, and MyMichigan Health, have committed gifts of \$40 million each to help CMU construct its new college of medicine location in Saginaw, Michigan."

Kenoshmeg: I came to document a community — and found my own

By Jo Kenoshmeg

Graduating photo editor

At MainStage in the fall of 2022, I pushed my way through a huge crowd of people on a mission to find one table — *Central Michigan Life*. The very first thing I did that day was fill out an application to become a photographer at CM Life, and I brought it to the office the next day.

I came to Central Michigan University in hopes of working for CM Life to get my first real experience documenting a community.

I always knew I wanted to do something related to photography and visuals, but when I discovered this newspaper, I fell in love with photojournalism — with using my skills to tell the stories of others.

I learned much more from this newsroom than just how to write a story, take interesting photos and interview people. I learned how to be part of a team, to be more open and to gain confidence in myself — and as a nonbinary student, I learned how to navigate and find belonging in spaces where my identity matters. I learned that good storytelling isn't just about taking compelling photos — it's about paying attention to people and focusing on the unseen moments.

There are many people I would like to thank for my journey at CM Life. There are so many who have helped me become who I am today, but here are just a few.

To Layla Blahnik-Thoune, you were not only the person who hired me at CM Life, but you were also the first friend I made at CMU. You were my biggest mentor here and taught me so many things, but you also helped me open up and realize that college is a place to meet new people and try new things. Thank you for being the first

person to make me feel at home — and for being the reason I knew CM Life was the place for me.

To Jeffrey Sauger, I feel like we did this journey together. A handful of us, photojournalism majors, began our freshman year as you began your first year as a professor here. I've admired how you've grown as a teacher and mentor through the years. My classmates and I have spent countless hours talking to you after class about careers, life and everything in between. I've always appreciated how deeply you care about your students' growth and how you push us to become the best photographers we can be.

To Regan Foster, we also began at CM Life around the same time. You have been an amazing mentor and friend. I'll always cherish the time we had during the summer of 2025 when I was the Summer Editor-in-Chief. Writing was definitely my weakest skill, but you offered endless support throughout my journey, and I'm so grateful for it. I also loved bonding over our completely different tastes in music and movies — it always made conversations more entertaining and reminded me how much fun it is to see the world through someone else's perspective.

To Lauren Rice and Masha Smahliuk-Bootz, you were both incredible editors-in-chief to work for and learn from. I admire you both so much.

Lauren, seeing how you lead with empathy and care for every single person you work with is truly inspiring.

Masha, watching you grow more confident and document every situation with such precision and care has been amazing. I loved being able to go into each of your offices to talk about anything, knowing you'd always listen and truly see me.

To Ella Miller, in my very first journalism class, you were right there



Ella Miller | Photo editor

Central Michigan senior Jo Kenoshmeg takes a photo of a field hockey game at Cristy Freese Field, Friday, Sept. 5, 2025.

alongside me. I remember being nervous to ask you to be my subject for a photo story and to work with you covering a musical. I still have our first texts where I asked if we were in class together and if I could borrow your notes. In one of my old emails, I even wrote, "I noticed we're on CM Life together now as well — looking forward to doing that!" It's wild to see how far we've come — now working side-by-side as photo editors. I couldn't have asked for a better person to share that with. Watching you grow more outspoken and confident over the years has been incredible, and I've never had more fun than working with you in the office.

To my desk, I really wouldn't have been able to be an editor without all of you. It's changed a bit over the years, but the photographers Ella and I have met this year are some of the funniest, kindest and most talented people I've met. I'm continuously impressed by how

every event gets picked up — and how you always ask for more. The effort you all put in makes me so proud to have been part of your journey. I know you'll go on to do amazing things, and I'll always be here as a mentor or a friend.

Mark, I know you'll do an incredible job as the new photo editor, and whoever joins you as an assistant will be lucky to work with you.

Leaving CM Life is bittersweet. I've made some of my best memories here and met some of my favorite people, but I'm excited to see what's next. I'll always carry the lessons, friendships and memories from this newsroom with me — and I can't wait to see what the next generation of CM Life editors and storytellers will create.

I came to CMU hoping to document a community, and in the process, I found my own.

Miller: What I'll carry with me

By Ella Miller

Graduating photo editor

I've never known college without *Central Michigan Life* and I never would've wanted to. I walked into the newsroom for the first time as a wide-eyed freshman with only a couple of weeks of journalism classes under my belt, and it's held a place in my heart ever since.

Though I came for career experience, I'm leaving with more than I could've imagined. The personal growth, friendships and memories this place has given me have been at the heart of my college experience.

I began here as a staff photographer and eventually became a photo editor. My camera and my press pass have brought me to places I never would've imagined — I've taken photos from a helicopter, front row at a bare knuckle fight, feet away from an injured bald eagle, on the sidelines of nearly every major sport on campus... the list goes on.

After almost four years here, I have no shortage of stories to tell.

But more than that, it is the people. As an introvert, that was the biggest learning curve I dealt with — I had to talk to people, all the time, on every assignment. It was terrifying, but for some reason, I just kept at it.

Now, the people I talk to are often the most memorable part of an assignment for me. A concerned grandmother protesting for her granddaughter's rights, wildlife rescue owners trying to prevent habitat loss on their property, a paraprofessional who sees her younger self in her students — I remember each of their stories. And I hope that my photos can play a small role in telling them.

I am not the same wide-eyed freshman who first walked into this newsroom. As I close this chapter of my life in December, I am leaving not only as a stronger photographer and journalist but also as a more confident and empowered version of myself. And there are a few people I have to thank for that.

