



The Eastern Echo

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Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor residents brave cold to denounce ICE

Lilly Kujawski
Managing Editor - News

On a Saturday afternoon in freezing temperatures, Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor residents braved the cold to stand up to Immigration and Customs Enforcement action in Washtenaw County and beyond.

On Jan. 31, about 70 community members flanked the corners of the busy Huron Parkway and Washtenaw Avenue intersection. Amid 17-degree temperatures, protesters waved signs and elicited honks of support from drivers passing by.

“I’ve been fighting these things my whole life,” said Cheryl Brooks, an Ypsilanti resident and Eastern Michigan University alumna. She said she marched in the Civil Rights Movement during the Martin Luther King Jr. era. She said it is absurd that she is still fighting for the same issues today that she did back then.

After President Donald Trump was re-elected, Brooks considered moving out of the country but decided not to.

“I had to stay here and fight,” Brooks said. “I couldn’t just disappear.”

Protesters at the rally mentioned the recent killings of ICU nurse Alex Pretti and mother Renée Good in Minneapolis as reasons to show out in the cold on Saturday. Pretti and Good were killed by ICE agents earlier this month, prompting outcry from Minneapolis residents and nationwide protests. Other protesters mentioned ICE presence in Washtenaw County as a concern that brought them to the streets.

“People are being murdered and kidnapped,” said Ypsilanti resident Savannah Cobleigh.

Ann Arbor resident Elizabeth Baker said she took a Constitution review



Protesters wave flags and signs at a Jan. 31, rally against Immigration and Customs Enforcement action at the corner of Huron Parkway and Washtenaw Avenue. Lilly Kujawski / The Eastern Echo

class last year, and she said she feels called to action by executive violations of the First Amendment, attacks on journalists, and the overreach of ICE.

“It is necessary for all of us to come together and make our voices heard,” Baker said.

America was not founded on a common heritage, Baker said, but rather the common values expressed in the Constitution.

“In America, we believe in the idea that every human has an inherent value,” Baker said. “That’s what makes America great.”

Tattoo artist and Ann Arbor resident Hannah Blackburn, holding a sign that said, “No one is illegal on stolen land,” said that most people have more in common than they realize.

“I want humans to remember that we’re all on the same team,” Blackburn

said. “I think it’s important to speak up against people who actively cause harm.”

“When you see your fellow people getting hurt, you gotta stand up against that,” Blackburn added.

Saturday’s rally was one of several that happened throughout Washtenaw County, said Gordon McAllister, an organizer for the Ypsilanti Indivisible pro-democracy group. Roadside rallies

against ICE will continue through February from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., including at the corner of Washtenaw Avenue and Huron Parkway in Ann Arbor.

A smaller protest, organized by Honk For Democracy, is planned for Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026, 4:30-5:30 p.m. on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Huron Street in Ypsilanti.

Water Street identified as top priority for Ypsilanti, residents share opinions



Ypsilanti resident Brian Geiringer speaks at the Jan. 28 meeting for the Water Street ad hoc citizens committee. Natalie Kyle / The Eastern Echo

Natalie Kyle, Katherine Tatomir
Editor-in-Chief, Newsletter Editor

The Water Street Redevelopment Area has been identified as the Ypsilanti City Council’s top priority for 2026

with a 95% consensus among council members. Now, city officials are working with residents to establish an ad hoc citizens committee to help make decisions for its redevelopment.

At a special council meeting Jan.

22, Morgan Milner, an organizational behavior expert and professor of management at Eastern Michigan University, presented the results of a City Council budget prioritization session he facilitated during the Jan. 20 City Council meeting, with Water Street ranked at the top of the list.

The priority declaration was followed by a community meeting Jan. 28 to discuss the next steps for the development and the formation of a Water Street ad hoc citizens committee. Council Chambers was filled during the meeting with approximately 60 attendees.

The meeting room saw residents eager to show their interest in the ad hoc committee, many with strong convictions of what should and should not happen with the Water Street area.

Water Street history

First purchased by the city in 1999, the Water Street Redevelopment Area is a 32-acre site east of downtown

Ypsilanti, situated between Michigan Avenue and the Huron River.

The city’s original hope for the area was to increase Ypsilanti’s tax revenue and improve its overall image. Redevelopment plans have been persisting unsuccessfully since then.

Water Street is considered a brownfield, which has complicated the redevelopment process. A brownfield is an area of land that has been contaminated from prior industrial and commercial use. The contamination of Water Street has been a concern for the community, with three resident speakers questioning the city’s plans to effectively clean the brownfield area before redevelopment at the Jan. 28 meeting.

In spring 2025, the City of Ypsilanti held three community engagement sessions regarding the state of Water Street and its future, followed by four focus groups in the fall to gather community feedback. During the focus groups, the city took notes of

the community’s hopes, fears, wants and needs concerning the Water Street Redevelopment Area.

Now, the City of Ypsilanti has applied for a United States Environmental Protection Agency Cleanup Grant, requesting \$1,890,350 to complete Polychlorinated Biphenyl, or PCB, cleanup efforts for Water Street. If awarded, the USEPA Cleanup Grant would fund the final PCB cleanup needed for Water Street, which is set to begin in summer 2026.

Ad hoc committee

The City of Ypsilanti is working to create an ad hoc citizens committee to assist in drafting a Request for Qualifications to identify a developer for the site.

The ad hoc committee will be made up of three city council members, six to eight city residents, and up to two non-residents with relevant expertise.

SEE WATER STREET, PAGE 4

The Eastern Echo

The Eastern Echo serves the Eastern Michigan University and Ypsilanti communities as an independent student-operated newspaper. Founded in 1881 as *The Normal News*, *The Eastern Echo* distributes weekly print editions on campus and throughout the surrounding Ypsilanti community during the fall and winter academic semesters. *The Eastern Echo* also publishes online year-round. Published content is subject to copyright and may not be reproduced without prior written consent of the newspaper.

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THE ECHO MISSION

The Eastern Echo informs the Eastern Michigan University and Ypsilanti communities by highlighting newsworthy content in a fair, accurate and timely manner.

HOW TO REACH US

The Eastern Echo
Winter 2026
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CORRECTIONS

- On page 1 of the Jan. 27, 2026 edition of *The Eastern Echo*, the date was incorrectly listed as Nov. 18, 2025.
- On page 1 of the Jan. 27, 2026 edition of *The Eastern Echo*, the name of Mason Vazquez was misspelled.

Cellar Roots,
EMU's Fine Arts
and Literary
Magazine:



FEB
3

Cycle and Sculpt It

7-7:45 p.m.

Rec/IM Building - Room 126

FEB
4

Campus Parking Listening Session

5-7 p.m.

Downing Hall - First Floor Lounge

FEB
5

H2O Fit

9-9:45 a.m.

Rec/IM Building - Jones Pool, Lanes 1-3

FEB
6

EMU Women's Hockey v. Grand Valley

Starts at 7:35 p.m.

Arctic Edge Ice Arena - Canton, Mich.

