



# Getting Involved...

**June 2009**

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Those Who  
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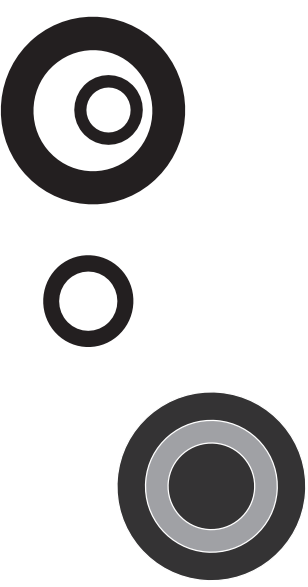
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“Getting Involved” was created to bring recognition to community members, service organizations, businesses and professionals that have made a personal commitment to enhance lives in Shiawassee County by “Getting Involved.”

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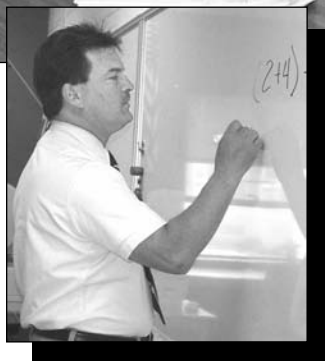
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# Getting Involved...



Mark Rairick



**"I can be  
goofy. The  
kids like  
that."**

## Rairick Enjoys Teaching 'Very, Very Much' and It Shows

By Donna Klein, staff writer

**A**ccording to the Schaefer family who nominated Mark Rairick as a Getting Involved Hero, Rairick "is the epitome of what a teacher should be."

The nomination also says: "He goes above and beyond in order to get to know his students so he can help them be the best they can be" and makes "learning a fun process."

When asked how he puts fun into the classroom, Rairick, a fourth grade teacher at Durand's Robert Kerr Elementary School, said he uses projects, games, spelling bees, writers' workshops ("fourth and fifth graders really take off on writing") and, "I can be goofy. The kids like that."

But there's much more to his teaching methods and philosophy. "The environment of the class is family-oriented . . . genuine caring. When kids feel safe, you can have fun because trust has been built."

He lamented that nowadays "teachers are forced to concentrate so much on curriculum," but, modestly, he emphasized that "most teachers here go way beyond in their own ways without people really knowing that. Teaching is a very difficult, busy job. A tremendous amount is going on all the time."

At Robert Kerr, each teacher treats all the others with respect, which is a good example for the students and he describes his own pupils, about 10 years old, as "good citizens. Fourth graders have a very good sense of responsibility," such as their student government which recently voted affirmatively to collect food for the needy "and which affects their teachers, school and community. They are, and they know they are, a reflection of the school."

Courtesy and similar behaviors, he added, "set the stage for adulthood." Asked about a clothesline strung across the classroom, he said he has each student hang up a paper he or she is proud of "and that's not necessarily an A paper."

Mark Rairick has two sons and 10 grandchildren. His wife Joyce, a native of the Netherlands, was also in the education field and retired two years ago.

Rairick has also coached soccer for more than 20 years and at one point was not teaching at all, but "I felt a pull back into education."

"I enjoy it very, very much!" And he enjoys not only the teaching, but also "watching the kids grow up."

*Nominated by the Schaefer Family.*

**Jon Michael Fuja**



Jon Michael Fuja

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# The Cook Family Foundation

By Jackie Leone, staff writer

**D**onald and Florence-etta (Cookie) Cook's commitment to community lives on today through the grant distribution of The Cook Family Foundation.

According to Executive Director Tom Cook, The Cook Family Foundation exists because of the success, commitment, generosity and hard work of the late Donald O. and Florence-etta (Bailey) Cook.

The Cook Family Foundation was started by Tom Cook's grandfather in 1978. The first grants, Cook said, was a scholarship to a future University of Michigan student and monies to help with a landscaping project at Owosso High School.

"The first few years, we didn't do much," Cook said, but when his grandfather died in 1997, "the entire estate passed to the foundation."