To Regan Foster and Jeff Sauger, I don't know that I can put into words what your



Ella Miller poses for a photo at her desk in the CM Life office Saturday, Oct. 18, 2025.

Jo Kenoshmeg | Photo editor

mentorship throughout the past three and a half years has meant to me. The way you both believe in me makes me believe in myself, too. Regan, you make the office feel like home for every student who comes into it. Jeff, thank you for being so invested in your students' growth and for continually pushing us. I'm so grateful to have you both in my corner.

To my co-photo editor, Jo Kenoshmeg, you were the first friend I made here, and I don't think we've stopped talking since. I've looked up to your work since we were on staff together. I think back to us being terrified to do our first interviews for Intro to Journalism class, freshman year. We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into (we probably still don't), but leading this team with you has been one of the most enjoyable and memorable parts of college

for me.

And to our next photo editor, Mark Hoover — Your work has impressed me since you did your first assignment, but more than that, your drive, instincts and creativity inspire me daily. There's no one else I'd rather edit 1,600 photos until almost 4 in the morning with. The desk is in good hands. Keep making weird photos.

To the first editor I ever had, Layla Blahnik-Thoune, thank you for believing in me. You showed me the qualities of a good editor that I wanted to model, and I've always looked up to you. And to Masha Smahliuk-Bootz and Lauren Rice, thank you for leading this newsroom with such kindness and grace, no matter what gets thrown at you. You both amaze me.

To our photo desk — thank you for your passion, thank you for picking up

assignments two seconds after they're sent out (you scare me sometimes), thank you for making Fridays the highlight of my week. Watching you all grow over the past year and a half makes me prouder than I can say. You're the best team I've ever been a part of, and you make this place what it is.

CM Life has shaped me in ways I'm still discovering, and I'm so sad to leave this second home behind. I'll carry the lessons and memories with me wherever I go next.

I'll leave you with this: if something feels scary, it's a good sign you should run toward it. Show up, be present, care deeply. It will take you far.

Gordon: A picture-perfect journey

By Soli Gordon

Graduating staff photographer

I applied to *Central Michigan Life* before I even applied to Central Michigan University. While other incoming students were figuring out dorms and meal plans, I was hunting down the photo editor, Nico Mendoza, and begging them to look at my portfolio. In hindsight, it was either determination or delusion, but thankfully, Nico saw something in me besides panic.

Being hired as a staff photographer has been one of the highlights of my college career. CM Life became my home, my training ground and the place where I learned who I am as a journalist and as a person.

Thank you to the entire newsroom — reporters, designers, photographers and editors — because CM Life is truly a team sport. Being surrounded by such talented, passionate people made this more than an extracurricular; it was a privilege.

A special thank you to my editors, Jo Kenoshmeg and Ella Miller. They inspire me to push harder and create work I'm proud of, and they pour their hearts into everything they do. They're not just editors; they're two of my closest friends and the people who kept me sane during 2 a.m. editing sessions.

I'm also grateful for professors like Jeff Sauger, who

has real-world experience, awards and endless patience. And for Regan Foster, our former director of student media, who somehow balances humor, compassion and high expectations all at once.

In staff meetings, I try to be a smiling face; partly because I genuinely love the people I work with and partly because I know I'll probably work with at least one of them again. Journalism is a small world. Be kind and stay humble.

Before CM Life, I had raging social anxiety. This job forced me to approach strangers, ask questions and truly listen. Somewhere along the way, I found my voice.

Covering multicultural events became especially meaningful. Those assignments helped me reconnect with my heritage and made me feel seen on campus. That's why I volunteered for so many. I wanted our community to feel visible and valued in our paper.

I'll never forget my first time being published: photos of Ballet Folklórico de la Luz. My editor said my best shot was "too blurry," and I submitted it anyway because I didn't know how to delete it. A week later, it ran in a CM Life article, and seeing my name in print made everything click.

As I graduate and move to Cincinnati to work as a newborn photographer, I carry everything CM Life taught



Jasmine Brookins | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University senior Soli Gordon poses in front of Moore Hall on Tuesday, Sept. 30, 2025.

me: empathy, curiosity, creativity and the confidence to walk into any room, even a hospital room at 6 a.m., and tell someone's story with honesty and heart.

CM Life gave me opportunities, lifelong friends and a purpose. I'll miss the newsroom more than I can put into words. Thank you for trusting me, challenging me and showing me what it means to be a journalist.

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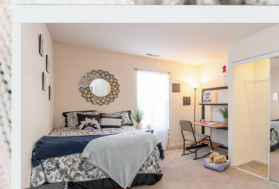
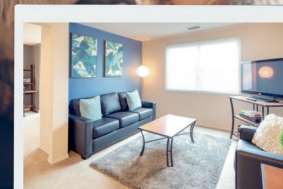
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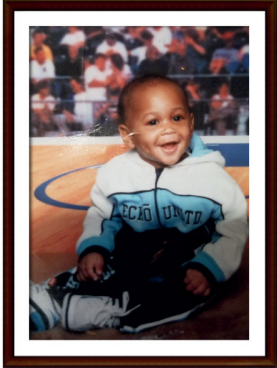
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Oh, baby...
LOOK WHO'S GRADUATING!
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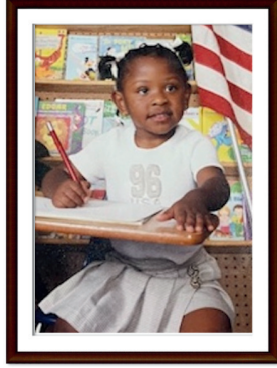


CONGRATULATIONS
KALEN!!!

We are SO very proud of you! Your hard work, perseverance & tenacity will continue to carry you through your next journey.

