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"GRATIOT COUNTY'S LARGEST CIRCULATION NEWSPAPER"

# Gratiot County Herald



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## Teenage Boy Battling Cancer Finds Support In Alma College Football

By William Meiners  
 Herald Staff Writer

These are not the best of times for student athletes. Consider the Alma College football team: having a fall season cancelled, only to run into games postponed, then cancelled in consecutive weekends in an abbreviated spring season.

These may not be the best of times for teenage boys, either. For many reasons. But consider Deacon Orłowski: battling cancer at age 14 instead of playing football and basketball, two things he really loves.

When the Scots football team learned of Deacon's fight, they knew they had to step up. Players and coaches signed some posters, and Jason Couch, head coach, gathered some t-shirts to send to the family.

The team also discussed trying to meet with Deacon in person, though circumstances would dictate the timing on that.

Couch wasn't sure what reaction he would get from his players after sharing the story about Deacon. None of them knew the teen. "I didn't push it by any means," he said. "The players asked what they could do."

See **SUPPORT** on page 5



Deacon and Aaron Orłowski show off the shirts, posters, and hopeful messages sent by the Alma College football team as Deacon continues in his battle with cancer.

## County, State Officials Meet To Discuss Wind Turbine Depreciation Issue

By Emma Selmon  
 Herald Staff Writer

Elected officials from Gratiot County and the State of Michigan sat down last week to discuss a complex tax issue which has millions of dollars in local tax revenue hanging in the balance.

State Senator Rick Outman of Michigan's 33rd Senate District and State Representative Pat Outman of Michigan's 70th House District, met with Gratiot County commissioners, administrative officials and representatives of other local organizations on Friday, April 2 to learn more about the taxation dispute between local governments and utility providers like Consumers Energy and DTE.

The issue, which has gone unresolved for a decade, centers around how quickly wind turbines depreciate for tax purposes.

In last week's meeting, the state officials met with Gratiot County Administrator Tracey Cordes as well as County Commissioners Chuck Murphy and Jan Bunting. Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. President Jim Wheeler was also in attendance, as were Jan Amsterburg and Kyle Hamlin, superintendents of the Gratiot-Isabella RESD and Montcalm County ISD, respectively.

Administrator Cordes told The Herald that there were "no particular outcomes from the meeting...nor did [she] intend there to be." The Gratiot parties spent the hour-long discussion sharing their perspective about the issue, and explaining some of the history, "centering on the promises that were made during the planning and approval processes more than a decade ago."

As The Herald previously reported, local governments like Gratiot County approved wind development projects based on an understanding that the turbines would depreciate in accordance with a particular multiplier table, which was approved by the State Tax Commission (STC) and had been in effect since 2008.

But in late 2011 — when wind farms like those in Gratiot were just beginning to come online — the STC adopted a new table in which the turbines depreciated much more rapidly. Local government entities like Gratiot County and its townships were not consulted when these changes were made, Cordes said.

The change, which local governments allege is a "bait and switch," would leave those entities with millions less in tax revenue than they anticipated, Cordes said. For Gratiot County, that difference amounts to a reduction of over \$3.2 million in revenue collected from 2012 to 2019.

The STC adopted yet another tax table in 2014, once again without consulting local governments. This table, which remains in effect today, would amount to a reduction of over \$1.3 million in revenue collected from 2012 to 2019.

Local governments like Gratiot County who felt blindsided by these changes banded together to form the Michigan Renewable Energy Collaborative (MREC).

The MREC group commissioned a new multiplier table from Appraisal Economics, Inc., a nationally-respected valuation firm. This table, although "less favorable" to local governments than the original STC table used to sell local governments on wind energy projects, is what

See **TURBINE** on page 7

## Easter Egg Walk Welcomes Sunshine, Family Strollers



Julian Scott, 3, of Alma, took the downtown St. Louis streets last Saturday for the city's Easter Egg Walk.

By William Meiners  
 Herald Staff Writer

Though no one specifically had to ask for the treats, the whole thing felt a bit like Halloween as masked children gathered candy in trips up and down the St. Louis streets. Still, Saturday's Downtown Easter Egg Walk was a hit with families and little ones. Under cooperating sunshine and temperatures in the mid-50s, some 14 businesses dished out candies and keepsakes to children under 12 throughout the two-hour event.

Liz Crider and Sandy Melow of Common Threads Quilt Shop utilized the help of three of Crider's rabbit-eared grandchildren, one from St. John's and two from Mount Pleasant, to greet passers-by and pass out goodies. Melow reported having packed 125 bags of candy in all and giving out every last one of them.

See **EASTER** on page 6

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**SUPPORT** *continued from page 1*



**When the Scots football team learned of Deacon Orłowski's fight, they knew they had to step up. The players and coaches signed some posters, and Jason Couch, head coach (left) gathered some t-shirts to send to the family. (courtesy photo - Alma College)**

The team's actions certainly caught the family by pleasant surprise, especially Deacon. "He had a grin from ear to ear," said Aaron Orłowski, Deacon's father. "He thinks it's pretty cool that a whole college football team has his back."

The elder Orłowski and Couch had crossed paths at Alma College. In fact, both played football for the Scots at the same time. Although Couch, who graduated in 1997, was a senior center and Orłowski, a 2000 graduate, was a freshman receiver at the time. So they may not have huddled up that much.

Additionally, it had been 20 years since his college days, so Orłowski had lost touch with many old classmates and teammates. Kori Orłowski, Aaron's wife, had been posting some updates on Deacon's "health journey" through a website called Caring Bridge. When some of Aaron's old teammates learned about what the family was dealing with, they reached out to Couch.

Couch contacted Aaron through a private social media message, asking if there was anything he could do. "I asked Aaron if I could share the story of the family's fight with the team, and he said, 'Absolutely.'"

