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The Berkshire - Paw Paw, a 42-unit senior housing community, is nearing completion as its first tenants are scheduled to move in later this month. The three-story complex, located at 308 E. Michigan Ave., has one- and two-bedroom apartments. Autumn House Adult Day Care Services will occupy a portion of the ground floor, offering area residents daytime environment for adults with special needs such as Alzheimer's, dementia or other physical impairments. The Berkshire - Paw Paw is certified by LEED, a nationally-recognized environmental program that demonstrates a commitment to energy and care for the environment.

Courier-Leader photos/Paul Garrod



Mattawan Council dismisses member

By Paul Garrod
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MATTAWAN - Monday night, following a hearing on a misconduct charge, the Mattawan Village Council voted to dismiss one of its members.

Scott Smith, whose term expires in 2018, and who served as the council's Department of Public Works chairperson, was dismissed from his council seat, following a 5-1 roll call vote.

The charge involves an incident that occurred Jan. 9, near the end of a council meeting. During the hearing's presentation of facts, council member Pro-Tem John Beck said that Smith stood up, expressed out-

rage and said, "I quit." According to Beck, Smith then threw his board packet across the council room, where it struck fellow council member Brenda DeRuysscher in the face.

Council President Lesley Markle expressed similar comments about the incident, stating that Smith said, "I'm done," not, "I quit."

DeRuysscher stated that she heard Smith comment as he headed toward the council room door, "I quit."

Council member Joanne Rossman said about the incident, "It seemed totally uncalled for."

Smith told the council that he had received a letter on village

letter head from Markle asking for his resignation.

"I wasn't mad at any one person," said Smith.

DeRuysscher then asked Smith to comment on his sudden outburst.

"It was a personal thing that happened," said Smith.

"You sure made a fast exit," said Rossman about Smith's sudden departure.

"I haven't ran in years," Smith said.

Beck then made a motion to remove Smith from the council, after stating that misconduct had been found. The motion was supported by Rossman.

In addition to Markle, DeRuysscher, and Beck, also voting in favor of removing Smith were council members Donald Cole, and James Kirklin.

After the roll call vote, Smith gathered his papers and left the room, stating, "Thank you. I'll see you in court."

Village Attorney Scott Graham said the notice of misconduct was given to Smith at his residence by a Village of Mattawan police officer. "It was served 15, 16 or 17 days ago," said Graham.

Former Mattawan Village Council member Margot Bemer, who was in the audience, told the council following the vote, "An apology would be better than railroading him out."

Bemer said she is frustrated with the current council.

The council will seek letters of interest from individuals wishing to fill Smith's unexpired term, which expires in 2018.

In another area, the council approved a motion for the Mattawan Farmers Market to return to the downtown area, following last year's set up at McGillen's Crossing.

"We had a great year last year. It was very successful for our first year," said Sara Cox.



The Mattawan High School student body selected seniors Alec Bussott and Daniella Asafu-Adjaye as Snowcoming 2017 king and queen. The couple was crowned Friday as part of festivities during the varsity basketball game. The king is the son of Amy and Thomas Bussott, and the queen is the daughter of Abigail and Kwame Asafu-Adjaye.

TSS Photography/Steve Taylor

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Joint Adjustment Committee will develop strategies to help alleviate impact of Palisades Nuclear Plant closing in October

By Paul Garrod
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PAW PAW - Calling it an unprecedented economic event for Van Buren County and the greater community, on Tuesday afternoon, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, in preparation of the closing of Palisades Nuclear Plant, went on

VB County Administrator Cultra to retire in April

By Paul Garrod
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PAW PAW - After 19 years, including two stints as Van Buren County administrator, Douglas Cultra announced to the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday his plans to retire in April.

Cultra, 65, told the county Board of Commissioners that his last day would be April 21.

Cultra praised his staff and commissioners who he has worked with during the nearly two decades.

"The people here are dedicated and kind," said Cultra.

Cultra said through fiscal planning, the county is currently debt free, "which has allowed us to turn some things around. We never compromised our reserve," said Cultra.

"Since near bankruptcy, the county has secured a credit rating of AA and has generated a substantial amount of cash reserves. We've gone from a disaster to an extremely well managed county government, which is confirmed by our credit rating."