Love,
Mom,Dad,Dawsyn & Nike

DELTA SYMONE' HUMPHRIES



Delta,
We are so proud of you.
You kept the faith and you achieved your goal.

Continue to be your **AUTHENTIC** self and shine your beautiful light wherever you go. We will always be your biggest fans.

CONGRATULATIONS!
Love,
Daddy, Mama, Chris and Maxwell

AVA KUHN



Ava,

We are so incredibly proud of all your hard work and dedication. Earning your college degree is a monumental achievement, and it marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter.

Go out there and shine!
The world is waiting for you.

Love you!
Mom, Dad and Spencer

RILEY KATE LADD



Riley Kate we are so proud of you!

All your hard work has paid off- Fire Up!

We love you-
Mom, Dad, Brendan,
Avery, and Lucy.

MAX BERNARD O'CONNELL



Congratulations to my son.

I love you every day and am so proud of your accomplishments.

I wish you all the joy and happiness you deserve.

143 Mom

MARIA TRIPLETT



You did it Maria!

New state, new job,
endless homework and
you never gave up!

We are proud of you
princess!!

Love,Mom and Dad



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Whether it's a celebration of love, CM LIFE's all female editor team, or just pinball in the UC. . .

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KATE ELYSE JUNE VANDER LUGT



Congrats, Interior Designer!

You've grown fast while surviving critiques, floor plans, and all-nighters doing 47 versions of the same render. May your client's always trust the process, never tell you they want a 'minimalist farmhouse glam vibe', and your tape measure never mysteriously vanish (even though it absolutely will). Here's to all your future spaces coming together as you create beauty in this world.

"He has made everything beautiful in its time."

Ecclesiastes 3:11

Love, Mom and Dad

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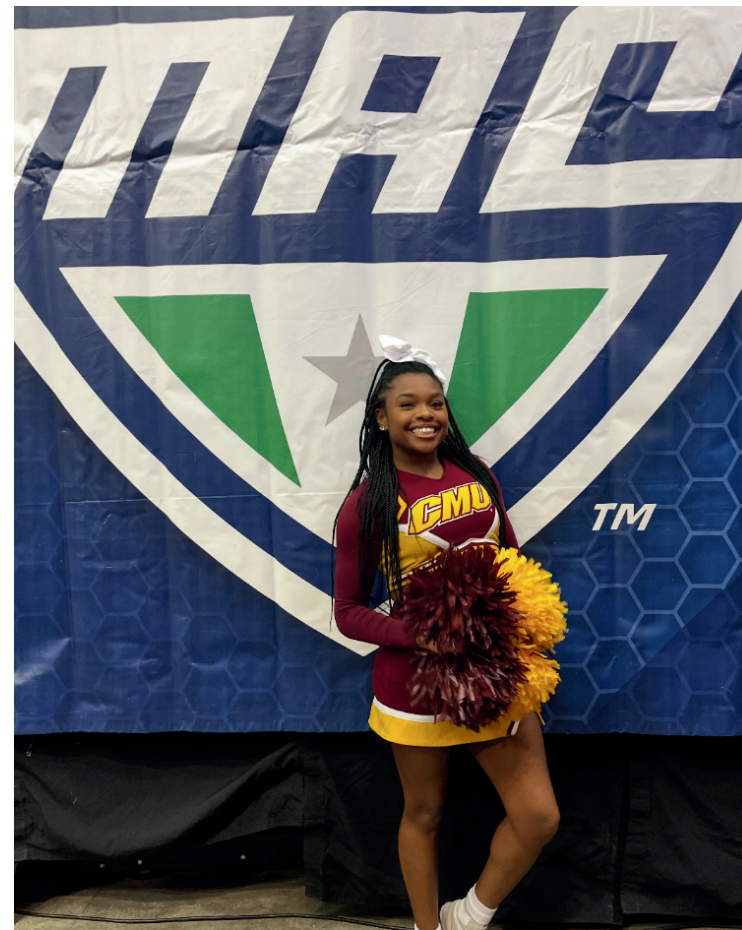
KATELYN CLAXTON

From your first steps, to this milestone moment, congratulations on all you have achieved, and more importantly, for the incredible person you have become!

Your strong character and determination will take you far. Simply trust as you move forward into this new season. No worry, no doubt, just believe!

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" Proverbs 3:5-6

Love,
Mom, Dad and Family



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Love always, Mom & Gia



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We couldn't do it without you!

Thank you!

Editorial: A thank you letter to our readers

This week has been both exciting and important for us at *Central Michigan Life* as we wrapped up two big things: Giving Tuesday and CM Life's 106th birthday.

First, the staff of CM Life wants to thank each and every one of you who supported our paper financially this Giving Tuesday.

We rely on our advertising revenue and your donations to fund student salaries and expenses, such as printing, equipment, travel and office supplies.

You can still financially support CM Life students and local journalism by scanning the QR code.

Your donation helps raise the next generation of journalists and supports the mission of the student press. At CM Life, we are getting real-world, professional experience.

The journalistic excellence of our work continues to be recognized, as CM Life received its 20th Associated Collegiate Press editorial Pacemaker this fall. CM Life is also a Pacemaker 100 recipient, placing us in the top 10% of all college media companies in the country.

We have been delivering high-quality journalism to Central Michigan University and Isabella County for the past 106 years.

In fact, Isabella County has only one daily newspaper, making it at risk of becoming a news desert. CM Life can satisfy the need for information and cover events and issues in places where large newspapers don't usually go.

Besides the community service the newspaper provides, CM Life has become a second home for all of us.

A staff of over 60 reporters, photographers, designers, videographers and account managers has become a true family. CM Life is our safe space to grow, filled with support, friends and inspiration.

