



WE ARE GR

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April 2025 | Vol. 22 | Issue 4 | Section A

Thanks to the generosity of our advertisers, this newsletter was funded using minimal taxpayer dollars.

Join Us in Celebrating Grand Rapids' 175th Anniversary & Neighborhood Summit!



Dear Grand Rapids Community,

This year marks a momentous milestone for our city – Grand Rapids is celebrating its 175th Anniversary!

Incorporated as a city on April 2, 1850, our Grand Rapids community has a rich history and a bright future, and we want YOU to be a part of this exciting year-long celebration!

The City's 175th Celebration Committee, in collaboration with organizations like Experience GR, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. (DGRI), and the Grand Rapids Public Museum, have planned a variety of events and activities to honor this special occasion.

Whether you're organizing your own celebration, creating custom merchandise, or simply celebrating in your own way, we invite all community members, businesses, and organizations to join in the festivities.

Save the Date – Celebrate with Us!

We're kicking off our official celebration with a birthday bash on Saturday, June 7 at Rosa Parks Circle. This will be a fun-filled event for all ages, so mark your calendars and get ready to celebrate Grand Rapids' vibrant past, present, and future!

175 Pictures for 175 Years – A Mobile Museum Exhibit

In collaboration with the Grand Rapids Public Museum, we will be showcasing 175 key moments in our city's history through a traveling mobile museum exhibit. This exhibit will make stops at various locations throughout the city, offering a chance to reflect on our journey from the early days of the Ottawa Indians to the bustling city we know today.

Digital Collaborations and Contests

We've got exciting digital initiatives in the works, including contests and collaborations that will let you engage with the 175th celebration in creative ways. Stay connected with us on Facebook and Instagram to be the first to know about these opportunities!

Join the 175th Anniversary Community Celebration

We encourage everyone to use the official 175th Anniversary logo creatively! The logo is available for free under

Creative Commons licensing for events, merchandise, and personal/business celebrations. Download the logo and brand guidelines at grandrapidsmi.gov/GR175-Logos.

For more details on events, how to get involved, and to stay up-to-date with the celebration, visit our official website at www.175GR.com.

The 2025 Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit: Don't Miss It!

In addition to the 175th Anniversary festivities, we're excited to invite you to the 2025 Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit, a powerful day of learning, connection, and action. This free event will take place on Saturday, May 17, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Grand Valley State University's Pew Campus.

This year's theme, "Bridging Differences, Building Unity," focuses on fostering belonging and inclusivity in our city. The Summit will feature workshops, a keynote presentation, a photo booth, and resources from local organizations. Plus, we'll be honoring community leaders who have contributed to Neighborhood Match Fund projects.

Participation is limited, so register now to secure your spot at <https://publicinput.com/grsummit2025>.



We're thrilled to celebrate these exciting milestones with you! Grand Rapids has come a long way, and with your involvement, the next 175 years will be even brighter.

See you at the 175th Anniversary Celebration and the Neighborhood Summit!

Mark Washington, City Manager

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2025 Road Construction Season Kicks-Off In Grand Rapids

The 2025 construction season is now underway in Grand Rapids with dozens of street and sidewalk improvements set to be made across our city.

Since 2014, our Grand Rapids' Vital Streets millage has funded the maintenance and reconstruction of 647 miles of streets, improving an average of 59 miles each year. In 2014, only 37% of streets were rated Good or Fair; by the end of 2024, this number rose to 61%, based on the Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER) scale – a rating system for road pavement condition using visual inspection to evaluate pavement surface conditions.

The Vital Streets Oversight Commission helps guide the allocation of funds to achieve our vision of safe, accessible, and multimodal streets. This is accomplished by following plans developed by all of you, such as the Vital Streets Plan, Bicycle Action Plan, Area Specific Plans and others. Since 2014, we have added 10.5 miles of new sidewalks and continue to repair and replace existing sidewalks. In 2024, 73-miles of sidewalk were repaired, 484 ADA-compliant ramps were added, 2.1 miles of new bike lanes were installed, and 1 mile of existing bike facilities was upgraded.

In line with our “Complete Streets” philosophy, we also incorporate green infrastructure, adding street trees, rain gardens, and bioswales to improve stormwater management.

City Engineer Tim Burkman noted, “On average, we complete 59 miles of street improvements annually. We understand large projects can be disruptive to homeowners and businesses, impacting travel around the city. That’s why we are enhancing our communications efforts this year to keep community members informed of the projects, suggested detours, and how they may impact travel and commutes.”

Burkman said preconstruction meetings give the City the opportunity to highlight some of the large projects that will impact the community this construction season including the five projects listed here. The Targeted Construction period focuses on the time from start of construction to open-to-traffic. This is not the full project schedule but helps clarify the duration of the most disruptive portions of the project.

Division Avenue – North of Fulton to Crescent

Targeted Construction period – Now to November

This project involves installing a new water main, replacing lead water services, reconstructing the street, curb and gutter, and narrowing the street to slow traffic and shorten pedestrian crossings. The finished street will include wider sidewalks, ornamental streetlights, new traffic signals, 79 new street trees, and raised bike lanes level with the sidewalk.

Leonard Steet – Powers to Alpine

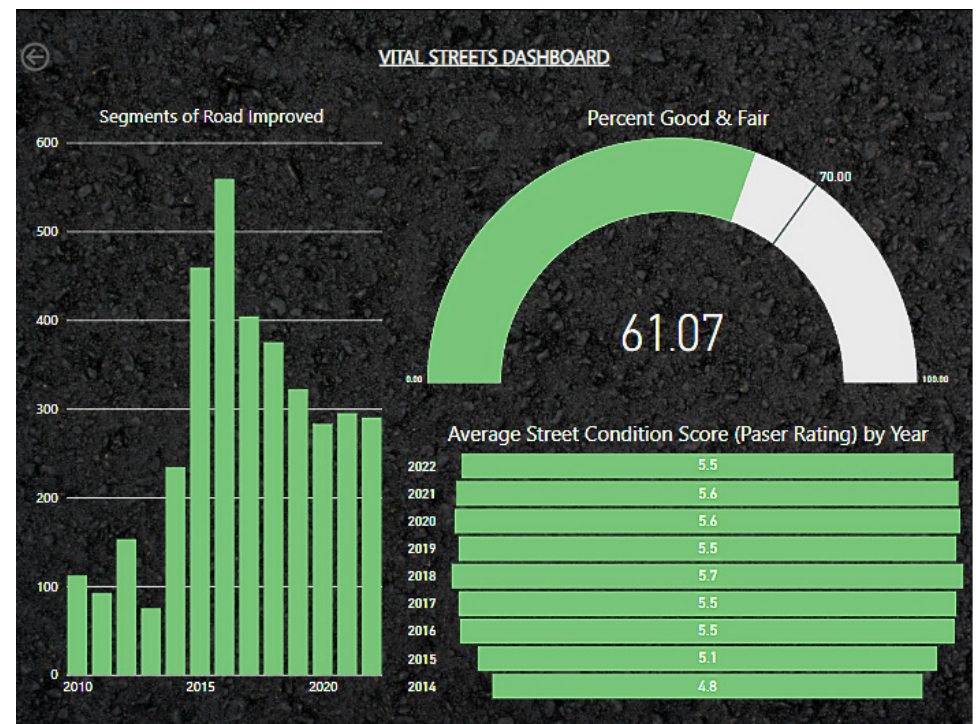
Targeted Construction period – Now to October

This reconstruction project will replace the street and lead water services, narrow the street, and widen sidewalks. Curb extensions will shorten pedestrian crossings, define parking, create space for rain gardens, and slow traffic. ADA-compliant ramps and brick pavers for stormwater management will be added. Streetlights will be upgraded with new fiberglass poles and LED lights, and 31 street trees will be planted. A rapid flashing beacon will be installed at Fremont Avenue. On Leonard, from Powers to Tamarack, the south parking lane will remain, with wider sidewalks on both sides of the street. From Tamarack to Alpine, the north parking lane stays, and the south side will be converted to wider sidewalks on both sides of the street. In-set parking will be added at 842 Leonard, and a loading zone at 900 Leonard.

Ann Street – Monroe to Plainfield

Targeted Construction period – June to September

This reconstruction project will install new road surface, curb and gutter, sidewalks with curb extensions to shorten pedestrian crossings, define parking lanes, and slow traffic. All sidewalks and ramps will meet ADA standards. Raised separated bike lanes will be added on both sides of the street. The north on-street parking lane will be removed, and a raised parking lane installed on the south side of Ann Street. The project also includes replacing driveway approaches and planting new street trees.



61% of Grand Rapids streets now rated good or fair

Boston Street – Fuller to Plymouth

Targeted Construction period – Now to August

The Boston Street reconstruction project will install a new water main from Calvin to Plymouth and replace all lead water service lines. The street, curb, and gutter will be reconstructed, with curb extensions at intersections to shorten pedestrian crossings and define parking lanes. New roundabouts at Calvin, Rossman, and Rosewood will improve safety and slow traffic. The street will be widened between Fuller and Rosewood, with ADA-compliant sidewalks and ramps. Parking will be removed on both sides between Rosewood and Plymouth, and on the north side between Fuller and Rosewood, while maintaining south-side parking. Bike lanes will be added, and driveway approaches and street trees will be replaced.

Plainfield Avenue – Fuller to I-96

Targeted Construction period – June to November

The Plainfield reconstruction will include new pavement, curb and gutter, wider sidewalks and ADA compliant curb cuts, bike lanes extending to Denny's and the BP Gas Station at I-96, driveway approach replacements, and new street trees. This is a short section of road for the City that is being coordinated with a larger Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) project on Plainfield Avenue from I-96 to Airway Drive through the City of Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Township and Plainfield Township. The Targeted Construction Period covers both the MDOT project and City project. MDOT will be scheduling a construction focused public open house this Spring.

To learn more about road construction projects in your neighborhood and citywide, please visit:
grandrapidsmi.gov/Residents/Road-Construction-Projects





Summer Jobs Available

Applications are now available for the City's GRow1000 Summer Youth Employment Program. Teens and young adults may apply for employment through April 25 to earn money while gaining and enhancing workplace skills.

This year, we plan to hire over 100 young people aged 15 to 24. Participants earn \$13 an hour – 20 hours a week. The week includes paid professional development workshops every Friday. This year's workshops will focus on building social, financial and workplace capital.

"We have employed 1,150 young people in jobs since this program's inception in 2020. I know firsthand how impactful youth employment opportunities are in helping one prepare for present and future success. Furthermore, this program also designed for our youth to discover who they are and who they want to be," City Manager Dr. Mark Washington said.

Youth will work the six-week program from Monday, June 9 to Friday, July 18.

Jack D. worked last year at Public Thread learning about upcycling and the textile manufacturing industry. He said, "When choosing a future job, I will explore my career options to be more community-oriented because of GRow1000. My job site last summer prioritized community and I found it inspiring and fulfilling."

GRow1000 participants must meet the following basic requirements:

- Be between 15 and 24-years-old as of June 9, 2025
- Live in the city of Grand Rapids
- Be eligible to work in the U.S.

