

East Village Magazine

June 2026



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Commentary

What to look for on August's primary ballot and where to find more information

By Paul Rozycki

Michigan's primary election is on Aug. 4 this year, and while that is more than a month away, absentee ballots will be available on June 25 and voters will be able to begin early voting on July 24, according to the State of Michigan's website.

There is much at stake in this year's primary, and what follows is a list of some of the key contests and issues that Flint voters will be considering this August. While this column can only offer a list of candidates and ballot initiatives, I encourage you to take the time to learn about them before casting your vote.

In addition to finding information through traditional media coverage and campaign pages, there are also a number of websites that present information about the candidates and the election. Some of those that I find most useful include BallotReady.org, Ballotpedia.org, and Vote411.org. Each tends to update their information as campaigns develop, so head there after reading this in print!

Governor

With Governor Gretchen Whitmer being term-limited this cycle, the gubernatorial race has drawn some of the most attention

in Michigan this year.

Following are the Democratic and Republican candidates who will be on the ballot in August, as voters will be picking the nominees for the major parties who will compete in November. One major surprise in this race has been the withdrawal of former Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan - who was running as an independent. His candidacy was a concern for Democrats who feared that he might draw Democratic votes from the Detroit area and hurt their chances in November. We will see where his voters will go and if Duggan endorses a candidate.



Democratic candidates

- Jocelyn Benson, Secretary of State
Chris Swanson, Genesee County Sheriff

Republican candidates

- Mike Cox, CEO / Former MI Attorney General
John James, U.S. Representative
Perry Johnson, Perry Johnson Companies, Owner
Aric Nesbitt, State Senator, Minority Leader

U.S. Senate

When incumbent Democratic U.S. Senator Gary Peters

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Cover: A stroll through Applewood Estate. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)



Photo of the Month: A busy bee in a Crapo Street apple tree. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat

Beecher’s bid to draw students on Flint’s north side: Two new classrooms kickstart complete makeover of century-old building

By Harold C. Ford

The bid by the Beecher Community School District (BCSD) to retain current students and draw new enrollees reached a milestone moment in January with the reopening of two newly remodeled classrooms at the south end of what locals have long called the “Old Building” of the district’s former high school campus.

The two new classrooms with remodeled interiors, new furniture, and state-of-the-art technology house 10th grade students who have been bused over, on a daily basis, from the current Beecher High School (BHS) campus’s Dolan Building less than two miles away.

According to the school district’s “In Touch” publication, “The two classrooms have been intentionally designed to prepare students for college and careers.”

One classroom “mirrors a college instructional environment,” the

publication stated, as it features new tables, carpeting, an interactive white board, and access to Chromebooks. A second classroom “includes collaborative learning spaces and specialized equipment commonly found in hospitals and healthcare facilities.”

BCSD leadership expects to fully reopen a newly-christened Beecher High School as a health science academy in the fall of 2026.

At the moment, the Old Building and environs – at the northwest corner of Saginaw Street and Coldwater Road on Flint’s near north side – are largely occupied by a crew of construction workers engaged in the near-complete makeover of the building that first opened its doors to students in 1926.

“It’s amazing,” said Marvin Smoot, Beecher Board of Education president, during an interview with East Village Magazine (EVM).

“That’s always been a vision to reopen that high school.”

“I walked those hallways,” recalled an emotional Smoot, himself a 1983 BHS graduate. “When I got on the board, I knew it [a Beecher rebirth] had to start in the educational system.”

The Old Building was completely shuttered in 2004 for financial reasons, as were two others at the five-building campus. For 22 years, Beecher’s senior high school students have attended classes at the Dolan Building along with 7th and 8th graders. Until now.

Beecher plans to return all 10th-12th graders to the new facility by September 8, 2026. “That’s the target date if no construction issues happen,” Smoot said. The district’s Dolan Building will then serve students in grade 6-8, while Dailey

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Beecher's bid...

(Continued from Page 4)

Elementary, across the street from Dolan, will enroll K-5 students.

“Catastrophic damage” to “shiny new object”

The south end of the so-called Old Building where the two renovated classrooms have reopened was completely destroyed by the horrific 1953 tornado that roared through the district, killing 116 people – 113 in Beecher – and injuring more than 800 others.

