



## Milford basketball wins scrum at South Lyon East

SPORTS, 1B

# NORTHVILLE RECORD

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### HURON VALLEY SCHOOLS

## Middle school changes at heart of plan

Susan Bromley

Hometownlife.com

USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

MILFORD — The middle schools in Huron Valley are poised to undergo a dramatic makeover, pending board approval of a strategic plan that would transform the entire district.

The proposed changes include repurposing of Oak Valley Middle School to house Harbor High School students and other programs, enhancements to White Lake Middle School and construction of a new middle school on the Milford High School campus.

Whether Muir Middle School will close hasn't been determined. In an October report by Plante Moran Realpoint, commissioned by the district to conduct a needs assessment, closure of a middle school building was recommended.

"It makes sense to have eight elementary schools, but not three middle schools," Paul Theriault, a planning engineer for Plante Moran Realpoint, said. "Just because of the geographic size of the district, it makes sense to keep two high schools."

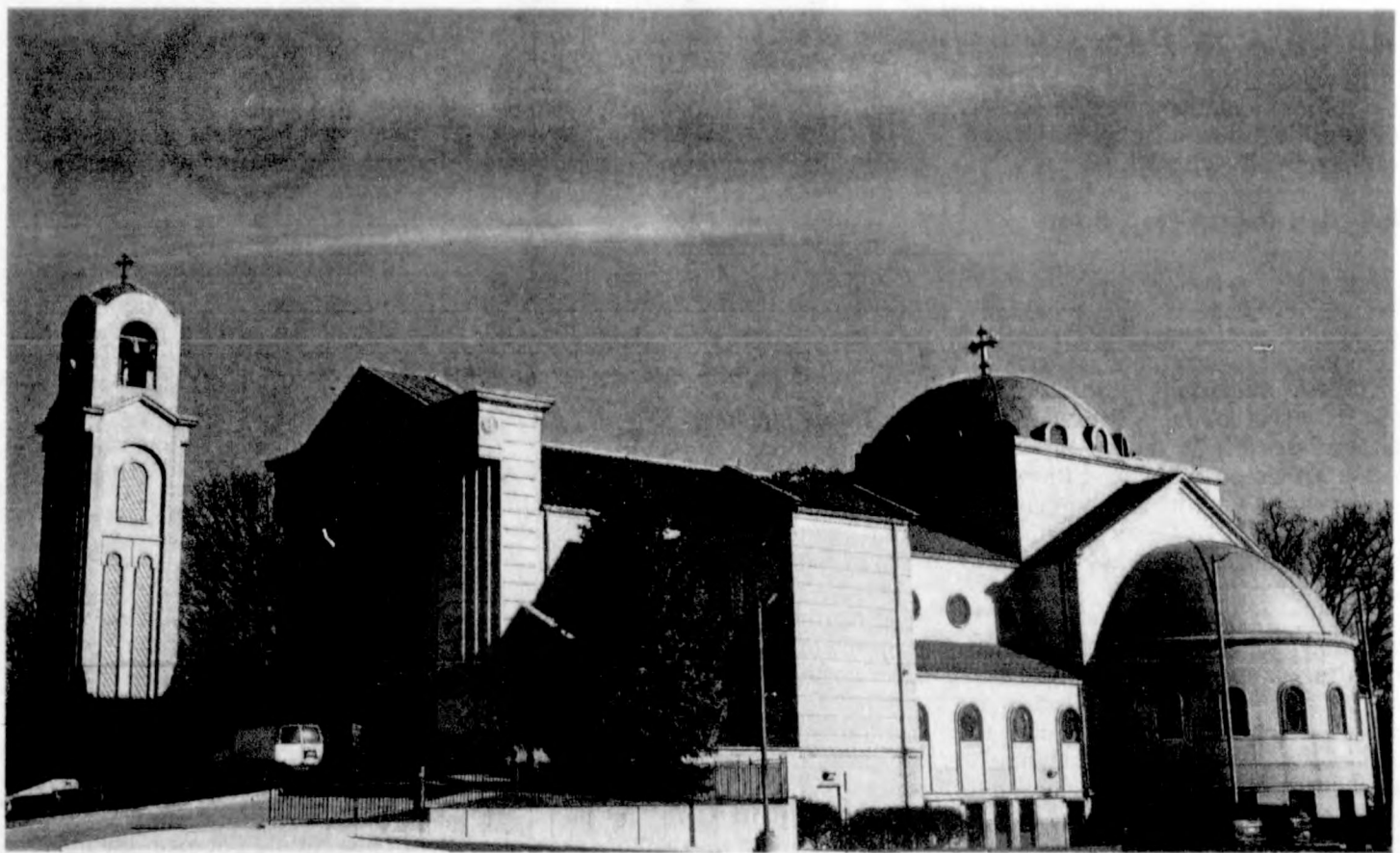
Theriault offered more details behind the firm's recommendations during a Monday night presentation to the board.

Plante Moran Realpoint estimates the district will have \$436 million in capital needs over the course of the next 10 years with its current buildings, including Muir, which is nearly 60 years old and on its own would need \$35 million in improvements. Regardless of whether the proposed changes are adopted, the district is expected to place a \$360 million, 20-year bond proposal before voters next spring.

A study by the firm, which included enrollment projections based on declining birth rates, and housing developments in the district and surrounding areas, helped determine the best course of action to save the district between \$19 million and \$23 million over the course of the next decade, and offer the best programming for students.

"The consensus coming out of that study was to reduce square footage, reduce your footprint, and try to reduce operation and maintenance costs," Theriault, who is also a parent in the district, said. "We looked at scenarios of how to accomplish that and

See CHANGES, Page 7A



The Basilica of St. Mary in Livonia. SHELBY TANKERSLEY/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

## Basilica of St. Mary property rezoned for school, community center in Livonia

Shelby Tankersley

Hometownlife.com

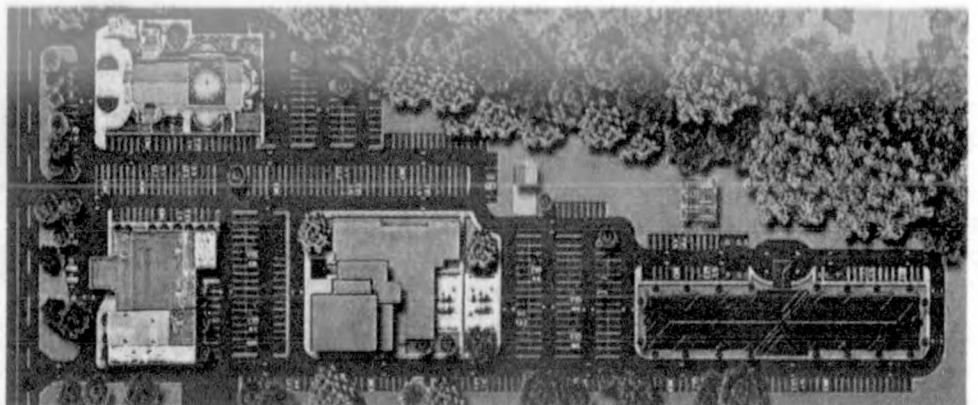
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

LIVONIA — Redevelopment of an empty field next to the Basilica of St. Mary has cleared the rezoning process.

Church leaders have said they wish to develop St. Mary's property, including 18100 Merriman Road and 30600 Brookview Drive, into a school and community center. The church has also proposed creating a senior living complex on another part of the property, which would be considered by Livonia City Council at another time.

Council voted 5-1 to rezone the property for neighborhood purposes at a meeting Monday, Dec. 4. The next step for the proposal is a site plan review.

Brandon McCullough, the council president-elect, voted in dissent of the rezoning, citing too little information. Council President Jim Jolly recused himself from the vote because he works for Fausone & Grysko, the law firm representing the church.



A rendering shows a reimagined Basilica of St. Mary campus on Merriman Road. The church wants to build a Montessori school and a senior apartment complex. COURTESY OF BASILICA OF ST. MARY

Multiple council members noted they were not approving the development by deciding to rezone the property that previously had a public lands zoning.

"If the petitioner ultimately presents plans that we as a council don't like, we can deny it," Councilman Rob Donovic said.

Many who live in the nearby neigh-

borhood are vehemently opposed to the development. Residents have cited environmental impacts and density as major concerns. Many use the field, nicknamed Bryant Field, as a park.

"You're missing some ordinances that protect natural spaces," resident

See BASILICA, Page 7A

## Something to squawk about: Shaq's Big Chicken heading to Highland

Susan Bromley

Hometownlife.com

USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

HIGHLAND — Shaquille O'Neal is giving Highland something to squawk about.

The big guy's Big Chicken restaurant will hatch next spring at 1050 Highland Road near the Enterprise Drive shopping plaza.

The location will be the second Big

Chicken to open in Michigan behind an outlet in Clio, which is scheduled for early next year, and will be followed by more than a dozen franchises as H&D Group Investments cracks the eastern Michigan chicken market with the fast-growing chain.

"Our talented partners with H&D Group Investments are a powerhouse team who have a passion for bringing

See SHAQ, Page 7A



Shaquille O'Neal's Big Chicken restaurant will open in Highland next spring. COURTESY OF BIG CHICKEN

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# Canton Chiefs could change name to Cobras

Laura Colvin

Hometownlife.com  
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PLYMOUTH — The Canton Chiefs could become the Canton Cobras.

The Plymouth-Canton Community Schools Board of Education, which voted 6-1 last summer to retire the Canton High School Chiefs mascot and arrow-head logo, heard a presentation Nov. 28 from the committee tasked with recommending a new mascot for the school.

"I want to emphasize that in recommending a new mascot, we are embracing our future," said Hal Heard, P-CCS director of high school education. "It does not change our history or legacies tied to the retired Chiefs mascot. The winning seasons, records, plaques and other positive memories will remain. The school colors of red and white will also remain."

The recommendation for replacing Chiefs with Cobras was a first reading for the board. If the board agrees with the recommendation after a second reading at a future meeting, the change will be formally adopted.

## Selecting Cobras for Canton

Heard said the selection process began early in the school year when Canton High School students were called on to submit mascot nominations.

Of 279 submissions received, Chiefs was the most common, with 55 nominations. Heard said those were eliminated. Other popular suggestions included cardinals, with 34 nominations, and cobras, with 31. Other nominations included cougars, coyotes, chargers and 140 other suggestions.

In October, a group of 43 students reviewed and discussed all the submissions to ensure compliance with district criteria such as positive representation, originality, symbolic connection, cultural sensitivity and alignment with district and school values and mission.

From there, students narrowed the list to 10 possibilities: Phoenix, Vipers,



Canton High School locator. JOHN HEIDER/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

Comets, Cardinals, Cobras, Coyotes, Cubs, Cyclones, Raptors and Cosmos.

All Canton High School students, along with seventh and eighth grade students slated to attend Canton High School, first voted for three finalists and later for a final choice.

When it was all said and done, Cobras came out in front with 53% of the vote, trailed by cardinals, with 29% and coyotes with 17%.

## Low voter turnout

Of 2,866 students eligible to vote, only about 1,100 cast a ballot in the first round and 1,000, or approximately 35%, in the second round.

Canton High School Principal David Reed-Nordwall indicated he was unsure why more students did not participate, noting the opportunity was advertised on social media, the school PA and through other methods.

