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J&J Party Store owner Joe Taylor (left) stands alongside his mother, Jennie Taylor. Beginning in 2001, Jennie and her late husband, Jim Taylor, put out a donation tub for the Gratiot County Commission on Aging Home Delivered Meal Program. Over 20 years later, the Ithaca business has contributed nearly \$9,000. (Herald photo)

FEEDING THE SOUL: Over Two-Decade Span, Ithaca Party Store Donates Nearly \$9K for Home Delivered Meals

By William Meiners
 Herald Staff Writer

Some spare change here and there into a small donation tub. Maybe a few dollars at a once for someone feeling particularly blessed. A five spot around the holidays. And over a two-decade period the J&J Party Store in Ithaca has provided \$8,782.43 to the Home Delivered Meal (HDM) program of the Gratiot County Commission on Aging.

That's nearly nine grand from what may have been a lot of nickels and dimes. Jennie Taylor, who recently celebrated her 90th birthday, works seven days a week at the store. "A lot of people think she lives in one of the apartments above us," said Joe Taylor, her son. "But she drives in seven days a week from Alma."

For maybe as long as they can remember, the Commission on Aging was near and dear to Jennie and her late husband, Jim Taylor. In 2001, they placed the tub with a note near the cash register. "It's the only thing they ever asked for like that," Joe said.

Converting that coin and cash to dollars, they'd turn it in every few months. Maybe it was just something that built upon itself. Jennie and Jim's cause, a good cause. Not everyone ages as well as Jennie Taylor, driving around at 90, working without days off. Some folks need a little help.

"My parents wanted to help out the senior citizens in the community," said Joe, 64, who bought the store with his father more than 40 years ago.

See DONATES page 6

Fulton's Hungerford Selected to Lead Gratiot-Isabella RESD

By William Meiners
 Herald Staff Writer

There's some bitterness all around as Paul Hungerford steps into a new role as superintendent of the Gratiot Isabella RESD.

Recently hired to lead the two-county educational district, Hungerford leaves behind similar leadership positions at Fulton Schools. And as he gets assimilated with his new job, challenges abound.



HUNGERFORD

"The biggest challenges will be to ensure our local school districts are being provided with the support they need during these most challenging of times in education, as we're still in the midst of educating students during a pandemic," Hungerford said. "Our number one goal is to serve our local districts to the best of our ability. Additionally, the region has a CTE millage renewal quickly approaching next year, and we need to make sure to work hard on achieving the renewal to continue the fantastic Career Technology opportunities for our students in Gratiot and Isabella counties."

Though if experience serves him well, his time with Fulton Schools, where he served as superintendent and the principal of the high school and middle school, Hungerford will be successful.

See RESD page 6

Michigan Department of Civil Rights Joins Warwick Rezoning Discussion

By Emily Bevard
 Herald Correspondent

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights has joined the discussion on the controversial zoning request to turn the former Warwick Living Center into a temporary housing facility for adolescent male refugees.

In a letter to the Alma City Commissioners, Executive Director John E. Johnson Jr. expressed concern over the potential for exclusionary zoning decisions to discriminate based on race, color or national origin.

The current proposal by Bethany Christian Services hopes to use the former nursing home to function as an Unaccompanied Children's Pro-

gram, housing refugee boys ages 12-17 who crossed the border without guardianship and who have no legal status in the U.S.

In his letter, Johnson emphasized that using race, color or national origin of the intended residents as factors in denying the request may constitute as "unlawful discrimination."

"The Alma City Commission must refrain from making decisions based upon any applicable protected class or acting on fears, stereotypes, unfounded assumptions, or alleged public safety concerns that involve unfounded beliefs that members of particular protected classes are more likely to engage in criminal activity," he wrote.

Any alleged violations of the Fair Housing or Civil Rights acts may be reported by the Department of Civil Rights to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The city would then have the opportunity to defend its denial of the zoning request, if that path is taken.

City Attorney Anthony Costanzo responded to Johnson's letter stating Alma is mindful of prohibitions against discrimination.

The use requested by the Masonic Home and Bethany Christian Services, Costanzo said, is not allowed in the R3 district where the Warwick Living Center sits and is not contiguous to the Campus Institutional (CI) District where the use

would be permitted. This makes the conditional rezoning route the only viable option.

Before approval, the Planning Commission and the City Commission must resolve five factors relevant to conditional rezoning.

