

Gratiot County Herald



Gratiot County's Largest Paid Circulation Newspaper

An Independent Publication

Number 20

May 14, 2026

Est. 1887

\$1.50

County Board Approves Public Funds for Staff Events

Michael MacDonald
Herald Editor

Gratiot Commissioners last week approved \$5,000 in public funds for employee appreciation events after being told the spending would violate state rules and raise issues in the county's annual audit.

The 4-1 allocation supports an Employee Engagement committee, which has used various fundraisers to help offset taxpayer money for staff functions.

Commissioner George Bailey said the funding would provide a set amount for the group rather than leaving members to rely on

scattered fundraising.

For example, cost of the county's holiday luncheon has increased in recent years, with estimates for 120 to 140 employees now ranging from about \$2,500 to \$2,800.

According to Bailey, commissioners previously moved a line item from the general fund budget into a union labor agreement for staff appreciation.

Commissioner Steve Sopocy questioned whether the allocation was allowed.

"We can legally do this, right?" he asked.

See FUNDS page 5



The Sin City Disciples of St. Louis delivered \$7,307 to the Michigan Autism Care & ABA Services in Alma last Friday. Pictured here (left to right) are Aurora (Dolly) Light, Mike Fowler, Ashely DeGroft (the check recipient), Philip (Oz) Ozment, Dean (Reflex) Marrison, Liz (Baby Shark) Baldwin, Rebecca (Leggs) Spencer, Christopher (Casper) Larsen, Dawn (Kat) Keck, Bob (Future) MacLennan, Kim (Naughty) MacLennan, Megan (Blanca) Lewis, Matthew (Cowboy) Burkard, Rich (Beenie) Darmody, and Olivia (Frizzle) Darmody.

Breckenridge Weighs Future of Law Enforcement Services

Megan Neeley
Herald Correspondent

Breckenridge has operated without its own police department for more than four months as the village council weighs the future of local law enforcement.

The gap began when Police Chief Brendan Weslock resigned Dec. 24, 2025. He had taken over solo operations in 2022, replacing longtime chief James Durham

Breckenridge Village Manager Jeff Ostrander told The Herald the

resignation prompted a review of options, including restarting the department or restructuring services.

For now, law enforcement coverage is being handled by the Gratiot County Sheriff's Office, with support from Michigan State Police. There is no formal agreement as residents already pay a countywide millage for services.

That is not a complete break from past practice. The village had been limited to the Weslock's on-duty hours, generally Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with county deputies handling nights and weekends.

See SERVICES page 4

Motorcycle Club Delivers Big for Autism

William Meiners
Herald Correspondent

The familiar rumble of a Harley Davidson, announcing an authoritative presence on the highway or a side street, may conjure up images of the open road and a long springtime ride. Fewer folks, however, might associate that sound with a heart for helping children with autism.

Enter the Sin City Disciples, the St. Louis motorcycle club whose members fired up their bikes and delivered an oversized check to Michigan Autism Care & ABA Services in Alma last Friday.

The grand total of \$7,307 came courtesy of individual and business donations, as well as proceeds from a fundraiser and ride that took place on the last Saturday in April.

See CLUB page 5



Other Disciples include (left to right): Jayme Lynn, Mike Davis, Ruth Teed, Terry (Troll) Teed, and Mike (Corn Bread) Johnson.

St. Louis Couple to Lead Alma Highland Festival Parade

Chris Boshoven
Herald Correspondent

Bill and Liz Weaver of St. Louis will serve as grand marshals for the 57th annual Alma Highland Festival and Games later this month, which is especially exciting for them given that it will be only the second time in more than 50 years they've actually viewed the parade.

That's because the Weavers have been too occupied these past decades volunteering with highland dancing and bagpiping to be able to see the procession.

"We were always either competing, judging the dancing competition or coaching our dancers in the competition," Liz said.

Both were active in committee work, with Liz serving more years than she can properly recall as chair of the highland dance competition for the festival while Bill competed

in piping events and also provided the live music for the dancers.

Even though the two of them have been participating one way or another in the festival since about 1975, the only time they broke away to see the parade was the year that Liz's sister was on the queen's court, she said.

