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A note from the editor-in-chief



By Lauren Rice
Editor-in-chief

Congratulations graduates! You're not just graduating from college, but from so many college student struggles.

You're graduating from dorm rooms and studying all night; from the 24/7 schedule of a student and the awkward life stage of being half-adult, half-teenager.

I would encourage, however, that you keep your mind open to learning new things, the way college requires. Keep making adventures outside your comfort zone and seeking out the voices of people who don't look or live like you.

And as you take the next step that so many people only dream about, don't worry about getting the perfect job on day one. Instead, focus on the attitude you bring with you, and the bigger plans you have for yourself.

People around the world are looking to the future right now for various reasons. Some people are preparing to graduate from college, but others are making their resolutions for the new year, preparing for the new era of American politics or waiting for wars to end.

Whatever your reason is for looking to the future, all I would ask is that you do so with hope and courage.

Being on the brink of a new year is always an exciting time to explore the possibilities of what comes next, not only for us as individuals, but for

the spaces we share with others. I know I've been picturing what I want to come next for my state, my country, my hometown.

That vision of safety, love and community is going to guide me through whatever hardships or changes come next. I'll be holding onto that dream, and you should be holding onto yours.

Whether this has been the best year of your life, the worst or somewhere in between, a new year is coming. Take advantage of the breath of fresh air to ask yourself: what's next, and how do we get there together? I'll be doing the same.

Safe travels, happy holidays and I'll see you next year.

Lauren Rice is Central Michigan Life's 2024-25 editor-in-chief.

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Central Michigan Life serves the CMU and Mount Pleasant communities, and is under the jurisdiction of the independent Student Media Board of Directors. Regan Foster serves as Director of Student Media at CMU and is the adviser to the newspaper. Articles and opinions do not necessarily reflect the position or opinions of Central Michigan University. Central Michigan Life is a member of the Associated Press, the Michigan Press Association, the Michigan Collegiate Press Association, the Associated Collegiate Press, College Newspaper Business & Advertising Managers Association, the Mount Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce, Central Michigan Home Builders Association, Mount Pleasant Housing Association and the Mount Pleasant Downtown Business Association. The newspaper's online provider is SN Works.

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On the cover: Photo illustration by Brittany Stevens with assets by CM Life photographers Soli Gordon, Mark Hoover, Jo Kenoshmeg and Marie Underwood, and from from CM Life files.

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Top of the line

It's been quite the year. Here's our newsroom's guide to news and sports stories that got us through 2024.



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So long, farewell

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Being an athlete AND a student can be stressful. Here's an inside look at what it means to be a student athlete, and the available resources to thrive in the process.



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Baking spirits bright

We take our holiday desserts very seriously around here. And at our inaugural holiday bake-off, we found out which baker would take the cake.



ONLINE



You think you're so smart?

Find out if you're smarter than the top of our "Are You Smarter?" leaderboard members in the penultimate episode of the semester.

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NEWS

Sounds like Life

Here are our editors' picks for must-hear podcasts from 2024. To listen to these or any of our podcasts, scan the QR code.



1 "Past Deadline: Traditions through time"

Podcast Editor Renae King talks with long-time faculty member Timothy Otteman about his experiences at CMU and the 100-year-long Homecoming tradition.

2 "Roadmap to CMU: Roommates revealed"

Host Kwame Ofori dives into the roommate chronicles — from hilarious first impressions to unforgettable moments — with guests Pushpa Talluri and Esther Benewa.

3 "Raving Geeks: Cryptids and urban legends"

Hosts Carter Salley and Christian Valk delve into the unknown with Editor-in-Chief Lauren Rice as they weigh the winners in an inaugural cryptid bracket.

4 "Are you Smarter than a CM-Lifer: Sydney vs. Rachel vs. Olivia"

In this chaotic episode of "Are you Smarter than a CM-Lifer," National Account Manager Rachel Kidder, Advertising Manager Olivia Garcia and Assistant Sports Editor Sydney Neal put their knowledge to the test.

5 "Crime Time: Raising awareness of sexual assault with Steve Thompson"

In this season finale of Crime Time, former Podcast Editor Abby Zimmerman sits down with Steve Thompson to discuss the importance of raising awareness of sexual assault. Listener discretion strongly advised.

A look back at 2024

This year has been filled with an overwhelming deal of changes on campus and across the globe. We've seen administrative shakeups, peaceful protests and an unprecedented election here, all during a time of global crises. In reflecting on 2024, the *Central Michigan Life* editorial team took a look back at the top stories locally. Here is our pick for the 10 most critical stories of the past year. You can scan the QR codes to read the full pieces.

President Bob Davies announces his resignation

This year started with Central Michigan University President Bob Davies's announcement of resignation. In a press conference following the Board of Trustees meeting on Feb. 6, Davies explained why he decided to leave.

Davies resigned to spend more time with his family. For the remaining 11 months, he said his goal was to ensure the well-being of the university.

"Even after nearly six years on this campus, I still marvel at the passion from our students, our staff, our faculty, our alumni and our many, many supporters," Davies said. "That fired up energy, that drive, that passion and that dedication is what made this decision to step down as president at the end of this year so very, very difficult."

Davies advised the new president to "embrace the students," and said that students always inspired him.

"CMU students, they're gritty, every day they work hard," Davies said. "It's amazing what they're able to achieve, so I want the students to know I love 'em."



CM Life photo | Nico Mendoza | file
Central Michigan University President Bob Davies talks about his departure, Tuesday, Feb. 6, in the Bovee University Center.



Wrestling coach Tom Borrelli caps legendary career

In March, then-Central Michigan wrestling head coach Tom Borrelli announced his retirement after 33 seasons with the Chippewas, leaving behind a legacy that would be cemented in CMU's history.

Borrelli secured 15 Mid-American Conference Championship titles, including one in his final season. He coached 45 All-Americans and 10 MAC Wrestlers of the Year.

"You don't remember the wins and losses that much," Borrelli said. "You remember the bus rides, the funny things that happened (and) just the relationships."

His impact was seen through wrestlers like Alex Cramer and assistant coach Matt Stencel who said he taught them more than just how to be champions on the mat.

