The $20-million question everyone is asking: ‘How could the credit union not know what was going on?’

By Sally Rummel
news@tctimes.com; 810-629-2892

The biggest question local residents might have asked in recent months regarding Michael LaJoie’s business dealings has been, “Where did he get his money?”

Now this question may have been answered with his arraignment on Jan. 6 for allegedly embezzling $20 million from the Clarkston Brandon Community Credit Union. The next question is, “How could they (the credit union) not know what was going on?” Aren’t there regular audits and ‘checks and balances’ that take place at every credit union? Here is some background about Clarkston Brandon Community Credit Union, and credit unions in general. Clarkston Brandon Community Credit Union (CBCCU) was founded in 1957 and is a state-chartered and federally insured credit union. If a credit union doesn’t have the word “federal” as part of its name, it’s to protect public interest.

The Clarkston Brandon Community Credit Union was taken over by the state effective Wednesday, Jan. 13 to protect public interest. See Page 5A

Charities scramble to fill commitments made by Michael LaJoie

Chasse owner almost always topped the list of local donors. See CREDIT UNION on 5A

Tim Jagielo

The Beacon and Bridge Market in Holly has attracted much media attention after selling a winning Powerball ticket worth $1 million. See WINNER on 21A

$1 million lotto winner bought ticket in Holly

By Vera Hogan
vhogan@tctimes.com; 810-433-6795

Someone in or around Holly has a little more spending cash this week after winning $1 million in the largest Powerball game in history. This lucky individual, whose identity is not yet known, purchased the winning $1 million ticket from Beacon & Bridge Market, at 820 North Saginaw St. in Holly. Beacon & Bridge Market operates under the umbrella of Quick-Sav Food Stores.

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Second Course
Soup of the Day or
House or Caesar Salad

Third Course
(choice of one)
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LaJoice spent nearly $2.5 million buying properties in Fenton over the past six months

Since June 18, 2015, LaJoice Properties has purchased seven properties in the city of Fenton. These properties were paid for with cash for well over the fair market price.

RIVERVIEW PROJECT

City was not allowed to review finances because it was privately owned and financed

By Vera Hogan
vhogan@tctimes.com; 810-433-6795

It is still too early to fully know what impact the Michael LaJoice debacle will have on the city of Fenton and surrounding communities.

LaJoice has been charged with embezzling $20 million from the credit union he served as chief financial officer.

City Manager Lynn Markland says he is not aware of any other investors involved with the Riverview project, which in addition to LaJoice’s dance business Chassé Ballroom & Latin Dance Studio, promised office space, condos, restaurants, a market and additional parking at 225 West Caroline, the site of the former Topps market and Wash King Laundromat.

LaJoice purchased that property in June 2015 for $1.2 million.

“If there were other investors, I am not aware of them,” said Markland. “Mr. LaJoice did not share a lot of information with us. We were not aware of when or what properties were purchased until they were filed with the assessor’s office.”

Markland said the city always requires an escrow account be established by developers to pay for consultant fees during site plan reviews.

“Because of the complications of the site, the reviews took more time than usual,” he said. Markland said he is unsure at this time whether all of the consultants involved have completed billing the city for their work on the Riverview project.

“We received the latest bills on Friday, after we were notified about the problem,” he said.

Since August 2015, the Fenton City Council has approved the payment of $19,416 to consultants for work on the LaJoice property.

“The (LaJoice) escrow account will be short about $15,000 and we are checking with the city attorney to see if we can place

See PROPERTY on 10A

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Lottery is predatory

Deceptive advertising. Promoting gambling addiction. Preying on the young, the uneducated, the poor and the ignorant. No, not the St. John’s bingo night, I’m talking about the state lottery. In 1903, the United States Supreme Court wrote that “…the lottery preys upon the hard earnings of the poor. It plunders the ignorant and simple.”

Nothing has changed in the 111 years since that opinion was written except that the lottery has sunk its claws so deeply into the psyche of most state governments that they have become addicted to the teats of these cash cows.

Through lotteries, government exploits the most vulnerable of the very citizenry it should be protecting — the poor, the young, the old and the ignorant. Over half of all lottery sales are purchased by only 5 percent of the population. And these 5 percent are the poorest members of society.

The highest grossing sales outlets are always located in the poorest neighborhoods. These are people who, through the hopelessness and despair of poverty, have abandoned any hope of prosperity or success through their own efforts, and instead have placed their hopes for a better life on the whims of a…(gasp!) numbered Ping Pong ball. Most have no concept of the odds of winning. The odds on the most recent powerball (I refuse to capitalize it) were over 292 million to one. That would be about the odds of pulling your name out of a very large hat that contained the name of every single man, woman and child in America.

There exists no reasonable argument for government-sponsored gambling. And not just sponsored, but aggressively promoted and encouraged. One can hardly open a newspaper, turn on the TV or drive on our highways without being exposed to slick, professionally created advertising campaigns encouraging citizens to gamble by purchasing lottery tickets.

That’s absurd. Under that same twisted logic the state of Michigan should also sponsor advertising encouraging us to smoke highly taxed cigarettes and drink highly taxed liquor. Our legislators are taking the easy way out. It’s patently wrong to raise additional taxes through more lotteries as opposed to hard-nosed reduction of current costs and waste — you know, like you and I have to do.

The paradox is that we are simply borrowing from the future. Habits are ingrained young. Every year we foster a new generation of compulsive gamblers — gamblers whose campaigns will cost society far more in resources than any lottery ever generated. And the ever-widening gap represented by the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer will continue to escalate. Gambling is destructive to society. This does not change simply because lazy legislators give it their dubious moral stamp of approval.

If I were King, I’d get rid of lotteries — all lotteries. That would make us all winners.

Opinions offered in If I Were King are the author’s alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Tri-County Times or its staff. Email the King at king@tctimes.com. Some content adapted from the internet.

What’s your favorite winter activity?

“Cross-country skiing. I live on Loon Lake. Typically, I go on my lake. I’ve been doing it for 20 years. I just do the regular skiing.”

— Brad Muehl
Fenton Township

“I’ll go ice skating. I’ll try to learn how to snowboard. I like staying home and doing arts and crafts, cooking and making up recipes.”

