



# COUNTY OF NEWAYGO QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER SPRING 2008

Volume 3 Issue 1

April 2008



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## Newaygo County Seeks Transportation Planning Funds

With gas prices at all time highs, County Officials are looking for transportation alternatives. In February, Newaygo County submitted a \$100,000 grant (\$80,000 Federal and \$20,000 State) request through the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), to conduct a transportation needs study.

The last county-wide study was conducted over 10 years ago and an updated study will provide a basis for future funding requests and transportation planning. In addition to assessing current resources, the study

will examine the public transportation needs of County residents and develop ways to meet them.

Currently, public transportation in Newaygo County is limited to services for the elderly and/or disabled. Officials hope that the grant request will be the first step in the development of a regional collaboration that will provide limited public transportation services to County residents. A public transportation system would provide greater access to employment, health care, educational opportunities, and commercial resources.

## Newaygo County to Test Muskegon River Evacuation Plan

On Tuesday, June 3, 2008, Newaygo County will host phase II of the Muskegon River Evacuation Exercise. The exercise targets over 800 residences below the Croton Dam including homes in Croton, Brooks, Garfield, Ashland, and Bridgeton Townships and in the City of Newaygo. At 5:00 pm, the exercise will begin when the 8 warning sirens located along the Newaygo County section of the Muskegon River and the Newaygo County CityWatch Alert and Notification System are tested.

The purpose of the exercise, like the phase I test conducted last year, is to measure the time it takes responders to notify the 800+ households in the identified flood plain in

the event of a Dam failure or severe flooding that would require occupants to be evacuated. In addition to testing the sirens and CityWatch, Emergency First Responders and volunteers will go door-to-door to potentially affected homes. Residents will not be requested to leave their homes during the exercise. Instead they will receive packets of emergency information compiled by Newaygo County Emergency Services, Consumers Energy, American Red Cross, and the National Weather Service.

Anyone with questions or interested in volunteering is asked to call the Newaygo County Emergency Services Office at (231) 689-7354

## Surplus Equipment Online

In an ongoing effort to streamline the disposal of surplus equipment, Newaygo County will be offering items for sale on the internet auction site Bidcorp.com. The auction site is designed specifically for public entities such as cities, counties, and school districts.

Individuals interested in items can register with the site for free to bid on surplus vehicles, furniture, electronics, and other equipment. The winning bidder will make payment directly to Newaygo County. For more information on surplus auctions, visit [www.bidcorp.com](http://www.bidcorp.com). Look for Newaygo County items to be available on the site sometime in early May.

## Spotlight: Bob VanBelzen, Commissioner District # 4



It is hard to believe that my first term as County Commissioner is nearly over. When I was elected two years ago, I was flattered, humbled, and proud, to say the least. I had been entrusted by the public to help lead our County and it was not a task that I took lightly. To that end, I made it a point to draw on my experience as a former small business owner (gas station) and retired Detective Sergeant experience that I believe has been extremely beneficial and have complemented what was otherwise a well-rounded board.

Although it has not been without its

challenges, as a County we have accomplished many wonderful things. The two items that I am most proud of are the County's leadership in helping to develop a bulk fuel purchasing collaborative and our success in "freeing up" the County's PA 2 dollars and using them to leverage additional state and federal funding for substance abuse treatment within our County.

The bulk fuel purchasing collaboration is a discount fuel purchase program that extends the clout derived from the large quantities of fuel the County and the County Road Commission purchase to smaller users that would not otherwise be eligible for such a discount on their own. The collaboration includes the cities of Grant, Newaygo, and White Cloud, as well as to the White Cloud School District.

The collaboration pools the amount of fuel purchased by each of the entities and provides discounts from the supplier based upon the aggregate total. The program anticipates savings of .03 a gallon on fuel and expects to have total savings of up to \$25,000 a year over traditional purchasing methods.

In Michigan there is a tax on liquor that is used to provide substance abuse services to residents. These dollars are commonly referred to as PA 2 dollars and in Newaygo County are managed by an organization called Mid South Substance Abuse.

Unfortunately, although the monies were earmarked for substance abuse services in Newaygo County, due to personal agendas and governmental red tape, in recent years, no services have been provided and no money was spent.

In the past year and a half, by working to set aside personal agendas and looking towards the common good, I am proud to say that we have been able to "unfreeze" these funds and use them in leveraging several thousands of dollars in new/additional state and federal funding to aid some of the most vulnerable people within our community.

Our accomplishments show what can be done when you set aside personal agendas and work towards the common good. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you.