"Wrestling is important to me, and we all have goals here, but he's really reinforced the importance of other things outside of the mat as well," Cramer said. "Such as family and the importance of the brotherhood on the team (and) taking care of one another."

Borrelli said he wanted his legacy to be that he left the program in a better place, and then someone else can continue to move it in the right direction.

The Chippewas are now led by Borrelli's assistant coach, Ben Bennett.



CM Life photo | Isaac Ritchey | file
Central Michigan wrestling coach Tom Borrelli looks to the scoreboard against Missouri in this February 2020 file photo at McGuirk Arena.



LGBTQ+ athletes, coaches share stories of authenticity

April is pride month at Central Michigan University, but queer visibility can be celebrated all year round. LGBTQ+ representation in sports is important and can be highlighted in three women making their mark at CMU.

"I can't stress enough to just be unapologetically yourself, be your most authentic self all the time," Central Michigan softball assistant coach Brittini Merchant said. "People will love you no matter what, and if they don't then they don't need to be a part of your life."

A part of the journey for the women was being comfortable with their identity.

"I think every queer person, we have to come out to ourselves first and what that looks like and then everything else matters," CMU women's basketball assistant coach

Toccara Ross said. "That's the game we kind of play in our head, whether or not we're comfortable with ourselves enough to share it with the world."

Coming out to fellow athletes and peers can be intimidating, but the three have found support through their athletic careers and journeys as people.

"All of my teammates have been very accepting," Central Michigan lacrosse player Alyssa Lowe said. "Sports is usually a heteronormative environment, but all my teammates are supportive and I haven't been treated differently because of it."



CM Life photo | Nico Mendoza | file
CMU lacrosse player Alyssa Lowe poses for a portrait in Wightman Hall.

Staff vacancies, funding hamper DEI efforts

In May, Central Michigan University's chapter of Society of Professional Journalists, Central Michigan Life and a journalism capstone class partnered to investigate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts on campus.

They found several staff vacancies in the Division of Student Affairs and offices that struggled with both physical and human capital.

The division had over 10 staff members leave in 2023. Among them were the director of LGBTQ+ Services, the director of the Office of Indigenous Affairs and the director of the Sexual Aggression Services.

Some of those positions were vacant for over five months, and the former Vice President of the Division of Student Affairs demoted the LGBTQ+ director's position to the assistant director role. Many faculty members wondered why.

Shawna Patterson-Stephens, the vice president for

Inclusive Excellence and Belonging, said CMU was not alone.

"It's a current point of conversation that is being had at the national level in thinking about how we are supporting the needs of Student Affairs staff post-COVID," she said. "(Student Affairs) were worked in ways that really stretched people, stretched our understanding of what it means to provide holistic support when everyone is in crisis at the same time."

Aside from being understaffed, the division has been assigned to lead over 40% of the DEI Strategic Plan tasks.

The former Vice President of the Division of Student Affairs left the university on April 8.

Stan Shingles was appointed as the interim vice president of Student Affairs with a pledge to fill critical vacancies. Among the changes, he restored the director of LGBTQ+ services position and \$20,000 of funding



CM Life photo | Soli Gordon | file
Protesters peacefully march while carrying signs insisting on a call for change on Saturday, April 20, outside Warriner Hall. A protester displays a sign saying, "Mandatory DEI training 4 all @ CMU."

Netflix's 'Sign Stealer' gives voice to Stalions investigation

It was a scandal that drew the attention of the sports world when Connor Stalions and the University of Michigan football were investigated for sign stealing. In an August documentary, the subject of that scandal spoke out.

Central Michigan was thrown into the scandal when a man who allegedly looked like Stalions was seen on the sidelines in the Chippewas' 2023 season opener against Michigan State. At the time, head coach Jim McElwain said the team was completely unaware of how he got onto the sidelines.

In Netflix's "Untold: Sign Stealer" documentary, Stalions does not confirm nor deny if he was on the sidelines.

In November, it was announced that McElwain was being investigated by the NCAA for the situation.

CM Life photo |
Nico Mendoza |
file

MSU's Redshirt Sophomore running back Nathan Carter runs with the ball while CMU's Redshirt Sophomore defensive back Caleb Spann attempts to tackle Carter, Friday, Sept. 1, in Spartan Stadium.



Senior running backs Marion Lukes and Myles Bailey dish life lessons from the gridiron

In their final year as Chippewas, running back duo Marion Lukes and Myles Bailey have took different roads to Central Michigan University, but followed a similar map to success once they arrived.

As well as a tasty tradition.

In a special celebration that comes from the initials of their names, both have celebrated touchdowns for the past four years by throwing M&Ms in the end zone.

In September, to kick off their final season, the pair dished out some life lessons that were sweet as candy.

Their shared interest for football forged a bond rooted in competition, shared experiences and a pursuit of greatness. Despite coming from different paths, the two found common ground as

they grew from freshmen to senior leaders on the Chippewas' roster.

This story of friendship, hard work and dedication inspires others to pursue their dreams.

"Focus on doing what's right," Bailey said. "You're in a small environment, and if you're looking for trouble, you'll find it. But if you focus on your goals, you can accomplish anything."

Lukes said to take things day-by-day.

"It feels like just yesterday we were freshmen," Lukes said. "Enjoy the moment because it doesn't last forever."



CM Life photo | Ella Miller | file
Senior running backs Myles Bailey, left, and Marion Lukes, right, pose for a portrait Tuesday, Sept. 10 in Kelly/Shorts Stadium

Neil MacKinnon named Central Michigan University's 16th president

Neil MacKinnon was voted to become the 16th president of CMU on Sept. 26. He began his five-year contract on Nov. 1.

The Board of Trustees voted unanimously with no discussion to approve his hiring. Former President Bob Davies assisted with the transition until the end of fall 2024 semester, and he will stay on as a master's-level professor.

Davies congratulated MacKinnon and said that serving this university's community has been an honor.

"Congratulations President MacKinnon, you are joining a...

university that cares about its students," Davies said at the Board meeting. "I'm looking forward to being your favorite faculty member, and with your support, Chairman (Todd) Regis, we'll make this a smooth transition."