— Melissa Frith
Madison Heights

“Flying to see my daughter in North Carolina where it’s 30 degrees warmer. We just go down for a few days. They hardly ever get snow. When they do, the city closes down.”

— Ardel Phillips
Tyrone Township

“I have none. I tolerate winter. I walk and still go out and do things. I’m a three-season kind of person. I’m not a winter person at all.”

— Ray Zavada
Fenton

“Downhill skiing. I’ve been doing it forever. I like to go fast. It’s the one thing I enjoy that’s cold, especially when it’s crappy out.”

— Celene Howard
Tyrone Township

Compiled by Hannah Ball, staff reporter

Hot lines

Submit at: tctimes.com, call 810-629-9221 or text to 810-771-8398

At submissions, if approved for publication, must be 50 words or less and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Tri-County Times or its staff. Email the King at king@tctimes.com. Some content adapted from the internet.

WE NEED MORE retailers in Dibberville and more residents shopping at the existing ones. Small, quaint shops are the life-blood of any successful downtown. The book store, the candy store and the antique store are irreparable. Let’s support them.

MY SOUTHERN PAPER’s headline was 272,000 hires in December keeps the U.S. peaking. Ever since I was a little guy, everyone hires people in the busy season of December and January. Sixty days later, they’re gone. They’re all temporary employees.

WHEN OBAMA OUTLAWS guns, only Obama will be protected for the rest of his life by men with guns.

I’M TRYING TO find the lady who visited Oakwood Cemetery a few years ago looking for the Latorette family. If you’re reading this please reply. Thank you.

I’M CALLING ABOUT the so-called water poisoning in Flint. Why has it gone down for a few days. They’re all temporary employees.

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CREDIT UNION
Continued from Front Page

and is not headquartered in Arkansas, Delaware, South Dakota, Wyoming or the District of Columbia, it is likely a state-chartered credit union.

Calls and an email sent to Clarkston Brandon Community Credit Union CEO Donna Bullard were not answered as of press time on Friday.

However, a prepared statement from Bullard said, in part, “During the entirety of LaJoice’s employment, Clarkston Brandon Community Credit Union has had regular examinations and audits that were conducted in accordance with the Michigan Credit Union Act.”

She also assured members that their assets were safe. “Membership accounts are insured by the NCUA to $250,000, so all our members can rest assured that their assets are secure,” said part of the prepared statement.

The statement was published in Wednesday’s Times and can be seen in its entirety at tctimes.com.

“Generally speaking, the rules are about the same whether a credit union is state or federally chartered,” said Tom Alter, chief of marketing for Genisys Credit Union, with a location in Fenton. “Their primary regulator is the Michigan Department of Insurance and Financial Services (MDIFS).”

Locally, Dort Federal Credit Union and Financial Plus Federal Credit Union, with locations in Fenton, and Metro North Federal Credit Union, with a location in Holly, are federal credit unions. The National Credit Union Association is the regulator for all federal credit unions and comes in at about the same time as the MDIFS to annually audit state-chartered credit unions.

In addition, most credit unions also use the services of an independent outside auditor. “They strictly come in to verify the accuracy of the credit union’s financial statements,” said Alter.

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Jennifer Ludwigsen
Director of Marketing at Dort Federal Credit Union

At Dort Federal Credit Union, NCUA examiners come in every year. “It’s a very large scope exam,” said Jenny Ludwigsen, director of marketing. “They look at the independent audit, portfolios, cyber security, etc. The independent CPA audit focuses on the financial statements.”

Ludwigsen said, in response to this recent embezzlement charge against LaJoice, “We’ve been scratching our heads regarding how this has all happened. As an industry, this is shocking and not our standard of operation. Credit unions have a long history of being safe, secure and trusted institutions within our communities.”

State takes over LaJoice’s former credit union

Conservatorship necessary to protect public interest

To protect membership and to ensure uninterrupted access to funds, the Michigan Department of Insurance and Financial Services (DIFS) took action on Wednesday to conserve Clarkston Brandon Community Credit Union (CBCCU).

The credit union has become the focus of a $20 million embezzlement case, reportedly carried out by Michael LaJoice, its former chief financial officer who had worked at the credit union for nearly 13 years. Following an audit on Jan. 4, LaJoice turned himself in to the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office on Jan. 6, admitting to embezzling $20 million over the past 12 years. He was charged with 14 counts of embezzlement and bond was set at $1 million.

DIFS Director Patrick M. McPharlin issued an order that placed CBCCU into conservatorship and appointed the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) as the conservator, effective immediately.

“All of the 9,400 CBCCU members should be assured that all of their deposits are protected and they will have continued, uninterrupted access to their funds,” said McPharlin. “All Michigan state-chartered credit unions are insured by the NCUA for up to $250,000 per depositor and sometimes more. CBCCU will continue regular hours under management of NCUA.”

As the appointed conservator, NCUA will assume control of CBCCU in order to ensure its financial stability and safe and sound operation. DIFS and the NCUA will work together to address issues related to the credit union’s operations and financial condition while maintaining member services.

All credit unions with assets of $5 million or more are subject to annual audits conducted by a certified public accountant or other professionally qualified individual. DIFS is required to examine credit unions at least once every 18 months. Each exam cycle focuses on different operations of a credit union. Operations exams rely on a required outside audit as part of the examination review.

Upon review of the current DIFS examination, the DIFS director determined conservatorship of CBCCU was necessary to protect the public interest.

“We remain focused on continuing our efforts to provide regulatory oversight of the insurance and financial services industries, including state-chartered credit unions. We ensure that the businesses within these industries are safe, sound, and entitled to the public’s confidence,” said McPharlin.

Members and customers of CBCCU with questions about this conservatorship should contact the Clarkston CBCCU branch office at (248) 625-2923.

Members with questions or concerns about action taken Wednesday are asked to call DIFS toll-free hotline at (877) 999-6442.

NCUA is the federal agency that charters and supervises federal credit unions and insures savings in federal and most state-chartered credit unions across the country through the National Credit Union Share Insurance Fund (NCUSIF), a federal fund backed by the full faith and credit of the United States government.