FEB
7

Walk with Friends: Winter Beauty

8:30-10:30 a.m.

Rolling Hills County Park - Lodge

FEB
8

EMU Gymnastics v. Central Michigan University

Starts at 1 p.m.

George Gervin GameAbove Center

FEB
9

Valentine's Day Cards - Share the Care

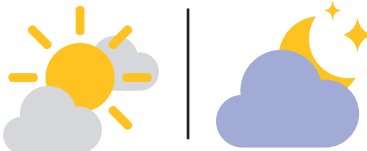
12-1 p.m.

Marshall Building - Room 201

WEATHER
FORECAST

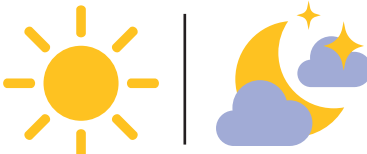
Tuesday, Feb. 3

High: 26 | Low: 3
Partly sunny / Partly cloudy



Wednesday, Feb. 4

High: 22 | Low: 6
Mostly sunny / Mostly cloudy



Thursday, Feb. 5

High: 25 | Low: 17
Mostly sunny / Mostly cloudy*



Friday, Feb. 6

High: 32 | Low: 1
Mostly cloudy* / Mostly cloudy



Saturday, Feb. 7

High: 13 | Low: N/A
Mostly sunny / N/A



*Chance of precipitation



Source:
The National Weather
Service

Where to find
The Echo:

Off Campus:

- Domino's Pizza, 953 Washtenaw Ave.
- Eagle Crest Conference Center, 1275 S. Huron St.
- Eagle Crest Golf Clubhouse 1275 S. Huron St.

On Campus:

- Pierce Hall
- Pray-Harrold
- Sherzer Hall

Where to find our links:



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Facebook @ The Eastern Echo

Frustration clouds U-M, Los Alamos data center project

Lilly Kujawski
Managing Editor - News

Washtenaw County residents gathered for an open house hosted by Los Alamos National Laboratory and the University of Michigan about their computing facility, proposed for construction in the township. Held on Thursday, Jan. 29, the open house was meant to answer questions about the project.

The open house followed concerns from the community and local leaders about a lack of transparency in the project. At the open house, held at Marriott Ypsilanti at Eagle Crest, information was presented on poster boards, arranged in a semi-circle and divided between project stakeholders. The formatting drew criticism from attendees, with some likening it to a science fair.

“This here feels like gaslighting in the form of a science fair,” said Finn Bowbear, an Ann Arbor resident with concerns about the project. “There’s people with a single name on their name tag talking next to their designated colorful poster board, but you don’t know who you are actually talking to because there is no last name. You can’t follow up with them.”

The project has been widely referred to as a data center by the public, a term U-M and LANL have pushed back on, instead dubbing it a high-performing computing facility.

“We don’t use the same kind of computers; they are not as large; they are not the same architecture. They are different things,” said Patrick Fitch, deputy director for science, technology and engineering at LANL. He said the facility is not a commercial data center and will not conduct the same kind of work as a commercial facility.

The \$1.25 billion project will create two facilities: a federal research facility and an academic one, as well as an electrical substation to power the facilities. At the open house, LANL displayed poster boards listing the types of research and computing the federal facility will do, including medical and health, climate, clean energy, mobility related to autonomous driving technology, advanced materials and national security.

Critics and opponents of the project have pushed back on LANL’s involvement, citing concerns with LANL’s role in creating the atomic bomb. LANL, one of the U.S. Energy Department’s 16 research and development laboratories in the country, was established in 1943 to



Patrick Fitch, deputy director for science, technology and engineering at Los Alamos National Laboratory, addresses a group of attendees at a Jan. 29, open house about the proposed Ypsilanti Township computing facility.

Lilly Kujawski / The Eastern Echo

conduct research for the Manhattan Project during World War II.

The research done by the federal facility in Ypsilanti Township will be computational work, Fitch said. The simulation and computational research conducted in the facility will inform LANL’s nuclear weapons program, he said.

“Aspects of nuclear weapons are key to our simulation expertise and we want this loop to include large investments in national security, so that spins back into the basic science, and what we learn here, on that list of non-nuclear weapons stuff, spins back into nuclear weapons,” Fitch said. “One of the two computers we are planning [in] our 55 megawatts if this facility is built, would be for what is called secret restricted data. It is going to be for the nuclear weapons program; not exclusively, but being able to do that work.”

U-M and LANL are currently looking at two possible sites in Ypsilanti Township to build the facility, posters presented at the open house showed. The first possible site is located on the north side of Textile Road. The other site is the American Center for Mobility, or ACM, which sits on a large piece of property near Willow Run. The site is a former Hydramatic plant

that was owned by General Motors.

“We are still looking at two sites and we are doing our due diligence and analysis of those two sites,” Chris Kolb told *The Eastern Echo*. Kolb is the vice president for government relations at U-M.

In previous Ypsilanti Township Board meetings, board members have expressed a preference for the ACM site, which they say is better suited for the proposed facility. In a previous interview with *The Echo*, Township Supervisor Brenda Stumbo said she did not think the Textile Road location was zoned suitable for the project. As a public university, U-M is exempt from zoning laws.

In a previous interview, Stumbo expressed frustrations about a lack of transparency about the project.

“We asked to be at the table and U of M flat out refused,” Stumbo said in a previous interview. She said the updates the township received on the project were limited at the meetings that did occur.

U-M is not required to include the township in decision-making for the project. Kolb said U-M met with township board leaders at least four times.

“We have met with the township

leadership, and we have never denied having a meeting with them, and we have provided answers to the questions,” Kolb said.

Despite some concerns raised by Michigan lawmakers, including a bill introduced by State Rep. Jimmie Wilson Jr. to callback \$100 million previously pledged by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to support the project, Kolb said he is optimistic about state support for the facility.

“This project is a priority for the governor,” Kolb said. “There is political support for this project in Lansing.”

Some residents, however, are not convinced. Natalie Zimmer, an Ypsilanti resident and Eastern Michigan University alumnus, opposes data centers in general because of their environmental impact and concerns about the potential effect of artificial intelligence on critical thinking skills. Zimmer attended the open house hoping to learn more about the project and was disappointed by the setup and lack of new information provided.

“I was hoping to actually learn more about what was going on with this data center, and I did not,” Zimmer said. “I would like to see more transparency.”

EMU expands loan repayment program to include more majors

Lauren Holloway
News Reporter

Incoming freshmen at Eastern Michigan University for the fall 2026 semester will have an opportunity to take part in EMU’s Loan Repayment Assistance Program.

LRAP started two years ago, when there were FAFSA delays. The program was initiated to help fill in financial gaps and entice students to choose Eastern, said Katie Condon, vice president of enrollment management at the university.

Incoming EMU students who plan to get a degree in one of the programs that LRAP supports will be contacted through email with instructions on how to enroll in the program, Condon said. After the student graduates, gets a job and starts to pay back the student loans, the program will provide quarterly reimbursements for up to the whole payment. The amount depends on

how much the loans were; the national average is \$200 a month, Condon said.