MacKinnon brings more than 25 years of experience in higher education, serving as a "super provost" at Augusta University and dean of the James L. Winkle College of Pharmacy at the University of Cincinnati.



CM Life photo | Jasmine Brookins | file
New president-elect Neil MacKinnon gives a thank you speech after being voted the 16th president of Central Michigan University alongside his wife Leanne at the Board of Trustees meeting Sept. 26.

Isabella County casts ballots for change: Rejects millage to keep sheriff's deputies on the roads

From late September into early November, *Central Michigan Life* reporters worked tirelessly to cover the 2024 election season, including local millages, county races, statewide campaigns and national issues.

On the day of the election, multiple reporters traveled to seven polling locations in Isabella County to collect voting numbers and interview voters from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. that day. These interviews and polling numbers were released hourly until final elections numbers were

calculated for the country, state and county.

Isabella County followed the national trend of moving toward fiscal conservancy, with a red sweep of contested county-wide races and the decision to reject a 1.45-mill question that would have kept 22 sheriff's road patrol deputies, detectives and sergeants employed. Starting in 2025, those positions will be cut from the financially strapped county's coffers.



CM Life photo | Soli Gordon | file
Bruno Wemigwans sports his "I voted" sticker after voting for the first time on Tuesday, Nov. 5, in the Chippewa Township Hall

From a dark past, an illuminating future takes shape at Mount Pleasant Industrial Boarding School

The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe (SCIT) is looking into a five to 10-year plan to renovate and restore the remaining buildings of the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School (MIIBS) in the hopes of opening the campus to the public and honoring those affected by its dreadful history.

The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe is working to renovate the campus into places of quiet reflection and community gathering.

Architect Christian Nakarado said even after the renovation, they “want the silence inside these buildings to speak for themselves.”

“That probably means that we don’t renovate for the reuse of any of the

buildings except for the workshop,” he said. “We want to encourage people who might visit the site to engage in a quiet reflection.”

He said the school’s workshop will be turned into a community center where the visitors can attend events.

Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and Chairwoman of the MIIBS Committee Marcella Hadden said other plans for this project include a potential memorial garden and ensuring that the buildings’ structural integrity is safe for visitors.

“It’s going to encompass culture, language, healing and arts,” she said.



CM Life photo | Nico Mendoza | file

A boarded-up building sits on the campus of the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School just north of Pickard Road. The site is currently closed to the public, with ‘No Trespassing’ signs stationed around the property. However, a team of historians, archivists, advocates and an architect are working to renovate the property into a place of culture, language, healing and arts, among other purposes.



Football says goodbye to coach McElwain, welcomes Army offensive line coach Drinkall

On Nov. 20, head football coach Jim McElwain announced his retirement after six seasons with CMU. McElwain expressed his gratitude to players, coaches, and staff, calling his coaching journey “a true privilege.”

“My wife Karen and I have cherished every moment of our football journey,” McElwain said in the announcement from CMU Athletics. “We want to express our deepest gratitude to the all the players who have welcomed us into their lives, and the incredible coaches and support staff at every stop along the way—it has been a true privilege to work alongside all of them. The lifelong friendships that were created mean the world to us.”

Following his retirement, McElwain will transition to a new role as Special Assistant to the Athletic Director.

During his tenure, McElwain guided CMU to a 33-35 record, highlighted by a standout 2021 season with a 9-4 finish and a victory over Washington State in the Tony the Tiger Sun Bowl. Under his leadership, the Chippewas earned two bowl game appearances and captured two Mid-American Conference West Division titles.

The team announced Dec. 9 that Army offensive line/co-offensive coordinator coach Matt Drinkall will take the helm. He met the public for the first time as head coach at a Dec. 11 “Fired Up to be a Chippewa” event.



CM Life photo | Marie Underwood | file

Central Michigan head coach Jim McElwain smiles after a play in the 2023 homecoming game against Akron, Saturday, Oct. 14, 2023, at Kelly/Shorts Stadium. McElwain retired after six years as the Chippewas’ head coach, and on Dec. 9 the team announced Army offensive line/co-offensive coordinator coach Matt Drinkall will take over at the helm.



OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

— *The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States*

YOUR TURN

We welcome letters to the editor and guest columns. All submissions columns must include a name, address, organization university affiliation (if any) and phone number for verification. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Central Michigan Life reserves the right to edit all letters and columns for style, length, libel, redundancy, clarity, civility and accuracy. Letters should be no more than 450 words in length. Longer guest columns must remain under 750 words. CM Life reserves the right to print any original content as a letter or guest column. Submission does not guarantee publication.

MORE VOICES



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Sports made me who I am: CM Life gave me the courage to do it



By Kaia Zimmerman
Graduating sports editor

From the first moment I can remember, sports were part of who I was. When I was young, I played every sport imaginable, even flag football. And let's just say I took it seriously.

As I grew up, sports never left my life. I dove into softball, putting all my energy into it. I played year round for travel and high school, and it was the place that I felt most like myself.

Sports is everything to me. It brings so much emotion out of me and has brought me so many of my friendships.

I always knew that I wanted sports to be a huge part of who I was, and *Central Michigan Life* gave me the confidence to pursue it.

CM Life has given me the chance to tell athletes' stories that show who they are beyond the field or court. It has shown me how sports can develop the most beautiful relationships.

I am the third female sports editor in over 50 years for the paper. It is an accomplishment I will always remember because I love being a woman in sports.

If I didn't have this organization in my college journey, I wouldn't be the person I am today. The people at CM Life have become my second family and have accepted me for who I am.

I came to CM Life thinking that it would be a great opportunity to gain experience. And as cliché as it sounds, not only did I gain experience that will help me in my future career, but also friendships that will last a lifetime.

That being said, my time with CM Life is coming to an end. I have been dreading writing that sentence.

There are so many people that I want to thank, and I certainly can't fit it all in one column, but I wanted to highlight a few individuals who I couldn't have gotten through college without.

Michelle Staffen, Ashley Birkeness and Hadlee Peters, there aren't many words that I can write to describe how much our friendship means to me. I don't think I would've had the courage to find my true self if I didn't have you three. Thank you for loving me as my authentic self and for the countless late night talks,

laughs and memories. I am truly grateful that all of us made the decision to come to CMU to find the greatest friendship I have ever experienced.