"We didn't mandate or force all students to do it, so they also had the option not to participate," he said. "We tried to...have it as available as possible. Literally face-to-face, going into class-

rooms and saying, 'It's here. We encourage you to use your voice to vote.'"

"We didn't mandate or force all students to do it, so they also had the option not to participate."

Those students who were engaged in the process, however, were enthusiastic about the potential Cobra moniker.

"You don't see a lot of pro teams or high school teams or college teams that have this name," Reed-Nordwall said. "Some of the students have been very excited: 'We could be the first champions, the first Canton Cobras to win the state title. We would be the first ever.'"

## Board reactions

Trustee Sheryl Picard, who cast the sole vote against retiring the mascot and logo in July, reiterated previous statements that the board should "listen to the voices" of those who participated in a community survey where many respondents said they were against retiring the Chiefs mascot.

Picard also said she was concerned a cobra mascot did not meet the criteria, because it was not significant to the

district.

"I don't think I've ever seen a cobra running around in nature," Picard said, noting she was also concerned that cobras are "seen as religious images in Hinduism and Buddhism and other religions."

Board President Shawn Wilson said he was glad to see the criteria the committee used to vet the nominations, but he wanted a deeper dive into how each fit the established guidelines.

"This is an important decision, this represents the Canton community," Wilson said. "We want to make sure we're beyond thoughtful on how it checks these boxes. I would just love for you to pull out a little bit more of why the committee felt Cobras represented these things."

## Paying for the change

Superintendent Monica Merritt said current estimates put costs associated with changing the mascot at about \$213,000 and that some of the costs could — but may not — be funded by grants.

"You definitely are making that decision (to change the mascot) with the understanding that grant money is not guaranteed and you would dedicate your general fund to covering this decision," Merritt said.

Merritt added that costs could be lower than Okemos', for example, where the school district reportedly spent \$400,000 for a mascot change.

At Canton High School, she noted, some Chiefs logos have already been replaced with the block "C" as uniforms went through the normal replacement cycle recently. Those would not be replaced once the new mascot is adopted.

The district's annual budget also includes an allocation for uniform replacement, she added.

A recording of the Nov. 28 meeting can be viewed on Plymouth-Canton Community School's YouTube channel.

Contact reporter Laura Colvin at lcolvin@hometownlife.com or 248-221-8143.

# January groundbreaking possible for new Canton High stadium

Laura Colvin

Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

PLYMOUTH — If everything goes according to plan, Canton High School will have a new stadium, followed closely by a new addition, to begin the 2024-25 school year. The work is part of the district's \$275 million bond program passed by voters in 2020.

At a Nov. 28 meeting of the Plymouth-Canton Community Schools Board of Education, Derek Dinkeloo, a partner at TMP Architecture, gave members an overview of the plans.

The new stadium, which will be the third for the district's three-high-school campus, will be located in the northeast corner of the Plymouth-Canton Educational Park near the Joy and Canton Center roads' intersection.

A January 2024 groundbreaking is tentatively planned.

"The stadium will have the football field, striped for other sports, and the track around it, (and) bleachers around the home and visitor side," Dinkeloo

## New Stadium Site Plan



Plans show the site and scope of a new stadium and new building addition at Canton High School. PLYMOUTH-CANTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

said, noting the stadium will include seating for 1,400 on the home team's side and about 400 on the visitor side.

The new addition to Canton High School's Phase 3 complex, he said, will include a large multipurpose room, along with two team rooms and restrooms. An entry plaza with a concession stand and ticket booths will connect the new stadium and the new addition.

"All the spaces can be entered from either the stadium side, the outside, or

from the addition side on the interior depending on what the function is at the facility," Dinkeloo said.

Nick Brandon, P-CCS executive director of communications and marketing, said the district did not have architectural renderings available to show how the new facilities will look.

Brian Gesaman, project manager with McCarthy & Smith, Inc. Construction Services, said the district received a total of 116 bids from various contractors

interested in the project.

The high volume of bids, he noted, was likely due to the potential for off-season work.

"A lot of the interest we received was (for) the opportunity to work through the winter," Gesaman said.

During the Nov. 28 meeting, several board members noted collaboration in the decision to build the new facilities.

"Some of the impetus behind a third stadium was to also support our middle school sports," Trustee Patti McCain said. "Our middle school principals were very collaborative in the whole process of needing a track because we lost a track at Central and also lost a track at the PARC...and so this is also to help support our middle school athletics."

Treasurer Patrick Kehoe agreed.

"These things have stakeholder input from the athletic directors, from...parents, teachers, students," he said. "Community is part of all these things."

Completion of the stadium is currently planned for September 2024. Completion of the Phase 3 addition is projected for October 2024.

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# Four finalists chosen for Wayne city manager position

Shelby Tankersley

Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

WAYNE — The search for Wayne's next city manager is down to four candidates.

City council voted unanimously during a meeting Tuesday, Dec. 5, to conduct a second round of interviews with Wayne Police Chief Ryan Strong and three others currently serving in surrounding communities — Mohamed Ayoub, Ken Marten and Diane Webb. Council pared down their options from an original pool of seven candidates.

Council will schedule a special meeting, likely in the next two weeks, to conduct a second round of interviews. Finalists will also be asked to meet with the city's department heads.

"I'd like to see the candidates come back and speak more about what they can do for the city," Councilman Kevin Dowd said. "I think that interview would translate better to being able to

make a business decision."

The new manager will replace Lisa Nocerini, who abruptly resigned in August to take a city manager job near Grand Rapids. Nocerini is a named defendant in an ongoing federal case brought by Mark Blackwell, a city critic who claims Nocerini and other city officials violated his First Amendment rights and falsely accused him of a misdemeanor during a police chief hiring process in 2019.

Multiple council members and city department heads openly threw their support behind Strong, the city's long-time police chief, who's also been the acting city manager since Nocerini's departure. Strong has been with the city's police department for over 20 years.

"Chief Strong really blew me away with his interview. He had some strong points he brought up," Councilman Donald Quarles said. "He's already embedded into our city, and I believe his vision he has moving forward is an absolutely great vision for us."

Webb is the superintendent of Redford Township, where she's been for

three years. Multiple council members identified Webb as the most qualified candidate for the job.

"My overall recommendation would be Webb," Dowd said. "That's based on her experience and based on her depth that applies to the job."

Ayoub is currently the planning director for the City of Westland. Ayoub has been with Westland since 2019 and previously worked as a lecturer for Eastern Michigan University.

"I think he has a lot of upside," Mayor John Rhaesa said of Ayoub. "He is an up and coming person that people are looking at. I think he'd be a great fit for us."

Marten works as a clerk and village administrator for Bingham Farms, where he's been since 2018. He has also worked for Lathrup Village.

Councilman Matthew Mulholland moved to offer Marten the job, but his motion did not receive support and, consequently, was not voted on.

Contact reporter Shelby Tankersley at stankersle@hometownlife.com or 734-311-0659.



# Kickstart Toddler Soccer plans new facility in Plymouth Township

Laura Colvin

Hometownlife.com

USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

**PLYMOUTH TWP.** — Kickstart Toddler Soccer plans to open a new location in Plymouth Township.

Founded in 2010, the company serves children age 18 months to 7 years old and has locations in Livonia and seven other Metro Detroit communities.

"We have about 8,500 toddlers that come through our program every year," said owner Frank Schodowski at a Dec. 7 meeting of the Plymouth Township Planning Commission. "(Plymouth Township) probably will be our biggest site, once we get it up and running. This is an area we've been looking at for a long time to put on our map."

Schodowski plans to open the business in a vacant 9,000-square-foot building at 14556 Jib St. in the Metro

West Industrial Park located northwest of the M-14/Sheldon Road interchange.

Because the site is zoned for industrial use, the indoor recreation use proposed by Kickstart required the planning commission to consider a special land use request and hold a public hearing.

The planning commission evaluated the request against six criteria that must be met before special land use can be requested, including, for example, intensity and scale of the use in comparison to surrounding uses and conditions and consistency of the township's master plan.

A similar indoor recreational facility, The Ninja's Edge, is located nearby off Helm Street.

McKenna, the township's planning consultant firm, shared a report outlining the criteria and noted the plan complied with all requirements.

Plymouth Township resident Dale

Bernhardt was the only member of the public to speak at the public hearing, asking whether the business would provide security for children attending classes.

Schodowski said the facility would include 10 cameras and auto-lock doors.

The program, he said, is based on development of skills and does not include games with spectators, although scrimmages would be held.

"Scrimmages are a way for toddlers to implement what we've been working on in those classes," he said. "Parents are required to stay on site while the classes are going on. At 18-month and 2-year-old ranges they are required to participate on the field with their toddler, then 3 and up they have to stay on the side."

Schodowski also said he plans to sublet the space, when not in use by Kickstart, to soccer, baseball, lacrosse or other local sports organizations who would

benefit from a turf-training facility.

The planning commission unanimously approved the special land use request.

Planning Commission Chair Dennis Cebulski said he was glad to see improvements to the building's exterior.

"Compliments to you because I did see the before and after pictures of the landscaping and you did clean up the outside," he told Schodowski. "Good luck to you. Thanks for your investment in our community."

It wasn't clear when the new facility would open.

In addition to Livonia, other Metro Detroit area locations of Kickstart Toddler Soccer include Flint, Fraser, Oxford, Livonia, Sterling Heights, Shelby Township, Troy and Warren.

Contact reporter Laura Colvin at [lcolvin@hometownlife.com](mailto:lcolvin@hometownlife.com) or 248-221-8143.

## Taxpayers will spring for special elections

**Lawmakers may consider reimbursing communities**

Clara Hendrickson

Detroit Free Press

USA TODAY NETWORK

Taxpayers in metro Detroit communities in two state House districts are slated to foot the bill for special elections Gov. Gretchen Whitmer scheduled after Democratic representatives' mayoral wins left the party without a majority in the Legislature's lower chamber.

Michigan election law gives Whitmer unilateral power to decide when to hold special elections.

After swearing-in ceremonies for former state Reps. Kevin Coleman, D-Westland, and Lori Stone, D-Warren, following their mayoral victories, Whitmer added two election dates to 2024: a Jan. 30 special primary election and an April 16 general election for the 13th and 25th House districts.

Next year's crowded election calendar could mean additional costs for taxpayers residing in those communities. A House-passed bill that would have required the state to reimburse local governments for special elections that don't coincide with other contests already on the calendar stalled in the Senate before the end of the year.

Some officials have called on state lawmakers to pass a supplemental funding measure to cover the costs of

the upcoming election anyway.

Westland Clerk Richard LeBlanc estimates it will cost about \$360,000 to administer the special elections plus possible additional costs to rent polling location venues after one of the school districts in the city is not allowing him to use their buildings. Detroit Clerk Janice Winfrey estimates it will cost city taxpayers \$180,000 to \$200,000. Warren Clerk Sonja Djurovic Buffa gave a rough estimate of \$200,000. Canton Township Clerk Michael Siegrist said he doesn't know how much the special elections will cost taxpayers in his community, but doesn't expect a substantial amount, estimating around \$12,000 in payroll costs plus additional costs such as overtime for election staff costs and postage for absentee ballots.

Wayne Clerk Tina Parnell was unable to provide a cost estimate as of Monday. Dearborn Heights Clerk Lynne Senia did not respond to messages from the Free Press.

