



# Ypsilanti residents, officials respond, raise questions after 30-hour barricade incident

**Lilly Kujawski & Gray Connor**  
Managing Editors

Community members and local officials gathered Sunday in front of the West Cross Street house where on Jan. 4 and 5, 2026, police spent more than 30 hours in crisis negotiations with a man, 53, who barricaded himself inside.

On Jan. 11, 2026, neighbors united on the front lawn in a display of support for the man, now in police custody, after residents and some elected officials raised questions about the police response to the incident.

## Police response to barricade incident

Just after 12 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, Washtenaw County Crisis Negotiators and Washtenaw Metro SWAT arrived on the scene to assist the Ypsilanti Police Department, stated a post from the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office on Facebook.

YPD had responded following a call reporting an individual allegedly banging on neighbors' doors with what police initially described as a long stick, stated the post. Police said they later confirmed the object was a sword and that the man confronted officers before retreating into the residence, the post stated. Police said it was unknown if there were additional weapons present, the post stated.

The post stated that mental health professionals were present on the scene. A Facebook post from Michigan State Senator Jeff Irwin (D-Ann Arbor) confirmed that Michigan State Police officers were also on the scene.

"After over 30-hours of crisis



Community members and local officials gather on Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026, at the West Cross Street house where a man was barricaded Jan. 4 and 5, 2026, for more than 30 hours, prompting police crisis negotiation response. Residents gathered at the house in a display of support for the man, who was arrested from the scene on Jan. 5. *Lilly Kujawski / The Eastern Echo*

negotiation, the armed 53-year-old man who had barricaded himself in the upper levels of a house in the City of Ypsilanti has been safely taken into custody," stated the post from the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office. "This matter remains an on-going investigation. We are unable to comment further at this time."

A Jan. 8, 2026, statement from the county sheriff thanked the deputies and law enforcement officers involved.

"Their unwavering dedication to service is the reason why no one was seriously injured or killed," said the statement. "We are working with our partners to obtain, compile, and disseminate appropriate information,

consistent with our obligations to maintain the integrity of the investigation and on-going criminal matter. We will provide further details of the incident as soon as practically feasible."

## Criticism of police tactics

Some residents and elected officials

have raised concerns about the tactics used by police during the incident. The house where the incident occurred was left with significant damage, with visible destruction and now-boarded windows.

**SEE BARRICADE INCIDENT,  
PAGE 3**

# EMU to recognize MLK Day with week-long celebration

**Gray Connor**  
Managing Editor - Operations



A bust of Martin Luther King Jr. resides between Welch and Boone Halls. *Lee Hammock / The Eastern Echo*

Eastern Michigan University is set to recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day with a week of celebrations across campus.

On Nov. 2, 1983, MLK Day was recognized as a federal holiday, held on the third Monday of each January. Since 1986, EMU had celebrated the holiday with a variety of keynote speakers, marches and other events in an effort to promote the mission of King and to celebrate his long-lasting legacy.

During the winter 2026 semester, EMU will be hosting seven events for students and staff to attend.

## MLK Ceremonial Wreath

### Laying and March

Monday, Jan. 19, 2026 - Martin Luther King Jr. Plaza

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, first founded Dec. 4, 1906, with the mission of promoting academic excellence, brotherhood and community support for African American men, is working alongside the National Pan-Hellenic Council for the annual ceremonial laying of a wreath, as well as a march through the Eastern Michigan University campus. Students and staff wishing to participate will gather at the Martin Luther King Plaza at 10 a.m. and finish marching at 11 a.m.

### EMU MLK President's Luncheon

Monday, Jan. 19, 2026 - Student Center Ballroom

This year's annual EMU MLK President's Luncheon, created to recognize the legacy of King, will be joined by Karine Jean-Pierre, the former White House press secretary for former President Joe Biden. The program will also be presented by Glenda Lewis, anchor for WXYZ TV Channel 7.

Tickets for this event are sold out. However, students and staff can still watch the luncheon inside the Student Center Auditorium. While this does not require a ticket, seating is limited to 240 guests on a first come, first served basis.

The luncheon will take place from

11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

### MLK Celebration Book Signing

Monday, Jan. 19, 2026 - Student Center Room 310A

Spokesperson and former White House Press Secretary Jean-Pierre will be available for book signings for her latest release. Titled "Independent: A Look Inside a Broken White House, Outside the Party Lines," the book encourages Americans to adopt independent political perspectives, as opposed to following the U.S.'s current two-party dominated system. Published in 2025, the book is Jean-Pierre's second work.

Located in the Student Center Room 310A, the book signing will last from 2-3 p.m.

### MLK Celebration Annual Basketball Game

Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026 - George Gervin GameAbove Center

The Eastern Michigan University women's basketball team will face the University of Toledo Rockets for EMU's annual MLK basketball game. Tipoff is scheduled for 6:30 p.m.

Non-student ticket prices range from \$7-32 depending on the seat. All EMU students can attend the game for free. For more information on pricing and ticket purchasing, visit EMU's venue website.

### DEI, Justice and Belonging & Rise Anyway Speaker Series

Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026 - Student Center Room 310A

Courtney Smith, founder and executive chief officer of the Detroit Phoenix Center, an organization focused on providing the necessary resources to youth who are transitioning out of poverty and homelessness, will be speaking at the annual Justice Speaker Series.

Smith's work in local nonprofit groups has been recognized by various magazines and media outlets, including Forbes, Entrepreneur Magazine and "The Steve Harvey Show."

The event is located in the Student Center Room 310A and will run from 5-7:30 p.m.

### The Beloved EMU Community: Student Volunteerism and Advocacy

Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026 - Student Center First Floor

EMU's Society for Human Resource Management, Student Government and Swoop's Pantry are collaborating for a collective goal of promoting service and civic engagement on campus. The event will offer resume assistance for local veterans, workshops on how to communicate with Michigan's legislators and the chance to donate to Swoop's Food Pantry.

The event will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

### The Beloved Ypsilanti Community Networking Event

Friday, Jan. 23, 2026 - Student Center Room 330

Joined by Ypsilanti Mayor Nicole Brown, EMU Student Government is hosting a community-wide networking event for local organizations, leaders and community members. Nonprofits, local businesses and civic leaders will build relationships with local residents, political leaders and fellow businesses to create more opportunity within Ypsilanti and help cultivate the vision of local organizations.

The event will be held in Student Center Room 300 from 9:30-11 a.m.

Nonprofits interested in participating should complete the registration form to sign up.

Eastern Michigan University has been participating in Martin Luther King Jr. Day for decades, with each year providing a different list of opportunities for EMU's students and staff to connect with history and engage in their communities. For a timeline of EMU's past keynote speakers, visit the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration page on the university's website.

For more information on the events, speakers, scholarships and schedule, students can visit EMU's MLK Day Celebration dedicated page.

The MLK events committee is also available to answer questions related to the celebrations. They can be contacted via email at [emu\\_mlk@emich.edu](mailto:emu_mlk@emich.edu).

**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 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**

In the Dec. 9, 2025, print edition of *The Eastern Echo*, the article "EMU AMP! connects student artists with audiences at Handmade for the Holidays Market" was written by Arts Reporter Hannah Borders.