The criteria for receiving the reimbursements include making less than \$50,000 a year after graduation and working at least 30 hours a week, Condon said. However, the job does not have to be in the field of the degree. As long as it is not a gig job, such as driving for DoorDash or Uber, it is eligible for the program, Condon said.

Originally, the program was exclusively for teaching majors; however, the incoming freshmen for the fall 2026 semester will have an expanded list of majors that the program supports. Some of the new majors are anthropology, cinema studies, English, international affairs, philosophy, religious studies, social work and others. The full list of all included majors is available on the EMU Advantage website.

The expanded list of majors was decided by Condon and EMU Provost

Rhonda Longworth. The choices were made based on data collected from perspective students on tours, ACT and SAT questionnaires and fields of interest on college applications, Condon said. Condon and Longworth decided on majors where there was interest but low enrollment for EMU, meaning that students going into those fields of study were choosing other universities. The starting salary for careers in those fields was also taken into consideration, Condon said.

“We’re hoping to maintain enrollment in our programs as a result,” Condon said about the expanded list of majors.

The funding for LRAP comes from EMU’s general fund, just like scholarships. Eastern started the program by partnering with Ardeo Education Solutions, formerly the LRAP Association. The company was founded by Peter Samuelson, who graduated from Yale Law School and

took part in its loan assistance program. The company was established in 2008 to assist students in their pursuit of higher education. Ardeo has partnered with over 200 colleges and universities across the country. The company has since changed its name and website from My LRAP to Ardeo. More information can be found on Ardeo’s new website.

Although the addition of more majors to the program has garnered some interest, the focus remains on education, Condon said, because EMU started as a teaching college and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer wants more educators in Michigan. 48 incoming students already plan to participate in the program in the fall, 80% of whom plan to be education majors, Condon said.

The goal is to support students’ needs and keep enrollment high at Eastern, Condon said.

What's the Move?

Feb. 3 - 9

Allie Beecher

Copy Desk Chief

Looking for something to do around town this week? Check out *The Eastern Echo’s* list of upcoming events in Ypsilanti.

Crystal Air-Plant Planter Craft Workshop - Feb. 3

Looking for a way to get crafty and spruce up any living space? Try this crystal air-plant planter craft workshop at Sticks Bar in Depot Town on Tuesday, Feb. 3. From 6 to 7:30 p.m., attendees will learn how to make their own planter, which will include wire, a crystal of their choice and a live or fake air-plant. Attendees will take home their finished projects, and the event will feature a prize raffle.

Admission to the event is \$35, and tickets are available online. It is limited to 15 spots, so reserve one as soon as possible by visiting the Happiness Crystals Co. - Crystal Shop Facebook page or checking out the event on YpsiReal.com.

Drinks will be served throughout the event, and dinner will be served at the end, around 7:30 p.m. The \$35 admission price does not include food or drinks.

Sticks is upstairs from Aubree’s Pizzeria and Grill at 39 E. Cross St. in Ypsilanti.

Valentine’s Craft Day - Feb. 4

Take a break from midweek monotony with this crafting event! On Wednesday, Feb. 4, the Ypsi Cocktail Club will host a crafting and valentine-decorating event from 5 to 10 p.m. Crafting supplies will be provided, but attendees are also welcome to bring their own to use or donate.

The Ypsi Cocktail Club is at 102 W. Michigan Ave. in Ypsilanti.

For more information, check out the event on YpsiReal.com or visit the Ypsi Cocktail Club Facebook page.

Speed Dating at Ypsi Cocktail Club - Feb. 7

Those looking for a valentine this season may be interested in checking out the Ypsi Cocktail Club’s speed dating event Saturday, Feb. 7. This event features three rounds of speed dating — the first from 6:15 to 7 p.m., the second from 7:15 to 8 p.m., and the third from 8:15 to 9 p.m. The first session will be primarily focused on straight dating, the second on gay and lesbian dating and the third on dating for bisexual and trans-for-trans individuals.

Event tickets cost \$10 and are available on Eventbrite.com. For more information, check out the event on YpsiReal.com or Eventbrite.com.

“This Girl Laughs, This Girl Cries, This Girl Does Nothing” - Feb. 7

Get ready, theater lovers — on Saturday, Feb. 7, Spinning Dot Theater will present the play “This Girl Laughs, This Girl Cries, This Girl Does Nothing” from 5:30 to 6:45 p.m. in The Ypsilanti Performance Space Annex Conference Center. According to The YPSI’s website, this play focuses on three young triplet girls left in a forest by their woodcutter father. The audience follows the adventures of each girl as she makes a choice about what to do next. The play is recommended for those five years of age and older.

Tickets are available on The YPSI’s website. The price is \$5 for youth and \$10 for adults.

The YPSI is at 218 N. Adams St.

Ypsi Flea: Lovers Edition - Feb. 8

Curious about the flea market experience, or just in the mood to do some shopping? Try Ypsi Flea at the Ypsilanti Freighthouse on Sunday, Feb. 8, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Here, shoppers can find valentine-themed goods, vintage clothing, art and more. Admission is free, and food will be provided.

For more information, check out the event on YpsiReal.com or visit the Ypsi Flea page on Facebook.

The Ypsilanti Freighthouse is at 100 Market Place.



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Families in Ypsilanti receive cash support from Rx Kids program

Laura Meriweather
News Reporter

Rx Kids has enrolled 63 Ypsilanti families since the direct cash assistance program was expanded to the city in December 2025.

Rx Kids, led by Michigan State University, offers eligible families \$1,500 during pregnancy and \$500 a month for six months after birth. \$94,000 has been distributed through the program as of Jan. 27, 2026, according to a statistics dashboard on the organization’s website.

The program, which was started in Flint in 2024, was allotted \$270 million in the state budget in October 2025. As of Jan. 30, 2026, 24 areas in Michigan are now eligible for the program. The Detroit government recently projected that coverage would start in the city within the first 100 days of its new mayor’s term.

According to U.S. Census data, the fertility rate in Ypsilanti was 3.7% in 2023. To qualify for the program, Ypsilanti applicants must live in the city of Ypsilanti and either be at least 16 weeks pregnant or have given birth after November 2025. When applying online, applicants will need to provide a copy of a government-issued ID, proof of residency and proof of pregnancy. If applying after birth, proof of birth and guardianship will need to be provided instead.

On Dec. 10, 2025, the Michigan House Appropriations Committee blocked over \$645 million in funding to state programs, including \$18.5 million that had been allotted to the expansion of Rx Kids to new areas in the state.

As of Jan. 16, 2026, the funds had been refrozen after a back-and-forth legislative battle between Michigan House Republicans and Attorney General Dana Nessel. The funding block did not impact previous funding for Rx Kids, according to a statement released by the organization following the initial blockage.

