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# Gratiot County Herald



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## ALMA COLLEGE TAPS CHAPLAIN TO LEAD NEW COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

**By Tim Rath**  
**Alma College Communications**  
 The Rev. Dr. Andrew Pomerville, an Alma College alumnus who currently serves as the college's chaplain and director of spiritual life — has been selected for a new role.



Pomerville will serve as the founding director of the college's new **POMERVILLE** Center for College and Community Engagement (CCCE), a program launched earlier this summer designed to create collaborative opportunities for the college and greater Alma area. In his new role, which reports to Alma College President Jeff Abernathy, Pomerville will focus on four key areas: engagement, community, sustainability, and purpose.

Throughout his career, "Andrew has focused on building communities, and we're delighted to welcome him in this new role at Alma College," Abernathy said. "The CCCE will teach students the value of purpose and place, by nurturing their senses of civic responsibility, meaningful service and vocation. I can think of no person better suited to lead those efforts than the Rev. Dr. Pomerville."

See **DIRECTOR** page 6



Howard Lott stands beside one of the desks he made for kids who had to take their learning home in the first days of the pandemic. Lott built 18 foldable desks in all, enabling schoolchildren to easily put the desk under a bed.

## Longtime Gratiot County Man Builds Desks for Homebound Kids During Pandemic

**By William Meiners**  
**Herald Staff Writer**

Howard Lott has long been a bit of an inventor.

Having lived in Gratiot County for nearly 60 years, he led engineering teams through patented work for the Alma Products Company. And on the side, the 88-year-old invented things that made yard-work easier.

Last year, when COVID-19 hit, he designed and built some foldable desks for kids who were suddenly sent home to do their schooling.

Four years ago, Lott and his wife Jackie found a little dream house tucked away on Deer Lake, near Harrison. On a recent muggy Friday that threatened rain all day, he apologized to the visitor who traveled to ask him questions and take some pictures. "If you had come up on a good day, we could have gone fishing," Lott said.

Instead of breaking out his tackle, Lott entered his workshop to show off one of his desks. He's made 18 in all, some even with a cubbyhole for books. The desks allowed grade

schoolers at Hillside Elementary, not too far from his new home — and perhaps squeezed for space in theirs — to effortlessly close up the desk and slide it under a bed.

Lott said he's "not in a hurry" to make the desks, but each one took about a week to build, accounting for the time to put the pieces together and stain it. He painted a few. The parts aren't cheap. Hinges alone can cost up to \$24 apiece. The price of wood was going up throughout the pandemic, too.

See **DESKS** page 6

## Farming Community Honors Breckenridge Farmer With Special Tribute

**By William Meiners**  
**Herald Staff Writer**

For a grieving family, the sight was heartwarming but hardly surprising.

On the last Monday in August, some 50 tractors, as well as combines, snowmobiles and various tools of the farming trade, were lined up for the funeral procession of Jeffrey Gulick — from M-46 to Barry Road to St. Charles Road on the way to the cemetery.

"It was awesome," said Josh Gulick. "My dad would have loved every bit of it."

Just 57 years old, Jeff Gulick was a sixth-generation farmer in Lafayette Township. The family

he left behind includes Denise, his wife of 35 years, two sons, Josh and Nathan, as well as their spouses and children, his mother, and three siblings.

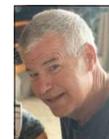
Pastor Steve Gulick of the Floyd Church of God put the word out on a Sunday morning, and the farming community had their equipment alongside the road by Monday.

"It was like saluting a serviceman that's fallen," said Pastor Gulick, who is also Jeff's first cousin. "You just try to pay your respect and help the family as much as you can down a rough road. It tears you up. But you couldn't help but go up and down the road and cry to see the love and compassion from

other farmers."

Pastor Gulick said everyone knows what a farmer's equipment means to them. Working their own land, farmers in many ways are competing against each other. "But then you come together and help each other out," he said. "Each tractor represented somebody's love and respect."

It's that same love and respect that Jeff felt for his family, friends, and neighbors. "He would have been the first one to do something like that for someone else," Josh



**GULICK**

Gulick said. "He was just a really liked guy. He loved to talk to people. You had to drag him away from conversations sometimes."

Family bonds often grow stronger through farming. Jeff loved working with his sons, and Nathan Gulick will be that seventh generation to carry on with the farm. Josh, who works at Nutrien Ag Solutions in Breckenridge, helps out when he can.

Jeffrey Gulick was involved with the Alma Beet Growers Association and helped form the Michigan Sugar Co-op. That sense of community, far past the edges of his farm, was part and parcel of his life.

See **TRIBUTE** page 6

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# DESKS continued from page 1

Along with each desk, Lott included a handwritten letter, introducing himself as the 88-year-old desk maker. He wrote, "My wife and I saw on TV that students are having to do their schoolwork at home, and they need desks to work on. I got busy and made some desks and this one is for you."

"I'm sorry we are having this pandemic," Lott continued. "When you are my age and tell your grandkids about it. I hope you say that we got through it by washing our hands, wearing our masks, and helping each other out."

Lott ended his letter saying he hoped the child would enjoy the new desk. And they included a card, with a self-addressed envelope, to see exactly what the kids thought about it. Both Jackie and Howard got a kick out of the responses. A 6-year-old named Liam reported liking the "desk a lot," declaring, "I'm going to keep it forever." In another short note, someone named Savannah thanked them six times.

