

Alcona County Review

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Alcona High School art and design students, Jasmine Walker (left) and Alera Buehl (right) work with art teacher Erich Carlson on covered pots the students made during a Beginning Work with Clay program brought to the school through grants. For the story, see page 6. *Courtesy photo.*

Grant covers tree planting expense

By Mary Weber
Staff Writer

“The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second-best time is now.”

~ Chinese proverb

Volunteers of all ages will come together Saturday, May 13, to plant 300 trees as a riparian buffer strip along Barlow Road.

The trees were purchased through a Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) grant of \$12,900 awarded to the Pine River Van Etten Lake Watershed Coalition (PRVEL).

Russell Williams, president of the PRVEL and Alcona County District Conservation district forester, explained they first applied for the grant in 2021 but it didn't receive the award. “It didn't work out in the first round, but another chance came up and we applied again, this time with success.

“The grant is in the form of reimbursement and the Iosco and Alcona Conservation Districts are providing temporary working funds to PRVEL to make the project possible,” Williams said.

He explained the buffer strip will be considered a demonstration program along Van Etten Creek which has had some quality issues in the past.

“In past years there were a lot of farms in the watershed that kept cows and that can at times be a challenge to water quality.

“After the planting is finished there will be signage making it an interpretive site explaining best management practices and how trees can assist our waterways and environment,” Williams said.

He explained some of the benefits of planting a riparian buffer. “Primarily the roots hold the soil together to prevent soil erosion. Sediment from soil erosion can degrade wildlife habitat in streams and lakes. The tree buffer provides shade which helps to establish a good water/soil community. There is a whole range of organisms and different things going on in the soil that none of us notice.

“The soil ecosystem is our foundation, and it pushes up through the food chain to support all different sorts of wildlife. The trees also provide cover and concealment for animals,” Williams said.

He felt the location should be an easy strip for most people to get to — about three miles south of F-30 on Barlow between Wissemiller and Kings Corner roads. The plan is to plant 100 white cedar, 100 white spruce and 100 balsam fir. Most trees are about 12 to 18 inches tall, and all were purchased through the Alcona Conservation District tree sale. The trees are relatively fast-growing and will put on about six inches per year.

According to Williams, the challenge is with deer thinking the newly planted trees are a food source, so each tree will have a cage around it for protection. “The spruce might not need all the caging, but the white cedar and balsam fir will for sure. Most of the money for the project will go towards fencing, that's the expensive part,” Williams said.

The current plan is to have the cages ready to go as well as have holes prepped so that volunteers have an easy time planting the trees but that all depends on the weather, Williams explained, and the opportunity to accomplish the task. He advised volunteers to bring a shovel just in case.

The tree planting will begin at 8:30 a.m. and run until 4:30 p.m. or when all the

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Food banks see increase in demand

By Samuel Blatchford
Capital News Service

Additional federal food assistance for low-income people that recently ended has led to increased demand for help from food banks and pantries.

The cuts were to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program emergency allotments which were a temporary strategy to help low-income families overcome COVID-19 hardships. The allotments to the program popularly known as SNAP, expired February 28.

Since then, the First Presbyterian Church Food Pantry, a satellite of the Greater Lansing Food Bank, has seen increased demand for food, said Marna Wilson, an Okemos, Mich. volunteer at the pantry, which is open four days a week. “It's pretty common that we are feeding 20 families a day,” Wilson said. “We are feeding a lot of people from all over the city.”

The pantry has handled the surge with an arrangement with a local grocery store to take any food that would otherwise go in the dumpster

for free.

The South Michigan Food Bank in Battle Creek, Mich. has seen a similar surge in demand, said chief operating officer Brittney Fletcher. The food bank has over 300 agencies that serve Barry, Branch, Calhoun, Jackson, Lenawee, Hillsdale, Kalamazoo and St. Joseph counties.

“Some of our sites have almost doubled in the number of households that need food,” Fletcher said.

And inflation doesn't help. “The money that families have available to purchase

food doesn't go as far at the grocery store as it used to,” she said.

Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan has run into similar problems. The Detroit organization serves Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Livingston and Monroe counties. The food bank also supports a partner network of over 400 soup kitchens, schools and shelters.

Pressure to distribute more food was increasing even be-



God Bless America



Special program brings ceramic art education to Alcona students

By Mary Weber
Staff Writer

Sculpting, molding and above all, the freedom to imagine, was offered to a group of Alcona High School art students thanks to an inventive, community-driven volunteer and her collaboration with local artists to obtain grants and make it happen.

Helen Hierta approached art teacher, Erich Carlson, last August with an idea to help students explore their creativity through three-dimensional ceramic art.

“Working with clay is an opportunity for students to express themselves in unanticipated ways, to find self-awareness that is beyond the usual education processes.

“Clay arts provide a physical activity necessary for people of all ages. It takes the individual into their inner world of feeling, knowing and understanding. The unique self-expression that accompanies ceramic art is limitless,” Hierta said.

As the founder of Huron Artist Residency and Collaboration (HARC) with its mission to be a source of ceramic arts information for the community as well as nurture Alcona County’s destination for artists, educators and visitors, Hierta has a vision for making art an experience for all to enjoy.

However, after looking at the art room supplies and what would be needed to support the project, she wasn’t quite sure how she would be able to come up with sufficient funds to make the project happen.

Knowing the program would benefit students, she just began by asking. “I had never written for a grant, but we were awarded an \$2,800 grant from the Michigan Arts and Culture Council.

“I then wrote to the Community Foundation of Northeast Michigan and they gave \$2,000, but that still wasn’t enough, so I wrote to the Presque Isle Electric and Gas Co-operative (PIE&G) and they were able to give \$500 which helped to pay for the electric pottery wheel. Inspiration Alcona just gave us \$1,200 and I’m still waiting to get one more source so we can continue with more programs,” Hierta said.



Alcona High School Art and Design students (front to back) Emma Schroeder, Morgan Munsey, Kioni Peoples, Maddalyn Eby and Bella Laird made a visit to the Flint Institute of Art Contemporary Craft Wing where they worked on pottery wheels. *Courtesy photo.*

Altogether the funds were enough to get the pilot program “Beginning Work with Clay” underway and the classes were held at the school for 15 students of Carlson’s Introduction to Art and Design class. The project ran from April 24 to May 5.

Part of the grant funds assisted in bringing Craig Hinshaw, Michigan’s Art Teacher of the Year and an award-winning ceramic artist, to the school to demonstrate his skills. Working alongside Carlson and Hierta for five sessions, Hinshaw taught students about building with clay, kiln drying, glazing and glaze firing.

On the final day of the program, students were treated to a docent-guided tour of the Flint Institute of Arts Contemporary Craft Wing. “The school provided the transportation for the field trip which was nice because that would have cost over \$1,000.

“The field trip pulled all

they learned together, it was a historical and contemporary visual with demonstrations by Guy Adamec, head of the Flint Institute of Arts Ceramic Department who has been teaching there for 40 years,” Hierta said.


Carlson explained the hardest part of the program, or for that matter, any art class he teaches, is for students to find their freedom to create. “We gave them basic guidelines and encouraged them to use their ideas.

“Students have been trained to have concrete answers and are afraid to experiment and use their creative potential. They question themselves with everything. In art, I need them to cut loose and just have fun creating,” he said.

Hierta said when youth are very young, they have a great ability to be imaginative, but somehow by the time they

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The Alcona Historical Society
ANNUAL MEETING
Thursday, May 18, 6:30 p.m. at
Alcona Township Hall - 5576 US 23,
Black River, MI. The township hall is
just north of Black River Rd.
*If coming from the north take the US-23 detour to
Black River Rd.*



There will be a short review of what has been accomplished by the Historical Society in the last year. Refreshments will be served.
The Public is Welcome.
At 7:00 Ric Mixer will present a lecture on the November Gales of the Great Lakes.

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Students Continued from page 6

reach middle and high school, most of that creativity has been washed away.

Carlson enjoyed watching his students become engaged in their projects, allowing their imaginations to soar. "There was a lot of laughter. A few were a bit frustrated because they couldn't get their project to be exactly what they wanted but that's okay, it's part of the learning process," he said.