“We are working around the clock with state leaders, budget officials and community and philanthropic partners to understand what options remain,” Rx Kids’ statement said. “Our priority is protecting Michigan families — especially pregnant moms



Ypsilanti Mayor Nicole Brown receives a check from Old National Bank Foundation on behalf of Rx Kids Ypsilanti in November 2025. AnnaBelle Favre / The Eastern Echo

and newborns — who are already experiencing the health, financial and emotional benefits of this program.”

On Jan. 30, 2026, when asked about plans for long-term funding, Katie Jones told The Eastern Echo in an email, “We are continuing to seek partners and fundraise through the next year.” Jones is the manager of Strategic Communications, Economic Development & Equity for the city of Ypsilanti.

A similar federal program created by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act last year called Trump Accounts is currently set to start July 5, 2026. Trump Accounts will be available to babies born from 2025 to 2028, according to the program’s website. Whereas Rx Kids provides immediate direct deposits to families, Trump Account holders will receive an initial \$1,000 deposit to an investment account that will remain

locked until they turn 18.

“It is a pro-family initiative that will help millions of Americans harness the strength of our economy, to lift up the next generation,” President Trump said about the Trump Accounts program at a White House press event June 9, 2025.

According to the most recent data on the Rx Kids website, 53.8% of Ypsilanti families enrolled in the program had an annual household income of \$30,000 or less and 93.65% were pregnant at the time of enrollment.

“I think the success is in the numbers,” Jones said. “People are signing up and getting access to resources during a time they most need them and that is amazing.”

More information about Rx Kids, including the online application portal, can be found on the organization’s website.

Water Street

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

After six committee meetings, the RFQ is planned for release in August 2026. After its release, the committee will recommend developers to City Council and work with them to create a Community Benefits Agreement with Developers.

During the Jan. 28 meeting, Ward 3 City Councilor Amber Fellows explained the purpose of the committee and encouraged residents to participate.

“This is a significant intervention to traditional developments,” Fellows said. “Instead of just having developers give us their pitch and then we try to change it from antagonism in the community, instead we’re coming together to do collective visioning.”

At the Jan. 28 meeting, there was confusion between attendees and city officials surrounding whether a straw poll would be conducted to nominate residents to the committee.

An unofficial vote was taken at the end of the meeting, when attendees raised their hands to show support for 11 residents intending to apply. Fellows said that the nominations will be considered by City Council when they select applicants for the committee. The city is still accepting online applications for those who did not attend the meeting.

Community feedback

A common concern among the community meeting’s attendees

involved the relocation of unhoused individuals residing in the Water Street area before developing the land.

Brian Geiringer, a 10-year Ypsilanti resident and previous campaign manager for Councilor Amber Fellows, pointed to a sign in the back of the room that read, “Your development is our displacement,” referring to unhoused individuals living in the area.

“No matter what happens here, that [displacement] has to be front of mind, because we’re talking about people’s lives,” Geiringer said.

Another resident, Elka Chamberlain, voiced her concerns about the extent of community involvement in the ad hoc committee and the overall development of Water Street.

“My biggest concern ... is to make sure that people that live in this community are involved,” Chamberlain said. “What kind of apprenticeships might be available for people so that we can put people to work?”

Nathan Phillips, originally from Omaha, Nebraska, has lived in Ypsilanti for the last few decades. He recounted to the community his experiences with homelessness, financial hardship and loss. As a Native American, Phillips feels strongly about using the land respectfully.

“I want to see something right for that land,” Phillips said. “I owe the spirits that are in that land a debt of gratitude because they comforted me

when I needed it. I do believe that whatever happens there, there should be a recognition of the indigenous people that were here.”

Several attendees mentioned the area’s contamination and doubted its safety for future use, with one resident, Lee Tooson, recalling his work on Water Street several decades ago.

“70 years [I’ve lived] in Ypsi, I worked at various places on Water Street ... the old convertible factory,” Tooson said. “What did we do with all the solvent we cleaned the metal with? We poured it in the ground.”

Next steps

Applications are currently open on the City of Ypsilanti’s website for residents to apply for the Water Street ad hoc citizens committee. The committee will be approved by City Council during its Feb. 17, 2026, meeting.

A Water Street community engagement survey can also be found on the city’s website. Residents can complete the survey to share their hopes and fears for the space.

Ypsilanti’s Community, Economic Development and Equity Manager Katie Jones said she was encouraged by the amount of people who showed up to the community meeting and hopes that the diversity of their voices will be represented in the development moving forward.

Opinion

The WellNest Watch

Health policy decisions made today shape Michigan tomorrow



Shafaat Ali Choyon
Contributor

Editor’s note: In The WellNest Watch, master’s degree candidates in the public health program at EMU’s School of Health Promotion and Human Performance explore news, research and standard practices in the field of health and wellness.

Last winter, I visited a small community hospital in Michigan whose expansion plans had been quietly shelved.

“We’ve stopped thinking about growth,” an administrator told me. “We’re just trying to survive the year.”

At the time, it sounded like a local problem. Today, it reads like an early warning.

Michigan is approaching a narrow decision window. Federal health-coverage changes tied to recent budget legislation, along with related Medicaid and marketplace policy shifts summarized by congressional and state agencies, are beginning to translate into real pressure on hospitals, clinics and public health systems. These changes are often described as fiscal adjustments. On the ground, they function more like stress tests, and many parts of Michigan’s health system are already operating close to the limit.

Healthcare is not a marginal sector in Michigan. It is a central piece of the state’s economic and social infrastructure. Medicaid alone supports more than 2.6 million Michigan residents, including children, older adults, people with disabilities and working families enrolled through the Healthy Michigan Plan. When federal policy tightens eligibility, increases administrative complexity or constrains financing flexibility, the effects are immediate and local.

State budget officials have warned that large reductions in federal Medicaid support would create a gap Michigan cannot easily absorb. Unlike federal agencies, states cannot deficit-finance indefinitely. That means pressure shifts quickly to providers and local systems — delayed reimbursements, frozen hiring, postponed capital projects and reductions in services that are essential but not legally mandated.

One of the most damaging effects is instability. Coverage churn, people losing and regaining insurance because of paperwork hurdles or reporting requirements, disrupts care continuity and increases costs. Hospitals still treat emergencies, but reimbursement becomes unpredictable. Clinics struggle to plan staffing. Rural facilities, already operating on thin margins, have little room to absorb shocks. Once a service line closes or a hospital consolidates, reopening is rarely an option.

Public health absorbs a different kind of damage. Prevention programs and community partnerships are often the first areas trimmed when budgets tighten. These programs don’t generate headlines, but they quietly reduce emergency visits, manage chronic disease and detect outbreaks early. When they are weakened, costs do

not disappear; they surface later, in emergency rooms, disability rolls and lost productivity.

Policy volatility compounds the problem. In early January, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced an updated structure for the childhood immunization schedule, emphasizing categories such as universal recommendation, high-risk groups, and shared clinical decision-making, while maintaining coverage requirements. Regardless of one’s view, when there are shifts in national guidance, states, health departments and providers are forced to divert time and resources toward recommunication and compliance, which is time not spent strengthening trust, improving uptake or preparing for the next public health threat.

