



2023-24

# Chardon

magazine

Presented by the Chardon Chamber of Commerce, The Good News and The Geauga Times Courier





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# 2023 CALENDAR of EVENTS



## April

### April 8th

Breakfast with the Easter Bunny  
& Easter Egg Hunt on the Square

### April 16th – 22nd

Chardon Restaurant Week

### April 27th – 30th

Geauga Maple Festival (Square)

## May

### May 20th

Geauga Park District:  
Touch a Truck @ The West Woods

### May 27th

Opening Day Chardon Municipal Pool

## June

**June 2nd – August 11th** (Fridays)  
Concerts in the Park (Square)

### June 3rd

Chardon Square Assoc.  
Flea Market (Square)

**June 3rd – August 26th** (Saturdays) –  
Chardon Square Assoc. Farmer's Market  
(Square), (Saturdays)  
– Community Yoga on the Square

### June 4th

Chardon Tomorrow's Bikes & Hikes

### June 10th

Movies on the Square: Hotel  
Transylvania 4

### June 11th

Caveman Crawl 5K Run  
(The West Woods)

### June 17th

Amphitheater Concert – The Swamp  
Rattlers (Big Creek Park,  
Geauga Pride Event)

### June 24th

Movie Night at Observatory Park  
– Star Wars: The Force Awakens

## July

**July 2nd** (rain date July 3rd)  
Chardon – Area Fireworks

### July 4th

Old Glory Day (Square)

### July 15th

Dog Day of Summer (Square)

### July 16th

Amphitheater Concert – Foster Brown  
(Veterans Legacy Woods)

### July 16th

(Rain date July 23rd)  
Chardon Chamber Classic Car & Bike  
Show (Square)

### July 22nd

Movie Night at Observatory Park –  
Disney's ENCANTO

### July 29th

Chardon Recreation Back to School  
Event, Love Fest (Square)



## August

### August 1st

National Night Out (Square)

### August 3rd

Chardon Square Assoc. Kids Fest & Kid's  
Flea Market (Square)

### August 6th

Chardon Square Assoc. Arts Festival  
(Square)

### August 8th

Geauga County Sheriff's Dept.  
Remembrance Event (Square)

### August 11th

Chardon Chamber Golf Outing  
(Chardon Lakes Golf Course)

### August 12th

Chardon BrewFest (Square) – 10th  
Annual Movie Night at Observatory Park  
– Singin in the Rain

### August 19th

Amphitheater Concert – Jim & Beth,  
Acoustic (Big Creek Park)

## September

### All month

Sweets September – Extension  
of Restaurant Week

### September 9th

Geauga Fun in the Park Day (Claridon  
Woodlands)

### September 17th

Chardon Square Assoc. Harvest  
Handmade Market (Square),  
Kiwanis Corn Roast (Square)



## October

### October 6th

Chardon Tomorrow's Hungry for History

**October 7th** (Rain Date Oct 8th)  
Fall Fest (Square)

### October 31st

Halloween on the Square

## November

### November 3rd – 4th

Holly Days Artisan Boutique  
(The West Woods)

### November 23rd

5K Turkey Trot/Walk  
to Stop Trafficking (Square)

### November 25th

Small Business Saturday

### November 30th

Chardon Square Christmas Lighting

## December

### December 9th

Chardon Square Home for the Holidays

### December 21st

Winter Solstice Celebration  
(The West Woods)

### January 14th – 20th 2024

Pizza Week (Extension  
of Restaurant Week)

*For complete listings go to [www.chardonchamber.com](http://www.chardonchamber.com)*



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# Dear Readers,

**W**e are excited to welcome you to the eighth edition of our annual Chardon Magazine. For several years now, we have partnered with our friends at the Geauga Times Courier and The Good News to present this valuable tool to assist us in achieving the Chardon Area Chamber of Commerce's mission to promote, protect and serve the general business interests of the City of Chardon and the surrounding Geauga county area. We hope to help create a unified public spirit within our community and to that end, offer you this resource that promotes the many organizations, businesses, educational institutions and of course, the wonderful events throughout the year that call this area home!

