



It's Blossomtime!

• See page 2 •



Shaniah Monet'

• SEE PAGE 6 •



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Benton Spirit

Community Newspaper

April 28, 2011
Volume 10, Number 17
Benton Harbor, MI Michigan 49022
and South Bend, Indiana



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Benton Harbor Becomes Battleground -- Epicenter -- For Newly-Passed EFM Laws

Chris McCarus
Guest Columnist

Benton Harbor is becoming the battleground for Michigan's new emergency financial manager laws. Yesterday, about 200 protesters vowed to repeal the laws and recall the legislator who wrote them. There are several links in the emergency financial manager chain. Let's start with former Governor Jennifer Granholm. A year ago, she appointed an emergency financial manager for Benton Harbor. Two weeks ago, the manager, Joe Harris, used his new powers. In a quote from a story published in *The New York Times*, Harris stated, "I'm looking at what's good for Benton Harbor, nothing more, nothing

less. Until you can break the contracts, your hands are tied."

The issues raised in the EFM debate are resonating beyond Benton Harbor, as well. Last Wednesday, the Rev. Jesse Jackson met with city commissioners looking to overturn the bill, most likely through a lawsuit. The civil rights leader urged local elected officials to join a broad-based coalition against the law, which he denounced as a dictatorial initiative that puts too much power in an unelected manager's hands. Those concerns have also been raised by U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-Detroit), and the

BENTON HARBOR,
continued on page 5



Crowded Ballot For SB Mayor's Spot: Race Features Five Democrats, Three Republicans



Felipe M dropped out, but is still on the ballot

Mayoral Candidates (l-r): Barrett Berry, Ryan Dvorak, Mike Hamann, Peter Buttigieg, and Wayne Curry

By Ralph Heibutzki
Michiana Spirit Correspondent

For the first time in nearly 20 years, there isn't an incumbent mayor on South Bend's ballot – and both major parties are making the most of their chance to succeed incumbent Democrat Stephen Luecke, who ruled out seeking a fifth term

last December. The surprise announcement from South Bend's longest-serving mayor set off a stampede of would-be contenders for the May 3 primary ballot. The field includes five Democrats and three Republicans looking to take their

SB MAYOR RACE,
continued on page 8

School Board Election - May 3: Ballot Proposal for BHAS

By Ralph Heibutzki
Spirit Correspondent

School funding ballots will dominate choices that Berrien County voters will have to make in next week's primary on Tuesday, May 3. One proposal that's likely to draw a great deal of voter interest is a \$103.5 million bond issue being floated by Lakeshore Public Schools, to fund a transformation of all five of its buildings. Those efforts will be focused on energy efficiency, security and technology upgrades. If the proposal passes, voters will effectively endorse a 3.8-mill property tax increase. However, Lakeshore officials state that the increase will actually be 2.8 mills, because they're pledging to reduce the district's building and site sinking fund by 1 mill.

Officials at Buchanan Community Schools are citing a similar rationale in proposing a \$31 million bond issue that would also fund building and technology improvements. If passed, Stark Elementary would close, and the district will pursue major expansions for its middle school, as well as Ottawa Elementary School. Technological priorities include improving the district's fiber-optic network, and improving



Pictured (l-r): Top Row: Barbara Bell, Jeffrey Booker, Bottom Row: Leroy Harvey, and Joseph Taylor. Leon Wilder is not pictured

infrastructure to make future upgrades more likely. Voters with a \$50,000 assessed home value will see their property taxes increase by \$140. For more information on specifics, visit: www.buchananschools.com.

Millage renewals are also on the ballot in several districts, with most of those propositions affecting non-homestead millage – which is levied

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION
continued on page 4

Blossomtime is Here!



WELCOME TO BLOSSOMTIME 2011!

On behalf of the citizens of Benton Harbor, it gives me great pride again to welcome all you to Blossomtime!

Blossomtime's history is part of Benton Harbor's history and this year we pause to celebrate the area's many achievements:

- The City of Benton Harbor was chartered 120 years ago.
- Whirlpool Corporation, largest appliance manufacturer in the world, started in Benton Harbor, Michigan 100 years ago.
- The Senior PGA tournament will be held in Benton Harbor at the Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course in 2012 and 2014.
- This year, we are pleased to showcase one of the best in Blossomtime country, Benton Harbor's own Darren McCormick, who was crowned Mr. Blossomtime 2011. Darren is an outstanding young man who will go far in life. He is an excellent example of "Life Renewed," a phrase coined by Rev. W. J. Cady of the First Congregational Church, in Benton Harbor.

Rev. Cady, in 1906, was the first to urge his parishioners to drive through the orchards and view the fruit blossoms. Cady termed them "symbols of life renewed" and his sermon is credited with the birth of the Blossomtime Festival. The first Blossomtime Queen, Catherine Burrell, was also from Benton Harbor. The City of Benton Harbor is honored to be the co-host for Blossomtime along with our neighboring friends from Saint Joseph.

Benton Harbor is the "Heart of Southwest Michigan" – nestled along Lake Michigan. As you embark into Benton Harbor today, we hope you

are pleased with the progress we have made in the last years. Have fun and cheer on Miss Blossomtime 2011, Lisa Bowman of Baroda, and Mr. Blossomtime 2011, Darren McCormick of Benton Harbor, and their respective courts, along with Miss Benton Harbor 2011, Denavia Mojet', as well as her court and other Blossomtime participants.

If this is your first visit to Benton Harbor, do not let it be your last and please return to our progressing city, where there are new fruits blossoming each day. If you are not new to Benton Harbor, then you know that blossoms are indeed blooming in Benton Harbor and the best is yet to come.

Enjoy Blossomtime Festival, the oldest and largest multi-community festival in the state of Michigan!

