

# Gratiot County Herald



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Bryan Heinze (center) competed in and finished the Cocodona 250, a 253-mile ultra marathon in Arizona that took him nearly four and a half days to complete. He credits his crew and family as the supporters who helped him reach the finish line. They include (left to right) his mother, Susan Heinze, wife, Jennifer Heinze, daughter, Brooklyn, cousin Sande Reid, and sister Sari Alger.

## Ashley Resident Completes Ultra Marathon

**William Meiners**  
Herald Correspondent

Bryan Heinze started a road race just north of Phoenix, Arizona in the 5 a.m. darkness on the first Monday in May. He walked and ran, putting one foot after another, for the next 253 miles.

The Ashley native effectively ran more than two full marathons on day one. Pushing his body through exhaustion, he finished the Cocodona 250 nearly four and a half days later, just under 108 hours.

The staggering numbers are enough to make anyone avoid participating in such a race. Had Heinze set off on a walk north from his home, the trek would have

See **MARATHON** page 5



ADDRESS LINE



## Breckenridge Schools Weigh \$10M Bond Proposal

**Michael MacDonald**  
Herald Editor

Breckenridge Community Schools is eyeing a \$10 million bond proposal for November that would piggyback on an expiring debt payment, funding a range of building improvements without raising taxes.

Residents currently pay 3.8 mills for bonds approved in 2012 and 2020, with the first of those set to be paid off after this year. If voters approve the measure, the district would keep the existing millage rate already in place.

A mill equals \$1 for every \$1,000 of taxable value, meaning it costs \$380 a year on a property valued at \$100,000.

Superintendent Wade Slavik told The Herald the levy would remain on tax bills through 2040.

"We have the opportunity to maintain this current rate to fund new projects without asking for an increase," he said, noting the Breckenridge Board of Education is expected to make a final decision in June.

The plan under consideration stems from a spring community survey conducted by School Perceptions, an independent firm. A steering committee of residents, staff and administrators identified priorities before questionnaires were mailed to households and emailed to employees and parents.

See **BOND** page 2

## Highland Festival Returns to 'Scotland USA' This Weekend

**Chelsea Sherlock**  
Herald Correspondent

The 57th Alma Highland Festival and Games will turn the city into "Scotland, USA" this weekend, giving visitors a chance to step into Scottish culture without leaving Gratiot County.

The event runs Friday through Sunday, May 22-24, on the Alma College campus.

For Adam Vibber, president of the festival's board of directors, the goal is to make the weekend feel like more than a schedule of competitions.

"We're trying to really lean into being Scotland, USA and this being your chance to 'visit Scotland' and truly believe you're in Scotland," he said.

Vibber, who also leads the marketing and parade committees, compared the approach to an immersive Disney amusement park experiences, where guests are invited to step into a cultural setting.

That experience will start before visitors reach the main grounds, with the downtown street parade at 10:30 a.m. Saturday.

See **FESTIVAL** page 5

## Storms Bring New Damage as Disaster Review Continues

**Megan Neeley**  
Herald Correspondent

A powerful storm system sent tree limbs crashing onto homes and vehicles and knocked down high-voltage lines across Gratiot County earlier this week as federal and state officials continue assessing losses from last month's EF1 tornado and flooding.

The National Weather Service had issued a severe thunderstorm warning Monday afternoon, with anticipated wind gusts of up to 70 mph.

Nearly 2,000 Consumers Energy customers were without power that night as first responders handled blocked roads and other storm-related hazards.

See **DAMAGE** page 2



A toppled tree rests on a vehicle in Pompeii after storms moved through Gratiot County on Monday, May 18. The latest damage came after federal and state officials were in the area last week assessing whether residents could qualify for disaster assistance tied to an EF1 tornado and flooding in April.

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# FESTIVAL continued from page 1

Bill and Liz Weaver of St. Louis will serve as grand marshals. The route travels west on Superior Street from Pine Avenue to Charles Avenue.

The Weavers have been involved with the annual gathering since about 1975, mostly through highland dancing and bag-piping. It will be only the second time in more than 50 years they have been able to watch the procession rather than take part in other duties tied to the festival.