"That's my pay," Lott said of the thank you notes.

Easing someone through a troubled path may not be the first order of business for most inventors. Though Lott may not be like most of them. His first wife, who died a few years, still enjoying doing the backyard landscaping through her struggles with leukemia. Lott invented a lightweight hose that could be retrieved easily and kept in a raised box on the side of a house. Soon after, his friends were putting in special requests for one.

Seven years ago, the Herald featured Lott and his patented invention, called the "Tote-A-Lott," which put a front-end trailer on

zero-turn lawn mowers. It allowed the backyarder to carry a variety of heavy loads — from dirt to waste to vegetables — back to where they needed to go.

Lott might tell you that his workshop could be a bit of a mess. There was some dirt inside the "Tote-A-Lott" from some recent work he did for his neighbors. Though about a dozen old coffee cans seemed to each hold the right nut and bolt for each job. On the walls were stories of his hunting youth in the form of deer, the pelt of a bear, a wild boar he did in with an arrow, even a jackalope (the antlers somewhat of a poetic licensed addition to a rabbit).

Having lived long enough, Lott has seen his fair share of loss, including two sons and a granddaughter. Though he also knows that life can be surprising. He married Jackie, an old family friend, a few years ago. "I bought a house, a truck and got married all in the same week," he said. "I tell my buddies that and they'll say, 'What kind of truck?'"

That sense of humor, along with being pretty handy in the workshop, gets him through his days. Maybe knowing he can still make a difference by helping grade school kids who've lost something of their education in a pandemic heightens that sense of purpose.

Snoop around long enough and you'd see those other things that have made Lott's life rich: furniture from his furniture-making days, a horseshoe pit positioned near the workshop wall to keep a game out of the sun, and that handful of thank you cards from kids excited about their new desks.

# TRIBUTE continued from page 1



Tractors, snowmobiles and various farm equipment align M-46 for the funeral procession of Jeffrey Gulick. The sixth-generation farmer was only 57 years old.

Still, the outpouring from the fellow farmers, even if half expected, was certainly appreciated. And that goes beyond the funeral procession. "It's been huge," said Josh Gulick, noting the offers of help with labor or equipment.

As the family picks up the pieces of a lost brother, husband, father, and grandfather, those offers stand firm. In a farming community, where you might not have next door neighbors, that's important. "That's what you want to do," said Steve Gulick. "You want to try to help anybody any way you can to get through a hard time."

# DIRECTOR continued from page 1

Pomerville has served as chaplain and director of spiritual life at Alma — overseeing spiritual life activities, as well as partnering with departments as varied as athletics, admissions and advancement — since 2018. Among his accomplishments in the role, Pomerville co-lead the successful \$2-million Dunning Memorial Chapel renovation campaign, increased average attendance at weekly worship services and implemented the Plaid Serves program, which connects high school students with community engagement opportunities.

Prior to coming back to Alma, Pomerville served as the senior pastor of the Peoples Church of East Lansing, Michigan, pastor of Church in the Hills in Bellaire, Michigan and national park chaplain in Denali, Alaska. In addition to a Bachelor of Arts degree from Alma College, Pomerville has earned a Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

"I am exceptionally excited for this opportunity to connect my beloved alma mater, our community and alumni base together to promote meaningful engagement and service to benefit the whole mid-Michigan region. Together, we will help students, faculty and staff discern and understand the needs of the people who live here and continue to be the heartbeat for the entire state of Michigan," Pomerville said. "I think the CCCE will be a hallmark program, something that sets Alma apart from all other colleges — one that demonstrates what it means for town and gown to be truly linked in matters of business, service and education."

Initiatives and activities that will work through the center include new service and service learning opportunities, faculty and staff engagement and training, community partnerships and curricular programming to promote ethical reflection and engagement.

The CCCE will also play a pivotal role in organizing and expanding already-existing programs; including Plaid Service summer service, leadership and community organizing course; the Scots in Service living learning community; Alternative Breaks; and Alma Venture programming.

Through the center, the college will develop pipelines to internships, civic engagement, student leadership development, and volunteer opportunities for students. It will help facilitate faculty and staff development for experiential and service learning, as well as academic and co-curricular experiences that will enhance students' community involvement, social capital, civic knowledge, and skill development for respectful and meaningful community engagement.



Rev. Dr. Andrew Pomerville, Alma College's New Center for College and Community Engagement Director, has served as chaplain and director of spiritual life since 2018

"As we work to solidify Alma as a leading community in Michigan for the benefit of all of its citizens, we're looking for leaders who can step up, accept those challenges and excel. Andrew Pomerville fits that description and more," said Alma City Manager Matthew Schooley. "On behalf of the city of Alma, we congratulate Andrew on his new role and look forward to working with him and Alma College within the framework of its new CCCE."

Added Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. President and Alma College Board of Trustees member James E. "Jim" Wheeler II: "I am very pleased with the appointment of Andrew Pomerville to be the director of the newly created Center for College and Community Engagement. I believe Andrew will bring great leadership and enthusiasm to this position. The center will greatly expand Alma College's role in connecting the college with the Gratiot area. I look forward to working with Andrew as he designs and drives this program forward."

While serving in his new role, Pomerville will continue to serve the campus community as senior chaplain. The college intends to hire a new, full-time campus chaplain to continue the work of spiritual life on campus.

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