But we also know that this connectiveness and family-like culture has been fostered by generations of journalists long before us. On Dec. 2, CM Life celebrated its 106th birthday – over a century of high-quality reporting, community service and talented journalists who started their path at our college newspaper.

That's why, in this editorial, the current staff of CM Life also wants to express our gratitude to you, alumni, for the program we've inherited, for the standards you've set and for the culture you've left for us.

As we say, CM Life is for Life.



CM Life Staff Photo

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FEATURES

Meet the new leaders

The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe inaugurated its new Executive Tribal Council through a secret ballot process Tuesday, Dec. 2. The council will serve until 2027

Chief

Lucas Sprague

Subchief

Craig Graveratte

Tribal Secretary

Christina Otto

Sergeant-at-arms

Frank Cloutier

Treasurer

Alice Jo Ricketts

Chaplain

Jennifer Wassegijig

SCIT swears in new council

Blace Carpenter
Managing editor

The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe elected Lucas Sprague, the former sub-chief, as Chief in a secret ballot process during their regular council meeting Dec. 2.

“We don’t do this for ourselves,” he said during

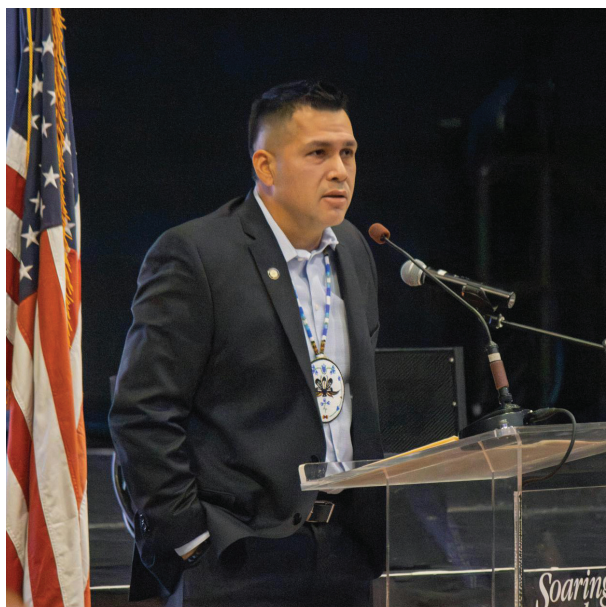
the meeting. “We do it for our families. We do it for our people. We do it for our community.”

In his first order of business as chief, Sprague swore in the other members of the Executive Tribal Council, elected through the same ballot process. The new council will serve until 2027. For more on this story, visit www.cm-life.com.



Blace Carpenter | Managing editor

The 2025-2027 Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribal Council take their oath of office during the Tribe’s December regular session council meeting at Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort on Tuesday, Dec. 2.



Blace Carpenter | Managing editor

The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribal Council elected Lucas Sprague as Chief until 2027 during the Tribe’s December regular session council meeting at Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort on Tuesday, Dec. 2.



Blace Carpenter | Managing editor

Newly elected Treasurer for the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe Alice Jo Ricketts writes on ballot during a secret ballot election for the 2025-2027 Executive Council that was conducted during the Tribe’s December regular session council meeting at Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort on Tuesday, Dec. 2.

A season of light, community and celebration

By **Alexandrea Ladiski**
Staff reporter

As the Michigan winter frost creeps in and dorm windows glow with twinkle lights, campus life shifts. It's not just Christmas on the calendar: from menorahs to Yule logs to Kwanzaa kinara candles, a mosaic of traditions fills the chilly months. Central Michigan University students of all backgrounds gather, celebrate and connect, marking the darkest nights with warmth, food, music and light.

This holiday season is about many things, history, ritual, comfort and the small moments of belonging that help carry students through the cold. On campus, those celebrations reflect a wide range of cultures and traditions, each illuminating winter in its own way.

History



Long before kisses under the mistletoe and stockings hung by the chimney fire, people marked the season with rituals and celebrations that honored the turning of the year. The Winter Solstice, the shortest day and longest night of the year, has inspired festivals across centuries. CMU religion professor

Laurel Zwissler said

communities have long looked to the Winter Solstice as a way to understand and cope with the season's darkness.

For some, that turning toward the return of sunlight after the darkest point of the year evolved into the festival of Yule. Celebrated by early Germanic and Norse peoples, Yule centered on honoring nature's cycles during the Winter Solstice, the moment when daylight slowly begins to increase again. Zwissler said this seasonal shift has long inspired rituals focused on light, warmth and gathering, which helped people endure the coldest and most isolating part of winter.

Others, like Jewish communities, observe Hanukkah, an eight-day "Festival of Lights," commemorating a miracle from the second century B.C.E.: oil meant for one night burned for eight.

More recent additions reflect evolving cultures. Kwanzaa, founded in 1966, was designed to celebrate African-American heritage, unity and collective healing

during December's darker days.

Even major holidays like Christmas, traditionally celebrating the birth of Jesus, share timing with these ancient seasonal observances, a testimony to how winter's darkness and the promise of light have always drawn people together.

Traditions: light, warmth and shared space

Today, those same impulses shape how communities celebrate, something Zwissler sees across many winter traditions.

"Human beings like to place themselves cosmologically in the flow of the seasons," Zwissler said, summing up a universal holiday impulse. "It's dark and it's cold. It's a nice time of year to emphasize light and warmth and community."

Wesley at CMU is a Christian community on campus. Director and Pastor Audra Stone said their celebrations, part of the "Crowded Table Dinner Church" series, combine meals, music, poetry and reflection to honor community, generosity and belonging.