Whether you are a lifelong resident, an adopted hometown transplant, one of the thousands of employees that work for a Chardon area based company or just happened to stumble upon one of our fine shops, eating establishments, or events held on the historic Chardon Square, we are glad you have become part of our community in some way. Chardon is a wonderful place to live, work and visit – and we hope you enjoy the time you spend here!

For more information on upcoming events, please visit [chardonchamber.com](http://chardonchamber.com) or [chardon.cc](http://chardon.cc), and find us on social media too. We appreciate your continued support.



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The Chardon Polka Band, the city's hometown heroes of polka, includes from left Mitch Lawrence on sax, Jake Kouwe on accordion, Bob Young on drums, Brian Brazier on tuba and Mike Franklin on the banjo.

# Crazy for Polka

Chardon Polka Band  
has been rolling out  
the barrels for 20 years

By MICHELE COLLINS

**T**he Chardon Polka Band has been bringing the polka love to its native Ohio community for twenty years now.

Even band founder and accordion player Jake Kouwe can't believe it's been two decades since he got his first accordion at the tender age of 14 and began to play. When Chardon High School wouldn't allow an accordion in the marching band, Mr. Kouwe



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formed his own band, a polka band of all things, and it has been entertaining audiences in Chardon and throughout the world with an energetic, sometimes zany, form of polka.

On a recent Wednesday evening, Chardon Polka Band was playing at the Mayfield Village Reserve Hall – a weeknight concert in front of a full house and hundreds of polka band fans both young and old.

**“One of the ways we have stayed in the business is by our versatility,” said Mr. Kouwe. “We play at nursing homes, we play at elementary schools, we play on a Wednesday night in February. We just play wherever we can.”**

The band is even part of a PBS documentary, a “gig” Mr. Kouwe hopes will lead to even more performances.

The Chardon Polka Band has become a tradition at many area events. Chardon Polka Band has played the Geauga County Fair for almost 20 years now.

“I know I am going to get the call from the Geauga County Fair asking us to schedule with them,” said Mr. Kouwe. “But the truth is,

whether they call or not, I’m going to be playing at the fair on Friday night, because I have been doing that forever.”

When Mr. Kouwe first started the band, he was in high school, along with his fellow Chardon musician bandmates.

“We used to use the instruments we had from band, the school’s instruments,” said Mr. Kouwe. “A lot of people know the story of how two of our band members were trying to get their instruments from the band room on a Friday night, when they found out the school was locked. They tried to break in the band room window, and they got caught.”

Did the band make it to its Friday night gig?

“Well, some of us did,” said Mr. Kouwe with a laugh. He added that his high school band director Melissa Lichtler deserves some thanks for her patience with him and his fellow musicians during their early years.

He credits his family, however, with getting him involved with polka and with the idea of performing as a career.

“My dad used to help us out. He would drive us, and he would play whatever instrument we needed him to play if a band member couldn’t make it. He can play anything,” he said.

Phil Kouwe, Jake’s dad, was at the recent Wednesday night show.

“Will my dad come on stage? Of course he will,” laughed the younger Mr. Kouwe. “He always joins in.”

Now, Mr. Kouwe has two three-year-olds who come to the show.

“My three-year-olds? They just love the band,” he shared. “Every morning when they wake up, they ask me about the band. They know all the members’ names and they ask, ‘Is Mitchell going to be there? Is Bob going to be there?’ They also love the alt horn.”

The alt horn is a four-foot-long horn that comes up in a scoop, like the one on the Ricola throat lozenge commercials. Its loud, low horn sound is unmistakably the Chardon Polka Band.

Band member Mike Franklin plays the banjo, Bob Young plays the drums, Mitchell Lawrence plays sax and clarinet and Brian Brazier plays the tuba. Mr. Brazier also sports a mustache that has a fan following all its own.

The band members said they love performing with the Chardon Polka Band locally, but also like the times the band travels, such as driving for three days to a performance in Oregon or Utah.

“We go to this awesome Oktoberfest in Mount Angel, Oregon, and we drive out there. It’s, like, six days in the car. But it is so much fun, and it is so beautiful out there. One of my favorite memories is when we hiked right to the Pacific Ocean in Oregon,” said Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Young, who is from his “own town in

**Continued on page 10**

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## Continued from page 9

Ohio,” Youngstown, said he also enjoys life on the road.

