

Leelanau Enterprise

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CHILD CARE INITIATIVE RECEIVES GRANT

By Amy Hubbell
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A grant for the purpose of recruiting home-based child care providers has been awarded to Leelanau County in the amount of \$318,000.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) announced nearly \$1 million in grants — with nearly a third coming to Leelanau County.

"We applied, not thinking we had a chance," said Patricia Soutas-Little, District No. 5 commissioner and member of the Leelanau Early Childhood

Development Commission (LECDC). "There were 147 applicants and five grants awarded. We asked for \$318,000 and they awarded it. We received the largest sum awarded."

LECDC with key partners (Leelanau Children's Center and the Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation) will scale up a county-based model that assists with the process of establishing a home-based child care business, which provides infant and toddler and extended hours care for working families.

The committee is already researching shared service with businesses to pro-

vide childcare for employees children and/or allowing multiple "home providers" to utilize some existing facilities in the region to provide childcare which would allow for the opportunity of extended hours.

The program, with the goal of providing quality child care that gets more people back in the workforce, would provide start up fees along with gap coverage to the providers for the real cost vs. what a family can pay for care.

According to LARA (Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs) website, there are three Leelanau providers

licensed for seven to 12 students; five licensed for one to six children.

Created in 2005 to be a statewide leader in early childhood education, ECIC collaborates to increase public and private investment in the earliest years, to elevate issues affecting young children and their families, and continuously improve the state's comprehensive early childhood system.

As an organization, ECIC has invested more than \$225 million to improve the social emotional health, economic stabil-

(Continued on Page 13)

Water warm, levels falling

By Alan Campbell
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Lake Michigan on Monday was the warmest it's been in five years and nearly a foot and a half lower than one year ago. What's that mean for us?

First, the fluctuations show peninsula dwellers once again that while the big lake may constantly influence our lives, it is anything but a constant. A road through archives of the Leelanau Enterprise takes you through washed-out roads in 1986 and an endless summer in 2016.

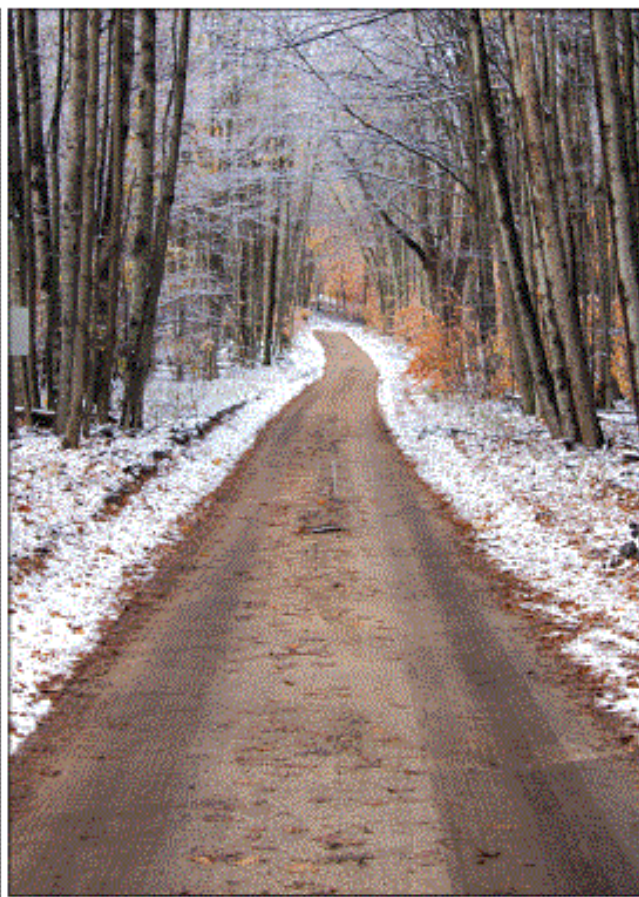
Among measurable impacts, moderating water levels have eased pressure to protect shoreline homes. And warm surface temperatures are setting up to help a series of forecasted late fall and early winter storms pack a wallop with an extra punch of lake-effect snow.

