



Kalamazoo Public Schools

EXCELSIOR

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Alumni Stories: Inspiring Success

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lead the way
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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Messages Still Uplift Us

A Message from the Superintendent

Dr. Darrin Slade



MY FIRST summer in Kalamazoo, I had the honor of being invited to participate in a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

As we celebrate Black History Month 2025, it is a good time to revisit his speech and the thoughts he shared in a subsequent visit to Kalamazoo later in 1963.

The Civil Rights leader made the famous speech on Aug. 28, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to more than 250,000 people during the March on Washington. His remarks are considered timeless because of the universal themes that he articulated. The speech is often quoted, and rightly so, as it is considered one of the most significant pieces of oratory in American history. Dr. King spoke with passion and fervor rooted in deep historical knowledge and a lifetime

of experiences dedicated to furthering social justice.

Early in the speech he said, "When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men — yes, Black men as well as white men — would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

And, most famously, he spoke of his dreams for us to come together to honor the rights of all. He said, "So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

In August 2023, a group of Kalamazoo leaders and residents, myself included, gathered at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park to recall his speech. Mayor David Anderson shared that King visited

Kalamazoo four months after the March on Washington, revisiting some of the themes of his Washington speech with his Kalamazoo audience.

"Somewhere along the way, we must see that time will never solve the problem alone, but that we must help time," King said. "Somewhere we must see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability."

"It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be coworkers with God. Without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of irrational emotionalism and social stagnation."

"We must always help time and realize that the time is always right to do right."

Today, King's timeless messages about our responsibility to ensure his dream is enacted as a reality remain as potent as ever. In 2023, I encouraged those in attendance to honor the legacy of Dr. King by supporting Kalamazoo Public Schools in its mission to educate our young people and prepare them for success today and

tomorrow — the tomorrow that King envisioned.

Kalamazoo Public Schools relies on courageous leadership in the community and a dedication to making sure students are in school every day, ready to learn, and encouraged to do their best to graduate and take advantage of the opportunities available through The Kalamazoo Promise.

That day in 2023, we gathered around the beautiful statue that is the centerpiece of the King Memorial Park. Around the base of the statue, the sculptor inscribed quotes from Dr. King, including this one: "Every man must decide if he will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. This is the judgment. Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

During Black History Month, we are reminded to live with that message inscribed in our hearts and to consider what we can do for others — for our children — to bring them and our society into the light of Dr. King's dream.

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KALAMAZOO RESA

Career Connect

ARTISTS' CORNER

Winchell Elementary School second graders studied the art of artist Wayne Theibaud, which usually centers around the imagery of desserts.

Students focused on symmetry, blending, and individual design when creating their works. Art

teacher **Mandy Clearwaters** said, "This lesson is always exciting, because I love hearing them discuss the flavors and toppings they are adding. We pretend to 'taste' each other's cakes, which leads to a lot of smiles and giggles."



Emmalen Fuller



Isaac Mansberger



Lila Pelletier



Mari DiTaranto



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Director of School Improvement, Title I and Assessments

Kalamazoo Public Schools

1220 Howard St.

Kalamazoo, MI 49008

(269) 337-0180

All other inquiries should be directed to:

Director of Human Resources

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District Directory at :

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Recipe

from the KPS Food Service, Chartwells



Kirsten Strong,
registered dietitian
nutritionist

Harvest White Chicken Chili

THIS month's recipe was inspired by a few different things including: The Super Bowl, the recent Downtown Kalamazoo Chili Cook-Off, and a new speed-scratch recipe that KPS Food Service has recently added to their school menu. The savory flavor combination of spices and the creamy and melty toppings, like cheese and sour cream, make chili a beloved comfort food that is commonly the subject of food competitions and is often the main dish at football tailgate parties. And for good reason!

Even though there are usually staple spices and ingredients that go into chili, you can also get creative in building your perfect flavor profile. No two chilis are alike. Cinnamon? Chocolate? Masa? Coffee? Molasses? Chili has unlimited flavor versatility.

You can spend a whole day prepping and layering the flavors of your chili, but in the school food service business we often shoot for recipes that can be adapted to limited time and equipment. This recipe is school food service-friendly and can be



made in one pot with minimal prep time, but it has lots of flavor, healthy proteins, a whole serving of veggies, and even some local ingredients. At KPS, it's topped with a little shredded cheddar and served with whole grain tortilla chips for dipping.