“I am an avid hiker, and we always try to fit in some hiking when we travel. I am happy to go wherever the band takes me. Happy to have a job in music that is a full-time job,” he said.

The energy the band brings to its shows is probably what initially makes people become fans. But the camaraderie of the band, the feeling of being with one’s family and friends, is what has made fans of their children.

“We have a lot of young fans. Kids that don’t even really know it’s polka music. They have heard us play when they are with their parents, and the music has just become part of their lives,” said Mr. Kouwe.

The band plays year-round, but fall is its busiest time, when Oktoberfests come calling to take Chardon’s polka band everywhere from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, down to Plano, Texas.

Dressed sometimes in traditional German lederhosen, the band plays a wide selection of polkas, yodeling songs, sing-alongs, and party time favorites. Known for “mixing it up,” the band is as much at home playing a traditional German favorite, such as the Liechtensteiner Polka, as leading the audience in a polka-fied rendition of Garth Brooks’ “Friends In Low



**The Chardon Polka Band played a weeknight concert in Mayfield Village recently, one of the many ways they continue to expand their audience in the area.**

Places,” according to Mr. Kouwe.

That’s the beauty of the twenty years of the Chardon Polka Band, say its fans. One really doesn’t know what they will do next.

But they do know they will be back on stage year after year with some serious oompah, some zany antics, and those fun, familiar, family-friendly polka songs. ■

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# Chardon High School earns “title town” reputation

By ANASTASIA NICHOLAS

**T**hanks to Chardon High School’s athletic successes, Chardon has earned the nickname of “title town.”

The 2021 Chardon Hilltoppers’ football team cemented their legacy with their second-consecutive Division III state championship. With that, they own a school record of 28 straight victories and became the first team in the history of the Ohio High School Athletic Association to go 16-0.

In June 2022, the Chardon Hilltoppers won the state baseball title for the first time in school history.

It was also the first time since the 2018 that Chardon recorded 20 victories in a single season.

That state baseball title came just months after the Hilltoppers won the 2021 state football championship.

That championship earned Chardon the distinction of being only the second public school to win two state championships in the same school year.

“Our kids work very hard,” 10-year coach Brian Long said. “They play summer baseball, they play fall baseball, they hit all winter and train all winter. Baseball is a sport where you have to play year-round and work at your game all year round. Our kids put a lot of time into it, and we’re reaping the benefits from all of the hard work that the kids are putting into it, and also our parents are very committed to their sons’ baseball careers.”

In July 2022, Chardon City Council approved a resolution expressing appreciation to the team on behalf of the city government and residents, congratulating the Hilltoppers for the recognition they brought to the community and school district. ■

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**Geauga County Sheriff Scott Hildenbrand, first elected in 2017, leads the largest law enforcement agency in the county. He said that he and his staff enjoy working with and helping the public.**



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**“This is probably the best county in Ohio to live in. Our people enjoy working here and helping people. We don’t have a lot of violent crimes. For the most part, it’s a pretty quiet county and it’s a good place to work.”** — Geauga County Sheriff Scott Hildenbrand

# Gauga champion

Sheriff Scott Hildenbrand is Gauga’s biggest fan

By ANASTASIA NICHOLAS

**F**irst elected in 2017, Scott Hildenbrand is in his second term as Gauga County Sheriff.

He leads about 160 employees who work together to keep the county safe.

Upon his graduation from Chardon High School, Mr. Hildenbrand joined Hambden Fire Department, commencing his career in emergency services. He originally came out of Auburn Career Center as a machinist.

“That was in the early 80s,” when it was difficult to work as a machinist because of the poor economy, he said. “I was still on the fire

department when there was an opening in dispatch in Chardon.”

He joined Chardon Police Department as a part-time dispatcher, and soon became a full-time dispatcher. While he worked midnights, he went to police school.