"These holidays are opportunities to reflect on what it means to be in loving and mutual relationship with others, Earth and God," she said.

For others, it might mean lighting a menorah, burning a yule log or gathering for a kinara-candle lighting. The common thread? Light, togetherness and a sense that as days grow darker outside, inside we keep the fires of community burning.



Food and comfort feasts

When it's cold outside, comfort food and hot cocoa warm more than bodies; they warm souls. Many holiday traditions deliver delicious rituals: potato latkes and jelly doughnuts for Hanukkah, eggnog and Christmas cookies in decorated kitchens, shared dinner tables during Kwanzaa often featuring dishes like black-eyed peas, collard greens, rice, yams or soul-food-style stews and seasonal pies or hearty meals for other holiday celebrations.

Pastor Stone said that their Wesley gatherings offer "home-cooked food, student-led music and art, and

plenty of time to connect as a community." For many students, it's that warm cup and shared meal that feels like home away from home.

In a time when winter can feel isolating, food becomes a simple, powerful act of care, a reminder that cold nights and heavy snow need not mean empty plates or empty hearts.

Music, art and expression

Sound plays an important role in how people celebrate. Whether it's the familiar melodies of Hanukkah, the harmonies of Christmas carols, the drumbeats of Kwanzaa or folk songs sung at solstice gatherings, music helps ground people in tradition and community.

The holidays also allow so many traditions to co-exist: someone lighting a menorah next to a person sipping hot cider after a yule-log reading; another quietly reflecting on family or identity while others sing carols.

Activities and campus life

At CMU this year, students don't have to go home to find a holiday celebration. As Zwissler said, in a campus with many traditions, it's helpful to think of this season not as dedicated to one holiday, but as "a season of a variety of celebrations."

For many, especially those far from home or family, that's an impactful part of their holiday experience: shared meals, warm lights, laughter, music and community in the shuffle between classes and finals.



SPORTS

Cheer for the Chippewas

The semester is wrapping up, but for CMU winter athletes, things are just starting to heat up. Here are some of the upcoming events where you can cheer on the Chippewas.

FRI 5 • **Wrestling at Indiana**
7 p.m., Big Ten+

SUN 7 • **Women's Basketball at Kentucky**
Noon, SECN+

• **Wrestling at Bellarmine**
2 p.m., ESPN+

• **Men's Basketball vs. Saint Louis**
3 p.m., ESPN+

SAT 13 • **Men's Basketball vs. Stoney Brook**
Noon, SNY/FloCollege

Skating the line



Jasmine Brooks | Staff photographer

The Central Michigan University D1 men's hockey team hosts Northern Michigan University for game two at Martin Ice Arena on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2025. The team came back from the first game, defeating Northern 4-3.

By Chance Hamilton & Isaac Krieger
Staff reporters

Central Michigan University's Division 1 Club Hockey team is experiencing a season of change. In March 2025, the team announced its move up to the D1 level of the American Club Hockey Association (ACHA), facing new opportunities and challenges to overcome in the process.

However, the executive board of the team looks forward to tackling these and finding success as they continue to grow their program. This e-board consists of current players on the team, who run day-to-day operations and make many of the important decisions.

Members of the e-board include graduate student goalie Dylan Niermeyer, who serves as the club president. In addition, junior goalie Aiden Reamer acts as vice president, and senior forward Riley Joyce is the team's treasurer.

Niermeyer has been the president of CMU's team for roughly three years, and assumed the position when members of the e-board at that time were either graduating or transitioning to become members of the D3 club hockey program. For Reamer and Joyce, both in their first year as e-board members, the process operated democratically.

"At the end of the year, we have team elections,"

Reamer said. "When a spot opens up, a couple guys might run for it. You make your case, say why you want to do it ... and the team votes."

Additionally, members can use this experience for their resumes.

"I wanted to do it since I'm a finance major, so I thought it would tie in and I could learn some stuff," Joyce said.

Modern operations of the team have a polished system in place, yet it wasn't always this way. The history of the team is somewhat murky, but the e-board's members agree that the team was founded in the early to mid-1990s.

"This team has been through a whole series of ups and downs," Niermeyer said. "There was a hazing incident in 2012 that shut down the team for five years. Then there was another tragic incident where a kid was celebrating his 21st birthday in Grand Rapids, and he passed away from a tragic accident, and they took the year off."

The team was reestablished in 2017.

"It's had its ebbs and flows, then some staff changes, and so we're finally starting to get our foothold," Niermeyer said.

Ultimately, there are still many intricate decisions that must be made for the team to operate smoothly, and it starts with the proper management of finance.

Fundraising and the budget

Most of the team's funding is provided by player dues, which are paid monthly. New players contribute \$3,300, which includes jersey costs for the entire team, while returning players pay \$2,900. The total for dues sits roughly around \$85,000 per year.

Tickets are another factor for supporting the program, but a significant piece of the puzzle results from fundraising opportunities, which amount to roughly \$30,000 per year. This season, the team has been intentional about involving the community to build further financial support from those in the Mount Pleasant area.

"This year, we're trying to do different things to help increase engagement and also involve more people, other than just friends and family," Niermeyer said.

Through working with the team's fundraising committee, which consists of the e-board members, current players and other staff members, the team has established numerous ways to increase funding.

Some chances for the community include game day events, such as auctioning off special edition jerseys and a Chuck-a-Duck activity for fans. In the offseason, the team participates in a golf outing, among other methods to raise funds.

"We have a donation drive that we do (in) the first month of every season," Reamer said. "We send it out to as many people as we can and ask for donations."

Roughly \$11,050 is contributed to the team because of this drive.