To our Editor-in-Chief Lauren Rice, watching you emerge as a leader of this publication has been amazing. Becoming friends with you last semester has made my CM Life experience so much more fulfilling, even though you gaslight me all the time. I am so grateful for all the memories, especially beating you in cards at the office.

To our Editor-in-Chief Lauren Rice, watching you emerge as a leader of this publication has been amazing. Becoming friends with you last semester has made my CM Life experience so much more fulfilling, even though you gaslight me all the time. I am so grateful for all the memories, especially beating you in cards at the office.

Zipporah Abarca, you care so much about people and making sure their voices are heard. It has been incredible to watch. Thank you for always caring about me and being someone I can talk to about anything. When I talk with you, I know that I have support.

Sydney Neal, you are the hardest worker I have ever met. I can not wait to watch you become the third in a row female sports editor, and see how the sports desk continues to grow under your leadership.

I wouldn't have been able to get through this semester without you by my side, not only as the assistant sports editor, but also as a friend. The support we have for each other makes me want to do my best every day. Thank you for always being there for me.

To my Mom, thank you for loving me unconditionally. I am so grateful to have you as my Mom. You give me the best advice that I will take with me forever, and have taught me so many life lessons that I will never forget. Even though you are far away, I have felt so much support from you throughout my college journey.

And finally, the person who started my love for sports, my Dad. Dad, you have been my coach, my trainer and my biggest supporter in my sports journey. When I played softball, you never missed a game. You spent countless hours driving me to tournaments, paying for camps and buying us Subway.

When I think about softball, I think about looking out in the crowd and always seeing you there. Those are precious memories I will never let go of.

Before every game that I played in, my Dad would say "make the most of every opportunity." That quote is up on my desk at CM Life. Thank you Dad for always instilling confidence in me, and for always being there. Words can not express how much it means to me.

CM Life and Central Michigan University will always have a special place in my heart. I am so grateful for all the experiences and memories. I will never forget it.

**Congratulations,
CLASS OF 2024**

**Look Who's
GRADUATING!**



CENTRAL
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Class of
2024

JACOB BISSONNETTE

Huge congratulations
on graduating from
CMU!

We're so proud of your
hard work and
dedication.

Your growth has been
inspiring. We can't wait
to see what you
accomplish next!

All our love,
Mom and Dad



Class of
2024

IZZY DEMERS



Congratulations Izzy!
2nd generation CMU grad!
we are very proud of you!
Love, Mom & Dad

KAYLA E. FOWLKES

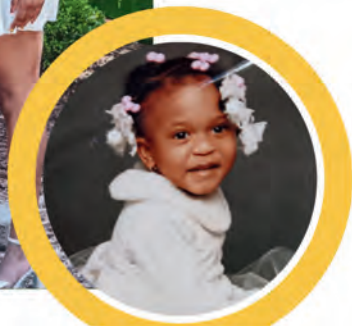


Class of
2024



My angel God has truly
blessed you. We are so
proud of you and all of
your accomplishment.
Remain focused & you
will get far.
Congratulations from all
of us!

Love, Mom & Dad &
family



Class of
2024

JAIDEN ALYIA VIANNAH GORDON

Jaiden,

We are continuously
amazed by your
compassionate heart,
incredible humanity, and
fierce determination.

Congratulations on
another goal crushed!!

Love,
Mom & Dad





Class of
2024

MADELON LUCE HUMPHREYS

Madelon,

We see who you truly are—faithful, come what may—but with a gift like yours, the sky's the limit—just you wait!

Love, Mom, Dad,
Devin, and Ainslee



Class of
2024

ZACHARY ALEXANDER KROPP

Congratulations Zak!

We could not be more proud of you and your accomplishments! You will Fire Up your students by sharing your passion for History and English!

We love you!
Mom and Dad



Class of
2024

OMOLARA AGUDA

Omolara,

Congratulations on your graduation! We are so proud of you. Good job!

This is only the beginning of your adult life and we cannot wait to witness all that you can accomplish.

Love always,
Mom, Dad, Grandma Emi, Oluwaseyi,
and Lindsey.



JACOB THOMAS BLAYLOCK



Jake,

We are so proud of your perseverance and determination to keep working toward your goals. This milestone is a testament to your strength, your hard work, and your commitment to yourself and your future. Congratulations!

Love,
Mom and Dad

NATHANIAL WALTER DICK



Congratulations, Nathan!!

We are so very proud of you and everything you have accomplished.

We are excited to see what your future holds.

We love you!
Dad, Mom, Sam and Nic

JESSE AREND HOLDEN



Congratulations, Jesse

I am so proud of you kiddo!

Love, Dad

MARC KENNETH KEMME



Congratulations, Marc!

We are all very proud of you and can't wait to see what great things the future has in store for you.

Love, Mom, Michael,
Emma and Uncle
Kenny

Congratulations,
Class of 2024



#FireUpForever

TOBIAS LEONARD



Tob,

We love you and are so proud of you! You are an incredible young man and we can't wait to see what the future holds for you!

Love,
Mom, Dad & Sarah



"For us a healthy relationship is built on support, balance, and communication."

Covering
What Matters
at CMU since
1919



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

CM Life has been there.

ROSEMARIAN GENEVIEVE MALONEY



Congratulations, Rosie!

We are all so proud of you for completing your degree.

YOU ARE AWESOME!

Love, Mom, Dad, Lilly, Brian, Christian and Sarah.

DESTINI' JOELLE STEPHENS



Congratulations, Destini' Joelle
We are so PROUD of YOU!

Love, Mommy, Daddy, Jay, Jorell and Taylor

T.J. MICAL



T.J.

You did it!!!! Haay!!!!
We are so very proud of you, and the man you have become. We hope and pray for a lifetime of success and happiness on your journey in life. Wishing you all the best!!!!

Love always, XOXO
Mom, Pup, Nicole and Mohamed

MARIE UNDERWOOD



Congratulations on achieving this academic milestone!

Through all your hard work and perseverance during both good and difficult times you are now a CMU grad! We are so proud and cannot wait to see what's next for you!