Youth may apply for the GRow1000 program at grandrapidsmi.gov/GRow1000. Bus passes will be available upon request.

In 2025, the City of Grand Rapids will continue to serve as the employer of record. Our Community's Children – a public/private partnership between the City, Grand Rapids Public Schools and community partners – will manage the program day-to-day.

Businesses and organizations can take part in one of two ways:

- Provide paid job or internship experiences. The amount per youth placement is \$1,600. Businesses can register at <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Programs-and-Initiatives/GRow1000/GRow1000-Employer-Registration>.
- Provide financial contributions to support placement of youth at local nonprofit organizations. Individuals are also welcome to donate. To donate, visit grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Programs-and-Initiatives/GRow1000/Donors. Youth applications and business registrations are due by Friday, April 25.

Support for business partners include:

- Employer orientation at Grand Rapids City Hall
- Job shadow opportunities prior to the first day of work
- GRowcases that provide meet and greet opportunities with youth employees
- mEasy, two-step weekly timesheet submissions for both employees and employers
- Full-time program coordinator support and on-site visits by Our Community's Children staff
- Electronic GRow1000 Employer feedback forms

If you choose to keep a firearm in your home, you are legally responsible for ensuring that the weapon is stored in a safe manner, and not easily accessible to children or other unauthorized persons.

Free gun locks are available at GRPD Headquarters (1 Monroe Center) by asking the reception desk - no ID needed or questions asked. Many neighborhood associations also have them on hand.

For more information on gun safety and the safe storage law, visit michigan.gov/mdhhs



YOU'RE INVITED!
GRAND RAPIDS NEIGHBORHOOD SUMMIT



SPOTS ARE LIMITED!

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!



SATURDAY, MAY 17TH 2025



8 A.M. - 5 P.M.

FOLLOWED BY A COMMUNITY CELEBRATION



GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY,
PEW CAMPUS 401 FULTON ST W,
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49504



To learn more + register:

Join us for a day of learning, connection, and action at the annual Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit! This free event brings together residents, community leaders, and organizations to explore ways to build a more equitable and engaged city.

GRVOTES

News from the Office of the City Clerk

Upcoming Election

May 6 – special millage election for Kentwood Public Schools and Forest Hills Public Schools *This is not a city-wide election*

On **Tuesday, May 6**, there will be a polling location open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. for voters in the Kentwood and Forest Hills Public School Districts. Voters may also apply for an absentee ballot, find their voting location or see a sample ballot at <https://mvlc.sos.state.mi.us/>

For more information:

www.kentwoodps.org/ourdistrict/operating-millage-ballot-proposal-information/

www.fhps.net/2025-operating-millage-renewal/

New precinct lines on the horizon

There have been many changes to election laws in the State of Michigan over the last seven years. With those changes, you have many options to cast your ballot including voting absentee at home, early in person at an early voting site or in person on Election Day at your local precinct. A majority of the voters are now voting before Election Day and is prudent to review the number of precincts in Grand Rapids. The City's Election Commission recently approved modifying precinct boundaries and requested that the City Commission approve an ordinance change to reduce the number of precincts to 59. Registered voters will get new voter registration cards in the mail this summer. To view the proposed precinct boundaries and location go to <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Residents/Elections/Precinct-Maps-and-Polling-Locations>.

Joining a Citizen Board or Commission is a great way to get involved within the City.

There are many boards with various topics, and we are confident you'll find one that suits your interests!

Check out all the boards to learn more about what they do and how to apply: www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Boards-and-Commissions

Need a passport or document notarized? We can help

Your City Clerk's Office offers passport and notary services. If you need to apply for a passport, simply make an appointment by calling 616.456.3010. If you need a document notarized, visit the second-floor City Clerk's Office at City Hall, 300 Monroe Ave. NW, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The fee for notarization is \$5 per signature. No appointment is needed. To learn more about these services and all that the Clerk's Office has to offer, visit grandrapidsmi.gov/clerk.



Bring Them home: GRPD is Hiring Certified Police Officers

Do you know a family member or friend in law enforcement who would love to serve in Grand Rapids? The Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) is actively hiring certified police officers—those who have already completed a police academy and are eligible for MCOLES certification.

This is a great opportunity for officers looking to return home to Grand Rapids

and serve the community they know and love. GRPD offers competitive pay, excellent benefits and a strong support system for officers committed to making a difference.

Visit joinGRPD.com or search for police officer openings on the City of Grand Rapids job site to learn more about key dates, salary details and the application process.

Water Pool-ooza at the Lakeshore!

Are you interested in learning more about your drinking water journey before reaching your faucet? Join the City of Grand Rapids Water System April 19 as we explore the drinking water treatment process from toilet to tap. Water professionals at this FREE event will join us to guide students (ages 9+) and families through the water treatment process with hands-on, interactive activities. Participants will learn more about their drinking water, explore the variety of careers in the water industry and learn how to be a water champion!



Don't miss the boat, register today! bit.ly/3D2yTkW

Saturday, April 19 | 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. | City of Grand Rapids Lake Michigan Filtration Plant, 17350 Lake Michigan Drive, West Olive, MI 49460

Water Pool-ooza on the Grand!

Dive into a day of water-filled fun at Water Pool-ooza on the Grand! Join us June 7 at Riverside Park for a FREE family event funded by the EPA in partnership with Grand Rapids Community College and the City of Grand Rapids. Open to students (ages 6+) and families, this event offers a variety of activities to explore while learning about water conservation and becoming water champions. Registration is not required.

Saturday, June 7 | 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. | Riverside Park (Guild Street Entrance), 2001 Monroe Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505

4TH ANNUAL

CLEAN SLATE GR: EXPUNGEMENT FAIR

EVENT INFO:

SATURDAY, MAY 3, 2025
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

KROC CENTER
2500 DIVISION AVE S, GRAND
RAPIDS, MI 49507

Clean Slate Fair open to all Michigan residents. We CAN NOT expunge out of state or Federal Convictions.

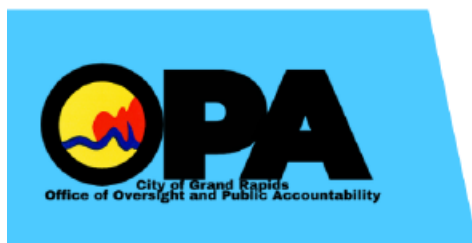
A CLEARED RECORD ASSISTS

- ✓ Employment Opportunities
- ✓ Housing Opportunities
- ✓ Education Opportunities

ATTORNEYS ON SITE

- ✓ Free ICHAT
- ✓ Free Fingerprinting & Consultation
- ✓ File Expungement petition

For more information and to pre-register visit: <https://t.ly/RJlfc> or scan below:



Safe & Just
Michigan



Lead-reducing water kits available to Third Ward residents

Attention, Third Ward! As part of the Participatory Budgeting Grand Rapids (PBGR) initiative, Third Ward residents allocated \$500,000 of its \$1 million investment to address lead concerns.

Healthy Homes Coalition is now distributing lead-reducing water kits to residents with lead service lines. Each kit includes

- A lead-reducing filter pitcher
- Replacement filters
- Materials for cleaning faucet aerators
- Lead education materials
- Optional: In-home assessment of pipes and fixtures to identify risks

For more information or to check your eligibility, visit grandrapidsmi.gov/LeadReduction or contact Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan at (616) 241-3300.

EPA **GRCC** **2025**

WATER POOL-OOZA

ON THE GRAND!

FREE!

JUNE 7
10 AM - 2 PM

RIVERSIDE PARK
2001 Monroe Ave NE
(Guild Street Entrance)
Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Join us for a free family event where students of all ages can explore careers in water, learn about conservation efforts, and discover how to become a water champion! Enjoy hands-on activities led by water professionals, nonprofits, and community partners.

Questions? Email waterprograms@city.gr for more information!

Free Summer Event Offers Resources and Family Fun



For the fourth consecutive year, the Grand Rapids Housing Commission (GRHC) and the Black Impact Collaborative are teaming up to host “Health and Unity in the Community,” a free resource and family fun fair. The event will be offered Friday, June 20, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Campau Park, 51 Delaware Street SW in Grand Rapids.

Health and Unity in the Community is open to all. It will feature free health screening, health care information and family/older adult services resource tables staffed by community organizations. Mainstreet Association will provide music. A bounce house, games, prizes, face painting, temporary tattoos, sno-cones, popcorn and more promise to make it fun for kids of all ages.

In addition to the event sponsors, the Family Outreach Center, Corewell Health, Oak Street Health Services, Vibrant Futures, the Kent County Health Department, Seeds of Promise and many more organizations will be on hand to provide information and resources.

For more information, including an updated list of participating organizations, contact GRHC Resident Services Manager Joyce Williams at (616) 970-8265.

Springtime Safety in Michigan: Be Prepared for Wind and Tornadoes



As spring unfolds in Michigan, we’re greeted by warmer weather and the sight of vibrant tulips. But this season also brings the potential for severe storms, including dangerous high winds and tornadoes. Recent events over the last few years, like the high winds and tornado that hit Grand Rapids, serve as a strong reminder of how unpredictable spring and summer weather can be. Michigan sees an average of 16 tornadoes each year, mostly from late spring to summer. With tornado warnings giving just 10 to 15 minutes of notice, it’s crucial to know how to protect yourself and your family when these storms strike.

Spring Safety Tips

1. Check the Weather: Before heading out, always check the forecast. Keep an eye on weather alerts through news or weather apps so you’ll know if a storm or tornado is likely. Sign

up for local alerts at grandrapidsmi.gov/emergencyalerts.

2. Find Your Safe Spot: If a tornado warning is issued, head to a basement, storm cellar or an interior room on the lowest level of your home. Avoid windows and stay away from large open areas like gyms.
3. Secure Outdoor Items: High winds can turn outdoor objects into dangerous projectiles. Secure lawn furniture, trash cans and anything that could be blown away.
4. Create an Emergency Kit: Pack a basic emergency kit with water, non-perishable food, a flashlight, batteries and a first-aid kit. Don’t forget a charger for your phone!
5. Recognize Warning Signs: Watch

for dark, greenish skies, low clouds and sudden changes in wind. If you hear a loud, continuous roar (like a train), it’s time to take cover. Also, make sure you know the difference between a “Watch” and a “Warning.”

- A *watch* means conditions are right for a storm or tornado to form, so stay alert.
- A *warning* means severe weather or a tornado is happening or about to happen—act fast!

Spring in Michigan is beautiful, but it comes with risks. By staying informed and prepared, you can protect yourself and your family from the dangers of high winds and tornadoes.

Learn more at ready.gov/tornadoes, and let’s make the most of this unpredictable season!

Fixing Up Your Home? Resources Are Available!