During her tenure as governor, Whitmer has scheduled a dozen special elections, but the most recent ones mark the highest-stakes such contest she's called yet with continued Democratic control of the state House on the line. She scheduled some in the past to occur on the same date as other elections on the calendar such as a 2019 special primary to fill a vacant House seat after former state Rep. Sheldon Neeley, D-Flint, won his city's mayoral election. "While elections always come with a cost, by holding the general elec-

tion on the date of an already scheduled election costs are able to be reduced," Whitmer's office said in a 2019 press release announcing the special election dates.

Asked about her decision not to use other election dates on the calendar this time, Whitmer told reporters, "it was important that we move swiftly so that these communities can have representation in the Legislature."

**Will lawmakers try to reimburse special election costs?**

State Rep. Veronica Paiz, D-Harper Woods, introduced a bill at the start of the year to reimburse communities that administer special elections on dates that don't coincide with other regularly scheduled elections. It passed with widespread bipartisan support in the state House, but the Senate Elections and Ethics Committee never held a hearing on her bill.

Paiz said lawmakers could have predicted Coleman and Stone's mayoral victories. "I'm disappointed that this hasn't passed the Senate yet," she said. "The timing was right for it."

Committee chair state Sen. Jeremy Moss, D-Southfield, didn't foreclose the possibility of legislative action next year. "We don't typically take up policy bills that have an appropriations component without first ensuring first that funding is allocated in the budget, and, up until last month, these special elections were only hypothetical," Moss

said in a text message. "Now that they are set, we'll have further conversations about next steps."

Coleman — who voted for the bill — said he wants to ask Democratic legislative leaders to pass a supplemental appropriations bill to reimburse local communities for the costs of holding the special elections. "I would encourage the Legislature to help these locals out, because that's a lot of money," he said. The Secretary of State's office also plans to ask lawmakers to appropriate funds to reimburse communities. Either way, taxpayers — whether those residing in the communities holding special elections or across the entire state — will pay for the additional costs associated with the two additional elections on the calendar.

Some of the clerks kicking off their busy election year early with the Jan. 30 special House primaries for the vacant seats, said they've never had to administer so many elections in a single year. And they said for the first time, they'll send out absentee ballots for two separate elections simultaneously between the Jan. 30 special primary and Feb. 27 presidential primary.

"My biggest concern is for the voters," said Buffa. She fears the overlap could create voter confusion and cause some to put the wrong ballot in the return envelope. Winfrey said she also worries about "voter fatigue."

"This not the year where we want a low voter turnout for (the) presidential election," she said.

## Mich. GOP plan seizes increased significance

Todd Spangler

Detroit Free Press

USA TODAY NETWORK

Time was, a voter could rely on Michigan's presidential primaries being pretty cut and dried: Both major parties, same date, pick your ballot, vote.

And that was only three years ago.

Next year, however, it's going to be more complicated, especially for Republican voters, who are going to see Michigan's role in the national nomination evolve into a two-step primary/convention process spaced out over at least five days.

We're going to explain how that process will work below. But first, it's important to know a few things. First, we're only talking about Michigan's part in deciding the major party nominees for president, not those for other offices like U.S. senator or congressperson, with those primaries still on the first Tuesday in August.

Second, this is happening courtesy of the Democratic National Committee, and President Joe Biden, who decided to revamp a calendar they believed gave too much sway to Iowa and New Hampshire, which traditionally have gone first. In doing so, they (and ultimately the state Legislature and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer) moved Michigan's primary up to the fourth Tuesday in February, which in next year's case is Feb. 27.

Michigan goes fourth nationally and a week before the slew of Super Tuesday states. (And that doesn't count the fact that New Hampshire is violating new Democratic rules that moved it back in

the calendar and won't see Biden campaigning there as a consequence.) So it could, theoretically, give the state a lot more clout politically, especially if Democrats keep the same calendar in the future.

But that day violates the Republican National Committee's (RNC) rules — still very much in effect — that say the only presidential contests before the beginning of March are supposed to be those in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina. And it wasn't going to change them just to please a Democratic president or members of his party who have long argued that Iowa and New Hampshire were not representative enough of the rest of the country to give them such prominence.

So Michigan Republicans have spent months working with the RNC to 1) keep all their delegates to the national nominating convention in Milwaukee next summer, many of which they would lose by simply awarding those delegates to whomever wins the primary Feb. 27, and 2) have that Feb. 27 public primary count for something.

And they did, but it does require some explanation.

**The primary will look like any other but ultimately decide only a portion of delegates**

If you're new to the world of presidential nominating contests, they are essentially about deciding how many delegates a candidate will receive from a given state to cast their votes for him or her at the national nominating conven-

tions held each presidential election year during the summer.

Since we're talking about Republicans here, they have 2,470 delegates to be selected nationally, spread across the states, with a candidate needing 1,236 to become the nominee. (This comes from the Green Papers, an online site that methodically tracks the ins and outs of the nominating and voting process; Democrats, by the way, have 4,541 delegates, with 2,271 needed to nominate.)

Michigan Republicans will, barring some change, award 55 delegates in all. And, if all goes according to plan, they shouldn't lose a single delegate either, even with a portion being awarded in proportion to the results of a primary held before March.

Just like any other recent primary year, registered voters in Michigan wanting to vote for a presidential candidate from the Republican or Democratic field in 2024 will get that party's ballot and do so (either through early voting, requesting and returning an absentee ballot, or in person at their polling places on primary day).

But not all of the Republican's 55 delegates will be awarded according to that popular vote. Instead, 16 so-called at-large delegates (meaning they're not being doled out to the candidates according to congressional districts, which will come into play later) will be awarded.

**Then comes the state nominating convention**

For Michigan Democrats, that's about it — their primary vote will sort out

which candidates get 117 of their 140 delegates, with the rest being unpledged delegates we used to refer to as "super-delegates." (In the primary, Democratic presidential candidates need at least 15% of the primary vote to receive any delegates, 40 of whom are awarded statewide and the rest split according to the winners in Michigan's 13 congressional districts.)

Republican candidates, however, have to go through another step in the process: a state convention to be held on Saturday, March 2.

There — presumably at one as-yet-unnamed site, though it could be at several if the state Republican Party were to decide otherwise — the remaining 39 delegates are to be awarded according to a vote of convention participants (who are also called delegates but that's confusing). Those participants will be selected in each of the state's 13 congressional districts. (Those convention participants will be selected at county GOP meetings across the state on Feb. 15.)

In essence, the nominating convention will consist of 13 separate conventions, one for each congressional district, with the presidential candidates (or perhaps their surrogates) going around and campaigning before each group takes a vote. Each gets three delegates to award, adding up to 39 in all.

If a candidate gets a majority of the congressional district participants' votes, he or she gets all three delegates. If no one gets a majority, then the candidate with the highest tally gets two and whoever comes in next gets one.



# Wayne-Westland schools cut staff, talk private bus service

Shelby Tankersley  
Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

WESTLAND — Wayne-Westland Community Schools employees say recent layoffs and talk of privatizing district transportation services feel like a slap in the face.

Both actions are happening following the recent discovery of a budget shortfall in the district. Superintendent John Dignan and his administrative staff are trying to make budget cuts to avoid the state of Michigan taking control of day-to-day operations.

The most recent budget cut — 39 part- and full-time positions — was announced Dec. 1. The layoffs go into effect when the winter semester begins in January. Some positions have been reclassified so they can be paid through grant funds.

"I'm concerned about the direction this district is going," said Jeff Marti, president of the Michigan Education Association Local 4, which represents the district's part-time employees. "We really haven't seen what money is being saved with layoffs and we still haven't seen a plan from the administration on what we're doing."

Wayne-Westland employs more than 1,600 people and has roughly 9,800 students enrolled.

Dignan said the layoffs are an attempt to cut costs without disrupting district operations.

"We have been able to identify areas where change can occur without impacting the essential educational services being provided to our students and families," the superintendent said in an emailed statement. "As a result, Wayne-Westland Community Schools notified individuals of layoffs and restructuring in this effort to begin to right-size the district."

Wayne-Westland is also looking at whether it will hire a private transportation company, a move that would likely cut costs and, staff members fear, lead to lost jobs. The district's board of education is expected to vote on the propos-



Wayne-Westland Community Schools Superintendent John Dignan speaks with a community member at a 2022 city of Westland event. SHELBY TANKERSLEY/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM FILE

al at its next meeting, Dec. 18.

"We feel upset and frustrated," said Jonathan Turner, a bus driver and graduate of the district. "Some of these people have many years in the district and they have forged bonds with students and parents that can't be replaced."

Marti said most of his union members have been with Wayne-Westland schools for generations. Local 4 includes bus drivers, custodians, student monitors and food service workers. Marti said the Michigan Education Association believes the decision to explore privatizing transportation is an unfair labor practice in violation of the union's current contract, in place until June 2025, and the union may fight the issue in court.

"We negotiated in good faith," Marti said. "We're still under contract, and for them to just one day pull this privatiza-

tion card out, is not typical. Typically, you'd see that at the end of a contract, not in the middle of a school year."

Marti and Turner both said they've been left with more questions than answers and are disappointed by the district they've given so many hours to.

"With my members, many of us went through Wayne-Westland Community Schools. Our kids went through it and our grandkids went through it," Marti said. "We are part of this community and we really, really take pride in that. That's why we take so much pride in our work."

Wayne-Westland has long struggled with administrative issues. Staff took significant pay reductions during the Great Recession and the district's last superintendent, Shelley Holt, resigned after staff claimed she abused her position.

## Franklin student hit by car while walking to school

Shelby Tankersley  
Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

LIVONIA — A Livonia Franklin High School student was struck by a vehicle while walking to school Dec. 4.

According to Livonia Public Schools, the student was evaluated by emergency medical personnel and, after being determined unharmed, reported to class.

The crash happened at the Joy Road and Liberty Street intersection, which is directly in front of the school. Earlier this year, Livonia Public Schools administrators described the area as the single most dangerous intersection for students walking to school in the district.

School and city officials have been pushing Wayne County, the entity responsible for crosswalks and road signals on major roads in Livonia, to make improvements. Crossing guard services are usually reserved for elementary students, leaving middle and high school students to cross roads on their own.

"We would like to remind drivers to take extra caution while driving on Joy Road, particularly during the early morning hours when it's dark outside and many students are walking onto campus," Franklin Principal Andrew Pesci said in a letter to parents Monday.

In his letter, Pesci noted that Livonia Public Schools reached out to Wayne County again following the incident. Nearby, the Wayne-Westland Community Schools district has also seen students hit while trying to walk to or from school.

Get the latest headlines for metro Detroit every morning in your mailbox by signing up for our daily briefings newsletter.

Contact reporter Shelby Tankersley at [stankersle@hometownlife.com](mailto:stankersle@hometownlife.com) or 734-311-0659.

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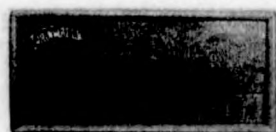
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FIND THE WORDS

This is a theme puzzle with the subject stated at right. Find the listed words in the grid. They may run in any direction but always in a straight line. Some letters are used more than once. Ring each word as you find it and when you have completed the puzzle, there will be 14 letters left over. They spell out the alternative theme of the puzzle.