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School shooting suspects competent to stand trial

By Tim Jagielo

Three teens charged with plot to carry out school shooting in Linden

Ends 2/29/16, must be presented at time of service.

Summary

Ryan Stevens, the 18-year-old suspect in an alleged plot to carry out a shooting at Linden schools appeared in court Wednesday for the first time. The court determined that he is competent to stand trial.

“...We are ready to stipulate to the fact that he (Stevens) is indeed competent to stand trial,” said Karasick. Dukes’ attorney Jodi Hemmingsway expressed the same opinion of her client.

Because of their ages, Dukes and Brewer did not appear in court. They remain lodged at the Genesee County Regional Detention Center. Stevens has been lodged in the Genesee County Jail since his arrest in October 2015.

The three teens have been charged with conspiracy to commit first-degree premeditated murder, a felony punishable by up to life in prison and false report or threat of terrorism, a felony punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

The three teens are believed to be responsible for an alleged plot to carry out a shooting at Linden schools at the end of October 2015.

Argentine Township police became aware of the alleged plot on Oct. 28, 2015, when the police department’s school see TRIAL on 7A

HOLLY TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS

TOWNSHIP CALLS ON RESIDENTS TO HELP CHART THE FUTURE OF HOLLY TOWNSHIP

Township hosts open house/workshop in preparation for Master Plan update

Holly Township, MI; January 1, 2015---As Holly Township continues the process of updating its Master Plan, it is asking community members to participate in an open house/workshop to help clarify and implement the vision for the Township. The workshop will provide residents with the opportunity to make sure their voice is heard in the planning process.

For those who love Holly just as it is or for those who envision it becoming even better—this is your chance to come share your ideas, concerns, questions, and opinions. We want to have as many people participate in the workshop as possible, to make sure our Master Plan reflects the people who live, work, and play here.

The survey will include questions about many elements of life in Holly, including community character, natural feature preservation, trailways, and economic development. As the guide for the future of Holly, the newly-updated Master Plan will influence future decision-making on development, infrastructure, budgeting, and conservation, among many other topics. Because of the importance of this document to so many facets of community life, public officials are urging residents to participate and voice their opinions.

We believe this will be an engaging and exciting opportunity for community members to participate in this very important process. It’s important we plan ahead to influence the priority of our residents. We need to know what they think so that the Plan best represents their vision."

The workshop will be held on February 2, 2016, at the North Oakland County Fire Authority (N.O.C.F.A.). 5051 Grange Hall Road at 6:30 P.M.

ATTENTION
CHILD PORNOGRAPHY CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Stevens last fall, were bound over to circuit court, with Judge Archie Hayman.

The court that she told Stevens to stop the sexual act with the other 13-year-old female victim about what took place. According to the victim, Stevens admitted to filming the sex act, and sending it on.

Fulton said he has seen the video on all three devices, and that it has been downloaded for forensic use. He said Stevens has been cooperative during the investigation.

After testimony from the alleged victim and Fulton concluded, Karasick and Rundles discussed the five counts against Stevens. Karasick agreed with all counts except count number one, which was essentially aiding and abetting in criminal sexual conduct. He argued that the act had begun before filming, and therefore wasn’t encouraging the act itself.

Judge McCabe agreed with the prosecution, that Stevens’ filming encouraged the illegal activity taking place, and bound Stevens over to circuit court on all five counts.

The 15-year-old male from Linden was arrested and remains lodged at the Genesee County Regional Detention Center. The 13-year-old female has not been charged. An older woman who reportedly booked the motel room for Stevens is not expected to be charged, as there is not sufficient evidence at this time to prove she knew what would happen in the room.

FELONY COUNTS AGAINST RYAN STEVENS

Count 1: Criminal Sexual Conduct — third degree (person 13-15) — 15-year felony

Count 2: Child Sexually Abusive Activity — 20-year felony

Count 3: Computers – using to commit a crime – 10- to 20-year felony

Count 4: Child sexually abusive activity – distributing or promoting – seven-year felony

Count 5: Child sexually abusive material – possession – four-year felony

TRIAL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6A

A 48-year-old Fenton man is dead after an early morning crash in Flint Township Friday morning. The accident closed I-75 for several hours. According to Lt. David Kaiser of the Michigan State Police-Flint Post, the crash occurred at about 2:50 a.m. The crash occurred on southbound I-75 just north of Maple Road in Flint Township, according to the MSP press release. The name of the victim was not released before press time Friday. A semi-tractor trailer was traveling southbound on I-75 when it was struck from the rear by a Jeep that was also traveling southbound. The Fenton man sustained fatal injuries. The driver of the tractor trailer was uninjured. A MSP traffic crash reconstructionist and motor carrier investigator are assisting troopers investigating the crash. Lanes were re-opened shortly before 9 a.m. Visit www.tctimes.com for further updates.
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$1.8 million loss forcing changes at Linden schools

Losing 253 students is cause of revenue shortage

By Hannah Ball
hball@tctimes.com; 810-433-6792

Linden High School students will no longer be on a trimester schedule starting with the 2016/2017 school year. At its January meeting, the Linden Board of Education voted 6-1 to revert to semesters as part of its cost containment plan to help the schools deal with a projected future loss of 253 students, which is a loss of $1.82 million over the next three years.

Steve Murphy, board vice president, cast the dissenting vote.

“It’s cost savings and it’s not detrimental to our students’ education,” said Board President Scott Maker. “It’s in line with the vast majority of schools in the state.”

The board estimates reverting to semesters could save $82,000 to $328,000 over the next six-plus years. Personnel would be reduced by approximately one to four teachers and less money would be spent on curriculum supplies. Students will have fewer academic options.

Maker voted in favor of the change.

“We’ve got three board members with education backgrounds,” he said. “One is working as a teacher right now and they support it, I supported it with what I saw with my kids.”

Trustee Jason Rowden teaches personal finance at Howell High School.

Maker said they had to make a quick decision because of the amount of work counselors have to complete with class offerings and scheduling.

“Teachers have to adjust their pacing guide. It forces them to do a lot of work to change up their tempo,” Maker said.

At public forums, many parents voiced their objections at switching back to semesters, saying students will have fewer options and the board isn’t considering academia when making these decisions.

