

Family Focus

WEST MIDLAND FAMILY CENTER

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Thriving,
Giving,
Growing...
Together



West Midland
FAMILY CENTER

West Midland Family Center and The Herbert H. and Grace A.

Dow Foundation Partner-up Once More!

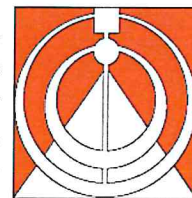
There are a number of ways to support local non-profit organizations. Volunteering, donating supplies, and making direct monetary gifts are the most popular ways people support West Midland Family Center (WMFC). This year *The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation* is once again stepping up in a BIG WAY to encourage donors to link arms with WMFC to help those in need.

In an effort to help WMFC build its donor base, The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation has committed to contributing \$450,000 over the next three years, up to \$150,000 per year, in matching grant funds. This means that those donating to WMFC now have the opportunity to double their impact through this matching challenge. If you have ever considered donating to WMFC but have yet to do so, the time is now! Your donation will now go further

thanks to this matching grant opportunity provided by The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation.

"It all adds up quickly," explained *Mike Sobolewski, New Initiatives and Promotions Director*. "Many people think their single donation doesn't make much of an impact for WMFC, but it really does. All those contributions, when combined together, allow WMFC to continue doing all the great things that have been helping our community to thrive."

Combining the year-end contributions people like to make to their favorite organizations, with the matching grant monies from The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation, means a bigger impact is made by each individual.



*The Herbert H.
and Grace A.
Dow Foundation*

West Midland Food & Clothing Depot Helps Struggling Families



Super imposed signage on the new West Midland Food and Clothing Depot which is located two miles west of WMFC on M-20.

According to the *State Science & Technology Institute (SSTI)*, today almost 40% of American adults report that they are struggling to make ends meet each month. This is an increase from 34.4% in 2022 and 26.7% in 2021. As a result of ever-increasing prices across the economy, the need throughout the WMFC community has reached unprecedented levels. These facts made it necessary for WMFC to find new ways to help families make ends meet.

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WMFC Employees Aspire to The Diane Dauer Gold Standard of Care

Each year, at the *WMFC Annual Professional Development and Safety Day*, WMFC awards the *Diane Dauer Heart of the Center Award* to two employees who best exemplify the character traits of the late Diane Dauer who worked at the WMFC Welcome Center for over 20 years.

"Although many of those who cur-



Katelyn and Mike

rently work at WMFC didn't know Diane it's important for them to know that WMFC was built as a result of the sacrifices made by people like Diane. If not for them, WMFC would not be what it is today. We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who came before us," explained long time WMFC employee *Renee Allen*.

"Diane knew everyone in the community and everyone knew her. She made each person feel welcome and cared for when they walked through the door of the Center. She was loving, caring, giving and compassionate. She was truly the Heart of the Center who modeled a gold standard of care for future WMFC Employees to aspire to," shared Allen.

"When Diane passed away in 2006, WMFC thought it was important to capture the essence of who Diane was and pay tribute to the lifelong contributions both she, and her family, had made to WMFC. Thus, the reason the Diane Dauer Heart of the Center Award was developed and the *Diane Dauer Butterfly Garden* was planted out front. Diane would have been proud of this year's award recipients," concluded Allen.

This year the Diane Dauer Heart of the Center Award was presented to *Preschool Teacher Assistant Katelyn*

LeViere and *New Initiatives and Promotions Director Mike Sobolewski*.

"Katelyn is kind, respectful and uplifting to all those around her. She works incredibly long hours, starting in the childcare department in the early morning hours before transitioning to the preschool classroom later in the day," shared *WMFC 3's Preschool Teacher Julie Smith*. "She has a deep commitment to the children in her care and tackles all challenges with steadiness and grace. She truly embodies what it means to be the Heart of the Center."