ADSL	Disc	Keys	SAMES
Bars	Dots	Laptop	Screen
Beta	Edit	Malware	saver
Binary	Email	Menu	Solid state
Bits	Fast	Modem	Store
Boot	File	Mouse	Tape
Bugs	Firewire	Network	Tuner
Byte	Floppy	Peripheral	Type
Cache	Format	Power	USB hub
Card	Google	supply	Video
Chip	HTML	Printer	
Click	iMac	Remove	
Copy	iPad	Runs	

TODAY'S ANSWER

Analogue is dead

Digital age

S P O T P A L A N C L M T H A  
L A O Y P P O L F A S T E G U  
U B M A L W A R E M T S C N S  
S A E E S D I B S I I G S T U  
B R D T S C O P Y Y D U I A E  
H S O L I D S T A T E B D P L  
U D M T A M R O F D E K L E G  
B Y L P P U S R E W O P I C O  
I O P E R I P H E R A L A H O  
N E O U I M O U S E O C M I G  
A I N T N V I D E O H T E P C  
R S N E T W O R K E S D S E L  
Y A P R E V A S N E E R C S I  
D Y C A R D E R I W E R I F C  
T U N E R E M O V E F I L E K

NEWSDAY CROSSWORD

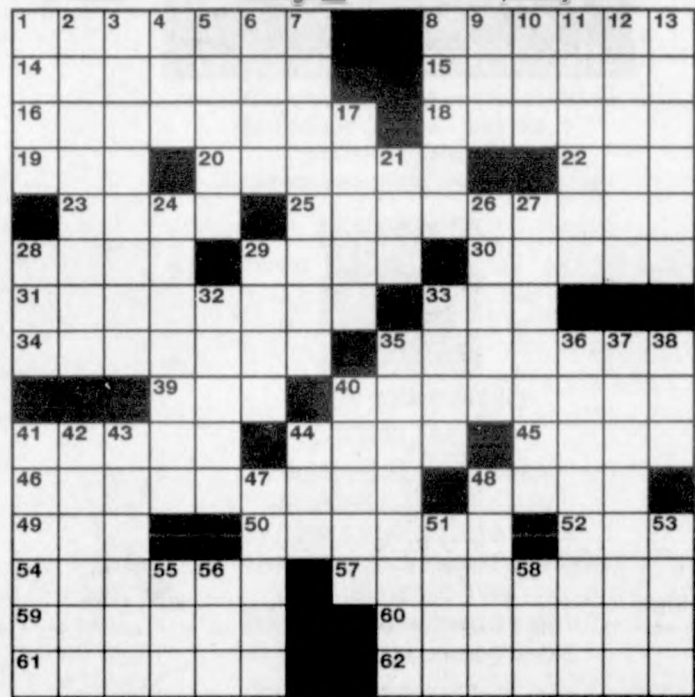
ACROSS

- 1 Drinks favored by Hemingway  
8 Music icon knighted in 2003  
14 Explanatory tool  
15 Literally, "little grapes"  
16 Ends, often  
18 Comeback  
19 Bar designation: Abbr.  
20 Rough housing  
22 Pinch hitter's hope  
23 Mug  
25 Something worn on a hood  
28 Fudge alternative  
29 Defeat  
30 Jordan's only seaport  
31 Romeo or Juliet  
33 Rugrats dad  
34 Purchase before going to court  
35 Dictionary directive  
39 Attendance bk. notation  
40 '97 film with the tagline "Coming soon. Honest."  
41 Tribe in the *Little House*... books  
44 Jazz duo in Vancouver  
45 Woody Guthrie, e.g.  
46 Blackballed  
48 Belgian chanson master  
49 Caper film narrator, often  
50 *Sesame Street* shopkeeper  
52 Obedience school no-no  
54 Carthaginian, e.g.  
57 Warning heading  
59 Chain on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge

DOWN

- 1 Game-ending word  
2 Racking up charges  
3 Intricate fabric pattern  
4 Character  
5 Exactions  
6 \_\_\_ delta (Concorde wing shape)  
7 It's east of Rochester  
8 One taking up charges  
9 Ancient salutation  
10 Word before check or course  
11 Mass movement  
12 Thing secured with a post  
13 Only externally visible part of the central nervous system  
17 Sound betraying boredom  
21 Cause headaches for  
24 Boxer's destination  
26 Any of 26 in 1959-60 prime time  
27 Wretchedness  
28 Nielsen Ratings data category  
29 Nancy Drew pal  
32 Honor for four presidents  
33 High \_\_\_

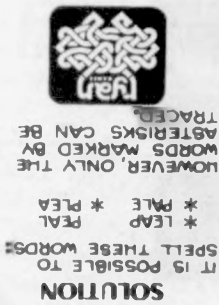
- 35 Some poker accumulations  
36 Good representation  
37 Dress down  
38 Silicon Forest loc.  
40 Dud  
41 Showed more patience than  
42 Hiding place  
43 Wheeler's refrain  
44 Chaotic scene  
47 \_\_\_ cold  
48 Bumper sticker verb  
51 \_\_\_ second (trance, in France)  
53 Menial  
55 "Traditional" plan  
56 Rorschach card complement  
58 Impetus for Fogg's journey



CREATORS SYNDICATE © 2023 STANLEY NEWMAN STANXWORDSBAG.COM

12/9/23

TODAY'S ANSWER

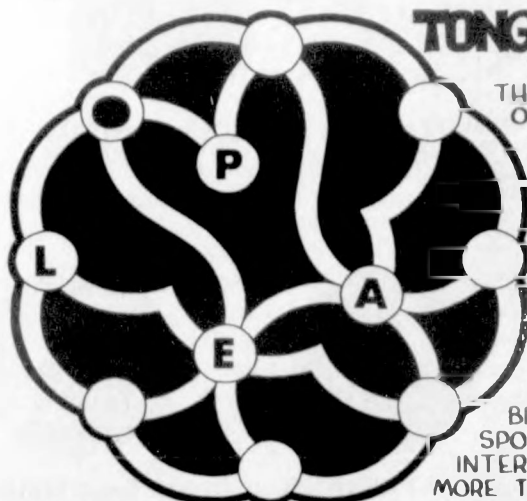


12/9/23



PUZZLES & POSERS

TONGUE TWISTER



THIS PUZZLE CONSISTS OF TWO SEPARATE CHALLENGES:

1. SEE HOW MANY DIFFERENT WORDS YOU CAN UNSCRAMBLE WHICH CONTAIN ALL THE LETTERS AT LEFT.  
2. SEE HOW MANY OF THESE WORDS YOU CAN TRACE WITH A CONTINUOUS LINE. EACH TRACING MUST BEGIN AT THE BLACK SPOT. NO PASSAGE OR INTERSECTION MAY BE USED MORE THAN ONCE PER WORD.

SUDOKU | CREATORS

Insert numbers 1-9 in each box with every row, column and 3x3 box containing the digits just once. Difficulty level ranges from Bronze (easiest) to Silver to Gold (hardest) RATING: GOLD

TODAY'S ANSWER

6	7	8	9	1	5	4	3	2
3	1	2	5	4	6	7	8	9
2	1	7	3	6	4	5	8	9
3	5	4	8	7	6	1	9	2
8	6	1	9	5	2	3	4	7
6	7	2	4	1	3	5	8	9
4	6	7	2	7	2	5	9	6
7	2	5	1	6	9	8	3	4
1	5	3	2	8	4	9	7	6

		5	2			9		
		8		9	1		3	
4	9					2		
	7		4					
8		1		5		3		7
					6		9	
		7					5	8
	8		7	2		4		
		3			8	7		

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## Shaq

Continued from Page 1A

BIG fun to more families throughout eastern Michigan," Big Chicken CEO Josh Halpern said. "They have a great understanding of what Big Chicken is all about, and we're thrilled to see how they will continue to scale the brand's presence across the Midwest. Let's grow, Highland!"

Big Chicken was founded in 2018 by NBA Hall-of-Famer Shaquille O'Neal, JRA Hospitality and Authentic Brands Group.

The fast casual chain features crispy chicken sandwiches and tenders, as well as new takes on the NBA legend's favorite foods from his childhood, including "Lucille's Mac n' Cheese," which adds a Cheez-it crust to his mom's recipe.

According to the restaurant's web-



Some of the many offerings of Big Chicken include crispy chicken sandwiches, jalapeno slaw, fries, and Lucille's Mac n' Cheese.

COURTESY OF BIG CHICKEN

site, each menu item — which also includes hand-crafted ice cream shakes, jalapeno slaws, and several varieties of fries — "tells a story, all while offering guests an inside look into the life and personality of Shaquille O'Neal."

Big Chicken currently has 12 traditional restaurants, as well as several more kiosks in arenas across 15 states and also can be found on three Carnival cruise ships.

O'Neal often makes surprise visits to Big Chicken locations, spokesperson Peyton Harvey said, and this week, he was planning a visit in Arizona. If he makes visits to his soon-to-be-opening Michigan locations, they will be unannounced.

"We're not publicizing, because in the past it has gotten out of hand," Harvey said ruefully. "Houston was the first location he visited and the fire marshal had to shut it down."

Shaq already surprised Michigan earlier this year when he gifted shoes and other apparel to a grateful Goodrich teen with size 23 feet. And that's nothing to cluck about.

Contact Susan Bromley at sbromley@hometownlife.com or at 517-281-2412.

## Basilica

Continued from Page 1A

Colleen Badgero said. "I don't think endless development is inevitable. I think we can change course and protect these spaces that are important."

Church leaders have said they're willing to work with nearby residents to create something people can accept. But, residents say the space is good as it is.

"If this many people who live nearby oppose this, that doesn't mean it should proceed," resident Kevin Skyless said.

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Contact reporter Shelby Tankersley at stankersle@hometownlife.com or 734-311-0659.

## Changes

Continued from Page 1A

put money into programs that you're looking to fund."

A town hall meeting at which Plante Moran and district administrators will further explain how conclusions were reached is planned for 6 to 7:30 p.m. Dec. 11 at the Milford High School Performing Arts Center.

At the Dec. 18 board of education meeting, the board will have separate votes on both the strategic plan recommendations and the bond proposal. If approved by the board, the bond proposal would be put on the ballot in May.

### Community group examined options

Superintendent Paul Salah noted district officials began looking at the strategic plan in September 2022, with a committee of 50 community members.

The committee, split into six groups, examined four different scenarios developed by Plante Moran Realpoint, and five of the six groups chose as their preferred option "scenario C," which would build a new middle school at the Milford



Oak Valley Middle School will be affected by changes in the strategic plan.

HOMETOWN LIFE FILE PHOTO

High School campus. The sixth group chose "scenario A," which would renovate Muir Middle School.

Both options close Oak Valley as a middle school, but use it for other programs, including Harbor High, adult education, special education programs, and district-sponsored parks and recreation programs. In the future, the school may also be considered for early childhood education.

Oak Valley was chosen for repurposing due to its proximity to the northwest quadrant of the district and because it's a newer building that still has "a lot of life left in it," Salah said. It would remain

a middle school next year and be repurposed for Harbor High in the 2025-26 school year, at which time the Brooks Center, which currently houses Harbor High, would close.

Middle school students from Oak Valley would be split between White Lake Middle School and Muir Middle School until a new middle school could be built on the Milford High School campus, possibly opening in the 2027-28 school year or, at the latest, the 2028-29 school year.

Constructing a new middle school on the Milford High campus offers numerous advantages for such things as en-

hanced career technical education, gifted and talented programs, sharing teaching staff, and implementation of two-tiered busing, Salah said.

Transportation changes in which middle school and high school students are bused together would generate an estimated savings of \$13 million to \$18 million over 10 years. In addition to the financial benefit, it could result in a large benefit for sleep-deprived teens — a delayed school starting time, already implemented in Novi.