INGREDIENTS

*Makes about 9 1-cup
servings*

- 1 15-ounce can pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup onion, diced (fresh or frozen)
- 10 ounces chicken breast, diced
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup bell pepper, diced (fresh or frozen)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup corn (frozen or cut fresh from the cob)

- 1 cup butternut squash, diced (fresh or frozen)
- 8 ounces canned green chilies, not drained
- 2 cups queso cheese sauce (look for one with high protein)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chicken broth
- 4 tablespoons cumin, ground
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional garnishes: Corn chips, cheddar cheese, sour cream, green onion, cotija cheese, avocado, lime, hot sauce

PREPARATION

Because not all of our schools have an oven range, this recipe is prepared in the oven. You can also prepare it in a large saucepan or stock pot on the stovetop.

1. Thaw any frozen vegetables.
2. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
3. Add all ingredients to a Dutch oven or other oven-safe dish. You may want to spray the pan with cooking spray beforehand to help with cleanup. Stir ingredients together until evenly combined.

4. Cover and heat/cook until the chili reaches 165°F, stirring the chili every 20 minutes for about 45 minutes.

Note: If you are cooking on the stovetop, after thawing frozen veggies, sauté them in a little oil. Add all ingredients to the stock pot and heat on medium to medium-high heat stirring every 10-15 minutes. Once chili comes to a simmer, reduce heat to medium-low and cook for 30-40 minutes until veggies are tender. Do not bring to a boil.

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KPS Literacy Nights Prepare the Way for National Reading Month

KALAMAZOO Public Schools elementary and middle school buildings will host their annual Literacy Night celebrations this February.

Elementary schools will hold their events on Wednesday, Feb. 26, while the middle schools will celebrate on Thursday, Feb. 27. Times vary by school. These family-friendly nights include special themes and hands-on activities that promote the importance of reading.

KPS Literacy Nights lead into National Reading Month, which runs through March. The month kicks off on March 1 with the National Education Association's Read Across America Day, which more than 45 million readers are expected to celebrate. The month was originally organized around the birthday of children's book author Dr. Seuss, whose birthday is March 2.

"The most significant factor influencing a child's early education success is an introduction to books and being read to at home prior to beginning school," according to the National Commission on Reading,

Dr. Angela Justice, KPS director of Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development, has several suggestions for parents on how to encourage and support their children in their reading education:

- Be a strong role model. "Let your child see you reading a book or a magazine or notes — not on a screen. Read with your child every day. Listen to your child read every day."
- Make books at home. When the children are retelling their favorite stories, have them write down



Maximus Gainey and Pilot Gainy create an art project at the Arcadia Elementary 2024 Literacy Night.

the beginning, middle and end of the stories and their favorite parts of the story. "This helps them think about events in order, and they hear and record sounds and words."

- Play word games. Ask children to make rhyming words, identify the beginning, middle or end sounds of words. Ask kids about the meaning of words. Kids love to learn new words.
- Monitor screen time.
- Establish a reading routine that works for your family. Reading to a child 20 minutes a day exposes them to 1.8 million words a year. "That is a lot of words at just 20 minutes a day."
- When reading with a younger child, explain the parts of a book — the cover, the back of the book, the way to hold a book, point crisply under the first letter of each word. This will help a child entering kindergarten be prepared to start the ac-

tual work of learning to read.

The Kalamazoo Great Start Collaborative (GSC), a program of Kalamazoo RESA, has been promoting Talking is Teaching, a national campaign to support early learning, literacy skills, and brain development of children from birth through their early elementary school years. Working with community partners, GSC is sharing positive literacy messages with the community and distributing Talking is Teaching materials that encourage parents to talk, read, and sing with their children.

According the Kalamazoo RESA website, a 2019 Kids Count data found almost 55 percent of third graders in Kalamazoo County are not reading at grade level. Children are starting kindergarten unprepared, lagging behind in critical language, math, and social-emotional skills.



For more information about Talking is Teaching, visit www.KalamazooGSC.org

GSC said that research shows that during the first years of life a child's brain forms one million new neural connections every second and absorbs information like a sponge. Simple, everyday interactions with young children — like describing objects seen during a walk, singing songs, or asking questions— can better prepare them for school and lay a strong foundation for their social-emotional development, health, and lifelong learning.

(continued on page 7)



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(continued on page 7)

KPS Literacy Nights *(cont. from pg. 6)*

The NEA offers these tips for ways families can promote essential reading skills in young children, starting in infancy:

- Snuggle with children and their favorite blanket or toys as you read.
- Read with expression using different voices for different characters.
- Emphasize rhythms and rhymes in stories. Give your toddler opportunities to repeat rhyming phrases.
- Use pictures to build vocabulary by varying objects and their colors.
- Use pictures to develop speaking vocabulary by talking about what is shown.
- Encourage children to repeat what you say or comment on it.
- Look for books that are about things that interest your toddler. For example, does your child like cars, insects, or animals?
- Make reading a habit for bedtime, after lunch, or after naptime.
- Give children an opportunity to choose their own books.
- Read stories repeatedly. Children enjoy repetition, which helps them become familiar with how stories are organized.