"It will be a different perspective, being in the parade," Liz acknowledged. But one thing that will not change is their concern for the dancers they coach. "We hope our students do well at the competition."

The Weavers own King of Scots Dance Studio, based out of their home in St. Louis, where technology advances enable them to teach many of their students remotely. As a result, they have had students from all over the United States and Canada.

See PARADE page 4



Bill and Liz Weaver of St. Louis will serve as grand marshals for the 57th Alma Highland Festival and Games after decades of volunteer work.



3 WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE!

ONLINE
gcherald.com

CALL
989-875-4151

STOP IN
123 N. Main St.
Ithaca

Superior
CARPET CLEANERS
& In-Home Flooring Sales
800.584.3724

Our Cleaning Services:
Carpet & Furniture
Air Duct Cleaning, Vinyl & Tile Floor

\$10.00 off any cleaning!
www.SuperiorCarpetsInc.com

Living Room Carpet Cleaning \$99.00	Sofa Cleaning \$89.00 Recliner \$45.00	2 Bedrooms & Living Room \$169.00
---	--	---

CLUB continued from page 1

Christopher (Casper) Larsen, president of the club, told The Herald about their reasons for circling their bikes around this particular cause.

"Last October, we went over there on our motorcycles and handed out a bunch of candy for their Trunk-or-Treat event," he said. "While we were there, I thought this is the place we should donate to."

Larsen said it's not uncommon for motorcycle clubs to raise money for various groups, including the Wounded Warrior Project, as well as hospice and suicide prevention programs. A few members of the Disciples have children with autism, so focusing fundraising efforts there turned out to be an easy and welcomed decision. He and Dawn (Kat) King distributed flyers to a slew of local businesses — from auto body shops to construction companies. Sponsored prizes like coolers and minibikes were raffled off. And nearly 70 bikers, each of whom contributed a small fee, rolled out on the four-and-a-half-hour roundtrip on a sunny Saturday.

The donation was the first for the Alma autism center.

"We occasionally receive donations such as clothing and toys from families in the community," said Lara Hakamaki, director of corporate development at Michigan Psychological Care, acknowledging the motorcycle club's presence from last fall's event. "They are a great advocate for autism awareness."

Lauren Wilson, the director of the autism center, helped coordinate the donation with the Disciples.

"Lauren is the voice and direction of the ABA center," Hakamaki said. "She helped create the whole business several years ago."

Michigan Autism Care & ABA Services will use

the donation to update and replace items such as toys and storage, and to acquire new items for a forthcoming sensory room, Hakamaki said. The sensory rooms can be used for various activities, including improving focus and communication, sensory integration processing, and developing regulation and coping skills.

"When it comes to autism, the biggest misconceptions usually stem from seeing it as one size fits all," Hakamaki said. "ABA services differ between every single client because each and every person experiences the world in a different way."

Hakamaki noted the technique of "modeling behaviors" that people can employ with family members who have autism. "It's how you act," she said, "how you show them what to do, and the way you speak to them and about others."

For a motorcycle club out of St. Louis, the modeled behavior of providing a community service may go against the grain of stereotypes. Larsen, a veteran himself, said a lot of former military members rediscovered the camaraderie on bikes that was once part of their units.

"I've immersed myself in the Disciples for years and I haven't found a better group of giving, caring people," he said. "I wouldn't want to surround myself with anybody else."

Larsen, who grew up in Greenville, helped set up the St. Louis chapter of the national club a couple years ago. Next month, they will celebrate their founding.

"None of my guys have ever gotten in trouble up here," he said. "We're just trying to beat the stigma of having people think that motorcycle clubs are full of bad people."

FUNDS continued from page 1

County Administrator Tim Dolehanty described the issue as straightforward under the Michigan Uniform Budgeting and Accounting Act, which states public funds cannot be used for employee-only events unless the public is also invited.

"I cannot support you doing this," he said. "It's very clear, black and white."

Dolehanty added the Michigan Department of Treasury has issued a "number of notices" identifying such spending as an unlawful expenditure. He also told commissioners the county's audit team had flagged the issue and warned that approval could result in a negative finding.