Harold Feigel has seen it all before. For 25 years he's been the "weatherman" at a National Weather Service (NWS) volunteer station near Maple City. Before that he followed tornados for the NWS while heavy equipment mechanic in the Air Force and living in Texas. And he drove a plow truck for 10 years for the Leelanau County Road Commission after moving here.

The weather station can be found in Feigel's back yard in one of the snowiest valleys in the county, which keeps him busy. So far in November he's measured 8.1 inches of snow, with 3.5 inches falling on Nov. 14.

"Through my life about the time of the deer opener, the day before or the day after, you get a little snow," Feigel said. "It's going to get colder. It's coming from

(Continued on Page 10)



Back country roads with a touch of snowfall earlier this week reminds us that fall is over and winter is near. Enterprise photo by Brian Fraiberg

Board OK's childhood contract

By Eric Carlson
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Despite suggestions that officials administering the county's early childhood "Parenting Communities" program were spreading "outright misinformation or lies" and were being "deceptive" about the program, the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners this week voted 5-2 to approve a contract with the Health Department to administer the program through 2024.

A discussion and a vote on the contract at this week's county board meeting went fairly smoothly in contrast to a more detailed and far more heated discussion the county board had about the program at its executive meeting last week.

At last week's meeting, Health Department officials Michelle Klein and Dodie Putney appeared before the board to explain a work plan and 2022 budget proposal for the program but ended up on the hot seat under questioning by commissioners.

District No. 7 Commissioner Melinda Lautner accused Health Department officials of spreading "outright disinformation or lies" about the program and called use of the term "Parenting Communities" a "shell game." Lautner said she'd heard from people who want to one of the Parenting Communities events who did not know what it was.

Klein explained that "Parenting Communities" amounts to a "brand name" that has been used by the county's early childhood program for many years — since before voters approved a millage for the program and it was funded through a variety of grants that have since dried up.

District No. 2 Commissioner Debra Rushton noted that the millage was for children ages 0-6 but that the Health Department's work plan indicated home visits were also being made to pregnant mothers.

"If we wanted to take care of children in the womb... that should have been spelled out in the millage," Rushton

(Continued on Page 13)

Judge OK's Bunek recall language

By Eric Carlson
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An effort to recall the chair of the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners from office is moving forward following a court ruling late last week.

According to 13th Circuit Court Judge Kevin Elsenhanser, language on a petition to recall county board chair and District No. 3 Commissioner William J. Bunek is sufficiently clear to allow circulation of the petition.

Reasons stated for recalling Bunek on the petition consist primarily of verbatim statements made by Bunek and another commissioner at a Sept. 14 coun-

ty board meeting.

During a discussion surrounding a vote to reduce to zero an extra-voted millage to support the county's early childhood services program, Bunek was asked by another commissioner whether his intent was to "nullify" the millage vote because of a "wrong decision" Bunek said voters had made.

Bunek confirmed his intent by replying "yes, that's exactly right," according to the recall petition.

The judge's Nov. 12 decision affirmed an Oct. 6 decision of the Leelanau County Election Commission that reasons stated on a petition to recall Bunek from office were "clear and factual."

Bunek represented himself in the Nov.

12 appeals hearing, held via the online teleconferencing application Zoom and live-streamed on YouTube. The Election Commission was represented by attorney Courtney Gabbara of the county's "corporate counsel," the Lansing law firm Cobl-Stoker.

Bunek pointed out differences between what was quoted on the petition form and what could be heard in a recording of the meeting. He said the petitioner apparently relied on draft minutes of the meeting, which were not entirely accurate.

Bunek also asserted that the petition language was not factual because of

(Continued on Page 15)



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Child care initiative receives grant

Continued from Page 1

ity, safety, physical health and school readiness of all children — focusing especially on prenatal to age 5.