**Where to find the newest volume of *Cellar Roots*, EMU's Fine Arts and Literary Magazine:**

**CALENDAR**

**JAN  
13**

**Indoor Flag Football and Co-Ed Volleyball league registration**

*All day (Open all week)*  
Rec/IM website, Intramural Sports page

**JAN  
14**

**Drop-in Basketball**

*7-10 p.m.*  
Rec/IM Building — 3rd floor courts

**JAN  
15**

**Winterfest**

*4-7 p.m.*  
Student Center Ballroom

**JAN  
16**

**Honors College January Pancake Breakfast**

*10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.*  
Honors College — Reception Hall, Room 107

**JAN  
17**

**EMU Gymnastics Golden Girls Classic Meet**

*Begins at 4 p.m.*  
George Gervin GameAbove Center

**JAN  
19**

**Martin Luther King Jr. Day**

**MLK Ceremonial Wreath Laying\* and March to Freedom**

*10-11 a.m.*  
Welch Hall — near Martin Luther King Jr. statue

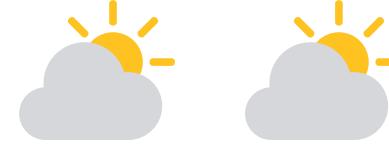
**MLK Celebration Book Signing with Karine Jean Pierre**

*2-3 p.m.*  
Student Center — Room 310A

**WEATHER FORECAST**

**Tuesday, Jan. 13**

High: 44 | Low: 31  
Mostly cloudy / Mostly cloudy



**Wednesday, Jan. 14**

High: 37 | Low: 14  
Mostly cloudy / Mostly cloudy



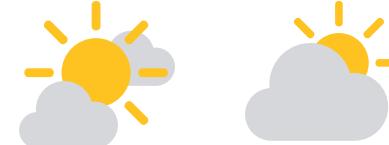
**Thursday, Jan. 15**

High: 25 | Low: 15  
Partly sunny / Mostly cloudy



**Friday, Jan. 16**

High: 29 | Low: 17  
Partly sunny / Mostly cloudy



**Saturday, Jan. 17**

High: 29 | Low: N/A  
Mostly cloudy



**Source:**  
**The National Weather Service**

**Where to find *The Eastern Echo*:****Off Campus:**

- Basil Babe, 701 W. Cross St.
- Blackstone Book Store & Cultural Center, 214 W. Michigan Ave.
- Benito's Pizza, 1088 N. Huron River Drive

**On Campus:**

- Alexander Hall
- Boone Hall

**Where to find our links:**

**EASTERN  
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

## EMU student workers see pay raise with minimum wage increase

**AnnaBelle Favre**

News Reporter

The start of 2026 brought with it an increase of the Michigan minimum hourly wage. Starting Jan. 1, minimum wage workers saw their hourly rate increase to \$13.73, up \$1.25 from the previous \$12.48 rate.

This change is a part of a series of planned wage increases. This stemmed from Senate Bill 8, introduced by Michigan Sen. Kevin Hertel (D-St. Clair Shores). Senate Bill 8 required the state minimum hourly wage for non-tipped workers to increase to \$12.48 Feb. 12, 2025; \$13.73 Jan. 1, 2026; and \$15 Jan. 1, 2027.

The hourly minimum wage for

tipped workers will also increase over time. On Feb. 21, 2025, the minimum wage for tipped workers was set at 38% of the minimum wage, at about \$4.74. On Jan. 1, 2026, it rose to 40% of the current minimum wage, and the percentage will continue to increase by 2% every year until 2031, when it reaches 50% of minimum wage.

For minors under 18 in the state of Michigan, pay will remain 85% of the minimum wage, meaning they will make \$11.67 beginning January 2026 and \$12.75 beginning January 2027.

Senate Bill 8 states, "Every October beginning in October, 2027, the state treasurer shall calculate an adjusted minimum wage rate. The adjustment must increase the minimum wage by

the rate of inflation." The adjusted rate will be announced each year by Nov. 1 and will go into effect the following Feb. 21.

These changes affects nearly all student workers at Eastern Michigan University, since most on-campus jobs pay minimum wage.

Sophomore Sydney Mahaney works as a desk assistant in Downing Hall. Her job includes answering resident questions, handing out and receiving mail, and ensuring residence hall happenings go as planned.

"I'm honestly really excited, because I work during the semester to help pay for next semester," Mahaney said. "This extra money from the increase does help with that."

Like Mahaney, many students use their income as student workers to help pay for the expenses of college.

Alberto Dericu has a job in the biology office as a part of the work-study program. Dericu works at the front desk and helps the biology department when needed.

"I think it's cool if it was any other job, but the money I can make per school year is still \$2,500, so I won't actually make any more money; I will just work less hours," Dericu said.

Since students in the work-study program have an allotted maximum amount of pay per semester, they will not earn more money, but they will have to work fewer hours for the same amount.

## Student government operations gear up for the 2026 election cycle

**Laura Meriweather**

News Reporter

As the winter 2026 semester begins at Eastern Michigan University, a new student government election is on the horizon. The roles of president, vice president and senator will all be on the ballot since the entire leadership team will be ending their current terms as dictated by the Student Government constitution and bylaws.

As the Student Government constitution outlines, "Student Government is an independent, student run organization established to further Eastern Michigan University students' rights while working with the university. Student Government is a service organization intended to serve the needs of the Student Body."

The Student Government budget allocated by the university for the 2026 fiscal year is \$150,000, according to an email from Leigh Greden, who serves as one of two co-advisers to Student Government. Greden, who is also the chief of staff for EMU President James Smith, said the budget is based on each year's student enrollment.

Kevin Williams, EMU's director of

access and opportunity programming, serves alongside Greden as the other Student Government co-adviser.

According to the Student Government bylaws, "All currently registered students shall be eligible to cast one (1) vote" in student government elections. In the 2025 election, 644 votes were cast, according to election results published on the Student Government website.

The structure of student government has varied since the creation of the Student Senate in 1914. Currently, it consists of an executive branch that includes a president and vice president and a legislative branch with slots for one senator for every 1,000 students enrolled during the fall semester preceding the election, according to the Student Government constitution. Up to five delegates may also be appointed by the Senate to serve in the legislative branch to represent various constituencies. In addition to the full Senate, the legislative branch also consists of three committees made up of various senators: Internal Affairs, Business and Finance, and Student Services.

Student Government elections

are administered by an election commission consisting of an election commissioner, five students and a student government adviser. The senate voted Nov. 4, 2025, to appoint Director of Internal Affairs Max Butler as the 2026 election commissioner.

In a Dec. 9, 2025, email, Butler said he would be receiving additional training for the position in January. The student government bylaws, available on EagleSync, allow any student in good academic and judicial standing to serve in one of the five student slots on the election commission, with the exception of candidates running in the corresponding election.

One of the election commissioner's roles is setting election dates.

Student Government President Jack Booth said the timeline for the 2026 election will be uploaded by the commissioner to the election website by Feb. 1, 2026, as required in the constitution.

While the official timeline has yet to be released, its structure is outlined in the Student Government bylaws.

In addition to submitting an application, students who wish to run for office must attend one Senate

meeting and turn in a required number of signatures from currently registered students. The signature threshold is 300 for presidential and vice-presidential candidates and 50 for senatorial candidates. Candidate names and tickets will be randomized on the ballot for all positions. Election results are counted by the student government adviser and the election commissioner, who is also responsible for ratifying the election results.

The governing documents also allow for constitutional amendments and referenda to be placed on the ballot, if requirements outlined in the governing documents are met. The bylaws say that referenda may be added "to gauge the opinion of the Student Body on an issue or advocate a change in Student Government policy." Additional guidelines and requirements regarding the election are available under chapter six of the current student government bylaws.

The EMU Student Government offices are in Room 342 of the Student Center. The Student Government can be reached by email at [emu\\_studentgovt@emich.edu](mailto:emu_studentgovt@emich.edu) or by phone at 734-487-1470.

## Barricade incident

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The man in custody had a history of mental illness, said Washtenaw County Commissioner Annie Somerville (D-District 6). Somerville was at the community gathering on Jan. 11, 2026. During the barricade incident, neighborhood residents reported police use of tear gas, flash bangs and a long-range acoustic device, a specialized sound weapon used to produce sound at a high pitch.

The heating inside the house was disconnected, Somerville said. A fire hose was used to spray water into the room in which the man was barricaded, she said. She also said equipment was used to ram into the building.

The Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners issued a statement on Jan. 9, 2026, calling for associated charges against the man to be dropped. It is currently unclear what the man involved has been charged with.

"We think that this whole situation from start to finish was a huge disaster and really a misrepresentation of what government is supposed to do for people, and so we feel it is very inappropriate for charges to be pressed against him, given the circumstances and given the 30-plus hours of torture by the government," Somerville said.