This year's Queen of Scots court also will be represented. Aliyah Tangeman, 17, of Alma, will serve as queen, along with Hanna Hutchinson, 17, of Alma; Emalee Woodard, 19, of Ithaca; and Wee Queen Macy Block, 8, of Alma.

The official opening, including the Parade of Tartans, begins at 12:15 p.m. from the Alma College Chapel to Bahlke Field.

About 7,000 people now attend the annual gathering, while Vibber would like to see that number grow to 10,000. He has worked with Alma College's marketing team to strengthen the event's social media presence and update its website.

Organizers also have added ways for visitors to spend more time on the grounds. Newer offerings include a Scottish bake-off, gem mining for children and a Commander Clash Tournament in collaboration with Block House. Drop-in rugby sessions also return this year, with cricket added through a demonstration by a Scottish group.

The weekend opens Friday with road race registration from 4 to 7 p.m. at Tyler-Van Dusen. The Alma High School Jazz Band performs at 5:30 p.m. on the Heritage Center lawn.

The entertainment tent opens at 7 p.m., with Jedi Mind Trip performing from 8 p.m. to midnight. Admission is \$10.

Jedi Mind Trip is a mid-Michigan band that has entertained audiences since the winter of 1996, with a show built around rock, country, karaoke and nightclub DJ experience.

Saturday begins with solo piping and drumming competition at 8 a.m. A kids' run starts at 8:30 a.m., and the 5K run/walk begins at 9 a.m.

Highland dance competition runs from 8 a.m. to noon with pre-premier competition and choreography. The Great Lakes Open Championship follows from 1 to 5 p.m.

Professional athletic events and the women's invitational begin at 9 a.m., with the Great Lakes Scottish Heavyweight competition continuing at 12:30 p.m.

The U.S. Open Pipe Band Championship begins Saturday afternoon with band competition at 12:30 p.m. Massed bands are scheduled for approximately 5:30 p.m. at Bahlke Field.

Visitors also will find several activities away from the main contests. A reenactment camp will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, while glass blowing runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Sunday.

Saturday also includes an arts and crafts fair from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., clan activities from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Scottish animal viewing from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., axe throwing from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and a blacksmith showcase from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.



A pipe and drum band performs at a previous Alma Highland Festival and Games. This year's 57th annual event returns Friday through Sunday, May 22-24.

The medieval gathering of clans includes more than 50 invited groups. Families can look up surnames, learn Scottish history and connect with clan representatives.

Border Collie exhibitions are set for 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Saturday, while Wee Bairn Games run from 2 to 4 p.m. north of the Stone Recreation Center.

The entertainment tent opens at noon Saturday. Colin Grant-Adams performs at 12:45 p.m., whisky tasting runs from 2 to 5 p.m., Chelsea House Orchestra plays at 2 p.m. and Pictus follows at 3:30 p.m.

Grant-Adams, a Scottish and Celtic folk singer and guitarist originally from Oban, Scotland, presents traditional and contemporary music with original songs about the country's landscape.

Chelsea House Orchestra uses traditional stringed instruments, including violins, cellos and bass, along with wind instruments, to perform Celtic-based music. The group has played in several states and Canada.

Pictus brings drums, Highland bagpipes and soprano recorders to its performances, mixing traditional instruments with original compositions and arrangements.

The tent runs from 6 to 10 p.m. Saturday evening, leading off with open piping before Chelsea House Orchestra performs at 6:30 p.m. Brother Crowe follows at 8 p.m., with DJ music from 9 to 10 p.m. A \$5 cover applies after open piping.

Brother Crowe is a Detroit-based Celtic roots rock band formed in 2002. The group performs original music and has appeared at several regional festivals.

Sunday begins with men's amateur athletic events and Highland dance competition at 9 a.m. The dance schedule

includes the Midwest Regional Championship.

Men's and women's rugby games are scheduled from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Bahlke Field. Kirking of the Tartan begins at 9:30 a.m. at the Chapel of Alma College.

Pipe band exhibitions are scheduled throughout the late morning and afternoon in the Pipe Band Circle, with performances from 10:30 to 11 a.m., 11:30 a.m. to noon, 12:30 to 1 p.m. and 1:30 to 2 p.m.