In addition, the team utilizes sponsorships from local businesses and some larger companies.

"The Cabin is a big one, and also Cottage Inn, so whenever we have events, we try to work with (local sponsors)," Niermeyer said. "I want to involve somebody who's given us money, and we want to show appreciation back."

Covering the expenses

After the bulk of the fundraising is completed, it becomes vital for the club hockey program to keep track of how they're moving their funds. Some of their most significant funds come in the form of renting ice and covering travel costs, which combined total around \$70,000.

All of CMU's club hockey programs play home games off campus at Martin Ice Arena, where renting an hour of ice costs \$240. For the team to prepare for games properly, they require 70-80 one-hour practices per year, with three practices per week, and each game requires three hours of time for ice rental.

In addition to renting ice, the team must factor in additional costs for playing as ACHA Division 1 members. They have seen an increase in costs after their promotion up from D2, including changes in registration fees and referee paychecks.

"With \$600 for the refs, each game is essentially \$1,300, and our tickets don't cover that," Reamer said.

During away games, the team must cover costs for

transportation, which vary based on trip length.

"We'll typically rent vans through either Krapohl Ford Enterprise or even used U-Hauls for equipment vans," Joyce said. "Typically, those come out to \$700 when we travel; however, on our longer trips that can be more expensive, like for our upcoming game in Kalamazoo, our bus trip is just under \$2,000."

In terms of equipment, players are required to purchase their own gear, including helmets, padding, skates, sticks and other essentials. However, the team has worked with local vendors to provide discounts for certain pieces of equipment.

Team staff, apart from coaches and long-term members who receive paychecks, are primarily volunteers. The team also sets aside a certain budget for those who seek recruits, which includes costs for travel and hotel rooms. Each recruiting class yields 8 to 12 new players, who join after these recruiting trips or via a contact form on the team website.

Transitioning to the ACHA's Division I contributed to the level of talent the team can bring in.

"There (are) a lot of guys that it does mean a lot to say, 'I play Division I, not Division II,'" Niermeyer said. "The quality of player that we are able to bring in now, just with the DI stamp on the program, it was definitely noticeable."

Current and future impact

The passion of the e-board members to create a program for fans, players and families to become involved is clear. Even when focused on classes, they work each day

to hold e-board meetings and find opportunities to benefit the team.

"Definitely can feel like you're drowning, but then it's rewarding on the back end," Treasurer Joyce said. "Somebody's gotta step up and do it, but you're helping the team run, and it's the reason I get to play."

With the move up to Division I in the ACHA, they've realized it's crucial to utilize the work of others in the community and around campus to make it not only a successful club hockey program but also a chance for students to build their portfolios.

"We can give something of value to them, and that's the most rewarding thing ever," Niermeyer said. "That's what keeps driving me, being able to give people pieces for their resumes. ... It's so cool that we're now becoming big enough that people want to volunteer their time for us."

This increased level of production allows the program to compete with others in their conference, which has been another goal for the e-board.

"Some really big teams out there that have really good production, and I would like to get closer to that," Niermeyer said. "I know that [CMU's] BCA and journalism departments are really good, and so we'd like to utilize them more."

This ultimately is the mission for the e-board when managing their club hockey program: to create a system for the CMU community to get involved in some way, establishing a space for individuals to grow while remaining centered on this well-loved sport.



Jasmine Brookins | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University freshman forward Drake Fletemier races towards the end of the rink, getting the puck closer to the goal at Martin Ice Arena, Friday, Nov. 7, 2025. Fletemier attempted no shots in the game against Northern.



Class of
2025

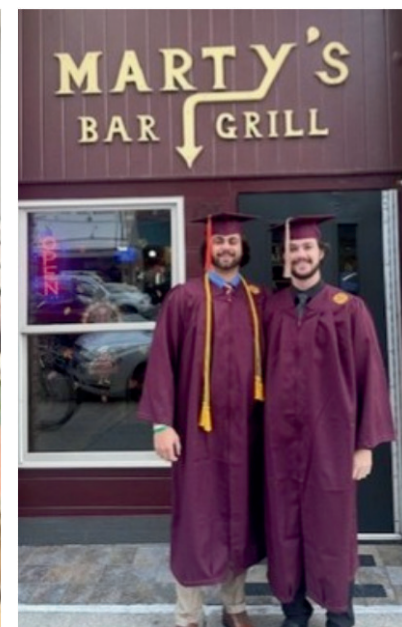
BRENDAN ALEXANDER BAJIS

Congratulations, Brendan!

Graduating with honors in Mechanical Engineering while excelling as a college hockey player is an incredible achievement.

We are beyond proud of everything you've accomplished at CMU and can't wait to see the amazing things your future holds. Wherever life takes you, know that we will always be there cheering you on. **Fire Up!**