Bailey argued the board should still move forward, saying they had supported similar appreciation efforts for years.

"We've done it forever. It's best practice," he said.

Commissioner Jan Bunting immediately challenged that history.

"No, we haven't done it forever," she said. "The county used to pay for that. We did get into trouble."

Sopocy noted the Employee Engagement committee was formed during his final year as county undersheriff, in 2023.

Bailey moved to approve the funding, with Sopocy offering support. Board Chairman Dave Owens and Commissioner Tim Gay also backed the motion, while Bunting opposed it. She asked for a legal opinion.

"That's why we have Tim (Dolehanty) here," Bailey said.

He then dismissed concern over possible consequences from the treasury, saying if the state wanted to make a "big deal" out of it, officials could "put me in handcuffs."

Bailey added that he had "suffered through 14 years of bad audits" and another footnote is "not going to bother me any."

The matter came during the same meeting in which Owens, acting on a procedure brought forward by Dolehanty, opened the session by inviting commissioners to declare any conflicts of interest involving county contracts. The inquiry is now expected to be asked before all regular board meetings.

Michigan law has long required elected officials to disclose direct or indirect interests in public contracts, but that disclosure had not been part of Gratiot's opening routine.

For commissioners, an interest

must be divulged, approved by a three-fourths board vote and recorded in the minute. If a conflict exists, they must abstain from voting and from participating in public discussion.

No conflicts were declared.

TREASURER APPOINTMENT COMMITTEE

As determined by the Gratiot County Treasurer Appointment Committee, at their Wednesday, May 6, 2026, meeting:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE THAT:

Those wishing to be considered for appointment to the vacancy created upon retirement of the Gratiot County Treasurer, Terri Ball, must submit a cover letter and resume which must be received by the County Clerk no later than:

Thursday, May 28, 2026
At 4:00 p.m.

Submissions may be made via hand-delivery, U.S. Mail, courier or email. Applicants bear all risks associated with their choice of delivery, including untimely delivery, electronic transmission errors or delays, or courier failures. Candidates may confirm receipt by the Clerk, by calling 989-875-5297.

Gratiot County Clerk
Attn: Treasurer Appointment Committee
Gratiot County Clerk Office
214 E. Center St.
Ithaca, MI 48847

treascandidate@gratiotmi.com

The individual appointed by the committee will hold the position through December 31, 2028.

Kristin M. Bakker, Probate Judge
Laura Bever, Prosecutor Attorney
Angie Thompson, County Clerk

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING City of Ithaca Property Owners and Taxpayers

Notice is hereby given, as required by Chapter VII Section E of the City Charter, that a public hearing on the proposed City Budget for the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 will be held Tuesday, June 2nd at 5:30pm or as soon thereafter as the agenda allows during the regular meeting of the Ithaca City Council. The meeting location is at the City Hall located at 129 W. Emerson St, Ithaca, MI.

The proposed property tax millage rates to be levied and the water and sewer rates to support the proposed budget will be a subject of this hearing.

A copy of the proposed budget is on file at the City Hall in the City Clerk's Office and on the city website for public inspection prior to the public hearing. If unable to attend, written comments may be submitted to the City Clerk by 4pm on June 2, 2026 at the above address or by email to clerk@ithacami.com.

Cathy Cameron - City Clerk

SUDOKU

8								
	6				4		7	
1	2							9
2				6		1		3
	7							8
6							9	
	4	6			7	8		1
			3					
		1		9				2

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

ESTD 1997 MON - FRI: 8AM - 5PM

GRATIOT PLUMBING SUPPLY LLC

PLUMBING & HEATING/PARTS SUPPLY

GPSMANAGER97@GMAIL.COM 108 E. Center St.
Ph.: (989) 875-7072 Suite G
Fax: (989) 875-7074 Ithaca, MI 48847

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
13					14				15			
16				17					18			
19				20				21				
			22				23			24		
25	26	27		28			29			30		
31			32		33		34				35	
36				37		38			39		40	
	41				42			43		44		
		45					46		47		48	
49	50		51			52			53			
54		55			56					57	58	59
60					61				62			
63					64				65			
66					67				68			