Somerville said the situation required deescalation measures and an approach sensitive to mental health crises, as opposed to the tactics used.

She said she visited the scene during the incident and was told by Sheriff Alyshia Dyer on Monday, Jan. 4 that deescalation attempts would be made. Before the Jan. 4 and 5 incident, efforts were made to provide support to the man, Somerville said.

"Many people who were close to him tried calling and getting crisis support, not police response. From everything that I've gathered, every time that they called dispatch at any point prior to the Sunday situation, there was no mention of the CMH (Community Mental Health Organization) crisis

line," said Somerville. "So for the people who were calling saying that they just wanted to help before it gets bad, they (Community Mental Health Organization) were not given that information."

In a written statement, the Washtenaw County Community Mental Health organization confirmed it was "not contacted by the individual involved, their family, or law enforcement prior to the January 4, 2026, incident or in months preceding."

### Calls for third-party investigation

"We're asking questions," said Ypsilanti Mayor Nicole Brown, who was also at the community gathering on Jan. 11, 2026. "We're trying to figure out what the policies and procedures were, if there are gaps and if there needs to be a change. We want to try to come to an understanding on what that change needs to be, so that we do not end up in a situation like this in the future."

Steve Wilcoxen, an Ypsilanti City Council member representing Ward 2 who was also present, confirmed that there would be a third-party investigation into the incident.

"It was a crazy, disproportional response to what was needed," said Wilcoxen. "The person should have been receiving other services."

Wilcoxen said there was miscommunication and issues between various departments involved that impacted the response to the incident. He confirmed that the individual involved was both hospitalized and incarcerated following the events of the barricade incident.

### Eyewitness accounts

Neighbor Greg Woodring, who lives on the same street in which the barricade incident took place, said he was an eyewitness to some of the tactics



Community members gather Jan. 11, 2026, and write messages of support on a sign for residents of the house involved in a 30-hour barricade incident on Jan. 4 and 5, 2026, on the 1100 block of West Cross Street in Ypsilanti.

Lilly Kujawski / The Eastern Echo

used by police officers. At 1 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, Woodring saw police first arrive at the location of the incident. Woodring said he later returned to his home at 10 p.m. to see the situation still ongoing.

"I went in and heard an explosion and it shook all the walls of my house, so I went outside," Woodring said. "I found out that the police were throwing flashbangs and tear gas into the window."

By 1:30 a.m., Woodring said the incident was still ongoing, with police forces attempting to communicate with the individual inside with a loudspeaker and LRAD, often used by law enforcement for crowd control.

"When I woke up the next morning, I was certain that it would be over by then, but I could see that it had only grown larger," said Woodring.

At noon the next day, a group of onlookers had formed to watch the situation unfold. According to Woodring, the police instructed the crowd to move back toward Oakwood Street, where the house was not visible. Video recorded by Woodring and reviewed by *The Eastern Echo* showed a physical altercation between police officers and onlookers, with some onlookers pushed to the ground and

detained by police.

Alongside tear gas, flash bangs and a LRAD, the police also used a rook, a modified vehicle used by SWAT forces and police, to allow officers to shoot water from a fire hose into the house where the individual was located.

### Community members respond

Following the incident, President of the Normal Park Neighborhood Association of Ypsilanti Dawn Keech and her husband, Jason Keech, built a heart out of wood and a whiteboard and nailed it to a tree outside of the house where the incident took place. The heart featured sentiments from neighbors and those close to the individual.

"Your community loves you," wrote one of the gatherers. Another read, "Hate has no home here! You are not alone."

The board also included calls for more mental health awareness in crisis situations.

According to Keech, the heart was created to show support for the involved individual and their family.

"We just wanted people to come and write a note, and for it to serve as a reminder that in neighborhoods and communities, connections between people matter," said Keech.

## What's the Move? Jan. 13 - 19

**Allie Beecher**

Copy Desk Chief



On Jan. 13, 2026, the Rhizome Roots Studio, pictured above, will host an accessible, beginner-friendly yoga class called Vinyasa Yoga.

(Photo courtesy of Rhizome Roots Studio)

Welcome back to campus, Eagles! As the semester begins, there is no shortage of interesting events to attend in Ypsilanti.

### Vinyasa Yoga for Beginners at Rhizome Roots — Jan. 13

No matter their level of experience, all who enjoy yoga are welcome to attend this accessible, beginner-friendly yoga class at the Rhizome Roots Studio at 108 Pearl Street on Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2026. Vinyasa Yoga for Beginners meets every Tuesday from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Signing up for the class is encouraged, but drop-ins are also welcome. The class is donation-based, and attendees are encouraged to make a \$5-15 donation in cash or through Venmo.

To learn more about the event and sign up, visit the Rhizome Roots Studio website or find it on Facebook Events.

### 4th Annual Black Artist Exhibit Opening Reception — Jan. 16

On Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, the Riverside Arts Center will open its 4th Annual Black Artist Exhibition: Embracing Unity Through Art. This exhibition will be open until Feb. 28, 2026, and will honor Black History Month and the life of Martin Luther King Jr.

The opening reception will take place Jan. 16 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Riverside Arts Center at 76 N. Huron Street in Ypsilanti. The reception will feature a special performance by violinist Rodney Lamar. The event is free with \$5 donations encouraged.

To learn more about the exhibition, visit the Riverside Arts Center website or email [info@riversidearts.org](mailto:info@riversidearts.org).

### Ypsilanti Nutrition 2026 Vision Board Event — Jan. 18

At this event at local cafe Ypsilanti Nutrition, attendees can ring in the new year by setting goals and intentions for 2026. On Sunday, Jan. 18, from 3-5 p.m., attendees will create vision boards to provide inspiration and motivation throughout the year. The event will be facilitated by a licensed therapist.

General admission tickets cost \$28.52 and are available on Eventbrite.com. The price includes a choice of one regular shake or mega tea as well as all vision board supplies and take-home tools.

Ypsilanti Nutrition is at 1338 Anna J. Stepp Drive. To learn more about the event, visit Eventbrite.com or Ypsilanti Nutrition's Facebook page.

### MLK Day Service Project — Jan. 19

On Monday, Jan. 19, 2026, the library will recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a national day of service by inviting community members to participate in a service project to make greeting cards for Meals on Wheels. Attendees can also bring trial sizes of hygiene products to donate to the Warming Center and Hope Clinic.

The service project will take place from 2-4 p.m. in the Program Room at the Michigan Avenue branch of the YDL at 229 W. Michigan Ave. The event is free, and no registration is required. For more information, visit the YDL website.



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Facebook @ The Eastern Echo

# The WellNest Watch

*Get a heavier coat! This winter will be different*



**Ebrima Jobarteh**

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.*

It is that time of year when we adjust the clocks, get firmer tires, and, most importantly, adorn ourselves in our warmest coats as we embrace the cold of Michigan winters. What lingers in our minds is whether this year's winter will be any different from what we are used to. Unfortunately, Michigan is expected to experience heavier and colder temperatures, especially in the second half of winter. Meteorologists predict the return of La Niña, a climatic phenomenon that allows for cooler and wetter winter patterns. This weather pattern, often attributed to climate change, is expected to impact most of southern Michigan, whilst the north remains erratic.

This summer, we witnessed the other side of the spectrum, where extreme heat provoked record-high daily temperatures across major cities, causing medical emergencies, and spread of drought across various states in the U.S. and Puerto Rico that left farmers struggling to meet market demand.

The consequences of adverse, low temperatures are hypothermia, frostbite, and respiratory illnesses like the flu.

As public health practitioners, we encourage college students to indulge in more cold-protective interventions like wearing adequately-heated clothing, discourage outdoor exposure in harsh weather conditions, adjust their room temperatures to ambient conditions, avoid driving in thick snow, and, more importantly, take the flu vaccine.

*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 EMU.*



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# Process of FOIA: The unseen work of government transparency

**Lilly Kujawski**  
Managing Editor - News

**Editor's note:** This article was written in conjunction with the Michigan Press Association's Trott Foundation Fellowship Program. Lilly Kujawski was selected as a fellow for the program in 2025.