Mr. Hildenbrand rose through the ranks. After becoming a full-time patrolman, he was promoted to sergeant. After 19 years with Chardon Police Department, the late Sheriff Dan McClelland asked Mr. Hildenbrand to come to the Gauga County Sheriff’s Office as a chief deputy.

“I spent 13 years as chief deputy, and then Sheriff McClelland decided he was going to retire, so I ran for sheriff in 2016 and became sheriff in 2017,” Mr. Hildenbrand said.

State law tasks sheriffs’ offices with many responsibilities, including running the county jail. That includes security, housing and care for inmates awaiting trial or serving a jail sentence.

These responsibilities also include running the county dispatch system. The Gauga County Sheriff’s Office dispatches or handles radio and telephone duties for nine law enforcement agencies and 14 fire departments, Mr. Hildenbrand said. In 2022, it received 71,279 phone calls, and 21,692 of those were 911 calls.

The sheriff’s office is also tasked with serving and assisting the courts; generating, maintaining, filing and retrieving records; and providing law enforcement in the county. In emergencies, deputies may also be called on to assist sheriffs in other counties.

The sheriff’s office is the largest law enforcement agency in Gauga County. As county sheriff, Mr. Hildenbrand is also responsible for preserving the peace.

“Everybody thinks you’re responding to calls

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**Continued from page 13**

and traffic accidents, but we also have the responsibility of the courts for security,” he added.

In addition to state law requirements, the Geauga County Sheriff’s Office performs a variety of tasks that other law enforcement agencies do not.

In Geauga County, the sheriff’s office is also responsible for a full-time, 182-bed jail, the Geauga County Safety Center, as well as the 800 MHz radio system, used by all police and fire to

communicate. When requested, the sheriff’s office also provides security for polling places.

The sheriff’s office also registers certain types of offenders, issues concealed carry weapon permits, serves civil papers, transports inmates, conducts sheriff’s sales and appraises those – “just to name a few,” Mr. Hildenbrand said.

Mr. Hildenbrand said his employees are a hard-working, close, effective group. He said he is “not a micromanager,” but hires the right people and lets them do their jobs.

He does the same at the Hambden Fire De-

partment, where he has been chief since 1995.

“People ask me how I can be the fire chief and the sheriff,” he said. “My standard response always is, ‘I have good people underneath me that do a good job, and I let them do it.’”

As Geauga County grows, so has Hambden Fire Department, from a strictly-volunteer fire department to one fully staffed 24/7.

“When I joined in 1981, we ran only 24 calls that year,” he said. “That’s two calls a month. In 2022, we ran almost 1,000 calls. It’s a constant growth, and it’s growing to meet the needs of the township.”

Mr. Hildenbrand has seen policing evolve during his career as well.

“When I first started in law enforcement – even the cars have changed,” he said. “I still remember when we got the first police car that had electric windows.”

The Geauga County Sheriff’s Office was founded in 1806. It is headquartered in Chardon on Merritt Road, the site of the jail.

“This is probably the best county in Ohio to live in,” Mr. Hildenbrand said. “Our people enjoy working here, helping people. We don’t have a lot of violent crimes. For the most part, it’s a pretty quiet county and it’s a good place to work.”

Mr. Hildenbrand said community policing – which includes community involvement, working with the public and friendly interactions – continues to be important in the county.

“It’s nothing new for us,” he said. “You wave to people when they’re out on their lawns as you drive by.”

In turn, the community is supportive of local law enforcement.

“They always have been,” Mr. Hildenbrand said.

Residents say “thank you” often and take part in civic events, including veterans’ food drives and the annual Geauga Jeep Invasion.

“It’s amazing the community support that comes out,” Mr. Hildenbrand said, “as well as the support for our K-9 units and the DARE program.”

The job brings opportunities to talk to and see others in the community, including when he attends or walks in the Geauga County Maple Festival or the Chesterland Independence Day parades.

The Great Geauga County Fair is another aspect of the job that Mr. Hildenbrand enjoys.

“I’m there every day, walking around, talking to people, purchasing animals from the kids, and apple pies,” he said. “I really enjoy that.”

Mr. Hildenbrand is a lifelong Geauga County resident whose community involvement includes Chardon Rotary Club, Geauga County Bluecoats, Geauga County Township Trustees Association and many more.