The recommended strategic plan would close the administrative building, which would be razed, and move the offices into Milford High School, which would likely take place in the 2025-26 school year. Also implemented at that time would be redrawn school boundary lines (which will be finalized by December 2024).

"I am extraordinarily proud of the work that the committee has done," Salah said, adding that the zero tax rate increase bond also includes a significant amount of money allocated for safety and security in the schools. "They asked a lot of questions to get us where we are today and recommended a plan that is not only a cost savings to the district, but provides an exemplary learning experience for our students."

## STYLISH SENIOR LIVING AT Fox Run

### THE Brighton LARGE ONE BEDROOM

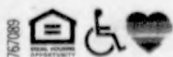
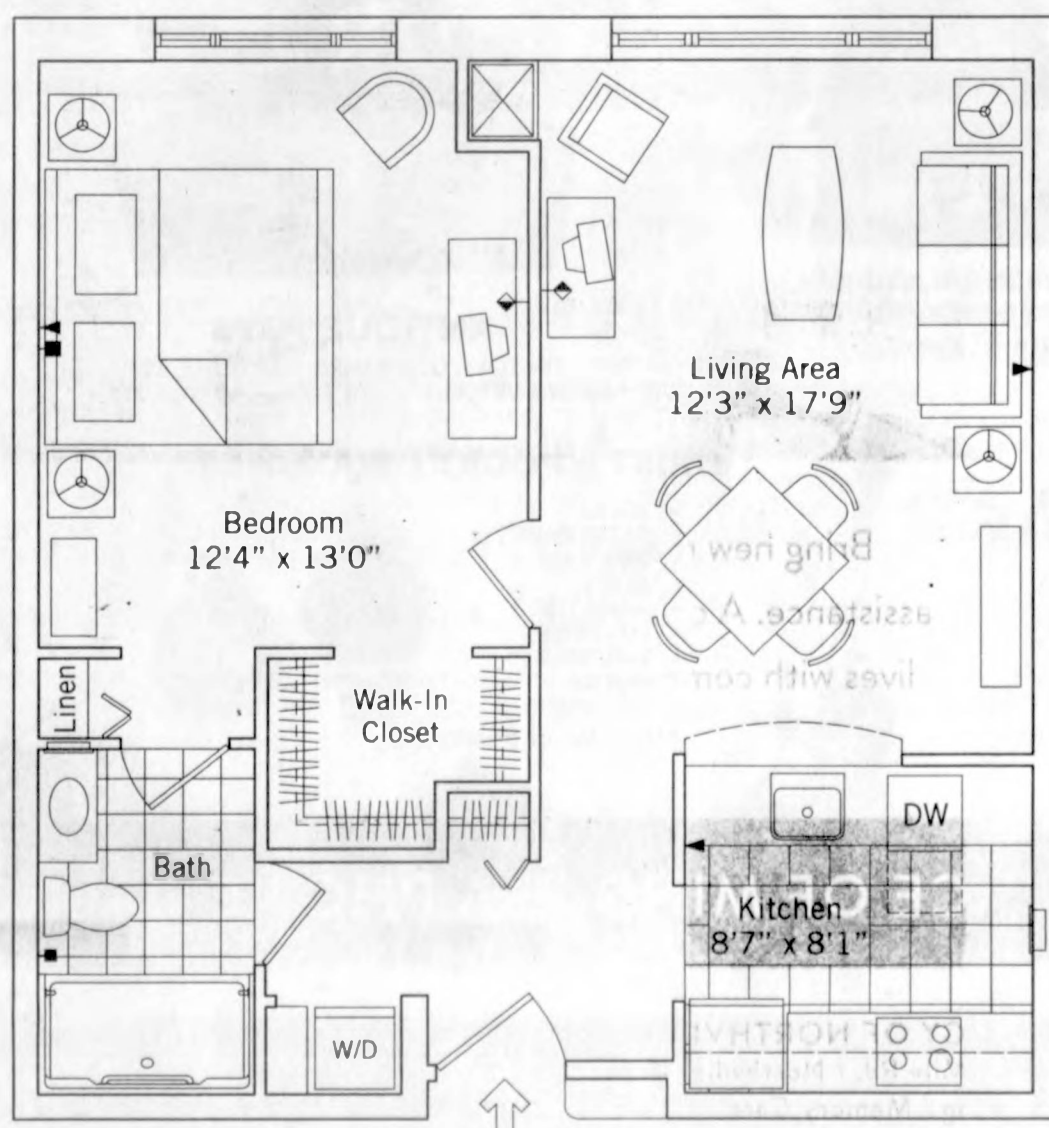
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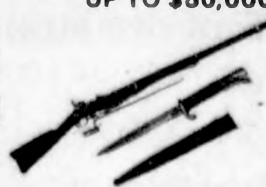
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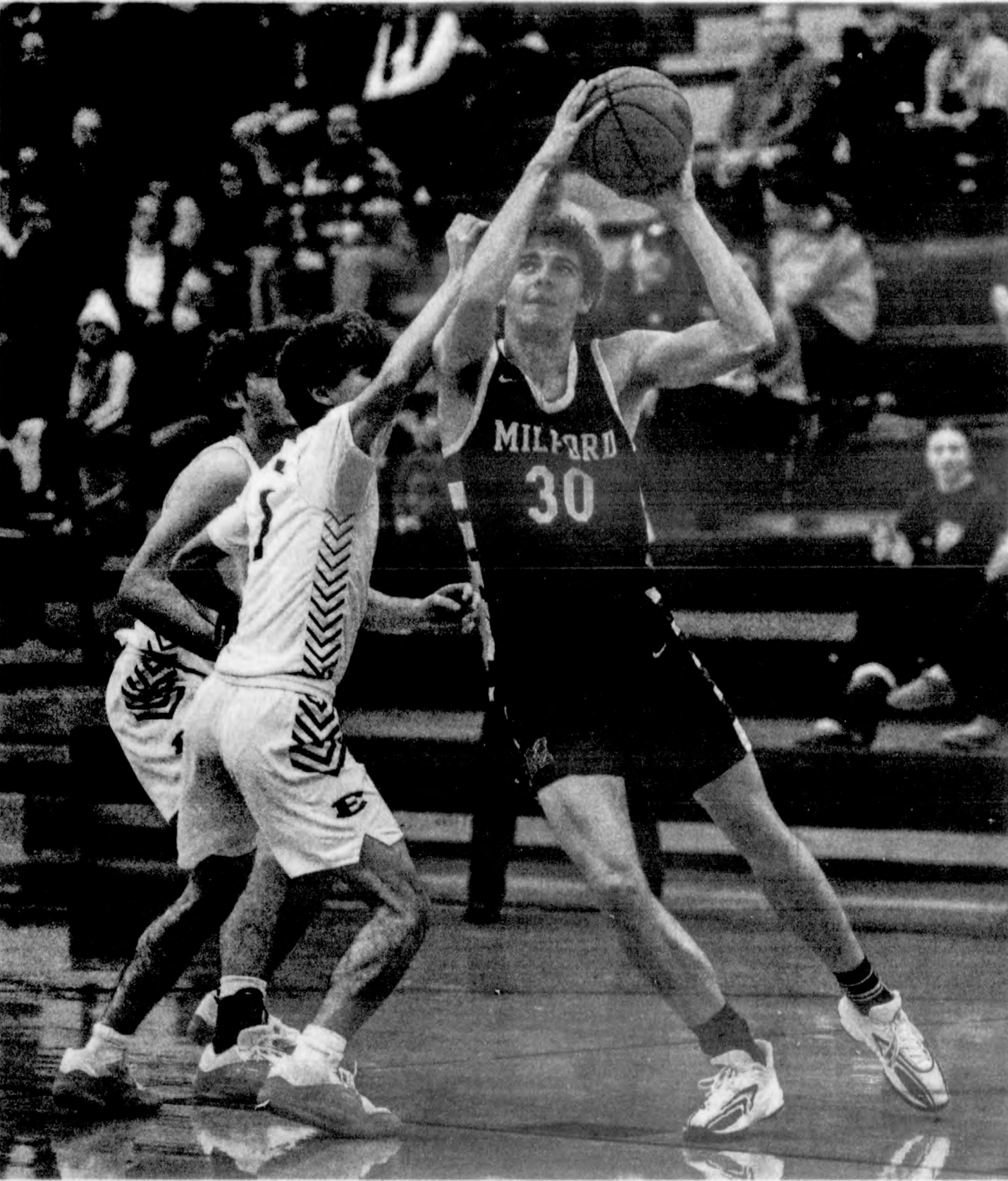
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# SPORTS



Milford's Jimmy Stevenson scores down low during a Lakes Valley Conference boys basketball game on Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2023, at South Lyon East. BRANDON FOLSOM/HOMETOWN LIFE

## Milford basketball wins scrum at South Lyon East

**Brandon Folsom**  
Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

As the Milford boys basketball team worked the ball around the perimeter to kill as much clock as it possibly could in the waning moments, that's when the student section started chanting. "Just like football!" And what fitting words they were.

Because the Lakes Valley Conference matchup on Dec. 5 was about as close to a football game as you could get. The Mavericks erased a five-point halftime deficit by playing gritty defense, battling hard to win offensive rebounds and outlasting host South Lyon East to earn a 57-47 victory on Tuesday. Just how scrappy was it out there? Guard Carson Lutz took a shot to the face and was forced to leave the game

with a bloody nose. The junior also received a small gash on his shin. Welcome to the LVC, where this kind of dogfight is to be expected. Last year's conference race finished with a three-way tie for first place between Milford, East and Waterford Mott, all three securing 12-4 records in league play.

See BASKETBALL, Page 6B

## Franklin has most interesting roster in KLAA

**Brandon Folsom**  
Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

After the opening night of the girls basketball season on Dec. 4, Livonia Franklin was already 2-0 overall.

Well, kind of. Hold on, we can explain. Not only did the Patriots beat Walled Lake Central 32-14, but most of their roster was on hand to defeat the Vikings in the JV game as well.

That's because of Franklin's limited roster size. While it has 10 players on the varsity, seven of them also play on the JV as fifth-quarter rule players.

What's the fifth-quarter rule? In 2020, the Michigan High School Athletic Association created a rule that allows football and basketball players, mostly underclassmen, to play five quarters in one day. Meaning, a player could play a full JV game and then play in one quarter on the varsity. Plenty of schools take advantage of this rule, mainly to get their up-and-comers some experience at the varsity level.

Franklin is using the rule a bit differently because of its lack of depth.

Here's how it works: Those seven girls will usually have all four quarters available for the varsity games and then they'll each make an appearance in one quarter on the JV.

When asked how she's keeping track of it all, coach Colleen Flaherty's face resembled the infamous meme of actor Zach Galifianakis attempting to do math in his head during the movie "The Hangover."

"Math is my thing," the first-year coach joked. "So it's a puzzle, and that's how it all falls into place. We have seven five-quarter kids on our team, and we make sure that the kids that make an impact on varsity have four of their slots available to them when they come to the varsity game from playing on the JV.

"They're slotted in one quarter at a time on JV, and our JV coach does a great job of making sure that they're available for me on the varsity to play. It's going to be a lot of math puzzles as the season goes on, and, hopefully, we can stay healthy. As soon as we're not healthy, there's going to be a lot more planning as far as who's going to be available on JV and who's going to be available on varsity."