Commissioner Bob VanBelzen

## A GRIM FUTURE FOR MICHIGAN ROADS

After nine years of stagnation, Michigan road-funding dollars are now on the decline. Michigan primarily pays for its transportation infrastructure through the Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF). This fund consists mainly of revenues from the state-collected gas and diesel taxes and from vehicle registration fees. This money is divided among county road commissions. Most Michigan road commissions, including the Newaygo County Road Commission (NCRC) do not receive any additional revenue from property taxes.

Since fiscal year 1998, the statewide MTF revenue has increased only 10.67%. This equals an average annual increase of merely 1.13%—far less than the rate of inflation and substantially below the rate of inflation seen for many road construction-related expenses. Revenues began to decline in the second half of fiscal year 2006 and continued to fall, with 2007 revenues \$15 million less than the amount generated in 1998.

One cause of the decline is the state-collected gas tax, the largest single portion of the MTF, which has been gradually decreasing for several years. Between fiscal years 1998 and 2007, the revenue generated by the gas tax has decreased by 1.66%.

If the cost of building and maintaining Michigan's roads had remained the same throughout this nine year period, stagnant or declining revenues might not have had such a negative effect. Unfortunately, that hasn't been the case. In fact, many of the costs associated with building and maintaining roads have gone up by double or even triple digit percentages.

Consider the cost of diesel fuel, which is required to run the large trucks needed to plow and salt roads in winter, patch potholes and grade gravel roads in the summer, and to complete virtually any of the other heavy tasks required to maintain

roads. Based on the actual cost NCRC paid, using the low bid process, during this period, diesel fuel now costs more than four times as much as it did in FY 1998. The cost of the large trucks needed to conduct road maintenance has also risen—by more than 70%. China's booming economy is also using huge quantities of natural resources from across the globe, causing the cost of any steel items, such as guardrails, sign posts, and bridge beams to go through the roof. If costs continue to rise while revenues fall, Michigan roads face a grim future.

### ATTENTION ALL NEWAYGO COUNTY RESIDENTS HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION

The Newaygo County Board of Public Works has arranged for the FREE disposal of your Household Hazardous Waste at the Newaygo County Road Commission Garage on June 7, 2008. Household Hazardous Wastes include all toxic materials, pesticides, automotive fluids, oil based paint only, and batteries found in your home or garage. **Appointments Must Be Made** by leaving a message at (231) 689-7225. Leave your name and telephone number and someone will return your call to schedule your collection time and document the type of household waste you have.

The cost of this program to the County is approximately \$68 per participant and **any donations are appreciated.**

Please, Household Hazardous Waste only. Hazardous Waste generated by business WILL NOT be accepted.

## County Wrestling with Ambulance Funding Issue

Ambulance services within Newaygo County are provided by two companies. Pro Med is under contract with the Village of Hesperia and the Townships of Denver, Beaver and Troy, while Newaygo County has a contract with Life EMS for the remainder of the County.

Although Pro Med receives a subsidy from the local units it serves, Newaygo County has been fortunate for years to avoid having to subsidize Life EMS for the services it provides to the majority of area residents and visitors. Unfortunately, County and local officials are finding out that their luck may be running out.

In 1999 when Gerber Hospital sold their ambulance service to Life EMS, based upon population projections, conventional wisdom was that there would be enough runs to cover the expense of keeping 4-5 ambulances housed by Life in the County.

Unfortunately, due to a recent federal declaration that Newaygo County was an “urban county,” for Medicare reimbursements rates, Life EMS has found itself providing more ambulance runs, but with a significant reduction in reimbursements. The designation change, coupled with stagnant population growth, has created annual

operating losses for Life and a recipe where County and local officials will likely be forced to choose between scaling back the number of ambulances housed throughout the county, or having to “pony-up” to pay for them.

A survey of surrounding counties reveals a trend. It appears regardless of where you look, that good, quick ambulance response—without sufficient population to drive the market—requires a subsidy by the local Township, City or County.

While Kent County enjoys enough market competition to avoid contractual subsidies, to the north, Lake County has made a decision to house 2 ambulances and to subsidize them with a dedicated millage. The other surrounding counties of Mason, Oceana, Lake, Osceola, Mecosta and Montcalm either subsidize ambulance services from a private provider or offer the service themselves.

Although the verdict is still out on how to remedy the situation, some options involve a county-wide millage, leaving the issue to the local Townships and Cities to address, or hoping that “business” picks up. What is certain is that none of the options are very appealing.