Boasting wide, bipartisan support from Michiganders, transparency in government runs on the behind-the-scenes, often invisible, work of public servants working for local municipalities.

The Freedom of Information Act, Michigan public records law meant to help inform citizens about how their government works, is an example of government transparency efforts in action.

First passed in 1976, the state law came into effect at a time when there was demand for more transparency in government, according to Gregory Plagens, professor of political science at Eastern Michigan University.

Before his career in higher education, Plagens worked as a journalist and later the communications director for a school district in South Carolina, where part of his job was processing FOIA requests.

Access to public information allows citizens to hold government accountable, understand how decisions are made, and participate meaningfully in democracy, he explained.

"Part of the desire for transparency is to promote the democratic process," Plagens said. "People can't make informed decisions about elected leadership if they don't understand what's happening."

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act applies to local governments, school districts and state agencies, requiring them to release public records on request.

However, the law does not cover the Legislature or the governor's office, leaving Lansing lawmakers largely exempt from the same transparency rules imposed on local officials, explained Barb Byrum, Ingham County Clerk and Democratic Secretary of State candidate.

"Michigan has some of the worst transparency laws in the country. I think it is high time that we respect the public's access to information," Byrum said.

## Number of requests

In Ann Arbor, which has a population of more than 122,000 people, Chief Deputy Clerk Sarah Alanis manages the FOIA requests that the city receives.

Alanis said she's seen an increase in requests over the last few years. In 2023, she received 640 requests, 740 in 2024, and 860 requests so far in 2025.

As the sole person responsible for fulfilling these requests and corresponding with the requestors, Alanis said an increase of 100 or more each year is significant.

When Alanis started her job in 2021, she spent a few hours of her day working on FOIA requests. Now, she spends half of her day on them, in addition to other responsibilities, such as administering elections, creating City Council agendas and meeting minutes, and working with the city's 60 boards and commissions.

"A lot of people now know about FOIA, which is great. I'm very, very happy that people are understanding that this is a service that your government, at any level, is required to provide," she said.

Nearby, in Milan, a town of just over 6,000 people, City Clerk Lavonna Wenzel receives between 50-60 FOIA requests per year. To her small office, that's a significant amount of time and resources.

"I feel like I get a lot," Wenzel said. "As soon as I get one or two off my desk, I get two or three more."

State law dictates certain time constraints that the government has to adhere to in responding to requests,



**Ann Arbor City Hall, located at 301 E. Huron St., Ann Arbor.** Lilly Kujawski / The Eastern Echo

Byrum explained. Under Michigan's FOIA, requestors must receive a response within five business days, either granting, denying or partially denying the request, or requesting an extension for up to 10 business days.

The size of a municipality can dictate the resources its FOIA officer has, Byrum said. Requestors can aid themselves and FOIA coordinators, and expedite the process, by making sure requests for information are specific and delivered to the correct person.

## Request types

In Milan, most of the requests Wenzel receives deal with real estate. Political candidates sometimes use FOIA to request the city's absentee voter list to send out campaign materials, she added.

In Ann Arbor, most requests are for records like building permits and fire reports, Alanis explained. If something particularly "hot button" happens in a City Council meeting, Alanis said she will see an influx of requests related to that topic, too.

Interest in requests for proposals, or RFPs, has seen an increase in popularity, Alanis said. She credits this to the rise in artificial intelligence use.

"There are a number of people that are just using AI to get a lot of data at once and using FOIA to do it," Alanis said. "It is overwhelming the system a little bit."

She mentioned one name in particular that appeared repeatedly in the requests she has received: Mark Zurada.

Zurada is the chief operating officer for Pinpoint Analytics in New Jersey, an AI company that focuses on public construction space. He confirmed that his company uses FOIA as a tool to request bid proposals from contractors on city projects across about 45,000 townships in the country.

Pinpoint Analytics uses the bid summaries combined with AI technology to predict the cost of projects, advising contractors on how to price their proposals to clients, Zurada said.

"I think we probably have the most powerful FOIA software in the country," Zurada said.

The company submits no more than 2,000 daily requests, but at least 500 per day, Zurada said. He said the company is intentional with this range to avoid overburdening the government with excessive requests.

Anyone can submit a FOIA request, Plagens said, though the law is often used by journalists who use it to aid their reporting. FOIA is also used by insurance companies when property is damaged, such as a fire or accident report, Alanis said.

In many cities, police records are requested through their own police-managed system.

Sometimes, individuals use FOIA to divert time, attention and resources away from election administration, Byrum said.

Instead of voter lists and election data that Byrum's office usually sees, she noticed an increase in more unusual requests, she said. Some of them were for proprietary information about the office's computer program. Others were for information that would require the office to make a new report, which it is not required to do.

"Stuff like that, that takes more time, requires the lawyers to be involved," Byrum said. "Those are not the typical FOIA requests, but we have seen an increase in those."

## Request fees

In Michigan, fees for FOIA requests are calculated based on the lowest wage of an employee capable of fulfilling the request.

Some documents are exempt from FOIA in Michigan or may require redaction of information, a process that can make fulfilling the request more time consuming. Some of these exemptions are personal information, information that would interfere with law enforcement proceedings if made public and certain trade secrets, according to the law.

Requestors may be charged a fee to receive the records they want, which is calculated using guidance written in the Michigan law. The fee is assessed based on the labor involved in finding the documents and the actual cost of delivering them.

In Ann Arbor, the city provides up

to an hour to process a request at no charge, Alanis said.

Most of the requests Alanis processes bear no cost to the requestor. It's for more time-consuming requests that deal with extensive data that she has to estimate a fee, such as collecting and redacting emails from over a long period of time. Alanis added that she is good at keeping the fees she does charge under \$100.

One request, though, Alanis said, had a significant estimated fee: \$1.5 million.

In 2020, a requestor asked to see every general election ballot cast in the city. Alanis confirmed with other clerks' offices around the state that her municipality was just one of many that this requestor was trying to collect.

"The highest (estimate) that I have personally given out was the \$1.5 million," she said.

Collecting and producing that kind of volume of records would take extensive time and labor, Alanis explained. The requestor declined to follow through when they saw the estimated cost of the request.

In Milan, the first 15 minutes of the time it takes to process a request are provided at no cost, Wenzel said. Most of the requests she processes take less than 15 minutes, but occasionally, a more extensive request or locating a very old record, such as one from the early 1900s, takes longer and requires a fee.

Most documents are public and therefore available to anyone who requests them, Plagens said.

"Whether people realize it's there or not, I do think the importance of the law is that it makes clear that we are supposed to share and make open as much as we can," Plagens said.

Transparency helps expose waste, corruption and abuse of power, builds public trust, and ensures officials act in the public interest rather than behind closed doors. If a document is public, Byrum said, citizens should have access to it.

"As a government official, I spend taxpayer dollars," Byrum said. "And since I spend taxpayer dollars, the citizens should have access to public information."

# Mike Hart elevated to assistant head coach of EMU football

**Ruby Brannon**  
Sports Editor

Eastern Michigan University football is starting the new year with a boost to its coaching ranks. On Monday, Jan. 5, Head Coach Chris Creighton announced that Mike Hart has been promoted to assistant head coach and will oversee the wide receivers for the upcoming 2026 season.

Hart, a prominent figure in Michigan football history, spent the 2025 season as an offensive analyst for the Eagles. His promotion marks a significant step for the program as it looks to build on the momentum of a highly efficient offensive performance last year.

## Praise for a 'winner'

Coach Creighton did not hold back in his praise for Hart, citing the immediate impact he made upon his return to Ypsilanti. "Coach Hart is a winner," Creighton said in a news release.

Hart expressed equal enthusiasm for the role and the community. "EMU football and the Ypsilanti community have always held a special place in my heart," Hart said in the release. "Coach Creighton is one of the best leaders of men I have ever been around."