Fortunately for Flaherty, she does have two seniors in Emerson Nordbeck

See ROSTER, Page 4B

## Brother Rice football coach Adam Korzeniewski resigns after 7 seasons

**Brandon Folsom**  
Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

The Brother Rice football team will have a new coach in 2024.

The school announced in a press release Dec. 5 that Adam Korzeniewski has resigned after leading the Warriors for the past seven seasons.

Under his leadership, Brother Rice went 40-33 and made playoff appear-

ances in each of his first six seasons, including winning district championships in 2021 and 2022. However, this past fall, the Warriors were winless for the first time since 1963.

Korzeniewski, who was the defensive coordinator at Birmingham Seaholm before joining Brother Rice, will remain at the school as the associate athletic director.

"We appreciate all what Coach K has worked to achieve at Brother Rice dur-



Korzeniewski

ing his seven years as Head Coach and previously as an assistant," Brother Rice athletic director Jeff Calcaterra wrote in a press release. "As a man of outstanding character, his leadership helped provide our students with a football experience they will draw upon for the rest of their lives."

Before leaving for Seaholm, Korze-

niewski, who attended Grosse Pointe North and played linebacker at Western Michigan University in the 1990s, spent three seasons as a defensive coordinator under Michigan Sports Hall of Fame coach Al Fracassa, who coached the Warriors from 1969-2013, won 430 games and nine state championships and sent more than 300 players to play in college.

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# Does Canton boys basketball have the most improved player in KLAA?

Brandon Folsom

Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

The search for the most improved player in the Kensington Lakes Activities Association is over.

Because it's going to be hard for anyone to top the growth that Teddy Winstel showed during the Canton boys basketball team's 72-39 victory over Detroit Country Day in its season opener on Dec. 1.

As a sophomore, Winstel was merely a role player. Albeit, it was an important role. It was his job to play tough defense on guards, not turn over the ball and help get the ball to Canton's scorers, such as Lake Superior State University signee Omar Suleiman and Siena Heights University's Dante Favor, as well as Bradley Eziuka.

But Suleiman and Favor, two Hometown Life All-Area first-teamers in 2022-23, are now playing in college. And with them went a large chunk of the team's offensive and defensive production.

Entering this winter, it was no secret that Canton was in dire need of someone to step up and help replace the two best players from last year's KLAA championship team.

Winstel took that challenge head-on. Call it a labor of love for Winstel in the off-season, as the junior worked with his teammates to improve his game. He worked with Canton assistant Bob Blohm — whom its home court is named after — to improve his shot. And Eziuka, a Kalamazoo College signee who's arguably one of the best returning seniors in the league, helped him improve his leadership.

"He was a tough guy last year. He had some fight, but he was a little bit more of a role player," said Eziuka, who scored a game-high 26 points against the Yellowjackets. "But we expected him to take a step up this year. He worked in the off-season with me, and we both worked together. His work ethic is unmatched. He works so hard."



Canton's Bradley Eziuka pulls down a rebound during a non-conference boys basketball game against Detroit Country Day on Friday, Dec. 1, 2023.

BRANDON FOLSOM/HOMETOWN LIFE

"He doesn't miss a lot, and he was just a beast in the off-season, so it's not really a surprise that he's showing it here early this season. We expected this from him."

And what is this?

That's the incredible effort Winstel put forth in the opening half against DCDS, helping Canton erase an early 7-2 deficit, go on a handful of big runs and enter halftime with a commanding 39-15 lead.

First, it started with the 6-foot-1 junior's hustle plays on defense. Then, it was his shooting. He knocked down back-to-back jumpers, including a fade-away from the elbow and a 3-pointer to put Canton ahead for the first time.

And then he knocked down another 3 to ignite a 9-1 run to close out the first quarter.

He scored all 11 of his points in the opening half, and no shot was bigger than his catch-and-shoot 3-pointer from the wing with 33.5 seconds left in

the second. That death knell all but ensured that DCDS would not be making any sort of comeback in the second half, and it resulted in Winstel emphatically flexing at halfcourt with Eziuka in celebration.

"It's awesome being a main guy in this offense now, and we're a great team," Winstel said. "Being a main guy is nice because you're a big part of wins and get to be in front of this crowd. It's nice scoring a lot."

"But to make this transition, I put a lot of work in the offseason to get to this point. My role has definitely changed a lot, and that comes from working throughout the offseason. Summer league games. Putting up hundreds and hundreds of shots. Working with Bob on my shots. Thanks to him, he's really improved my shot. My role has definitely increased, so I'm really happy about that."

And that increased role will be important. Not only is Canton without Suleiman and Favor this winter, but it has only 10 players, one of the smallest rosters it has ever had.

But it's a good 10, with five seniors and five juniors, and eight of them saw varsity minutes a year ago.

The seniors include Eziuka, three-star football recruit Caleb Williams (who is a steady ballhandler), Grand Valley State University football signee Devon Pettus (the team's resident bulldog on defense and under the basket), reliable shooter Alexander Persinger and Joey Pierson, the team's tallest dedicated post player.

The juniors are Winstel, Lemuel Pettway, Chase Harlin, Kessler Blakita and Nick Hurley.

Canton is a fundamentally strong program, one that doesn't make too many mistakes when doing the little things. But its biggest deficit is height. When Pierson and Pettus are not on the floor, for example, that forces Eziuka, a traditional shooting guard, to play in the post. And while Eziuka, who is 6-4, does well forcing double teams, drawing fouls and banging around down on the

block, it means he's not on the perimeter where he excels the most.

And that's another reason why Winstel's growth will be a boon for Canton. He should carry some of the guard play if Eziuka can't physically be in the backcourt. And he proved he's capable of doing that against DCDS.

Winstel truly is the most improved player in the league, right?

"Hopefully, hopefully," coach Jimmy Reddy said. "It happened this summer. He started taking more of a leadership role and more of a scoring role. He plays very hard, so he's got all of those attributes to become a really good player here. He was a star in his role last year, for sure."

"We talked about how we've got to replace a lot of production from Omar and Dante on both ends of the floor. So we needed people to step up, and Teddy is definitely a guy who showed that in the summer and continued to grow into more of a scoring threat for us."

Reddy believes it's Winstel's attitude that sets him apart from most players.

"He's a kid who's just going to keep getting better because he wants to, right?" Reddy added. "He's willing to. Everyone wants to be good, but he's willing to do the things to be great. The sky is the limit for him, man. He's going to keep grinding to get great this year, and then he'll have another good off-season before his senior year."

Canton returned this winter minus two college basketball players from a year ago. But with guys such as Winstel stepping up and showing improvement, it's easy to see why the coaches around the league predicted Canton to once again win the KLAA-West in the preseason coaches poll. Winstel's work ethic is infectious, and he shouldn't be the only former role player making strides this winter. And that could mean more hardware for their team by the end of the season.

Brandon Folsom covers high school sports in metro Detroit for Hometown Life. Follow him on Twitter @folsom-brandonj.

## Selflessness from Idris Cotton helps Plymouth win 1st game

Brandon Folsom

Hometownlife.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

The Plymouth boys basketball team wouldn't have held on late to beat Zeeland East 55-53 on Dec. 2 to earn its first victory of the winter without Idris Cotton returning for his senior season.

The three-star offensive lineman's future is sewed up. He's firmly committed to Northwestern and is prepared to play in the Big Ten very soon. He'll make that decision official on signing day on Dec. 20.

It would've been completely understandable had he forgone playing basketball this winter to prevent any possible injuries from affecting his football future. You don't need to look far around metro Detroit before finding other future college football players who are sitting out their senior basketball seasons. It's a business decision, really.

But Cotton is not that type of guy. He's still got unfinished business in both basketball and track (he was an all-state finisher in the shot put last spring). Plus, he's not about to let down his best friends when they need him.

And the Wildcats (1-1) needed him against the Chix.

Yes, it was, essentially, a meaningless non-conference game. The result wasn't going to matter in the final Kensington Lakes Activities Association-West standings. But, actually, the matchup did have some meaning to it.

The whole reason Zeeland East made the almost 175-mile trip east to play the Wildcats was for second-year Plymouth coach Andrew Meeuswen, who graduated from East and still has family on the west side of Michigan.

This wasn't just about picking up a win for the Wildcats but also giving their coach a bit of a homecoming. Heck, even Meeuswen's parents made the trip over to watch the game at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park.

And it would've been a sad finish for the Meeuswen family had Plymouth not pulled it out.

The Wildcats held a commanding 14-point lead early in the fourth quarter until standout guard Lucas Porter drove to the basket and was fouled hard while trying to finish at the rim. The 6-foot-4 senior ultimately left the game with an



Plymouth's Idris Cotton scores down low during a non-conference boys basketball game against Zeeland East on Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023.

BRANDON FOLSOM/HOMETOWN LIFE

injury, visited the trainer's room and spent the rest of the evening at the end of Plymouth's bench.

On the court, his team struggled without him. Most of that had to do with it being early in the winter and several of Plymouth's younger guards not having experience moving the ball against East's full-court pressure. And that tactic worked for the Chix, who went on a 12-4 run late in the fourth quarter to trim their deficit to just 46-44. That included East senior Layne Risdon slamming down a dunk, drawing a foul and making the ensuing and-one attempt to reinvigorate his team with some energy.

While a pair of timeouts helped Plymouth sort out its backcourt issues, playing steady was its 6-4, 290-pound center, Cotton, who inbounded the ball, played tough defense in the paint and secured frequent rebounds.

It was his offensive rebound and tough put-back that drew an and-one with 1:43 left that essentially kept the Wildcats ahead once and for all.

"He's a load," Meeuswen said. "He's doing everything on both sides of the floor. He's kind of sneaky at it, but he's a real good defender. He's got good feet. He's got a soft touch around the rim. We're really excited that he's back."

Sneaky is one way to put it.

All evening, Cotton was making big-time plays, despite finishing with just eight points.

Early in the second quarter, the ball got kicked out to him for a wide-open 3-pointer in the corner. Instead of attempting the shot, he made an extra pass around the horn for Porter, who had an even more wide-open 3 attempt, one Porter drained to kickstart a 10-2 run that ensured an eventual 29-21 lead entering halftime.

At the end of the third, Cotton had another beautiful swing pass, once again to Porter, who knocked down the 3-pointer to put the Wildcats ahead by 13 points, their second biggest lead.

"I wasn't ready to go to college yet," Cotton said about his decision not to enroll early at Northwestern. "I wanted to finish up basketball because I've played it my whole life, and I wanted to finish track season and, hopefully, win states in that. I've got a few more goals I want to accomplish before I get to the next level."

Surprisingly enough, Cotton admitted that basketball used to be his main sport. That was, of course, before he gained weight during the COVID-19 quarantine and started garnering interest as a monstrous blocker at football camps.

But his size should also be a boon on the court for Plymouth, which is trying to replace 6-11 center Kelvin Amoako, who had a breakout season as a senior a year ago and signed with the University of Indianapolis at the Division II level.

"We're very excited to have him back," Meeuswen reiterated about Cotton. "It was a good conversation we had at the end of the year (last season). I said, 'You've got to do what's best for you,' and he said, 'No, coach, I'm playing hoops.' We might have talked one or two times since then, but he always had the same answer. He'd say, 'I'm excited for hoops, and I love these guys,' and he's got a couple of his close buddies on the team."