Love,
Dad, Mom, & William

Where's the
*Best place
to shake
a leg*
in Central
Michigan

*Best of
2024*

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JULIA DANIELSON

Julia,
We are so incredibly proud of the woman you have become! You love your people fiercely. Keep reaching your goals and we know you will go far. You are our shinging Starr and we love you!

Love always,
Your people



CENTRAL
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2024**ALLISON MARIE OVIEDO**

Allison,
All that you have done and the way you've grown has
been amazing to us. We are so very proud of you.
Love, Mom & Dad

CENTRAL
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2024**VERONICA GERALDINE ROSINSKI**

Happy Graduation Day,
Veronica!

We are very proud of you and
what you have accomplished,
and look forward to your future!

Love - Mom and Dad.

CENTRAL
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2024**RACHEL
CHRISTINE
KIDDER**

Rachel,

Congratulations! We are so proud of you
and everything you've accomplished!

Never forget who you are and you can't
go wrong. This is just the beginning.

Love, Dad & Krista



JENNA SUST**CENTRAL**
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Congratulations, Jenna!!!

We are all so proud of you! You are strong, smart, and beautiful inside and out! We know that you will go on to make all of your dreams come true! FIRE UP! We love you so much!

Love, Mom, Dad, Alexandria, and Michael

JAMIL CLARK THOMAS**CENTRAL**
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As you step out into the world, remember that you are capable of extraordinary things. You have the power to make a difference, to inspire others, & to leave your mark on the world. Continue to pursue your passion, practice empathy, cultivate curiosity & embrace learning opportunities.

Congratulations Jamil!!
Xoxoxo Mum/Dad

**JORDAN DAVID VANNEST****CENTRAL**
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Jordan,

You did it! We are extremely proud of all your hard work and accomplishments. Looking forward to following your next adventures and know you will be nothing but successful!

Much Love,
Mom, Dad & Ellie

MADALINE OLIVIA WELCH**CENTRAL**
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**Class of**
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Congratulations, Madaline!

In the grand symphony of life, your voice, spirit, kindness, and tenacity soar among the stars. Your journey has been a hard-fought, yet beautiful dance of discovery, wit, and imagination. We've watched you grow, learn, and persevere through every challenge. It is time to forge your own path, chase your own rainbows, and create your own sunshine. Here's to crafting a masterpiece of a future!

Love, Dad, Mom, Hailey (and the rest of the family too!)





Class of
2024

EMAN ADEL ABDULLA

Eman,

Congratulations on your graduation.

You have always been a hard worker.

We're very proud of your accomplishments
and can't wait to see you thrive further.

Love, your parents and siblings!



To the *Central Michigan Life* Advertising Team



By Rachel Kidder

Graduating national advertising manager

To the *Central Michigan Life* advertising team,

As many of you may know, I have been working for CM Life for about 3 years. I started when our office was at one of the lowest lows. We had very little staff, I was untrained and attempting to manage an office.

With that perspective I am so amazed by this team, you are all driven, thought-

ful and incredible people. The account managers before you all were capable and talented, but you take it even further.

You take failures in stride, celebrate other's successes and have taken the empty office that I was fighting to fill and have made it full of light and success. You all have been fundamental to my growth as a professional and as a person.

You have all provided me with life advice and held me when times were hard. We laughed together and helped each other succeed; I couldn't have asked for more from this wonderful team.

I certainly wouldn't have made it this far in this major, or even through college at all if it wasn't for CM Life. Kathy and Megan have provided me room to grow and learn. I wouldn't be as capable as

a professional or adult had they not been there to listen to every rant and provide me with the support and tools to push through my challenges.

They have acted as my biggest cheerleaders throughout my journey here, and I cannot explain how grateful I am to have had them as mentors.

Specifically, to all the account managers, I am devastated to leave. You are

my family; you have been a consistent source of light in my life. I am going to miss coming into a full office and listening to all the jokes, laughter, supportive words and advice.

Some of my best college memories come from spending time with you guys. I am going to miss every single one of you. As I am sitting here writing this, you all are surrounding me, doing what you do best: filling this office with light. I know you all will exit this office as I am now and set the world on fire.

I love you all, beat Cal Poly, and Fire Up. CM Life 4 Life <3

Love,
Rachel

Rachel Kidder is Central Michigan Life's national advertising manager and the 2023-24 advertising manager. She is graduating with degrees in advertising and graphic design Dec. 14.

You are my family; you have been a consistent source of light in my life. I am going to miss coming into a full office and listening to all the jokes, laughter, supportive words and advice.

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SUN 15

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1 p.m. at Dayton (ESPN+)

TUES 17

- Men's Basketball v. Mississippi State
7:30 p.m. at Mississippi (ESPN+)

SAT 21

- Men's Basketball v. Arizona
4 p.m. at Arizona (ESPN+)

SUN 22

- Women's Basketball v. Milwaukee
1 p.m., McGuirk Arena

'This is what you do, it's not who you are'

Kaia Zimmerman
Sports editor

Sports have the power to move people to tears, bring people together and create lasting moments that will forever be talked about.

But behind every moment is an athlete: Someone who works countless hours to get the level where they can inspire others.

Oftentimes, it is forgotten that there is a human behind that performance who has the daily struggles that any other person goes through. The pressure to perform for not only themselves but their community, can weigh on them.

Mental health conversations in sports are growing, with iconic athletes like Olympic Gymnast Simone Biles who are coming forward about the issue. However, there is still stigma and a fear among athletes that they will seem less tough if they are open about it.

"I think in some ways we're getting there," Central Michigan University Student Athlete Designated Counselor Brooke Bechtel said. "But the sports environment has been a little behind in picking up on what that could look like to create a mentally healthy environment for our student-athletes to thrive."

Mental health in CMU Athletics

On CMU's campus, Bechtel works with student athletes to help them through the unique struggles they go through, compared to other students. She has been in that role for seven years.

According to Bechtel, 25% of the total student athlete population reaches out for individual counseling throughout the year.

Specifically with athletes, Bechtel said a major theme that she sees with is identity in sports, where students put how they see themselves in their performance.

