



COUNTY OF NEWAYGO QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER WINTER 2009

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GERBER COMMITTED TO NEWAYGO COUNTY

In exchange for the Agricultural Processing Renaissance Zone (APRZ) designation, Gerber Products Company has agreed to invest \$50 million in its Fremont facility and to retain 1,100 jobs over the next 10 years. The agreement allows for an extension to 15 years, if Gerber invests an additional \$25 million (\$75 million total) and creates 200 new jobs.

The APRZ designation will make the facility exempt from the Michigan Business Tax (MBT), state education tax, and personal and real property taxes. The incentive package is a result of the joint efforts of the City of Fremont, Newaygo County, the Newaygo County Economic Development Office (NCEDO), the Michi-

gan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the Michigan Department of Agriculture, The Fremont Area Community Foundation, and Gerber Products Company.

Development plans will likely include an expansion of the facility's research and development capabilities and a new call center for the Gerber Life Insurance Company.

In addition to over 200 Michigan farms that benefit by supplying the company, a Regional Economic Model (REMI) Analysis, commissioned by NCEDO, revealed that the 1,100 retained jobs actually equate to a total of 3,500 jobs statewide.

Newaygo County Parks is Awarded \$267,500 Development Grant for Sandy Beach Campground.

This spring, Newaygo County submitted a proposal to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, requesting a \$267,500 development grant to fund improvements at Sandy Beach Campground. The Trust Fund, supported by monies that are generated from gas and oil royalties on state owned lands, has a highly competitive grant program. The Parks Commission is pleased to announce that the Trust Fund Board recommended Newaygo County's proposal at its December 3, 2008, meeting.

Sandy Beach County Park, located on Hardy Pond, is the most popular of the parks in the Newaygo County System. Grant funds will be used to upgrade and pave the park's primary road, provide utilities to 22 lake view campsites, construct 2 camping cabins, add a covered shelter to the picnic area, and provide a pier at the boat launch.

Following Trust Fund Board approval, the Department of Natural Re-

sources (DNR) will request legislative approval and appropriation of funds for the grant awards. Because this step often takes several months, the Parks Commission anticipates starting construction in late 2009.

"New development at Sandy Beach will benefit the parks system, as well as the entire county," said Parks Director Ron Welton. "Newaygo County is committed to providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities in its county park system and this grant will allow us to provide even better service to both local residents and the thousands of visitors who come to our county each year."



Did you know that Newaygo County, in cooperation with the National Association of Counties, offers a Prescription Discount Card, free to county residents? Any county resident without prescription coverage can use this program. Even if you have insurance for prescription drugs, you may still benefit from the discount card on prescription drugs your existing plan does not cover. Cards are available at the Newaygo County Administration Building and other locations throughout the county. For more information on the card and a list of distribution locations, visit www.countyofnewaygo.com or call (231) 689-7302.

**Christine Gooding Recognized
by Michigan Family Support Council**

In October 2008, Friend of the Court Business Administrator Christine Gooding received the Michigan Family Support Council's 2008 Friend of the Court Staff Award for her contributions to Michigan's child support program.

After beginning her 21 year career at the front desk of the Friend of the Court Office, Chris held the positions of Payment Clerk and Finance Officer before her promotion to Business Administrator. The variety of positions has given Chris an extensive knowledge of Michigan Child Support Enforcement System, which has made her the "go to" person for the entire FOC staff.

Newaygo County congratulates Chris on her award and thanks her for her years of service!

**New Commissioners
Join County Board**

Newaygo County recently welcomed three newly elected Commissioners. Barb Geno was elected by District 1: Troy, Beaver, Merrill, Denver, Lincoln, and Dayton townships. James Maike, Jr. was elected by District 4: Sherman and Everett Townships, the City of White Cloud, and Brooks Township north of the Muskegon River. Simon "Sam" Scholtens was elected by District 7: Grant and Ensley townships and the City of Grant.

United Way of the Lakeshore will be accepting grant applications from qualified non-profits for Newaygo County programming until March 13, 2009. For a copy of grant application material or for additional information, please contact Andrew DeLong at (877) 722-3134 extension 222.

