

WEST MIDLAND FAMILY CENTER
4011 W. Isabella Road
Shepherd, MI 48883

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West Midland Family Center's
Family Focus

Enhancing the Quality of Life for Area Residents of all ages

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United Way's Leadership Circle Reception Causes Dorrien to Think (Finally!)

By Greg Dorrien

The year was 1981. I was mad at the Midland Community Center (something about being called a hack in a basketball game) so I didn't give a contribution to United Way a key funder of the Community Center (of course, right?). Luckily, Carl Gerstacker wasn't mad at anyone. Carl was the United Way's Campaign Chair that year and he not only set a Midland County record by raising \$1,877,045, but also the highest per capita giving rate in the nation! That was extremely fortunate because the same year brought news that Midland County could no longer keep the then, West Midland Community Center open. The Federal revenue sharing stream supporting it had dried up, so United Way of Midland County rode to the rescue!

I of course didn't know about any of this at the time.

Fast forward to June 16th, 2009 at Midland's new Holiday Inn. The United Way is celebrating its Leadership Circle group,

those individuals whose philanthropic efforts are vitally linked to the quality of life enjoyed by so many Midland County residents. Leadership Circle members, 915 of them, have all contributed \$1,000 or more... and judging by the \$1,900,000 they raised, a lot of them gave more than \$1,000. Twenty-nine Tocqueville Society donors gave \$10,000 or more. The entire United Way campaign brought in \$4.9 million at a time when everyone was experiencing the stock market crash (October 2008): Truly incredible.

So while I'm enjoying a glass of non-alcoholic champagne (yes, that's not a misprint), I notice Gene Yehle and think about my first "Gene experience". It was 1987 and he was the Secretary of the Charles J. Strosacker Foundation. He had just climbed the long flight of stairs to the second floor preschool room at the former West Midland Community Center. Gene

was on a mission. He wanted to know if the three major foundations along with Dow Chemical and Dow Corning should ante up \$1.8 million to build the new West Midland Family Center. He knew that financially those five donors could combine to provide the bricks and mortar. The question remained, "Where would the funding come from to meet the ongoing, expanded programming, and facilities expenses?" Historically foundations favor bricks and mortar projects

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Our home 1974-1989

WMFC Summer Program "Goes Green"

To inspire respect for the finite nature of the world's resources the WMFC Summer Program has "gone green." This effort was prompted by Stacey Urbani, Director of School Age Programs and has been supported by everyone involved, especially the children. "At the Center, we insist that children demonstrate respect for themselves and others. We feel that showing deference to our environment is just one more way of demonstrating concern for others. The really great thing is that the kids get it, they love that we are doing this! When asked, "Why do we compost?" James, age 8 said, "Composting helps the earth and it's good

to do it." Brycen, age 9 said, "Composting helps the earth because if you don't compost, then all that garbage goes into an incinerator or landfill. In a landfill it takes longer to break down."

In past summers, the program generally contributed 10, 60-gallon bags of trash DAILY to the local landfill. Over the course of a summer this amounts to approximately 17,000 gallons of waste. Each day children receive one snack, a full lunch and occasionally breakfast. The remains of these meals result in the thousands of gallons of trash. So this year the Center invested in recycle buckets and a composter, recycled plastic lunch trays and corn-based spoons and forks. After eating, children, with the help of staff members separate their trash and recycle all they can. Then they wash, rinse and sanitize their trays. Raw fruits and vegetables, egg shells, utensils are placed in the composter and stirred periodically for fourteen days. The resulting compost is placed in the garden where the sixth and seventh graders are growing cucumbers, zucchini, tomatoes and herbs. As a result of this effort, with the same number of children

on-site garbage production has decreased to a mere 1-2 bags daily. Instead of garbage, WMFC is producing a garden full of healthy veggies.

At the Center we love trees, green grass, fresh air, fresh fruit and vegetables and our friends. We have found composting and recycling to be relatively easy ways to demonstrate caring for ones community and its environment.