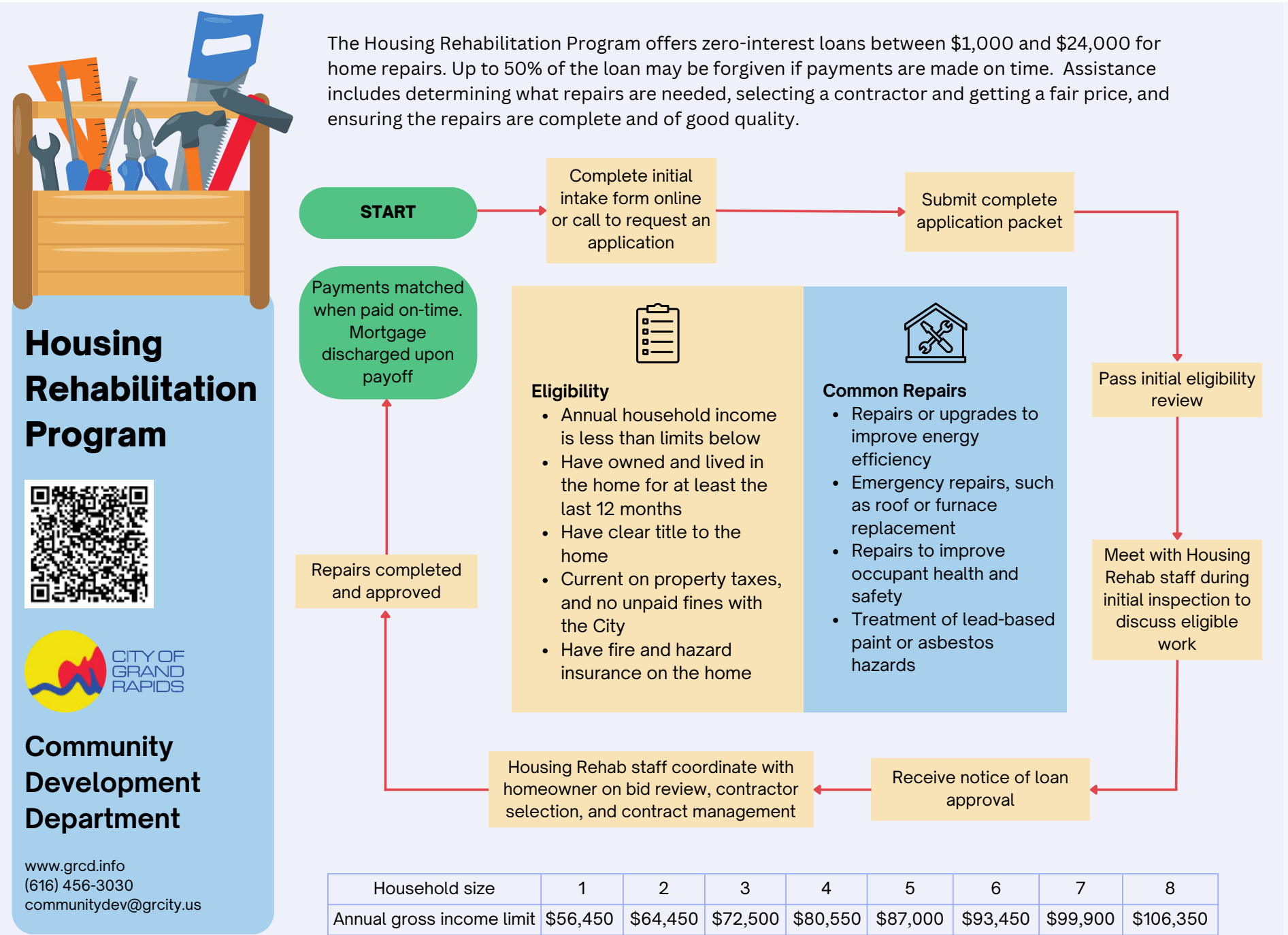
Summer is a great time for making home repairs. But be careful because renovation can release toxic lead dust that poisons children. If you have an older home, we want to make it easier for you to renovate lead safe.

There are two programs to help people fix lead hazards in their homes.

Grand Rapids households are eligible for help from the City of Grand Rapids Lead Hazard Control program if they are low to moderate income. A family of four can make up to \$80,550, and larger families can make even more.

The City of Grand Rapids program provides up to \$20,000 to fix lead paint hazards in homes built before 1978 where children under age six live. Homeowners who stay in their home for five or more years will have 100% of the loan forgiven interest free! For more information call (616) 456-3030.

If your family makes too much for the City’s program, the State of Michigan has the Michigan Saves Lead Poisoning Prevention Fund. Michigan Saves offers low-interest loans with easy eligibility. Borrow \$1,000 to \$50,000 and take one to 15 years to repay. Interest rates vary by lender. To apply for Michigan Saves, call (517) 484-6474 or apply online at michigansaves.org/homeowners.





Grand Rapids Offers a Full Lineup of Summer Fitness, Recreation and Camps

Local parks and recreation programs provide summer fun for all ages

With summer just around the corner, our Parks and Recreation Department is gearing up for a season packed with exciting ways to stay active, connect with community and enjoy the outdoors. From sunrise yoga and team sports to kayaking on the Grand River and free summer day camps for kids, residents of all ages will have plenty of opportunities to make the most of the warm weather.

"We really want people to take advantage of and enjoy the incredible outdoor spaces we have here," said David Marquardt, director of Grand Rapids' Department of Parks and Recreation. "Whether you're looking to start a new fitness routine, join a recreational sports league, meet new friends with shared interests, or give your child a summer filled with adventure, we have something for you."

Family-friendly recreation for all ages

In addition to a vibrant parks system offering a mix of splash pads, playgrounds and walking trails, families can enjoy a variety of summer recreation programs designed for all ages. Free family paddle nights provide a chance to kayak together

on the Riverside Park Lagoon (see page 9), while Tae Kwon Do (see page 9) classes offer a fun way for both kids and adults to build confidence and learn self-defense. Families can also cool off at one of the city's three outdoor pools — Briggs Park Pool, Martin Luther King Park Pool and Richmond Park Pool — which open June 6.

Youth sports, camps, and leagues keep kids active all summer

Along with family-friendly activities, the City is offering a variety of youth programs, sports leagues and skill-building lessons designed to keep kids active and engaged throughout the summer (see page 9). Young athletes can join tee ball and baseball leagues, participate in baseball clinics with the Grand Rapids Police Department, develop their skills in youth soccer camp or the summer soccer program, and take part in running sessions to build endurance. These programs emphasize teamwork, sportsmanship, and fun while helping kids develop lifelong skills.

Free Summer Day Camps for Kids

This summer, Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation is offering free day camps designed to provide kids with an enriching and exciting break from school (see page 9)

"At our summer day camps, we believe every child deserves a summer filled with adventure, creativity and growth," said

Kourtney Perkins, recreation coordinator for the department. "From canoeing and outdoor games to STEM projects and arts and crafts, we create a welcoming and safe space where kids can learn and play."

Each camp includes a mix of outdoor activities, sports, arts and crafts, STEM projects, reading, and games. With free lunch and a snack provided daily, the goal is to create a fun, supportive environment where kids can build confidence, make new friends, and create lasting memories.

Adult recreation programs offer fitness, fun, and community connection

Adult residents can challenge themselves with the slow burn of a barre class, find balance through sunrise yoga or explore local trails at their own leisure. For those interested in learning a new skill, beginner pickleball lessons offer an introduction to one of the fastest-growing sports, while Tae Kwon Do classes (listed above) provide training in self-defense, flexibility and discipline. Kayak rentals (also listed above) will return to Riverside Park, offering water-focused experiences on the Grand River.

For individuals ages 50+, additional programs are available and run Monday through Friday. These programs are free, occur at Garfield Park Community Gym at 2111 Madison Ave SE and open to the public.

Free Outdoor Fitness Series Starts May 12

Back for its 11th year is the popular Free Outdoor Fitness Series that offers 16 weekly classes over 15 weeks at various parks and downtown locations. Classes will include returning favorites like Sunset Yoga at Lookout Park, Zumba at Rosa Parks Circle, and Barre on the Blue Bridge along with new classes like Hip Hop Yoga at Pleasant Park and Core Blast at Roosevelt Park.

"Our outdoor fitness series combines the best of our parks with the best of our fitness classes," said Amy Kwaiser, fitness coordinator for the department. "Not only do participants get to improve their physical and mental health, they get to do it while enjoying the outdoors. Offering these for free and to a variety of skill levels is an important step towards creating a vibrant and healthy city community."

Classes kick off the week of May 12 and run through August 22. A full schedule of class times and locations will be announced soon through the department's website and social media accounts.



CITY OF
GRAND
RAPIDS

Parks and
Recreation

City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation

SUMMER CATALOG

Kayaking on the Grand River

For those who love the water, Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation is offering free and affordable kayaking options at the Riverside Park Lagoon, making it easier than ever to get out and paddle.

Free Family Paddle Nights – These 20-minute kayak rides are open to all skill levels, no registration required.

Dates: May 9, June 20, July 18, August 15

Time: 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

\$5 Per Hour Kayak Rentals – Available every Saturday, visitors can rent a kayak and explore the Grand River.

Dates: May 31 - August 30

Time: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

At all kayaking events, participants under the age of 18 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian on the water. Children ages 10 and older may ride in a solo kayak, while those under 10 may ride in tandem with an adult.

Tae Kwon Do

Participants will learn the basics of the Korean martial art form of Tae Kwon Do. The program is designed to increase confidence, flexibility, balance, and self-defense skills. Green belts and higher will meet until 8:00 p.m.

Ages: 7 - Adult

Location: Garfield Park Community Gym

Time: 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Sessions: May - June and July - August (Dates & Cost TBD)

Camp Information:

Dates: June 9 – August 22

Ages: 6-12 years old

Registration Opens: April 28

Locations and Times:

- Garfield Park Summer Day Camp – 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- MLK Park Summer Day Camp – 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. (Location TBD)
- Roosevelt Park Summer Day Camp – 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Youth Soccer Camp

A four-day soccer camp will be offered for children interested in developing their skills on the field. Participants will learn ball work, dribbling, shooting, passing, and control through drills, games, and competitions. Teamwork, sportsmanship, and safety will be emphasized.

Ages: 5-12

Dates: Monday through Thursday, June 9-12

Time: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Location: MacKay Jaycees Park

Cost: \$50 for residents, \$60 for nonresidents

Summer Soccer Program

For those looking to continue their development beyond camp, the city’s summer soccer program will offer extended skill-building opportunities. Certified coaches from MPFA will lead age-appropriate drills and small-sided games throughout the program.

Ages: 5-12

Dates: Mondays (trainings) and Wednesdays (small-sided games), June 30-July 16

Location: MacKay Jaycees Park

Cost: \$60 for residents, \$70 for nonresidents

Schedule by Age Group:

- Ages 5-7: 5:45-7:00 p.m.
- Ages 8-9: 7:15-8:30 p.m.
- Ages 10-12: 7:15-8:30 p.m.

Running for Wellness

For children interested in building endurance and improving fitness, the city will offer a Running for Wellness program. Participants will work on speed, agility, breathing techniques, strength training, and stretching.