And, today, the Cook Family Foundation continues to carry out the founding Cooks' mission: To strengthen organizations in Shiawassee County through strategic, proactive use of funds and grants.

The Foundation annually gives more than \$100,000 in scholarships to graduating high school seniors from the area to attend the University of Michigan, Donald Cook's alma mater.

That is in addition to the many grants the Foundation makes for area programs, nonprofits and events. The Foundation invests in community organizations that are committed to positive change, both within Shiawassee County and within the organization itself.

Rather than just make a gift of financial resources, the Foundation seeks to invest in the mission – and the future – of an organization.

"We couldn't do what we do without my grandfather's insight," Cook said, noting he was "a successful businessman and a wise investor."

Cook went on to say, "My grandparents loved Owosso. They could have gone anywhere to start their business (Wolverine Sign Works), but they stayed right here, in this community they loved."

And today, the community is still benefiting from that love.

In the last five years, the Foundation has made grants totaling nearly \$2.9 million in five main areas.

According to the 2008 Annual Report, The Foundation funded \$185,208 in grants to community nonprofit institutions; \$129,904 for education and youth; \$73,050 toward betterment of the environment; \$71,000 in scholarships and support of the University of Michigan; and \$21,000 in scholarships to state of Michigan YMCA camps; in addition to \$124,046 in administrative, communications, taxes and other grants – for a total disbursement of \$604,208.

The Cook Family Foundation, previously operated partly out of Wolverine and partly out of Tom Cook's home, recently moved into its own office, in the riverside portion of the Matthews Building at 312 W. Main St., Suite 3W, in Owosso.

The move was made in the hope a new office would put the Foundation in a position to be more engaged with past grantees and other community organizations.

Still a family-operated philanthropy effort, The Cook Family Foundation is operated by Board President Bruce and wife Trustee Jacqueline Cook, Trustee Paul and wife Vice President Laurie Cazatt Cook and ED Tom and wife Trustee Anna Owens.

With the move to the new office Nancy Barnes is now the part-time Foundation Administrator.

Although the address is new, the phone number remains the same: (989) 725-1621.

Nominated by Carrie Rathbun Hawks.



Bruce and Tom Cook

**"My grandparents loved Owosso. They could have gone anywhere to start their business, but they stayed right here..."**

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# Getting Involved...

## Connie Ellenberg

By Jackie Leone, staff writer



Connie Ellenberg, Director Amanda Reed and Maggie (shown in Humane Society Ad below).



**"My heart goes out to all the animals."**

**A** deep love of animals, instilled in her in childhood, is what keeps Connie Ellenberg volunteering at the Shiawassee Humane Society. "They're (animals) always there for you, they're non-judgmental and so forgiving."

Ellenberg says her parents always had pets, she grew up with them and now has her own brood, as does her sister and the siblings' children – compassion for animals is a family tradition.

"I love working with the humane society and the animals. My heart goes out to animals, I feel badly if any of them get hurt (by being unlawfully dropped off on a roadside or abused by their owners). That's why I give the majority of my time to the humane society," Ellenberg, a teacher for 32 1/2 years, 29 of those at Emerson Elementary in Owosso, explained.

She admits, however, it is hard for her to come out to the shelter "and see all the animals" that have been abandoned for one reason or another. "We do the best we can to find them homes, a safe environment and loving family."

The Shiawassee Humane Society has been in existence since 1951. The organization first operated out of volunteer homes, in conjunction with animal control, and, ultimately, in a separate facility.

The shelter opened its doors at 2752 W. Bennington Road in 1977. The current building was finished in 1981, with several remodels and expansions taking place over the year to accommodate today's capacity of 100 animals.

A Michigan 501c3 non-profit animal welfare organization, the humane society serves approximately 1,200 animals per year with a small staff, hundreds of volunteers, foster homes and in affiliation with numerous statewide pet rescue organizations.

It is led by a volunteer board of directors and funded entirely through memberships, donations and grants. The Shiawassee Humane Society has no governing ties with any other organizations and is independent of the Shiawassee County Animal Control agency.

