

## WMFC Aquatics Changing of the Guard...continued from page 1

mountainous task fell on our shoulders to figure out and make happen. That spring the two of us worked alongside construction workers and the maintenance department rushing to put everything in place. I often joke that I was given a pencil and told “good luck,”” laughed Allen. “If only I had the energy now that I had then!”

Throughout the next 22 years the **WMFC Swimming Pool** would become a place of fun, learning, and enjoyment for WMFC families. Allen would be kept busy hosting senior dinner dances on the pool deck, teaching swimming lessons, training WMFC summer camp counselors and teaching



Renee Allen

WMFC families how to stay safe in water environments. She would develop the **WMFC Junior Lifeguarding Program** as a mentoring program for young teens and a recruitment tool for future WMFC lifeguards. She would also obtain her **American Red Cross Lifeguard Instructor Certification** so that she could not only train her own staff, but also train the lifeguard staff at the **Midland Parks and Recreation Plymouth Pool**. In addition, Allen would partner with the **Midland County Health Department** to educate pool managers and she

would become a speaker at aquatic conferences throughout the country.

Although her accomplishments are many, Allen will tell you that there is one that supersedes all the rest. The fact that in 22 seasons there have been no life-threatening accidents at the WMFC swimming pool. “Enforcing rules saves lives,” stated Allen. “I told Chelsea she should put that on the back of the lifeguard shirts next summer,” laughed Allen. “Enforcing rules and keeping people safe is something that our lifeguard team does well and takes seriously; they are the reason for our unblemished record and our success.”

Perhaps one of Allen’s most satisfying accomplishments has been lifting WMFC into a leadership role amongst aquatic leaders across the **United States**. “The **National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA)** sent out an email looking for people interested in becoming **Aquatic Facility Operator (AFO)** instructors,” explained Allen. “I’ve always loved learning and teaching so I shared my interest with Greg. As usual, he encouraged me to go for it. It took about a year and it was full of hurdles and rough patches. Had it not been for Greg I know I

would’ve quit. But because of his continued encouragement I was able to obtain my **AFO Instructor Certification**.”

Allen now teaches aquatic and maintenance managers from all across the United States. She is one of only two instructors in the **State of Michigan** and one of only a handful of instructors in the **United States Midwest**. Her course schedule has gotten busier as the demand for AFO certification classes has increased due to the fact that most organizations now require AFO Certification for newly hired aquatic professionals.

Although Allen has stepped down from her aquatic duties at WMFC, she will continue to teach AFO classes. She will also remain in her numerous other roles at WMFC. In addition to being next summer’s aquatic director, Davis will continue to fill her current roles as Recreation Director and Building Supervisor.

“Chelsea will do a magnificent job for the community,” stated Allen. “She’s an extremely hard worker and a great role model for the team. She’s exactly the type of manager every employee should have. In May she worked hard to obtain her lifeguard certification,” continued Allen. “This summer she put in the hard work to simultaneously learn the roles of both lifeguard and aquatic director. By the end of the summer she was the one running the entire show. I’ll still be around. I’ll just be on the dry side of aquatics,” laughed Allen. “I look forward to being a resource and helping Chelsea and the team in every way I can.”



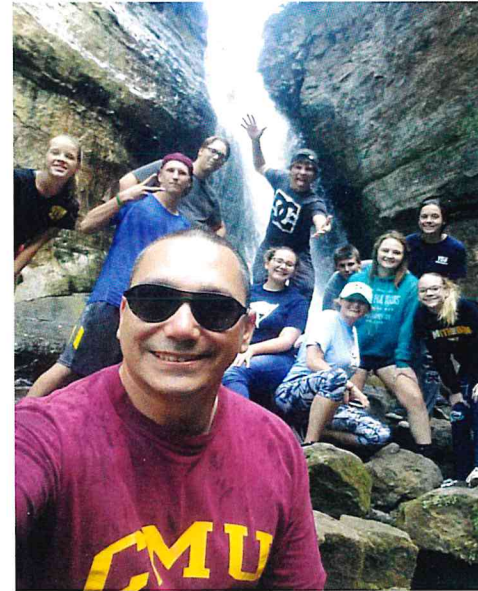
Chelsea Davis



Chelsea Davis (left) and the 2022 WMFC Lifeguard Team

## Sobolewski Moves On and COP Gains New Leader in Northup

After nine years at the helm of the **College Opportunity Program (COP)**, **Mike Sobolewski** is moving on to the next phase of his career at WMFC. **Haley Northup** has stepped in as director as Sobolewski has transitioned to work in



Mike Sobolewski with COP students at Miners Falls.

the grant writing and promotions department with **WMFC New Initiatives Director, Susan Love**. After over two decades of working directly with students at WMFC and elsewhere, Mike is ready for the next chapter. “Now is the best time to bring in a new program director,” explained Sobolewski. “It was definitely a tough decision, but I feel it’s best for the students and COP as a whole.”

“It has been such a privilege to be a part of so many students lives,” shared Sobolewski. “Watching them graduate from college, attending their weddings and watching them start their own families has been such an honor,” continued Sobolewski. “Mentoring so many amazing teens into becoming incredible adults has been the most rewarding venture of my life to date.”

“Our new program director, Haley Northup, has been doing an extraordinary job. She helped chaperon two of our

COP trips this summer,” shared Mike. “She is someone with great energy and she has all the personality characteristics needed to make those important connections with our students. Seeing how well the students have taken to her,” continued Sobolewski, “and how she interacts with them, has really put me at ease. I know that the program and students will be in the most capable hands!”