Michigan’s health ecosystem is tightly interconnected. When Medicaid financing becomes unstable, costs and risks spill outward, to employers facing higher benefit costs, to local governments managing public health capacity, and to families delaying care because coverage feels uncertain. What looks like savings at the federal level often reappears as higher costs and weaker resilience at the state and community level.

This is where urgency matters. Hospitals do not close overnight, and public health departments do not disappear in a single budget cycle. The damage accumulates quietly, one unfilled position, one canceled program, one postponed investment at a time. By the time the effects are obvious, rebuilding takes years and costs far more than what was saved.

Michigan policymakers still have choices. The state can invest in enrollment assistance to reduce coverage churn, prioritize rural access and protect local health departments that carry the prevention load. Health systems can strengthen regional partnerships so that smaller facilities are not left to absorb shocks alone. But these actions are time-sensitive.

Once institutions are dismantled and professionals leave the field, recovery is no longer a budget decision; it becomes a generational one. Healthcare is infrastructure. It requires predictable investment and long-term planning, not constant recalibration. If Michigan waits until the consequences are undeniable, the most expensive outcome will already be locked in. Survival should not be the best our health system can aim for, and the decisions that determine that outcome are being made now.

Editor’s note: Contributors to The WellNest Watch health column are Kegan Tulloch and Ebrima Jobarteh, graduate assistants in the Office of Health Promotions, and Shafaat Ali Choyon and Nathaniel King, graduate hall directors in the Department of Residential Life. All four are master’s degree candidates in the Public Health Program from the School of Public Health Promotion and Human Performance at Eastern Michigan University.



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Eagle Watch | Jan. 26 - Feb. 1



Eastern Michigan University women's basketball player No. 7, Ainhoa Cea, completes a crossover during the game against Northern Illinois University on Jan. 24, at George Gervin GameAbove Center. Bradan Copeland / The Eastern Echo

Ruby Brannon
Sports Editor

Men's basketball: Gregory Lawson

Freshman guard Gregory Lawson II is proving he belongs on the big stage after a career-high 20-point performance against the University of Massachusetts on Jan. 31. The Saginaw, Michigan native was electric, shooting 9-for-14 from the field and leading the Eagles for a hard-fought second half. Lawson II is quickly becoming a foundational piece of the roster as he joins Mohammad Habbab as the only EMU freshmen to cross the 20-point threshold this season.

Women's gymnastics: Kyrie Lowe

Senior all-arounder Kyrie Lowe

continues to be the backbone of EMU gymnastics, recently leading the team to a resounding 191.575–155.025 victory over Wilberforce University. Lowe was the meet's premier all-arounder with a total score of 37.875, highlighted by a first-place tie on the uneven bars. A veteran leader from Lake Worth, Florida, Lowe entered the 2026 season ranked fifth in the Mid-American Conference for bars, bringing a lifetime of experience coached by her mother at Intensity Gymnastics.

Women's basketball: Ainhoa Cea

Ainhoa Cea is making magic happen on the court as a senior transfer from Lipscomb University. In a dominant 71-51 victory over the University at Buffalo, Cea recorded her first double-double as an Eagle with 10 rebounds and a career-high-tying 12 assists, tied

for the most in the MAC this season. Her elite playmaking ability makes her the first Eagle to record a double-double in rebounds and assists since program great Ryan Coleman in 2005.

Men's track: Kian Wiles

Distance specialist Kian Wiles just made history at the Meyo Invitational by clocking a MAC-leading mile time of 3:59.78. Not only did this earn him an event win, but it also secured the No. 5 spot in EMU program history. The senior from Hull, England, is a former MAC Indoor Champion in the mile, and his latest performance proves he is one of the most dangerous runners in the conference.

Women's track: Shamoya Clemetson

Sophomore standout Shamoya Clemetson is a versatile force in the

multis category, recently securing third place in the pentathlon at the Jet's Pizza Invitational with 3,156 points. Clemetson is no stranger to the record books; she holds the program-best mark in the outdoor long jump (6.06m) and ranks in the top 10 for the 60-meter hurdles and high jump. Her explosive athleticism has made her a consistent podium threat across multiple track and field disciplines.

Women's tennis: Cylova Zuleyka Hukmasabiyya

Freshman Cylova Zuleyka Hukmasabiyya is a major reason that EMU tennis has tied the program record for its best start ever at 6-0. Hailing from Indonesia, Zuleyka Hukmasabiyya clinched the match victory against Oakland University with a dominant 6-3, 6-4 win at No. 2 singles. Now sitting at 8-2 on the year, this freshman phenom is quickly becoming a high-stakes closer for the Eagles.

Zuleyka Hukmasabiyya is also an athlete to watch as the lacrosse season kicks off Sunday, Feb. 1, 2-26, at noon against the University of Charleston in an exhibition match.

Women's lacrosse: Mackenzie Blackwell

Senior attacker Mackenzie Blackwell is the undisputed heart of EMU's lacrosse team as they chase their first undisputed MAC title. A two-time All-MAC selection and former Freshman of the Year, Blackwell entered the season needing only 12 goals to reach the 100-career goal milestone. In 2024, she shattered eight single-season program records, including goals and points, and her leadership as team captain will be vital for the Eagles' 2026 campaign.

Championship ambitions: Eastern Michigan lacrosse sets sights on 2026 MAC title defense

Ruby Brannon
Sports Editor

The Eastern Michigan University lacrosse team enters the 2026 season with the momentum of a historic 2025 campaign that saw the program capture a share of its first-ever Mid-American Conference Championship.

In just their third varsity season, the Eagles finished the regular season with a program-best eight wins and a 4-2 mark in conference play, securing a three-way tie for the title alongside the University of Akron and Robert Morris University. While the year reached a bittersweet conclusion with a 16-4 loss to Akron in the MAC Tournament semifinals, the season was a resounding success that established EMU as a legitimate title threat and saw the team break 12 program records. Now, with 12 seniors returning and a hunger to move beyond the semifinal round for the first time, the Eagles are prepared to build on their co-champion status and chase the program's first undisputed crown.

A veteran squad with established leadership

The foundation of the 2026 Eagles is built on experience and defensive grit. Leading the charge are team captains Mackenzie Blackwell, a senior attacker from North Beach, Maryland, and Annika Wozney, a senior defender from Elk River, Minnesota. Blackwell and Wozney represent the heart of a senior class that has seen the program grow from its infancy to a championship-caliber team.

The roster is filled with veteran talent across all positions. Senior midfielders like Abby Alderman, Amber Alderman and Payton Bloedow — a transfer who previously played at Stony Brook University — provide a sturdy presence in the center of the field. Defensively, the Eagles return seniors Samantha Borgert, Sanai James and Gina D'Alessio to protect the net. In the goal, junior Maddy Porter and sophomore Elanya Narloch return

with experience, joined by incoming freshman Emma Baker.