In 2008, source of funds exceeded use of funds by \$59,190, due in part to a \$95,475 anonymous gift and a \$20,400 Cook Family Foundation grant.

Both of those gifts helped fund major projects, such as a new heat/ventilation/air conditioning system -- which provides the shelter with a healthy living environment that is critical to the overall health and reduction of illness within the dog and cat populations – and the installation of a gas line, with the excess amount being transferred to the restricted fund reserves.

Ellenberg has served on the SHS board since 1987, 11 1/2 of those years as treasurer, a post now held by Robert Meihls.

"I just do everything I can for the animals," Ellenberg said, conceding that she now works "mostly behind the scenes," but her focus has not changed – it is all for the animals.

Some of that "behind the scenes" support includes working with her sister Pam Carlson, also a long-time SHS supporter, and Meihls in organizing the annual dinner auction fundraiser and co-chairing, with Ruth McCarty, the Pets on the Street fundraiser.

"I try to help with other fundraisers, too, when they come up," Ellenberg said, mentioning the mini-Pets on the Street held recently and the fourth annual Adopt-A-Thon at the Young Chevrolet dealership.

What breaks her heart, Ellenberg admits, is that the shelter is not larger so that more animals can be helped.

Noted Ellenberg, "We have lots of cats out here, more than 100, and a waiting list (dating back to September) for more to come in. "There is just not room to take in any more."

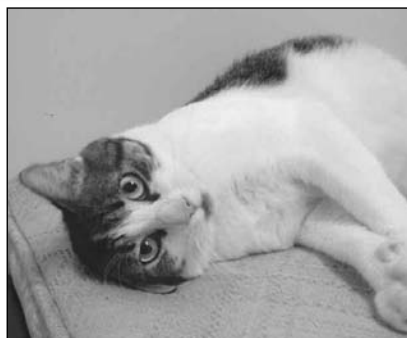
According to the SHS annual report, the ideal shelter capacity is 25 dogs, five puppies, 50 cats and 20 kittens. This "ideal" level is exceeded more than 90 percent of the time due to the number of animals that need help in the community.

Always in need of volunteers, adoptive families and donations, interested persons may call the shelter at 723-4262.

Pets available for adoption may be viewed at [www.shs-pet.petfinder.org](http://www.shs-pet.petfinder.org).

*Nominated by Carol Vaughn.*

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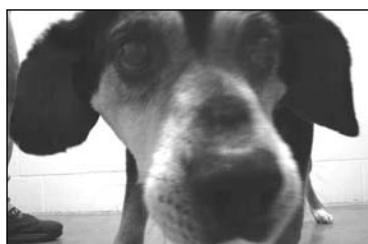
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Photos by Jon Griesen

## Kevin McPhail & Tom Turek: Working to Keep Laingsburg "A Great Place to Grow Up"

By Ed Buskirk, *The Laingsburg Independent*

Listen to lifelong Laingsburg residents Kevin McPhail and Tom Turek chat for a few minutes and it soon becomes apparent how much their small town upbringing meant to them, and why they both have devoted so much of their adult lives to their community.

"This was a great place to grow up," Turek says, describing a "Wonder Years" youth.

The two men (who were nominated for Getting Involved by Carrie Rathbun Hawks), shared many of the same mentors growing up, but probably no one influenced them more than their late fathers. "Our dads were friends," McPhail recalls. "They bowled together on the same team. They both belonged to the Lions Club and did a lot of community service work through it."

McPhail and Turek were both active in athletics at Laingsburg High School before going on to college and credit athletics with shaping their lives. Turek currently serves as president of the Wolfpack Sports Boosters.

Both are family men. McPhail and his late wife Beth were married 31 years and raised three children, while Tom and Sandy Turek have been married 23 years and are the parents of two daughters.