UNDERSTANDING PROPOSAL A IN A DECLINING MARKET

Since Proposal A was adopted on March 15, 1994, Michigan property taxes are based on taxable value. Taxable value is determined as the lesser amount of the State Equalized Value (SEV), which is 50% of True Cash Value as determined by the local assessor, or the Capped Value, which is the prior year's Taxable Value, adjusted for additions and losses, multiplied by rate of inflation determined by the state or 5%, whichever is less. Generally, Capped Value is the Taxable Value amount. Exceptions to this would occur if the current SEV dropped below the last year's Taxable Value or if there is a transfer of ownership which resets the taxable value to the SEV.

With the current downturn in real estate sales, you might expect significant decreases in SEV and Taxable Value, leading to lower property taxes, but this will not happen for 2008 in most cases. SEV is calculated using sales information over a two year cycle and the low number of sales in 2008 does not offer enough data for assessors to drop True Cash Values very far. Even if True Cash Value and the SEV do drop in 2008, the SEV is usually still much higher than the prior year's Taxable Value. In these cases, Taxable



Value will continue to increase by the rate of inflation, until it reaches SEV.

Recently, many properties have been purchased for less than the properties' True Cash Value, especially with sales of foreclosed properties. The actual sale price of a property is not True Cash Value. Legally, True Cash Value is defined as the *usual* selling price of a property. Michigan's Legislature and Courts have clearly stated that actual selling price is not a controlling factor in the True Cash Value or SEV. When the local assessor analyzes sales to determine assessment changes, non-representative sales are excluded.

Distressed sales, such as sales involving mortgage foreclosure or trans-

ferring property to or from relocation companies are considered non-representative sales. The State Tax Commission has issued guidelines that generally preclude assessors from including these distressed sales in assessment analysis because they are not reliable indicators of value. New guidelines allow the inclusion of foreclosed sales, but only if they are considered **reasonable** and have been **verified**.

For a more detailed explanation of Proposal A, and for information regarding millage rates, principle resident exemptions, and other assessment information, please visit <http://countyofnewaygo.com/Equal/EqualHome.htm>

Road Commission Fights Harsh Winter and Tight Budget

As the unpredictable Michigan winter increases the demand for services, the Newaygo County Road Commission is also facing significant increases in the cost of business. Although low budgets, primarily funded by the flat \$.19 per gallon Michigan gas tax that has not increased since 1997, make it harder than ever to face these challenges, the Road Commission remains committed to providing excellent service.

The Road Commission is continually seeking new ways to become more efficient during these tough economic times. Anticipating the skyrocketing price of salt, we made large purchases of salt at the end of last winter, saving nearly

\$42,000. To further save money, we still need to be cautious with our salt usage and will be mixing sand with the salt to stretch the reserves. We have also opened up our salt storage facility in Newaygo to become more efficient by saving the time and cost of trucks driving back and forth from the Southern part of the County.

These changes have helped the road commission to meet road maintenance demands, but further changes will be needed as funding continues to be stretched. Rest assured that even with current budget constraints, your road commission will continue to do everything that we can to provide safe roadways.

Winter Safety Reminders

Don't build snow forts, make tunnels, or play in or on snow banks next to roads.

Keep **well away** from the edge of the roadway as you wait for the school bus, get the mail, or watch the plow trucks.

Stay away from the end of a driveway when a snow plow is approaching

Keep sleds and toys away from the roadways at all times.

Keep garbage cans up in the driveway if it snows on garbage collection day.

Don't attempt to pass or drive alongside a snow plow vehicle while they are plowing!

Don't crowd the plow!

If your school, business, or community group is interested in an on-site, first hand snow plowing demonstration, please contact Road Commission Office Manager Kristin Luchies at 231-689-6682. The demonstration addresses winter safety topics and includes a group photo opportunity.

Probate Court Corrects Common Estate Myths

Myth: Probate Court takes a huge portion of the estate.

Fact: The filing fee for a deceased estate is \$150. The only other court fee is an inventory fee based on the value of the assets. (For example, the inventory fee on a \$200,000 estate is \$488). Previously, an inheritance tax was assessed, but now estates with a value below \$2 million pay no tax.

Myth: It takes forever to probate an estate.

Fact: The average time for an estate to remain open is one year and Michigan law allows an estate to be closed following a four month claim period, so it is possible to close an estate within five months.

Myth: There is a will, so it isn't necessary to go to Probate Court.

Fact: A will *must* be admitted to probate for it to be carried out and probate proceedings must take place to transfer ownership of real estate, to appoint a guardian for minor children, and to appoint an administrator. Probate Court determines how your estate will be divided, using your will for instructions as long as it is valid and uncontested. The court monitors administration of the will to ensure the decedent's wishes are followed accurately and in a timely fashion.

