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'My Sadness Will Always Be'



Paula Rosas (left) alongside Gilbert Rosas and Sgt. Alejandro Rosas, tells the 9/11 gathering about her son, Richard Rosas, an Army private first-class from St. Louis who was the first Michigan soldier to be killed in the Global War on Terror on May 25, 2004.

9/11 Remembered in Ithaca Park

By William Meiners
 Herald Staff Writer

On a beautiful Saturday morning, perhaps as nice weatherwise as that September Tuesday 20 years ago, a group filled the pavilion in Ithaca's Woodland City Park to commemorate the anniversary of 9/11 and the terrorist attacks on the United States.

The 9/11 Global War on Terror Recognition Event, hosted by Gratiot County Veterans' Affairs, and cosponsored by the American Legion Post 266 and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3055, welcomed all U.S. veterans while recognizing those who have served this century. Nancy Bozzer, director of Veterans Affairs, led the ceremony that also featured a veteran of "Desert Storm" and a special honor for a Gratiot County Gold Star Family.

We've got your six

Eric Traux, the main speaker, said he was a little nervous about this particular speech. An architect at

Microsoft, Traux frequently speaks before sizable crowds, but with the occasion to talk to some fellow veterans, he may have lost a little Friday night sleep.

With passion and good humor, Traux pointed out specific times both in his life and our collective lives as a nation that have become defining moments.

One came in his introduction into the U.S. Army, in those first few "weird clerical" days at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

There, a drill sergeant he recalled as "seven and a half feet tall, with large glowing red eyes and actual knives for hands" told the young recruit, "You will not talk during this class."

Traux would not talk in the class; he hardly breathed. But it was in that moment, in the gaze of a fiery-eyed drill sergeant, who in actuality was under six feet tall, that Traux knew he was in the military. Everything, he said, had changed.

See 9/11 page 6

PUBLIC HEARING SET FOR PROPOSED COUNTY BUDGET

By Michael MacDonald
 Herald Editor

Though it's projected to have a general fund surplus of \$1.4 million, Gratiot Financial Administrator Chris Oosterhoff is calling next year's county budget "boring" and "straight forward."

Totaling just over \$40.2 million, with a general fund of \$13.2 million, the proposed 2021/22 fiscal year budget was presented to county commissioners last Tuesday. Its adoption is anticipated to take place following a public hearing on Sept. 21 at 4:30 p.m. in the County Commissioners Room at the courthouse.

The excess in the general fund, the county's primary operating fund, is the result of additional wind farm tax revenue. However, with litigation still pending at the state-level in regard to wind turbine tax depreciation, commissioners may be tentative in spending down the surplus.

Oosterhoff said that there will be a nearly \$2 million increase to the overall budget from the current fiscal year, but 99 percent of the adjustment is directly attributed to projects that will be funded with some of the \$7.9 million the county received in COVID relief funds from the federal government.

He also noted that the general fund budget is only anticipated to rise by \$100,000, a "wonderful achievement" with union raises for county employees now on the books.

"I was extremely pleased to see that," Oosterhoff said.

During the upcoming fiscal year, which begins on Oct. 1, general fund revenues are projected to reach \$14.6 million. Of that, an estimated \$9.3 million will be generated from local taxes.

See BUDGET page 5

Community Organizations to Participate in Emergency Drill

MidMichigan Medical Center – Gratiot, along with a number of city, county and state organizations, will demonstrate response skills during an emergency drill held the week of September 20, on the campus of the Medical Center in Alma.

Disaster drills prepare Medical Center and community emergency responders to be ready with the most efficient processes should a disaster occur. Such drills enable Medical Center staff and community partners to remain up to date in their abilities to respond in case of large scale emergencies and disasters.

"It is important to alert our community members so that they are not alarmed when a large number of police and emergency vehicles are surrounding the Medical Center," said Marita Hattem-Schiffman, president,

MidMichigan Medical Centers in Clare, Gratiot and Mt. Pleasant. "These types of emergency preparedness drills are required for hospitals, and are part of essential preparation."

"The nature of the type of emergency being addressed by the drill is not being released until afterward so that all involved can react in a way that helps them prepare for an actual emergency," said Kendra Overla, Alma Police Chief. "We appreciate all agencies participating in this important event."

