

Family Focus

WEST MIDLAND FAMILY CENTER

Spring 2024

Volume 34, Number 1

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Thriving,
Giving,
Growing...
Together



WMFC Celebrates 50 Years of Thriving, Giving and Growing... Together

Cultural anthropologist *Margaret Mead* once said “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Fifty years ago, not many would have imagined that an old abandoned schoolhouse in *Greendale Township*, would one day become the *West Midland Family Center (WMFC)*. Today, because of a group of caring and like-minded citizens who lived on the outskirts of town at the time, WMFC stands as a testimony that Margaret Mead’s words ring true for those in rural *West Midland County*.

In 1974, the old schoolhouse, which sat on the corner of M-20 and Alamando Roads, was used as a gathering place for local teens until *Phyllis Breedlove*, first

Director of the West Midland County Community Center, suggested that programming be expanded to include those

...continued on page 2



Key Figures from Dow College Opportunity

Program Mourned....Memorialized by Greg Dorrien

We mourn the passing in 2024 of two key members of our *Dow College Opportunity Program, (COP) Frank Popoff and Gene Wejrowski*.

In 1989, the original idea for *Dow* to sponsor a college opportunity program for first-generation college students was *Dow’s Corporate Contributions Officer Charles (Chuck) Infante’s*, but it was *Dow’s Chief Executive Officer, Frank Popoff* that gave the green light to make it a reality. However, Frank wasn’t content to simply hear reports of activity. He and *Jean* (his wife) attended COP graduation ceremonies when their schedules permitted and asked about previous student members by name. When Dow would auction its surplus equipment and

computers, Frank made sure proceeds were donated to the Dow College Opportunity Program at *West Midland Family Center*. That fund now stands at \$1.3 million and typically supports about 80% of the annual program costs. Frank and Jean have been personally supportive around Christmas time every year for the last 30+ years.

Throughout his professional career, Gene Wejrowski was a Project Manager/Engineer, just one of the many “hats” he wore at Dow. Although, around WMFC, he’s best known as *Chairman of the Dow COP Committee* for 25 years. He developed an *Olympics of the Mind Activity*,

...continued on page 2

WMFC Celebrates 50 Years of Thriving, Giving and Growing...continued from page 1

of all ages. Phyllis' idea took off and it wasn't long before she and others in the community began working together to transform the Center into a place where all could gather and participate in wholesome family building activities.

Over the next 15 years, the Center would become a safe haven for many. As a result, the community would outgrow the small schoolhouse as much needed services such as child-care, assistance for seniors, and services for families were added.

In 1989, a new building would replace the original schoolhouse and as the Center continued to thrive and grow other projects were taken on and completed. In 1993, the *Arbury-Breedlove Memorial Garden* began to bloom. In 1995, the modular behind the Center was added. In 2001, a building expansion including an outdoor pool was completed and then in 2017 the facility was expanded again with the addition a preschool classroom wing, a bowling center and

a transportation garage. Finally, in 2023 WMFC would grow in a way as never before with the acquisition of the *West Midland Food and Clothing Depot*.

To celebrate West Midland's historic milestone, WMFC is hosting the *50th Golden Celebration* this summer.

Live music, food, swimming, games and activities for all ages will showcase the amazing facilities and grounds WMFC has to offer the community. Please mark your calendars and join us on Thursday, July 25th when we celebrate 50 years of thriving, giving and growing together.



The former Greendale School #4 served well as the Center from 1974-1989.

Key Figures from Dow College Opportunity Program Mourned...continued from page 1

which was an event student families' looked forward to attending annually, (it was designed to let every family member showcase their unique and

valuable knowledge, while shining in the process).

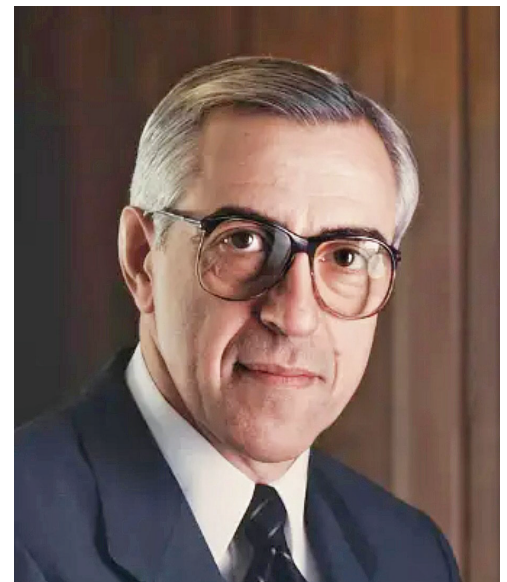
Indeed, he took a personal interest in working with the first four Program Directors' to plan activities that are still a staple of the core part of our program today (service learning, career exploration, college campus visitation, summer adventure).

These men had a number of overlapping traits: they genuinely liked being around others, they made people comfortable through humor, they believed we are caretakers of the earth and that we all need to learn to live more sustainably. Over the course of their lives, it seems both men expressed pride and satisfaction in the Dow College Opportunity Program. As such, their family members were prompted to make mention of COP in their obituaries, once again helping first-generation college students. Your dedication and enduring

support has not gone unnoticed, gentlemen. We will miss you both, Frank and Gene.