Both have been involved in successful local businesses – McPhail as owner of the McPhail Insurance Agency, which his father started over 50 years ago, and Turek as editor of *The Meridian Weekly* until 2001 – and have been active in the Laingsburg Business Association. Both were chosen as Businessperson of the Year, in addition to Turek's selection as Unsung Hero of the Year. Both also actively participate in the

annual LBA Community Pancake Breakfast. McPhail also serves as chairman of the LBA's Winterfest Committee.

Both men are supporters of Laingsburg schools. McPhail served as chair of the committee to build a new high school in 1990, while Turek actively supported the effort editorially through the newspaper. Both continue to actively work for school causes such as the recent passage of a building improvement millage.

McPhail's and Turek's paths crossed in 2007 when both were asked to serve on the A Century of Values committee. That committee, under the chairmanship of Darrel Corp, spent countless hours planning Laingsburg's Feb. 2009 hosting of the kickoff of a year-long nationwide motor tour marking the 100th anniversary of Boy Scouting in America. McPhail secured corporate sponsorship for the weekend-long event, in addition to serving as the lead sponsor himself. Turek put his newspaper experience to work promoting the weekend, which brought statewide and even national attention to the community.

A reminder of that work lives on with the two being instrumental in creating an Avenue of Flags going in and out of Laingsburg during holidays and community events, just as was done during the A Century of Values celebration.

So why, at an age when, like most of their contemporaries, they could be spending the lion's share of their time on the golf course, do Kevin McPhail and Tom Turek continue to devote so much of their lives to the Laingsburg community?

Tom Turek sums it up for both of them when he grins and says, "Man, I love this town!"



Kevin McPhail & Tom Turek



**"Our dads were friends. They bowled together on the same team. They both belonged to the Lions Club and did a lot of community service work through it."**

*Nominated by Carrie Rathbun Hawks.*


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# Getting Involved...



Barbara Williamson



**“Few things bring her more satisfaction than serving others at the local food bank.”**

## ‘I’ve Got to Keep Smiling’

By Donna Klein, staff writer

“I’ve got to keep smiling,” said Barbara Williamson during a 2006 bout with cancer, and it seems to hold true for her life as a whole.

A plaque given to her as part of a fundraising campaign for the Memorial Healthcare Cancer Center, Owosso, states, “Few things bring her more satisfaction than serving others at the local food bank.” And her smile welcomes everyone.

The “food bank” is the Durand Area Loaves and Fishes, where every Wednesday she joins several other volunteers at the Vernon United Methodist Church (L&F headquarters) packing bags full of food for families who need help.

But according to Garnet Seger, who nominated Williamson as a Getting Involved “Hero”, that’s only one of many volunteer duties.

Barbara, however, is quick and adamant about crediting others, including her co-volunteers at Loaves and Fishes, where they work from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays. Gesturing toward rows of shelves in the church basement, she explained that each volunteer is responsible for a row (her’s is mostly peanut butter, jelly and cereal). When a customer comes in, each packs food in a plastic sack, the amount determined by the size of the family.

The rest of their three-hour stint might include unpacking groceries purchased or gathered in food drives and stocking the shelves, which sometimes get a little bare, she noted. Barbara also does the book work every Wednesday.

Born in Covington, Ohio, she came to Michigan in 1965. She taught school for 40 years, including 28 years teaching first graders at the Robert Kerr Elementary School, Durand. She also taught military dependent children in Germany for two years.

She and her late husband, Ken, were married for 15 years and Barbara has one step-daughter, Gayla Williamson of Owosso.

Asked how she became involved in Loaves and Fishes, she said the Rev. Rick Brown, former circuit minister for the Vernon and Bancroft Methodist Churches, asked her to help and she enjoyed it, besides having the chance to help others.

Typically thinking more about others than about her nomination, she noted that those pantry shelves always need non-perishable items like canned fruit and soup, macaroni and cheese, cereals and laundry detergent. Items can be dropped off at the Vernon UMC, the Durand Senior Center, 5th/3rd Bank, Citizens Bank, Curves, all in Durand, and at the Vernon Village Restaurant and most area churches.

Nominated by the Garnet J. Seger.