Sunday's entertainment tent runs from noon to 6 p.m., with Colin Grant-Adams at 12:30 p.m., Ironwood at 1:30 p.m., Pictus at 2:30 p.m., Chelsea House Orchestra at 4 p.m. and Brother Crowe at 5 p.m. A whisky tasting is also scheduled from 1 to 4 p.m.

Ironwood performs music from the Celtic regions of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany and Galicia, along with selections from Canada and America.

The weekend closes with a ceremony scheduled for approximately 5 p.m. at the athletics field.

The festival committee, about 200 volunteers and Alma College help put on the event each year. Vibber told The Herald the group behind it has made his role easier.

"They make it really easy. Our committee is awesome," Vibber said. "They're a well-oiled machine, and they know what they're doing."

Admission can be purchased at festival entrances or online. Weekend passes are \$20, or four adult passes for \$70. Veterans, first responders and seniors 55 and older are admitted for \$18. Children 10 and under are free. Dogs are allowed for \$5, while service animals are permitted on campus.

The full schedule and online ticket information are available at [almahighlandfestival.com](http://almahighlandfestival.com).

# MARATHON continued from page 1

led him across the Mackinac Bridge into the heart of the Upper Peninsula. Instead, he traversed the extremes of heat and nighttime cold, from desert towns through rolling pine forests with elevations rising nearly 39,000 feet.

Heinze, a 43-year-old financial planner, finished 125th overall, 95th among competing men, and 36th in his age group. A 2001 graduate of Fulton High School, he first became interested in ultra marathons during the pandemic five years ago.

Heinze has run several 100-mile races, but this was his first multi-day event. With previous long runs in the California and the Leadville Trail 100 across the Colorado Rockies, He likens the sport to an addiction but knows not all runners would see it that way. "I find that doing hard things voluntarily makes me a more well-rounded individual," he said.

Even as a grueling race forces Heinze to "become comfortable with being uncomfortable," he has a support system to keep him going. His sister and a cousin helped "crew" him, essentially driving his gear to the appropriate stations and helping him change socks and recoup in small moments. "They were very green but did an utterly amazing job," he said. "Without them, I wouldn't have been able to finish it."

Finishing is the goal for many competitors, and they've got 125 hours to do that. To make that happen, Heinze reported sleeping for maybe four-and-a-half hours total

— an occasional "dirt nap" along the trail and in the back of his mother's car. To put that all in perspective, Rachel Entrekin, the first woman to win the Cocodona 250, slept for less than 20 minutes in a race she completed in 56 hours, nine minutes, and 48 seconds. She reportedly broke the tapeline in Flagstaff a full hour (with enough time for a shower) before the second-place man behind her.

A mind can go to dark places in an ultra-marathon race. Hence the importance of a support system. Runners are allowed someone to "pace" them, and in one long stretch Heinze said he simply followed the voice of his friend. They

also did a "gratitude mile" where they talked about their families and the blessings in their lives.

His wife, Susan, and oldest daughter, Brooklyn, 12 years old, surprised him along the trail on Wednesday. Heinze carried between 18 and 22 pounds in a backpack, depending on what section he was in. He used poles to guide him through all sorts of terrain.

The calorie count and steps walked is practically off the charts.

"The best way to describe these races is that it's an eating competition with running," Heinze said. "I would estimate that I burned somewhere between 25,000 and

30,000 calories. I probably took over 600,000 steps, if not more."

Back at work the second week of May, Heinze had recovered from the swollen legs and face he flew home with. "I weighed 171 pounds when I got home on Sunday," he said. "This morning [Friday], I weighed 149."

With a week to reflect on the accomplishment of a multi-day, ultra marathon, Heinze simply expressed gratitude.

"I'm thankful not just for my family, but the community," he said. "We really do live in a county that still has a family feel, and that's why I live here."

**FULTON TOWNSHIP BOARD MEETING CHANGE NOTICE**

Fulton Township's May 2026 monthly board meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 26th, 2026 at 7:00 pm at the Fulton Township Hall, due to our normal meeting date being on a holiday.

Denise Rossman  
Fulton Township Clerk

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**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  
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[treascandidate@gratiotmi.com](mailto: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