At the Oct. 21 board meeting, a few parents and educators spoke against moving to semesters. One said she wanted Linden to be more competitive by offering more class options.

YOUNG FIVES PROGRAM

The board also unanimously voted to allow administration to conduct research on whether parents would be interested in a full-day Young Fives program. Currently, the school receives half of the $7,391 FTE (full-time equivalent) because it is a half-day program, but a full-day program would allow the school to receive the full amount.

“Moving to a semester schedule and offering Young Five programming options to our students should help in providing some cost containment measures, as well as continued positive educational experiences,” said Interim Superintendent Russ Ciesielski in a press release.

Maker said the decision to have the full-day program is ultimately the parents’ choice, and many area schools offer a full-day program or both full day and half day.

“We approved the administration to explore the Young Fives offering full day and half day if there’s enough parents interested in a full-day program,” he said. “If we had enough families interested, we would allow the administration to go forward and have the full-day program.”

He said they’d like to provide more education for more students if possible.

The board is still discussing possible elementary school reconfigurations to save more money.
County Prosecutor expects more charges

Feds also investigating LaJoice, may charge him with additional crimes

By Hannah Ball
hbball@tctimes.com; 810-433-6792

Oakland County Prosecutor Jessica Cooper expects Michael LaJoice will face more charges.

LaJoice of Tyrone Township is currently lodged in the Oakland County Jail on 14 counts of embezzlement, after he turned himself in to authorities on Jan. 6, saying he embezzled $20 million from the credit union where he worked for nearly 13 years. Bond was set at $1 million.

“I can’t guess in terms of what will be uncovered and what will not be uncovered. It is a long and involved process,” she said.

Oakland County has been working with the federal government during the investigation.

“When you’re talking about millions of dollars in normally stays in a federal system,” she said. However, the government gave Oakland County the case because the county moves more quickly.

“We’re required under the statute system to move quickly,” she said.

“There’s a whole different set of statutes and rules and regulations between federal and state systems. We’ll cooperate to get to the bottom of it.”

“It’s an unusual and rare case for the county. “I don’t think we have any history of someone confessing to something of this magnitude,” Cooper said. “I don’t think the sheriff’s department has had anyone walk in and say ‘I’ve embezzled $20 million.’”

The fact that he turned himself in does not prove he’s guilty.

Even though he walked in and confessed, he has the same rights to a fair trial and to plead guilty or not guilty, Cooper explained.

“It’s going to involve a lot of motions and a little bit of complexity. We really don’t know the extent of this until all of the auditors get done with it,” she said.

LaJoice could face charges from both the county and the federal government if each system tries him on different crimes, which is possible because the Oakland County’s statute of limitations on this crime go back six years, but the federal government’s is longer.

According to 18 U.S. Code 656, the statute of limitations for theft, embezzlement, or misapplication by a bank officer is 10 years, according to federalcharges.com.

LaJoice admitted to embezzling for the past 12 years.

“There will be so many other charges the federal government will come up with,” she said. “There are charges that the federal government could bring that we couldn’t bring.”

LaJoice’s defense attorney Michael Manley petitioned the court on Tuesday to have a forensic evaluation conducted on LaJoice.
Many charities scrambling to fill donation commitments made by Michael LaJoice

By Sally Rummel
news@tctimes.com; 810-629-8828

Local charities and non-profit groups are reeling from the sting of hypocrisy, learned of Michael LaJoice’s financial support of their projects and events allegedly came from embezzled funds, rather than his own wallet.

Sharron Kutnasek, executive director of the Fenton Regional Chamber of Commerce, LaJoice Properties sponsored many of the chamber’s most popular events through LaJoice’s business, Chassé Ballroom & Latin Dance Studios.

LaJoice’s corporate sponsorships through the chamber amounted to $5,617 in 2015, according to Lee Mitchell, membership coordinator.

“His last sponsorship was as Main Event Sponsor for Jinglefest in December (2015),” said Mitchell.

“He also held sponsorships for Expo, Taste in Fenton, Linden Easter Event and the annual Golf Scramble, and supported the Business & Community Guide with a large ad.”

Larger non-profit groups that counted on his support in the past are now scrambling to fill this year’s sponsorship lists.

Chamber Executive Director Shelly Day wants to assure everyone in the community that the loss of support through LaJoice’s sponsorships will in no way harm the chamber.

“My one message is that we want to assure everyone in the community that we have in Genesee County.”

“We, as a community, have a lot of lessons to learn from this,” said Shard.

“Such an unfortunate event. We need to know there are checks and balances in our organizations and businesses. No one would’ve expected that a credit union (Chase Brandon Community Credit Union, where LaJoice was employed) would’ve had such balances and places in it. This doesn’t represent all the great credit unions we have in Genesee County.”

Pink Night, hosted by Financial Plus Credit Union and the community-at-large, benefitted from LaJoice’s $15,000 title sponsorship, which helped the event raise a net of nearly $70,000 in 2015.

“Pink Night is bigger than the financial support of any single sponsor,” said Olga Long, senior vice president of Financial Plus Credit Union.

“Although the recent news regarding Michael LaJoice is unfortunate, the Pink Night Committee would focus will continue to be helping to find a cure. We have many long-time sponsors and supporters and we look forward to hosting another successful Pink Night on Thursday, Oct. 6. We have some exciting new plans in the works and are confident our supporters will be thrilled with the event enhancements.”

Whaley Children’s Center in Flint was another recipient of LaJoice’s financial generosity.

LaJoice’s home parish, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Fenton, is another group he supported as a member since he was in kindergarten, according to an Our Town interview with LaJoice in the Times on Feb. 27, 2015. He became well known for buying the first-place pie at Applefest every year, shelling out $4,000 for the privilege, for the past five years.

“I believe he picked charities to support that meant something to him,” added Shard.

“Even if it wasn’t his money to give.”

Chassé owner almost always topped list of local donors

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COMMERICAL PROPERTIES

CORNERSTONE CONDOS
Fenton, Holly, Linden leaders make 2016 ‘forecast’

Growth and development continue to be a theme for upcoming year

By Sally Rummel
news@tctimes.com; 810-629-8282

Fenton — What a difference five years makes. This new period of growth and development after Michigan’s recession was a common theme among tri-county area government leaders at the 2016 Chamber Forecast Breakfast on Wednesday morning.