The Beecher tornado was the deadliest in Michigan's history and one of the ten worst in American history in terms of fatalities caused by a single-funneled twister. It registered as an F-5 storm on the Fujita scale, its highest rating, which indicates “catastrophic damage” caused by wind speeds ranging from 261-318 miles per hour.

The storm left a path of destruction that stretched for 186 miles. Property damage was estimated to be \$19 million in 1953 – about \$237 million in today's dollars when adjusted for inflation.

Nonetheless, the Beecher community, with help from others, set about the task of rebuilding. An army of 5,000 community volunteers donated an estimated 80,000 hours

to help with the rebuild, including Charles Stewart Mott, then-CEO of the foundation that bears his name.

The rebuild attracted the attention of the National Civic League, which honored Beecher with its prestigious All-American City award in 1966.

In 2026, the school district is on the precipice of reoccupying its Old Building that is morphing, according to Jendayi Gardner, BCSD Superintendent, into “a shiny new object.”

“When parents see a new building and other amenities, it might move parents to want to send their children to that school district,” Gardner added. “The high school is the cornerstone of your district.”

Mott pitches in \$10 million

Decades after that devastating tornado, Charles Stewart Mott is again assisting Beecher in a rebuild. Flint's largest foundation announced on its website in January 2025 that it was providing \$10 million to support Beecher Community School District's work to reopen the shuttered school.

Gardner and BCSD Director for Business Services Michelle Woodley confirmed the financial package undergirding the restoration project.

The package includes, in addition to the grant from the Mott Foundation: \$5 million from a State of Michigan Budget Allocation; \$2

million from a Housing and Urban Development Community Project Funding Grant; \$1.5 million from a Michigan Department of Education Grant; and \$500,000 from a Michigan Enhancement Grant.

The renovation project was jumpstarted by Matthew Rizik, a Flint area native, Powers Catholic High School graduate, and current officer at the Detroit-based Rocket Companies founded by Dan Gilbert.

Rizik's attention had been drawn to Beecher by an online competition BCSD entered to upgrade its locker rooms – and the district's overall impressive history of athletic excellence. (Beecher's 25 state team championships are exceeded in Genesee County by only Powers Catholic and Flint Northern.)

“What they [Beecher] accomplished with the resources they have is amazing,” Rizik told Detroit-based WDIV during a visit to the Beecher campus in February 2025.

“He [Rizik] saw something in Beecher,” said Smoot. “He did a walk-through ... he went out on a limb ... he said, ‘we can do this.’”

New programming

Smoot lauded the revamped curriculum that will accompany the renovated building, citing offerings in health and science. “It's going to give kids the opportunity to see if this is what I want to do for a career,” he said.

Former BCSD Superintendent Richard Klee told EVM in October 2024 that, “work-based learning” would be available during students' junior and senior years with on-the-job experience at nearby health facilities. “Our goal is to provide students with hands-on learning experiences, industry certifications, and pathways to both higher education and immediate employment,” he said.

“They'll leave high school with some sort of certification that will provide a foot in the door to employ-



One of two newly remodeled classrooms in the Beecher High School “Old Building.”

(Photo by Harold C. Ford)

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Commentary ...

(Continued from Page 3)

announced that he wasn't running again back in 2025, it opened the floor for strong competition as both parties seek to gain the majority in Washington. Senator Peters' seat is considered one of the few toss-up senate races this year as his spot is one Democrats are defending in states that Trump won in 2024.

Democratic candidates

- Abdul El-Sayed, 2018 gubernatorial candidate
- Mallory McMorrow, State Senator
- Haley Stevens, U.S. Representative

Republican candidates

- Mike Rogers, former U.S. Representative
- Bernadette Smith, former Michigan Republican Party co-chair

There are also a number of third party and independent candidates who are running as well. They are Doug Marsh (Green Party) and independent candidates Lydia Christensen, Craig Johnson, Jason Sherman, Thomas "TJ" Stephens, and Valerie Willis.

U.S. House District 8

The 8th Congressional District includes most of Genesee County, all of Saginaw and Bay counties, and parts of Midland and Tuscola counties. It is currently represented by Democrat Kristen McDonald Rivet, who was elected two years ago after Dan Kildee (D) chose not to run for reelection. The 8th District is one of 14 in the nation that was won by Trump in 2024 that is represented by a Democrat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Democratic Candidate

- Kristen McDonald Rivet, Incumbent

Republican Candidates

- Amir Hassan

- Al Lemmo
- Thomas J. Smith

State Senate

There are 38 members in Michigan's Senate, each serving four year terms. Most of Genesee County, including the City of Flint, falls within District 27. Our current State Senator is John Cherry (D) who is running for re-election this year. The two Republican candidates are Bill Bain and Tammy Parillo.