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# Jeff Crawford; A Very Good Man

By Jackie Leone, staff writer

**T**he late Jeff Crawford, 47, of Perry was a “getting involved” kinda guy; no matter if it was his children’s sports teams, being a Perry Area firefighter or just a concerned citizen – Crawford, family and friends say, was always there to extend a helping hand.

Crawford died March 31 in a tragic accident while helping cut down some trees and one of them fell on him and killed him.

Greg Hebdon, who says he is proud to call Crawford his best friend during his abbreviated life, said, “Jeff was always there to lend a helping hand. He was always helping other people.”

“He was the type of person that if he made a commitment to be someplace, he was there; he was reliable and a great friend,” Hebden said, adding, “Jeff was very involved in the Perry Sport Boosters, if it required all night to do it, that’s what he did. If he worked eight hours at General Motors and was needed to man the ticket booth at a game, that’s what he did.”

Hebden went on to say, “Jeff was a perfectionist. The right way, to him, was the only way. He was the one who made sure if a certain tree branch was in the way, it was cleared away. He was the one to take precautions first. For him to die the way he did, it had to be a freak accident; not carelessness or recklessness on his part. I guess it was just his time to go; everything he did was to an exact science.”

Hebden likened he and his friend to Mutt and Jeff, saying, “He was a great friend. He never spoke ill of anyone; he always spoke positive of everyone.”

“Jeff was a giving person, always there to help someone out the best he could; doing anything he needed to do. If there were more people like him, it would be an awfully good world to live in.”

Hebden also credited his friend to be “slow to anger, quick to help,” saying “Whether it be doing a great job for GM for a salary or the Sports Boosters for free, he gave people the same quality. We had a lot of laughs; went through a lot of ups and downs.”

A particular attribute Hebden cited was Crawford’s love of his children. “He did everything for his kids.”

Agreeing with that assessment, Crawford’s former mother-in-law Judy Beach, said when son Drew was growing up, Crawford coached his Perry-Morrice football league for three years, as well as coaching daughter Katie’s T-ball teams. Jeff was “a very dedicated and devoted father.”



Jeff Crawford



**“Jeff was a very good man. Ever since I’ve known him, and that is almost all his life...”**

A member and president of the Perry Sports Boosters, Beach said, Jeff was instrumental in the erection of the Bump Lardie monument at Perry High School’s Bump Lardie Field.

“Jeff was a very good man. Ever since I’ve known him, and that is almost all his life, he has been a very active participant in community projects.”

Noting Crawford was “a very active member of the Perry Area Fire Department,” Beach related that “Jeff joined the fire department 15 years ago, after his home on Winegar Road burned. Many of his school friends were among the firefighters who responded and Jeff wanted to get involved; give something back to the community. He asked his friends, ‘What can I do?’”

Shortly after, he was a trained firefighter and responding to fires himself.

According to Beach, Crawford was an avid deer and turkey hunter, but, she stresses, “He was a very, very caring and compassionate person. Jeff loved life.”

The son of Gary and Diania Crawford, he has four brothers: Tim, Kevin and Troy, who all live in the Shiawassee County area, and Tod, a resident of Tennessee.

*Nominated by the Joyce & Zachary Gomez.*



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# Getting Involved...

## 4th of July Commission

By Elizabeth Wehman, staff writer



Al and Shauna Bayless



Nominated by the Rhonda Harris.

**"B**oth our parents told us to give back," commented Shauna Bayless. Al and his wife, Shauna are a major part of the 4th of July Commission in the city of Corunna. Al has been a part of the festivity planning for the past seven years and currently serves as Vice President. As a city employee, Shauna is major help on the committee.

Al's favorite part of the 4th of July events is the annual Belt Sander Race. Al built the first Belt Sander track for the first race at Corunna. Along with the other participants at the Belt Sander races that first year was Al and his daughter. After having winning entries that first year, Al commented, "From that point on, I was hooked."