The Fenton Regional Chamber of Commerce sponsored the event, drawing a record crowd of about 80 to the Fenton Community and Cultural Center.

FENTON

Fenton City Manager Lynn Markland said many new businesses will be opening this year, including Ulta (cosmetics), Famous Footwear and Maurice’s (women’s wear) near Target, La Marsa Mediterranean Cuisine, Cancun Mexican Restaurant, and an office building on Silver Lake Road, developed by Wilson Labohd.

These construction projects will be completed or started this year in the city:
- Silver Lake Road bridge repair begins Monday, Jan. 25 with the replacement of the water main under the Shiawassee River. Completion is expected before July.
- Extension of Caroline Street, opening the badly-needed repair of this iconic bridge.

Markland. “The first trail will be between the cities of Fenton and Linden, then a whole system of trails will follow.”

A new Arts and Culture Commission, with the Downtown Development Authority’s goal of maximizing the use of the newly renovated and expanded Fenton Community and Cultural Center.

The re-appointment of a Museum Board for the maintenance and upkeep of the A.J. Phillips Museum.

LINDEN

Linden Mayor David Lossing presented new projects for the city of Linden in 2016, including:
- The Mill building repair. “We’ve engaged an architect and we’re putting together a planning committee, starting the grant process and fundraisers for the badly-needed repair of this iconic Linden building,” said Lossing.
- Working with other communities to support the National Heritage Water Trailway, maximizing the use of the Shiawassee River.
- The second round of Gus Macker (3 on 3 basketball tournaments) will be coming to Linden again this summer.
- Final report coming next month from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) regarding clean up of the gas contamination problem downtown.
- Continued support of the non-motorized trail project linking Fenton, Linden/Argentine-American (Linden-Argentine-Fenton-Lake Fenton) Pathways, Ron Stack and Vic Lukasavitz to bring bike trails to the area,” said Markland.
- The re-appointment of a Museum Board for the maintenance and upkeep of the A.J. Phillips Museum.

HOLLY

“Five years ago, downtown Holly was half empty and now it’s at 100-percent capacity,” said Village President Ryan Bladzik, who credited the DDA and its director Andy Potter for the success of business development in Holly.

See FORECAST on 16A

This week’s inserts
- Alpine Marketplace
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Keeping the faith

Traditional churches use creativity and outreach to keep young people involved

By Sally Rummel
news@tctimes.com; 810-629-8282

One of the challenges that traditional churches have in today’s society is keeping young people involved in faith-based activities.

Today’s Millennial generation, defined as young people from late teens to early 30s, are less likely to say that religion is very important to them, according to recent statistics from Pew Research Center.

The politics of religion, the growth of the Internet in sharing beliefs and non-belief and a distrust in many mainstream institutions are just a few of the reasons that are cited for this “lack of faith” by young people.

However, many local churches find that today’s youth are looking for the same love and acceptance as they always have.

“We need to try to create an environment where relationships and a sense of community are more important than a set of rules, of ‘don’ts,’” said Father Jim Rolph, associate pastor at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Fenton.

He credits the active involvement of 24-year-old youth minister Kyle Ulrich for the growth in youth, college and young adult ministries at St. John’s.

Ulrich, who grew up in the St. John’s parish, reaches out to youth with the Gospel spoken in modern-day terms so that kids can apply them today.

By meeting youth group activities to Sunday night after Mass, it gets them into the doors of the church and allows them to connect with what they hear in church with what’s happening in the youth ministry, according to Ulrich.

He tries to lead kids by example with acts of service in working with clothing giveaways and soup kitchen work in Flint, as well as mission trips, where kids can put their faith into action.

Another ministry, led by Dan Medich, focuses on young adults in their 20s and 30s. Called ID 916, its name reflects St. Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians, imploring Christians to preach the Gospel out in the world as “intentional disciples.”

At Hope Lutheran Church in Linden, youth volunteer Kim Colmer says that “kids need God more than ever,” and hopes to plant the seed of faith through a variety of programs.

Surrounded by three schools in the Linden school district, Hope Lutheran has created mentoring opportunities at the schools, partnering with them to provide relationship mentoring, not evangelizing.

“A trained mentor is paired one-on-one with a student at Central Elementary, with parental permission, and once a week they spend an hour together talking and building a relationship,” said Pastor Jim Rolff of Hope Lutheran Church.

The program has now grown to include Linden Middle School, which requested it after seeing the success of the program at Central (Elementary School).

Behind the scenes, each of these paired mentoring relationships also has a prayer person, who prays every week for these relationships. “They don’t ever meet the child,” said Colmer. “But it appears to be working.”

Colmer also started “Oasis,” a group for middle school students, who come to the church every Thursday by the school district’s bus to hang out in a fun, safe place. Volleyball, foosball, table tennis, arts and crafts and playing pool are just a few of the activities kids enjoy.

Rolf also visits Linden High School every month, sets up a table with a big bowl of candy and asks a “question of the day.” “We have about 300 kids who stop at the table to talk,” said Rolf. “We can’t evangelize, but we can talk. If the kids bring up the topic of church or faith, I can respond.”

‘Messy Church’ increases teen attendance

By Hannah Ball
hball@tctimes.com; 810-433-6792

Fenton — Aside from the usual routine of going to church and listening to the pastor, members of St. Jude’s Episcopal Church in Fenton have started to do more involved activities on Sunday night, fostering conversation between the older and younger students, as part of an international program called “Messy Church.”

One of the goals of Messy Church is to increase teen attendance, which is exactly what the church aimed to accomplish.

Rev. Heather Barta, interim priest, and Kris Forsyth, director of Christian Formation, started the program at their church because teen attendance was low. “We were having light teen attendance so we decided to try something else,” Forsyth said.

Starting at 5 p.m. on Sunday nights, after having dinner, story time, and singing songs, members participate in activities, such as arts and crafts or scavenger hunts. One Sunday they blessed pets like, dogs, cats, and turtles.

Messy Church started in England and has two requirements: food and stories.