State House, District 70

There are 110 members in the state House of Representatives and they are elected to two year terms. Candidates that will be on the ballot in Flint are Larry Hutchinson (R), incumbent Cynthia R. Neeley (D), and Rob Waskoviak (R).

Flint Mayor

Voters will have the opportunity to vote through two candidates for Mayor of Flint to the November general election ballot. The candidates on this August's primary ballot are:

- Tonya Burns
- Sheldon Neeley, Incumbent
- Michaiiah Owens
- Roshanda Womack

Flint City Council

City council members are elected to four-year terms in the same year as the mayoral and gubernatorial election. In the Flint wards where there are only one or two candidates, there won't be a primary election as those races go straight to the general election in November. For those wards with more than two qualified candidates running, here are the candidates you will see on the primary election ballot:

First Ward

- Debra Coleman
- Cynthia Haynes

- Arthur Woodson

Second Ward

- Maurice Davis
- LaQuindra Hodge
- LaShawn Johnson, Third Ward Incumbent
- Ladel Lewis, Incumbent
- Audrey Young

Fifth Ward

- Joel Arnold
- Wantwaz Davis
- Jeron Dotson
- DeWaun Robinson

Eighth Ward

- Ezekiel Harris
- Brandan Jamison
- Casey Lester

Ballot issues

In addition to picking candidates for the major parties, Flint voters will also be considering four millage renewals.

- **Genesee County Arts Education & Cultural Enrichment millage renewal:** This would renew the arts millage that supports a variety of cultural activities in the county as discussed in last month's East Village Magazine.
- **Genesee County Emergency Medical Services millage renewal:** A .46 mill renewal to support emergency medical services in the county.
- **Mass Transportation Authority millage renewal:** A 1.51 mill renewal to support mass transportation in the county.
- **Genesee District Library millage renewal:** A .95 renewal millage to support the Genesee District Library.

Plan to vote in August

There is clearly much at stake in this primary. Take time to learn about the candidates' platforms and the issues on the ballot – and be ready to cast

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Commentary ...

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that ballot in any of several ways. Here are some important dates to keep in mind, courtesy of MichiganVoting.org:

- **NOW:** You can go online to request an absentee ballot or submit a printed application. MichiganVoting.org suggests requesting a ballot no later than July 14 to make sure you have time to receive and return it.
- **JULY 20:** This is the last day to register to vote online or by mail. After this date you will need to register in person at the city clerk's office.
- **JULY 21:** MichiganVoting.org recommends mailing your ballot by this date to avoid postal delays. After July 21, they suggest returning your ballot in person to the Flint City Clerk's office or an official drop box.
- **JULY 25:** This is the first day for statewide in-person early voting. Again, details on when and where you can vote will be available from the Flint City Clerk or mi.gov/vote.
- **AUG. 2:** Last day of statewide in-person early voting.
- **AUG. 3 at 4 p.m.:** This is the last day to vote in person, with an absentee ballot, at the city clerk's office. (After 4 p.m., you must vote at your polling place on Election Day.)
- **AUG. 4:** Election Day! Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. local time. Voters who still need to register to vote can do so at the city or township clerk's office, and then cast their ballot until 8 p.m.

One of the advantages of absentee and early voting is that you can take the time to learn about the candidates and cast an informed vote on Aug. 4 (or before). Be sure and take the time to learn and vote this year! ●

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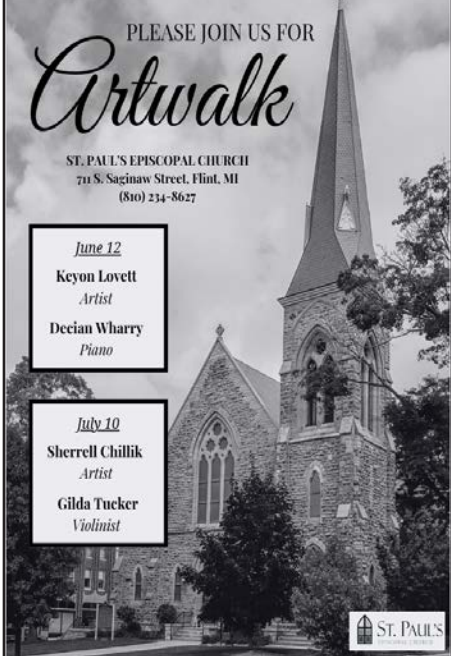
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THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

Below is a selection of events available to our readers, beginning after our June publication date. To submit events for our July issue, email information about your event to eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com by June 30.