"Mike is always looking for ways to improve the Center and patrons' experiences," shared *Chelsea Davis, WMFC Recreation and Aquatic Director*. "He is always willing to help out whenever someone needs a hand, no matter the task. He helps with food distributions, taking photos when supervisors have their hands full, rides the preschool bus when we are in a pinch and helps the maintenance department with short and long-term projects. Whatever the need, Mike is always ready with a smile and a helping hand and he does all this in addition to his own job as New Initiatives and Promotions Director. Mike is truly a Heart of the Center."

Congratulations Katelyn and Mike!

WMFC Mourns the Passing of William "Bill" Bowen

WMFC is saddened by the recent passing of former *WMFC Board of Directors Vice President Bill Bowen*. Bill is survived by his wife *Sally Bowen*. Both Bill and Sally have been helping WMFC become stronger for more than a dozen years.

In an age of political hostility, Bill was just the opposite. He was kind and compassionate. He had well-thought out views on many subjects, but he didn't feel a need to make them known to everyone within earshot. Bill had a wry sense of humor which was best described by a friend at Bill's memorial service who used the example of when Bill was a plant manager for one of the big three auto companies and he said "You can find similar quality in other parts, but you can't pay a higher price anywhere else."

Bill served on the WMFC Board of Directors for six years and also chaired the *Dow College Opportunity Program Committee (COP)*.

"Bill served as the chair of the COP Committee during my time as director of the program. His leadership helped bring that committee together in working towards the goal of supporting our students," shared *Mike Sobolewski, Former COP Director*. "I recall a time when Bill and Sally had the students and me over to their house for a fundraiser doing yardwork. After we completed the work, Bill grilled us lunch and shared some of his experiences at *Alma College*. It was inspiring. Later we had a student attend Alma College, and Bill wrote him a recommendation for an annual scholarship to attend. Bill will certainly be missed," concluded Sobolewski.



Bill Bowen was the Vice President of the WMFC Board of Directors for six years.

West Midland Food & Clothing Depot Helps Struggling Families ...continued from page 1

As a result, WMFC knew it needed to find a new home with more space for the **WMFC Surplus Food and Goods Distribution Program** so that availability to food and goods could be increased.

In the past, not being able to have enough space dedicated to the display and distribution of food and goods meant availability of those items was limited to narrow windows of time when staff and volunteers were available to organize, set up, monitor and then clean up after each distribution. Although hundreds of community members are helped on a regular basis by the WMFC Surplus Food and Goods Distribution Program, finding a facility with more space to increase availability would allow WMFC to serve many more patrons who are in need. To that end, WMFC recently purchased and renovated the former **Army Surplus Headquarters**, and renamed it the **West Midland Food & Clothing Depot**.

WMFC's most recent mobile surplus food distribution on November 14, 2023 was held at the new West Midland Food & Clothing Depot on M-20, two miles west of the Center. **Helen Roth, WMFC Surplus Distribution Program Director** met with staff ahead of the distribution to reconfigure how to make the program work and best meet the needs of the community. Determining how many patrons to register for each time slot, how to station food for distribution and managing traffic were just a few of the hurdles Roth and her team tackled ahead

of the recent distribution.

"The process we developed and used in the past for distributions in the **WMFC Bus Maintenance Facility** worked really well, but it was the result of many, many revisions and small changes we made after each distribution," stated Roth. "We will have to put the same amount of time and effort into developing a new plan that will work seamlessly at the new Depot."

The West Midland Food & Clothing Depot will provide for a huge increase in the availability of rescued food and goods to the many families who are struggling to make ends meet.

"We will be able to reach more families once we are in the new building," shared Roth, "because we won't have to distribute food as quickly due to temperature issues." The new location will allow Roth, her staff, and volunteers to access coolers and freezers to hold food, prolonging the life of both produce and meals before members of the community take them home to enjoy.

Capacity-building is great for the surplus distribution program, but Roth is still working to solve one unanticipated challenge that may occur once WMFC moves to the new location.

"It's important to me for patrons to have

time to visit with one another while they wait for the food," explained Roth. "The time our seniors spend together at the distributions is often the only social time they get during the week. Many have formed close friendships with one another. The surplus distribution program is so much more than just providing food to families," concluded Roth.