Love,
Mom, Dad & Maya





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KALEN CARROLL

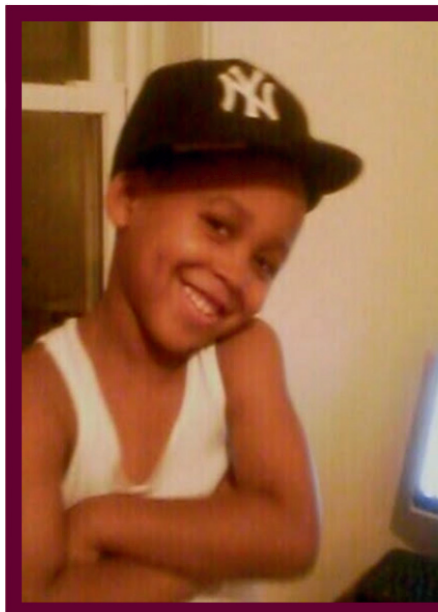
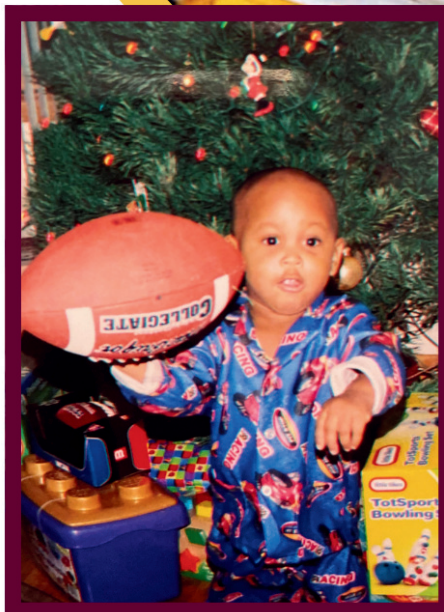
Kalen,

We are so proud of the thoughtful, hardworking man you've become. Your graduation reflects your perseverance, character and the dreams that you have pursued.

Carry your kindness, strength and integrity into every new chapter. Wherever life you remember that you have a family who loves you and believes in you wholeheartedly.

Keep shining-you have an extraordinary future waiting for you. Congratulations!

Love, Grandad, Grandma, and Shay



By Noah Henson
Staff Reporter

CMU FOOTBALL IS BOWL ELIGIBLE!

CMU has finally made its highly anticipated return to Bowl eligibility in the first year of the Matt Drinkall era in Mount Pleasant. In week one, Central Michigan showed off its three-headed quarterback system in a gritty 16-14 victory over San Jose State. After back-to-back losses to power five opponents in Pittsburgh and Michigan and suffering an injury to one third of the quarterback room, CMU finally played its home opener on Sept 20 in a 49-10 rout over Wagner. The Chippewas got its long-awaited revenge from last season in a 24-13 victory over Eastern Michigan. The squad from Mount Pleasant suffered a humbling 28-22 loss to Akron before snapping

a 10-game in conference road loss streak the following week in 27-6 triumph over Bowling Green. A 38-13 homecoming victory over UMASS set the tone for rivalry week against Western Michigan. However, Central Michigan fell in heartbreaking fashion in a 24-21 loss. Two straight wins over Buffalo and Kent State clinched a bowl appearance and gave hope for a Mid-American title appearance. However, a loss to Toledo shut the door on the hopes to play in Detroit in the first year under Drinkall.

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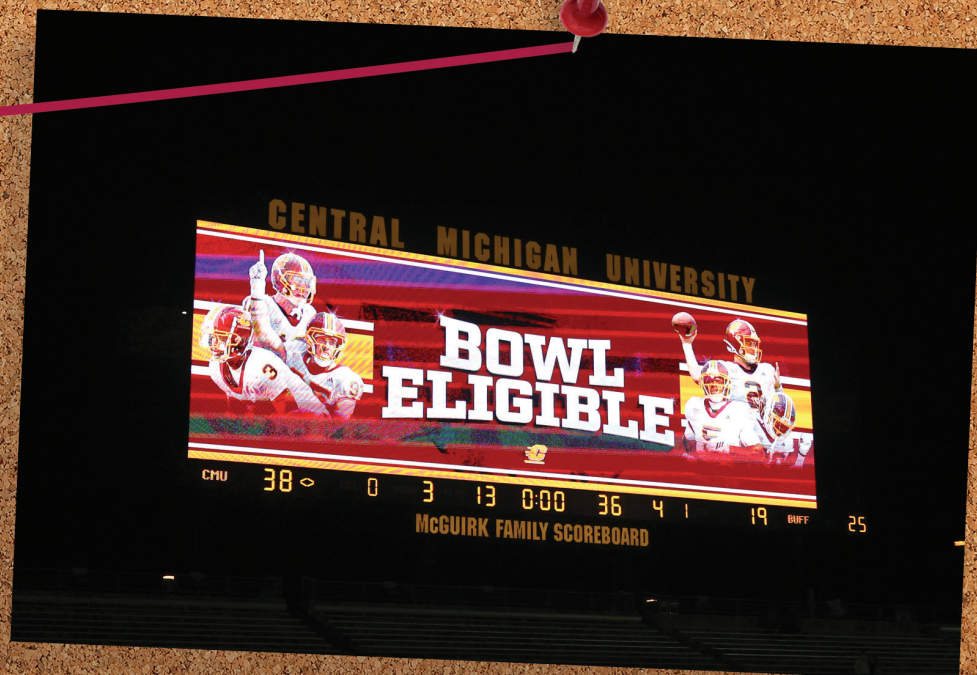
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WORD SEARCH

Words can be found in any direction (including diagonals) and can overlap each other. Use the word bank below.

A S T N E S E R P N R U O O A T
H Z I B O X I N G D A Y O F I S
C A E N G A P M A H C M T I A A
S R N S T L U C I A I N N L U I
E A S U R S D S W S E B O E V A
K T A U K W T E O V E H O C H S
A H D C C K U K D S C S H D D A
L O A A S R A A S I T R S F H N
F S S R E E Y H N O I H K G S I
W H O O Z T R T U S L W S I T E
O T P L N N S O T Y A S T N G T
N T S I S I A M U N M A T G S A
S E A N M W A L Z O A T N I H A
C S L G B S E A F S O O A S C H
F R U I T C A K E E G G A S C E
F I S O F E S T I V U S L G V A

ADVENT	LAS POSADAS	CHRISTMAS	ST LUCIA
BODHI	OMISOKA	EGG NOG	ST NICHOLAS
BOXING DAY	PRESENTS	FESTIVUS	WINTER
CAROLING	SNOWFLAKES	FRUIT CAKE	YULE
CHAMPAGNE	SOLSTICE	HANUKKAH	ZARATHOSHT

RAIN, SLEET OR SNOW?

