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**HEART OF GOLD:**  
 Ithaca Girl Selling Christmas  
 Trees to Pursue 4-H Dreams

**SPORTS • 18-20**  
**HONOR ROLL:**  
 Herald All-County  
 Football Team - Offense



"GRATIOT COUNTY'S LARGEST CIRCULATION NEWSPAPER"

# Gratiot County Herald



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Christmas parades on consecutive nights in St. Louis and Ithaca (above) gathered sizeable crowds to welcome Santa Claus and the holiday season.

## Christmas Parades Welcome the Season in Gratiot County

By William Meiners  
 Herald Staff Writer

On consecutive nights early in the month, the skyline sporting a new moon made 6 p.m. look like a deep and dark December. Yet soon enough, the flashing lights of emergency vehicles let bystanders know that Christmas parades were underway.

See CHRISTMAS page 28

## Bravehearts Pub Christmas Tree Giveaway Now in its Seventh Year

By William Meiners  
 Herald Staff Writer

Charles Chapman is resplendent in a loud yellow blazer featuring repeated silhouettes of Santa Claus, three reindeer, and a Christmas tree - red then blue, over and over the fabric field of gold. He would be overdressed for any other Sunday where downtown sidewalks roll up throughout Gratiot County. But today's the Christmas tree giveaway.

For seven years now, Chapman has been giving out Christmas trees in front of Bravehearts Pub, the place he's owned for 12 years and managed since 1999.

With 100 trees purchased, Chapman said folks lined up on the sidewalk by 9:30 a.m. Seemingly quicker than you could sing a few rounds of "O Tannenbaum," some 70 pines had been whisked away on tops of cars and in beds of trucks. The grateful recipients smiling with their Sunday finds.

He had Christmas tree lights, too. Enough for each tree, and maybe up to 20 stands. When pressed about why he does it, Chapman downplays his own generosity, citing "all the Christmas feels" and simply embracing the holiday spirit.

See GIVEAWAY page 5



Charles Chapman, owner of Bravehearts Pub in Alma, has been giving away Christmas trees for seven years. Spreading some joy early in the season is all about sharing "the Christmas feels," he said.

## Social Media Threat Prompts Lockdown at Ithaca Schools

By Michael MacDonald  
 Herald Editor

As a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of its staff and students, Ithaca Public Schools went into a lockdown Tuesday morning following a threat posted to social media by a former student.

The roughly two-hour lockdown was implemented shortly after 11 a.m. at each of district's three campuses and was lifted by 1:15 p.m.

Ithaca superintendent Steven Netzley said the threat was discovered by a high school student during lunch and that the student promptly informed building principal Jim Thompson.

"We immediately put all of our schools in lockdown and contacted the police," Netzley said. "A Gratiot County Sheriff's officer was at the Junior-Senior High within five minutes and began the investigation. The police had the suspect in custody a short time later."

See THREAT page 5

## Child Advocate Named 'Optimist of The Year'

By William Meiners  
 Herald Staff Writer

It takes more than a sunny disposition to be named the 2020-21 Optimist of the Year. On December 2, Rachel Molands, CASA Recruitment Coordinator of Child Advocacy, was selected by her fellow Optimist Club members for the award because of her outstanding leadership and volunteerism in club service projects.

In 2010 the award was named for the late Don Pavlik. An active member of the Optimist Club for a number of years, Pavlik personified the organization's community service.



MOLANDS

"I am honored to be a part of an organization that brings out the best in youth in Gratiot County," Molands said. "I am blessed with the opportunity to serve on the executive board and be surrounded by a giving group of people that share a similar passion."

See OPTIMIST page 5

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Rachel Molands (left) was named the 2020-21 Optimist of the Year last week. Shown here with last year's recipient, retired Ithaca educator Renee Sopel, Molands, who is the CASA Recruitment Coordinator of Child Advocacy, was selected by for the award by her fellow Optimist Club members.

CASA, or Court Appointed Special Advocates, is one of the four major programs under the Child Advocacy umbrella. Child Advocacy thrives to improve the welfare of children and their families through education, training, and support for the prevention of substance abuse, and child abuse and neglect.

"CASA of Gratiot County pairs everyday citizens with children involved in child abuse/neglect court proceedings in our community," Molands said. "They act as their voice throughout their journey to permanency."

Molands is responsible for the recruitment and training of the CASA Volunteers in Gratiot County. "The favorite part of my job is seeing all the good we do for children and families in our community," she said.

Her work in support of children

dovetails nicely with the Optimist Club and its community service programs. That work is evident in a philosophy focused on "bringing out the best in kids."

"The Optimist Club in Gratiot County has a history of sponsoring field trips for classrooms, sponsoring a family in the foster care system throughout the year, hosting classroom parties, and clothing drives for schools," Molands said. "All schools nominate students that have overcome great adversity and rose above. The students receive a Young Optimist Award. In 2021, we awarded 34 children."

