



Rotary Club of Kalamazoo

Date: 02/11/25

Editarian: Aaron Bradford

Today's meeting was called to order by President Taylor Huie at 12:10 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance: Taylor Huie led us in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation: Rotarian Jeff Ross

Arts News By: Dann Sytsma presented the latest arts news.

- Canned Champagne - Described as "an eclectic group of improv-ers...a variety pack, if you will," Canned Champagne is classy, yet down to earth; effervescent, yet digestible; bursting with flavor, yet sturdy in their aluminum casing. Graduates of the Crawlspace Comedy Theatre improv program, this group is ready to have fun and get silly! February 15, 2025
- DIAL M FOR MURDER – Directed by D. Terry Williams. Presented by Farmers Alley at Farmers Alley Theater. Is this twisty mystery of forbidden romance, blackmail, and betrayal the perfect crime – or will Scotland Yard's best detective crack the case? A PLOT TWISTING THRILLER that will keep you on the edge of your seat! February 6-23, 2025

Visit the Arts Council website at kalamazooarts.com for a full list of activities.

Guests:

- Julie Deppner, Heritage Community of Kalamazoo, President and CEO, guest of Aaron Bradford
- Chris Bovid, The Bovid Law Firm, Attorney, guest of Chris Shook
- Nathan Ekola, City of Kalamazoo, Civic Engagement Coordinator
- David Brose, Brose and Brose Consultants, Partner, guest of Jim Cupper
- Dennis Lutz, retired U.S. Army Major General, guest of Bob Hencken
- Anthony Trobeck, WMU, Digital Gift Officer, guest of Chris Shook

Happy Bucks:

- Don Flesche, Farmer's Alley doing a great job
- Marvinetta Woodley-Penn, Rob's listening prowess
- Anne Witherspoon, New role as Director of Development at Gilmore
- Jeff Ross, Felicitous Finn, Sunshine, turnout and to be at meeting
- Steve Duisterhof, Jeff's invocation
- Patricia Daugherty, Blue badge
- Bill Rose, Hip Hop symphony – tremendous combination
- Rhasheda Shepherd, doctoral project submitted
- Sand Bliesener, Arizona vacation next week
- Taylor Huie, Thank you to Ann for peace poll approval

Announcements:

- Red Rose nominations due by March 30th
- River Clean-up coming up on May 17th
- Rotaract is looking to set up mentors with groups of three students – contact Dare'l McMillian for more information

Speaker: Mary Balkema (Introduced by Amy Remmert)

- Former City Treasurer and City Commissioner
- Focused on poverty and housing challenges in Kalamazoo
- Founded the Kalamazoo County Land Bank to stabilize blighted properties
- Director of Housing, involved with multiple nonprofits

Kalamazoo Housing Initiatives

- Budget: \$389 million, with 21% funded by the Federal Government
- 2020 Housing Millage: Passed to support housing needs
 - One of the only counties in Michigan with a housing millage
 - Raised over \$8.6 million
 - Leveraged an additional \$115 million in funding
 - Supports both housing development and supportive services
- Housing Demand & Shortages:
 - 7,750 housing units short, while the population is increasing
 - Affordable housing crisis: House prices have risen from 3x to 7x annual salary
 - Cost of construction is high (e.g., average lot price: \$80,000)
 - Kitchens built by prisoners in Ionia to reduce costs
- Affordability Standard: Households should pay no more than 30% of annual income on housing to be considered "non-burdened"
 - Need to earn \$19.78 per hour to afford housing in Kalamazoo

Housing Projects & Development

- Units in Progress:
 - 30 S Rose Senior Housing – 64 units completed
 - Rehabilitation of 215 units across the county
 - 1,498 people funded through housing programs
- Future Projects:
 - 2024: County matches local business contributions for housing projects
 - 2025: Multi-unit developments in Portage & critical repair projects
 - Awarded \$18 million for low-income neighborhoods
 - 2026: Portage Creek Apartments – \$5 million awarded
- New Housing Models:
 - Tiny Homes (~400 sq. ft.) – Cost \$100,000 each, available for lease
 - Rivers Edge – 44 single-family homes in Portage, built over 7 years
 - 80-room hotel purchase on Old Kilgore Road to house homeless families
 - Focus on families with school-aged children (1,700 homeless students in county)

- Not for surrounding counties

Supportive Services & Policy Considerations

- Millage Funds: Also pay for supportive services for those without permanent housing
- Rehabilitation vs. New Construction:
 - Focus on rehabbing existing housing stock instead of solely building new
 - Local governing boards must support development
- Affordable Housing & Nonprofits:
 - Funds allocated based on Area Median Income (AMI)
 - AMI for a family of 4: \$100,800
 - Funding recipients must provide a percentage of units for accommodations (e.g., for disabilities)
 - Supports YWCA and Disability Network
- Preventing Evictions: Programs in place to help prevent displacement
- No Cut to Housing Millage: Current millage has 8-year duration and is in year 4

Challenges in Housing Development

- High Interest Rates (7%) increasing costs
- Rising construction costs
- Low inventory of homes affordable for workers earning \$20-\$25 per hour

Resources & Reports

- Annual Reports & Housing Study available online
- NY Times article featured their work

Next week's program on February 17 with speaker Wendy Fields, President of Kalamazoo NAACP.