Sincerely,

Wilce L. Cooke
Mayor Wilce L. Cooke,
City of Benton Harbor, MI



**Darren McCormick of Benton Harbor
Mr. Blossomtime 2011**



**Lisa Bowman of Baroda
Miss Blossomtime 2011**

Blossomtime Schedule of Events

- April 30: Farm Tour Berrien/Cass/Van Buren Counties All Day
- May 1: Blessing of the Blossoms 2 p.m. Southwest Michigan Research & Extension Center, 1791 Hillandale Road, Benton Harbor
- May 1: Vintage Baseball with House of David, 3:30 p.m. Eastman Field, Benton Harbor
- May 1-4: Blossomtime Good Will Tour All Day Southwest Michigan
- May 3: Keys to the Cities/ Mayors Banquet 6:30 p.m. Vineland Center, 1155 Vineland Rd., St. Joseph
- May 5: Annual parade for preschool through middle school 5 p.m., Dickinson Stadium, St. Joseph High School.
- May 6: Pre Parade "All You Can Eat" Pasta Party 6 – 11 p.m., St. Joe Kickers Club, 2601 Hetler Drive, St. Joseph. Entertainment included.
- May 7: 32nd Annual 5K Run/Walk for the Buds, 10:30 a.m. Whitcomb Tower, 509 Ship Street, St. Joseph
- May 7: Grand Floral Parade, 1 p.m. Downtown St. Joseph to Downtown Benton Harbor

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By Princesa Tobias, Founding Publisher, Spirit Community Newspapers



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Community Liaison - Ralph Heibutzki, Candrice Williams, Greg Osmun, Tyler DeJong, Linda Strohl, Richard Smith, Tim Johnson, Trenton Bowers, Stephan Tinsley, Elaine Osmun, and Pastor Michael Carson.

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The Power of Freedom of Speech. Note: editorials and letters to the editor are not the opinion and/or view of the *Benton Spirit*, but the viewpoint of the author.

Spirit News is currently seeking the following:

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- Graphic Designer

Volunteer with Benefits

- Graphic Designer
- Writers (South Bend area)
- Calendar of Events Coordinator

Call: (269) 926-4241 or email: editor@bentonspiritnews.com

Letters to the Editor

Benton Harbor is Not an Oligarchy

You must be totally informed about what's happening in your city. You may not know it, but Benton Harbor is the epicenter for a struggle between a democratic form of government and an oligarchy.

I think it's disgusting to continue to send our young men and women to a foreign country to fight for democracy, and when they return home (in Benton Harbor) they discover that one man, due to an illegal law, is attempting to dissolve our local government. In my opinion you cannot have a democracy without a local government. This is not a democracy, it's an oligarchy. Come on man.

On April 14 Josep,h Harris (the illegally appointed emergency manager) informed the commissioners and the mayor that once items are vetted through the standing committees, they are to be forwarded to him for final approval. Therefore, these items will no longer appear on the City Commission agenda for approval. I don't recall seeing Mr. Harris' name on any ballot when the citizens voted. This is a direct violation of my constitutional rights and must be stopped.

Now you heard it from me first: The next thing Mr. Harris will utilize to assist him in dissolving the local government is to lock up City Hall. And in my humble opinion, Mr. Harris will also attempt to sell your beach to a private entity, Cornerstone Alliance or Whirlpool. Mr. Harris didn't come down here to balance a budget -- this is all about power and control. A democratic form of government or an oligarchy, which one to you want?

Did you know that state reps. Al Pscholka and Sharon Tyler (his counterpart in Niles), while pushing through legislation, were also co-promoting legislation to allow them to keep their seats in the Legislature for 14 years? I thought junk like this was only done in Cuba.

When they have the next big golf tournament on TV, the citizens of Benton Harbor should make an announcement

on the first tee at Harbor Shores. They should inform the country that Benton Harbor may be the first city in the state, maybe in the country, to have their local government dissolved by a state-appointed emergency manager, making their elected officials' positions titular.

This is an oligarchy, not a democracy. Come on man.

-George Moon, Benton Harbor

Dear Editor:

To the *Benton Spirit* and to Princesa Tobias. You and your staff are to be congratulated for all of the accomplishments that were achieved in a short period of time.

-H. L. Sampler, Chicago

Dear Editor:

Find enclosed a letter to the editor for publication if appropriate. It can be summarized according to his will.

In a book of child psychiatry, I learned that an emotional issue for many children is the lack of self-confidence. And how to get to grow up safe and form a balanced personality? The author identified three fundamental pillars: the affection, stability and constancy.

The child needs to feel loved by their parents and educators and agree with their virtues and weaknesses.

The environmental and regulatory framework must be stable. The rules of conduct in the family cannot change overnight, as the mood of the father, or if you are tired or have things gone wrong at work. The rules must be agreed by both parents and can not be changed without a good reason. This is stability.

Those operating norms must be constant, i.e., for all days alike. The boy can guess what will happen tomorrow remembering what happened yesterday and the day before. With these three things a child will have a reference framework that will give you security.

But often are their own parents and educators who create insecure in their children through pedagogy wobbly." It will be formulated rules of conduct for

today and tomorrow are no longer valid. A teacher said that "school is where more laws are given and where they are least fulfilled." Educators, who behave like that, provoke insecurity in the learner and, indirectly, they push to them to defy with a haughty behavior, to their parents and teachers.

Children need loving parents, stable and consistent in its rules and decisions, that will do the same thing tomorrow and the day after. It needs to set limits with love for the sake of your child and insist on respect each other. Kids need strong parents who do not hesitate or falter, but they must know exactly what they want for themselves and their families. With such kind of educators, learners feel safe, welcome and happy.

Sometimes we remember the visit of a relative or friend with a child unfriendly, angry, tyrannical, used to always call the attention and failing to obey when called to order. In these situations, older people do not know whether imposed or compromise to avoid a scolding that leaves more discomfort to the parents that the child.

In conclusion, we could say that a boy that not find around himself a signage and demarcation reasonable and reasoned it becomes unsafe or nervous.

-Arturo Ramo,
Independent Forum of Opinion

Do you have a Letter to the Editor?

Send it to

editor@bentonspiritnews.com

Snyder's Proposed Budget Hurts Education



By: William Crandall, Guest Columnist

In Governor Snyder's budget proposal for the 2011-2012 school year, he has called for a shared sacrifice in education. Yet the only sacrifice that is being made is to our children's future.

In his current budget proposal, Snyder intends to raid the K-12 fund. The K-12 fund was established in 1994 when proposal A was passed by the people of Michigan to guarantee funding for their children's education. The Governor now intends to cut a minimum of \$470 dollars per student in the upcoming school year. Nearly 200 hundred districts across the state face cuts of \$500 hundred dollars or more. In Berrien county, losses per student for three of the districts will be \$839 in River Valley, \$505 in Benton Harbor and \$640 in Galien. All face the possibility of being taken over by Emergency Managers and could cease to exist altogether.