Location: MacKay Jaycees Park

Cost per session: \$40 for residents, \$50 for nonresidents

Session One:

- Dates: Wednesdays, June 4-25
- Ages 5-8: 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- Ages 9-13: 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Session Two:

- Dates: Wednesdays, July 30-August 20
- Ages 5-8: 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- Ages 9-13: 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Beginner Pickleball Lessons

This four-class session is designed for adults looking to learn the basics of pickleball, including rules, skills, and strategy.

Ages: 18+

Location: Garfield Park Community Gym

Cost: \$26 for residents, \$36 for nonresidents

Dates: Tuesdays, May 6-27

Time: 2:45-4:00 p.m.

For more information on upcoming summer camps, fitness classes, and recreation events in Grand Rapids, visit www.grandrapidsmi.gov/recreation or call 616-456-3696 for more information and follow Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation on social media for updates.

Youth Tee Ball & Baseball Leagues

The youth tee ball and baseball program is open to all kids ages 4-12. All programs meet for practices and games on Tuesdays and Thursdays, beginning July 8. Final games will be played on Saturday, August 2. Practices are held in the evening. Baseball/softball glove and athletic shoes are required.

Cost: \$50 for residents, \$60 for nonresidents

Location: Huff Park

Registration: Opens April 7, deadline June 20

Schedule:

- Tuesdays and Thursdays: July 8-31
- Saturday: August 2

Age Groups:

- Tee Ball (4-6)
- Coach Pitch (6-8)
- Player/Coach Pitch (9-12)

On Base - Baseball Clinics

The Grand Rapids Police Department, in partnership with the Department of Parks & Recreation, will be hosting baseball clinics for kids to learn the game and engage with local officers in a positive, non-enforcement capacity. The program is designed for children with little to no experience, but all levels are welcome. Due to generous donations, there is no cost to participate. Space is limited, so early registration is encouraged.

Ages: 9-12

Cost: Free

Clinic Schedule:

- Huff Park – Tuesday & Thursday, June 10 & 12, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
- Sullivan Field – Tuesday & Thursday, June 17 & 19, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
- MLK Park – Tuesday & Thursday, June 24 & 26, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.



Main Library

111 Library St NE
616.988.5400

Madison Square

1201 Madison Ave SE
616.988.5411

Ottawa Hills

1150 Giddings Ave SE
616.988.5412

Seymour

2350 Eastern Ave SE
616.988.5413

Van Belkum

1563 Plainfield Ave NE
616.988.5410

West Leonard

1017 Leonard St NW
616.988.5416

West Side

713 Bridge St NW
616.988.5414

Yankee Clipper

2025 Leonard St NE
616.988.5415

grpl.org

Storytimes

Baby & Me

Bring your baby and bounce along to fun stories, songs, and rhymes. Baby & Me is a 15-minute storytime followed by a relaxed playtime where you and baby will meet new friends. For ages 0–18 months.

Fridays, June 6, 13, 20, 27, July 11, 18, 25, August 1

10:30 am Van Belkum

Family Storytime

These storytimes feature great books, songs, fingerplays, and hands-on fun. Classes end with an art activity and playtime designed to help your child's brain grow. For ages 0–5 years.

Fridays, June 6, 13, 20, 27, July 11, 18, 25, August 1

10:30 am Ottawa Hills



Storytime on the Lawn

Join us for this outdoor storytime held on the lawn! Children and their caregivers will love this 30-minute event that features stories, songs, rhymes, and playing on the lawn. In case of inclement weather, this event series will be moved indoors. For ages 0–5 years.

Wednesdays, June 4, 11, 18, 25, July 9, 16, 23, 30

10:30 am Seymour

Thursdays, June 5, 12, 19, 26, July 10, 17, 24, 31

10:30 am Yankee Clipper

Outdoor Storytime

If you love stories, songs, and rhymes, join GRPL for outdoor storytime. This fun event for kids is the perfect way to get some wiggles out. Each child will take home a free storytime kit at the end of the program while supplies last. For ages 0–5 years.

Mondays, May 12, June 9, July 14, August 11

10:30 am Mulick Park
1632 Sylvan Ave SE

Mondays, May 19, June 16, July 21, August 18

10:30 am Lincoln Park
231 Marion Ave NW

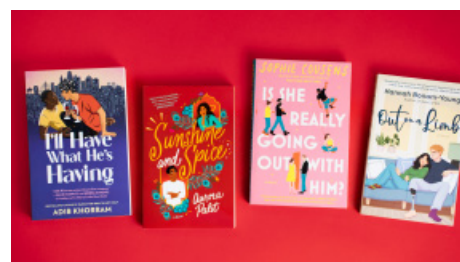
Pajama Time

Get cozy in your pajamas, grab your favorite stuffed animals or blanket, and come to the library for a special bedtime event! Listen to stories, sing songs, and get those wiggles out before bed. Great for working parents and caregivers! For ages 0–5 years.

Mondays, June 2, 9, 16, 23, July 7, 14, 21, 28

6:30 pm West Leonard

Book Clubs



Steamy Lit Book Club

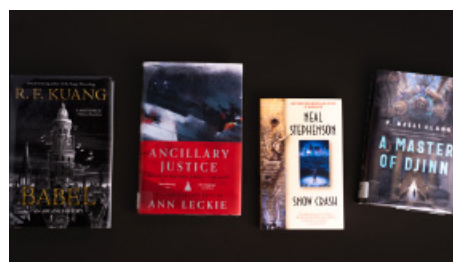
Wednesdays, May 7, June 11, July 9, August 13

6:00 – 7:00 pm Ottawa Hills

Dive into the heartwarming, passionate, and sometimes heartbreaking world of romance novels. Whether you love contemporary love stories, historical romances, or steamy thrillers, we read and celebrate all things love. This book club is designed for adults.

May: *Sunshine and Spice* by Aurora Palit
June: *I'll Have What He's Having* by Adib Khorram

July: *Out on a Limb* by Hannah Bonam-Young
August: *Is She Really Going Out With Him?* by Sophie Cousens



Sci-Fi Book Club

Wednesdays, May 7, June 4, July 9, August 6

7:00 – 8:00 pm Main Library

Join other science-fiction readers for a book club led by GRPL staff. Participate in a discussion about each book with members of the community. This book club is designed for adults.

May: *Babel* by R.F. Kuang

June: *A Master of Djinn* by P. Djèlí Clark

July: *Ancillary Justice* by Ann Leckie

August: *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson

Popular Pages Book Club

Join us for our monthly book club! Enjoy popular fiction and nonfiction titles selected by GRPL librarians and participate in a discussion about each reading with members of the community and library staff. This book club is designed for adults.

Popular Pages at Yankee Clipper

Mondays, May 19, June 23, July 21, August 18

6:00 – 7:00 pm Yankee Clipper

May: *Severance* by Ling Ma

June: *Burn the Place* by Iliana Regan

July: *Psalm for the Wild Built* by Becky Chambers

August: *Poverty, by America* by Matthew Desmond

Popular Pages at the Main Library

Saturdays, May 3, June 14, July 12, August 9

12:00 – 1:00 pm Main Library

May: *Ministry of Time* by Kaline Bradley

June: *Stolen Focus* by Johann Hari

July: *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters

August: *The Unclaimed: Abandonment and Hope in the City of Angels* by Pamela Prickett & Stefan Timmermans

Events for Everyone

FOR KIDS



Tails & Tales: Read to Therapy Dogs

Literacy is a fundamental skill that takes practice. In this program, kids are invited to practice reading to a licensed therapy dog from West Michigan Therapy Dogs Ruff Readers!

Attendees will be able to read to a therapy dog for 10–15 minutes. While kids wait for their chance to read, the library will provide a small craft or activity. Reading spots with dogs are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Designed for ages 6–13.

Wednesday, April 23

6:00 – 7:00 pm Ottawa Hills

Día at the Library

Celebrate El Día del Niño! Día is a nationally recognized initiative that emphasizes the importance of literacy for all children from all backgrounds. Drop by your neighborhood library to read children's books in cozy spaces, pick up a special Grab & Go Activity Kit, and enter to win a raffle prize!

Wednesday, April 30

1:00 – 5:00 pm All locations

Wild Encounters with John Ball Zoo

Join us for a fun and interactive program with John Ball Zoo! Learn about animals and their habitats through hands-on activities. Zoo educators will introduce fascinating creatures, share exciting facts, and answer all your animal-related questions! For ages 6–11.

Tuesday, June 10

2:30 – 3:30 pm West Leonard

Tuesday, July 8

2:30 – 3:30 pm Main Library

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation – Meijer Fund and Edsko & Claire Hekman Family Fund.

FOR TEENS

Teen Anime Club

Join Teen Anime Club to chat with other enthusiasts about your favorite anime and manga! Chat about what you're currently reading and watch anime episodes together! Snacks are provided and attendees can enter a drawing to win a prize. Designed for teens ages 13–19.

Tuesday, April 22

4:00 – 5:30 pm Madison Square

Pop into K-Pop

Get ready to explore the world of K-pop at the library! Join us for a fun, interactive program where you can dive into the music, fashion, dance moves, and culture of your favorite K-pop groups. Whether you're a super fan or just curious, come connect with other teens and share the K-pop love! For ages 11–18.

Tuesday, May 6

3:30 – 4:30 pm Seymour

Tuesday, May 13

3:30 – 4:30 pm West Side

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation and the Wege Foundation.

FOR ALL AGES



Friends of the Library Book Sale

Join us at our biggest book sale of the year! Both cash and credit cards are accepted at this event. All proceeds benefit the Grand Rapids Public Library.

Saturday, April 26

9:00 am – 4:00 pm Main Library

All books are 50 cents each.

Sunday, April 27

1:00 – 4:00 pm Main Library

Fill a bag for \$5.00. Bring your own bag.

This event is presented by the Friends of the Grand Rapids Public Library.



Community Hike with Friends of Grand Rapids Parks

Join us for a relaxed 3-mile hike through Huff Park, led by community educators from Friends of Grand Rapids Parks! Discover the natural beauty in your own backyard while learning about the city's park system and getting tips for exploring the outdoors. Meet in the north parking lot off Aberdeen. For all ages.

Saturday, May 10

2:00 – 3:30 pm Huff Park

2399 Ball Ave NE

Malia's Hula & Polynesian Dance Performance

GRPL presents a Hula and Polynesian dance performance and lesson by Malia's Dance Academy. Hula and 'Ori Tahiti are two styles of dance from the Hawaiian and Polynesian islands that blend traditional storytelling with rhythmic movements. Learn more about Hawaiian and Polynesian culture in this lively experience. For all ages.

Saturday, May 24

11:15 am – 12:00 pm Main Library

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation and the Wege Foundation.

FOR ADULTS

Crafternoons

Join us for an afternoon of coffee, cookies, and crafts. Bring your own project or make a craft with the supplies provided by the library. Meet new friends and chat with neighbors while you get creative.

Thursday, April 17

1:00 – 2:00 pm Yankee Clipper

Introduction to Abstract Portraits

In this class, you will learn and practice continuous contour line drawing. Then, you'll make a unique mixed media portrait or self-portrait using oil pastels, watercolor, and collage techniques. No experience necessary. Designed for adults. Space is limited and first come, first served.