## Resume of success

Hart brings 14 years of college coaching experience to the Eagles' full-time staff. His career has come full

circle: he began his coaching journey at EMU in 2011 as an offensive quality control assistant, then served as the team's running backs coach in 2012 and 2013.

Since his first stint at EMU, Hart has built an elite coaching profile:

- Michigan (2021-2023): As the running backs coach and run-game coordinator, he helped lead the Wolverines to three straight Big Ten titles and the 2023 National Championship.
- Interim leadership: Hart served as Michigan's interim head coach for one game in 2023, leading the team to a 35-7 victory over UNLV.
- Player development: He has a proven track record of tutoring 1,000-yard rushers, including NFL draft pick Blake Corum, who became Michigan's first back-to-back 1,000-yard rusher since Denard Robinson under Hart's guidance.
- Stints across the region: Hart has also coached at Western Michigan University, Syracuse University and Indiana University, where he was a 2018 Broyles Award nominee.

## Impact on the field

In his role as an offensive analyst in 2025, Hart's influence was felt. Despite injuries to the offensive line,



Earlier this month, Mike Hart was promoted to assistant head coach and will oversee wide receivers for the Eastern Michigan University football team. *Julius Stewart / The Eastern Echo*

the Eagles' offense remained one of the most efficient in the Mid-American Conference.

Under Hart's guidance, running back Dontae McMillan became a 1,000-yard rusher, and the team finished first in the MAC in red zone offense at 94.6% and fourth-down conversions at 61.1%.

## Playing history

Before entering coaching, Hart was

a standout player at the University of Michigan, where he remains the program's all-time leading rusher with 5,040 yards. A two-time Doak Walker Award finalist, he finished fifth in the 2006 Heisman Trophy voting.

Hart also spent three seasons in the National Football League with the Indianapolis Colts, appearing in Super Bowl XLIV in 2010.

# Eagle Sports Tips & Tales: Jan. 13 - 19

**Ruby Brannon**  
Sports Editor

A pivotal mid-January stretch lies ahead for Eastern Michigan University Athletics as Eagle teams gear up for some key matchups. From essential matchup insights to notable moments from the program's history, here's everything fans need to know as the Eagles take the floor Jan. 13-19.

## Gymnastics

The scouting report: The Eagles return to home soil in Ypsilanti on Friday, Jan. 17, to host the Northern Illinois University Huskies.

Current momentum: In their last home meeting on the same date in 2025, the Eagles secured a strong 195.125-193.275 victory over the Huskies.

Historical snapshot: The date of Jan. 17 has been kind to the program before; for example, on that date in 2004, the Eagles defeated NIU at home, 192.850-191.325.

Streaming info: Fans can watch the meet live on ESPN+ or via Eagle All-Access.

## Women's tennis

The scouting report: A heavy home schedule arrives Saturday, Jan. 18, 2026, as the Eagles welcome the Ferris State University Bulldogs to Ypsilanti.

Current momentum: The Eagles achieved a rare double-header sweep against the Bulldogs on Jan. 18, 2025, winning both matches with dominant scores of 7-0 and 4-0.

Historical snapshot: The team has historically used this late-January window to build win streaks, currently holding a four-win streak against Ferris State dating back to 2024.

Streaming info: While live video is not available, fans can check for live scoring and updates on Eagle All-Access.

## Men's basketball

The scouting report: The Eagles head south to Bowling Green State University on Saturday, Jan. 18, 2026, for a conference road test.

Current momentum: The Eagles have shown they can handle the Falcons' home court, evidenced by their 68-62 victory over Bowling Green during the 2024-25 season.

Historical snapshot: Mid-January road trips have tested Eagle grit before; on Jan. 16, 1999, the team traveled to DeKalb and ground out a narrow 51-48 win against Northern Illinois University.

Streaming info: Catch the broadcast on ESPN+. Fans can also listen to the game on WEMU (89.1 FM) or via the Varsity Network.

## Women's basketball

The scouting report: The team travels to Mount Pleasant on Saturday, Jan. 18, to face the Central Michigan University Chippewas.

Current momentum: The Eagles are looking to flip the script following a 64-73 road loss to the Chippewas on this same date in 2025.

Historical snapshot: EMU has a record of finding success against CMU Jan. 13-19 in previous years, including a 76-68 home win Jan. 13, 1996, and a dominant 77-62 victory Jan. 17, 2007.

Streaming info: The game will be available for streaming on ESPN+.

## Track and field

The scouting report: The mid-January window is traditionally reserved for high-stakes regional competition at the Michigan Invitational in Ann Arbor.

Current momentum: This meet serves as a platform for athletes to land Mid-American Conference top-three marks, a feat the women's team achieved during the January 2025 iteration of the event.

Historical snapshot: The Eagles have consistently competed in Ann Arbor during this specific week for decades, with meet appearances recorded on Jan. 13, Jan. 14, Jan. 17, and Jan. 18 across various recent seasons.

Streaming info: Coverage and results will be posted on Eagle All-Access.

# Western Michigan's second-half surge halts in Kalamazoo, 79-62



EMU men's basketball player Mohammad Habhab dunking the ball in the game against IU Indy on Nov. 14, 2025, at George Gervin GameAbove Center. Habhab led The Eagles with 20 points and nine rebounds during the Jan. 10 game against Western Michigan University. *Braden Copeland / The Eastern Echo*

**Ruby Brannon**  
Sports Editor

For the first 20 minutes on the afternoon of Saturday, Jan. 10, the Eastern Michigan University men's basketball team appeared to have the momentum necessary to claim a critical Mid-American Conference road victory. However, a late offensive explosion by Western Michigan University erased a halftime deficit and sent the Eagles home with a 79-62 loss at University Arena.

The contest was a tale of two halves for the Eagles (8-9, 2-3 MAC), who saw their six-point halftime lead evaporate under the pressure of a 15-0 Bronco run late in the second half. Despite the score remaining deadlocked at 56-56 with 8:15 left in regulation, the Broncos (7-9, 1-3 MAC) found a rhythm that Eastern could not match down the stretch.

## The tale of the tape

Eastern Michigan entered the matchup having out-shot its opponents

from three-point range in 10 consecutive games, a streak dating back to the start of the season. That trend met a sharp end in Kalamazoo. While the Eagles struggled to a 23.1% clip (6-of-26) from beyond the arc, Western Michigan utilized a second-half barrage to finish at 43.8% (7-of-16).

The discrepancy was most notable in the second half. After failing to connect on a single 3-pointer in the first frame, Western Michigan went a blistering 7-of-9 (77.8%) from distance in the final 20 minutes to pull away.

## Standout performances

Redshirt freshman forward Mohammad Habhab anchored the Eagles' interior presence, leading the team with 20 points and nine rebounds. It marked his fourth 20-point performance of the season and his 13th game scoring in double figures. Habhab finished just one rebound shy of what would have been his sixth double-double of the year.

Supporting Habhab was Addison Patterson, who tallied 17 points and flirted with a triple-double by

contributing seven rebounds and eight assists. Patterson's eight dimes matched a career high, and his performance marked his fifth straight game with at least 12 points.

For the Broncos, Jalen Griffith proved to be the difference-maker, dropping a game-high 21 points while shooting 7-of-12 from the floor. Western's depth was also on display as their bench outscored Eastern's reserves 22-10.

## How it unfolded

The Eagles initially struggled, falling behind 20-12 early in the first half. They responded with a defensive lockdown and an offensive clinic, mounting a 12-0 run to take a four-point lead. During this stretch, Eastern was nearly perfect, connecting on 10 consecutive shots from the field over a nine-minute span. This efficiency allowed them to enter the locker room with a 36-30 lead.

The second half began with a quick 5-0 burst by the Broncos in under a minute. Though the Eagles briefly regained control to lead 43-37, the tide

turned for good during the final 10 minutes. After the 56-56 tie, Western Michigan's 15 unanswered points effectively ended the Eagles' hopes of a comeback.