Meanwhile Snyder's budget proposal intends to use the revenue he is taking from the fund to make up for the 1.8 billion dollars in tax cuts he proposes to give to big business and other special interest groups - all in a vain attempt to create more jobs for the state. Tax breaks have never worked in the past. They have not proven to create jobs or stimulate our economy, why should the people of the state of Michigan believe that they will work in the future?

Many of Michigan's school districts will have to privatize their non educational support staff just to make ends meet. Lunch attendants, janitors and bus drivers will soon be out of work or be forced to accept harsh pay cuts and give up their benefits, all of which they've worked hard to earn. Do we really want

the good people who work in our schools and live in our communities, the people we know and trust, to be privatized, only to have corporations put their profit above our children's future?

Some school districts in Berrien County have already laid teachers off in reaction to their uncertain economic futures. Recent reports have stated that the Niles school district has laid off 22 teachers, Dowagiac 15, Brandywine eight, and Benton Harbor 20. All in an attempt to shave down their budgets.

If the Governor's budget is passed it will also place a serious financial burden upon our local economies. With more educational and support staff out of work less money will be spent in our local businesses. Our local economy will continue to falter.

In our schools, class sizes will increase and they will not have the money to purchase materials or replace computers and textbooks. Special education students and students who struggle in a general education classroom setting will have less one on one time with staff members to help them understand the material so that they can excel in the future and have the same opportunities as everyone else.

With the financial failing of our schools, Emergency Managers will be appointed, stripping local districts of their right to self govern. Taking away the right of every parent in this state to have a say in their children's education and future.

The Governor asked for a shared sacrifice. But the only sacrifice that is being made is by the middle class, educators and the children of this state.

William Crandall is a Paraprofessional at the Berrien RESA's Blossomland Learning Center

School Board Election, continued from page 1

on commercial and industrial properties. Benton Harbor, Coloma, New Buffalo, Riverside and Sodus will see this language on their ballots. In the city of New Buffalo, residents there will consider a five-year, .4634-mill renewal expected to raise \$94,000 for park improvements.

Primary elections have one other main purpose - to determine nominees for the November ballot.

For more information about elections or ballot proposals, contact the County Clerk's Office at (269) 983-7111.

Benton Harbor Area Schools

Five candidates are seeking two

four-year terms ending in 2015, and one partial term ending in 2012. The field includes two incumbents in Board President Leroy Harvey, of PO Box 1371, Benton Harbor, and Trustee Barbara Bell, 194 Brownway, Benton Harbor. Bell has held her seat since August 2010, when she was appointed to fill a vacancy created by former Board President Dan McGinnis's resignation.

Other candidates are Jeffrey Booker, 184 River Terrace Drive, Benton Harbor, and Tom Wilder, 2024 Colfax Ave., Benton Harbor, as well as one write-in challenger in Joseph Taylor, 1874 E. Empire Ave., Benton Harbor. Voters wishing to declare their

Student of the Month

Bruce Roman

By: David Jones
Spirit Youth Correspondent

Bruce DeWayne Roman II is a senior at Dream Academy in Benton Harbor MI. He was born June 15, 1992. Roman is a three time Honor Roll student at the Dream Academy High School. He is a two time varsity starter and ranks number 10 in the leading scorers in basketball in Berrien County with 14.7 points per game. He was also the team captain. It isn't very surprising that basketball is his favorite sport.

Roman will attend Western Michigan University and play college basketball. While in college he plans on studying African-American Literature. He also ranks number three in his class. He spends time at Second Baptist Church which is his church home. He enjoys being in the choir. Roman is the first young singer in the choir and is also the lead singer. He has been mentored by David Lee Shaw Sr. and his basketball coach, Mike McCree. "The people who inspire me are God, my mother Delfene, my grandmother Jessie, my uncle David and my basketball coach."

Roman is well liked, respected



and a really good person.

- Favorite Color: Red
- Favorite Food: Chicken & Cornbread
- Favorite Song: "You're my Lady." by D 'Angelo
- Favorite Movie: "The Temptations."

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP RUMMAGE SALE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
2001 NILES AVENUE, ST. JOSEPH, MI

THURSDAY, MAY 5 • NOON TO 7 P.M.

Outside sale items may be purchased at 11 a.m. if not raining

FRIDAY, MAY 6 • 9 A.M. TO NOON
BAG SALE NOON TO 2 P.M.

preference for Taylor must write down his name on their ballot. Wilder is new to the field, while Booker and Taylor had both applied unsuccessfully for the vacant seat that Bell now holds.

Voters will also have to decide on renewing an 18-mill, non-homestead operating millage. This levy is assessed on all property, except principal residences and qualified agricultural property. This is how the language will appear on the ballot, according to the Berrien County Clerk's Office:

"Shall the currently authorized millage rate limitation of 18 mills (\$18.00 on each \$1,000.00 of taxable valuation) on the amount of taxes which may be assessed against all

property, except principal residence and other property exempted by law, in Benton Harbor Area Schools, Berrien County, Michigan, be renewed for a period of 5 years, 2012 to 2016, inclusive, to provide funds for operating purposes (17.8308 mills of the above is a renewal of millage which will expire with the 2011 tax levy and 0.1692 mill is a restoration of millage lost as a result of the reduction required by the Michigan Constitution of 1963); the estimate of the revenue the school district will collect if the millage is approved and levied in 2012 is approximately \$6,638,463?"

BENTON HARBOR, continued from page 1

Michigan Black Caucus, which have questioned how the law will effect cities with minority populations.

Harris got his new powers from State Senator John Proos and State Representative Al Pscholka. Both are Republicans from the St. Joseph area, Benton Harbor's twin city along the Lake. They sponsored the bills that became law and Governor Snyder signed them.

In an interview with Pscholka, he responded that this bill is not a threat to democracy as some say it is, that it is only temporary until an emergency is over. In response to the Benton Harbor situation he said, "Benton Harbor's actually starting to show a positive cash flow. What do you think about that? You know the financial condition of the city at all? Missing pension funds for police and firefighters. It's not a good thing. Gotta fix that. That's what we're trying to do."