Northup came on board in June of this year. Prior to coming to WMFC, Northup graduated from **Saginaw Valley State University** with a degree in Public Administration. She then served as a college adviser with the **AmeriCorps program AdviseMI**. As an AdviseMI advisor Northup supported students at the **Academic and Career Education Academy (ACEA)** and **Bullock Creek High School**, helping them to develop and follow through with their postsecondary plans.

“Working with the **Class of 2022** made me realize how difficult it is for students to figure out what they want to do with their lives and how to go about putting the pieces of their future together,” shared Northup. “When I heard that WMFC was looking for a new COP director, I saw a great opportunity to make a meaningful and longer-term impact on students’ lives.

Working alongside Sobolewski all summer, Northup was able to meet and work with the students that are currently in COP. “I’m looking forward to adding more freshmen to

the program in the coming months,” continued Northup. “It’s such a privilege to be a part of these students’ lives and work with them to reach their personal goals.

In the two months I’ve been here, I can already tell that this will be a very rewarding position.”

Northup has lots of new ideas for growing the program. “I really want to connect more with the schools and surrounding communities,” explained Northup. “Students need support, and I know there are a lot of people in this area that want to be that support. I plan on adding elements to COP so that student voices are amplified. This will help us to better understand their needs and meet them where they are at. It truly takes a village.”



Haley Northup



An exhilarating moment and great teamwork as COP Seniors battle and conquer the intense rapids of the Menominee River this summer.





"Hugs make forever friends."

## "Team Umie Zomie Experiences Farm Life" ...con'd from page 1

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Renee Allen

Chew laughed, "I have no idea." Each week the kids worked with and learned about different animals. Chickens, goats, and for several weeks we worked with horses. We read books, played games and made different crafts. We also taught the younger children in summer program about the animals."

"We spent a lot of time at *Starry Meadows* and the *Kissinger Farm*" stated Chew. "Starry Meadows is owned by *Jeff and Tricia Dudley*. The Dudley's share what they've been blessed with in hopes of handing down their love of horses to the future generations. *Steve and Gayle Kissinger* have opened their doors to hundreds of WMFC children over the past few decades," continued Chew. "They enjoy teaching the students about their animals."

"My proudest moment was watching Team Umie Zumie serve others," shared Chew. "They took ownership of the Backpack Buddies Project. They organized, sorted and packed all the food

that the summer program kids took home. They worked as a team to get the job done every week with limited adult assistance. Best of all was their attitude," concluded Chew. "They worked so hard and were so happy serving others."



Karann Chew and Grace



"When animals come into the lives of children, extraordinary things happen... it's nothing short of magical," stated Chew.

Numerous studies have shown that a home with pets helps children improve confidence, build self-esteem, learn unconditional love, teach empathy and respect, teach responsibility, and helps children learn social skills and communication. There are also distinct physical changes that occur such as decreases in blood pressure and cholesterol levels, reduced stress and anxiety, and reduced loneliness and depression. Children who have pets are also better equipped to fight off sickness because of the positive impact animals have on their immune system performance.

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# Family Focus

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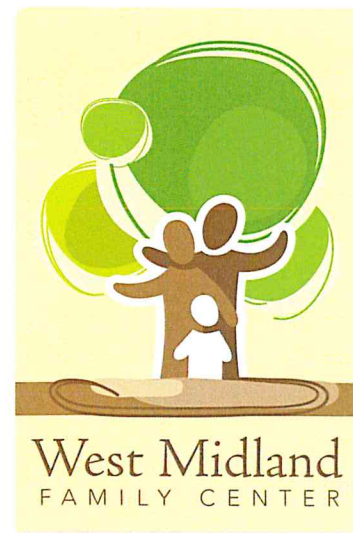
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Thriving,  
Giving,  
Growing...  
Together



## "Team Umie Zumie Experiences Farm Life"

It has been said that "until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains dormant." Animals have a way of speaking to the inner spirit of a child. There are countless

stories where animals have been the catalyst for miraculous changes in children's lives. Many of life's most valuable lessons are taught to children by animals.

**WMFC Preschool teacher Karann Chew** knows all too well the benefits that animals bring into children's lives. "Three years ago, I started an animal assisted activities business," explained Chew. "When animals come into the lives of children, extraordinary things happen...it's nothing short of magical. I wanted to bring that learning opportunity to the children at WMFC." So Chew approached **Executive Director Greg Dorrien** with the idea and Dorrien suggested she put together a program for the kids participating in summer program.

"I put together a curriculum using animals to help teach things like leadership skills, goal setting, kindness and respect, boundaries, problem solving, communication, and making friends," explained Chew who worked with the 11-13 year-old group of students. "They called themselves **Team Umie Zumie**. Don't ask me how to spell that,"

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Jeff Dudley shares his love of horses with WMFC Summer Program student Dakota Jacobs.

## WMFC Aquatics Changing of the Guard

All good things must come to an end...or so the saying goes. "I'm saddened as I think of the end of Renee's leadership in our aquatics department," commented **WMFC Executive Director, Greg Dorrien**, "We've come a long way since that first summer in 2001 when the pool was still a hole in the ground. Renee has done a magnificent job in all areas of aquatic management and in typical Renee-like form she has insured a seamless transition by passing much of her experience on to our new **Aquatic Director Chelsea Davis**." "I'll never

forget that first summer," explained **WMFC Aquatic Director Renee Allen**. "The Center was going through the first of two expansions that I've experienced in my time at WMFC. My job interview was in Greg's office which was in a modular in the parking lot. There was so much work to be done to get the pool ready. Greg ended up hiring two of us - Beth Doubles and myself. Beth and I were given a 6'x 4' office to share, a few office supplies and Greg's full support. The rest of the

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