Those interested in more information about the drill may contact Mary Jo Beal, B.B.A., CHEC III, C.O.S.S., security and emergency preparedness supervisor, MidMichigan Health, at (989) 466-7427 or maryjo.beal@midmichigan.org.



MASONIC VILLAGE ESTATES

Are you looking for a vibrant community of seniors who enjoy the comforts of home, without the hassles of home ownership? Located in Alma on the Masonic Pathways campus, beautiful landscaping surrounds this safe and secure neighborhood of independent living duplexes. We are now accepting applications. Call us today at (800) 321-9357 to schedule a tour!



MASONIC PATHWAYS



The MidMichigan Health Foundation, MidMichigan Medical Center - Gratiot Maternity Unit and Metro Detroit Share held a dedication ceremony in memory of families across Michigan. Those pictured for the gathering are (from left to right): Kaylee McCaw, Erin Lovas, Jessica Meyer, Angela Winton, Nicole Anderson, Tonia VanWieren and Becky Church.

Caring Cradles Dedicated at MidMichigan Medical Center - Gratiot

The MidMichigan Health Foundation, MidMichigan Medical Center - Gratiot Maternity Unit and Metro Detroit Share held a dedication ceremony in memory of families across Michigan.

Metro Detroit Share, a state-wide pregnancy and infant loss bereavement support organization, has provided Caring Cradles (cooling unit bassinets) to MidMichigan Health's Maternity Units over the past two years. The Caring Cradle allows an opportunity for families that have lost their baby to keep their baby in their room with them. It preserves the baby and will enable families to be able to create memories. Memories that otherwise wouldn't be possible, such as taking pictures and holding the baby before the difficult task of saying goodbye.

Angela Winton, founder of Metro Detroit Share, was inspired to start the organization by the loss of her daughter, Brooke Marie, in 2005. The group, founded three years later, offers services intended to help families bring more awareness about pregnancy and infant loss.

"It's very emotional. It's an emotional time both for the family and for the staff," said Winton. "MidMichi-

gan Medical Centers in Alpena, Gratiot, Midland and West Branch have all received a Caring Cradle to assist grieving families throughout one of the most devastating experiences a parent can face."

The Caring Cradle works by using a cooled mattress pad, allowing the family to spend several more hours/days with their loved one. During that time, families receive a special box full of items they will hold near and dear to their hearts after leaving the hospital.

"They are not going home with empty arms," said Winton. "You come into the hospital, you expect to go home with a baby in your arms, so this will at least give them something to take home with them."

"We are honored that Metro Detroit Share has united their efforts in this special way that will impact the lives of others in our communities," said Becky Church, director, MidMichigan Health Foundation. "Their compassion and concern for the well-being of our families are incredible."

The option to join in supporting maternity health care is also available by visiting www.midmichigan.org/donations.



Eric Traux, the main speaker at the 9/11 Global War on Terror Recognition Event in Ithaca, spoke about some of the defining moments of the terrorist attacks on the United States.

He compared that moment, years later, when as a civilian working in an office building in Marshall, Michigan, when he realized the significance of September 11, 2001. It was when the second plane struck the World Trade Center. "You can't have a first plane until you have a second," he said. "That was the moment we knew somebody had attacked the U.S. Someone had attacked us."

Years prior to 9/11, he realized with distinct clarity the time he feared that he could have been killed in combat. Sitting in his tank in "Desert Storm," as he transitioned from training to action, he was hypersensitive to the heat and smells of his surroundings. In a heartbeat of a moment a cold chill ran down his spine knowing "someone in the direction I was facing wanted to kill me," Traux said of the moment that can still wake him up in the middle of the night.

Traux likened the birth of his son, with all the renewed sense of purpose it afforded him as a husband and father, to September 12, 2001. It was that day, after a murderous attack on civilians that the country, seemingly united, no longer focused on the divisiveness of "race, religion, or politics," had to steel our resolve as a nation. "Within that unity," he said, "we were able to overcome the previous moments. We were able to find some sense of peace."

Yet that peace, especially for veterans, can be allusive. "After 20 years of fighting the war on terrorism, many of us are still struggling to find our own peace," Traux said. "There are two things I want you to know. One, I'm here for you, I've got your six."

In military parlance, "got your six" means the same thing as "I've got your back." It's a saying that goes back to World War I pilots referring to a pilot's rear as the "six o'clock position." The meaning now extends to the loyalty among military members and vets.