The McGuire era begins on defense

The coaching staff sees a major addition this season as head coach Maddie Dugan announced the hiring of EMU alumnus Ty McGuire as an assistant coach. McGuire, who will lead the team's defense, returns to Ypsilanti after a stellar seven-season run as the head men's lacrosse coach at Concordia University in Ann Arbor. During his tenure there, he posted a 57-38 record, won three conference titles and was named Wolverine-Hoosier Athletic Conference Coach of the Year twice.

Coach Dugan expressed high confidence in McGuire, noting that as an alum, he has a "strong connection to the university" and brings a perspective that will add "real value to our team and our culture." McGuire highlighted the honor of returning to his alma mater, stating that he is ready to help the team "grow and hit the goals we're chasing." He joins assistant coach Irene Carlquist and graduate assistant Liv Dameron on Dugan's staff.

Infusion of new talent

The 2026 season also marks the arrival of Coach Dugan's first full signing class. The program has added 11 recruits for the 2025-26 academic year, a group Dugan described as having a "strong commitment, work ethic, and passion for lacrosse." These newcomers hail from seven U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, bringing diverse athletic backgrounds in sports ranging from rugby to alpine ski racing. The new class includes attackers Zola LeDonne and Brooke Sganga; midfielders Ashley Culin, Christie Evans, Reagan Morrison, Ainsley Owens, Ashley Poquette and Ella Toth; and defenders Emma Reichert and Paige Sutton, alongside goaltender Emma Baker. This influx of talent is expected to provide immediate depth as the Eagles navigate a grueling 16-game



The Eastern Michigan women's lacrosse team huddles together, raising their sticks in unity before taking on San Diego State in a hard-fought matchup Feb. 9, 2025. Elena Davis / The Eastern Echo

schedule.

The 2026 gauntlet: Schedule highlights

The 2026 schedule is designed to test the Eagles early and often, featuring seven home contests and matchups against four first-time opponents. The season officially begins Feb. 6, 2026, in Milwaukee against Marquette University, followed by the home opener Feb. 8 against Butler University at the Indoor Practice Facility. Key stretches of the season include:

- **The non-conference road swing:** In late February, the Eagles embark on a four-game road trip that takes them to Canisius University, the University of Oregon, Austin Peay State University and Vanderbilt University.
- **Conference play:** The MAC season kicks off March 14 against Kent State University at Scicluna Field.
- **The UMass challenge:** On April 11, the Eagles will host the University of Massachusetts, the newest member of the MAC and a formidable opponent coming

- off an Atlantic 10 Championship and an NCAA Tournament appearance.
- **Championship rematches:** April will be a month of reckoning as EMU faces the teams with which they shared the 2025 title: Akron on March 28 and Robert Morris on April 18, which doubles as Senior Day.

The road to Moon Township and NCAA glory

The road to the postseason leads directly to Moon Township, Pennsylvania, where the MAC Tournament is scheduled for April 30 and May 2. For the Eagles, the mission is clear: break through the semifinal barrier that has previously halted their progress and finish the job as the league's sole champion. Bolstered by the defensive expertise of new assistant coach McGuire and a versatile class of 11 incoming recruits, the program is better equipped than ever to handle the 2026 season. As the Eagles prepare for the opening draw on Feb. 6, it is evident that the rapid rise of Eastern Michigan lacrosse is far from over — it is only just getting started.

Eagle Sports Tips & Tales:

Feb. 3-9

Ruby Brannon
Sports Editor

Get ready for a whirlwind of action! Here is a fan's Tips and Tales preview of the week ahead.

Tuesday, Feb. 3: Midweek MACtion

The week kicks off Tuesday, Feb. 3, with a heavyweight basketball battle on the hardwood. The University of Akron Zips fly into Ypsilanti to face the Eastern Michigan University Eagles at the George Gervin GameAbove Center at 6:30 p.m.

Those unable to make it to the arena can watch this game on ESPN+ or listen to it on WEMU/Varsity Network.

Wednesday, Feb. 4: Heading east

On Wednesday, Feb. 4, the Eastern Michigan women's basketball team heads to Amherst to take on the University of Massachusetts at 6 p.m. This is a huge road test for the eighth-ranked Eagles. The Eagles will need to channel the energy from players like Peyton Hill, who recently scored her first career double-double.

Friday, Feb. 6: Lacrosse season opener and tennis marathon

Friday, Feb. 6, is massive. Lacrosse is officially back, and they are starting the season with a bang. With a new season comes new energy. This is a deep squad with 12 seniors and an exciting new freshman class. Friday is also all about endurance for the women's tennis squad. They face a daunting doubleheader in Richmond, Kentucky, taking on Eastern Kentucky University at 11 a.m and the University of Tennessee Chattanooga at 4 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 7: The super Saturday challenge

Saturday, Feb. 7, is the crown jewel of the week, featuring the MAC-SBC Challenge between the MAC and Sun Belt Conference. **Men's hoops:** The men travel to Appalachian State University for a 1 p.m. tipoff. This is part of a massive 13-game slate where the MAC looks to exert dominance over the Sun Belt. **Women's hoops:** At 2 p.m., the Eagles host Arkansas State University. Arkansas State is the reigning SBC champion, so expect some fireworks in Ypsilanti. **Swimming and diving:** For those who prefer the water, the Senior Day Extravaganza starts at 1 p.m. at the Jones Natatorium. It's a heartfelt way to celebrate the veterans who have powered the program over their collegiate careers. **Track and field:** Early birds can head to Ann Arbor for the Michigan Invitational starting at 10 a.m. The team has been on fire lately, recently earning three program top-10 marks.

Sunday, Feb. 8: Home takeover

The week closes with a spectacular Sunday, Feb. 8, featuring two thrilling sports at home. After their season-opening road trip, the energy shifts back to Ypsilanti for a massive regular-season lacrosse home debut. The Eagles return to the Indoor Practice Facility to face Lindenwood University at 1 p.m. This is fans' first opportunity to see the squad compete in Ypsilanti for the 2026 regular season. Women's gymnastics also takes the spotlight Sunday in a clash against one of their most frequent rivals. The team has been sensational at home recently, maintaining a perfect record in their latest outings at the George Gervin GameAbove Center. They will need to lean on that home-floor momentum to carry them through this gritty conference battle

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Intermedia Gallery Group opens Annual Juried Student Show



“Parts of a Whole”, a piece made by Elliot Visel with wood, acrylic and metal, is displayed at the 2026 IGG Annual Juried Student Show. Maddy Makin / The Eastern Echo

Hannah Borders
News Reporter

The Intermedia Gallery Group at Eastern Michigan University opened its Annual Juried Student Show

Monday, Jan. 26.

The show features work from many different artists at EMU. A call for art was put out, and all students were welcome to submit work until the Jan. 12, deadline.

The show will run until March 20, 2026. The show is in the Ford Gallery in Ford Hall. Ford Gallery is open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

There will be a reception for the

Annual Juried Student Show on Feb. 26, from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.

The reception is a celebration of the show. Art professors will attend, and students whose work is featured in the show will talk about their work, said Kristen Holsworth, president of IGG.