He is president of the Geauga County Fire Chiefs Association and vice president of the Geauga County Police Chiefs, which coordinate policies and discuss industry trends.

Mr. Hildenbrand was inducted into the Chardon High School Hall of Fame in 2005. ■



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**Chardon Square**



# Chardon Toastmasters Club helps members to plan, think and speak on their feet



Amy Whipple, a member of the Chardon chapter of Toastmasters International, gives the first speech of the evening to the local club which helps make better speakers of all of its members.

By MICHELE COLLINS

For the 30 or so members of the Chardon chapter of Toastmasters International, one of the caveats is to be able to think on their feet.

At a recent February meeting, the group also had to quickly change its location due to a scheduling mishap.

The group had no problem handling the change – in the same way that its two speakers for the evening had no problem getting up in front of the group and delivering a five- to seven-minute speech.

The goal of Toastmasters International is to teach public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs.

Headquartered in Englewood, Colorado, the organization has 280,000 members in more than 14,700 clubs in 144 countries.

Since 1924, Toastmasters International has helped people from diverse backgrounds become more confident speakers, communicators, and leaders.

And on a recent Thursday evening in Char-

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don, it did the same.

Juel Leonard, who is president of the Chardon club, said she joined Toastmasters in 2003, when the Chardon group was chartered, after she retired from teaching. While there are some other retired members, there are also young members just starting their careers. Financial planners, sales people, technology professionals, even a local factory worker have all sought out the Chardon Toastmasters for a

**“At Toastmasters, you practice both extemporaneous and prepared speaking. Both are important to being a good public speaker.”** — Juel Leonard, president of the Chardon club

chance to develop their speaking skills.

“I honestly come back for the people,” said Shelli Wesler, a new member of the club. “It is really an enjoyable group and I learn so much from attending.”

The group meets Thursday evenings at the Community Room 107 South Street in Chardon. But once in the group, members find it is

like a social club, where, prior to the start of the night’s speeches, they share what is going on in their lives.

But once the Toastmaster for the night starts the meeting, the members have their work cut out for them.

Some have to present prepared speeches.

At the Feb. 23 meeting, Amy Whipple and Michael Richmond gave well-prepared speeches on topics of interest to them. Both excelled at bringing the listeners into their subject matter and then keeping their interest for at least five minutes. They utilized good eye contact, hand gestures and differing tones in their voices to engage listeners.

A second activity, Table Topics, asked speakers to stand up and speak about a topic with little time to prepare.

“At Toastmasters, you practice both extemporaneous and prepared speaking,” said Ms. Leonard. “Both are important to being a good public speaker.” She added that the pandemic has also incorporated the use of virtual speaking. At this meeting, one of the group leaders, Kathleen Deley, was joining virtually.

She started the program with a humorous story, sharing that she wondered why everyone was talking about a “Rita,” that they didn’t like at her office that morning.

It turned out that Rita was actually RITA, the Regional Income Tax Authority, and that was the reason for their dislike.

The story started the evening off on a roll, eliciting smiles, and then each speaker took a turn on the impromptu podium, a step above the meeting space.

Members of Chardon’s Toastmaster group

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take turns rotating the different roles or duties of the club each meeting.

"One person's job is to be the Wag Master," shared Sharon Cooper, who was assigned that job for the evening. "This person looks out for the stumbles of speaking, like saying "ummm" or using too many 'likes,'" she said.

Another person's job is to evaluate the speakers. Toastmasters International uses a specific form with evaluation criteria.

"The evaluations are always done in a positive and constructive way," said Ms. Leonard.

"Where else can you go where everyone will clap whenever you are done speaking?" she added.

The group continues to add new members, who hear about its ability to help make better public speakers or presenters out of all who join.

New member Joe Rosipko said he joined to be able to better present ideas at work to other members of his staff.

He was welcomed into the group with an inauguration ceremony.

But it was club member Marilyn Harman, who really shone at the Toastmasters International of Chardon meeting that evening.