The program started in September at St. Jude’s and the church has seen an increase in teen attendance. “Older kids interact with the younger kids and build relationships,” she said. “We have students in all different school districts. They get to know each other.”

Barta said the 5 p.m. slot was a more convenient time for the younger crowd.

“Teens don’t want to get up at 9 on a Sunday,” she said. “They really grow the core of the youth.”

On average, about 12 to 15 teens attend each Sunday night.

“Pretty overwhelming we have participation. People are happy to come, happy to be here,” Barta said. “Teens who weren’t participating are happy to be here.”

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Tenants struggle to find security deposit funds

At least one family has moved out of LaJoice rental home; need their $975 security deposit back

By Vera Hogan
v Hogan@tctimes.com; 810-433-6823

A few of the homes Michael LaJoice purchased within the past six months have tenants still residing in them. Keri Garrison was one of them. She lived at 219 South Adelaide St. with her husband and older children. They lived there for three-and-a-half years before moving out on Jan. 4.

“We never really dealt with Michael LaJoice in person,” Garrison said. “We received a letter from him, telling us that he had purchased the home and that we would have until March 1, 2016 to move out because it was going to be demolished.”

Garrison said the letter contained an apology for the inconvenience and as a result of the license fee, she and LaJoice’s other tenants would be able to stay in the rental homes rent-free for January and February.

Garrison said the house her family lived in has two other tenants still living there. Two nearby houses also have tenants still living in the homes.

“My husband and I didn’t want to wait until the last minute so we moved out right away,” Garrison said.

Garrison said they turned in their keys on Jan. 4, and on Jan. 6 called LaJoice’s secretary to find out about the return of their $975 security deposit. They paid $800 per month in rent.

The secretary said she had not seen LaJoice yet that day but would get back with her. “Then on Friday we heard the news that he was in jail for embezzlement,” said Garrison.

LaJoice turned himself into the Oakland County Sheriff’s Department on Jan. 6, claiming he had embezzled $20 million from his bank employer.

Garrison said she believes 219 South Adelaide was the only house LaJoice intended to demolish.

Although the Garrisons had a lease, they had no idea the lease does not contain information intended to demolish.

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Smith breaks Lady Bronchos’ all-time career scoring record

By David Troppens
droppens@tctimes.com; 810-433-6789

Holly — Four days earlier, Kaitlyn Smith had an outstanding chance to become the outright all-time career scoring leader in Holly girls varsity basketball history when she was leading a 2-on-1 break in a victory against Swartz Creek.

Instead, the senior dished the pass off to a teammate for the easy bucket. Due to the play, that meant the senior standout had to wait until Tuesday night’s home contest against Kearsley to get the additional point she needed to break the all-time career scoring point tie between her and Molly Hugan.

It didn’t take Smith long. Just 26 seconds into the contest, she received a pass from junior Paige Reid and then nailed the three-pointer giving her 1,021 points for her career and also making her the Holly scoring career leader. Before the game was up, Smith had a game-high 16 points, leading the Bronchos to an easy 53-28 victory against the Kearsley Hornets.

“It was tough, but it wasn’t that tough,” Smith said when asked about having to wait between games to break the record. “I tried not to put that pressure on me. I just tried to come out, play my own game and play for my teammates and for myself.

“It was a relief (getting the record on my first shot). Now I can just play and play for my team.”

“She plays to help Holly win,” Holly varsity girls basketball coach David Hall said. “The last two or three years she’s been the leading scorer, the leader in assists and right up there in steals, too. She does score but she helps the team win. She’s a leader. ... She thinks about other people. She is kind of like the mother of our team. She looks out for people. It doesn’t matter if it is her or the 12th player – she treats everyone the same.”

Reid, who assisted Smith’s record

By David Troppens

Losing is one thing. Getting pinned is another. That was the message Don Pluta and Todd Skinner gave their teams after the Holly and Linden varsity wrestling teams, respectively, lost Metro League dual meets to Kearsley, on Wednesday.

Both squads defeated Swartz

See SPLIT on 20A

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By David Troppens

d troppens@tctimes.com

The co-op gymnastics team (LFLF) went to meets, people didn’t know who they were. Heck, the LFLF squad was just learning about themselves and about the prep gymnastics season as well because it was their first season ever.

This year things have changed. “Our first competition last year no one knew us,” sophomore Blake Hutchings said. “But this year we know we are competition for them. Hutchings’ words have proven true. About halfway into the season, the LFLF gymnastics team has won or taken first place at every event they’ve competed at except one. The one they didn’t was last weekend’s East Lansing Invitational. They placed second out of nine squads.

“We know more what to expect when we go to competitions,” second-year head coach Nancy Holland said. “We started out the season with injuries to girls who were on the team last year, but we are scoring well even with the injuries. We are having a pretty strong season.”

One change is evident to anyone who went to a LFLF practice from last year versus this season. The numbers are much higher. Last year’s first-season team had only six gymnasts. This year, there are 11 high school-aged gymnasts running, jumping and twisting at the team’s practice facility at Hyatt Elementary School.

“I think it’s cool because we get to meet new people and grow as a team,” Miranda Stephens said. “I like that we are getting along together really well, and that the scores are growing. We are getting better as a team.”

The LFLF team’s second season hasn’t been without issues, however. Injuries have struck the program, but even that hasn’t stopped the squad from performing well.

“We are not quite hitting our high score we reached last year, but we started this season with a higher score than we did last year,” Holland said. “So there is still room to grow.”

“I didn’t see it (us doing this well) because everyone was dropping one-by-one, but we are doing really good,” Hutchings said about the injuries. “We practice really hard and we are doing a lot of new skills.”

The team competed at the Jeanne Caems Invitational on Saturday. The squad’s next meet is against Tecumseh and Port Huron on Jan. 19.

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The team competed at the Jeanne Caems Invitational on Saturday. The squad’s next meet is against Tecumseh and Port Huron on Jan. 19.
The Bronchos dominated Kearsley, cruising to a 36-5 first-half lead, eventually resulting in a 74-36 road victory against the Hornets.

“I came out with a lot of energy, enthusiasm and intensity,” Holly varsity boys basketball coach Lance Baylis said. “They went on an 11-0 run after that, but by that point, the environment had been set. The guys played hard and very unselfishly. Everybody played.”