That can include athletes who are transitioning in and out of college sport along with athletes who deal with injury.

While she said male and female athletes deal with similar issues, there are some different themes she sees for women compared to men.

The lack of professional opportunities for women athletes can also lead to mental health issues because they will no longer play their sport after graduation, Bechtel said.

In the Women's National Basketball Association, the biggest women's professional sport league, only 36 players were picked in the 2024 WNBA Draft. According to the NCAA, there are 351 women basketball programs in Division I which gives women athletes limited opportunity to make it at the professional level.

In a well being survey completed by the NCAA in 2023, it was found that women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ athletes dealt with higher rates of mental health issues. The survey said that 29% of women athletes "felt overwhelming anxiety" compared to nine percent for male athletes.

Bechtel said the reason women engage with mental health services more could be because there is less stigma for women compared to male athletes.

"I think that's a difference that I notice is that I would confidently say the stigma remains higher among male student athletes than female student athletes," Bechtel said. "So female student athletes in my experience are more likely to engage in help seeking for mental health than our males."

"So this data could potentially be skewed, saying that they access it more, but I wouldn't say that the concerns are greater."

Even though they are athletes, Bechtel said students don't just talk about being an athlete because of the unique experiences that make them who they are.

"At the end of the day, you still are supporting the mental health of the human across from you," Bechtel said. "You still have to approach them like you would any other. What has that been like for them?... It can be harmful to assume that the individual across would fit within those themes."



Marie Underwood | Staff Photographer

Central Michigan's softball team huddles before game five of the MAC softball tournament against Ohio on Friday, May 12 in Oxford, Ohio.

"Everyone can experience the exact same environment, but have a very different reaction to it."

Human first

Bechtel said one of the most important aspects when looking at student athlete mental health is to recognize that all athletes are human first, reminding people that these athletes are 18-22 years old.

"I think student athletes are often criticized by their wins and losses of performance on and off the field, and remember, this is a human," Bechtel said. "They are so much more than their number (and) their stat book."

CMU Softball Assistant Coach Sara Driesenga recognized the importance of pushing her players to perform well, but she said that starts with making sure they are at their best mentally.

"Obviously, as a coach, I care about them first as a person and then, obviously, as an athlete," Driesenga said. "That's always our job is to have them perform well, so if we want them to do that, we really have to start with their mental health and make sure that they're doing okay in their everyday life, so that they can show up and be present and perform."

When athletes are at their best mentally and programs prioritize a human-first mindset, it can lead to better performance on the field," Bechtel said.

"Systems that appreciate the human first, rather than the performance, could be really beneficial for anyone's mental health, which in turn will improve performance," Bechtel said. "We perform better when we're feeling better."

Along with spending countless hours perfecting their craft in their sport, student athletes also have to focus on excelling in the classroom, relationships and unpredictable moments, like any other person.

Former CMU softball player and current assistant coach Abbey Tolmie was a part of the 2022 softball team that experienced a bus crash while traveling in South Carolina. According to a *Central Michigan Life* article about the accident, the bus driver fell unconscious, which caused the bus to go to the side of the road for 250 yards.

A day later, the Chippewas had to play a softball game.

The issue hit close to home for her because she had family members who had passed away in a car accident.

"That impacted me really at a deeper level, and then (we had to) continue to play right after that," Tolmie said.

Tolmie said the team wasn't given any time to process the traumatic event, and wasn't provided much help from the university in terms of classwork and extensions, which made it harder for her to work through all the emotions that came with the crash.

"It... felt like they made it seem like it was a fender bender, and that wasn't the case," Tolmie said. "So it was just... a difficult time for all of us, but we really became stronger together and leaned on each other."

She said the team was able to get through it because of each other and their coaches.

"We maybe had like nine hours before we had to do it again (ride a bus)," Tolmie said. "So, it was just really important to lean on each other."

The accident also led to more conversations within the team of being more open about the struggles they were going through.

"That was the first and only time I ever received counseling or help at all, which I shared with my teammates," Tolmie said. "And multiple of us had to reach out for help because it was just too much."

Finding that support within her team is a major reason that Tolmie was able to get through it. She said the relationships she built with her teammates throughout her college career are irreplaceable.

"They don't even have to express that they're struggling for you to see it," Tolmie said. "And I think that's just so important. It's basically girlhood to the max, so we absolutely take advantage of that."

Identity in sport

A majority of athletes deal with performance in their sport defining how they see themselves.

When an athlete works their entire life to make it to the Division I level, they can oftentimes define their identity by the sport.

"I'm often having conversations with student athletes about 'this is what you do, it's not who you are,'" Bechtel said. "And sometimes that feels confusing for them too."

The pressure that is put on athletes to perform whether that is due to social media, family, coaches or themselves is common for Division I athletes. This is because there is so much care and work that is put in to get to the highest level in college sport.

"It is a sport or something that we have been focusing on typically from a very young age and working to perfect to be able to get to this level, clearly a high level of talent to be able to make it to the Division One level," Bechtel said. "And so, that does not come without internal and external expectations (and) performance pressures."

As a college athlete, Tolmie said it is not so much the pressure from outside sources, but the pressure athletes put on themselves to perform at their best.

"I think anybody who cares so much about their sport deals with (identity in sport), and it's almost like it's a good and a bad thing because I feel my identity in it because I've given so much of my life to it and I've cared so much about it and it's a big part of me," Tolmie said. "It has a lot of my friendships and relationships and role models tied to the sport... you want to make yourself proud, make them proud, make Central proud."

"So I think it's a good thing that you have that added pressure but a lot of it is like self-internalizing it and it's not everybody putting on you, it's you thinking that and really you're putting it on yourself."

She got through the added internalized pressure by creating a mindset that was more about the process rather than the results.

"I'm going to put in the extra work... so that when it's my turn to win the game or to get it going for the Chippewas, I've given myself the best chance to put the team first and to succeed in that moment," Tolmie said. "And if it doesn't work out, like it's the nature of the game; our game's a game of failure. So just accepting it and moving forward and doing the next best thing."

One reason that she was able to have that mindset is because of the support system she has around her.

"I know that they're going to love me whether I hit a home run or was 0-for-3," Tolmie said. "Just giving my best every single day and trying to be prepared to the best of my ability."