- CLUES ACROSS**
- 1. Hillside
 - 6. A way to ingest
 - 9. Large number
 - 13. Southeastern Minnesota city
 - 14. Cronies
 - 15. Having sufficient skill, knowledge
 - 16. Supplements with difficulty
 - 17. Former VP nominee Palin
 - 18. Cambodian monetary unit
 - 19. Where coaches work
 - 21. Secret political clique
 - 22. A type of lute
 - 23. Tan
 - 24. Empire State
 - 25. Where golfers begin
 - 28. For each
 - 29. Muslim inhabitants of the Philippines
 - 31. Bird genus
 - 33. Popular Dave Matthews Band song
 - 36. Domesticates
 - 38. "Boardwalk Empire" actress Gretchen
 - 39. Asian antelope
 - 41. One who takes apart
 - 44. Kin
 - 45. Dresses
 - 46. Says something about you (abbr.)
 - 48. Doctor of Education
 - 49. One quintillion bytes (abbr.)
 - 51. Overcharge
 - 52. Sailboats
 - 54. Indian musical patterns
 - 56. Predisposition to a condition
 - 60. Share a common boundary with
 - 61. Wide
 - 62. Skin disease
 - 63. Monetary unit of Samoa
 - 64. Source of the Blue Nile
 - 65. Instrument
 - 66. Red deer
 - 67. Unidentified flying object
 - 68. Bar or preclude
- CLUES DOWN**
- 1. Flying insects
 - 2. Strong alcoholic spirit
 - 3. Old
 - 4. Moves in slowly
 - 5. Symbol for tin
 - 6. Having certain appendages
 - 7. Expression of sorrow or pity
 - 8. Type of hormone (abbr.)
 - 9. One with an unjustified mistrust
 - 10. Hebrew calendar month
 - 11. Pure
 - 12. LSU football coach
 - 14. Unbroken views
 - 17. Fathers
 - 20. Part of a race
 - 21. Hairstyle
 - 23. Fifth note of a major scale
 - 25. Body art
 - 26. Amounts of time
 - 27. Designed chairs
 - 29. Sensational dramatic piece
 - 30. Arrangement of steps
 - 32. Classifies
 - 34. Young child
 - 35. Oh, no!
 - 37. Astronomical period of about 18 years
 - 40. Not or
 - 42. Poke fun at
 - 43. Consisting of roots
 - 47. "Humbly"
 - 49. A way to remove
 - 50. A confusion of voices and other sounds
 - 52. Keyed instrument
 - 53. Varnishes
 - 55. Unpleasantly sticky substance
 - 56. Unable to hear
 - 57. A short erect tail
 - 58. Indicates interest
 - 59. Flow or leak through
 - 61. British thermal unit
 - 65. Iron

CHECK BACK NEXT WEEK FOR THIS WEEK'S ANSWERS.

6	9	8	3	2	4	7	1	5	R	U	E	R	M	S	T	R	A	T		
2	1	4	7	5	6	3	9	8	O	X	B	O	W	A	K	A	R	A	B	I
5	3	7	9	8	1	4	6	2	M	O	L	T	O	N	I	L	A	G	E	
9	8	6	4	3	2	1	5	7	R	A	C	E	S	I	L	L	S	E	T	S
1	4	3	5	6	7	2	8	9	A	B	O	L	I	S	H	E	S			
7	2	5	1	9	8	6	4	3	T	R	A	N	S	L	U	C	E	N	T	
4	7	2	8	1	9	5	3	6	S	H	I	N	N	E	D	D	N	A		
3	6	9	2	4	5	8	7	1	K	O	R	E	A	T	A	B	E	S		
8	5	1	6	7	3	9	2	4	F	A	A	E	B	O	N	I	E	S		
									U	N	D	E	S	I	R	A	B	L	E	
									S	U	B	S	I	D	I	E	S			
									M	A	G	I	M	U	T	E	A	G	A	N
									E	B	R	O	I	C	H	A	U	B	E	R
									S	E	I	S	Z	E	E	R	A	B	B	I
									A	R	C	E	R	R	R	E	E	D		