Residents questioned by the Benton Spirit voiced mixed opinions about the issue. "At first, I thought these elected officials are wrong, and they deserve what they are getting," said Mrs. D. Johnson, who said she was born and raised in Benton Harbor. "But, now, this EFM and the State of Michigan has gone too far. The city managers and elected officials who caused all of this are gone. And, now the State coming in and disfranchising us -- the people, selling off our precious land and water plant, disregarding the citizens and their vote, and making us look like a darn fool around the world is horrible. I hate it. Mayor Cooke, keep fighting and do not give up. You are finally showing the people what you are made of. You should have been doing this all alone. Shaw and the rest of you, where are you? The elected guys sitting there now, keep fighting. I hope it is not too late. Please do not allow them to get rid of our city. We see it and we do not like it. More importantly, God do not like ugly."

Benton Harbor native Kevin Hunter focused on the bigger issues behind the legislation. "No one could be against the redevelopment of Benton Harbor," Hunter said. "The problem isn't the franchising of Benton Harbor with the new golf course; but the disfranchisement of the residents of Benton Harbor using the Fiscal Accountability Act, a.k.a. 'Emergency Financial Manager Bill.'

"Al 'The Joka' Pscholka-R, former vice president of Cornerstone Alliance and sponsor of the Fiscal Accountability Act, has been instrumental in the destabilization of Benton Harbor's government for years, from the secret parking lot meetings with officials to today's EFM. The entire purpose of the EFM is to deflect interference from the \$500

million golf venture undertaken by Whirlpool and the Not-so-Great State of Michigan."

Aicena Diamond, also of Benton Harbor, questioned how city officials made the EFM's entry possible. "I'm a 21 year-old resident and to say that this is an outrage would be an understatement. We cannot point fingers, however our city officials brought this upon us all," Diamond said. "They made their decisions without regard of our opinions, and now they need our help getting them out of the sticky situation in which they created. Why? Why should we not accept the EFM and his new policies? Why should we be against the two organizations who ARE creating jobs and bringing opportunities that we might have never been able to have?"

"If our City's local government were capable of making sound decisions, there's no way they would have accepted the proposed \$200,000 that Whirlpool offered. Even if they were threatened by the corporate giant's 'take this or we'll leave' scheme. I don't know how much our land is worth, but what I do know is: we're on one of the freshest water resources in the world, we're between two metropolitan cities, and we have many residents that are artistically gifted in more ways than one. I can't even wrap my head around what was taken into consideration when they made their decisions. However, if possible, the city should renegotiate the terms of the contract made between our counterparts. Because, if not, we're only going to be consumed by our neighboring city...."

Benton Harbor minister Ricardo Byers hoped to see a more unified city emerge from the controversy. "People now need to stop thinking of only themselves. Some fuss, argue, and talk a lot, but it is time for us to come together and rally for our city," he said. A similar perspective came from Leon Williams, who said, "As a business owner and life-long resident of Benton Harbor, I feel that what is happening should have never happened. I do not like what I see. One good thing is that it has brought black and white people together. Now I hope

our community will change."

About 200 people marched through the downtown square of Benton Harbor yesterday. A woman with a megaphone led this chant: "Save the people, not the banks. Save the people, not the banks. Who's Benton Harbor? Our Benton Harbor. Who's Michigan?"

The protesters also came out of the rain and rallied inside. One of the organizers was John Waltz. He's an Iraq and Afghan war veteran who's now an activist. "We've seen the lawsuit. That's one. We've seen referendums to pull away that bill P.A. 4. And I'll announce today that Heartland Revolution, (the Kentucky based group he created, though he was born and raised in Kalamazoo) in conjunction with this great community—we're gonna start the recall process of Al Pscholka," Waltz said, during his speech to the group. The audience cheered.

Benton Harbor business owner and resident Emma Kennard hoped that Wednesday's rally would build momentum against the legislation. "This is a great cause and the turnout was great. Now we need to have a big recall for all who are for this EFM. Communities from all around are supporting this effort and neglecting us the people and our voices," she said. Resident Pati Heinz voiced similar hopes. "When I think of the works of Martin Luther King and how hard he fought for the rights of all people today," Heinz said. "He worked hard and if he could see what is happening to our community here in Benton Harbor today, he would not like it. This EFM, Pscholka and others are trying to over do what Martin Luther king worked so hard to do; give us justice, fairness and a voice."

The emergency financial manager has stripped the city commission of its powers. He's said to be looking for missing pension fund money. Wilce Cooke is still the Mayor, in theory.

When asked about the missing money Cooke explained, "Let me tell you. If

Benton Harbor Emergency Manager Joseph Harris will host a TOWN HALL

MEETING on April 28, 2011 at 200 Paw Paw Business Growth Center in Room

116 from 6:00pm until 7:30pm. Public is invited.

that was that much money missing from the pension fund don't you think the police and firefighters would be up in arms jumpin' up and down? Have you heard them say anything? Of course not. There's not that much money missing. When they first come in, we had about an \$8 million deficit with three or four in the general fund, and maybe some underfunding in the pensions. There's nothing missing. It's just that we used it to do certain things for the pensioners of people who are already retired."

Back inside the fiery town hall, several people got up to speak. It was a mix of black and white, like the audience itself. One speaker was Mary Alice Adams. She says the differences in America these days are between rich and poor. "We didn't all come over here on the same ship. But we're definitely in the same boat. This thing has come from Capitol Hill. Barack promised us that he would change the way Washington is ran. And now we're demanding it because it has trickled down into our small communities," Adams said to the crowd.

Not money that's trickled down... but the governing philosophy of tax cuts started by President Reagan. And what's also trickled down is powerlessness, felt by people in places like Flint, Muskegon, Saginaw and Benton Harbor.

Chris McCarus is a reporter for Public Radio and MichiganNow.org.