59th Annual Flint Art Fair

Saturday to Sunday, June 13-14

The Friends of Modern Art (FOMA) is pleased to announce the 59th Annual Flint Art Fair. Named one of the 200 Best Shows in America by Sunshine Artist in 2025, the annual Flint Art Fair is a juried fine art and fine craft fair held on the lawn of the FIA. Takes place on Saturday from 10 am - 6 pm and Sunday 11 am - 5 pm. Admission is \$5 for everyone 12 and up; children under 12 are free.

Flint Institute of Arts
1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint

Mott Fest

Saturday, June 13 | 2 - 8 pm

Hosted by the Mott Park Recreation Association, this annual event features live music, bounce houses, a graffiti wall, tie-dye (bring a T-shirt!), Teddy Bear Clinic (kids bring your favorite stuffed animal!), pony rides, craft booths, food trucks and a beer garden. Plus a dance demo by Flint's FliCity Studio and live music from Elizabeth Reed and the Eclipse Band. Mott Fest is an all-ages event and free to attend.

Mott Park Recreation Area
2401 Nolen Dr., Flint

Two for Tuesday

Tuesday, June 16 | 6 - 8:30 pm

Looking for the best deal in town this summer? We've got you covered! Join us every Tuesday from for our popular ****Two for Tuesday**** special at Rollhaven! Includes 2 skating admissions for only \$9; plus \$2 for lasertag, bouncehouse, and skate/blade rentals. Whether you're bringing a friend, a sibling, a date, or the whole family, Tuesday nights are the perfect way to beat boredom and make memories all summer long.

Rollhaven Skating Center
5315 S. Saginaw St., Grand Blanc Twp.

Buckham Alley Theatre: Lysistrata

Thursday, June 18 - Saturday, June 20 | 7 pm

In *Lysistrata*, the women of Greece band together in a daring plan to end a never-ending war—by refusing intimacy with their husbands until peace is achieved. The result is a riotous, fast-paced battle of the sexes filled with clever dialogue, physical comedy, and timeless social commentary. Buckham Alley Theatre brings this ancient story to life with a fresh, energetic cast and a playful outdoor staging that invites the audience right into the action. 18+ due to mature themes. Because this is an outdoor production, guests are encouraged to bring a blanket or chair for comfortable seating on the lawn. Tickets are \$10 and are available online at buckhamtheatre.org or at the door.

Whaley Historic House
624 E. Kearsley St., Flint

Levitt AMP Music Series: Hot 8 Brass Band

Tuesday, June 23 | 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Straight from New Orleans, Hot 8 Brass Band brings the powerful, high-energy sound of traditional New Orleans brass mixed with hip hop, jazz, and funk influences. Known for their dynamic live shows, they create an unforgettable experience that gets the entire crowd moving. This is a free event. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets, and friends for a relaxed and enjoyable night in the heart of Flint.

Totem Books
620 W. Court St., Flint

Slice of History - Flint Edition

Thursday, June 25 | 4:30 - 6:30 pm

Our nation is marking 250 years and young people are the "founders" of our next chapter. Meet up at the new pavilion in the gardens to add to the Wish Wall for our nation's future and enjoy free pizza and great conversation about Flint's role in shaping history. Featuring Rachel Stock with the Sloan Museum of Discovery and Delma Jackson III with the Sankofa Project, we'll dig into the impact of the Flint Sit-Down Strike and the Fair Housing Ordinance of 1968. As always, Applewood events are free!