Now as one of the assistant coaches for CMU, Tolmie wants to be a coach that helps players focus on the positive in each moment.

"I think there's so much self-reflection and self-negativity when it comes to our game because

it's a game of failure," Tolmie said. "And everybody who is considered a perfectionist wants to be 10-for-10. But if you are 3-for-10, you're considered pretty good."

Driesenga said when she was an athlete, she also experienced the struggles that come with identity in sport.

"I think a lot of my worth was placed on my performance," Driesenga said. "And I think that's something very common that we see in our student-athletes, especially because they care so much and they want to do well and they put a lot of hard work in, and sometimes to not see the results is hard."

It wasn't until she met a sports social worker in college that she really started to understand the impact mental health could have on how she sees herself.

"I didn't always really know what mental health was, but then when I was in college, I ended up meeting with one of our sports social workers in the athletic department, and he was life-changing," Driesenga said. "Meeting with him really made me learn about how I see myself and how I see my sport and knowing that it's something that I do and not who I am."

The importance of conversation

It is conversations and education like Driesenga had in her college experience that helps normalize mental health in sport.

"If we're creating a culture within our team where we normalize it and we have conversations surrounding it, our athletes are going to talk about it more which is going to give other athletes permission to consider their own experience and also motivate them to also seek help on their own," Bechtel said.

"Versus if it's something we don't talk about, it's kind of this unsaid expectation of like 'yeah, we don't go there, we don't talk about that on our team, figure it out, do that on your own.'... Without that normalization, there's shame."



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Mental health is often seen as a weakness in sports. One of the best ways to get rid of the shame that some athletes feel is education and hard conversations, according to Bechtel and Driesenga.

One of the changes Bechtel has seen throughout her career at CMU is the greater number of students who are referring other student athletes to her services.

"If there's less conversations, there's less help seeking," Bechtel said. "Or at least public awareness of it, and I think really that is the biggest thing when we think about the biggest common referral source is other students."

When student athletes are exposed to important conversations, it can educate them on how mental health can impact them, which can lead to them reaching out for help.

"In our minds, that's what the anxiety or the depression or whatever it might be, that's what it's telling us, is that, like, 'you're alone. There's nobody that can help you. It's going to be like this forever,' which all of those things are false," Driesenga said. "And I think being able to differentiate that voice versus the voice of who you actually are, I think knowing that and having the awareness and just the education to know what that is, is really important."

The softball team has something called Mental Health Monday where they discuss important topics concerning mental health education, so the players can work on how they can be their best mentally.

Driesenga also said it is important for young athletes to hear about other student athlete's experiences.

"Hearing athletes' stories, I think is how we're going to continue to reduce the stigma and continue along that spectrum of making it much more accepted to be able to share how you're actually doing," Driesenga said.

What needs to be done?

The sports world has continued to grow in how it handles mental health with more athletes stepping forward about their own experiences. However, Bechtel said there are still strides that need to be made.

"The world of collegiate athletics is a little behind in terms of the normalizing of the athlete rather than the performance expectations," Bechtel said.

Tolmie said she believes that the university has done a good job of prioritizing mental health of student athletes throughout her college career.

"I think they've done a great job," Tolmie said.

"Obviously, there's always room for improvement, and we never want to stay where we're at. But I'm very proud of the university in that aspect."

CMU was one of the first institutions in the Mid-American Conference to have a designated student athlete counselor.

Bechtel also said that she believes the administration has made strides with mental health acceptance and understanding.

"(I) definitely also have noticed a lot of positive motion and changes in efforts from an administrative standpoint in terms of understanding and acknowledging like, 'okay, this is a resource that we need to sustain and build upon and what that looks like as we plan out in future years,'" Bechtel said.

Going forward, Bechtel said it is important to not only realize that mental health issues exist, but how institutions can create positive environments to combat those issues.

"I think we're aware that it exists," Bechtel said.

"But more about the idea of not every feeling requires a mental health intervention. And so how can we create environments that have positive factors for

mental health, like relationships, connection, having conversations beyond our performance expectations."

As conversations continue to grow, Bechtel said mental health resources for student athletes need to continue to develop to help student athletes succeed.

"Mental health is health," Bechtel said. "And it can't be all reliant on one person... Certainly if we need mental health treatment, that needs to rely on the clinician, but really looking at what can our systems do to make sure we integrate. Our sports medicine staff now does mental health screening for every student athlete every single year across, not only if they're having some experience but just from the minute they step on our campus to have a conversation."

Another area where universities can continue to grow its resources is in hiring more mental health clinicians, having speakers come to campus and providing safe spaces for athletes, according to Driesenga.

As Tolmie reflected on her college experience, she said sports has shown her that she can do hard things and has given her confidence in herself.

"I think it's a super special experience to play a college sport," Tolmie said. "And I wouldn't have the amazing friendships and life lessons, and the transferable skills... I think it was really special and something that I would never give up for anything. But go in with a mindset, expecting it to be hard."

"No one walks away from college athletics and (is) like 'that was super easy.' It shouldn't be that way or else you're not getting the full potential you could out of yourself. So just having the mindset that you expect it to be hard and that you know you can handle it."

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Baking seasons bright

CM Life sweetens the season with inaugural Holiday Bake-Off

By Mia Kerner
Staff reporter

The staff of *Central Michigan Life* was baking spirits bright on Nov. 22 at the office's first Holiday Bake-Off. Though her opponents' baked goods were tough to beat, Assistant Photo Editor Ella Miller ultimately slayed the competition.

The inaugural Bake-Off featured six participants and was judged by three guest judges.

The judges included Central Michigan University Professor and Director of the Political Science Program Kyla Stepp, Assistant Director of Student Media Kathy Simon and Associate Professor and Director of the Allen Foundation Culinary Nutrition Center Jeff Fisher.

Stepp said that she was asked by one of her students, Editor-in-Chief Lauren Rice, to participate as a judge in the friendly competition.

"I've probably mentioned once or twice that I like desserts," Stepp said.

The judges sat at a small table in the center of the office, surrounded by crowds of eager onlookers. From the first bite taken, the room was chillingly silent. Tension flooded the space like a cool winter breeze.