READING RESOURCES

Community Resources

SLD Read
Dorothy J. McGinnis Reading Clinic at Western
Michigan University Kalamazoo
Kalamazoo Literacy Council
Kalamazoo Public Library – Children’s Services

Books

“Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons” by Siegfried Engelmann, Phyllis Haddox, and Elain Bruner
“Rewards: Multisyllabic Word Reading,” from Stenhouse Publishers

Online Resources

Read Across America Digital Calendar — www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/read-across-america
21 Day Challenge — marylandfamiliesengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/21-day-challenge-calendar.pdf
Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library — imaginationlibrary.com/

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Alumni Days: Central, Norrix Grads Return to Provide Tips for Success

FOR MORE THAN a decade now, Kalamazoo Central and Loy Norrix high school graduates have returned to their alma maters the last Friday before winter break. It's a chance to see old friends and to visit with their favorite teachers.

But the real focus is on helping current students learn about the alumni's experiences post high school. They provide a unique perspective that administrators say can be particularly impactful because of their youth and familiarity with some of the younger students.

Their words of wisdom about studying, tackling college, and choosing careers can sometimes have a bigger impact than the same advice from a school counselor or a parent.

"Students who graduated within five years are invited back to speak to the students about their life experiences since graduating high school," said Judi Mentzer, the dean of students at Kalamazoo Central High School. "We hope that students will see the importance of taking high school seriously, so that they can do great things when they graduate."

The alumni visit classrooms and have informal conversations with the students, who are free to ask questions.

"The teachers do give the students some suggestions of questions that they can ask if they are not sure what to ask the alumni," Mentzer said. "The alumni can discuss the benefits of going to college or the military and things that they wish they had known before going to college."

Loy Norrix High School Principal Chris Aguinaga said, "This is a great opportunity for students to see the journey other

Knights have taken since high school. The goal is to expose as many students as possible to as many different pathways after high school as possible to help inspire plans for the future."

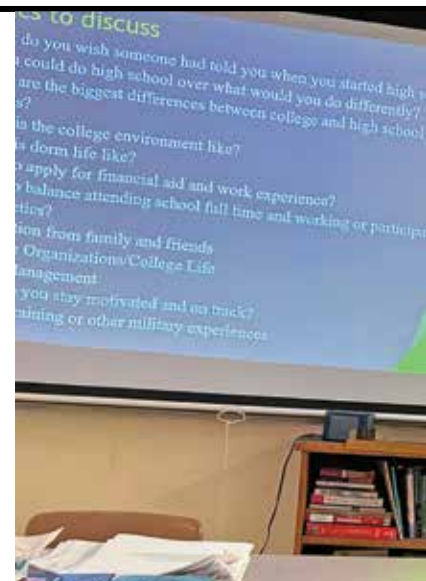
Dozens of alumni participate at each high school, and the gathering includes students who are currently in college, some who are serving in the military, and some grads who have already entered the world of work. The day usually ends with the alumni sharing lunch with their former teachers and friends.

Here are some of the comments offered by three of the alumni who spoke at Kalamazoo Central in December.

JAVON WILSON — MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The transition from high school to college is easy once you move and get settled in, but when it comes to classes, "It's a little different because each professor is a little different, each class is a little different. It's not like high school where you walk around and your teachers instantly care about you for no reason.

"You have to go out of your way to make connections with those professors, you have to go out of your way to make sure your grades are OK. You actually have to be on top of it, because nobody is going to remind you. Not even the campus system that they use. Like, you have to have your own calendar and make sure you keep track of things like



Rahya Kelly said students should develop



Javon Wilson graduated from K Central in 2022. The Michigan State University student says making connections is key in college.



Cameron Moore has used internships to learn about the world of work. He graduated from KC in 2022.



Ethan Semelbauer graduated from Loy Norrix in 2020 and is studying music at Western Michigan University.



good time management skills now. She is a 2020 KC graduate.

your tests, your exams, make sure you're on time."

Sometimes it can get a little overwhelming, he said.

His best advice is to get to know your professors by taking advantage of office hours. "Even if it's just for a few seconds. When you first start a class, go to all of the office hours at least once. Meet the teacher, talk to the professor. Just say, 'Hello.' Sometimes that's all it takes for them to see that you at least care about your grade, that you care about your class."

Networking is important not just with professors, but with other students as well. Be open to meeting new people, Wilson advised.