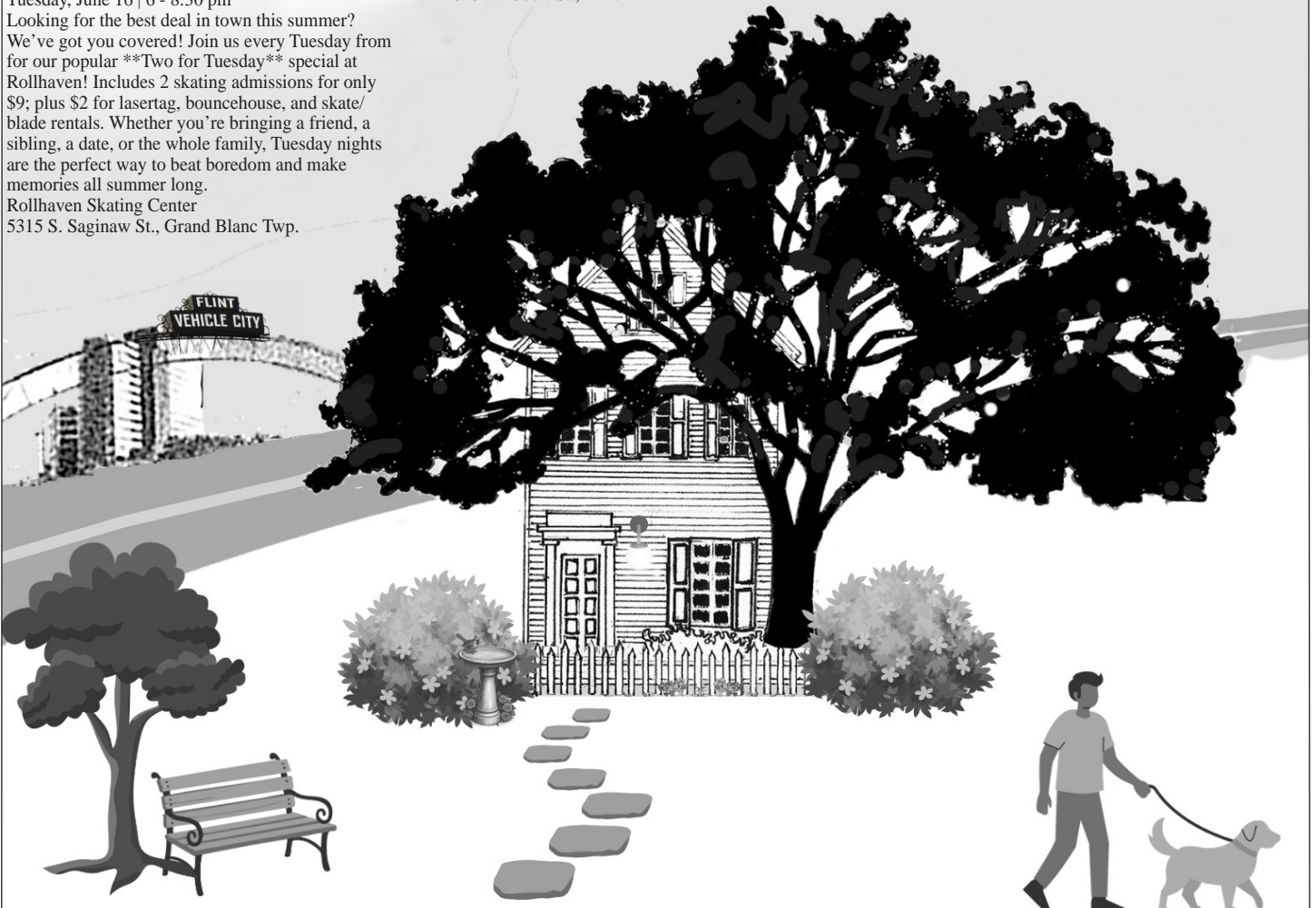
Applewood Estate
1400 E. Kearsley St., Flint

Passages Storytelling: Without A Net

Saturday, June 27 | 6 - 9 pm

Tell us about the time you faced uncertainty with a shrug, and took a big step forward into the unknown with nothing to catch you if you fell. Passages Storytelling is an open mic event, for true stories on our theme. Each story must be told without notes, and be no longer than 5 minutes. Doors open at 6:00, stories start at 6:30. Admission is free but seating is limited.

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Beecher's Bid ...

(Continued from Page 5)

ment and a possible career," Smoot told EVM more recently.

"You can't teach like we used to teach 40 years ago, or even 20 years ago," Smoot added. "If you make education fun in today's society, kids will want to learn."