### HELP FOR FAMILIES FACING TAX OR MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE

As more homeowners, locally and state wide, face foreclosure, this issue demands greater attention and more public awareness. To help families understand the tax foreclosure process and make them aware of resources available to Newaygo County residents, County Treasurer Holly Moon is collaborating with NCCS Center for Nonprofit Housing (CNH). Information sheets are now included in tax notice mailings to educate taxpayers about the programs and services available in the County to assist them in developing a solution to save their homes.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Fremont Area Community Foundation, CNH is now able to help even more Newaygo County families through free counseling, budgeting classes, and payment assistance for qualified persons. If you need assistance or know someone who would benefit from a free, confidential appointment with a certified housing counselor, please call CNH at (231) 924-0641 and ask for Julie Higgins or Roxane Hiler.

If you have specific questions about the tax foreclosure process, you may call Holly Moon, County Treasurer, or Julia Bird, Tax Reversion Coordinator, at (231) 689-7230 or visit the County Treasurer’s website, [www.countyofnewaygo.com/Treasurer/TreasurerPA123.htm](http://www.countyofnewaygo.com/Treasurer/TreasurerPA123.htm) for tax foreclosure information and timelines.

To encourage public attendance, the Newaygo County Board of Commissioners has scheduled quarterly night meetings. The first meeting took place on March 12. Upcoming meetings are scheduled for **June 11, September 10, and December 10** at 6:30 p.m. All meetings will be held in the Board of Commissioners Room in the Administration Building, 1087 Newell Street, White Cloud. We hope to see you there!

Newaygo County Parks and Recreation Department is busy preparing for another fun-filled camping season. For campers wanting an early start on summer, Ed H. Henning Park and Pettibone Lake Park opened on **April 25**. Sandy Beach opens on **May 9** and Diamond Lake County Park and the Hardy Dam Marina open on **May 16**. All parks are scheduled to remain open into September. To schedule a reservation before a park opens, or to reserve a slip at Hardy Dam Marina call the Parks Office at (231) 652-9298. To reserve a site after opening day, call (231)652-1202 for Ed H. Henning, (231)689-1190 for Pettibone Lake or Diamond Lake, and (231)689-1229 for Sandy Beach. Information and reservation forms for County parks are online at [www.countyofnewaygo.com](http://www.countyofnewaygo.com).

### New Locations for Health Department Offices

On April 24, two divisions of the District 10 Health Department changed locations within the Newaygo County Complex in White Cloud. The Cancer Screening program moved from the DBH building at 306 S. North Street to the Health Services Building at 1049 Newell Street. The Environmental Health Division moved to the newly vacant office space at 306 S. North Street.

Environmental Health provides septic and well permits; building permit authorization; mortgage evaluations, and oversees licensing and inspections for food service, campgrounds, swimming pools, daycares, septic tank pumpers and septic disposal sites. The move places Environmental Health at the same site as the Building Department and the Drain Commissioner and Soil Erosion office. Homeowners, builders, and contractors now have convenient, “one-stop shopping” for their permit and inspection needs. Environmental Health is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.



**Brownfield Authority Awarded \$100,000 Fremont Area Community Foundation Grant**

Since holding their first meeting in July 2007, the board members of the Newaygo County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA) have worked quickly to educate themselves about Brownfield redevelopment.

Their hard work appears to have paid off. In early 2008 the Board learned it has been awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Fremont Area Community Foundation. The grant will be used to hire a consultant to develop a county-wide Brownfield plan to establish the guidelines and procedures for redeveloping brownfield properties and determining what financing and tax

credit options are available to property owners. The grant will also be used to conduct initial environmental assessments on brownfield properties throughout Newaygo County.

In February the BRA Board conducted a Request for Qualifications and held interviews to select an environmental consultant. AKT Peerless was chosen as the firm to guide the process.

AKT Peerless’s Jim Linton will serve as Project Manager and will be meeting with the BRA Board in the coming months to write the Brownfield Plan. In addition, Jim will also be

meeting with county, city, and township officials and scheduling informational meetings in the coming months to garner input and to ensure that the plan has the support of the local entities.

Intergovernmental cooperation will enable the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority to achieve its goals of making contaminated, blighted properties usable once again, while encouraging economic development within Newaygo County. For more information or to schedule an informational meeting for your organization, please call Marcy at (231) 689-7223.