<p>Mayor Wilce Cooke Wants to Hear from YOU!</p>	
<p>We held this meeting to give you, the citizens of Benton Harbor, an opportunity to be heard. Should you have other thoughts/suggestions after you leave this meeting or know others who wish to comments, please tell them to contact me below:</p>	
<p>City Hall – Clerk's Office</p>	<p>(269) 927-8408</p>
<p>E-Mail Address</p>	<p>yourvoice@mayorcooke.com</p>
<p>Personal Voice Mail</p>	<p>(269) 849-9490</p>
<p>You may also have other suggestions/concerns regarding other issues please do not hesitate to contact me today. I am here to serve you, the citizens of Benton Harbor, MI. –Wilce L. Cooke, Mayor, City of Benton Harbor</p>	



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**SAY IT LOUD
I'M BENTON HARBOR PROUD!**

Benton Harbor Native Daughter's Six-Year-Old Def Jam Artist, SHANIAH MONET' --Stands Up With The Best Of Them

By Lisa Gulley and Ralph Heitbutzki
Spirit Correspondents

Who'd have thought that someone from Benton Harbor would make all their dreams come true by finding fame and fortune in the music industry? That's exactly what's happened for Cherlon Jones, who graduated from Benton Harbor High School in 1990, and played on its girls' basketball squad, which made the quarterfinals that year. After graduation, Cherlon immediately left the area to pursue a career in music promotions in Atlanta, GA, where she's currently guiding a special kind of artist – her daughter, Shaniah.

Shaniah is only about four feet tall, but when the “lights, camera, action” are involved, this six-year-old rising star stands up with the best of them. She began her rap career – as Shaniah Monet' – with her first single, “I'm Feeling Myself,” which she debuted on CBS's “Atlanta Metro Mix.” The resulting interest led to Shaniah competing on Q100's Atlanta Network Show, “The Bert Show: Bert's Big Break,” in which she placed second, out of thousands of contestants. As one of the top two finalists, Shaniah had the chance to sit down one of the music business's most powerful managers in Scooter Braun, who also handles teen pop phenomenon Justin Bieber's career. “Shaniah has a song at six that's catchier than most people trying to make records every single day,” Braun said.

The “Bert's Big Break” victory also opened the doors for a deal with Def Jam/Island Music Group to team up with Shaniah on her upcoming singles. Asked how she felt about this offer, Shaniah responded that “she is very excited for the opportunity to be able to inspire other children.” Asked when she noticed Shaniah's talents, Cherlon responded: “At the age of three. She did her first recording at four years old. She's always been a natural, so I enrolled her into the John Roberts Powers School of Acting – but, as far as music (goes), one day, while working with another artist in the studio, Shaniah just starts rapping into the microphone. She was only four.” As far as up and coming artists



Shaniah Monet' one of the Newest Def Jam Artists

are concerned, Cherlon has only one piece of advice: “To stay focused on the outcome, not give up, remain positive, and believe.”

Shaniah's motivation for writing and performing is inspired by family and life events. Shaniah enjoys cheerleading, acting and riding her bike. Shaniah is a first grade honor roll student at Thomasville Heights Elementary School, in Atlanta. She recently won first place in her school's talent show. Shaniah's message for kids is to “stay in school, have fun and do their best, while being there get good grades.” When she's not in school, Shaniah makes selected appearances around the Atlanta area – such as the Atlanta Zoo's annual event, “Boo At The Zoo” – and also does commercials.

To book Shaniah, email Cherlon Jones at: cherlonj38@gmail.com, or become a fan on her self-titled Facebook page, or @therealShaniah, on Twitter.

View her video and New York trip with Def Jam/Island Music Group on the Youtube link, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3w3O8BKNndg. Shaniah will also debut her superstardom on the “Ellen DeGeneres Show,” with more details to be announced.

For additional information, email playgroundmusicgroup@gmail.com.

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Crowded Ballot For SB Mayor's Spot: Race Features Five Democrats, Three Republicans

continued from page 1

party's nomination into the November general election – although Democrat Felipe Merino has since dropped out, but remains on the ballot.

The odds are seen as longer for Republicans, who haven't won the mayor's office in four decades – although contractor Wayne Curry, the best-known GOP contender, is hoping to buck that trend. The Democratic side features names that are well-known in local political circles, including pastor and activist Barrett Berry; Indiana State Representative Ryan Dvorak; and St. Joseph County Councilman Mike Hamann. The *Michiana Spirit* now offers a brief rundown of the candidates' backgrounds and stances to help voters in their decision-making.

MEET THE DEMOCRATS:

Barrett Berry

A minister, educator and entrepreneur, the Rev. Barrett Berry, 2043 S. South Bend Ave., South Bend, is well-known for hosting the "Empowered Living With Barrett Berry" radio show. He returned to South Bend in 2008, after a lengthy federal government career that included several job during President Bill Clinton's administration. One of his most high-profile assignments came as a control officer for the U.S. State Department in Nairobi, Kenya, during the terrorist attack against the American embassy there. A former Reynolds and Woodrow Wilson Fellow, Barrett serves on several local boards – including St. Joseph County's Area Planning Commission, to which Luecke named him.

Berry's platform includes promoting economic development, and effective government; ensuring great schools, and a safe, sustainable community; and making South Bend into a world class city. If elected mayor, Berry promises to launch the Jobs Council, which would be staffed by a special assistant for business and jobs development. According to Berry, the Jobs Council would advise the mayor on ways of strengthening the city's economy, and making the region more competitive. "TOGETHER WE CAN build the Beloved Community in the great City of South Bend in every neighborhood, on every block, and in the hearts and minds of all of all people," Berry concluded, in a statement posted on his website, <http://barrettberry.ngphost.com/>. For more information, visit his website or campaign headquarters at 540 Carroll St., South Bend.

Pete Buttigieg

Local businessman Buttigieg, 28, 107 W. North Shore Drive, South Bend, received the St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce's endorsement in March

He last worked for McKinsey & Co. as a consultant, advising business and government leaders on major economic development, energy policy and strategic business initiatives. His work has taken him around the U.S. and all over the world, including Afghanistan and Iraq, according to his website, www.pete-forsouthbend.com/. Although his career has been focused in business, Buttigieg emerged as the Democrats' top vote-getter when he unsuccessfully ran for state treasurer last year.

Buttigieg's key priorities include a more responsive city government. To save taxpayer dollars and promote efficiency, he would cross-train staff to do more than one job, and create a 311 phone line to offer a "one-stop shop" for city services and information. As mayor, Buttigieg would "personally lead efforts to attract and retain businesses that create good-paying jobs," according to his website's platform, while working proactively with key employers "to make sure that they are able to succeed and grow." Like the other candidates, he agrees that improved education and safer neighborhoods are important goals, as well.