Ian Hodges led the Bronchos (3-0, 6-0) with a game-high 24 points. He also had six rebounds and five assists. Kyle Woodruff finished with 19 points, while Adam Tooley chipped in eight rebounds and five assists.

Holly’s Kyle Woodruff netted 19 points in the Bronchos’ 74-36 victory against the Kearsley Hornets on Tuesday.
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> **Executive Vice President**

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**SPLIT Continued from Page 17A**

Creek. Holly opened the double-dual with a 49-17 pounding of the Dragons, while the Linden Eagles beat Swartz Creek 55-19. However, neither was able to do the same with ninth-ranked Kearsley. Linden opened the meet with four straight pinfall losses to Kearsley and lost 38-25. Holly had eight six-point team wins in its match with Kearsley, resulting in a 54-24 loss. Both area Metro League squads are 3-1 in conference action after Wednesday’s split.

“I told these guys coming in we can’t give up pins,” Skinner said. “If we give up pins it would be the difference in the dual meet, and I believe it was. We gave up five pins and four in a row to start. We do have some guys out of the lineup, but every team in the state of Michigan does, so I’m not making any excuses. This lineup we had tonight, we can win with this lineup and we need to win with this lineup.”

The Eagles had half of their wrestlers defeat Kearsley grapplers, but the pinfalls cost Linden, Seven Eagles finished with two varsity victories. They were Patrick Kerr (140), Dawson Blank (145/152), Bryce Davis (160), Cade Dickson (171), Jaylin Steedman (215), Skyler Stites (285) and Adam Glazar (171). Justin Cygnar (112) and Koleton Strauss (119) earned wins against Swartz Creek.

The Bronchos had five wrestlers finish the day with 2-0 marks. They were Carsen Cuthbert (130/135), Colton Cleaver (152), Cade Dallwitz (171), Collin Dallwitz (215) and Jimmy Gray (285). Others winning one match were Dan Stallard (140), William Greer (160), Morgan Hensel (189) and Calvin Curtis (112).

Both teams face each other at Linden on Wednesday. Both hope to rebound and remain in Metro contention.

“The good news is we are basically healthy,” Pluta said. “We have five duals this weekend … and I think we can get mentally and emotionally healthy for next week. I think we are capable of beating everyone in the league, but we are capable of losing to anybody if we don’t wrestle our best.”

“Hopefully we can rebound and get ready for next week when we host Holly and Clio,” Skinner said. “Maybe we can have a shot at the league.”

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**SMITH Continued from Page 17A**

breaking hoop, was excited for Smith.

“It’s awesome. We are all so proud of her,” Reid said. “Kaitlyn and I get in the gym a lot together, so she’s definitely deserving of it and it’s really cool to see her accomplish it.”

The Bronchos (3-1, 5-4) accomplished a pretty impressive team win on Tuesday as well. Holly scored the game’s first 10 points and Kearsley never threatened the lead, eventually resulting in a team victory that everyone was able to play a lot of minutes in. All but one player scored points for Holly.

“Everyone deserves a little shine,” Smith said. “Not everyone gets their name in the paper, but everybody comes to practice every day and works their butt off at practices. We appreciate everyone single person on this team, and we wouldn’t be the same team if it weren’t for all of us. To see all those girls come out, play and score is an honor.”

“It’s so fun,” Reid said. “The girls have been working their butts off in practice this year and it’s fun (seeing them all get a chance to play).”

Holly hit a sizzling 17-of-29 shots during the opening three quarters, earning a 44-16 lead entering the final period. Smith also had three assists and three steals to go with her 16 points. Reid also netted 16 points, while grabbing nine rebounds. Taylor Vines had six points and four rebounds while Jenna Pepper had seven assists.
Trial delayed for man accused of killing, burning wife’s body

Lawyers waiting on more reviews, evaluations

By Vera Hogan
vhogan@tctimes.com; 810-433-6823

The start of the jury trial for Erich Wilfinger, scheduled to begin on Jan. 12, has been postponed until the end of February. According to Laurie Jimkoski, clerk for the Montmorency Circuit Court, authorities are waiting for more reviews and evaluations.

Wilfinger is accused of killing his wife, Marsha (Sargent) Wilfinger, formerly of Argentine Township.

Marsha Wilfinger was found in the back seat of a burning car on June 20, 2015 at the intersection of Sheridan Valley Road and Scenic Rte. 3 in Montmorency County’s Briley Township, east of Gaylord.

When Michigan State Police troopers arrived, they found the car burning in a ditch. When the fire was put out, investigators discovered Marsha Wilfinger’s burned remains in the back seat.

He has been charged with open murder-homicide, possession of weapons and firearms by a felon, and trying to escape from jail where he continues to remain without bond.

The case is being heard in the Montmorency County Circuit Court.

Vic Canever goes green, gets award

Vic Canever Chevrolet of Fenton owner Richard Canever shakes hands with Chuck Gates, zone area sales manager, after a news conference last Thursday. Behind him are zone managers Stacey Summers and John Fitzpatrick. Vic Canever Chevrolet was recognized with a General Motors Green Dealer Award, which acknowledges wide-ranging improvements to practices in recycling, energy conservation and others to create a more sustainable, green business.

WINNER

Continued from Front Page

Betty Durant, executive assistant for Quick-Sav Food Stores corporate office, said they don’t know yet how much money the retailer will receive because of this win.

“We’re waiting to hear back from lottery officials,” she said. “I do believe it will be a flat fee.”

Durant said the Beacon & Bridge Market in Holly will receive their share of whatever is received through their normal commission distribution process.

Tom Asmaro of Merchant Gourmet Wine Shop in Fenton said if their shop had sold the winning $1.5 billion jackpot, they would have received $50,000. Had Merchants sold one of the winning $1 million tickets, they would have received $2,000.

The drawing for the astronomical $1.58 billion jacket was drawn Wednesday, Jan. 13. The lucky numbers were 4-8-19-27-34, with 10 as the Powerball number.

Three winners will share the big prize. They hail from California, Tennessee and Florida.

All winning ticket holders have one year to claim their prize.