Saturday, April 19

1:00 – 3:00 pm Main Library

Conversation Circle | English

Each week, join others who are practicing English through conversations centered around topics like music, food, sports, travel, and more! These casual and fun events are designed for adult English language learners.

Wednesdays, April 23, 30, May 7, 21, 28

7:00 – 8:00 pm Main Library



Model Minority: Exploring Mental Health within the AAPI Community

Join us for a discussion with local experts about mental health challenges in the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. We'll explore how cultural identity and the "Model Minority" stereotype impact asking for help and what can be done to break those barriers.

Wednesday, May 28

6:30 – 7:30 pm Main Library

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation and the Wege Foundation.

**Support
library
events.**

Donate today.



**Grand Rapids
Public Library
Foundation**

www.grplfoundation.org

Small Business Resource Center Spotlight

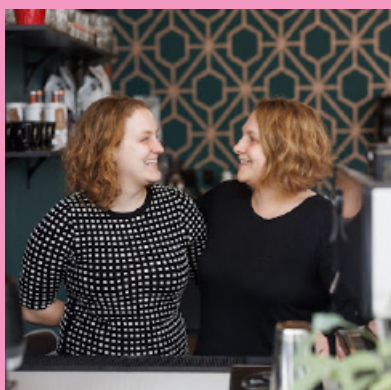


Photo credit: Amanda Kamppinen

INTERVIEW WITH CHARTREUSE SISTERS

If you're looking for an exceptional combination of pastry and potions in the city of Grand Rapids, look no further than Chartreuse Sisters. Actual sisters Alyson and Mallory Caillaud-Jones founded their cafe in 2019 after a unique education in entrepreneurship that included a visit to the Grand Rapids Public Library. Steven Assarian, Business and Career Librarian, sat down with Alyson and Mallory to learn their perspectives on sweets, culture, and commerce in our current era.

Steven Assarian: How did this whole idea get off the ground?

Alyson Caillaud-Jones: Well, we were both working in film and video after college. Both of us had been in this gig for so long that we'd worked in coffee shops. I had developed a knowledge of coffee and mixology. I wanted to make coffee, but I didn't want to work for someone else.

It was one of those wild moments. Mal and I were in a coffee shop (I'm getting a little emotional just thinking about it) and I said, "This is what I'd like to do." I didn't know how to start a cafe, or anything like that. My first thought was: Is that allowed?

Mallory Caillaud-Jones: Alyson said, "I'll do it if you do it with me." I asked, "What am I going to do?" That's when she asked me to bake. I've always loved baking, but it was just something I did for friends and family. I had never thought it could be something I did professionally.

It started as a fun conversation, but as we kept talking, we started to look at what we'd need to do to make this work as a business. We started doing pop ups and farmers markets to see if people wanted what we were selling.

Steven: Tell me about your background.

Mallory: Our mom's from Paris, our dad's from Muskegon. They met at Michigan State. Because they were both teachers, they had the summers off. So it worked out that, growing up, we spent three months of the year in France, and the other nine months in America. So we grew up with these two different cultural experiences.

With our family, food's been a very important part of our lives. I think being able to experience France really informed the kind of business we wanted to be. We wanted to bring it back to Grand Rapids, our hometown.



Steven: So how is the American coffee experience different from the French?

Alyson: In the States, coffee tends to be very focused on work: you're going to work and picking up a coffee, having a meeting over coffee, etc. We wanted to create an atmosphere that was along the lines of the European style, where you're coming to enjoy.

Mallory: I think in France, when you have a coffee or a tea, that is your time to take a pause. There's a phrase in French called pause cafe, which is a pause in your day to take your coffee. We wanted to bring that kind of European mentality of rest, to create a third space for that.

Steven: Tell me a little bit about the food that you all make here. Chartreuse Sisters is a pâtisserie, not a bakery, which are two different things, right?



Mallory: There's actually a few different types of French bakeries. For croissants and other kinds of bread, you have a boulangerie. The viennoiserie serves breakfast pastries, while a pâtisserie sells desserts, things like pain au chocolat. Currently we're transitioning a bit from the traditional French pâtisserie and more into more whimsical, nostalgic kinds of food and beverage.

Alyson: It opens up the possibility for us to be more creative.

Steven: Speaking of creativity, tell me a little bit about the drinks and potions. I think this is the first place that I've seen serve potions.

Alyson: Potion Number 34 has been on the menu since day one. We knew we wanted to create an experience in some way, whether visually or through the flavor profiles, like introducing people to new things.

Like I said, I like mixology a lot. I try to stay up to date on what's popular and how people are experimenting. I came across butterfly pea flower tea, which has been popular in cocktails for a long time. It's a blue flower in nature and the color of the tea it makes is blue, but when you mix it with citrus or any kind of acid, it becomes purple. That's the naturally magical potion part of it.

It was so popular that Potion Number 34 is still on the menu, and I've made other potions since then that have been super popular. It's very fun.

Steven: It's clear that a lot of thought and planning went into your business. What did your education as entrepreneurs look like?

Alyson: There's a lot of work, a lot of time. I mean, you helped us a lot. [Laughs] A lot of it was us reaching out to people and just asking how we do this from the business side, because neither of us went to business school or culinary school. We had to learn how to set up a kitchen, how to set up our space to provide the experience we wanted.

Mallory: I think not having trained professionally had us looking outside the box in some ways. We weren't told, this is how you open a business, and this is what you should do and what you shouldn't do.

From the very beginning we knew this was going to be a micro business run by the two of us. And we're going to have very specific hours and products. I do wonder if we had gone to school, if we would have even thought we could do it this way, because it is different.

Steven: How would you say the food business has changed since you started?

Alyson: I think that there's a lot more small micro businesses, trying to open shops or doing pop ups. There's a pretty strong community. A lot of them have worked in the industry and wanted to start something on their own. So that's been really interesting, because it creates a nice collaborative energy. People and other businesses are more willing to wait for that pop up, show support, and post about it.

Mallory: We're seeing people help each other out and seeing other people succeed. Since we started, there's been so many other places opening with specific hours and small teams. And the more those places open, the more we see the success and the excitement that Grand Rapids has for those small businesses. I feel like there's a shift happening.

Steven: It's interesting to hear you both talk about collaboration instead of competition.

Mallory: I think this new generation of entrepreneurs understands how we need to work together. We want to support each other. Everyone we're talking to wants to collaborate, rather than just compete.

This interview is part of GRPL's quarterly Small Business Resource Center eNews. Sign up for the newsletter by visiting www.grpl.org/sbrc.

The Small Business Resource Center is funded thanks to a generous grant from the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation—Titche Family Fund.

Grand Rapids History Center Spotlight



INTERVIEW WITH JULIE TABBERER

We've created a new online tool for exploring newspapers! Now, you can easily search and save articles from neighborhood newspapers from 1893–1963 like *The Grand Rapids Herald*, *The Burton Heights Record*, *Southwest Community Alliance*, *Madison Square Sun*, *Creston News*, and *West Side News*. Best of all, it's free and doesn't require a password. Learn more about the impact of this new online tool in this interview with Julie Tabberer, Head of the Grand Rapids History Center.

What is the impact of this project on patrons?

We are adding tons of newly digitized content, and we're making our historical newspapers much easier to use. There are so many stories contained in historic newspapers, but they can be tough to find. Taking these newspapers from microfilm that's only at the library to digital content that you can use anywhere, anytime is a huge increase in access. The ability to search and view these newspapers gives patrons a powerful tool to learn about their history, and the moments that shaped our community.

Why did GRPL initiate this project?

We started this project because we saw a demand in our community that wasn't being met.

Newspapers are rich sources of information. They record the daily stories about life in our community. In the last 5-10 years, the amount of historical newspapers online has exploded. Digitized newspapers are very popular. We get requests for digital newspaper content all the time.

Why is it significant that so many of the newspapers are neighborhood based?

For this project, we focused on digitizing neighborhood newspapers, like the *West Side News*, *Madison Square Sun*, and *Creston News*. These newspapers have not been digitized and are not available anywhere else online. Neighborhood newspapers are important because they provide a different perspective on the history of our city. Often, the focus of historical collections is on the downtown area and it can be difficult to find rich information about neighborhoods. We know that neighborhoods are vital to our community, and many of us live in and appreciate those neighborhoods. We hope that our patrons will discover different stories about our neighborhood histories using these newspapers.

What is the impact of this project on other libraries?

Getting historical newspapers online is tremendously difficult. It is technically complex. It calls for a completely different approach than things like photographs or videos. The infrastructure and funding needed to get newspapers online is a barrier for a lot of public libraries.

The newspaper viewer we developed is open-source and can be used by other libraries. It's built in CollectiveAccess, a digital collections platform for libraries and museums. The developers we worked with are committed to keeping the platform affordable and accessible. That really aligns with our values.

We'll also be sharing our project in a presentation at the American Library Association conference this summer. We hope that this new platform will provide a path for other public libraries to make their newspapers available online.

What are some of the ways this can be used?

There's a range of uses for historic newspapers, from satisfying casual interest or curiosity to supporting serious research. Patrons can search for family names, street names, places or businesses to find mentions in the newspaper. Historic newspapers covered the news, certainly, but you might be surprised at how much information about people's lives were published. Neighborhood newspapers often printed lists of where people went on vacation, who came to visit them, and parties or events in the community.

Looking for school sports statistics is a fun way to connect with the past. Did your family member play a sport? Team rosters and scores are often listed regularly. Wonder what movies were playing at a local theater? What were the prices in a grocery store around the corner?

What are some of the features that make this newspaper interface such a great tool?

Searching for names and subjects across newspaper issues is a powerful feature. The time saved by clicking through search results rather than loading and advancing microfilm reels is a huge advantage to researchers.

The newspaper interface offers a lot of the same features you'll find in other databases: a preview of the text, highlighted search results, sorting features, and the ability to clip and save articles. Most of those databases require a paid subscription. Our newspaper content and interface are freely available, with no paywalls or logins required.

Who is this designed for? Who will find this useful?

We kept a wide range of users in mind as we developed this platform. That reflects the work we do in the Grand Rapids History Center. One of our core values is to serve the full range of our patrons.

That means that we want anyone to be able to use these newspapers. We want the platform to be easy to use for someone with very little computer or research experience. We also want it to meet the needs of people doing complex research. It isn't easy to balance those extremes in one system.

We built a system that includes features our experienced users will love, such as the ability to craft targeted searches. Our primary focus, however, was on those who may be new to research or less confident with technology. Throughout development, we consistently asked ourselves: How can we make this simpler? How can we make this more accessible? Even with those efforts, learning to use a database can still be challenging. That's why our staff at the Grand Rapids History Center are always happy to assist—whether it's answering questions, offering guidance, or providing helpful tips.