Jonathon Edison's golden tickets

But to further encourage learning and good behavior beyond a fun teaching approach, there's Jonathon Edison, a former Detroit Public Schools teacher and administrator.

Edison studied neuroscience at Harvard, and now as Beecher's "9 Pathways of Success" Administrator, the district is using the "golden ticket" approach to motivating school children that evolved from Edison's research.

Edison described the approach to EVM as an "evidence-based, cognitive-behavior therapy, neuroscience, emotion-driven program."

Students of psychology will likely see the behavioral science of Ivan Pavlov (classical conditioning) or B. F. Skinner (operant conditioning) as underpinning Edison's golden ticket approach. In each, desired behavior is paired with a reward.

So, desired behaviors at Beecher schools – good attendance, volunteerism, satisfactory grades, solid

citizenship – can earn students golden tickets. Regular, random drawings of golden tickets result in rewards, and the more tickets earned, the better the chance of being rewarded.

Rewards have ranged from food, clothes, books, and a shopping spree at a local market all the way up to Detroit Pistons tickets, a \$2,000 college scholarship, and a chance at snatching cash in a windy "money machine."

Edison told EVM that misbehavior infractions are down 70% since implementation of the "golden ticket" program.

"We are shifting mindsets in students," said Superintendent Gardner. "We have students running to school, not only for golden tickets, but also ... for learning."

Gardner said she was well aware of Beecher's reputation as a "district of champions for athletics," but she added, "we are shifting that perception to be the district of champions for academics."

In 2024-25, Beecher was removed from the state's "Priority Schools" list, or the list where underperforming schools find themselves based primarily on student academic achievement levels and graduation rates.

"No longer under state oversight," Gardner proudly reflected, "that's a watershed moment. The sky is the limit for Beecher." ●



From left: Jendayi Gardner, Beecher Schools Superintendent; Marvin Smoot, Beecher Schools Board of Education President; Jonathon Edison, Beecher Schools "9 Pathways of Success" Administrator. (Photos by Edwin D. Custer)

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Local News

After federal spending cuts, what's happening with AmeriCorps in Flint?

By Madeleine Graham

AmeriCorps, the federal agency behind a network of national service programs working to address community needs like academic achievement, fighting poverty, and preparing for disasters, saw a substantial funding cut last year. Today, local programs are navigating the changed landscape and trying to remain optimistic as they rebuild what was lost.

According to a July 2025 Charles Stewart Mott Foundation report, Flint lost 66 AmeriCorps service members after the Trump administration cut roughly \$400 million, or 41%, of the agency's budget in April 2025.

Though that represents a huge loss for the Flint community, some programs survived even if organizers and funders had to abruptly halt programming as they worked to understand the federal cut's local implications.

For example, United Way of Genesee County (UWGC) had to pause its grants to AmeriCorps programming completely in 2025, though UWGC leaders are hopeful to see the return of 18 AmeriCorps service members, now called "volunteers," in the fall of 2026.

Jamie Gaskin, CEO of UWGC, explained that his organization had been managing reimbursable grants for AmeriCorps groups in the area before the federal funding cuts of last spring/summer.

"We currently don't have any of the money," indicated Gaskin of the usual funding UWGC received to support AmeriCorps before last year, "but there is a signed contract for the award of \$400,000 that we hope will be honored."

Jamie-Lee Venable, UWGC's Vice President of Operations, explained a bit further.

"For government fiscal year

2024, the State of Michigan received \$15.5 million for AmeriCorps programming. The State of Michigan awarded grants to 20 agencies of which we (UWGC) were a part. The grant was just over \$400,000 to support 18 volunteers in 10 different nonprofits," Venable shared over email. "For FY 2025 the State of Michigan received \$18 million and awarded that to 24 agencies. The UWGC was one of the awardees but chose to not activate the grant until Congress passed an appropriation in January 2026, and we are now moving forward with our FY 2025 grant."

Though UWGC has a plan, Venable noted that states are still currently applying for FY26 funds, and "we have no idea what that allocation will be for the October 1, 2026 program year."

As to how this strange funding structure happened, Gaskin explained that, too, was a bit complicated.