"Well, they called me at about 5:30 p.m. and asked if we could have the meeting at my house," said Ms. Harmon. "I said, 'Sure!' then had only a few minutes to get ready." By the time club members started arriving at 6:15 p.m., Ms. Harmon had set the chairs out, spread agendas about the group and even accepted her role as a mentor to the club's newest member from her second-floor balcony.

"I am ready and willing to help our new member," said Ms. Harmon from above.

Then she came back downstairs to do the evening's job of announcing the table topics.

Ms. Harmon proved that membership in this group can help you handle just about any situation under the sun, not the least of which is speaking in front of a group. ■

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# The candy man can

“Sweets on the Square” is a nostalgic trip to candy land

By **MARTHA SOROHAN**

**W**hen Jeff and Catie Traffis told their three children – ages 5, 7 and 9 – about their plans to open a candy store on Chardon Square, the reaction was not what they expected. “They were confused,” said Catie.

But no more.

Since it opened in November, “Sweets on the Square,” has become a favorite of young and old alike, a popular after-school stop for local students.

The old-fashioned shop is filled with candy that harkens back more than half-a-century –

Bun bars, Clark bars, Fifth Avenue, Chuckles, Laffy Taffy, gumdrops, Nickle dips in wax bottles – “Everyone loves them,” Catie says – and lollipops, Pez dispensers, candy buttons, salt water taffy, Jolly Ranchers, Bazooka bubble gum, baseball cards and so much more – including the ultra-popular six-foot rolls of bubble gum tape.

European chocolate flies off the shelves, too, as do Baker’s whipped eggs and freeze-dried Skittles.

“Once you open a bag, you can’t stop eating them,” Catie says.

Locally-made chocolate is available as well. “Sweets on the Square” may be one of the few retail spaces where visitors are encouraged to open drawers of wooden cupboards lining the walls. They, too, are filled with candy.

Fun is all around. A Candy Land game painted onto the floor silently beckons players, while a toy airplane buzzes overhead. Classic Disney songs play in the background. Vintage toys, in-

cluding a model train, fill the front window.

“The dads and grandpas come in and tell us their train stories. It’s fun,” Catie said.

More fun awaits fans of “Where’s Waldo.” Waldo is hiding in Sweets on the Square, and whoever finds him may choose his next hiding place.

Used board games including “Candy Land” and “Chutes and Ladders” sit on the shelf, waiting to be played.

“We wanted more, but there was no space,” Catie said.

Everything, Catie says, has been made with “love and creativity.”

“We are going for nostalgia,” Catie said. “We want to remind people of their childhoods. They come in and say, ‘Oh! I remember!’”

As members of the Chardon Square Association and Farmers Market volunteers, Jeff and Catie Traffis avidly support all things Chardon.

So when the storefront at 101 South Street, on

**Seven-year-olds Taylor Dulla (left) and Lucy Traffis love to stop in at Chardon’s local candy shop, Sweets on the Square. At right is Lucy’s dad and shop co-owner Jeff Traffis.**

**Continued on page 20**

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## Continued from page 19

the south side of the Square, became available last summer, the Northeast Ohio natives jumped at the opportunity to rent it – well before they knew what their new business would be.

“We wanted something that would attract families to the Square, maybe a general store or a candy shop. I’m a big fan of candy,” Catie said.

Buoyed by warm memories of candy stores such as Kraynack’s in Hermitage, Pa., Catie said her candy-loving nature won out.

“We always visited there at Christmas and Easter when I was growing up,” she said. “So I wanted to bring the magic closer to home.”

Former food business owners who raise 12,000 tulips annually for their home-based “Dottie’s Flower Farm” on a 17-acre home-stand, the couple knew a thing or two about entrepreneurship.

But not everything translated into the candy business and the new world of supply-and-demand.

The couple designed and stocked the shop with what they thought people would like.



**“Sweets on the Square” is a treasure trove filled with old-fashioned candy and fun.**

The inventory is always changing. Some is phased out, and some – given the green light from family members serving as guinea pigs – is phased in.

“Sweets on the Square” Facebook page asks for requests – as long as it’s not available at Wal-Mart,

Some popular-demand candies are hard to find. Take the Clark bar, for example, now produced by a new company after The Clark Company went out of business.