James recycling leftovers from lunch



CIT Matt explains how to wash the tray

WMFC Board of Directors Welcomes Joell Anthony

Joell Anthony grew up on a dairy farm in Lowell Michigan with her mother, stepfather, sister and three brothers. She attended the University of Arizona after falling in love with the state while visiting her grandparents. Joell majored in accounting and finance. After receiving her degree, she was drawn back to Michigan by her family. After a year of enjoying the seasons once again she was happy to have returned.

Joell started out working in the auto industry. She then went to work for the Hope Network a non-profit organization where she worked for the management services organization and handled the books. In 2001 she moved to Alpena with her husband and began her career in the banking industry. 2005 brought an opportunity for Joell and her husband Jeffery to advance their careers and move to

Midland, closer to family. Joell and Jeffery find Midland to be an ideal fit. "We have discovered a generous and loyal community. I'm proud to work for a community bank, Wolverine Bank, which has served the Great Lakes Bay region for 76 years and has also been named one of the strongest banks in the country," states Anthony. They reside west of Midland and Joell feels fortunate to be able to contribute to an organization, like WMFC, that really makes a difference by enhancing the quality of life for area residence. Her husband Jeffery is Post Commander for the Gladwin and West Branch State Police.

In addition to her Board of Directors duties, Joell also volunteers on the Center's Investment Committee and the Accounting and Budget Committee.



Joell Anthony

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and very few give to ongoing operations. So where would ongoing funding come from?

Being the brash young Assistant Director-type I said, "Government Grants." Upon which my boss, Phyllis Breedlove told Gene the only stable way for us to operate would be if the good citizens of Midland County continued to give more to the United Way. This in turn could prompt the United Way Board to pass some of the increased revenue our way. I was afraid that Phyllis had just sunk our chances of getting a new facility and I was going to have to go search for a new job. Gene smiled and said, "Phyllis,



Gene Yehle (in back) with Paul Sheffield, Ruth Sheffield and Millie Yehle at the United Way Leadership Circle Reception

your reputation for doing a lot with a little is one of the main reasons I'm here. I'll be talking to the United Way and the other foundations to see if your dream could become a reality. No guarantees though". The rest is history. West Midland Family Center became a reality! I was very pleased to have such a great boss: a mentor that taught me how to judge which way the wind blows in Midland County.

Phyllis' words flashed back to me at this year's reception, "Only if the citizens of Midland County continue to give more". Just one segment of the 2009 United Way Campaign (The Leadership Circle) gave more than the entire United Way campaign raised in 1981. Without the generous donors of 1981 and a compassionate United Way Board that accepted WMFC as a new agency, none of our current works would exist. Thousands of children and parents would be less prepared for the world. Tens of millions dollars would never have arrived in Midland County, (because we did eventually figure out how to leverage United Way dollars into matching grants for government programs). This September the United Way campaign will roll out again. Your support will be

needed as always. Unfortunately you may never fully understand how truly valuable your contribution will be today and into the future. Just like the 1981 donors were unaware of their immense legacy. Your gift may prove to be even more valuable than that of 1981... I'll let you know in 30 years!



No one calls me a hack anymore, mostly they just laugh!

Staying in Shape with Silvana

The swimming pool is alive with activity, the surroundings echo with the sound of music and laughter. Water splashes, waves form and instructions are issued from the pool deck. This view *erroneously* inspires thoughts of WMFC Summer Program, because *this* snippet comes to us complements of the WMFC Aqua Aerobics class. This scene is played out every Monday through Thursday from 8:30- 9:15 a.m. at the WMFC pool. The commotion is created by a group of 7-8 dedicated aqua aerobics class members and their instructor, Silvana Spindler.