See today's forecast at:
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GOLD ROUTE

SAC/Indian Trails	:13	:43	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Stadium Mall			UPON REQUEST
TJMaxx			UPON REQUEST
Walmart			UPON REQUEST
Copper Beech	:26	:56	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
The Reserve	:28	:58	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Jamestown Apts.	:30	:00	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Broomfield Mall			UPON REQUEST
Music Building Lot #33	:42	:12	EVERY 1/2 HOUR

MAROON ROUTE

Village@Bluegrass	:21	:51	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
University Meadows	:25	:55	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Union Square	:29	:59	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Target			UPON REQUEST
Music Building Lot #33	:42	:12	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Washington/Ojibway	:44	:14	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Anspach/Pearce	:45	:15	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Ronan/Grawn	:47	:17	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Main St./Gaylord	:48	:18	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
MMC/Doan Center			UPON REQUEST
Washington/Clayton	:05	:35	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Larzalere	:06	:36	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Wightman	:07	:37	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Park Library	:08	:38	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Music Building Lot #33	:12	:42	EVERY 1/2 HOUR

DEERFIELD

Towers	:15	:45	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Deming/Edgewood	:16	:46	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Westpoint Village	:18	:48	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Lexington Ridge	:25	:55	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Theunissen Lot#70	:27	:57	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Commuter Lot #75	:29	:59	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
SAC/Indian Trails	:30	:00	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Music Building Lot #33	:42	:12	EVERY 1/2 HOUR




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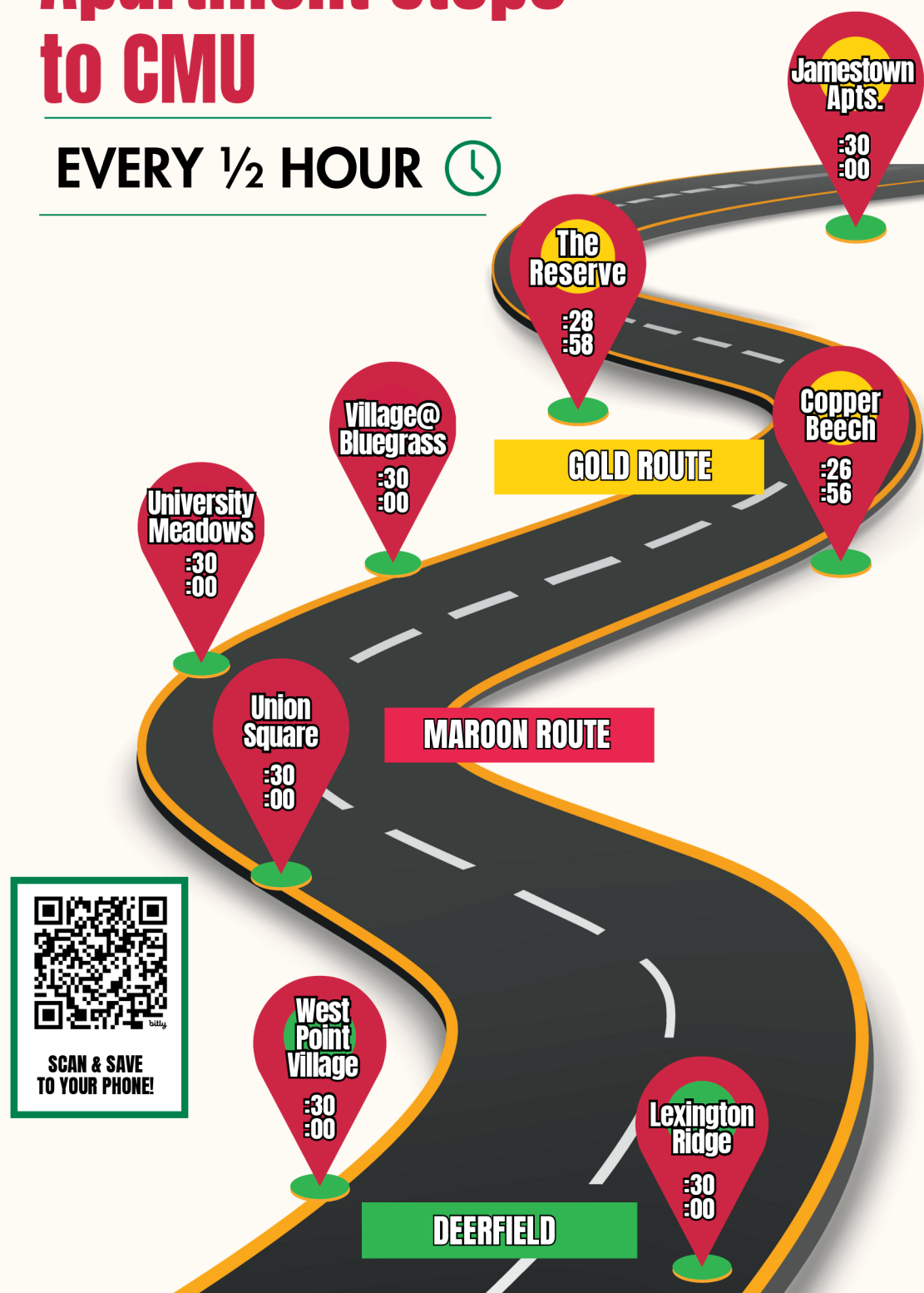
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