**“There is a Clark ‘cup,’ but it’s not quite a Clark bar,” Catie said. “I think they can’t figure out how to make it yet, so it’s not available here now. It’s also three times the price of what it should be, but I think it’ll come down.”**

Named “Sweets” for Jeff’s nickname for his wife, this unique slice of the past is intended to be a fun place for kids of all ages.

Business picks up at “Sweets on the Square” at three o’clock – when schools let out – and kids come in to spend a few coins in their pockets or \$10 or \$20 bills.

“That blows my mind,” Catie said. “Kids will say they’re not supposed to spend all their money. Others count out their change. But it’s fine either way. We’re here to have fun.”

The Traffis children have to save up their own money to spend in the shop, too, and may buy just one item per day – excluding what they are asked to sample.

“They just can’t come in and grab stuff. We had to set boundaries,” Catie said.

“Sweets on the Square” continues to evolve. Popcorn and sodas are under consideration.

For now, the Traffis family sleeps well at night, confident that the shop is going in a good direction.

“As word spreads, we are getting busier and busier,” Catie said. “It’s working out nicely.”

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# Shining a light on small



Chardon Physical Therapy owner Dave Nelson records the first episode of the Chardon BIZ Podcast with episode guest CJ Paterniti, owner of D&S Automotive.

‘Chardon BIZ’ pod cast uncovers stories behind successful businesses

By ELISE VON GUNTEN

**W**hat do a teen donut maker, an auto mechanic, and a karate instructor have in common?

They are all part of the community of small business owners who contribute to Chardon’s success, and they all have a story to tell.

This is why Dave Nelson, owner of Chardon Physical Therapy, created his podcast “Chardon BIZ.”

It highlights Chardon small business owners rather than their businesses.

A Chardon resident, Mr. Nelson opened Chardon Physical Therapy (CPT) in December, 2020.

Although he started his podcast, “Chardon BIZ,” before developing CPT’s mission

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statement – “Be present with your family, be present with your client, be present with your community, only 100% of the time” -- the two aligned perfectly.

“I launched the first episode right away, before I had anything else, because CJ Paterniti was running for school board, and I thought, hey, this would be a neat way for anybody to maybe listen to his story and really understand whom they would be voting for,” Mr. Nelson explains. “Business owners are not just owners of that business. They have families, or they have hobbies, and the podcast uncovers that,” he said.

The idea for “Chardon BIZ” was inspired by another podcast, “How I Built This,” hosted by Guy Roz.

Mr. Nelson was inspired by how the show lets listeners in on the story behind the brands they already know.

He thought the concept would be a great way to help local businesses become a part of the community again, not just structures that come and go.

“I do not want my business just to pop up, and it’s like just ‘come see me if you need me,’ and then one day it just kind of fizzles away,” says Mr. Nelson. “My intention was always to build a legitimate practice that serves the people of my community and stays for a very long time. ...and I thought this podcast would be a really fun way to connect: meet

with someone and capture their story.”

Chardon BIZ has been successful in that effort, becoming a platform for people to share their knowledge and experiences; and for others to learn about and from them and their stories.

Mr. Nelson and his CPT Administrator, Chelsey Stone — who edits and does all the back end work, released the first episode of Chardon BIZ in October, 2021. New episodes are released about twice a month, and although the businesses owned by the guests are discussed throughout each podcast, that is not the show’s real focus. The individuals who created them are.

Why focus on guests rather than their businesses?

Mr. Nelson believes every successful business owner has a “secret sauce.”

“Every business owner has something really ‘special about them or about their operation that makes their business, in my opinion, very obviously successful. And so, everyone has that thing right, but everyone is so different on what that is,” says Mr. Nelson.

Mr. Nelson points to Mitch and Gail Hewitt, owners of Chardon’s KingKone.

“If you want to hear a cool story about a successful husband and wife who are keeping four kids alive, you want to hear theirs.” Mr. Nelson says, “I think their secret is that they prioritize connection and teamwork with each other. ... Gail runs the show at KingKone, and Mitch is the head coach of the football team at the

high school. They both have those strong roles in the community, four kids, and are probably the busiest people you’ll ever meet. However, they still do a weekly date night to take time for each other,” says Mr. Nelson, clearly still in awe nearly a year after recording. “They talk about their successes and failures and what they mean. And it really helps keep them connected. In everything they do, they work together.”