## Historical context and what's next

The loss extends a difficult trend for the Eagles in enemy territory, marking their fourth consecutive defeat in Kalamazoo. Western Michigan now holds a 67-56 lead in the all-time series, which dates back to 1915.

Eastern Michigan will have a chance to regroup as the team returns to Ypsilanti to host Northern Illinois University on Tuesday, Jan. 13. Tipoff is set for 6:30 p.m. at the George Gervin GameAbove Center, with the game scheduled for broadcast on ESPN+.

As the Eagles move into the heart of the MAC schedule, they will look to recapture the shooting efficiency that defined their early-season success and find consistency across both halves of play.

Streaming info: Coverage and results will be posted on Eagle All-Access.

# Embracing Our Differences open submissions for 2026 art project, exhibit

**Ky'anna Coats**  
Special to The Echo

An art and education program called Embracing Our Differences Michigan offers artists the opportunity to create and display works focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion. Organizations planning the 2026 exhibit are seeking submissions until Jan. 30.

Nancy Margolis, the program's executive director, said submitting artists are encouraged to address the theme for the new exhibit: "Enriching Our Lives Through Diversity."

"Art can be transformative," Margolis said. "Preparing art about differences and inclusion helps the artist and others gain a greater understanding of ways that diversity enhances their life."

Submissions can be displayed through visual art or short-form writing, such as quotes or slogans. Anyone interested in participating in the 2026 exhibit can visit Embracing Our Differences

Michigan for details, but the project is open to artists of all ages, skill levels and regions.

The 2025 exhibit featured 44 art installations divided between Ypsilanti's Riverside Park, at 2 East Cross St., and Ann Arbor's Gallup Park, 3323 Geddes Road. The outdoor installation was taken down Oct. 30. All of the pieces can be viewed on the Embracing Our Differences Michigan website under the 2025 digital exhibit.

Any community members interested in receiving the 2025 exhibit artworks, for free, can reach out to the program. Margolis hopes schools and businesses will show interest in taking the billboard-sized banners.

"We would like to expand this program into the out-county, ... Chelsea, Dexter, Milan, Saline," Margolis said, referring to the future of Embracing Our Differences Michigan program.



Wayne Ramirez from Venice, Florida, submitted this piece, *Yearning to Breathe Free*, for the 2025 Embracing Our Differences project. "While this image of the child with tear-filled eyes is a product of my imagination, she represents the reality of what thousands of migrant children confront at the United States and Mexican borders," Ramirez said in the artist statement on the project's website. Courtesy of Embracing Our Differences Michigan

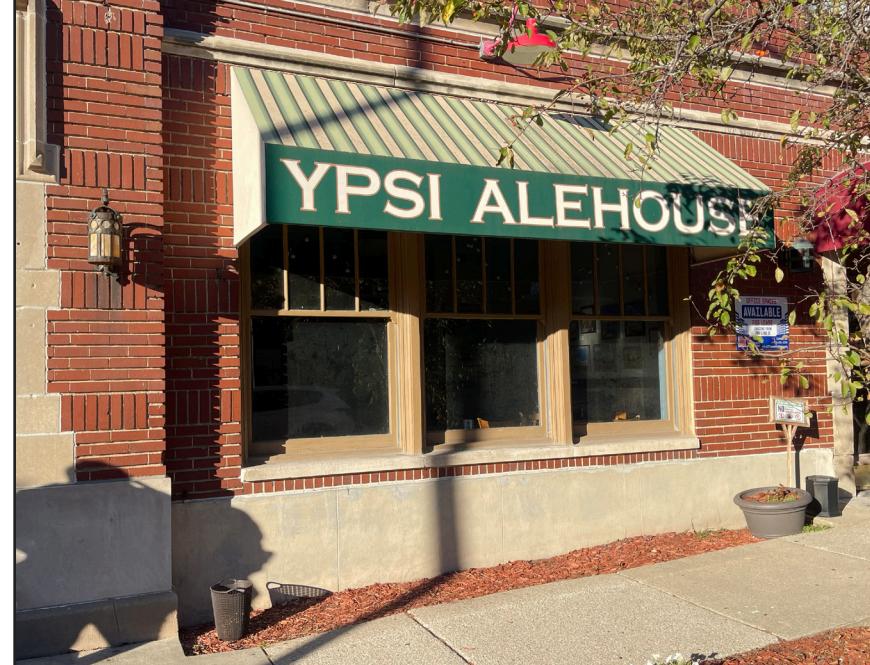


This artwork, *Stuck In Your Mind*, was contributed by Lydia H., a fourth-grade student at Ypsilanti International Elementary School. "The reason I chose this piece is because I often find myself stuck in my mind. One side represents bad thoughts and the other side represents good thoughts and, in the end, she realizes she is human and she is good enough," the website artist statement said. Courtesy of Embracing Our Differences Michigan



Created by Kaila Greatness Price, from Farmington Hills, Michigan, this work is titled *Free*. "This digital photo collage and painting serves as a powerful reminder to the Black community to honor where we came from and celebrate the ancestors who paved the way for our existence," the sentiment accompanying the work reads. "We come from ancestors of greatness; we must live to honor them." Courtesy of Embracing Our Differences Michigan

## Ypsilanti night spots feature several campus open mic events near the EMU



The entrance of Ypsi Alehouse in Ypsilanti, Mich. Ky'anna Coats / The Eastern Echo

**Ky'anna Coats**  
Special to The Echo

Thanks to Eastern Michigan University's close proximity to downtown Ypsilanti, student creatives can find numerous public places to display their skills. A number of spots are within a one-mile radius of Eastern's campus, according to Google Maps.

Local artist Queso Tone, who has hosted numerous open mic-style showcases, said the events offer opportunity for connection and community support.

"There are a lot of talented people in Ypsilanti, and there are a lot of businesses that want to showcase talent in Ypsilanti. I've gotten the chance to meet people not only at Eastern but in the area," Tone said.

With a new album coming out, Tone said these events offered him opportunities to test new material.

second, third and fourth Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. It is open to all ages. Additionally, it has live music 7-9 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. The Alehouse is at 124 Pearl Street, No. 100 in Ypsilanti.

### Ziggy's

Ziggy's is a performance space, bar and coffeehouse with occasional open mic nights. Its event scheduling and performance details are updated on its website and social media. It is open to all ages, and entry prices may vary. Ziggy's is at 206 W. Michigan Ave. in Ypsilanti.

### Powell's Pub

Powell's Pub is a bar on the outskirts of campus that hosts karaoke Saturdays from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. The space is filled with dartboards and pool tables. Powell's is at 625 N. Huron St. in Ypsilanti.

### Wyrd Byrd

Wyrd Byrd, a shop for new and used media, holds occasional open mic night events. Event dates are updated on the shop's website and Instagram. The space is filled with vinyl records, films, tabletop role-playing games and self-published booklets.

Wyrd Byrd is located at 9 S. Washington St. in Ypsilanti.

### Rhizome Roots Studio

Rhizome Roots Studio is a wellness studio that provides a speakeasy open mic night once a month on Fridays. According to its official website, it is open to acoustic musicians, poets, authors in the making, artists and patrons of the arts. Entry is \$10 or \$5 for students. Rhizome Roots has a public calendar on its website for upcoming events.

The studio is located at 108 Pearl St.

### Ohana Lounge

Ohana Lounge is a coffee lounge that hosts occasional showcases and weekly DJ sets. Past showcase events include Ypsi Got Talent, during which musicians, poets, comedians and magicians had the chance to perform to win studio time. Upcoming event information can be found on its website and Instagram account, @ohanacoffeelounge. Ohana Lounge is at 11 E. Cross St. in Ypsilanti.

### The Ypsilanti Freighthouse

The Ypsilanti Freighthouse is a local venue run by the City of Ypsilanti. There have been numerous open mic nights held there in the past. The City of Ypsilanti website has a public calendar of upcoming events and openings for the Freighthouse, which can be found at 100 Market Place in Ypsilanti.