"If you're a welcoming person, there might be random people who might walk up to you and say 'Hello.' I went to dinner with some friends in the

dining hall and a group of people just connected with us somehow. They asked us a question and we started eating and talking. I still see those people on campus and give them hugs and say, 'Hi.'"

College is about connections, he said. Make sure you join clubs and explore. That's a part of the college experience.

RAHYA KELLY — THE UNIVERSITY OF OLIVET

Olivet is a small liberal arts school between Kalamazoo and Lansing, and Kelly said it's been a perfect fit for her. "I wouldn't change a thing. I know it's not meant for everyone. Some of the people I go to school with come from big cities like Detroit. They might complain about being bored and that there's nothing to do.

"I like how small it is. It's a community. My school is small enough that there's no person you shouldn't know. You can find connections anywhere on campus."

She encouraged the students that she spoke with to start building a strong foundation during high school. Make connections now. That's the same advice she'd give anyone starting college.

"I wish I would have taken high school more seriously," she said.

The senior business major said Olivet does a good job of exposing students to careers through various job fairs, which are a good resource for seeking internships and for hunting. "Your professors play a big part in that too, especially if they have great relationships with you," she said.

One of the challenges with going to college in a small town is finding a way to address the hair care needs of multicultural students. Kelly responded to the problem by working with her aunt to launch a hair care vending machine.

"My school is in the middle of nowhere. For multicultural students, you can't go to your nearest Walmart or something and always get your hair care product from there, because they don't always cater to our needs," she said. "My aunt is CEO of the company and I just run it. I am the manager of it."

The vending machine offers shampoos, conditioners, bonnets, picks, combs and more in a store on wheels.

ON THE COVER:

Kalamazoo Central graduates gather for lunch in the KC auditorium lobby on Alumni Day.

Her final word of advice for students: Don't be like her.

"I'm the biggest procrastinator there is," she said. "I still procrastinate to this day. Honestly, if I'm not hosting study tables and working on my homework, it won't get done until the last minute. Please don't do that. It's really not worth it. I say it all the time, but I wish I got this out of the way. I don't know what it is."

CAMERON MOORE — AQUINAS COLLEGE

The business administration and sports management major has been taking advantage of every opportunity to launch his career while still a student at Aquinas College. He has had internships at Gryphon Place and Stryker Corp., and next semester he'll intern at MSA Fieldhouse in Grand Rapids.

He said that work experience is expected at Aquinas, which requires students to complete two internships before graduation.

"I'm excited for the MSA Fieldhouse internship," he said. "I got it because it was one of the places we toured during my facilities and event management classes. They have volleyball, basketball and soccer facilities. The Rise, the Grand Rapids professional volleyball team that plays at Van Andel, practices there."

He said it didn't take long to acclimate to college because he did a good job of preparing himself for college life while he was still in high school. He took a class-load heavy in Advanced Placement classes and he learned time management from his busy extracurricular activity schedule playing travel basketball and soccer and volunteering with Jeter's Leaders.

"My best advice for high school students is to take those hard classes," he said. "They prepare you for college and for learning by yourself. The hardest thing to adjust to in college is that everything is on you. You have to hold yourself accountable for everything."

"There's no one breathing down your back, saying you have to go to class, that you have to do your work. If you don't do those things, you'll end up losing The Promise and things like that."

Tinashe Chaponda Makes Forbes 30 Under 30 List

TINASHE CHAPONDA celebrated turning 30 in style by making the Forbes 30 Under 30 list in marketing and advertising.

Chaponda learned he'd earned the honor 30 days before his 30th birthday on Jan. 4.

Chaponda, who is a native of Zimbabwe and a 2013 Loy Norrix graduate, is the founder of Sosani Studios, a marketing firm that connects high-profile clients such as Sony, Lexus, and Ulta with social media influencers. According to Forbes, Sosani has booked nearly \$3 million in campaigns and consulted on another \$2 million of creator deals.

While the firm started by managing social media talent, it has since broadened to become a full-service marketing agency that helps with brand strategy and developing influence campaigns. His company has worked with talent such as Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and TikTok influencer Khaby Lame.

Chaponda refers to himself as the "Mayor of Influencer Marketing" for his work helping brands connect with Gen Z and Gen Alpha constituents.

Chaponda moved to the United States as a youth, following his parents who first immigrated to Southwestern Michigan for economic and educational opportunities for their family. Chaponda started attending Kalamazoo Public Schools as an eighth grader — shortly after his mother passed away.

He attended Milwood Magnet School: A Center for Math, Science and Technology, where he worked with teachers such as Don Taylor, Julie Jenkins, Beth Washington, and Rana Findling.

"It was a lot different than" the charter school he attended previously, Chaponda said. "It really gave me a place where I could truly be myself.