WMFC is confident that Helen will find a solution for this important facet of the program as well!

A grant provided by the **Midland Area Community Foundation** allowed for the necessary updates needed at the Depot to get underway. Each of these projects is just one piece of the puzzle. When complete, that puzzle will look a lot like a store providing needed food and goods for the community. WMFC has also submitted a grant to the **State of Michigan** to provide other necessary pieces to move the progress of the new Depot along and complete the puzzle.



Patron cars line up for much needed food at recent food distribution.

July 25, 2024 Save the Date!

Ready to do it again?! It's been ten years since the **WMFC 40th Anniversary Celebration!** In 2024 WMFC will celebrate its **50th Anniversary!** Please **SAVE THE DATE.**

More information will be provided in future **Family Focus Newsletter** issues and on the **WMFC Website** at www.wmfc.org



Graduations, Scholarships, and Summer Trips... Oh My!

Students in the **Dow College Opportunity Program (COP)** had a fun-filled summer. The **COP Sophomore and Freshmen Classes** traveled to **Grand Rapids** for a week of volunteering.

The first half of the week was spent at **Calvin University's Ecosystem Preserve** where COP students cleared two acres of invasive trees and woody plants to help re-establish the 22 acres of oak-savanna habitat within the preserve.

The second half of the week the

students spent with **Community Rebuilders** where they helped create hygiene packs for the homeless and Welcome Home Baskets for families transitioning into permanent supportive housing. They also cleaned and painted an entire house, which will be rented through the **Community Rebuilders' Affordable Rental Properties Project.**

The Dow COP Junior Class spent a week touring a variety of universities

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WMFC held its Annual Halloween Trunk or Treat Event in October and hosted all kinds of characters including princesses, goblins and super heroes! The 115 families that attended the event took pictures at the photo booth, played family games and won lots of prizes while having a truckload of fun! WMFC will host its **Soup with Santa** event on December 7th.

2023

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Graduations, Scholarships, and Summer Trips... Oh My!

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including *Wayne State University*, *Albion College*, *Hope College*, and *Saginaw Valley State University*. The knowledge that students gained as a result of touring the different universities will help them with the life changing decisions they will make in their senior year of high school.

The *Dow COP Senior Class* celebrated four successful years in Dow COP by planning a trip to *Munising, Michigan*. The students took part in a *Pure Michigan Adventure* traveling throughout the beautiful Upper Peninsula, which included visits to many waterfalls and the *Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore*. During their last week together, the seniors had a lot of fun, spent time reminiscing about their years together in COP and offered their continued support to one another going forward. The next chapter of their lives will be an exciting one!

Wraelyn Fry is attending *Hiram College* this Fall to pursue a bachelor's degree in biology so that she can pursue a career in research aimed at protecting wildlife. Wrae was awarded the *Esther and Carl Gerstacker Scholarship* which will cover the cost of attendance at Hiram this year, and Wrae is eligible for renewal each of the next three years.

Aleyah Seegraves is working and taking classes at *Mid-Michigan College*. She is undecided in regards of a field of study and will explore a variety of classes to determine a future career path. Ally hopes to travel the world and learn more about other countries and cultures.

Ethan Houghten attended a four-week training program at *North Country Heavy Equipment School* this past summer, which resulted in him earning certifications in excavation and construction work. This fall Ethan has returned to *Delta College* to receive a certificate in *Heavy Duty Diesel Service Technology*. Ethan earned scholarships from the *Trucking Association*, *Delta College*, *Coleman Lions Club*, *Matthew Murphy Memorial Fund*, and the Dow College Opportunity Program at West Midland Family Center.

Marcy Farlow is attending *University of Michigan – Flint* this Fall to pursue a bachelor's degree in engineering. She received a merit-based scholarship, the *Willard and Martha Dow Memorial Scholarship*, and the Dow COP Scholarship.



Dow COP Senior Class visits Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. (L to R) Kaitlyn Wilson (COP Assistant), Haley Northup (Dow COP Director), Ethan Houghton, Wraelyn Fry, Marcy Farlow and Aleyah Seegraves.