## Cellar Roots

### Volume 52

EXTENDED!  
Deadline  
Jan. 20

Students and EMU alumni can submit their own creative works to be featured in the upcoming edition of Cellar Roots, Volume 52.

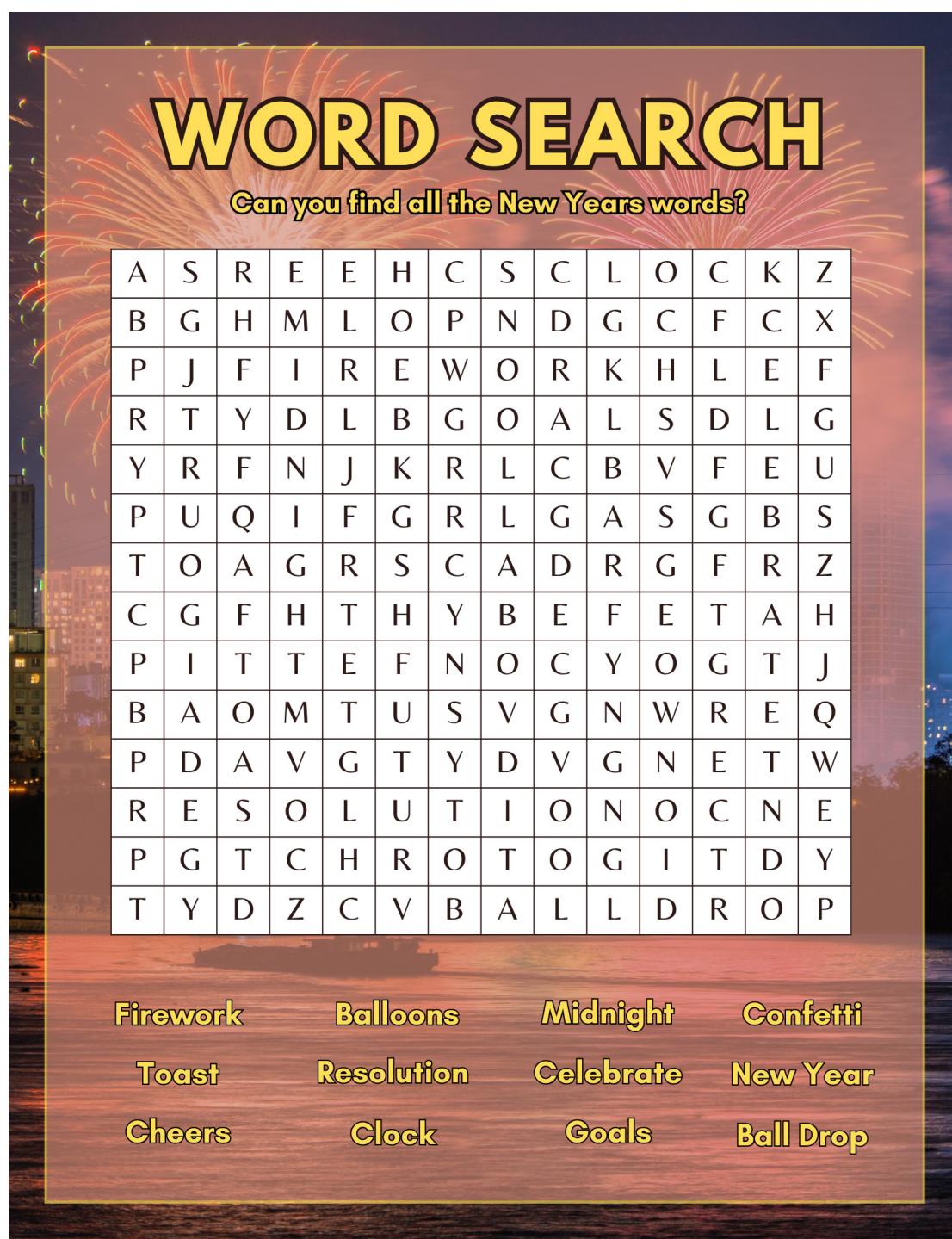
### Submit Works Here:



[cellarroots@easternecho.com](mailto:cellarroots@easternecho.com)

[cellarroots](https://www.facebook.com/cellarroots)

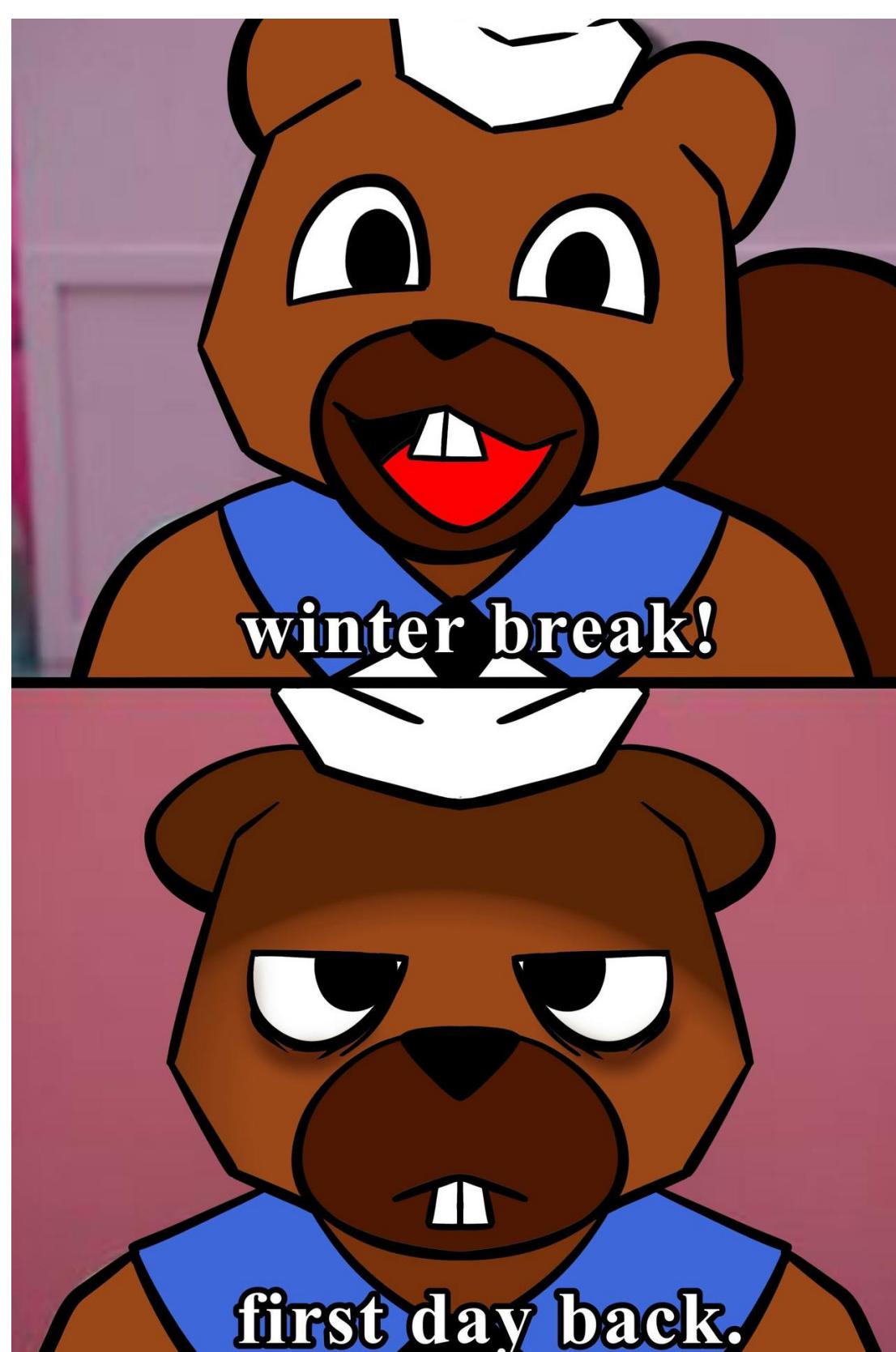
Please email [cellarroots@easternecho.com](mailto:cellarroots@easternecho.com) for any questions or inquiries.