Gene Wejrowski



Frank Popoff

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Pickleball Fever Hits West Midland Family Center Community

According to the *Association of Pickleball Professionals* (Aug 31, 2023), pickleball is now the fastest-growing sport in the nation for the fifth consecutive year in a row, with 48.3 million U.S. adults (19% of the adult population) having played at least one game in the last 12 months. Pickleball's popularity has skyrocketed due to its accessibility, inclusive environment, health benefits, endless opportunities for fun and social interaction, and the fact that players of all abilities and fitness levels can play the game. Given its immense popularity, it's hard to believe pickleball is not yet an Olympic sport.

Pickleball is not really a new game. It was actually invented in 1965 by **Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell, and Barney McCallum** who lived in *Bainbridge Island, Washington*. The three fathers were looking for a way to keep their children entertained during the long, hot summer days. Unable to find shuttlecocks to play badminton, the men put on their thinking caps and invented a new game using equipment they made from items lying around the house, and rules they created from combining tennis, badminton, and table tennis rules.

Despite its name, pickleball has nothing to do with pickles. There are different stories as to how the game got its name, but most say the name came from *Pickles*, the *Pritchard Family*



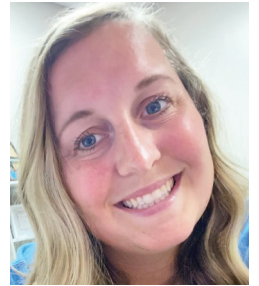
Kenneth Henderson returns a hard serve during a recent indoor pickleball game at WMFC.

cocker spaniel, who would chase the balls and run off with them during the game. Regardless of how the game got its name, no one can argue the fact that pickleball is now the fastest growing sport worldwide and its popularity at *West Midland Family Center (WMFC)* is no exception.

"We started playing pickleball here at West Midland because the ladies that attend our *Zumba* classes were interested in it," explained *WMFC Recreation Director Chelsea Wall*. "The word got out and pickleball took off. It's now one of our fastest growing recreation programs."

"It wasn't long before it started getting really crowded on the courts," shared Wall. "To keep up with the demand, we increased the number of courts, purchased additional equipment and started offering more times and days when people can come in and play."

"The *Greendale Senior Center* has even added pickleball to its list of activities for Wednesdays and Fridays," shared Wall. "Our seniors come in around noon to hang out with friends and have lunch, then they walk over to the gym to play pickleball."



Chelsea Wall

Some have become so enamored with pickleball that they claim to be addicted to the game.

"I'm a pickleball addict," laughed long time *WMFC Employee Renee Allen*. "I play anywhere from three to five times a week. It's easy to get addicted to pickleball because it's fun, challenging and you meet a lot of friendly people on the courts," explained Allen. "Pickleball provides a great workout, improves hand-eye coordination, and helps with balance and agility while enabling you to mingle with people from all different backgrounds and generations. 99% of the new friendships I've made in recent years are with people I've met on the pickleball court," concluded Allen.

As pickleball continues to grow in popularity, so will the pickleball program at West Midland.

"We are looking at adding courts in our second gym," shared Wall. "For now, we invite people to come to WMFC and see what all the buzz surrounding pickleball is about," concluded Wall. "And don't be surprised if you catch the fever and get hooked."



Mark Murray and James Bujalski battle hard against the team of Shannon Smith and Laura Sian. In pickleball, if a team does not score at least one point in the game, they are said to be "pickled."



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Kathryn Tate

Hello and Goodbye to WMFC Board Members

The 2024 *WMFC Board of Directors* would like to welcome two new directors while wishing two long time favorites adieu.

The first new member is *Mike Rapanos*, a native Midlander, a real estate developer and owner of *Midland Building Company*, but many people know of him through one of his many sporting passions that have included softball, soccer, basketball, hockey, golfing, fishing, hunting, boating ...and once he completed a marathon on a spur of the moment dare wearing brand new shoes (OUCH!) and zero training.



Mike Rapanos

The second, *Kathryn Tate* moved to *Midland* with her husband *Michael* in 2008. They have two children, *Sam* (14) and *Aaron* (11), who are currently enrolled at *Northeast Middle School*. Kathryn has been the *Director of the Legacy Center for Community Success* since 2019. The Legacy Center empowers youth and families to

thrive through one-on-one tutoring, positive youth development, and substance use prevention. When Kathryn isn't working, you'll probably find her on the sidelines of a soccer game or a robotics competition. In addition, she claims to be an intense quilter when she slips away twice a year for three days at a time (for the last five years), but her two completed quilts is evidence to us she enjoys talking quilting with her friends even more.

Unfortunately, with every "hello" often comes a "goodbye". After six years of service we say goodbye to *Board President Ben Dollard*, (*Ameriprise Financial Services*) and *Board Treasurer Brooke VanderKelen* (*SMI Snow Makers*), both of whom have brought so much knowledge, and given so much time and treasure, to our organization. Thank you both for sharing and caring these many years!



Ben Dollard



Brooke VanderKelen