The couple thought of this year's theme as a result of a recent vacation in Hawaii. The event is now dubbed as, "Hawaiian Holiday in Corunna." Al found this year's Tiki totem pole artist, Steph Collin, a local wood carving artist. His Tiki pole carving is the central theme to the 4th of July float. The float made its debut in the 2009 Curwood Festival parade. Complete with Tiki torches, palm trees, surf boards and a hut, the float took "Best Community Unit," in the Curwood parade.

When asked why the couple thinks the 4th festivities are so important they added, "Every town has a festival. Ours is only a one day event but it is good ole' fashioned fun and the best part, it's free to the public." The celebration has been a part of the Corunna community for the past 25 years.

Al was on the City Council for three years and during that time held a position on the Parks and Recreation Committee. The couple has assisted with Pancake Breakfasts, helped build the Eagle Scout Pavilion and most of the Jeep at the McCurdy

playscape was Al's creation. Shauna is a major part of the gardening at McCurdy and coordinates the sled hill gardening project. Six tiers of the garden are adopted by area organizations for upkeep. Shauna helps with the Train Festival group and Corunna Founder's Day.

What encourages the couple to keep active in their community? The whole 4th of July weekend event is a family affair for the couple. They have relatives return to Corunna on the 4th to help. "I also tend to draft family if they don't volunteer," chuckles Al.

Al is happy to report that the Commission is doing well financially. Poker fundraisers, during the year, have raised 16,000 even after sharing half of the earnings with the Historical Village of

Corunna. This year's sponsors of the annual fireworks display are the Commission, The Independent, The Argus-Press and Meijer.

Some of the major events this year are a car show with 300 cars, four bands including "Magic," a big headliner right before the fireworks display, a climbing wall, two parades, a Velcro Sticky Wall and new this year, a Coconut Roll on the sledding hill. Another large attraction is the "Lords of the Sky," a Birds of Prey Show. "Airbrush face painting will undoubtedly be a fun new event this year," commented Al.

One big problem the Commission lacks is volunteers. "I wanted to have a 5K race this year," Al commented, "If only a few runners would have helped with the race, we would have been able to do it."

Volunteers are a huge part of what the 4th of July Commission is made up of in Corunna. If you would like to become a part of the Commission, meetings are held the second Tuesday of every month. Some winter meetings are not held. Interested persons may contact Al at beltsanderrace@aol.com.

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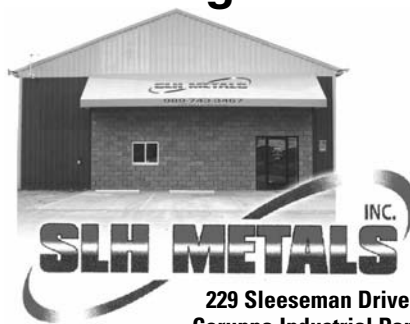


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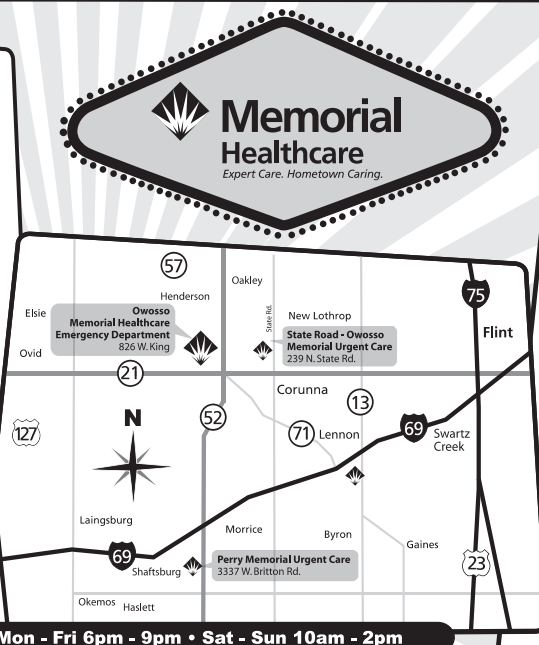
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