Ryan Dvorak

Dvorak, 36, 215 W. North Shore Drive, South Bend, hopes that his state-house record will get voters to take a closer look. The son of County Prosecutor Mike Dvorak, he's now in his fifth term as State Representative for Indiana's 8th House District (northern St. Joseph County, plus parts of South Bend). As a legislator, Dvorak helped pass laws to keep drunken drivers off the roads, crack down on methamphetamine trafficking, and promote job growth in the state – such as through the first "Buy Indiana" statute, according to his official website, www.ryandvorak.com/. Prior to becoming a state lawmaker, Dvorak served as a senior legislative aide to U.S. Rep. Tim Roemer.

Dvorak remains a practicing attorney with May Oberfell Lorber, "where he helps local businesses – small and large – grow their companies here at home," his biography states. If elected, Dvorak expects to use the mayor's office to rally economic development efforts, and convince companies with well-paying jobs to call South Bend home. For higher quality of life, Dvorak will improve parks and green space; increase access to quality public transit; and promote cleanup of abandoned properties. On the public safety side, Dvorak will work with police and residents to improve response times in problem areas.

Mike Hamann

Hamann, 51, 2658 Tomahawk Trail touts himself as "the only candidate with proven executive experience" on his

website, <http://hamannformayor.com/>. As an example, he cites his tenure as a St. Joseph County Commissioner (1999-2003), an experience that put him in contact with a \$65 million budget and 1,100 employees. As a St. Joseph County Councilman, he represents the city's and county's northwest sides, while serving as chairman of the Human Services and Criminal Justice committees. He's also been a teacher for 26 years, and run a communications and marketing firm for the last eight years.

Hamann's life took a tragic turn last weekend, following the death of his wife, Mary, in the South American nation of Paraguay – where she was celebrating their daughter's wedding. After a period of reflection, Hamann has decided to continue his campaign, with economic development as the focus. Calling South Bend's unemployment rate "unacceptably high," Hamann pledges to "pull out all the stops" in attracting well-paying employers – and sending a clear message that the city is "open for business." If elected, Hamann will move aggressively to demolish abandoned properties, which he calls crucial to revitalizing neighborhoods and fighting crime. To that end, he will work with community leaders and police "to forge a plan of action that will bring safety and security to city residents," his platform states.

Felipe Merino

Merino, 2124 W. Western Ave., South Bend, became the last Democrat to file by the mid-February deadline. Barely a month later, however, the South Bend attorney disbanded his campaign committee and dropped out of the race – citing unspecified "personal issues" that preceded his candidacy. By state law, however, Merino's name must remain on the ballot, even if he's no longer an active candidate.

MEET THE REPUBLICANS:

Wayne Curry, Jr.

Wayne Curry, Jr., 1050 Burns Ave E., South Bend, has been the most visible GOP candidate so far. Curry had planned to run for the South Bend Common Council's 4th District, but changed his mind in favor of a mayoral run, instead. He's no newcomer to campaigning, having unsuccessfully sought a Common Council at-large seat in 2007, and a county council seat in 2008.

Curry, 50, has owned and operated Wayne County Construction for 22 years. He's also been active in several community ventures, most notably serving as chairman of the Economic Development Panel of South Bend's "City Plan" process from 2003 to 2006. He's also served as treasurer for the Community Oriented Policing Leadership Council and North

East Neighborhood Council, according to a biography posted on the St. Joseph County Republican Party's website, www.gopsjc.com.

Curry is running to give South Bend residents, whom he considers the city's "biggest asset," an alternative to long-term Democratic rule. "Obviously the direction and philosophy for which they base their decisions on is grossly flawed," Curry said, in a statement for www.gopsjc.com. "The declining population, businesses, and jobs in South Bend are a testament to that. My administration will turn this around with sound common sense decision making and leadership, leaving the ideology out of managing our city." For further information, call (574) 288-3645, or email: wayneccs@aol.com.

William "Bill" Davis

Davis, 63, of 1631 Lincolnway East, Apt. 111, South Bend, is also a familiar face from past campaigns. His last try for public office came in 2008, when he received 40 percent of the vote in the St. Joseph County Commissioner's race. Davis also lost to Luecke in 2007, although he did receive 20 percent of the vote.

Davis has emerged as the campaign's least conventional candidate, having drawn media attention for a volatile past that includes stints in prisons and mental hospitals. However, Davis asserts that his background is less relevant than his platform that's focused on revitalizing neighborhoods – which he sees as vital to improving the city's economic condition. If elected, Davis would make it easier to buy up vacant houses, and put them back into public use.

Will Taylor

Taylor, 54, PO Box 8, Notre Dame, IN, has also made vacant properties a centerpiece of his campaign. A real estate investor who buys, fixes and sells properties for a living, Taylor claims the city has been overly aggressive in demolishing vacant houses. He's currently suing the city's code enforcement department for not allowing him to fix up a condemned property on the 1100 block of East Donald Street, which he bought in a tax sale. If elected, Taylor would make anti-drug efforts a priority, as well as a major revamping of the code enforcement department. However, Taylor has pledged to leave most other city departments alone, because they are functioning efficiently.

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- Residents of other housing developments managed by the Benton Harbor Housing Commission (category 2 residents);
- Participants in HUD Youth Build programs being carried out in the Benton Harbor metropolitan area;
- Other Section 3 residents.

Resumes and qualifications for Section 3 Businesses can be emailed to harborbluffs@douglascompany.com or will be accepted during normal business hours at the construction trailer located within Harbor Bluffs at 708 Harbor Bluffs Court Benton Harbor, Michigan 49022. All resumes and qualifications will be kept on file until construction of this project is completed. Qualified applicants will be notified of any future opportunities.

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The Spirit of Youth - On Mother's Day

In celebrating Mother's Day on Sunday, May 8, the *Benton Spirit Newspaper* allowed two of their interns, David Jones and Rachel Ash, an opportunity to write about their mothers, see below. Happy Mother's Day!

Celebrating My Mother

By: Rachel Ash, Spirit Intern

My mom, Dawn Ash, is a very important person in my life. She is everything I could ask for in a mother. She may not seem like a very interesting person but she is. Mildred Pearson, my grandmother, is an important person in my life as well. We all celebrate Mothers Day together. My mother and her mother are the people in my life who I value a lot. Mother's Day is a holiday that celebrates mothers. There are times when my mother can be really funny, like when I asked her what she thought about mother's day. She said, "Mother's day is a day that mothers deserve," and then she laughed.