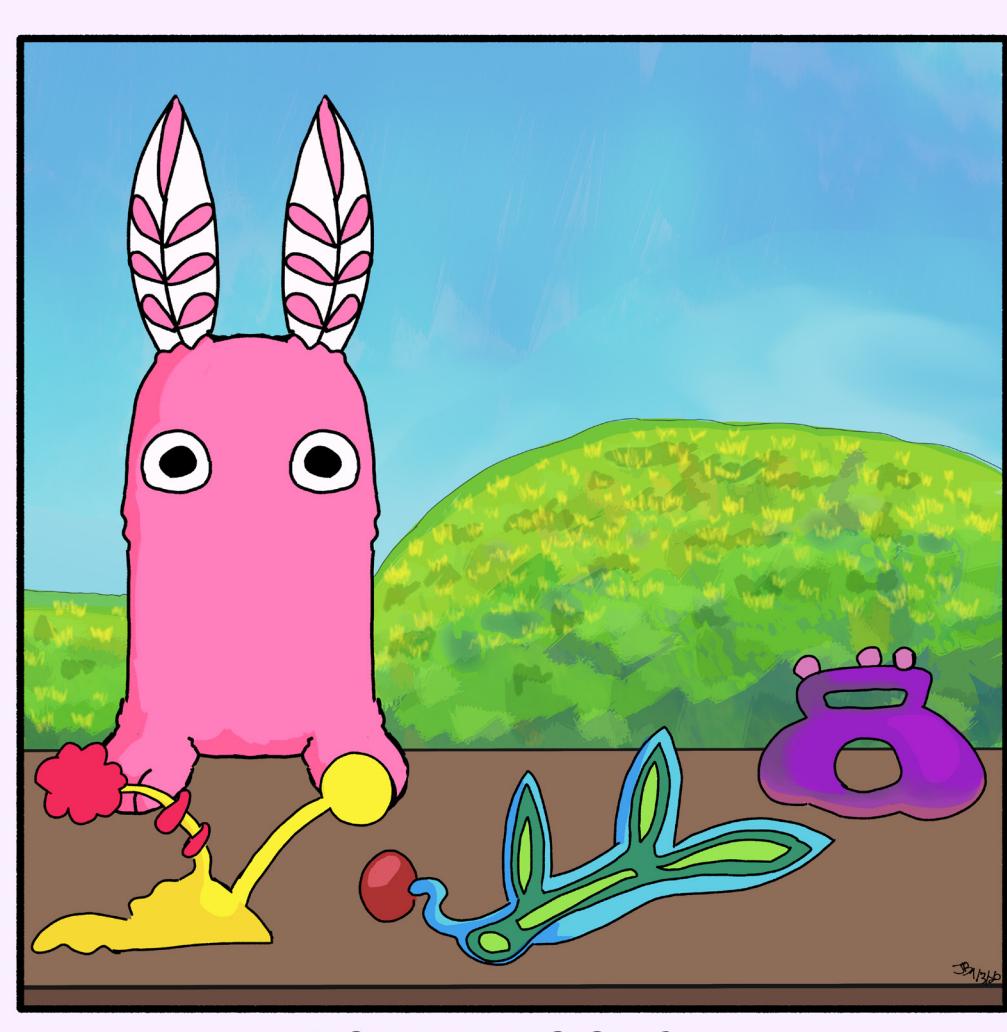
Moonlight 12-1 | FunkyL0af



first day back. | Rylee Curley



tobble tools | Julia Bartlett



*Scan to find  
our links!*



# EMU campus locations quiz

How well do you know the Eastern Michigan University campus? Test your knowledge with this campus landmark quiz. First, try to place where the landmark is located, and then scan the QR code to check your answers on our website.



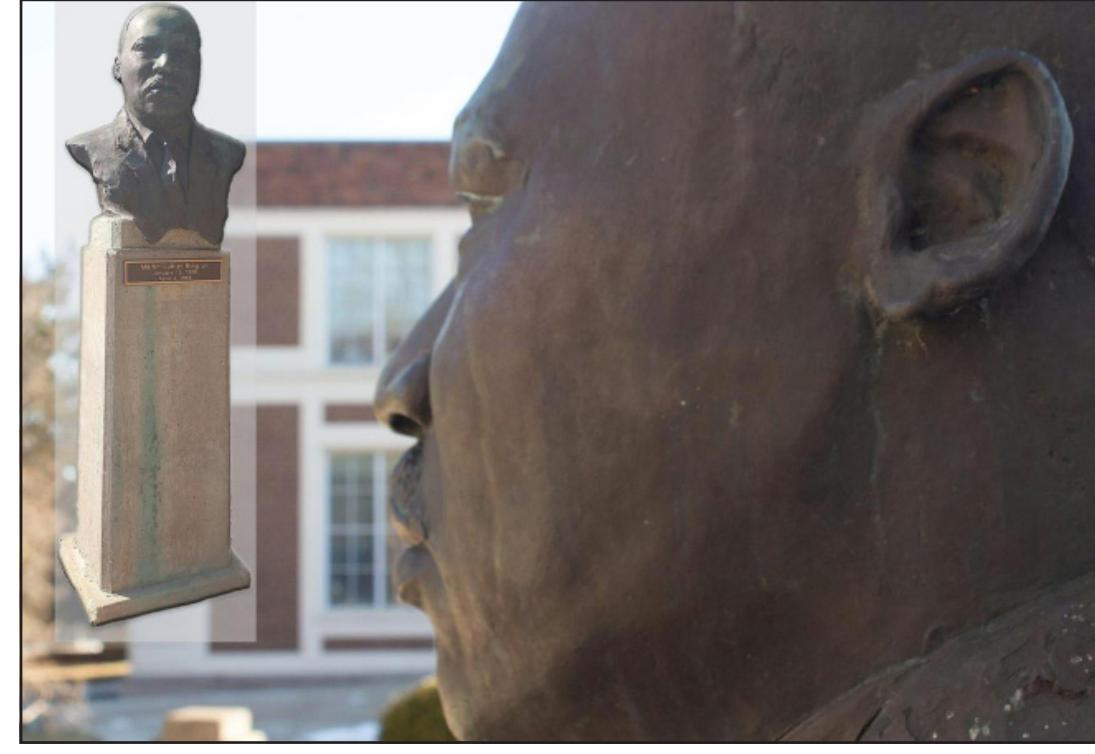
Photos by Israel Shriki, quiz created by Israel Shriki and Natalie Kyle, Special to The Echo



**Name:** "Eagles Rising" sculpture

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**About:** Created by artist Mier Naghi in 2009, this sculpture captures the figures of two eagles interacting with one another. The eagle has symbolized EMU since 1991.



**Name:** Martin Luther King Jr. bust

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**About:** The sculpture was made by EMU graduate student Nancy Sippel in 1989. Sippel entered and won a competition to create the sculpture, winning a unanimous vote from the judging committee.



**Name:** "Lineage" sculpture

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**About:** The sculpture was made by Charles McGee in 2008. McGee was an art professor at EMU from 1969-87. The sculpture was made to represent the connection humans have to their ancestors and descendants.



**Name:** "Interaction" sculpture

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**About:** The sculpture was created by Benjamin Victor in 2023. Inspired by his years of experience working with engineers, the artist created a composition of rectangles meant to capture the viewer's attention as the sculpture spirals upward.



**Name:** Building entrance

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**About:** The entrance to this building is designed with geometric shapes; the triangular pyramid rests on four spheres, which rest on four trapezoidal pillars. The building was constructed in 1967 and functioned as the University Library until 1998.



**Name:** "Icarus" sculpture

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**About:** The statue was created by artist and EMU professor John Pappas in 2003. The sculpture shares the story of the ancient Greek tale of Icarus. In the tale, Icarus' father, Daedalus, crafts wax wings to help them escape imprisonment, but Icarus flies too close to the sun and falls into the sea.



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