For Molands, the Optimist Club is a place where she can connect with likeminded people who are supportive of youth in the community. "What I enjoy most about the Optimist Club is the service and friendship that it has provided me," she said.

GIVEAWAY *continued from page 1*

Seven years ago, he bought and distributed a dozen leftover Christmas trees from a lot in Alma. The giving grew in years since. Now he goes through a tree wholesaler. Still, dropping \$4,000 on a giveaway might stretch any holiday budget. JTS Electronics chipped in a big sum of money for half the trees, he said.

Aeric Ripley, interim city manager of Alma, sees it as more than a kind Christmas gesture. "It's good PR for any business to give back to the community in hopes that people will support that busi-

ness," he said. "But it also encourages other businesses to do similar good deeds."

Ripley said he was aware of some folks, both business owners and private citizens, who would anonymously donate money at Ace Hardware for lights to go with Chapman's trees. "All the Christmas feels" seemingly spreading throughout the downtown business district.

By early afternoon Sunday, with snow flurries gathering some steam, there's no one on the sidewalks in front of Braveheart's. Whoever braves that weather

need only stick their head inside the pub and enquire about a free tree. Maybe they'd sit for a beer and watch the rest of the Lions first win.

"I guess I'd blame it on my mother," Chapman said about his efforts. "We didn't come from much, so my mother made the best of what we had — cookies, all the Christmas traditions."

In its seventh year, the Braveheart Pub Christmas tree giveaway has become something of its own tradition. One that would make any mother proud.

THREAT *continued from page 1*

Netzley added that the suspect was last enrolled at IPS during the 2020-21 school year, but deferred questions regarding the former student's gender, age and nature of the threat, to Gratiot County Sheriff Mike Morris.

Morris confirmed that his office had the juvenile suspect in custody and that he was working with the county prosecutor and juvenile court. However, as of Herald presstime Tuesday afternoon, no further information was made available regarding the suspect or incident, and formal charges had yet to be filed.

Unconfirmed reports from parents with children enrolled at IPS, who were notified about the incident through the district's emergency alert system, said the suspect is believed to be a tenth-grade boy from Perrinton, and that the social media post included a threat to "shoot up the school."

In the wake of a school shooting at Oxford High School last week which left four students dead and six other students and a teacher wounded, Tuesday's

incident mimics numerous copycat threats made against Michigan school districts in recent days that have led to closures and further unnerved anxious parents and children.

Such crimes are considered felonious by state law, and those charged could face 20 years in prison.

Netzley praised the Gratiot County Sheriff's Office for their immediate response and said the district's preparation for such matters led to a safe and positive outcome.

"Our school safety training and protocols ensured that our collective response to this threat was rapid and effective," Netzley said. Our close working relationship with the Sheriff's Department really pays off when faced with threats to school safety. I have the highest praise. They did a great job quickly tracking down the suspect and taking that person into custody. When students, parents, school personnel, and law enforcement work together, we can quickly identify and eliminate threats to our children and our schools. A job well done by all involved."

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PARCEL #3

- 20 acres vacant farmland
- 14.79 FSA tillable acres
- Parkhill \* Selfridge Loam Soils
- Well tiled farm
- Enrolled in PA116
- Farm NOT rented for 2022

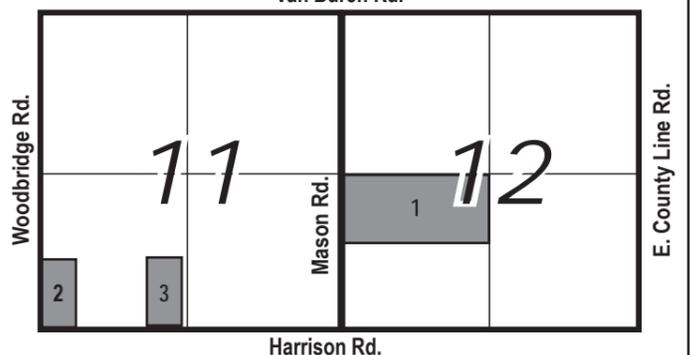
PARCEL #4

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- These are the ONLY parcels that will Be combined together

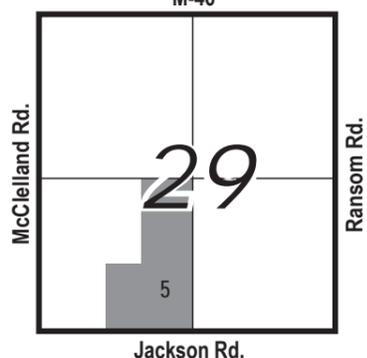
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- Well tiled farm
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