Board of Library Commissioners

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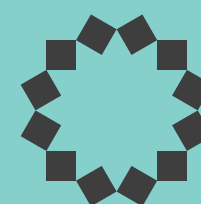
Bryan Holt

Kevin Peterson

Lauren Woolsey

Library Director

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GRAND
RAPIDS
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

Where should someone start if they aren't a seasoned researcher but are curious about history?

There are so many ways to get started, and the best approach is to look for something you're interested in! There are no wrong answers here! If your family has history in Grand Rapids, you could search for a grandparent's name. You could look for the street that you live on, or a business that's been around for a while. You could look for articles about major world events, like the stock market crash of 1929, or popular culture moments like the first movie with sound, *The Jazz Singer*. Instead of starting with a search, you could also pick a newspaper and start with a specific date and just read the paper.

Start exploring at digital.grpl.org.



CASUAL • ENGAGING • OUTREACH

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS COFFEE WITH THE BOARD

You're invited to meet and have a casual conversation with board members at our **"Coffee with the Board"** gathering.

GRPS Board of Education

☎ 616-819-2197

✉ board@grps.org

🌐 grps.org/boe

UPCOMING EVENTS

TUESDAY, MAY 6

6:00 – 7:30 PM

Baxter Community Center

935 Baxter St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

6:00 – 7:30 PM

Kids' Food Basket

1300 Plymouth Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

6:00 – 7:30 PM

Gilda's Club Grand Rapids

1806 Bridge St NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504



April 2025 | Section B

New Union High Musical: 18

Record Breaking Athletes: 20

Graduations: 24

2025 State of Our Schools: ‘On the Rise’

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – On a night showcasing the incredible talent within GRPS, Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby shared updates on the ongoing progress to Reimagine GRPS and outlined her vision for the district’s future.

“I am proud to say GRPS is a district on the rise,” Dr. Roby exclaimed in the opening of her first State of Our Schools address.

Dr. Roby highlighted several points of pride, including graduation rates being above the statewide average, an increase in the number of graduates enrolling in college, attendance rates improving, and enrollment levels rising for the first time since 2016.

“We believe the transformative initiatives of Reimagine GRPS will not only strengthen our schools but also inspire families to return and thrive in our district,” Dr. Roby said.

REIMAGINE GRPS FACILITY PLAN

“We have dozens of exciting projects on the way to improve our learning spaces, performance halls, and athletic facilities. Thanks to our community’s strong support, we are investing \$305 million throughout our district,” she explained. “We will create a more equitable GRPS. This includes mirroring academic programs in our city.”

The plan includes creating a new environmental science academy at Ken-O-Sha Park. There will also be a new Pre-K through 12th grade Montessori campus at the current site of Riverside Middle School and an expansion of Ridgemoor Park Montessori. Massive renovations are also planned at Campus Elementary, Mulick Park Elementary, and Southwest Elementary Academia Bilingüe.

“We are also solving one of the top issues raised by scholars in our 2023 Engagement Report,” Dr. Roby said. “Through the Reimagine GRPS plan, every school will have air conditioning.”

All five GRPS performing arts centers and several athletic facilities will also be renovated.

“Our scholars who dedicate themselves to performance - whether in music, theater or athletics - deserve a first-class stage. And we are committed to delivering it,” Dr. Roby said.

SAFETY

“Our top priority remains the safety of our scholars and staff,” Dr. Roby added. “The Reimagine GRPS plan will allow us to reach our goal of having a secure entrance at every GRPS-owned school.”

GRPS is adding more security cameras and implementing the use of the Raptor Visitor Management System at all schools.

The GRPS Public Safety and School Security team has also given away more than 1,000 gun locks at school and community events this school year, to help ensure that weapons remain out of reach of children.

TRANSPORTATION

“One of the biggest challenges that we faced coming out of the pandemic was providing reliable transportation for our scholars,” she said. “We agreed when parents told us that this was unacceptable, and we got to work with Dean Transportation to find solutions.”

Dr. Roby highlighted a new Parent Transportation Advisory Council, Dean job fairs, and a dashboard that tracks Dean’s on-time performance.

“I am proud to share with you tonight that Dean Transportation is at its highest staffing levels since before the pandemic,” Dr. Roby said. “In fact, Dean has not had to double up a single route this school year or cancel transportation for athletics.”



“I am proud to say GRPS is a district on the rise,”

– Dr. Leadriane Roby, State of Our Schools Address

Dr. Roby touted that thanks to grants from the State of Michigan and the Environmental Protection Agency, Dean Transportation will launch 15 electric buses starting later this year.

“Transitioning to electric is more than just an upgrade, it’s a commitment to our community and environment,” she said.

GRPS TEACHERS

Dr. Roby shared that GRPS has cut teacher vacancies in half over the past two years. She credited innovative initiatives like Teach Michigan, which provides stipends for teachers. She also said that new programs like a Hispanic hiring initiative and the revitalized Grow Your Own program will soon start to have impacts.

GRPS is also actively encouraging its current scholars to explore careers in education through programs like the Grand

Rapids Community Teachers Initiative.

“Fifteen GRPS seniors are currently dual enrolled in our first cohort to begin their journey into teaching,” Dr. Roby explained. “Thanks to a generous donation, they will attend college earning a teaching degree from Michigan State University at no cost to them.”

Dr. Roby also announced that the Academy of Teaching, Learning and Social Justice at Innovation Central High School is being named in honor of Hattie Beverly. Beverly, a graduate of Central High School, became the first black teacher in the district’s history in 1899.

BELONGING

The Superintendent concluded her remarks by reinforcing that everyone belongs at GRPS.

continued on page 15 ►

2025 State of Our Schools: 'On the Rise' (continued from previous page)



"So many in our community are facing real fears due to increased immigration enforcement," Dr. Roby explained. "We have scholars who are concerned that when they return home from class, their parents might be gone. Children are worried that their friends may leave and never come back."

Dr. Roby thanked staff for helping to provide comfort to scholars and families and explained that GRPS has visitor protocols in place to ensure that schools remain a safe place.

"Let me state this clearly, every child has a right to a quality education and that commitment will never change at GRPS," Dr. Roby said.

KICKOFF TO THE NIGHT

The evening began with dynamic performances from the Ottawa Hills High School Drumline and the Coit Creative Arts Academy Honors Choir. Staff Notes, a choir made up of GRPS music educators, performed the national anthem as the Union High School JROTC presented colors.

Board of Education President Kymberlie Davis welcomed those in attendance.

"I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for being here," President Davis said. "Your support is the driving force behind our mission, and together, we are shaping the future of education in Grand Rapids."

Barrett Vernon, a senior at Innovation Central High School, shared his experience at GRPS.

"I have found tremendous care for not only my academic ambitions, but my personal well-being and happiness," Vernon said. "I'm very grateful that when I graduate, it will be with a diploma that says Grand Rapids Public Schools."

Mayor of the City of Grand Rapids, David LaGrand, introduced Dr. Roby.

"Public schools look a lot like democracy done right," Mayor LaGrand said. "Everybody gets to come and everybody counts. Can you imagine a better dream than that? Schools are probably our most foundational community building block."



Innovation Central Renovation Honored With Historic Preservation Award

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – The largest renovation project in Grand Rapids Public Schools history has earned a prestigious recognition. The City of Grand Rapids has selected GRPS to receive a 2025 Historic Preservation Award for the extensive renovation of Innovation Central High School, a landmark that has shaped generations of learners since 1911.

Over three years and with a \$40 million investment, the project restored the school's historic character while modernizing its learning spaces. Key improvements included restoring the building's exterior to its original 1911 appearance, upgrading masonry, and installing 400 new, larger windows, which increased classroom daylight by 7,600 square feet.

As Michigan's oldest continuously operating high school, Innovation Central remains a cornerstone of education in Grand Rapids. The renovation was made possible through a 2015 voter-approved bond.

"This honor is a testament to the power of community investment in education," said Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby. "Innovation Central High School is not just a building, it's a place where history and innovation come together to inspire scholars. We are honored to see this restoration recognized and excited for what it means for generations to come." – Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby

The 2025 Historic Preservation Awards ceremony is on Monday, May 19, at the Grand Rapids Public Library

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January 2025

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Title IX Annual Athletics Compliance Report: Grand Rapids Public Schools is committed to securing athletic equity and provides annual Title IX reporting to the athletes and parents in an effort to bring increased attention and resources towards ensuring that gender equity as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments for 1972, Grand Rapids Public Schools annual report is available at www.grps.org.

To comply with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), parents may request information regarding the professional qualifications of the student's classroom teachers.

Please contact Christi Atwood, Director of Human Resources, in Human Resources via email atwoodc@grps.org or at (616) 819-2095.

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Academy Of Teaching, Learning & Social Justice Named In Honor Of First Black Teacher



“She was a pioneer, breaking barriers at a time when opportunities for Black educators were scarce,” Board of Education Vice President Aarie Wade said. “Her courage and resilience paved the way for future generations.”

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- The teaching academy within historic Innovation Central High School is now named the Hattie Beverly Academy of Teaching, Learning, & Social Justice.

Beverly became the first African American teacher at Grand Rapids Public Schools in 1899. She taught at Congress Elementary. Beverly was a GRPS alumnus, graduating in 1895 from what is now Innovation Central High School.

“Today, the past meets the present, as we honor the education, life, and legacy of Hattie Jeannette Beverly, one of Central High School’s most distinguished alumni, one of the City of Grand Rapids’ most distinguished citizens, and our city’s first African American teacher,” Innovation Central High School Principal Derrick Martin said at the naming ceremony.

The Beverly Family moved to Grand Rapids in the 1870s. John Beverly, Hattie’s father, was one of the first black business owners in Grand Rapids, operating a butcher shop. While in high school she majored in Preparatory English. She would then enroll in the teacher cadet training program, finishing her training in 1899.

“At that time, the city school board had a choice to make - whether or not to hire the city’s first African American teacher,” Martin explained. “Some citizens expressed concerns over an African American teacher teaching mostly white children. Thankfully, her persistence and determination and reasonable voices prevailed, and in 1899, Hattie Beverly was hired.”

State Representative Kristian Grant, a

former Board of Education member, also spoke during the event.

“GRPS has a long history of legacy builders,” Rep. Grant told scholars in the Hattie Beverly Academy of Teaching, Learning, and Social Justice. “As I look at you right now, I see the next generation of history makers in front of me.”

“I want to speak directly to our students,” Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby told attendees. “Many of you are planning on following in Hattie Beverly’s footsteps, using your career to educate and inspire others. Keep going. Your future students need you.”

“All of us unite under the umbrella that schools are the center of effective and lasting social change, to better our society through an educated and compassionate populous, and to bring about a better country and better world,” Innovation Central Senior Barrett Vernon said.

“In our classes they learn about themselves, they are discovering what they are capable of,” explained Lisa Orban, the lead teacher of the Hattie Beverly Academy of Teaching, Learning, and Social Justice. “They relish in the sharing of their ideas and understanding their strengths.”



Fifth Graders Unite Through ‘One Book, One City’ Reading Program

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Each year, fifth graders across GRPS embark on a shared journey through One Book, One City, an initiative that brings them together to read the same book and meet its author.