"I didn't fit the urban Black stereotype as an immigrant. I didn't fit the picture of what TV said an urban Black student was. I wanted to express myself in different ways. I didn't realize how impactful my time in KPS was until I was in college."

After Milwood, Chaponda moved to Loy Norrix High School where he was a soccer player and participated in Jeter's Leaders, the leadership organization started by Baseball Hall of Famer Derek Jeter, who is a Kalamazoo Central alum.

Soccer was one of his defining activities. Coach Matt McCullough "expected more from us than just on the field. He expected us to do our best in our grades



Tinashe Chaponda was named a Forbes 30 Under 30 entrepreneur for his Sosani Studios success.

and how we represented ourselves. You could see that influence on the team and how we operated."

Key teachers in high school included Shay Wintz and Tisha Pan-kop. Both teachers truly connected with their students.

"Wintz specifically expected a lot from us. She really worked to relate to kids on their level. She kept them writing at a very high standard and created this environment where you wanted to participate in class," he said. "She related to you but she also held you accountable.

"There are certain teachers who are really good at motivating you — just because you don't want to disappoint them."

At Loy Norrix, Chaponda said he came in contact with a diverse student community and he developed a broad network of friends.

"The diversity of people was really important to me. As an immigrant I never felt at home anywhere," he said. "I developed a skill set of being curious of other people's community because I didn't have my own community. What I loved about Norrix is that I was friends with the white kids, I was friends with the Black kids. I was friends with the sports kids and

the poor kids. I was friends with everybody.

"So even today, if you go to a Tinashe party, you're going to see everyone even with today's political climate. You're going to see every color because I was so interested in people, even people who don't think like me."

After graduating from Loy Norrix, Chaponda enrolled in Western Michigan University. He eventually graduated in 2018 with a degree in general studies after spending several years in various business majors.

The key to college, he said, is to make it work for you. He was not earning one degree, — he was using college to attain the education he needed and wanted. Students need to be more flexible in their thinking and view college as a tool that they can use to plan their future and to pursue the skills they want to hone, he says.

"I was reframing what education means. I was very intentional in thinking about what do I want to get out of it and thinking about how am I going to make the university work for me," he said. "A lot

of students don't realize college is a time for exploration. You don't want to be definite about what you're going to do when you graduate; you just want to be able to leverage it to experience as many things as you want."

While at Western he started a nonprofit called Focus Kalamazoo, started a K-pop reaction channel on YouTube, and held several internships with businesses such as Stryker and Goldman Sachs.

After graduating, he moved to Atlanta to pursue work as an influencer before returning to Kalamazoo to work with a local video production company. After several years working with the firm, he left

to launch his own company.

He launched Sosani in 2020, first as a talent management firm before switching over to advertising that helps brands connect with Gen Z and influencers. They went from helping talent find brands to represent — to helping brands find the talent to

Students need to be more flexible in their thinking and view college as a tool that they can use to plan their future and to pursue the skills they want to hone.

(continued on page 11)

Tinashe Chaponda (continued from page 10)

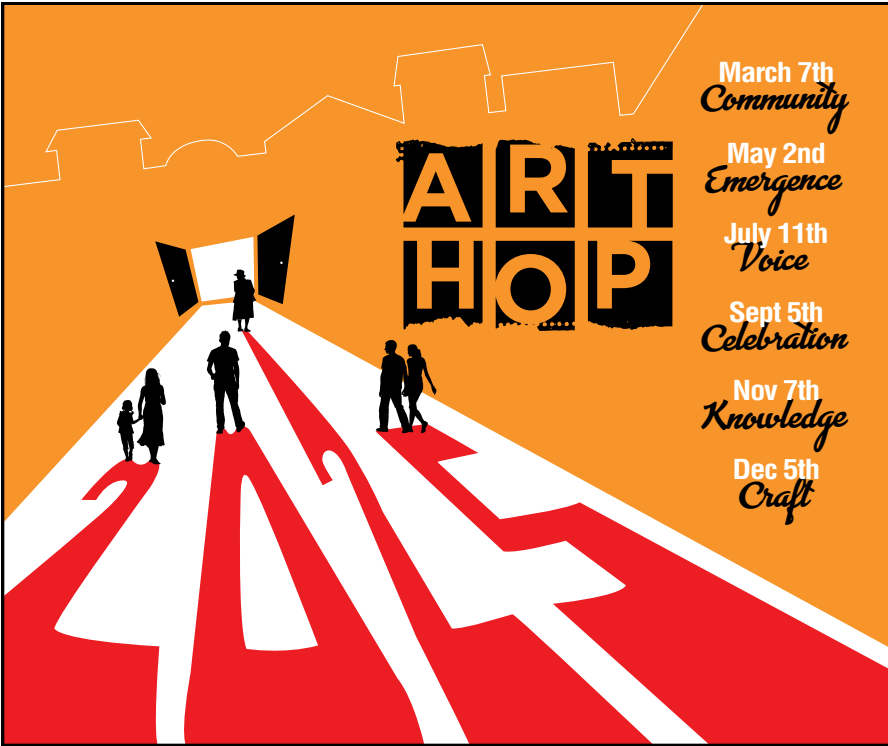
tell their stories,” he said.