Myth: Attorneys are a waste of money to complete an estate.

Fact: Probate law, with regard to an estate, is very technical, so most deceased estates are handled by attorneys. Attorney expenses generally come out of the probate estate. Attorney fees vary, so it is important to reach a written agreement with the attorney.

For more information and probate forms, visit www.countyofnewaygo.com. Please note, this information is **not to be taken as legal advice**. Always consult with an estate attorney and tax professional for advice regarding specific situations.

NEWAYGO COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING
 St. Patrick's Day
 Potato Lunch
 Tuesday, March 17, 2009
 11 A.M. - 1:30 P.M.
 ONLY \$5.00
 HUGE baked potato with LOADS of toppings, cole slaw, drink & dessert

Eat in or take out

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO COA PROGRAMS

Call in reservations by Tuesday, March 10th at 689-2100 or 1-800-689-2100

County Economic Development Efforts Highlighted at State Conference

Tobi Lake, County Administrator, and Andy Lofgren, Executive Director of the Newaygo County Economic Development Office (NCEDO), were guest speakers at the Michigan Economic Developers Association meeting in December 2008. Speaking on the topic "Local Government's Role in Economic Development", the local representatives shared their best practices with other economic development professionals and local officials.

Mr. Lofgren discussed the NCEDO Strategic Plan and the economic development strategies developed for the county. These include retaining existing businesses and jobs, attracting and growing new businesses and jobs, enhancing tourism, and expanding awareness of Newaygo County. He also emphasized

that NCEDO is a joint partnership of the public and private sectors with officials from both areas serving on the Board of Directors.

Mr. Lake explained how our local counties, cities, and townships all contribute to and benefit from local economic development efforts. He noted that, particularly in rural counties, community development and economic development often go hand-in-hand.

The presenters also shared examples of various levels of government working together to promote economic development. One successful example of this collaboration was the recent Agricultural Renaissance Zone established for Gerber Products, which required cooperative efforts and approval from both the City of Fremont and the County of Newaygo.

Spotlight: Newaygo County Animal Control

Animal Control is staffed by two full time Animal Control Officers and a part time kennel attendant/adoption coordinator. Newaygo County Animal Control Officers have completed the training required by state law, have been approved by the Michigan Department of Agriculture, and are fully trained in all aspects of Animal Control including animal capture, law enforcement, animal nutrition, veterinary care. They continue to receive ongoing training in these areas while addressing public safety and animal welfare concerns in Newaygo County.

Animal Control hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. To contact animal control, call (231) 689-7020.

If you are interested in adopting a pet, contact the Newaygo County Animal Shelter at (231) 689-1867 during shelter hours. The shelter is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 11am- 1pm. If needed, adoption appointments are available outside of business hours.

Animal Welfare is Our First Concern

Neglect of dogs, cats, horses, and other livestock is a serious issue that Animal Control is dealing with more frequently. Our primary goal is to improve animal welfare, so before animals are removed from homes, the first response to neglect complaints is to educate owners and work with them to improve their pets' care. If pet owners are unable to provide proper care, they are given the opportunity to voluntarily surrender their animals to Animal Control. Removal is a last resort, but if owners refuse to care for their animals, Animal Control's only choice is to remove animals from homes and pursue prosecution against the owner for cruelty or neglect.

Please help us protect the welfare of animals in Newaygo County. If you are concerned about possible animal neglect, please contact Animal Control at (231) 689-7020.

Dog Licenses are sold at the County Treasurers Office. A current rabies vaccination certificate is required to purchase a dog license. Information on dog licenses is available at the Treasurer's Office at (231) 689-7230.

Animal Control Reaches Out to Find Homes for Animals

Newaygo County Animal Control deals with hundreds of animals a year and with the current economy, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find homes for them. From January through October of 2008, Animal Control has taken in 907 animals including dogs and cats. A large majority of these animals were either abandoned or owner surrendered. Unfortunately, the animal shelter only has 22 dog kennels and 15 cat cages, so it is crucial to move these animals to good homes in a timely manner. To meet this need, the shelter has found new ways to use the internet to place pets with adoptive families. Cats and dogs are now listed on craigslist.org, petfinder.com, and dogsindanger.com.