Members of the Newaygo County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority will attend the Brownfields 2008 Conference in Detroit, Michigan, from May 5 to May 7 to market properties within the county. This national conference, sponsored by the US EPA, offers a forum to market Brownfield Properties to developers from all over the world, as well as useful education sessions involving the redevelopment of brownfield land. For more info, visit [www.brownfields2008.org](http://www.brownfields2008.org)

**Newaygo County CVB Promotes Tourism Industry**

In an effort to target tourism opportunities, Newaygo County Tourist Council members, assisted by the Newaygo County Economic Development Office and the Fremont Area Community Foundation, formed the Newaygo County Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) in July of 2007. The CVB then implemented a State authorized 2% assessment on hotel rooms, paid by hotel guests and passed along to the Newaygo County CVB to support efforts marketing Newaygo County tourism. As of February 2008, the CVB has collected over \$13,000 through this assessment.

The marketing dollars have already been a big boost to promote tourism and have been used to create and maintain a new website, attend more tourism related trade shows, and market to a broader audience inside and outside of Michigan. The CVB is also working with regional partners such as the Kent County CVB and the 5 county Michigan’s Great Outdoors group to attract people visiting other areas. The Tourist Council and the CVB officially merged this April and are embarking upon the exciting task of showcasing our county as a place of rural sophistication and endless possibilities.

The CVB office, located at the Sports Park building on M37 between Newaygo and White Cloud, is open 7 days a week with a variety of maps, tourist guides and brochures available. For more information, please visit [www.newaygocountytourism.com](http://www.newaygocountytourism.com).

**Circuit and District Courts Welcome New Staff Members**



Edward J. Staffeld became the full-time Administrator of the Circuit Court and Friend of the Court in September 2007, filling the position after the retirement of Barb Geno.

Having previously worked as the Director of Investigations for Ingham County Friend of the Court and Deputy Director of Jackson County Friend of the Court, Ward brings almost 3 decades of court experience to Newaygo County. He received a bachelor degree in Criminal Justice and History at Northern Michigan University and a Masters degree from Western Michigan University.

Thrilled to be working with an enthusiastic and dedicated staff, he strives to continually improve the services of the Circuit Court.

In his free time, Ward is an avid golfer. He also enjoys

writing fiction and poetry and spending time with his family, including his twelve grandchildren.

The other new face in the courthouse is Caryn M. Michalak, Chief Probation Officer for the 78<sup>th</sup> District Court. Caryn began work on January 22, 2008. The position was vacated after the retirement of Patrick M. O’Neil, who served the residents of Newaygo County with dedication for over 30 years.

Caryn is a graduate of Michigan State University and has spent the last five years working in the Ingham County courts as a probation officer. She is energetic and eager to face the challenges that she’ll encounter while working for the District Court. She enjoys being active in the community and is looking forward to serving the residents of Newaygo County.



# SENIOR NEWS

## Women's Heart Health—What You Should Know

Heart disease doesn't just affect men. Heart disease is the #1 killer of women in the United States. Most women don't know this. But it is vital that you know it—and know what it means for you.

**Some surprising facts:**

- One in four women in the United States dies of heart disease, while one in 30 dies of breast cancer.
- 23 percent of women will die within one year after having a heart attack.
- Within six years of having a heart attack, about 46 percent of women become disabled with heart failure. Two-thirds of women who have a heart attack fail to make a full recovery.

The fact is, if you've got a heart, heart disease could be your problem. Fortunately, it's a problem you can do something about!

**What is heart disease?**

Coronary heart disease—often simply called heart disease—occurs when the

arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become hardened and narrowed due to a buildup of plaque on the arteries' inner walls. Plaque is the accumulation of fat, cholesterol, and other substances. As plaque continues to build up in the arteries, blood flow to the heart is reduced. Heart disease can lead to a heart attack. A heart attack happens when an artery becomes totally blocked with plaque, preventing vital oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart. A heart attack can cause permanent damage to the heart muscle. Heart disease is one of several cardiovascular diseases, which are diseases of the heart and blood vessel system. Other cardiovascular diseases include stroke, high blood pressure, and rheumatic heart disease.

**You have the power.**

You have tremendous power to prevent heart disease—and you can start today. Learn about your own personal risk factors and make healthful changes in your diet, physical activity, and other daily habits. Even if you al-

ready have heart disease, you can take steps to lessen its severity.

Important risk factors for heart disease that you can do something about are cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, being overweight, physical inactivity, and diabetes. Research shows that more than 95 percent of those who die from heart disease have at least one of these major risk factors. Some risk factors, such as age and family history of early heart disease, can't be changed. First steps are important. Talk to your doctor to learn more about heart disease and your risk factors.

**A Healthy Partnership**

A crucial step in determining your risk for heart disease is to see your doctor for a thorough checkup. Your physician can be an important partner in helping you set and reach goals for heart health.