This annual tradition is made possible through a partnership with the Grand Rapids Public Library. This year’s featured book, *Playing the Cards You’re Dealt* by Varian Johnson, captivated more than 1,200 scholars in more than 60 fifth-grade classrooms across the district.

“I love when everyone kind of has a shared book to read,” Johnson said. “We have all these different kids reading it with all these different backgrounds. They’re bringing their own experiences into it and then they’re sharing it. It’s really just an honor that this book gets to be the vehicle for that.”

As they read the book, scholars engaged in classroom discussions and shared their thoughts through blog posts for each chapter.

“The posts are relevant,” said Nanette Hersberger, ELA Curriculum Supervisor. “They’re meaningful, and they take a lot of time to connect to the story.”

Playing the Cards You’re Dealt explores important themes such as toxic masculinity and addiction.

“It’s really all about figuring out who you are, who you want to be, and realizing that it’s okay to ask for help,” Johnson explained.

The program’s impact extends beyond the pages of the book, fostering a love for reading that lasts a lifetime.

“It really does foster that deep sense of the love of reading,” Hersberger said. “It’s something that they’ll remember forever.”

Each year, One Book, One City continues to create a powerful, district-wide reading experience, uniting scholars and sparking meaningful conversations.



The Curtain Rises Again: Union High Brings Back Musical Theater

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – For the first time in more than a decade, the curtain was raised as Union High School brought back its long-awaited musical production.

For Teacher Marisa Plouhar, who serves as both director and cast member, this moment in years in the making.

“It’s great to finally be able to open up these curtains and use it for what it was made for,” Plouhar said. “I’m excited to see the community realize, wow, we’ve been missing something. Now it’s back. I’m going to be crying when those kids take their bow.”

Bringing the musical to life was made possible thanks to recent lighting and audio upgrades to the auditorium. Additionally, the GRPS Foundation awarded Plouhar a \$2,000 Teacher Grant to help cover production costs.

When word spread that Union High School would once again stage a musical, scholars were thrilled.

“I’ve always loved theater,” said Finnick Coburn, a junior playing Damian Hubbard. “When she said that we were going to do this, I was like, I like freaked out in class.”

“I was ecstatic,” added Marisol Gutierrez, a senior playing Janis Sarkisian. “I’ve always

loved musical theater since I was young.”

The lessons learned over the past three months will have lifelong impacts for the cast and crew.

“Theater education is incredible for kids,” Plouhar said. “They learn incredible skills they can’t learn anywhere else.”

Makayla Beane-Windon, a junior starring as Cady Heron, shared how the experience is helping scholars grow.

“Theater kind of forces you to get out of your shell,” Beane-Windon said. “Everybody has been working really hard.”

Excitement is building for the future of theater at Union High School.

“Every little moment is so important,” Plouhar said. “It all culminates into this beautiful outpouring of talent and impressive GRPS kids.”

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These materials were developed under a grant awarded by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential.

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Asbestos is a general name for a group of naturally occurring minerals composed of small fibers. These fibers are very strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. The mere presence of asbestos in a building does not mean that the health of the building occupants is endangered. When left intact and undisturbed, asbestos-containing materials do not pose a health risk to

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The Grand Rapids Public Schools has an asbestos management plan that addresses contact persons, training,

inspections, response actions, operation and maintenance activities, periodic surveillance, cleaning, disclosure efforts, and school building areas containing asbestos. Any person may review the management plan at the Grand Rapids Public School's Facilities Management Department, 900 Union, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503, during regular business hours (8:00 am to 4:00 pm). Alternatively, any person may request a copy of the plan

by writing the Grand Rapids Public Schools Facilities Management Department, 900 Union, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503. There is a cost involved in reproducing the document of approximately 10 cents per page. The Grand Rapids Public Schools will send a copy out of the management plan within 5 business days of receiving the request.



Coit Scholar Performs with Rapper T.I.

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – A scholar at Coit Creative Arts Academy was able to play on the big stage at DeVos Performance Hall with legendary rapper T.I. during the Grand Rapids Symphony's Celebration of Soul concert.

"It was fun up there and it really made me excited," Percy, a fifth grader at Coit, explained during the Board of Education meeting on March 3. "It made me happy that all these people came to see me."

Debra Perry, the music director at Coit, has worked with the Grand Rapids Symphony for more than two decades. She explained that during planning, she realized that Percy would be perfect to perform during the Community Chorus' rendition of 'Glory.'

"(Percy) just mesmerized the Community Chorus and the Symphony members," Perry said. "His approach was very professional. That's just one of the things that I try to engrain in students is that you are always auditioning. You never know who is looking at you and when you get an opportunity. Percy made the most of that opportunity. We are so proud of Percy and his performance."

The Principal at Coit had high praise for both Percy and Perry.

"Miss Perry has taught this great scholar how to become bold, brave, and stand on it, because every single time he gets before our community it's an audition," Principal Dr. Lametria Johnson Eaddy said.

"I am happy I did good, and I'm happy people liked it," Percy concluded.

Deputy Superintendent Appointed to U.S. Commission on Civil Rights State Advisory Committee

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Grand Rapids Public Schools Deputy Superintendent of Preschool-12 Learning & Leadership, Dr. Brandy Lovelady Mitchell, has been appointed to the Michigan Advisory Committee for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

A proud graduate of Ottawa Hills High School, Dr. Lovelady Mitchell has served as Deputy Superintendent since 2022. She is a well-respected regional leader that has facilitated and presented nationally on topics such as project-based learning, adaptive schools, diversifying the educational workforce, equitable and inclusive practices and environments, and social-emotional wellness.

Her four-year term on the Advisory Committee will run through February 2029.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights maintains 56 advisory committees. Mandated by Congress, the advisory committees are bipartisan and conduct studies of civil rights topics within their geographic jurisdiction. The reports that culminate from their studies are based upon diverse and bipartisan testimony heard through public briefings and result in reports including advice and recommendations to the Commission. The Commission forwards Advisory Committee reports to the local, state, and federal entities that the advisory committee identifies in the report.

*"I am excited to continue leading
and serving in a meaningful
and impactful way."*

– Dr. Brandy Lovelady Mitchell



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GRPS ATHLETICS

City High Middle Senior Signs to Run at Wayne State

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – City High Middle School senior Reese Hansen will continue running at the next level, signing with Wayne State University in Detroit to compete in both cross country and track.

Hansen competed in varsity cross country and track at Ottawa Hills High School.

In cross country, she earned three All-Conference honors and helped her team qualify for the state meet last fall. She ranks ninth in school history with a personal best of 19:36 in the 5K.

Hansen's success extended to the track, where she is a three-time All-Conference performer and three-time conference champion in the 3200-meter run. She played a key role in her team's 3200-meter relay,

which won a regional championship with a school-record time of 9:40. Additionally, she helped qualify the relay team for the state meet in both 2022 and 2023. She ranks among the top ten in school history in the 800m, 1600m, and 3200m events.

"Reese is a great teammate and friend, and she will be missed," said Ottawa Hills Cross Country Head Coach Dan Ebright. "We celebrate this achievement, wish her well, and look forward to following her success at Wayne State."

Off the track, Hansen is equally ambitious. She plans to major in biology at Wayne State University, where she will continue her passion for both academics and athletics.



Senior Shatters Redhawks Diving Record

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – A school record that stood for nearly four decades has fallen.

Major Vance, a senior at Grand Rapids Montessori Middle High School and a member of the Union Redhawks swim and dive team, delivered a historic performance at the OK Rainbow East Swim-Dive Championships. Vance scored an impressive 407.85 points, securing first place and breaking the previous Redhawks Boys 11 Dive record set in 1988.

"Major has only been diving for three years, and in that short amount of time, his progress has been remarkable," said Kelly Williams, Union Redhawks Swim & Dive Coach. "I'm so proud of his accomplishments and personal growth over the years, especially this season. We practice whenever and wherever we can, including Saturday trampoline work and diving 3 meter with a club team. Major is a natural talent with a very bright future in springboard diving."

With this record-breaking achievement, Vance has punched his ticket to the Division 1 Regional Dive Meet, set for Thursday, March 6, at Hudsonville High School.



Union Wrestler Earns All-State Honors at State Tournament

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Sam Kik cemented his place in school history with an incredible performance at the Division 1 State Wrestling Tournament held at Ford Field. Competing in the 106-pound weight class, Kik battled his way to a fifth-place finish, earning All-State honors and securing his 100th career victory along the way.

Kik, a junior at CA Frost Environmental Science Middle High School who wrestles for the Union Redhawks, had a dominant run to the state tournament. He won his conference championship and followed

it up with a district title. At regionals, he took second place, setting the stage for his remarkable state tournament run.

"One of Sam's goals was to make it to state this year. He works hard in practice while keeping up his GPA. Sam is an example for younger wrestlers to look up to. We as a team are looking to build a strong program and getting more students into wrestling in states," said head coach Ryan Smith.

With another season ahead of him, Kik's success at the state tournament only adds to his growing legacy.

Union Basketball Star Sets Rebounding Record



GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Senior Vivian Idziak is celebrating a record-breaking performance for the Union Redhawks.

On February 25 against Kelloggsville, Idziak collected 27 rebounds, setting a GRPS girls basketball record. Through the game against Kelloggsville, Idziak has 149 rebounds on the season, to go along with 86 blocks.

“She is truly a strong and dependable senior who works hard on and off the court,” praised Union High School Varsity Girls Basketball Coach Mamie Hai. “She is a captain and the type of player you don’t take out of the game because her defense is so strong and she is very well conditioned.”

Idziak is a senior at Grand Rapids Montessori Middle High School.

“I am extremely proud of the way she shows up every day and gives her 100% effort,” Coach Hai said.



CA Frost Scholar Signs to Play Volleyball at Kalamazoo College

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – CA Frost Environmental Science Middle High School senior Quaneice Dillard is taking her volleyball talents to the collegiate level. Dillard has officially signed to play volleyball at Kalamazoo College, continuing her impressive athletic and academic journey.

A standout athlete, Dillard competed in varsity volleyball and varsity basketball at Ottawa Hills High School. As a volleyball team captain, she led her squad in both kills and service aces. She also plays travel volleyball for the Michigan Volleyball Academy’s Rise Academy.

In the classroom, Dillard excels academically, maintaining a 3.5 GPA and earning a spot on the honor roll. She has participated in dual enrollment courses at Grand Rapids Community College since her sophomore year. She plans to major in psychology with aspirations of becoming a therapist.

Dillard’s dedication extends beyond sports and academics. She gives back to her community by volunteering with Habitat for Humanity and coaching youth volleyball and basketball. She also has a part-time job at Beacon Hill Assisted Living.

Ottawa Hills Legends Return for Hall of Fame Inductions

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – The GRPS community came together this month to honor the latest class of inductees into the Ottawa Hills High School Athletic Hall of Fame. A total of 19 individuals and one team were enshrined during the ceremony at halftime of an Ottawa Hills boys basketball game. The ceremony was preceded by a meet and greet where inductees, family, and friends gathered to celebrate the achievement.