Each class brings together a highly motivated group of adults who gather to exercise and socialization. The aqua aerobics class is preventative in nature and focuses on movement and water resistance to increase strength and flexibility and improve cardiovascular health. This is a great way to ease back pain or joint pain caused by arthritis. Class begins with participants taking long striding steps across the pool to warm up. From there arm movements are incorporated along with stretching and the use of bar bells. From one class to the next Silvana changes the format: a practice that participants find stimulating. Class regular, Louise said, "I have arthritis and her exercises have helped me a lot. It keeps my joints from becoming stiff.



Use of dumbbells increases resistance



Connie finds Aqua Aerobics energizing!

Jalen Parmele Visits with After School Program Participants

Jalen Parmele, a 2005 graduate of Herbert H. Dow High School and current NFL Baltimore Ravens running back, dropped in to visit with 40 after school program participants.

After a question and answer session, Jalen gave the kids a bit of advice...

- Do well in school
- Stay out of trouble (don't do drugs)
- Be nice to other people

Then it was off to the gymnasium where the kids raced and received passes from Jalen. He kindly allowed them to win the first race; he then ran in real time and of course 'smoked' everybody! The children were thrilled to have met a celebrity like Jalen who posed with each child for a souvenir photograph.



Parmele and Friends

DOW COP Shines at Midland Area Community Foundation's Scholarship Night

Whitney Merritt, a Midland County resident currently attending Grand Valley State University, was honored with the invitation to give the keynote address at this year's Midland Area Community Foundation's Scholarship Awards Night. In addition, Whitney opened the ceremony with a beautiful performance of the national

anthem. Whitney graduated from Shepherd High School in 2008 and has been an active and enthusiastic member of West Midland Family Center's Dow College Opportunity Program (Dow COP).

Whitney's speech was entitled "Daring to Achieve" and spoke to the painful shyness that she has overcome. She credited her former choir teacher, The Dow COP and her parents for pushing her beyond her veil of shyness and fear. She commended all the scholarship recipients for moving outside their comfort zones as well saying, "I applaud you all on expanding the courage that brought you to where you are now and for daring to work toward your life goals. Whatever your career path I hope that you inspire someone to gain that courage the way you did."

Whitney and fellow COP member Amanda Geer were both recognized as recipients of The West Midland Family Center/ Dow

Counselors in Training (CIT) Mentor Younger Children

to assure safe passage of all group members from one activity to the next. Another group prepares and serves lunch and snacks. These teens learn about the unique needs of each age group and model behavior accordingly.

- "I wanted to be a CIT because I enjoy working with the kids. I want to be a positive influence on the Center and the children here." Josh age 16.
- "I like being a CIT because I like little kids; they bring my energy back in me." Shelby age 14.
- "I work with 5th graders. I get to plan activities and work with the children" Ashley age 17.

These three clips are from the exemplary team of twenty dedicated teens volunteering as WMFC *Counselors in Training* (CIT). These twenty teens have been afforded the opportunity to reach out, mentor and develop their own character.

At WMFC we believe that each individual has a special gift and as such these young people take on one of three functions based on their gifts and area of interest. However, the underlying principle of each function is to act as a role model to the younger children. Each CIT takes on one of the following roles: Train to become a camp counselor like the Group Leaders that mentor them. In this role, the CIT acts as an assistant to the Group Leader helping younger group members transition from one activity to another, they plan activities and bring up the rear in line

College Opportunity Scholarship. Amanda has been a vital member of the Dow COP since her freshman year of high school. She attends Kalamazoo College.



Whitney Merritt

Amanda Geer

people from other countries spend their leisure. Everyone is having fun with this theme, both the challenge of understanding something new and finding the fun in the activity." concluded Hayner.

Three free field trips serve to acknowledge the outstanding contribution these CIT make to the Summer Program. Together, the teens chose their field trips: tubing down the Chippewa River, a day at Michigan Adventure, and a barbecue at Bay City State Park.



Playing the game PULSE – CIT's Tim and Jenny with younger children



CIT's Gabe and Jennifer help younger children at lunchtime