Using these websites has increased the shelter's adoption rate. The shelter continues to post animals available for adoption on the county website and to work with rescue organizations that adopt a large number of animals that would otherwise be euthanized. With all adoptions, applicants are screened to ensure that the animal is matched up with the correct home and that applicants have the means to provide proper care.

If you are considering a new pet, please visit one of the websites listed above or call the Newaygo County Animal Shelter and help us give a dog or cat a new home.

Newaygo County has collaborated with Lake Haven to provide low cost spay/neuter services to low-income families in Newaygo County. If your pet needs to be spayed or neutered, contact Lake Haven at (231)652-7507.

SENIOR NEWS

Monthly Pot-Lucks

The Commission on Aging (COA) recently held the first of many potlucks for county residents age 50 and older. About fifty guests braved the weather, brought delicious dishes to share, and enjoyed music, activities and each other's company. Attendees also suggested afternoon activities/programming in which they would like to participate such as writing and book clubs, card groups, and Nintendo Wii game leagues.

If there is an activity that you are interested in, please call the COA at 689-2100 and let us know! Potlucks will be held the second Friday of each month beginning in February.

Call for Volunteers

The COA is looking for volunteers for the following programs: Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program (Jill), Volunteer Drivers (Jill), Older Adult Respite Program (Pam), Exercise Programs such as *Matter of Balance* (Kathleen), Special Programming such as potlucks, dances, and fundraisers (Kathleen or Wendy), and baking for holiday bake sales (Kathleen, Nadine, or Margret). If you would like more information about these volunteer possibilities, please contact the person whose name is in parenthesis at 689-2100. Watch the Hi-Lites for more information on activities and volunteer opportunities!

Medicare Prescription Drug Program—Bridging The Coverage Gap

Most Medicare drug plans (Part D) have a temporary limit on what they will cover for prescription drugs, or a "coverage gap." The good news is that all Medicare drug plans provide coverage if you have an unexpected illness or injury that results in extremely high drug costs. This is called "catastrophic" coverage. It assures that once you have paid \$4,350 (in 2009) out-of-pocket for drug costs in a calendar year, almost all of your drug costs above that amount are covered. If your plan has a coverage gap during the time between a drug plan's standard level of coverage and the catastrophic coverage, you pay all of your drug costs.

If you have limited income and resources, and qualify for full extra help, most of the information in this article doesn't apply to you. You will continue to pay the same co-payment or coinsurance amount during a coverage gap if your plan has one.

If your drug plan has a coverage gap, here are some ways you can avoid or delay entering the gap, and continue to save money on drug costs while in the gap:

*Consider switching to generic, over-the-counter (OTC), or other lower-cost drugs. Ask your doctor about

generic, OTC, or less-expensive brand-name drugs that would work just as well as the ones you're taking now. Switching to lower-cost drugs may be enough to help you avoid the coverage gap, and can save you hundreds or thousands of dollars a year. Information on cost savings through the use of mail-order pharmacies, generic drugs, or less-expensive brand-name drugs is also available by visiting the Compare Medicare Prescription Drug Plans section of www.medicare.gov.

*Keep using your Medicare drug plan card, even while in the coverage gap. Using your drug plan card ensures that you'll get the drug plan's discounted rates and that the money you spend counts toward your catastrophic coverage.

*Explore national and Community-Based Charitable Programs that might offer assistance (such as the National Patient Advocate Foundation). These organizations may have programs that can help with your drug costs. Comprehensive information on Federal, state and private assistance programs in your area is available on

www.benefitscheckup.org

*Look into pharmaceutical Assistance Programs (sometimes called

Patient Assistance Programs) that may be offered by the manufacturers of the drugs you take. Many of the major drug manufacturers are offering assistance programs for people enrolled in a Medicare drug plan. You can find out whether a Pharmaceutical Assistance Program is offered by the manufacturers of the drugs you take by visiting www.medicare.gov and selecting "Lower Your Costs During the Coverage Gap."

*Apply for Extra Help. If you have Medicare and have limited income and resources, you may qualify for extra help paying for your prescription drugs. Contact Social Security by visiting www.socialsecurity.gov or calling 1-800-772-1213.

Remember, after you have paid \$4,350 (in 2009) out-of-pocket for drug costs in a calendar year, almost all of your drug costs above that amount are covered. If you want to switch to a plan that offers at least some type of coverage in the gap, you can do so between November 15-December 31 each year. Your coverage will begin on January 1 of the following year.