“Last year I was beaming ear to ear because I was just so excited to be there. It’s really nice to see everyone there come together to celebrate each other. It’s not about whether you win or lose at the reception; it’s just about all of the people there that have supported you to be here and make your work,” Holsworth said.

IGG is responsible for putting out the call for art and curating the show, Holsworth said. It is IGG’s biggest show each year, and the group wants to include many different types of art from different students. Holsworth said this year, they received much more 3D art than usual.

“This is not a themed show, but it is cohesive because we all make works that are reflective of the current world, and I think it is cool that a lot of the works go together even though they were not made with the intention to go together,” Holsworth said. “I think it’s cool that we have a lot of variety, because Eastern has a lot of variety in students and art is so broad.”

The show is called the Juried Student Show because each year, the group has a juror come in and select three pieces of art to win a monetary prize.

“It’s really cool to have someone working in the industry to look at your work and decide whether or not it’s technically proficient. It’s really cool to have someone look at your work from outside of Eastern,” Holsworth said.

This year’s juror is Thea Augustina Eck, a visual artist who has worked with many different mediums. She founded Hosta Designs in 2016, where she sold 3D wood pieces. The store is now closed, but custom orders are still available, according to the store’s website. In addition to being an artist, Eck is a co-founder and director of the Cluster Museum in Ann Arbor. The Cluster Museum is an artist-led organization for visual artists and writers, according to the museum’s website.

“We really wanted to have a local juror because having connections in the area is really nice to branch out to Detroit, which is the bigger art area in Southeast Michigan,” Holsworth said.

Students gear up for Eagle-Con 2026

Katherine Tatomir
Newsletter Editor

Fandoms, gamers and anime lovers around the community are gearing up for Eagle-Con 2026.

Eagle-Con is Eastern Michigan University’s annual Comic Con-style event, showcasing vendors, artists and cosplayers for a night of cartoonish entertainment. Organized by Campus Life, Eagle-Con is designed for anyone to come and have a good time, regardless of taste in media. Attendees in years past have seen prints, crochet, handmade earrings and various merchandise, all for sale for those looking to expand their collections.

Students can look forward to a performance by the Anime Music Club, a student organization on campus that meets to learn and perfect songs from different anime. The group was formed

in 2022 and can be found performing at Eagle-Con, the Anime Ball and Philippine Culture Night.

Anime Music Club is set to perform songs like “The Cruel Angel’s Thesis,” “Baka Mitai” and “Fuyu No.”

Event coordinator for the group, Cole Patton, hopes for the performance to reach a wide audience.

“We are hoping to put on a show for everyone, whether they be interested in anime, video games or neither, all we at AMC want to do is have fun and entertain people with song,” Patton wrote in a statement.

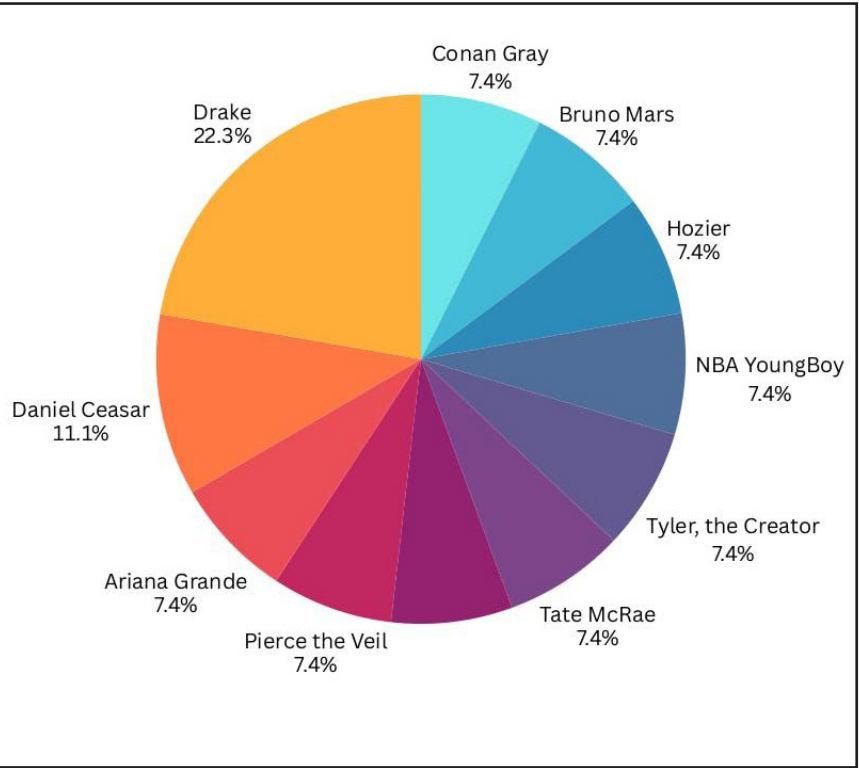
Anime Music Club is planning to host a giveaway along with anime trivia at their booth during this year’s Eagle-Con.

Eagle-Con will be held in the Student Center Ballroom from 7 to 10 p.m. on Feb. 17. Admission is free for all.



The Anime Music Club performs at Eagle-Con 2025 in the Student Center Ballroom on Tuesday, March 18th. Max Taylor / The Eastern Echo

EMU students' top music artists of 2025



With double the votes of any other artist, Drake sits as EMU students’ favorite artist of 2025 at 22.3% of the votes out of the top 11 artists. Gray Connor / The Eastern Echo

Gray Connor
Managing Editor - Operations

At the end of each year, Spotify, Apple Music and other streaming platforms release a list of each user’s most listened-to artists throughout the

year.

According to an in-person poll conducted by *The Eastern Echo*, these are the most popular music artists for Eastern Michigan University students.

The percentage beside the name represents the percentage of the total

vote each artist received.

11th place: Conan Gray (2.29%)

Conan Gray’s most recent album, “Wishbone,” released Aug. 25, 2025. With 12 songs, the album explores grief and heartbreak after the end of a relationship. Gray’s most popular song, “Heather,” currently sits at 2.2 billion streams on Spotify.

10th place: Bruno Mars (2.29%)

While Bruno Mars has not released a studio album since 2016, Atlantic Records recently announced that a new album is on its way. “The Romantic,” which features nine tracks, is set to release Feb. 27, 2026.

Ninth place: Hozier (2.29%)

With 41.2 million monthly listeners on Spotify, Hozier’s recent hit “Too Sweet” compares love languages and the different ways a person can show affection in a relationship.

Eighth place: NBA YoungBoy (2.29%)

YoungBoy’s most recent album release, “Slime Cry,” features an impressive 30 unique tracks. Born in Louisiana, YoungBoy’s musical

discography spans across nine studio albums and 23 mixtapes.

Seventh place: Tyler, the Creator (2.29%)

With back-to-back album releases, “Chromakopia” and “Don’t Tap The Glass,” Tyler currently has 43.1 million monthly listeners on Spotify, with recent hits “Sugar On My Tongue” and “Like Him” releasing within a year.