As they sampled each baked masterpiece (besides the

box of Little Debbie's Christmas Tree Cakes thrown into the mix) the judges nodded with approval and occasionally wrote down notes.

"It was really good. It was fun," Stepp said. "They were all very tasty."

When the time came to select the tastiest holiday treat, the contestants and onlookers began to chatter anxiously as the judges discussed and compared their scores.

The ranked list of bakers and their confections was posted as follows:

1. Ella Miller - Pumpkin chocolate chip cookies
 2. Courtney Boyd - Peppermint brownies
 3. Lauren Rice - Gingerbread cookies
 4. Lauren Pocica - Snickerdoodles
 5. Luana Stevens - Peanut butter cookies
- (Honorable mention) Olivia Garcia - Little Debbie's Christmas Tree Cakes

The room erupted into cheers as each contestant's name was read, especially for the first Holiday Bake-Off champion. Miller's pumpkin chocolate chip cookies were a smash hit among the judges, earning her the coveted title.

"I feel really happy. I wasn't expecting to win but I'm really excited," Miller said.

She said she didn't go into the competition set on winning, but rather to have fun with the experience. She agreed that the Bake-Off was a good excuse to break out her oven mitts.

"I bake a lot at home but I haven't baked in my apartment before this," Miller said.

Fourth-place contestant Pocica said she enjoys baking for the reprieve that it brings.

"It was something that I started as a hobby and something to get my mind off of school work and the craziness of life," Pocica said.

Similarly to Miller, Pocica said she signed up for CM Life's Bake-Off for the experience.

"I wanted to try my hand at a competition, I've never had my baking judged before," Pocica said.

After participating in the Bake-Off, Pocica said she'd be willing to join more competitions if the opportunity presents itself.

CM Life's inaugural Holiday Bake-Off brought healthy competition and holiday cheer to Moore Hall. It appears that this event will be a new holiday tradition for the CM Life staff for years to come.



Jo Kenoshmeg | Staff photographer

(From left) Associate Professor and Director of Allen Foundation Culinary Nutrition Center Jeff Fisher, Assistant Director of Student Media Kathy Simon and Central Michigan University Professor and Director of the Political Science Program Kyla Stepp judge the CM Life dessert competition Nov. 22 in the CM Life Office.

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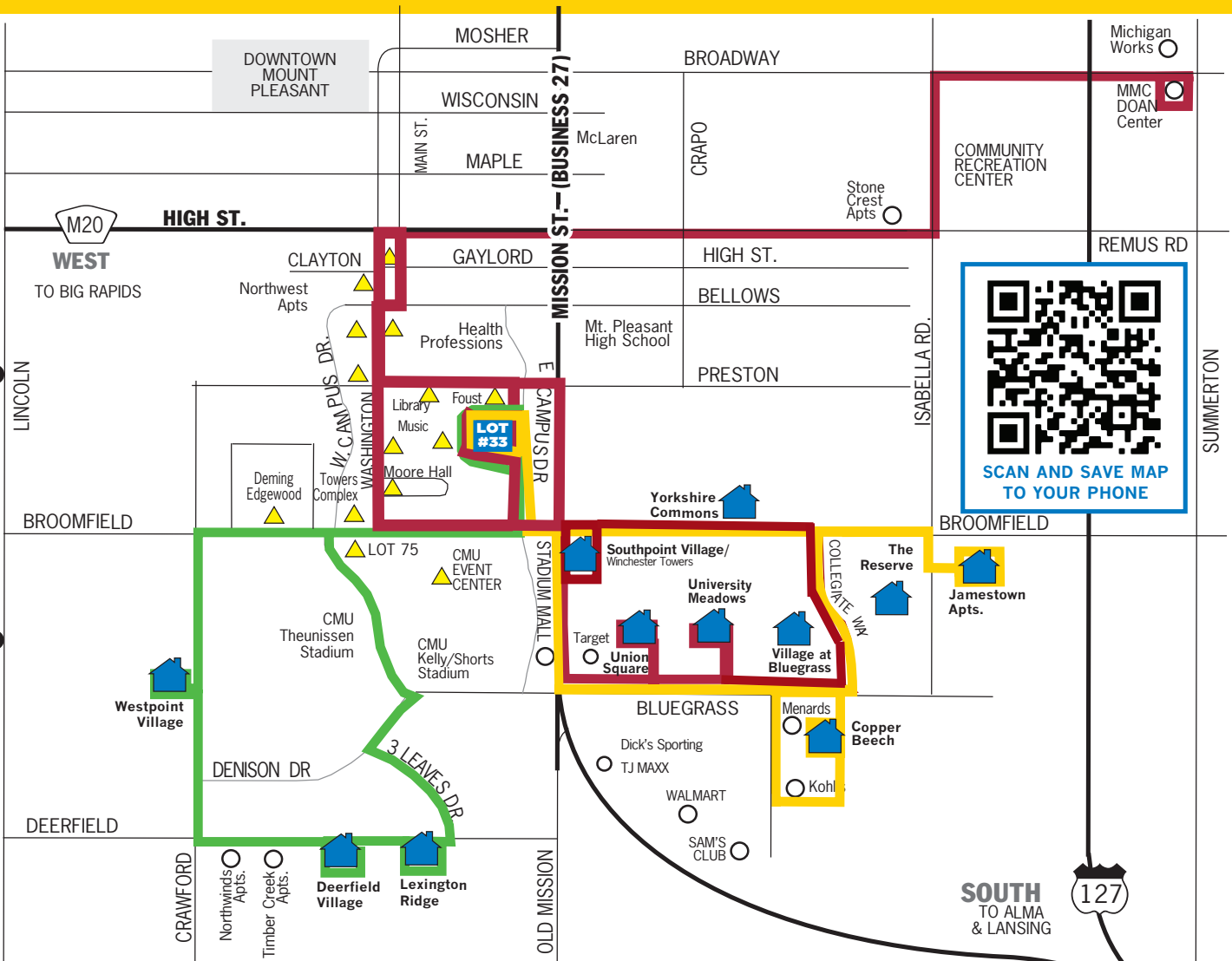
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