“Ottawa Hills alumni, welcome home,” Principal Dr. Timothy Mabin told those in attendance. “Inductees, we’re proud of you. Our community is proud of you.”

“I want to congratulate each of our athletes for this well-deserved honor,” Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby said. “Your dedication and hard work have made the Ottawa Hills family incredibly proud. Enjoy this moment as you have earned it.”



2025 Ottawa Hills Athletic Hall of Fames inductees:

- **Colin Christopher**, Basketball, Football, Track & Field
- **Kevin “Gubby” Dalson**, Baseball, Basketball
- **Marjorie “Marge” Deigert**, Cheerleading, Golf, Gymnastics, Swim & Dive
- **Martha DeVries**, Softball, Swim & Dive, Volleyball
- **John “Tony” Dow**, Baseball, Basketball, Golf
- **William “Bill” Goodson**, Basketball, Football, Track & Field
- **Alan “Al” Gortmaker**, Baseball, Basketball, Golf, Soccer
- **Andre Harris**, Basketball
- **Rausheda Hickman-Kirk**, Basketball, Track & Field, Volleyball
- **Ronella “Roni” McGregory**, Basketball, Softball, Track & Field, Volleyball
- **Christopher “Chris” Mendels**, Baseball, Basketball, Football
- **Lynnford James “LJ” Parker**, Basketball, Football, Track & Field
- **Jessie Powell-Jones**, Basketball, Track & Field
- **Raleigh Smith**, Baseball, Football
- **Manuel Strong**, Basketball, Football, Track & Field
- **Ennis Young**, Basketball, Cross Country, Track & Field
- **William “Bill” Zylstra**, Golf, Swim & Dive
- **Charles Brown**, Athletic Trainer
- **Dr. John Edleman**, Team Doctor
- **1997 Boys Basketball State Championship Team**

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These materials were developed under a grant awarded by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential.

At Mulick Park, 'we're a family'



PRINCIPAL PROFILE

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Grand Rapids Public Schools has been a significant part of Mulick Park Elementary School Principal Thomas Standifer's life.

"I'm a proud product of the Grand Rapids Public Schools," Standifer explained. "I wanted to give (back to) the district because I thought they gave me some great years and supported me in so many ways."

Educating the next generation in Grand Rapids was a calling for Standifer.

"It was just put in my spirit, the things I learned, I always wanted to give to those who were close to me," he said.

Standifer started as a substitute teacher in 2002. Over the next few years he served in LOOP, as a basketball coach, and eventually became a full-time teacher. In 2018, he became principal at Mulick Park Elementary School.

When asked why he loves being an educator, his answer comes easy.

"The joy of nurturing young minds and being a part of that educational journey, that's what keeps my passion alive," Standifer responded. He also loves collaborating with the staff at Mulick Park. "At most schools people have people say, 'oh a team.' We're not a team, we're family."



Setting a Positive Tone Right from the Start

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – The best part of Theron Brown's day at Grand Rapids Montessori often comes before the first bell even rings.

"What I enjoy most is the start of the day," he said. Brown is the Dean of Students at Grand Rapids Montessori Academy and Grand Rapids Montessori Middle High. "Seeing scholars early in the morning is an opportunity for me to set the tone for the day. Building relationships and being a positive role model is very important for me."

Theron chose to work at GRPS because he felt called to serve where he was needed most.

"It would have been easy to go elsewhere, but being a God-fearing man, I listened to Him, and He led me to GRPS," Brown explained.

His commitment to the district is evident in his daily interactions with scholars, providing them with both consistency and encouragement.

"They know I am approachable and easy to talk to," he said. "They know they can count on me to be present and also be an advocate for them."

Through his leadership, he fosters a welcoming and supportive school environment, ensuring that every scholar knows they have someone in their corner.

GRPS
BOARD BRIEF

Use the QR code to read the April 2025 brief



PRINCIPAL PROFILE

Inspiring the Next Generation of Leaders

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – As the driving force behind both City High Middle and the Center for Economicology, Principal Charlie Vandervliet is dedicated to shaping the next generation of innovators and community leaders.

“City High Middle is a unique place in which a variety of scholars with different backgrounds can come and thrive,” Vandervliet said.

Vandervliet started as a teacher at Grand Rapids Public Schools. She then transitioned to become the district’s first International Baccalaureate (IB) Coordinator.

“Leadership is something that’s very natural,” she said. “When I fell in love with the IB programs, I knew that leadership was definitely going to be part of my life a lot earlier than I had expected.”

Now as principal, Vandervliet is exactly where she wants to be.

Vandervliet takes great pride in the impact her scholars have on the world.

“They never cease to amaze me,” Vandervliet said. “They’re going to change the status quo. They are critical thinkers. They ask questions, they push back, they advocate for change. They want to be engaged in our community and our society.”

“I do feel like we’re training leaders. I think one day any one of these scholars could be my boss or could be leading this country or leading this city.”

“When I thought about moving into a principal job, there wasn’t any other place I wanted to be,”

– Principal Charlie Vandervliet speaking of City High Middle

Fostering Leadership and Family at Union High School

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- For Principal Aaron Roussey, Union High School is more than just a place of learning - it’s a family. “We always say once you’re a Redhawk, you’re always a Redhawk.”

With two decades of experience at Union High School, Roussey has cultivated a deep connection to the school and its community, shaping his leadership style to prioritize scholar support and staff empowerment.

His journey in education was inspired by influential teachers and mentors from his own youth.

“Why did I get into education? That was really fostered by teachers that I had growing up and mentors that I had growing up,” he explained. “I wanted to have that same impact on scholars here.”

A Grand Rapids native, Roussey began his higher education at Grand Rapids Community College before transferring to Western Michigan University. He later earned his master’s degree at Aquinas College.

His professional career started at Campus Elementary, where he worked as both a student teacher and a full-time teacher before moving to Union High School.

“I taught special education here,” Roussey recounted. “And then I kind of kept getting asked to get into different leadership roles and just accepted those based on hoping to have a bigger impact on more kids.”

“Leaders have the ability to make a great impact,” he said. “That starts with supporting your teaching staff, supporting

Teacher at MLK Leadership Academy Loves ‘Lightbulb’ Moments



GRPS CHAMPIONS

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- For Carmen Dunbar, teaching is more than a profession - it’s a calling. Reflecting on her more than two decades of experience in education, Dunbar shared one of the most rewarding aspects of her career.

“There are so many things I enjoy about teaching. One of the most important is when I see a student who has struggled a bit finally ‘get it,’” she said. “The connections are finally connecting, and they are putting it all together to be successful. It’s like a lightbulb has turned on in their brain. You know, when you turn on a light in a dark room and you can see exactly where everything is without bumping into everything. A scholar’s mind has just been unlocked to doing so much

more and building upon that. It makes me so proud to see.”

Dunbar’s journey with Grand Rapids Public Schools began in 2001 when she relocated after getting married. Her passion for teaching led her to GRPS, where she felt her skills could make the greatest impact. Today, she serves as a third-grade teacher at Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy.

“I always knew that my skills would be best used in the inner-city schools,” Dunbar explained. “I have a passion for teaching. I’ve been equipped to do it and have been doing so for 26 years!”

Dunbar recognizes the significance of her role as a mentor and role model.

“I believe I am showing my students of color and others who I come in contact with that there is nothing you can’t do if you put your mind to it,” she explained. “When I’m hard on my scholars, I tell them I’m giving them that ‘tough love.’ One of my first graders said, ‘What is that?’ I said, ‘It’s when I love you enough to want to see you do better when I see you doing wrong. I’m a little harder on you because I only want the best for you, and I want you to take responsibility for your actions.’”

Through her dedication, Dunbar has not only taught scholars how to read, write, and solve problems - she has also instilled in them a belief in their own potential. Her work exemplifies the transformative power of education, and her story serves as an inspiration to students, colleagues, and the entire GRPS community.

kids, building relationships, modeling those things you want to see within the building.”

One of his primary goals is to ensure that Union High School is a welcoming space for every scholar.

“I want to make sure that kids feel welcome as they walk through the doors,” Roussey said. “The very first thing this place has to be is a place they want to be. I don’t think there’s anything more important than all staff being welcoming to kids. I know I had that growing up, and I try to emulate that.”

“Our scholars are fantastic. Our teaching staff and support staff are here to support you. They care. We will do everything possible to try to put you in the best position to succeed.”



PRINCIPAL PROFILE

SENIOR SHOWCASE

Throughout the school year, we'll be sharing [#GRPSSeniorShowcase](#) videos to celebrate our incredible seniors. Stay tuned for more inspiring stories from the Class of 2025!



Singing, Competing, and Leading at GR Montessori

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Meet Wilonja Abasi, a senior at Grand Rapids Montessori Middle High School who is making the most of his high school experience.

“My whole family is a singing family. That was something that I wanted to do in high school and that was available for me here,” Abasi said. In addition to choir, he plays for the Union Redhawks soccer team and serves on the Superintendent’s Scholar Advisory Council.

After graduation, Abasi plans to study computer science and cybersecurity, aiming to turn his passion for technology into a future career.



A Personalized High School Experience

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Meet Richard Angarita, a senior at Southwest Middle High - Academia Bilingüe.

Coming from Colombia to the United States, Angarita said that finding the bilingual environment at Southwest Middle High has been critical to his education.

“The work is interesting and it’s personalized,” Angarita explained. “It does not feel like a traditional high school in many ways.”

After graduation, Angarita hopes to study history and humanities at the University of Michigan.



UPREP Shaped What’s Next

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Meet Jonathan Malone, a senior at Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy (UPREP). After graduation he plans to study mechanical engineering at Western Michigan University.

“The staff here want you to succeed. UPREP did shape where I’m going to go,” Malone explained. “They’ve looked at my interest, which was engineering, and they found this dual enrollment program with Western Michigan University. They’ve also given me a scholarship opportunity.”



Building Relationships During and After School

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Meet Demario Brown, a senior at Innovation Central High School.

Brown explains that he has enjoyed the relationships he has built at Innovation Central High School. “It made me see that school isn’t just all about paperwork, it’s more about what you need as a student, and that they’re supplying you with what you need and that is your job to make sure you get up and you go after it.”

Brown works at New City Kids, an afterschool program that provides tutoring and musical experiences for children.

After graduation, he hopes to earn a college degree in business.



GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2025 Graduation Schedule

HOSTED AT HOUSEMAN FIELD

Monday, May 19, 2025

- 5:00 PM: CA Frost Middle High School
- 7:00 PM: Union High School

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

- 5:00 PM: Southwest Middle High School
- 7:00 PM: Innovation Central High School and Grand Rapids Montessori High School

Wednesday, May 21, 2025

- 5:00 PM: Ottawa Hills High School
- 7:00 PM: Grand Rapids Public Museum School

Thursday, May 22, 2025

- 5:00 PM: Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy
- 7:00 PM: City High Middle School

Wednesday, May 28, 2025

- 6:00 PM: Grand Rapids Learning Center (Ceremony will be held at GRCC Spectrum Theater)