For more information call Medicare at 1-800-633-4227 or MMAP at 1-800-803-7173.

1087 Newell Phone: (231) 689-7200
 P.O. Box 885 Fax: (231) 689-7205
 White Cloud, MI 49349-0885 www.countyofnewaygo.com

The Newaygo County Board of Commissioners

Chairperson	Adam Wright	District 5	(231) 652-1589
Vice-Chair	Stan Nieboer	District 3	(231) 924-0594
Finance Chair	Pat Gardner	District 6	(231) 834-0230
Finance Vice-Chair	Barb Geno	District 1	(231) 689-1523
Commissioner	Chuck Trapp	District 2	(231) 689-6260
Commissioner	James Maike	District 4	(231) 335-8272
Commissioner	Sam Scholtens	District 7	(231) 834-7107

Regular sessions of the Board are held the second and the fourth Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m. in the Board of Commissioners Room located in the Administration Building.

Commission on Aging Meal Sites

Did you know that the Newaygo County Commission on Aging provides lunch time meals at four locations in Newaygo County for seniors and guests under 60? Each location is open Monday through Thursday; Newaygo and Fremont serve at 11:30 a.m. and the White Cloud and Merrill Township sites serve at 12:00 p.m. There is a suggested donation for those 60 and over of \$2.00 per meal and a charge of \$4.00 per meal for those under 60. Blood pressure clinics are held at each site on a monthly basis and other activities are scheduled according to participant interest. Limited transportation is available. For more information about the meal sites or to make meal or transportation reservations, call 689-2100 or 1-800-689-2100.

Newaygo County Meals On Wheels

Newaygo County, through the commission on Aging, provides "Meals on Wheels" service for homebound Newaygo County seniors. Every year the program has grown, serving more and more meals to an increasing number of seniors. Five driving routes, over 500 miles per delivery day, provide meals service to all areas of the county. During the past year, over 75,000 meals were served to frail, homebound Newaygo County seniors through this program.

It has recently come to our attention that Newaygo County residents are receiving mailings asking for donations to benefit Meals on Wheels of West Michigan/AgeWell Services. If you choose to make a donation to Meals on Wheels of West Michigan, a worthwhile organization and cause, please be aware that your donation will not benefit the Meals on Wheels program of Newaygo County; Meals on Wheels of West Michigan serves Muskegon, Ottawa and Oceana Counties.

If you would like more information about the Newaygo County Meals on Wheels program, or if you wish to make a donation to benefit the seniors of Newaygo County, please contact the Newaygo County Commission on Aging at 689-2100 (or 1-800-689-2100), 93 S Gibbs, PO Box 885, White Cloud, MI 49349.

SAVE THE DATE... The Next Commission on Aging Potluck will be Friday, February 13 from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Join us for fun, food, and friends!

Withheld Taxes: An Option for Taxable Social Security Benefits

Some people who get Social Security will have to pay taxes on their benefits. Less than one-third of current beneficiaries pay taxes on their benefits.

You will have to pay federal taxes on your benefits if you file a federal tax return as an "individual" and your total income is more than \$25,000. If you file a joint return, you will have to pay taxes if you and your spouse have a total income that is more than \$32,000. People whose only source of income is Social Security generally don't pay taxes. However, if you have other income, such as a pension, wages, interest, dividends or other taxable income, this added to your benefits could render a portion of your benefits taxable.

For individual tax filers, if your income is between \$25,000 and \$34,000, you may have to pay tax on up to 50 percent of your benefits; if your income is more than \$34,000, up to 85 percent of your benefits may be taxable.

For couples filing jointly, if your combined income is between \$32,000 and \$44,000, you may have to pay tax on up to 50 percent of your benefits; if your combined income is more than \$44,000, up to 85 percent of your benefits may be taxable.

Although you are not required to have federal taxes withheld from your Social Security benefit, you may find it eas-

ier than paying quarterly estimated tax payments. To have federal taxes withheld, or to change your original withholding request, you will need to complete IRS form W-4V, *Voluntary Withholding Request*, which is available on Social Security's website at www.socialsecurity.gov. Select a percentage of your monthly benefit amount you want withheld: 7, 10, 15 or 25 percent. Then, sign and return the form to Social Security. Of course, if your estimate is off, it will be adjusted when you file your federal income tax return.

For more information, contact the Social Security Administration by calling 1-800-772-1213 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays. If hearing impaired, call 1-800-325-0778.