Sixth place: Tate McRae (2.29%)

McRae’s first studio album released in 2022, with two more releases as of January 2026. Her recent release “Just Keep Watching” was also featured in “F1,” a 2025 film starring Brad Pitt.

Fifth place: Sabrina Carpenter (2.29%)

Former Disney star Sabrina Carpenter’s recent album “Short n’ Sweet” won two Grammy awards and topped the U.S. Billboard charts.

Fourth place: Pierce the Veil (2.29%)

First formed in 2006, Pierce the Veil has released five studio albums, with their songs “A Match Into Water” and “King for a Day” cemented as classic alternative hits.

Third place: Ariana Grande (2.29%)

Recent “Wicked” witch and former Nickelodeon star Ariana Grande has seen massive success after her tenure as a child actor, with 47 different songs reaching the U.S. Billboard Top 100 list.

Second place: Daniel Ceasar (3.44%)

With four studio albums and one studio EP, Daniel Ceasar currently sits at 39.7 million monthly listeners on Spotify, with hits “Best Part” and “Get You” featuring H.E.R. and Kali Uchis respectively.

First place: Drake (6.89%)

With nearly double the percentage of votes in comparison to the other 106 artists competing on this list, Drake has had 13 singles hit the number one spot on the Billboard Top 100 across eight studio albums.

Across 174 students interviewed, 107 unique artists were listed.

Editor’s note: Artists in third through 11th place each received the same number of votes. Interviews were conducted in person across EMU’s campus.

Moonlight 12-3 | FunkyL0af



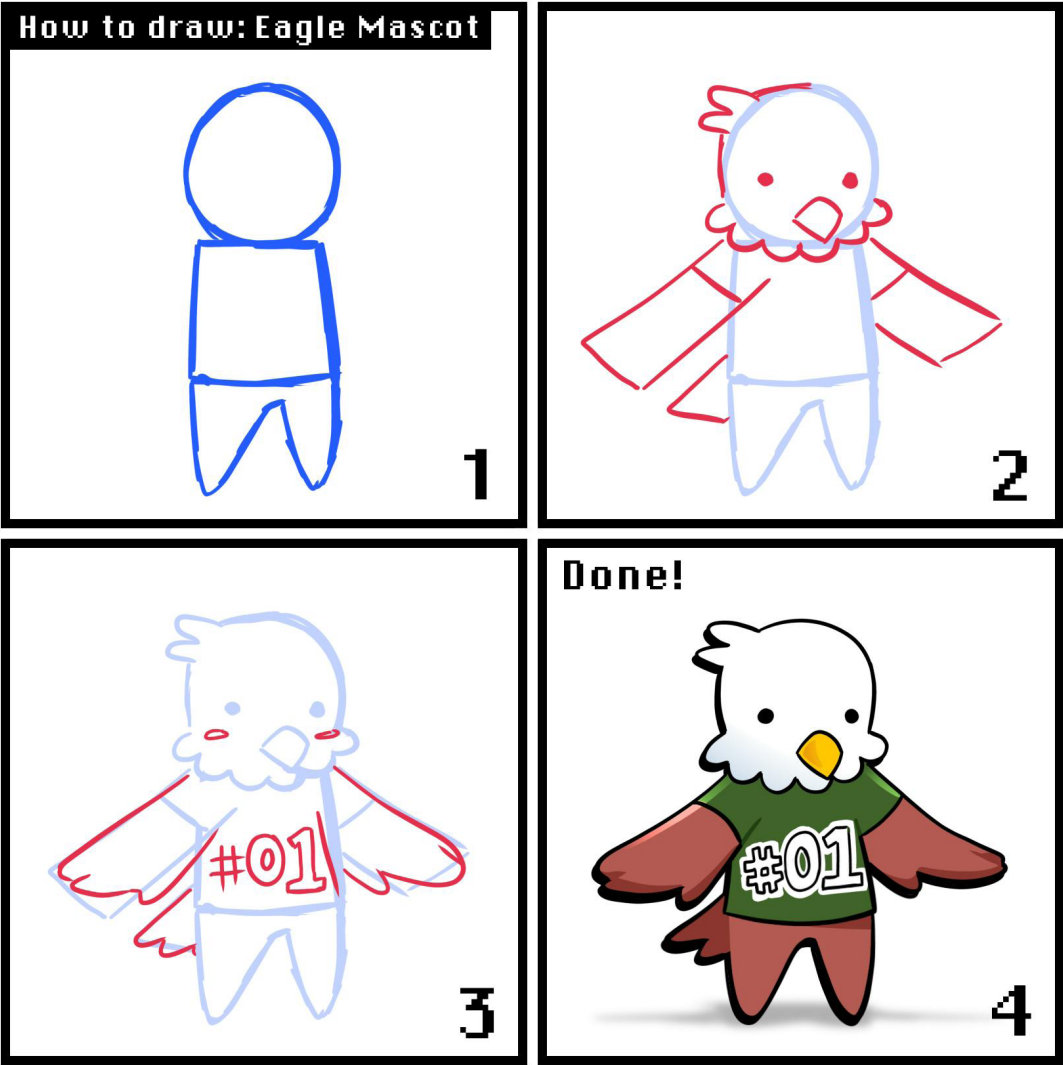
Delay for 5 | Isaiah Sanders



New Year, New Goals | Julia Bartlett



How to Draw: Eagle | Rylee Curley



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Community joins forces amidst winter weather



Community members gather on the corner of Huron Parkway and Washtenaw Avenue on Jan. 31 to protest recent immigration enforcement action. Lilly Kujawski / The Eastern Echo



Georgie Slack tackles the uneven bars and scores 9.525 points for her team at the gymnastics meet against Wilberforce on Jan. 29 in the George Gervin GameAbove Center. Max Taylor / The Eastern Echo



Keely Kohler stays strong on the balance beam and scores 8.850 points for the Eastern Michigan University Gymnastics team at the meet against Wilberforce on Jan. 29 in the George Gervin GameAbove Center. Max Taylor / The Eastern Echo



Jade Traska holds up their crochet reproduction of a section of the AIDS Memorial Quilt after their presentation analyzing the AIDS epidemic and the concept of art as a form of political activism at the Honors College as part of Queer Talks on Jan. 30. Maddy Makin / The Eastern Echo



From left, performers Sirgin, Dullahan, Lyrica, Kimani Roldan, Aurelia Aura, Fruit Fly, and Xiao Ghossty pose for a photo after the Queer Talks Drag Show on Jan. 30 at the Honors College. Maddy Makin / The Eastern Echo



EMU students Elizabeth Lesko and Lauren Formella race each other in a condom race at Sexapalooza in the Student Center Ballroom on Thursday, Jan. 29. Owen Cardenas / The Eastern Echo



Hannah Berberoglu sings “Gethsemane” with Thee Birdsongs during Art as Resistance at the Riverside Arts Center on Saturday, Jan. 31. Lee Hammock / The Eastern Echo