Cultra said that he has always had a passion about coming to work, where in his early years, he would spend 70 hours a week, but now spends between 50 to 60 hours each week.

Cultra said his retirement plans include traveling to Florida to see his daughter and spending more time with his grandson, who lives nearby.

record in support of the formation of a Joint Adjustment Committee (JAC), as proposed by Kinxus, Van Buren County's workforce and economic development agency.

JAC will be comprised of both private and public sector members who will be charged with assisting the company and community with strategies to alleviate the impact of the plant's Oct. 1, 2018, closing.

The closing of Palisades Nuclear Plant, which is owned by Entergy Nuclear Co., has an estimated impact to the county of approximately \$10 million loss in tax revenue, and the loss of the innumerable millions of dollars of ancillary revenue to the community in the form of company donations, employee wages, local supplier agreements, and contract labor.

Commissioners said the plant's closing will result in over 600 high-paying jobs no longer being in the community, resulting in the loss of employees patronizing local businesses, decrease in home ownership throughout the region, and countless volunteer hours to local community based organizations no longer being served.

Commissioners approved a request from Family Court to increase the contract amount for court-appointed attorneys from \$190,000 to \$215,000, effective April 1, 2017.

The Family/Juvenile Court has historically used a contractual arrangement with 11 attorneys who provide legal services

for people involved in the court's process.

The last increase was 14 years ago.

In another area, commissioners approved a request for a bid not to exceed \$80,000 from Linear Electric, Benton Harbor, for a lighting project at the Department of Health and Human Services Building.

In addition, commissioners approved a motion to pay DLZ \$12,500 for supervision of the installation of that new lighting.

In a related area, the State of Michigan had approached the county in regards to the installation of new workstations and carpet in the area that houses most of the caseworkers at the DHHS building.

Current workstations provide the task lights, as well as indirect lighting of the surrounding area. If the workstations were to be moved, there would not be any indirect lighting except for the task lighting directly associated with the specific workstation.

Commissioners approved a request for the purchase and installation of carpet and vinyl tile for hallways, entries and breakrooms at the DHHS building.

The State of Michigan has given the county over \$1 million to be used for various improvements during the building renovation.

Commissioners approved a bid \$24,867 from Lansing Tile & Mosaic, Inc., to replace carpet and tile in the DHHS building.

County approves brownfield and site plan for new Paw Paw Dollar General store

By Paul Garrod
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PAW PAW - Following an earlier public hearing on a brownfield re-development project that calls for a new Dollar General store to be built in Paw Paw on the former Paw Paw Laundry site, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday approved a brownfield and work plan for the site.

According to Van Buren County Director of Land Services, Ed VanderVries, the site at 711 East Michigan Ave., will see approximately 5,000 tons of soil removed. The state's Department of Environmental Quality has committed approximately \$1.5 million toward the contaminated soil removal project. Approximately 1,000 tons of that contaminated soil will have to be pre-treated prior to being removed by the state.

No start-up date for the project was given.

A Dollar General store is currently located east of the proposed new building site.



Lawton 2017 Hall of Fame Inductees

The intermission between the Lawton High School girls and boys varsity basketball games Friday was a very special moment for the Lawton community with the introduction of the Lawton Hall of Fame Class of 2017. Among the inductees for this special occasion were two married couples who contributed much to Lawton but have passed away. John and Zella Reid and Robert and Marjorie Howard, represented by family members, joined James Hunt, a 1963 graduate of Lawton High School, and the LHS 1990 State Champion wrestling team in receiving recognition. Hunt received a standing ovation for his service to the country as a member of the United States Marine Corps for 27 years. As a combat flight leader during the Vietnam War, Hunt flew more than 850 combat missions as a Huey helicopter pilot. Lawton's wrestling teams from 1985-87 are already in the Hall of Fame for their state championships and the team of 1990 will add to this prestigious record. The Hall of Fame Committee was formed two years ago. The eight-member panel, consisting of representatives from the Lawton education system and the community, is charged with the task of selecting the inductees from nominations.

By Kim Pastoll/Angela Rueff photo