“Back in the day when you wanted to be known, you had to go to the movie studios, the labels, radio and magazines,” Chaponda said. “Nowadays, your grandmother or someone from Oklahoma can post a video and within 24 hours can have millions of viewers. We are in a gatekeeper-less society. Now the individual dictates where the attention is going, where the community goes.”

“We’re an advertising firm that really understands people that can really help brands connect with Gen Z and connect with influencers.”

The company turns 5 this year and has plans to establish a brick and mortar presence in Los Angeles, which will put his team of about 12 in closer proximity to the talent and the clients he is trying to reach. The company will also be focusing on celebrating the company’s soft skills.

“This is the space we live in every day,” he said. “A lot of what were doing for brands is providing an education on how to take a traditional advertising model and improve it for a digital space.”



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Get ready to immerse yourself in a world of creativity and connect with local artists! Art Hop 2025 is going to be more exciting than ever! Save these dates and stay tuned for the exciting details to emerge. To learn of the latest Art happenings, sign up for our weekly eNews mailing list at KalamazooArts.org





If you need help paying your water bill, help is available.

Si necesita ayuda para pagar su factura de agua o alcantarillado, hay ayuda disponible. Para obtener información en español, el llame al 311 o al (269) 337-8000.

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The City of Kalamazoo is making critical investments in our water and wastewater systems. These investments are funded by all of us through the rates that we pay. Rates in Kalamazoo are still low relative to other communities, but we understand rising costs may create a hardship for some households. Financial and other help options are listed below.

Payment Plans & Due Date Extensions are available. Call 311 or (269) 337-8000 for help.

The Community Action Agency of SW Michigan can help low-income households pay overdue bills. Call 211 or 1-877-422-2726 for more information.

Consumers Energy offers a free home analysis that can help customers save money by reducing energy and water usage. Call 1-888-316-8014 for more information.

www.kalamazoocity.org/Residents/Water-Sewer-Service/Help-with-Utility-Bills

Yazmine Vargas Root Is Kalamazoo's Matchacita

ALOY NORRIX High School graduate is helping introduce Kalamazoo to a centuries-old treat that is full of health benefits.

Yazmine Vargas Root is co-owner, with her husband Tyler Root, of Matchacita, a cafe specializing in serving matcha — the frothy green drink that has been a staple of ancient Japanese tea ceremonies. She graduated from Loy Norrix in 2015.

Matchacita opened in downtown Kalamazoo, 120 W. South St., across from the Kalamazoo Public Library, on Dec. 13. The brick and mortar location is an extension of the latest iteration of the business that began in 2023 with a stand at the Kalamazoo Farmers Market.

"I've always wanted to run a brick-and-mortar business since I was fairly young. My parents, and just my family in general, have always been business owners. It's always been something that felt like a retirement thing honestly," she said with a laugh. "I figured I'd go through the whole career thing — then do the business."

Matcha is a Japanese green tea powder made from finely powdered, dried tea leaves that have a slightly bitter taste and a bright green color that results from the high chlorophyll levels that develop because the tea is grown largely in the shade.

According to WebMD, because matcha is made using the entire tea leaf (rather than the leaves just being steeped in water), the tea has higher levels of nutrients, vitamins and fiber. It is high in antioxidants which have been associated with cellular repair and improved brain function.

Matchacita serves only ceremonial grade matcha, which is the highest grade of tea. The store is also a dairy-free and gluten-free business. Many of its offerings are vegan as well. In addition to matcha, the cafe offers coffee and homemade baked goods.

The business was inspired by a matcha shop that Vargas Root's sister opened in Arizona. Vargas Root has more than a decade of food service experience, working as a server everywhere from Big Apple Bakery to Roca, so when her sister launched her business, Vargas Root went to help set up operations and organize the back of house with her husband. They came back to Kalamazoo excited about the possibility of replicating the cafe.

They started by testing the concept with a stall at the Farmers Market. There was a bit of a learning curve as they introduced the drink to Kalamazoo residents. But she said her husband was always quick to say, "Just try it. If you don't like it, we'll give you a refund. This is a safe place. You don't want to feel like you've wasted your money. Try it and get out of your comfort zone a bit."