Football is a game of adversity, Couch said. Players frequently deal with injuries, many of them severe. Playing through a pandemic, those players learn how disruptive a health crisis can be. But it all pales in comparison to what Deacon is living with. "This young man and his family have fought through more adversity than anyone should have to," he said.

It all put everything in perspective. "I walk through the arches every day at Bahlke Field," said Couch. "My little ritual is that I walk through and remind myself that I get to do this. Once the players learned about Aaron I think they realized they were pretty darn fortunate. The adversity we're going through now with Covid is nothing."

For them to extend the kindness to Deacon and his family, though maybe not surprising to a coach who knows his players well, was a bonus that came from the lesson. "They thought if they could lift up this young guy up through some thoughts and prayers, they were going to do it."

Deacon's fight with cancer began after a December 2018 biopsy revealed Rhabdomyosarcoma, a rare pediatric cancer. It is "a soft-tissue cancer," Aaron said, which appeared in his jaw area, upper neck, and cheek. "The cancer is growing out of his nerves."

With his treatments starting in January 2019, Deacon has endured nearly two-and-half-years of chemotherapy. It's tough on him. Tough on a family, which includes Everett, his 13-year-old brother.

The Orłowski's have been running on faith. "We have strength in our faith," Aaron said. "We have a strong family core."

Both Aaron and Kori work for Dow Chemical — Aaron as a research chemist and Kori in a more corporate role. "They've been very supportive, allowing us days off for Deacon's treatments," he said.

Those extended families, which include an understanding workplace and a caring alma mater, make the most difficult of times a little bit easier. "If people can keep sending those thoughts and prayers, we'd be really grateful."

When life really gets moving, you don't always have a chance to reflect on your college days. For Aaron, some 25 years ago, Alma College seemed like the perfect fit for a young guy from a small school in Lansing. The campus, the smaller classes, even the opportunity to play football, made for a great four-year experience.

Thinking back on that younger version of himself, Orłowski suspects he would have reacted the same way to learn of another person's son battling cancer. "I hope I would have responded the same way," he said. "It really speaks to their character."

Maybe Deacon will greet those players in person soon. Maybe in the fall, on the other side of a pandemic, with his immune system less compromised. When they can hopefully be fans in the stands, cheering on their kinship with the Scots.

**Upcoming Metal Recycling Event To Support Healthy Pine River**

**By Gary Rayburn  
Healthy Pine River**

This Earth Day, help the Pine River while also cleaning up old metal around your house and yard.

Padnos Central Michigan and WMLM radio are partnering up for a metal recycling event in Alma to support the Healthy Pine River community organization. All proceeds will go directly to the local environmental group.

Community members who come by to donate their unwanted metal items will also be entered for a chance to win concert tickets.

Metal collection is set for 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on April 22 at the Alma Public Library parking lot, located at 500 E. Superior Street in Alma.

Padnos will accept iron, steel, copper, tin, old appliances and equipment — anything made of metal or with metal parts in it.

Large items to donate, like cars or tractors, should be taken directly to Padnos at 1430 Williams Street in Alma. When dropping off the items, tell the folks at Padnos that you want the proceeds to go to Healthy Pine River.

During the Earth Day collection event on April 22, WMLM 1520 AM will broadcast live, and they will register attendees for a drawing to win two tickets to see Miranda Lambert with special guest Lee Brice at the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort on July 24.

**Masons to Place Corner Stone for New Building in Alma**

Construction of a new Michigan Masons administrative building will be commemorated with an official cornerstone setting ceremony within the campus of the Masonic Home on Monday, April 12th, 2021 at 12pm. Hosted by Most Worshipful Grand Master Craig Mason and Grand Lodge Systems CEO Robert Conley, the event will feature Craig H. Mason, Grand Master of Masons in Michigan, Mr. Greg Mapes, Mayor of the City of Alma and many more.

"The cornerstone is symbolic throughout Freemasonry, originating from the stonemasons and incorporated today to represent the labor and time necessary to build the moral foundations of truth, charity, and compassion that guide our Fraternity," said Systems CEO Robert Conley. "The cornerstone we lay today is significant as it acts as a reference for all other stones to build upon."

The new administrative building will replace offices currently housed in the decommissioned Hospital attached to the Masonic Home. Highlighting the new space, a mural depicting Mason's throughout history adorns the staircase visible through the glass wall entrance. These offices will include shared services for the Michigan Masonic Home, for the Grand Lodge of Michigan Fraternal offices and the Michigan Masonic Charitable Foundation philanthropy offices.

**Michigan Townships Association Offers Scholarship to Future Local Leaders**

The past year has shown us how critically important community leaders, programs and services are in helping to support Michigan residents. The Michigan Townships Association (MTA) Robert R. Robinson Scholarship offers financial assistance to today's students who are aspiring to future leadership roles in their community. Applications for this annual scholarship are being accepted now.

The scholarship is designed to help Michigan students who are preparing for a career in public administration. Applicants must be a junior, senior or graduate student in a Michigan college or university.

The scholarship is awarded on a competitive basis, and applicants are considered on several factors including academic achievement, community involvement and commitment to local government administration. Requirements include: a letter of recommendation from a professor or instructor; a copy of a resolution of support from an MTA-member township board in good standing; and a short essay on an important issue facing local government.

"The Michigan Townships Association is proud to offer this annual scholarship to our leaders of tomorrow," said Harold Koviak, Burt Township (Cheboygan Co.) supervisor and a member of MTA's Robinson Scholarship Committee. "The scholarship is critical both to students in pursuit of their local government careers, and to all public officials as we work to encourage today's students to pursue a future in public service."

All applications are due by May 31, 2021. More information is available online at [www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp](http://www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp), or by contacting MTA at (517) 321-6467.

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