"Obviously, I'm excited because he's quite a good basketball player for us."

The best news? Plymouth has a handful of other "good" basketball players right now.

Outside of Porter, who should be one of the top guards in the KLAA-West, the Wildcats also brought back Zack Jones,

who took over the game offensively when Plymouth needed it the most Saturday.

The senior, who played sparingly as a role player last year, dominated the ball. He scored on drives to the hoop, knocked down jumpers and earned plenty of trips to the foul line before finishing with a game-high 25 points.

"Yes, I've 100% been wanting to step up since last year," Jones said. "I'm just glad I got the opportunity today because I worked all summer. Iron sharpens iron. Our guys have worked super hard, and it's just made me better."

How does Jones go from a role player to becoming the leading scorer? Well, some of that had to do with Bryce Garbacz, who was the team's top shooting threat, graduating and signing with Alma College following the 2022-23 season.

Patiently, Jones waited for his time to shine. And during the off-season, he put in the effort it takes to be as good of a scorer as Garbacz, and it's starting to show for Plymouth.

"Zack was a role guy last year," Meeuswen said. "He might have started a handful of games last year. But since last March, he's been in the gym probably every single day. He and Lucas are gym rats. They love the game. They're going to the rec. They're finding a place to play. It doesn't matter if it's raining out, he's getting shots up, and he's improved."

"He's worked on ballhandling, and he's quite the player, and he's put on a lot of weight (gotten stronger). He and Lucas, they've been getting in the gym and finding a way to get stronger. They're really dedicated, and it's paying off."

It certainly paid off on Saturday.

The Wildcats earned their first win of the season. Meeuswen got to beat his old high school. They saw glimpses of how good they should be this season with Jones taking over, even when Porter was sidelined with an injury. And Cotton showed that his decision to return for his senior year was all worth it.

Watch out for Plymouth, KLAA-West opponents.

Brandon Folsom covers high school sports in metro Detroit for Hometown Life. Follow him on Twitter @folsom-brandonj.



# Birmingham Seaholm seeking OAA-White title

Brandon Folsom

Hometownlife.com

USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Ella Koosis dove out of bounds to save a ball, somehow got her right palm under it and lofted it back in play for teammate Sophie Sullivan to corral and toss back up for a tough two points.

That's the type of hustle you should expect out of the Birmingham Seaholm girls basketball team all winter long.

But that's also saying something because that effort 20 seconds into the second half of Thursday's Oakland Activities Association crossover matchup against Farmington kickstarted the 40-point running-clock rule.

There was no need for Koosis to put her body on the line to keep that ball alive. It wasn't going to impact the final score too much, an eventual 59-8 victory over the Falcons.

But that play was another tone-setter for the Maples (1-1), who realize the opportunity ahead of them and are not taking any play for granted, regardless of the opponent.

And that opportunity? Compete for the division championship.

It's a wide-open field this time around in the OAA-White. Defending champion North Farmington graduated its three best players — Sela Lefler (Kean University in New Jersey), Halle Rogers (Schoolcraft College) and Penelope Creary — plus the Raiders' longtime coach, Jeff Simpson, retired following the 2022-23 school year.

Sure, Seaholm's rival down Cranbrook Road, Birmingham Groves, has moved into the White, but this year's squad is built to be a contender right now. And the best part? This is just the beginning. The Maples have just three seniors, only one of whom is a starter — returner Clara Guffey.

Could this be the start of a one- or two-year reign?

"We're going to look pretty good this year and next year," coach Chris Manchester said. "I'm bringing back four starters, so we're young, but the White is going to be very evenly matched. Any night is going to be competitive. We're playing a high-level defense right now, and these girls are really defensive-minded."



Birmingham Seaholm coach Chris Manchester draws up a play during an Oakland Activities Association-White girls basketball game against Farmington on Thursday, Dec. 7, 2023. PHOTOS BY BRANDON FOLSOM/HOMETOWN LIFE

"Now we've just got to try and find the buckets."

Finding buckets isn't a comment about the 59 Seaholm scored against Farmington. It's regarding the Maples' close-call loss to Saline in Tuesday's season opener.

The Hornets, a 21-4 unit a year ago, which tied for first place with Temperance Bedford in the Southeastern Conference-Red, was one of the top teams in Michigan a year ago. Their season was cut short, however, once they ran into Salem during the Division 1 regional opener. But they still managed to beat Seaholm by 23 points.

It was a three-point game in the third quarter this time around. Except Seaholm's offense couldn't keep pace with Saline down the stretch, and the Hornets held on for a 47-33 victory.

But that was a barometer game for the Maples, one they'll use as a measuring stick going forward. They now know just what it takes to compete against the best in the state. And they should be ready when they take on Groves and North Farmington when the OAA-White schedule heats up.

"We had trouble scoring against Saline," Manchester said. "But, hopefully,



Birmingham Seaholm's Addy Flynn drives to the basket.

we can get that going as the season goes on, and we can start putting the ball in the basket. Games like the Saline game are going to help us prepare for the conference games we have coming up. And, last year, we gave Saline 75 points. This year, we gave them only 47, and they had the same team back.

"Playing Saline on Tuesday was amazing because it showed us where we are at compared to last year. They beat us a little bit worse last year, so to be competing with them in a three-point game in the third quarter, I thought that would fire us up and move us along."

The girls are certainly fired up. That was evident as the Maples' full-court pressure defense limited Farmington to just two points in the opening half and ensured them a 38-point lead entering halftime.

Addy Flynn and Jada Josifovski scored 14 points apiece, while Mary Gumbis had 12 and Emma Weber scored 11. Clara Guffey pitched in seven, Koosis had five and Sullivan, Taylor Hartwig, Hazel Guffey and Mary Wiltgen each had two.

Helping the Maples this year? Two of their three all-conference players from last season are back in Flynn and Hart-

wig.

While Seaholm graduated a handful of seniors a year ago, truthfully, they lost just former starter Shay Manchester.

Seven juniors and three underclassmen should lead this team.

"We've definitely come a long way," said Flynn, a junior who made the All-OAA first team in 2022-23. "We're a young team, definitely, but we have a lot of talent and are definitely willing to work hard."

"The conference? Yeah, we want it this year. It's ours."

Flynn said it was first-game nerves that cost the Maples a win against Saline. But the jitters are gone.

Seaholm has six more non-conference matchups before league play begins on Jan. 16 at Royal Oak. And then it'll have nine more opportunities to prove it's the best team in the OAA-White.

The team showed hustle and heart when the game was well in hand against the Falcons.

How tough will it look when the games finally start meaning something in the final league standings?

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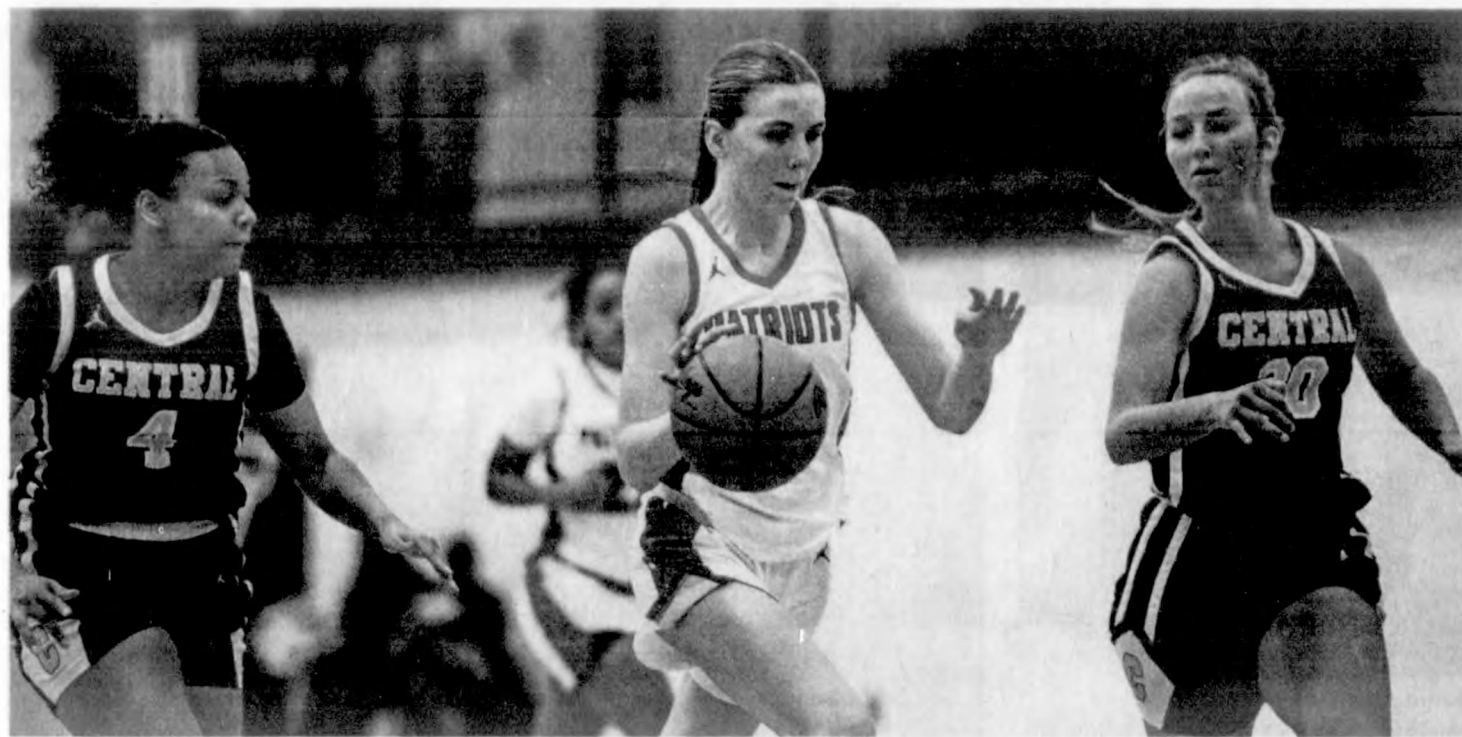
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Livonia Franklin's Kinsey Nordbeck attacks the basket during a non-conference girls basketball game against Walled Lake Central on Monday, Dec. 4, 2023. PHOTOS BY BRANDON FOLSOM/HOMETOWN LIFE



Livonia Franklin's Emerson Nordbeck drives to the hoop.

## Roster

Continued from Page 1B

and Mine Onosode to rely on.

Nordbeck, who should be an All-Kensington Lakes Activities Association guard when the season wraps up, helped this newfangled taxi squad early on by scoring the Patriots' first seven points and led them on defense. In fact, Central scored just three points in the first half and was held scoreless for the opening 4 minutes, and 49 seconds.

The senior, who is actually an All-KLAA runner and holds school records in both track and cross country, finished with 10 points alongside her younger sister, Kinsey, who also pitched in 10.

Onosode, on the other hand, made an early basket and contributed most as a rebounder in the post.

Needless to say, being on a team made up of primarily JV players is quite the experience for the seniors.

"It's very different from previous years when I wasn't really the leader," said Emerson, who is committed to Calvin University for running. "There are a lot of freshmen and sophomores, and we have problems with maturity sometimes, but it's working out, and it's been

a lot of fun growing the team for the next few years (to come). This has been a great opportunity."