Those Farmers Market customers now form the customer base for Matchacita.

"Our current regulars from the Farmers Market are amazing and so supportive," she said. "They love chatting about us, and I know a lot of them have done word-of-mouth marketing for us. We appreciate their love and support. Without them, there's no way Tyler and I would have felt confident about a brick-and-mortar store."

But those who knew Vargas Root when she was

growing up may be surprised by this new business enterprise. As a middle school and high school student, she was best known for her artistic talents. She took AP art classes, enrolled in Education for the Arts, and was a frequent participant in district art shows.

After she graduated from high school, she attended Calvin University, which was not a good fit for her. A few years later, she re-enrolled in school — this time at Western Michigan University in biology. But the pull of the arts was too strong. She switched majors back to art, eventually graduating with a degree in graphic design.

Now, she's doing both things simultaneously. Vargas Root is also a graphic designer for Landscape Forms.

"I love graphic design. I love art," she said. "But, there's such a different feeling from being in an office and essentially working with your hands in the cafe, moving around and going from order to order. I missed it. I missed it a lot actually."

So Matchacita satisfies that itch to serve people and nurture them through food and drink. It will be a long while before she and her husband can devote themselves full time to the cafe, without any other responsibilities, but Vargas Root says the hard work is worth it.

"There have been a lot of long nights so far, but I knew going in that it would be long and hard," Vargas Root said. "But, I'm excited to be a part of the community in Kalamazoo. I'm glad that I'm able to find a little market here and that there's another Vargas business here in the Kalamazoo area."



Yazmine Vargas Root is co-owner of Matchacita, which is located at 120 W. South St.



Vargas Root whisks a serving of matcha.



Vargas Root prepares a strawberry matcha, which is dairy-free.

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KRESA PAC Seeks Excellence in Special Education Nominations

THE Excellence in Special Education Award is sponsored by the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) of Kalamazoo County to honor those persons who have gone above and beyond their role in educating and supporting students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Nominations can be completed online at www.kresa.org/PACNomination and will be automatically sent to the KRESA Special Education office. Paper nomination forms can be turned in to the local district office.

All nominations must be received by the KRESA Special Ed office by Friday, March 7, 2025, to be considered for the current school year.



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SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC) EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AWARDS NOMINATION FORM

The Excellence in Special Education Award is sponsored by the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) of Kalamazoo County to honor those persons who have gone above and beyond their role in educating and supporting students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). If you are a Parent, Guardian, Family Member or Student, please complete the following nomination information or submit online at: www.kresa.org/PACNomination

Nominations MUST be received by Friday, March 7, 2025, to be considered.

The PAC will select the winners who will be recognized at their local school Board meeting.
Please **PRINT** the person's **FULL NAME** in the space provided below.

PERSON NOMINATED: _____
POSITION: _____
SCHOOL DISTRICT: _____ BUILDING: _____

- ☐ Volunteer (Parent, Grandparent, Community Member)
- ☐ Teacher (General or Special Education)
- ☐ Support Staff (Social Worker, Psychologist, Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Behavioral Specialist, Speech & Language Therapist, Teacher Consultant, Paraprofessional, Aide, Nurse, Bus Driver, Coach, Administrative Assistant, Secretary)
- ☐ Administrator (General or Special Education)

Give a detailed example of how this person has gone above and beyond and is deserving of this award.

(CONTINUE ON A SEPARATE PAGE IF NECESSARY)

Your Name: _____ Phone: _____

Role: ☐ Parent ☐ Guardian ☐ Family Member ☐ Student

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____

Information can be shared with the nominee. ____ YES ____ NO

Email to kelly_noteboom@kresa.org • Mail to KRESA, 1819 E. Milham Ave., Portage 49002 • FAX to 269-250-9322

**COMITE ASESOR DE PADRES DE EDUCACION ESPECIAL (PAC)
LOS PREMIOS A LA EXCELENCIA EN EDUCACIÓN ESPECIAL
FORMA DE NOMINACIÓN**

El **Premio a la Excelencia en Educación Especial** es patrocinado por el Comité Asesor de Padres (PAC) del Condado de Kalamazoo para honrar a personas que han ido más allá de su función de educar y apoyar a los estudiantes que tienen un Programa de Educación Individualizada (IEP). Si usted es un padre, un tutor, un miembro de la familia o un estudiante, por favor complete la siguiente información de nominación o envíela en línea a: www.kresa.org/PACNomination.