My mother has done a lot of things for me. She has encouraged me to be a good person and to make a future for myself. She gives me all the support I need. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have a mother that cared for me. Her favorite T.V. shows are crime dramas. What she likes the most are *Cold Case* and *Law and Order*. She can't get enough of those shows but I can.

When my mom was growing up she celebrated mother's day with her mom. She likes gospel music and her favorite group is the Clark Sisters. Her favorite song by them is *More than Conquerors*.



Dawn Ash, mother of Rachel Ash, enjoys a nice spring day outside her Benton Harbor home

When I asked my mom what she wanted to do this Mother's Day she said "I'm going to cook for the family and my mother. I believe Mother's Day is a day where mothers should be around family and have a good time and be happy."

When my mom has free time she likes to do puzzles and read the *Bible*. Our traditions for mother's day are getting together with my mom and her mom, spending time together and being thankful that we still have a mother to celebrate.

- Favorite food - pizza
- Favorite song - The Clark sisters: "More than a Conquer"
- Favorite TV show - *Cold Case* and *Law and Order*
- Favorite movie - *Beaches*

The Meaning of Mother's Day

By: David Jones, Spirit News Intern

I asked my mother, Bridgett Brooks what mother's day meant to her. She responded "Mothers Day is a day for family. I thank God for choosing me to be the mother of David and Laneva Jones. Without them there would not be a Mother's Day for me. When I see how hard they work to please me and I see the path they are on I know that God is in the center of our family. Looking at my children and the goals they have set for themselves, there should be an official Children's Day. I love you David and Laneva."

One of Brook's favorite memories is graduating from the Benton Harbor High School in 1988. I asked my mother if she had any powers in the world what would it be and she wishes she had the power of peace. It saddens her to see how families are falling apart. I feel that this statement means that everywhere she goes there's a family that's breaking up somewhere. I believe she wants to better the relationship she has with her sisters and her mother.

She wants to meet Tyler Perry because he is the real deal. The story of his life is similar to hers. I know his struggles and with God's help he knew he was going to make it. No matter what life threw at him, he still was leaning and trusting God.

Every year I give my mother a gift



Bridgett Brooks, mother of David Jones, shows off her shining smile

and we cook dinner for her. On that day her wish is my command I try and celebrate Mother's Day every day.

My mother means everything to me she always is there for me and she knows what is right for me. She is the most supportive person I know and love. She never lets me down and always there for others when others are not there for her. She knows how to plan things at the last minute which really interests me because that's a hard thing to do. She is a beautiful Minister at Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church, a teacher and a good friend.

- Favorite Food - Chicken Salad
- Favorite Color - Indigo
- Favorite Movie - *Happy Feet*
- Favorite T.V. Show - *Good Times*



Cinco de Mayo, A Day of Remembrance

Cinco de Mayo (Spanish for "fifth of May") is a holiday that celebrates the defeat of the French at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. This holiday is celebrated more in the United States (U.S.) than in Mexico where it is primarily celebrated in Puebla, the site of the battle.

In the U.S., Cinco de Mayo is primarily celebrated in the southwestern part of the country, but celebrations can be found anywhere there are Mexican populations. It is a celebration of Mexican heritage and pride and may well be so popular in the U.S. because it is believed that it was created by Mexicans and Latinos living in California who supported fighting for freedom and democracy in the infancy of the American Civil War. Cinco de Mayo is not Mexico's Independence Day.

The *Benton Spirit Newspaper* is pleased to partner with the Benton Harbor Charter School in celebrating Cinco de Mayo. Following are responses from Mexican-American students on how their families celebrate Cinco de Mayo. Join us in celebrating this historical celebration.

Nikki Martinez, Eighth Grade - For Cinco de Mayo, we usually have a big get-together at my dad's house. We would stay up all night until the following day. I'm not really sure what we are celebrating, but the grown-ups seem to know. We would have all kinds of food and a piñata for the kids. It's usually very fun! My dad said in Mexico, for Cinco de Mayo, that they would walk the streets with candles, and just be celebrating the Day of the Dead.

Stephanie Fuentes, Eighth Grade - Para 5 de Mayo, our family gathers up and celebrates two things: because it's 5 de Mayo, and because it's my parent's anniversary! We all gather at one of our aunt's or cousin's house. We have a big dinner for everyone. The women stay inside, drink coffee, talk, prepare the food, and take care of the kids. The men stay

outside, drink, and take care of the grill. We celebrate in a big way! There's a lot of different Mexican food. My mom makes frijoles and charros. My aunt makes rice and pork. My cousin makes tortillas. We all eat, celebrate, dance, and listen to a lot of traditional Mexican music.

Abraham Lopez, Eighth Grade - For Cinco de Mayo, we have a family get-together. We also have a special dinner for our family. We have chicken, rice, beans, and more good types of food. We just sit there having a good time with my family, sharing stories with each other.

Luis Lopez, Seventh Grade - I really like Cinco de Mayo because all of my family members come to our house at about 12:00 p.m. to eat a traditional Mexican plate that my mom makes. When we're done, with that, we start setting up the barbecue grill so that later on, we can grill barbecue

and chicken. When it gets dark, I usually go to the movies with my friends while my parents stay with their relatives at home. We usually stay up until 3:00 a.m. in the morning. As you can see, Cinco de Mayo means a lot to me and my family.

Eddy Perez, Third Grade - We celebrate 5 de Mayo because Mexico beat the French in a war. In Mexico to celebrate 5 de Mayo people dress as soldiers. People have parties and families gather together to celebrate 5 de Mayo.

5 de Mayo is important to Mexican people. When it is 5 de Mayo, my family makes tamales, tacos, and beans. My family goes to my cousin's house, and their



Above are a few students from Benton Harbor Charter School who celebrates Cindo de Mayo

mom makes different kind of food. 5 de Mayo is really important to my family.

Nathali Gasca, Third Grade - We celebrate 5 de Mayo because the Mexicans beat the French. We are so glad, and people can't forget about 5 de Mayo!

How do we celebrate 5 de Mayo? Well, the girls put on a dress, and the colors are red, green, and white. People make good food like tamales.

How does my family celebrate 5 de Mayo? We like to invite friends to my house, and we like to eat and talk.