Communication from over 50 members of the public adds to the controversy of the issue, with many split on their support.

Further discussion in the request will take place during the city commission's next regular meeting Sept. 14 at 6 p.m. The meeting will take place in the Alma High School Auditorium, in anticipation for large public turnout. This discussion will likely result in a final decision on the rezoning discussion.

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RES continued from page 1

"My experience at Fulton allowed me to become extremely familiar with many of the programs offered through Gratiot-Isabella RESD," Hungerford said. "Furthermore, and most importantly, my experience allowed me to build relationships with many of the existing superintendents throughout the region. We all have a very respected, and professional relationship with our students being at the center of our work. We will have three new superintendents in the region, and I'm looking forward to building relationships with all of them as well."

Among those cultivated relationships was one with Jan Amsterberg, the man he is succeeding. "It was an absolute pleasure to work with Dr. Amsterberg during my time as a local administrator," Hungerford said. "Dr. Amsterberg has created a very collaborative and respectful working environment within the region. This culture has allowed the region to work together while addressing challenges, and we also support and celebrate each other's successes. It's paramount to continue building on the foundation built by Dr. Amsterberg. He has been a support system for me in the past, and I won't hesitate to contact him in the future when situations arise."

Though Middleton will not be in the rearview mirror. Scot Henry, a former school administrator in Clinton County, has stepped out of retirement and into those same three roles Hungerford had in Fulton Schools. "Scot Henry has done a fantastic job," said Karla Childers, school board president. "He's doing this to

help us out until we can hire that new boss."

After conducting community and stakeholder surveys, the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) is helping in the search for a fulltime Fulton superintendent. The MASB will assist in finding and interviewing the administrative candidates that best fit the qualities outlined in the surveys.

Yet even as one of their own steps into a job where he can yield more influence, the community feels that loss. "We will miss him on a day-to-day basis, but the best thing is that we still get to work with him," Childers said. "He has always been such a huge advocate for public education. Now he can do that on a bigger scale."

And the bittersweetness goes both ways. Hungerford will miss the relationships with students, staff, and families formed over 11 years in total (he became the superintendent in 2017). But there's much to be proud of.

"During my time at Fulton Schools, it was an honor to be a part of passing the first millage in 13 years, this past November," he said. "So many people were influential to passing the millage that will provide many improvements for the district for years to come. Also, during challenging times the past few years, many programs were provided for the students of Fulton Schools, such as a successful preschool program, student camp at Fulton Elementary, Salmon in the Classroom at Fulton Middle School, and CTE and Dual Enrollment programs at Fulton High School. Just to name a few."

DONATES continued from page 1



Jennie Taylor (left) alongside Jennifer Cook, executive director of the Gratiot County Commission on Aging, inside J&J Party Store in Ithaca.

"You have to thank the customers because the donation is right here. They know their grandparents relied on this."

"Home Delivered Meals are provided to Gratiot County senior citizens aged 60 and over," said Jennifer Cook, executive director of the Commission on Aging. "The meals are prepared in the

COA kitchen, and delivered by volunteers Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of each week."

The HDM program is funded by state and federal dollars, as well as funds from the senior millage. "Local donations by meal recipients, community members, and local business owners have benefited our program tremendously,"

Cook said. "Donations toward the HDM program have been utilized to purchase food, coolers for delivery, and kitchen equipment. Our current wish list consists of vehicles designated specifically for meal delivery, including a Hot Shot Meal Delivery Truck for our most rural delivery areas."

If you don't have \$9,000 on you, or 20 years to collect it, there are other ways to contribute to the HDM program. In order to cover expanded routes throughout the county, they need additional drivers to deliver the meals. "Volunteers can provide help whenever their schedule allows," Cook said. "Some of our drivers run a route during their lunch hour, others run routes all three delivery days, and many do one day per week or sign up to be a substitute driver."

There are certain requirements for HDM drivers, Cook said. Anyone interested in donating their time can get more information by calling the agency at 989-875-5246.

As for little 90-year-old angels who make your cause her cause, what more can you say to that. "We cannot thank the Taylor's enough for their love, compassion, and support of the Home Delivered Meal Program, as well as the individuals we have served and continue to serve," Cook said. "If you get an opportunity, please stop by J&J Party Store, 213 E. Center Street, Ithaca and give thanks to Jennie and her son, Joe, for their tremendous generosity."

And since you're going in there, maybe throw a few bucks in the tub.

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