A lot of the AmeriCorps program was cut about a year ago when the federal government was rolling out the Department of Government Efficiency. There were significant and immediate cuts, though some of those cuts were later reversed. At the time, Gaskin noted, the federal government seemingly arbitrarily cut grants to states, and about 80% of employees of AmeriCorps at the federal level were let go or buyouts occurred.

For those programs that UWGC supports in Flint, the cuts impacted 18 AmeriCorps members who worked in "Educare, Asbury CDC, Flint & Genesee Literacy Network, Involved Dad, American Red Cross of Flint, Hurley Food FARMacy, Urban Renaissance Center, Pediatric Public Health Initiative, [and the] Genesee County Land Bank," according to Lindsay Crawford, Development Coordinator of the United Way.

"In 2024/2025 the Department of Government Efficiency terminated AmeriCorps contracts across the country, including ours," Venable explained further. "That contract was set to expire at the end of 2025. AmeriCorps was then removed from the FY26 Congressional budget until a few months ago when it was funded through the federal appropriation process."

Venable noted that the United Way is now starting its AmeriCorps programming back after receiving a contract from AmeriCorps through the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity. She said that contract will run through March 2027, and the "United Way currently has a request for funding submitted that would begin in October 2026 if awarded."

What all of this boils down to, UWGC leaders offered, is that there has been a tremendous amount of uncertainty surrounding AmeriCorps programs and volunteers over the last year.

Months after cuts were announced and stop work orders had been issued, there was a court order to restore some of AmeriCorps' funding, but many programs had been shut down already. Now, Gaskin said, it feels like UWGC is starting programs back up from scratch, but "we are anxiously optimistic that things will work for AmeriCorps programs this year."

As for the Michigan Education Corps (MEC), an AmeriCorps program that serves students aged three through grade eight, Holly Windram of Hope Network said over email that "there were two significant funding disruptions in 2025, one at the federal level and one at the state level" for MEC.

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AmeriCorps...

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At the federal level, she noted that when funding was unexpectedly terminated mid-year in 2025, tutors who served through AmeriCorps were impacted immediately by disruptions to staffing in the schools.

“We acted quickly to maintain services, and nearly 100% of tutors continued supporting students through the end of the school year. Federal funding was later released, but the disruption created significant instability,” Windram said.

At the state level, Windram shared that short notice was given on October 6, 2025, “that Michigan Education Corps was not included in the FY26 State School Aid Budget, resulting in a loss of approximately \$5,000,000 in anticipated funding.” There was a true impact on the schools and tutors, she said, adding that the funding “was not gone” but instead shifted to “other sources in the State School Aid budget going directly to schools and districts.”

Overall, Windram explained, “MEC began the year serving 66 schools in 24 districts and are currently serving 36 schools in 14 districts. The number of tutors decreased from 157 tutors to 84 statewide.”

And while federal funding has resumed, state funding has not been restored to MEC, so, she said, “MEC continues to operate in a more constrained environment while actively diversifying funding sources.” While Windram noted that MEC does not operate with a Flint-specific budget to compare year-on-year changes at the city level, she did offer that, “the specific impact to partners in Flint are the same as those experienced statewide; sustaining services in Flint now requires greater local investment and has constrained program size.”

She also shared that MEC’s staffing was “modestly higher” before the budget reductions experienced last year. She said MEC has served at the International Academy of Flint from

the 2020-21 school year to the present, with 11 tutors serving 133 students over that timeframe. In the current 2025-26 school year, one tutor is serving 38 students.

Another organization in Flint that employs AmeriCorps volunteers is the Crim Fitness Foundation, led by Program Manager, Josh Miller.

“The Crim Sports Corps program supports the fundamental youth sports programming offered during Thrive On afterschool programming. Unfortunately, the Crim Sports program is the only active AmeriCorps program housed in Flint,” explained Miller. “There are a few organizations who have members (volunteers) from national programs, but they are only sub-sites.”

In 2025, the Crim Fitness Foundation had ten AmeriCorps volunteers, Miller confirmed, but the organization is down to five volunteers this fiscal year.

Miller explained that the decrease in volunteers was actually not due to a loss in funding but because of the stop work order that had come along with the cuts in 2025. He said because the AmeriCorps grants were also released later than expected last year, the Crim requested a smaller amount of funding for the 25/26 year since the grant year had been shortened.