Traux concluded, speaking directly to the veterans in the crowd, with his second final point. "I know where we can get you help," he said. "We've got your six."

My sadness will always be

Bozzer recognized and honored the family of Richard Rosas, an Army private first-class from St. Louis who, at just 21 years old, was the first Michigan soldier to be killed in the Global War on Terror on May 25, 2004, in Fallujah, Iraq. Rosas' parents, Paula, and Gilbert Rosas, along with his nephew, Sgt. Alejandro Rosas, were on hand. Mrs. Rosas testified to the grief

that comes with the recognition of being a Gold Star Family, "a title I didn't want to have," she said. "My sadness will always be."

She recalled better times, including putting shin guards on her four-year-old son for soccer. "Run Ricky, run," she said, and they did not know then just how fast and athletic he would be.

From a proud veteran family that included two grandfathers who fought in World War II, with one in the Korean War, Rosas probably never considered not serving his country. His daughter was born in his time overseas, and he would only hear her voice on the phone.

That is part of the sacrifice of so many military families. "The veteran goes off to war, the family is left behind to keep the fires burning," Bozzer said. "We cannot do what we do when we go off to war unless we know that the home front is going to be taken care of. So I thank you from the bottom of my heart because my husband did that for me for 25 years."

For the families who do not see their loved ones return home, the pain cannot go away. Perhaps it's slightly dulled by the patriotism and pride felt for them. "I am proud of my son," Paula Rosa said through her tears. "I am proud to stand here and honor my son, Private Richard Rosas, who loved St. Louis, Michigan, and St. Louis, Michigan loves him."

Rodolfo R. Diaz-Pons, former VA director, spoke near the end of the ceremony. Many of the newest veterans who signed up for duty after 9/11 are still dealing with the country's longest war. "They were the new vets when I started in 2003," he said. "Nobody thought we would get caught up in an endless war."

Showing up for a ceremony can be difficult, "I think those who aren't here," Diaz-Pons said, "are still processing this."

His own 17-year journey in Veterans Affairs, Diaz-Pons said, was a series of one-year contracts that became a calling. Someone told him he'd never leave his veterans. "But the Lord gave me a heart attack to make sure," he said. "But the VA is taking very good care of me, and they've put in some spare parts. It's one of the greatest privileges of my life to serve you."

For the Saturday crowd, a mix of families, political representatives, and veterans of wars as far back as World War II, the remembering is what's important. Just as every American of a certain age can recall where they were on 9/11, that potential to unite as a country should resonate with the day.

Point Broadband to Offer Ultra-Fast Gigabit Internet in Alma

Internet service provider Point Broadband is excited to announce expansion of its 100 percent fiber-to-the-home broadband network into Alma, Michigan.

Residents of Alma will soon have access to the most robust Internet option on the market today, with symmetrical speeds up to 1 gigabit. Fiber broadband delivers the speed and reliability needed to power smart-home and streaming devices,

with faster downloads AND uploads. Point Broadband's fiber network also provides local businesses and healthcare facilities with access to the cutting-edge technology needed to be more competitive and serve the community more effectively.

"Broadband access is now a necessity of life, not a luxury, and a fiber network like ours is far superior to cable Internet options," said Point Broadband GM Dan Sullivan.

"As a local company, we are excited to bring this essential technology to Alma. It continues our record of providing critical Internet services that enhance economic development and quality of life."

Sullivan explained that fiber broadband is much more advanced than Internet delivered over old-fashioned cable or DSL because these legacy networks require a number of shared collection points which usually result in processing delays or lower speeds. With fiber, users get a dedicated connection.

"Point Broadband's fiber design takes the fiber directly from your home or business right to the edge of our core network, basically putting the on-ramp to the highway at your driveway," Sullivan said. "Additionally, the copper used in cable coax or old telco wiring naturally degrades over time, and these networks have been in place for decades. Fiber Optics use light to transmit data making it virtually future proof."

"The City of Alma has been exploring fiber options for the past couple of years," said Alma City Manager Matt Schooley. "We are very excited to see this project become a reality. Fiber connectivity to the home, at the level of service Point Broadband is providing, is a game changer."

Point Broadband currently operates out of Stanton and is actively expanding throughout central Michigan.

To learn more about this project, please visit www.point-broadband.com/construction or call 989-831-8800.

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