Las nominaciones **DEBEN** recibirse antes del **7 de marzo de 2025** para ser consideradas. El PAC seleccionará a los ganadores que serán reconocidos en la reunión de la junta escolar local. Por favor **IMPRIMA** el **NOMBRE COMPLETO** de la persona en el espacio provisto debajo:

PERSONA NOMINADA: _____

POSICIÓN: _____

DISTRITO ESCOLAR: _____ **EDIFICIO:** _____

- ☐ Voluntario (padre, abuelo, miembro de la comunidad)
- ☐ Maestro (Educación General o Especial)
- ☐ Personal de apoyo (trabajador social, psicólogo, fisioterapeuta, terapeuta ocupacional, especialista en comportamiento, terapeuta del habla y lenguaje, consultor de maestros, paraprofessional, asistente, enfermera, conductor de autobús, entrenador, asistente administrativo, secretaria)
- ☐ Administrador (Educación General o Especial)

Dar un ejemplo detallado de cómo esta persona ha ido más allá y se merece de este premio.

(CONTINÚE EN UNA PÁGINA SEPARADA SI ES NECESARIO)

Su nombre: _____ **Teléfono:** _____

Rol: ☐ Padre ☐ Tutor ☐ Miembro de la familia ☐ Estudiante

Nombre del estudiante: _____ **Grado:** _____

¿La información puede ser compartida con el candidato? ____ **SÍ** ____ **NÓ**

Email para kelly.noteboom@kresa.org • Correo a KRESA, 1819 E. Milham Ave., Portage 49002 • FAX al 269-250-9322



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WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE



NEW EXHIBIT FEB. 8 - AUG. 31 | FREE

THE ART OF ADVERTISING



Highlighting nostalgic signs and advertisements from local businesses from the permanent collection of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, "The Art of Advertising" offers up an eclectic mix of advertising paraphernalia from bygone eras.

NEW EXHIBIT FEB. 1 - AUG. 31 | FREE

COLORFUL COLLECTIONS

This new exhibit features items from the permanent collection of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum displayed in a rainbow of hues. Delve into the color spectrum like never before as you enjoy some of the brightest and boldest examples from the KVM's collection.



EXHIBIT NOW - MARCH 2 | FREE

COLLECTING BLACK HISTORY: MURPHY DARDEN'S LEGACY



This mini-exhibit features items collected by late Kalamazoo historian Murphy Darden, including artifacts, images and historic documents chronicling the achievements of African Americans.

EXHIBIT JAN. 25 - April 27 | FREE

RAY HARRYHAUSEN: MINIATURE MODELS OF THE SILVER SCREEN

Over 100 magical artifacts from the unique collection of animation filmmaker Ray Harryhausen are on display, showcasing his extensive career and the importance of his contribution to the art of stop-motion animation. Special speaker in January to be announced! Visit kalamazoomuseum.org for the latest.

The Ray & Diana Harryhausen Foundation (Charity No SC001419)



FREE EVENT MARCH 2 | TIME TBD

20 YEARS OF THE FRETBOARD FESTIVAL: THE VIDEO STORY

Learn the 20-year story of Kalamazoo's Fretboard Festival and celebrate the history, heritage and music of fretted instruments, along with the people who make and play them.

FREE EVENT WATCH FOR DATE & TIME!

ONE FAMILY'S LEGACY: THE WILLIAMS-JOHNSON FAMILY MINI-EXHIBIT TALK

Hear from Jacob Mabry Pinney-Johnson, a fourth-generation Kalamazoo resident whose family members were important to the history of Southwest Michigan. Also, check out the associated mini-exhibit featuring photos and mementos representing over 100 years of Black history in Kalamazoo. Exhibit ends March 2.

PLANETARIUM EXPERIENCE | FEB. SHOWS | \$3 PER PERSON

Visit kalamazoomuseum.org for details.

One World, One Sky: Big Bird's Adventure | 11 a.m. Sat. & 1 p.m. Sun.

30 min. | Pre-K - Grade 1

Join Big Bird, Elmo and their Chinese friend, Hu Hu Zhu, exploring the sky they share. Discover the Big Dipper and North Star, and take an imaginary trip to the moon.



The Sky Above Us | 2 p.m. Sat. & Sun. | 35 min. | Grades 4 & up

Learn about some of the "celestial wonders" that can be seen overhead in Michigan in this live, season-focused program.



HOURS: Tuesday - Saturday | 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Sunday | Noon - 4 p.m.

FREE GENERAL ADMISSION

Note: Some areas of the museum may be closed due to exhibit changes, staffing needs, special programs or collections care. We thank you for your patience.

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum is operated by Kalamazoo Valley Community College and is governed by its Board of Trustees.



230 N. Rose St., Kalamazoo
kalamazoomuseum.org | 269.373.7990