Source: wikipedia.org

Visit our Website: www.bentonspiritnews.com

Top Benton Harbor JROTC Cadet

Each year Algonquin Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution honors the top JROTC Cadet from Benton Harbor High School at one of their meetings. Col. Reginald Spivey, Commander of the JROTC program at the high school announced this year's Top Cadet to be Ryan J. Reynolds, son of Tracy Lilly and Ryan Reynolds of Benton Harbor. Ryan was presented with a medal and a certificate signed by the President General of the National DAR. This year, thanks to a donation from an anonymous Algonquin member, the chapter was able to also present him with a \$50 monetary award.

He is a senior at Benton Harbor HS. When I asked him if he is involved in any sports or clubs at school, he said, "I play baseball and



Ryan J. Reynolds

then I just study hard the rest of the time!"

Ryan plans a career in Criminal Justice, starting at Lake Michigan College and then transferring to Western Michigan University.

SW Michigan 2011 Princess and Pre-Teen Princess Crowned



Morgan Piontek



Kimberly Spaulding

The *Benton Spirit Newspaper* congratulates Kimberly Spaulding, Miss Southwest Michigan Princess 2011. She is the daughter of Jason and Tracy Spaulding of Coloma and is an eight year old second grader at Coloma Elementary in Coloma. We would also like to congratulate Morgan Piontek,

Miss Southwest Michigan Pre-Teen 2011, and Miss Photogenic. She is the daughter of Jeff and Julie Piontek of Benton Harbor, and is a 10 year old fourth grader at Lincoln Elementary School in St. Joseph.

Congratulations to All!

Stiletto Synergy Ready For Big Summer: Program Geared To Uplift Girls 8-18

By Ralph Heibutzki
Spirit Correspondent

Like many big ideas, Stiletto Synergy started off from a simple realization – one that occurred to founder Patrice Bettison-Clark about a year ago, during a trip from Phoenix, AZ, to her former home of Benton Harbor. "Typically, my contribution to the community would be on an annual basis. I'd write a couple checks to a couple non-profits for the Miss Benton Harbor festivities, (or) in support of Blossomtime Festival," Bettison-Clark recalled. "And it would be sporadic, in that I wouldn't come home very often. I looked around, and said: 'What can I do to assist on a regular basis?'"

As a communications and marketing manager for Arizona State University, Bettison-Clark is used to choosing words carefully, and thinking hard before taking action – so she enlisted some help. "I had a girlfriend gathering with some professional friends of mine: I want to do something formally in my hometown community – will you help me?" she said. The end result is a "sisterhood of service, action and deed" that's existed for about a year now, according to Bettison-Clark, and is gearing up for an action-packed summer. "It's powered by women – hence, the name. We partner with the Boys & Girls Club of Benton Harbor, and are launching a mentoring and leadership program for girls this summer – it'll be a six-week pilot program. That was our first step in the community as an organization," she said.

Stiletto Synergy made its community debut last month with its "Sister 2 Sister" summit in South Haven. The American Association of University Women's South Haven chapter and Lake Michigan College coordinated the event, which was designed "to strengthen girls' voices, so that they may be better heard on issues that affect their

daily lives," Stiletto Synergy's press release stated. Featured speakers and topics included Courage Coach/author Judith L. Pearson, as well as presentations on goal setting, healthy choices and positive attitudes, as well as a skit about women's struggles in winning the right to vote.

"Although I was tired from a full week of work and a red eye flight from Phoenix, the time spent with the girls and women made it all worth it; the experience was truly motivating and empowering," Bettison-Clark said, in the release. "The girls said they had a great time! We (Stiletto Synergy) are gearing up and looking forward to a fabulous summer in Benton Harbor, launching our Inspired And Motivated (I Am) program, in partnership with the Benton Harbor Boys and Girls Club."

The Summer Campaign

Stiletto Synergy's six-week program will run from July 11 through August 18, with formats, programs and times being worked out behind the scenes, according to Bettison-Clark. "The long-term goal is to develop a pipeline of opportunity for young girls, where we can be impactful on their development, and mentor them," Bettison-Clark said. "From a national standpoint, girls have issues with teenage pregnancy, dropout rates, not (being) focused on science, writing and math – that's a heavy focus of what our programming will entail."

As part of those efforts, Stiletto Synergy will bring in guest speakers for each week of the program, "so they can do a deep dive on the subject matter that's been covered," Bettison-Clark said. If nothing else, Stiletto Synergy is built on the notion of helping young girls make their dreams happen – not wishful thinking, as its brochure makes abundantly clear. "The partners of Stiletto Synergy are stepping up, and stomping out the negativity and obstacles that hold our



Jakira Marshall, Patrice Bettison-Clark, K Robinson, Diamonique Gibson, Kathy Atcher-Brooks.

young daughters/sisters back," the brochure states, in part. "We are kicking down the barriers, scraping away the scars and binding the curses of poverty, underexposure and inadequate preparation. Through our well heeled association, we are positioning for long term, sustainable success and societal contribution."

Bettison-Clark said that Stiletto Synergy chose to focus on sixth, seventh and eighth grades as their priority, because that's where young girls need the most help – which is often a commodity in short supply. As an example, Bettison-Clark points to numerous studies that have revealed gaps in math and science achievements, once girls reach those grade levels. "In sixth, seventh and eighth grade, they just kind of drop off, and it's downhill from there. We'll also do fun things – such as etiquette training, and financial literacy – but definitely with some teeth around health, and awareness," she said.

Long-Term Goals

Looking down the road, Stiletto Synergy

expects to change its constituency of young girls "with action-oriented deed, demonstration of excellence and economic development for community and societal sustainability," according to its mission statement. "We are women working together to promote common goals." The focus will remain on providing locations and programs for mentoring, character and life skill development that "elevate thinking, encourage innovation and promote service to others," the brochure states, in a summary of the organization's objectives.

Bettison-Clark hopes that stories like hers give Stiletto Synergy's key audience the inspiration they need to succeed in life. "I'm juggling travel and leaning more heavily on my board of directors, but so far, they're stepping up to say, 'We have it – we've been planning it for two years now, you've been on us every month for the past year, we're going to do it,'" she said. For more information about Stiletto Synergy, visit stilettoenergy.org, email Stilettoenergy@mail.com, or call (602) 469-1239.