“Our 26/27 grant request is back to the 10 members we have requested previously,” he shared, noting that the Crim’s program budget now consists of \$147,215 from the grant itself with a match in private donations.

“We are actively expanding our programs into other districts, and anticipate having more members next year, so we do not expect any difficulties,” explained Miller.

“I am an AmeriCorps alum myself, so I understand the value and challenges of being an AmeriCorps member,” he added. “I hope that even with the continued challenges the program faces, we are still able to continue to offer programs that are dedicated to serving the local community.” ●

2026 Juneteenth CELEBRATION @ Flint Cultural Center

FREE Family Event!

Saturday, June 20 | 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

Freedom March at Noon
led by Hamady High School Marching Band
Live Music, featuring Mama Sol
Hands-on Arts and Crafts
Vendors / Food Trucks
Bounce Houses

Located on East Kearsley Street between Crapo and Walnut Streets. Free parking at Applewood, Sloan Museum, Whiting, FIA and the Flint Public Library.

SPONSORED BY:

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Sports Beat

Billiards megastars Reyes and Strickland visit Flint

By Harold C. Ford

Efren Reyes and Earl Strickland – international superstars in the sport of table billiards – visited Flint on May 14 and gave Michiganders an opportunity to engage them in games of eight-ball at Grindstone Billiards Club, located at 3600 S. Dort Hwy.

Reyes and Strickland then played an exhibition ten-ball match which Strickland won nine games to eight. The approximate one-hour match is available for viewing on YouTube where it has already racked up over 1,800 views and 200 comments.

“Best players in the world”

“To me, they’re the best players in the world,” gushed Rod Brown, 76, who drove some 90 miles from Caseville, Mich. for the opportunity to witness and possibly play eight-ball with Reyes or Strickland. “It’s my once-in-a-lifetime chance to shoot with both of them,” he told East Village Magazine.

The \$150 entry fee provided pool patrons with the opportunity to cue up against one, or both, of the superstars.

“You can’t pass it up,” said Josh Powell, 46, a Clarkston native and creator of the YouTube channel Amateur Pool with Josh. “They’re legendary.”

Eight-ball aficionados Mark Gruzd, 56, and Dave Westfall, 61, called the event at Grindstone “very special” and “a very rare opportunity.”

“When are you ever going to have the chance to do that again?” mused A. J. Downey, who traveled from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula for the opportunity. He called Reyes and Strickland “the GOATs” an acronym meaning “Greatest of All Time.”

To put the night in context for those not familiar with professional billiards, an equivalent opportunity for basketball fans might be a free throw shooting contest versus Michael Jordan or John Stockton.

World champions

Reyes, a winner of over 100 international titles, was the first player to win world championships in two different billiards games – eight-ball and nine-ball. He is often credited as the best pool player in the world. Reyes,

also dubbed “The Magician,” grew up in a pool hall and told NPR in a 2007 interview that when he started playing at eight years old he was too short and had to stand on Coca Cola cases to see over the table.

Strickland (aka “The Pearl”) was named Billiards Digest Player of the Year five times and then Player of the Decade in the 1980s by the same publication. His career highlights include three World Pool Association nine-ball championships, and, in 1996, he ran 11 consecutive nine-ball racks, a feat not duplicated in any nine-ball tournament since. Prior to his 11-rack run, no one had ever run 10 racks in nine-ball competition. He was inducted into the Billiard Congress of America’s Hall of Fame in 2006.

In 1996, Reyes defeated Strickland in a three-day nine-ball challenge match with a \$100,000 purse going to the first player to reach 120 wins. Now called the “Color of Money” match, Reyes won the match 120-117, making up a 17-game deficit late in the contest.

Last match?

YouTube commentator Powell speculated the event at Grindstone may be the last time the two veterans face off against one another.

Reyes, a native of the Philippines, is 71-years-old while Strickland is 64. Powell indicated that Reyes yearns to return to his homeland and that Strickland is unlikely to travel to the eastern Pacific nation nearly 10,000 miles distant.

While we can’t be sure what the future holds for Reyes and Strickland, one thing for certain is that those lucky enough to attend the May 14 event in Flint were treated to quite an impressive show from the two billiards legends. ●



Billiards legends Earl Strickland (left) and Efren Reyes (right) came to Flint for a ten-ball match at Grindstone Billiards Club on May 14, 2026. (Photos by Harold C. Ford)