Students' ceramic designs included boxes with lids, func-

tioning whistles, art tiles and self-portraits on art tiles, some of which will be on display at the Student Showcase to be held Tuesday, May 16 between 5 and 7 p.m. at Alcona High School.

Carlson said the program was outstanding and way beyond what they normally do. He is also grateful to have a new electric pottery wheel in his art room, however, one wheel shared by 15 students for a 50-minute class doesn't quite give each student suffi-

cient time to work on their project. It also offers little to no chance for other students Carlson teaches to even try their hand at the wheel.

He does have another electric and two kick pottery wheels that have been in his classroom for years, however, they are in need of repair before students can use them. "The electric one sends out shocks. It would be nice to get these repaired and maybe a few more added.

"Our goal is to have four to six working wheels in the classroom to make sure we are giving students a better three-dimensional realm experience. It's important to do ceramics and pottery," Carlson said.

He would like to build on what they have accomplished with this project and possibly bring in more community elements.

"I'd like to have veterans or senior citizens come in and work with the kids. I'd like to see a bond built between the older and younger generation. Sometimes I think we are missing that in our society right now. There is a growing disconnect between youth and other generations," Carlson said.

Hierta explained she hadn't had much experience teaching youth this age and it was a learning experience for her as well. "I learned something about myself, my memories of high school and the conflicts I struggled with. You can't tell by looking at a student what their home life is like. Some are so fraught emotionally. Some of these kids are just wandering in the dark.

"It's very important they receive quality guidance, not guidance by rote but taught through analytical thinking. The idea of community (sharing) offers the growth of personal character. Art is therapeutic and our culture needs healing," Hierta said.

One additional class with the students will be conducted next week after Hierta has finished firing their ceramics.

At her studio in Greenbush, Hierta works with various clays, hand-building indoor and outdoor sculptures fired in electric, gas, and wood-burning kilns. Her art has been shown at national exhibitions, outdoor sculpture parks and art galleries.

For more information on HARC and what they are planning for future programs, visit www.huronartistresidency.com.

Grant Continued from page 1

trees are planted. Lunch will be provided for volunteers between noon and 1 p.m.

More volunteers are needed and everyone is welcome. Please call or text (989) 310-6408 before Friday so PRVEL knows how many to plan for lunch. However, Williams said if they don't call prior, volunteers can still show up. "Come when you can, stay as long as you want. No one has to work all day if they don't want to," Williams said.

Since this is road commission property, they will be providing some barrels to slow driving through the area, making it safer for volunteers to work.

Williams said the entire project would not happen without the vital support of both Alcona and Iosco Conservation districts and he thanks them immensely, as well as all the volunteers prepared to come and join in.



Russell Williams, president of the Pine River Van Etten Lake Watershed Coalition and Alcona County Conservation District Forester stands next to a display outlining the Cooperative Riparian Buffer Planting project that will take place with volunteers planting 300 grant-awarded trees on Saturday. *Photo by Mary Weber.*

Food Continued from page 1

fore the expiration of the COVID-19-related benefits. "We're seeing increases in requests for support across our partner network and direct-service operations since spring of last year, even without the added impact of conclusion of expanded SNAP benefits," said Kristin Sokul, director of advanced communications, marketing and pr/media.

From January 2022 through January 2023 there was a 40 percent increase in

guests coming to mobile distribution centers, she said.

Since the conclusion of expanded SNAP benefits, Gleaners' community mobile distribution centers saw an 11 percent increase in the average meal packages distributed from February 2023 to March 2023, she said.

The agency had to strengthen partnerships across the food industry, taking advantage of efficiencies to reduce expenses by collaborating, Sokul said.



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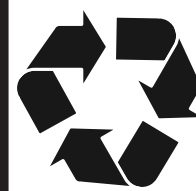
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Alcona COUNTY-WIDE CLEANUP

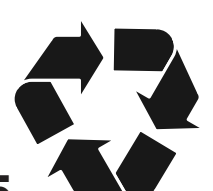
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