Source: MPRO, Dr. Jeffrey Detrich, DO

### Commission on Aging Senior Transit

Senior Transit provides transportation for shopping, banking, errands and meal site access. Service is provided to senior citizens and disabled individuals utilizing buses that are wheelchair lift equipped.

- Transportation is provided to the closest shopping community to the rider's home.
- Suggested Bus Fare Donation is \$2.00 per round trip.

**Transit Schedule**

- Newaygo/Grant/Croton/Ensley Areas: Tuesday & Thursday.
- Fremont/Bridgeton Areas: Monday—Thursday.
- White Cloud/Hardy Dam/Hesperia Area: Monday—Thursday
- Northern County Area: Monday

Riders have the opportunity to attend a Senior Meal Site in each destination community. Suggested donation for lunch is \$1.50 for those 60 & over and \$3.50 for those under 60. Lunch reservations should be made at least one day in advance.

For more information call 689-2100 or 1-800-689-2100.

### Know Your Medicare Terms

**Original Medicare**

This fee-for-service plan covers many health care services. You can go to any doctor or supplier that is enrolled and accepts Medicare and is accepting new Medicare patients, or to any hospital or other facility.

**Medicare Health Plans (like HMOs)**

These plans are approved by Medicare and run by private companies. When you join one of these plans, you are still in Medicare. Some of these plans require referrals to see specialists. They provide all of your Part A (hospital) and Part B (medical) coverage. They generally offer extra benefits, and many include prescription drug coverage. These plans often have networks, which means you may have to see doctors who belong to the plan or go to certain hospitals to get covered for services.

For more Medicare information contact the MMAP program by calling 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** Dan Powell District 7 (231) 834-0957  
**Finance Vice-Chair** Julia Bird District 1 (231) 924-9344  
**Commissioner** Chuck Trapp District 2 (231) 689-6260  
**Commissioner** Bob VanBelzen District 4 (231) 652-5603  
**Commissioner** Pat Gardner District 6 (231) 834-0230

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.



*The Commission on Aging is located at 93 Gibbs Street.*

## Commission on Aging—Services at a Glance

The Newaygo County Commission on Aging (COA) provides a variety of services for residents of Newaygo County who are age 60 or older. There are no income guidelines for services, but COA does accept donations for services provided. For more information on programs call **689-2100** or **1-800-689-2100**.

### Transportation

Senior Transit Buses provide transportation for accessing shopping, banking, errands and meal sites. Individuals under 60 with disabilities are also eligible for this service.

Wheelchair lift equipped vans provide service for those over 60 to health related appointments within the County. Volunteer drivers provide transportation to appointments outside of Newaygo County for specialist appointments.

### Home Repair

Labor for minor home repairs is available; the client is responsible for providing the necessary materials.

### Homemaker

Homemaker aides are available for basic housekeeping chores. Services are limited to those with physical disability and priority is given to those with the greatest need.

### Respite

Several respite programs are available and designed to provide a break from the 24 hours per day care of loved ones.

### Adult Day Care

Opportunities are provided for socialization and recreation in an effort to increase physical and mental skills.

### Case Management

Case Managers are available to identify the needs of an individual, develop and monitor a plan of service, assist in meeting those needs.

### Nutritional services

Congregate meal sites within the County serve hot, nutritious meals to seniors age 60 and over. Individuals under 60 are welcome also and pay a "guest" fee. Meal sites are located in Newaygo, Fremont, White Cloud and in Merrill Township.

Home Delivered Meals are available for homebound seniors who are physically unable to cook or attend the congregate sites. Eligibility criteria must be met in order to receive these meals.

## Do Not Forget To Change Address, Even With Direct Deposit

If you are a Social Security beneficiary or Supplemental Security Income recipient who is making or planning a move, it is very important to change your address and phone number with Social Security as soon as possible.

Even if you receive your benefits by direct deposit, Social Security needs to have your correct address so they can send letters and other important information to you. Your benefits could be stopped if they are unable to contact you.

Most Social Security beneficiaries can change their address online at [www.socialsecurity.gov/changeaddress.html](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/changeaddress.html). But to protect everyone's privacy, each person who wants to change his or her address must request it. For example, your spouse and other members of your household will need to each log on to do this. Each person decides when the

change of address will take effect.

You will receive a confirmation screen at the end of your report notifying you of the effective date of the change. In addition, you will receive a confirmation letter in the mail.

You cannot change your address online if you are a representative payee (someone who handles Social Security money for another person), or a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiary. Instead, these individuals — and anyone else who prefers — can call Social Security's toll-free number, 1-800-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778). You can change your address using the automated telephone service and it's available 24 hours a day. To speak to a representative, call weekdays from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Source: Social Security Administration