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Police&Fire Report

MAN SLEEPING IN CAR HAD WARRANT
Just after 2 a.m. on Jan. 8, a Fenton police officer spotted a suspiciously parked vehicle in the 3100 block of Owen Road. The officer checked out the vehicle and made contact with the driver, a 26-year-old Tyrone Township man, who was sleeping. A computer check of the man revealed he had an outstanding arrest warrant from the Michigan State Police-Flint Post. The man was taken into custody and turned over to troopers so that he could take care of his warrant.

HOMELESS MAN SHOPLIFTS
On Jan. 8, a Fenton business owner reported to Fenton police that a store on Owen Road to investigate a retail fraud complaint. A male customer had walked out of the store with merchandise that he had not paid for. Police located the man on Silver Parkway. The 26-year-old homeless man, originally from the Fenton area, turned over two video games and a knife he admitted to taking from the store. He said he hoped to sell the items for cash. Police arrested the man and he has a Feb. 29 court date for retail fraud. He was then taken to a shelter in Flint.

BUSINESS CHECK FORGED
On Jan. 8, a Fenton business owner reported to Fenton police that a business check for $1,600 was forged and cashed at an area bank. The check was legitimately made out to a vendor in Grand Blanc months ago, but the vendor never received the check. Police have identified the suspect and detectives are trying to locate the Flint area man.

Notes of Thanks

NAMI GENESEE COUNTY OFFERS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT
NAMI Genesee County has support groups for persons with mental disorders, their relatives and friends. NAMI Connections is for persons with mental disorders and Family Support Group is for relatives and friends. Meetings are 7 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays at the McLaren Behavioral Health Center at the Oak Bridge Center, 4448 Oak Bridge Dr., Flint. The Oak Bridge Center is off the east side of Linden Road between Corunna and Lennon roads.

A support group for female veterans with PTSD meets on second and fourth Tuesdays, 1 p.m. at Heart-to-Heart Hospice, 2029 South Elms Rd., Swartz Creek. Family-to-family classes for family members and friends of adults with mental disorders and NAMI Basics classes for parents of children with mental disorders will begin in February. There is no charge for NAMI meetings and classes. Call (810) 232-6498 for details.

REP. JOE GRAVES TO GIVE TALK ON MENTAL HEALTH AT HOLLY CHURCH
The Holly, Davison, Fenton, Linden communities are invited to hear State Rep. Joseph Graves of the 51st district. Graves will be giving a talk on mental health at 1 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 29 at the Holly Presbyterian Church, 207 East Maple St. in Holly. The event is sponsored by “Friends with Needs” of Holly, which meets most Tuesdays through Thursdays, from 12 to 3 p.m., at the Holly Presbyterian Church. More information on Graves can be found at www.gophouse.org/reps/representatives/southeast/graves.

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Meet Hassan Rutherford

By Vera Hogan
vhogan@tctimes.com; 810-433-6705
Meet Hassan Rutherford, 43, a server at The Laundry in Fenton for more than four years.

Tell us about your family and where you’re from:
I was born in Kalamazoo in December 1970-something. There was this weird star and some wise guys who brought gifts or something … just kidding. I have three daughters, Carson, 18, Spencer, 15 and Kendall 13. They live in Flushing with their lovely mother.

How long have you worked at The Laundry?
I have worked at The Laundry for over four years. My first actual day working was Halloween 2011. I had to relearn everyone’s names the next shift, because I didn’t recognize them without their costumes.

What do you like about working at The Laundry?
I love working at the Laundry for many reasons. I love the hands-on culture of it. The owners are quite accessible and understanding. The food is remarkable. Chef Jody is wonderful. I work at the best bar in the state. I mean by any real metric, literally the best bar in the state. I am continually challenged by our ever-expanding wine menu. I find that to be a joy, though. I am, after all, a wino … errr I mean oenophile. I think that’s the fancy word for it.

Tell us about your education.
I graduated from Flint Southwestern High School. My first undergraduate degree was earned at Western Michigan University and University of Michigan. My second undergraduate degree was earned at the University of Michigan-Flint. My education has touched many fields. Initially biological anthropology, with minors in economics, Spanish and Portuguese. Later, research psychology, with minors in advanced mathematics and philosophy. I have applied all of that to my life. Sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

Where did you work before The Laundry?
I have worked in everything from real estate to financial middle markets, yet I do this now with love and respect, and with a lot less stress. I do love sales. I have worked at National Real Estate Services, Merrill Lynch, Wachovia, UBS Warburg. Sales is the extension of one’s own values in the attempt to understand the other’s needs while simultaneously trying to find the understanding of what they need or want, and then the attempt to fulfill that. In the end, that is a short cycle that I get to see in its most complete, if not simplest form at The Laundry. I do love the idea.

What do you like to do in your spare time?
In my spare time, I have been quite athletic in the past. I’m heavily involved in such leisure activities as mountain biking, Wing Chun Kung Fu, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, soccer, and a few other things. I’ve since focused on a few other things, especially a more philosophical understanding of martial arts. That brings calm and peace.

I also find joy in the exploration of music and comedy. I say music, but my primary genre is jazz, though closely followed by hip hop (not rap), folk, punk, and electronic. I also love stand-up comedy. It is what I use on a daily basis to prepare me for the work day ahead. Tragedy plus time equals laughter. All of the best stories have the laughter of time added. I find joy exploring new foods and culinary ideas as well. Hell, If I could make eating a job, I most certainly would.

What saddens you or makes you angry?
The things that anger me, or make me sad involve almost wholly the idea of injustice or unfairness at any point. I think if you think about the concept of anger, you’ll find that almost every time you feel a sense of anger, you feel as if you’ve been treated unfairly. I’m angry that we as a nation have failed to continue to live up to the standard of social justice, scientific achievement, and scholarly integrity that my grandparents worked so hard for. I’m angry that we allow false ideas, not based in factual information, but more in sound bites guide our thinking. I get upset when I witness the intolerance that we are capable of, when I know that we are more than our baser selves, given to our sad prejudices and anger over minor inconveniences. We can be great again. Let’s endeavor to be.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
Ten years is 10 years. I have no idea, yet. That’s a future of a life that I will lead, however, and not be led by. My name is Hassan M. Rutherford, and I approve this message.

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