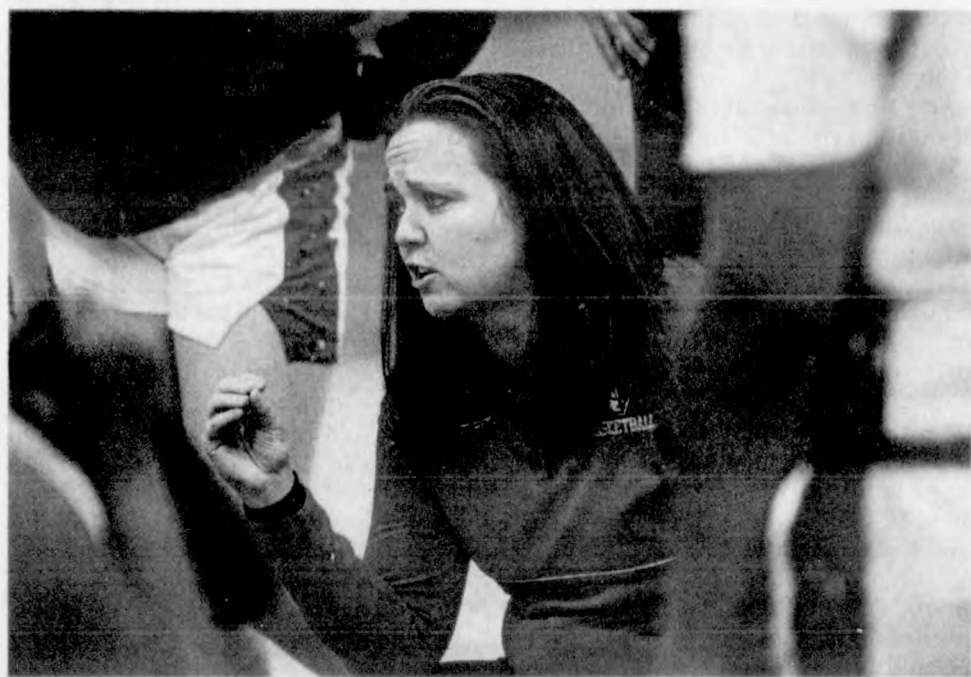
So who are these dual-team stand-outs? It includes sophomores Sammy Carignan, Sydney Kenyon, Aubree Ostroskie, Breann Campbell, Summer Montgomery and Kinsey as well as freshman Callie Bates.

Freshman Tessa White is the lone underclassman who is a full-time varsity player.

There's no doubt playing two games in one night is tough. Flaherty is happy with how her players handled those challenges in Game 1.

"They did a good job today of keeping their mental focus," Flaherty said. "That was the one thing that concerned me going into this. If they're playing, say, just the first quarter on JV and then have three quarters of a break, and then still have to go warm up for a varsity game, are they still going to be there? I was very impressed with how they were able to stick through it."

It's not going to be an easy season, especially with the likes of Wayne Memorial, a team that frequently wins district and regional championships, and Belleville, an early-season darkhorse favorite to win the Division I state championship, on Franklin's KLAA-East



Livonia Franklin coach Colleen Flaherty talks to her players.

schedule. But the Patriots should win some more games, and it wouldn't be surprising if they stole the Livonia City championship from rivals Livonia Stevenson and Livonia Churchill.

But, at the very least, this will be a foundational year for the program, one

that should make them very competitive by the time these underclassmen become seniors.

Brandon Folsom covers high school sports in metro Detroit for Hometown Life. Follow him on Twitter @folsom-brandonj.

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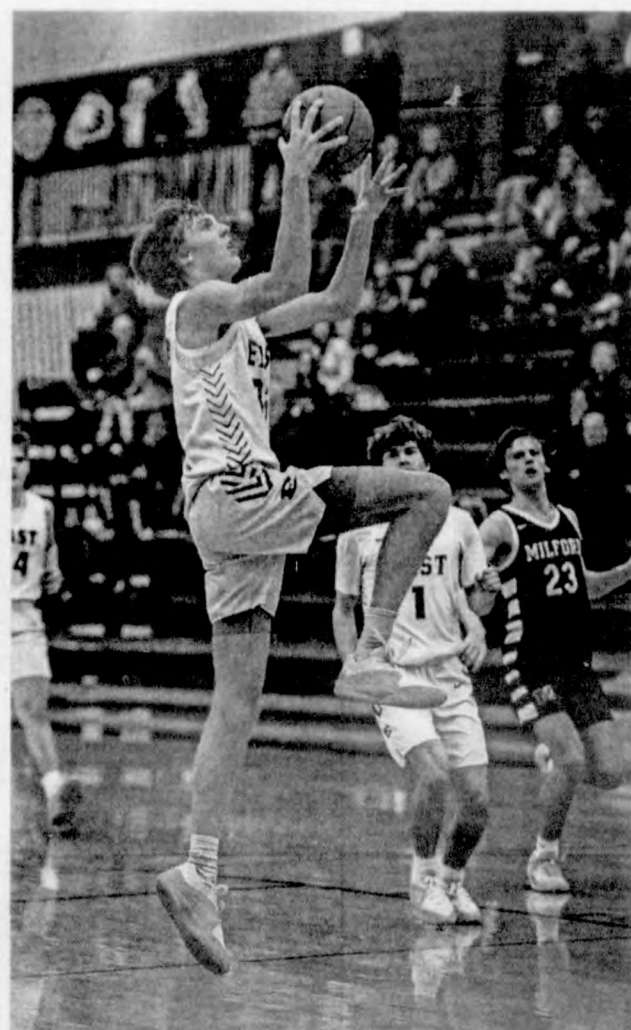
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Milford coach David Gilbert talks to his players during a Lakes Valley Conference boys basketball game on Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2023, at South Lyon East. PHOTOS BY BRANDON FOLSOM/HOMETOWN LIFE



South Lyon East's Cameron Crosby attempts a layup.

## Basketball

Continued from Page 1B

And it'll continue to be a league where any team can win a game on any given night, especially when there were no clear-cut preseason favorites to win it all.

Each night is going to be a battle.

"I mean, that's us, right?" Milford coach David Gilbert said. "We play hard, and we pride ourselves on our grit."

It certainly was the Mavericks (2-1, 2-0) throughout the second half.

East (1-1, 0-1) looked like the better team in the opening 16 minutes. Its defense was forcing Milford turnovers, its offense was scoring at will in transition and it even had luck on its side as Joey Andrews buried a fadeaway jumper from near halfcourt at the buzzer to put the Cougars ahead 25-20 entering halftime.

"Really, I thought our defense was fine," Gilbert added. "We held them to 22 until they hit that buzzer-beater. I thought we gave them some extra possessions in the first half that led to them getting some nice transition buckets. But we were more patient offensively in the second half, and you saw our offense come alive because we were so much more patient. And then our defense just held through and we gritted it out."

A patient offense will be key for the Mavericks this winter. Not because they lack the potential scorers. They certainly have a handful of them. But because they're without Sam Lewis, a Hometown Life All-Area first-teamer a year ago, who is now playing at Calvin University.

Lewis was the first Maverick to score 1,000 points in a career in 33 years, helping them win their first league championship in 25 seasons and guiding them to their first district title since 2019.

Last season, when Milford needed a basket, there was no doubt who was going to go get that for them, whether it was Lewis burying a 3-pointer from way downtown, driving to the basket or fighting through double teams to sink a jumper.

But he's gone.

Fortunately, plenty of guys have stepped up so far this season.

Against East, it was Lutz, who scored a hard-fought, game-high 20 points, including helping Mil-

ford go on a 9-3 run to close out the third quarter. That run saw him drive to the hoop and hit a shot at the buzzer to give his team a 41-37 lead.

And then it was Anthony Hutter, Milford's 6-foot-8 space eater inside. The big man scored four pivotal field goals in the second half and finished with 14 points. That included him scoring a tough basket down low late that gave the Mavericks their biggest lead of the game at 14 points.

But, perhaps, no player had as big of an impact in the second half as Jimmy "Buckets" Stevenson, another 6-5 post player who dominated. The senior had back-to-back putbacks early in the fourth quarter to give Milford a 10-point lead. And then he continued to control the boards.

As Milford's offense worked the ball around to find wide-open shots, Stevenson was always on the back-side ready to clean up the misses. He, too, finished with 14 points, six of them off offensive rebounds.

Stevenson also came up with, arguably, the play of the game, as he nabbed a steal near half court to set up Lutz with an eventual 3-pointer to push the lead to 53-40 and put any chances of an East comeback out of reach.

"I'm the trash man out there," Stevenson joked. "Yep. And it feels good. Just giving teammates assists, it feels really good. Getting wins and stuff like that, for sure. It feels good to be the guy who gets tough rebounds and is able to kick out (to teammates) for 3s."

"I've been working hard in the offseason, working hard just so I can get these putback layups, go hard to the rim and fight for rebounds."

Hard work is an understatement. Stevenson played sparingly as a junior. Some of that had to do with Lewis dominating the ball. The other part had to do with how small Stevenson was as a post player.

But he dedicated himself to the weight room and went from 155 pounds a year ago to 185 today. He's bulkier, stronger and capable of handling the beating that comes in the paint during LVC games.

"Jimmy Buckets didn't play a ton of minutes last year, but he's a great example for our younger guys," Gilbert said. "I told him he's going to be a great example to all of our underclassmen about what hard work does. Just be patient and ride out your time. We had a great season last year with a good team. Here we are three games in against very good teams, and he's had double-digit scoring in almost each game."

Of course, offense isn't everything.



Milford's Carson Lutz attacks the basket.

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# Work-related resolutions to consider in the year ahead

### Metro creative

New Year's resolutions run the gamut from kicking bad habits like smoking to finding more time to exercise to learning a foreign language. Many resolutions are about self-improvement, and that desire to live better can extend into the professional arena.

New Year's resolutions can be just as beneficial to a person's professional life as they can in that same individual's personal life. With that in mind, professionals can consider these work-related resolutions this January.

- Make a concerted effort to change careers. The numbers are in regarding satisfaction at work, and they're not very promising. According to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace: 2022 report, 60 percent of workers report being emotionally detached at work. Perhaps more troubling is that 19 percent report being miserable at their jobs. Professionals who are not engaged at work can resolve to get the ball rolling on a



career change in the year ahead. Look into what that might entail, whether it's simply applying for new jobs in your field or going back to school to facilitate a career change, and take the necessary first step.

- Rebalance your work and family life. A 2015 survey of 1,000 full-time professionals in the United States found that 77 percent felt they had experienced burnout at their jobs. Re-

balancing work and family life can make more time for things outside of work, including family. That can lead to greater life satisfaction, including a renewed vigor for your career.

- Resolve to communicate more effectively with your team. Even professionals satisfied with their careers can take steps to make their work lives better. There are many reasons why workers feel stressed and

burned out, and some may find communication with their managers is lacking. Managers can make a concerted effort to improve lines of communication with their staff. Doing so can improve productivity and create a better working environment for all.

- Find ways to be more productive. Remarkably, a 2019 study by Rescue Time found that, in a given workday, workers' average time of productivity is just two hours and 28 minutes. By making a concerted effort to be more productive, workers can get more done in a typical eight-hour workday, thus paving the way for a better work-life balance. Spend less time surfing the internet, avoid checking your phone for texts and other distractions, and make a daily schedule of tasks to tackle. Each of these steps can help you be more productive in a given workday.

When making New Year's resolutions this January, professionals can resolve to find ways to make their workdays better.

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