The first Child Care Innovation Fund awards ranged from \$75,000 to \$318,000. Others went to:

- **Kalamazoo** — a partnership between the Kalamazoo Literary Council, Southwest Michigan Child Care Resource and the YWCA will scale up a neighborhood-based career pathway that creates full-time child care jobs with competitive wages in a community with a child care shortage.

- **Grand Rapids** — a group led by Steepstown Neighborhood Services will scale up an early childhood educator registered, paid apprenticeship program, combining academic instruction with on-the-job training, in community with a child care shortage.

- **Newaygo County** — a coalition led by Newaygo RESA (Intermediate School District) will pilot a supply-building hub in a “child care desert” that engages economic development entities and employers to support child care business development.

- **Detroit** — a partnership

between Development Centers, IFV and Trinity Health with support from The Body Rouge Community Action Alliance, will pilot a community-based approach to building the supply of quality child care in a “child care desert” with a special focus on expanding access to infant-toddler care an to extended hours of care for working families.

“We know accessible, affordable and high quality child care is essential to Michigan’s recovery and future economic vitality,” said Joan Blough, director of the Child Care Innovation Fund. “And clearly the need to fund new ideas existed. Interest in this program was unprecedented.”

Meanwhile, the Michigan House last month approved a series of child care measures, including legislation from state Rep. Jack O’Malley, that establish a more effective, higher-quality child-care system for Michigan families.

The bills, which received broad bipartisan support, prioritize care families deserve but have had difficulty accessing. The plan provides much-needed flexibility to better support providers who depend on adequate resources to deliver reliable care.



These happy kids participated in the Leelanau County Soccer Club (LSC) annual, season-ending recreational soccer tournament, the Romp N Stomp recently at Myles Kimberly Park. *Courtesy photo*

“I’m pleased the Legislature is acting quickly and collectively to move these proposals for many people throughout the state who feel Michigan’s child-care system is not working for them,” said O’Malley, of Lake

Ann. “I have heard from many people who have experienced the strain of finding reliable child care. They need a better system. It’s time to move us in that direction.” O’Malley’s proposal, HB 5041,

increases the number of children that an in-home care provider can receive if it meets certain criteria — expanding available spots for families.

Board approves childhood contract

Continued from Page 1

asserted. District No. 5 Commissioner Ty Wessell commented: “I’m a little bit mystified that for the first time ever we’re saying children aren’t children until they’re born.”

District No. 2 Commissioner and county board Chairman Will Bunek said he questioned whether the county could legally fund a “Parenting Communities” program when “Parenting Communities” wasn’t named on the millage ballot. He asked county administrator Chet Janik to obtain a legal opinion from the county’s “corporate counsel” about whether a “Parenting Communities” program can legally be funded.

Bunek, Lautner and Rushton have repeatedly questioned the legitimacy of the November 2019 election in which voters approved the millage because it was conducted in an “off year”

and voter turnout was low. In September, the three commissioners and fellow Republican Commissioner Rick Robbins of District No. 3 all voted to recommend that the voter-approved 0.253-mill property tax levy for the program be reduced to zero.

Following a public outcry — and now an ongoing campaign to recall Bunek from office — the county board approved a millage levy of 0.1932-mill for the program to match funding required by the Health Department to execute a 2022 work plan.

It took more than an hour of debate and several failed votes at the board’s Nov. 9 meeting to move the issue forward to this week’s agenda. Discussion was sometimes heated at last week’s

meeting with Wessell addressing Bunek and noting that the visiting Health Department presenters had been “beat up on.”

Bunek responded that Wessell should not address the board chairman or other commissioners by name during meetings, and that Wessell should focus on budget issues on the agenda rather than how other commissioners were acting.

“We do not address each other,” Bunek admonished Wessell.

It is not known whether Bunek received the legal opinion he requested on whether the county can fund an early childhood program named “Parenting Communities.” The last time the Leelanau Enterprise asked county offi-

cials to turn over a document “subject to attorney-client privilege” that request was denied.

However, Bunek did vote “yes” at this week’s meeting to

approve the early childhood program’s work plan and budget proposal for 2022. Lautner and Rushton voted “no.”

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