In an April, 2023, episode of Chardon BIZ, Mr. Nelson sits down with Nate and Erica Mitchell, who started Blue Lake Cleaning Company as a side hustle to generate extra income while working around Mr. Mitchell’s 12-hour shifts at the Sheriff’s department.

In 2016, they turned it into a full-fledged business with the caveat that they hire only first responders: police, fire, EMTs, nurses, doctors, and military personnel-- the people we turn to in our worst moments but are often challenged when supplementing their incomes due to career demands.

“They are offering a part-time gig to really responsible folks. ...That’s incredible,” Mr. Nelson says. “Everybody wins that’s in his orbit with this business. They [sic the Mitchells] win because they are offering job opportunities to first responders, dependable folks. First responders win because if they are like, ‘look, I’m working a 48 and then have three days off’ they still have this way to

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supplement their income and earn a little bit more. The people paying for this service win because they can trust who is coming into their house.”

So what is Mr. Nelson’s secret to eliciting such personal candor from the people behind Chardon’s businesses?

### A Pre-interview.

He sits down with every guest before the day of the recording for a pre-show interview. In it, he gets to know the person so that he is able to structure the podcast interview to make sure it includes stories that make up each guest’s “secret sauce.”

Beyond that, it helps break down the barriers of nervousness many guests have.

Scott DeShelter, the owner of Chardon ATA Martial Arts and the guest on BIZ’s tenth episode, is a perfect example of what conducting a pre-interview can do.

“My son takes Karate with him” Mr. Nelson explains “so, I’m a couple of months in, and I’d done maybe four or five podcasts and during one karate class, it’s really busy and he’s behind the desk, so I go up to him and say, ‘So I have this podcast and I’d like to record you. Could we meet for coffee sometime?’ And he says, ‘Well, I don’t like to drink coffee.’ Just like that. So I’m thinking, ‘Okay this is going great.’”

Despite Mr. DeShelter’s hesitation, Mr. Nelson doesn’t give up.

“You know I ask can we just meet sometime I’d love to capture your story but he tells me ‘I

don’t know I get really nervous about stuff like that I’m sweating right now thinking about it,” Mr. Nelson explains “so I ask would it be alright if I could just meet with you and capture your story off mic? I could come here to your dojang, and we can just chit-chat and if you don’t want to do the Podcast we don’t have to,”

Mr. DeShelter hesitantly agrees to meet, and the initial interview, which lasted over an hour, was the turning point.

“It actually got to the point in that pre-interview, we had gotten so comfortable chatting, that he started sharing his story about his life and what brought him to his business and I had to cut him off, which was really hard. But I knew the questions I asked to get to this point, and I wanted to make sure that we had that authenticity of him sharing it with me for the first time on the recording.”

Which, of course, Mr. DeShelter did.

By the day of the BIZ recording, Mr. DeShelter’s nerves had disappeared entirely, leading to an authentic interview on the mic.

“He was so much fun,” Mr. Nelson says. “We talked about my son, his business, his girls, and his entire journey. It was really neat.”

In addition to breaking down barriers between host and guest on the day of recording, the authenticity it results in enables Mr. Nelson to break down barriers between interviewees and Podcast listeners.

Something Mr. Nelson has already seen the effects of on Chardon business owners.

“Some really beautiful things have happened,” he says. “Collaborations are starting to happen between businesses. I think the barriers are coming down from a competition standpoint and it’s more or less like how can we do even better within our own business, and maybe help each other out at the same time?”

Part of the charm of small towns is the familiarity among residents, workers and establishments that creates a sense of trust and permanence – something many feel has been lost in the digital age.

Mr. Nelson hopes that through his podcast, he can utilize the digital age to combat what’s been lost by it. He wants to see that sense of community, already growing between business owners, spread to and from residents.

Chardon BIZ meets the community where it’s at, allowing listeners on their own time to get to know people and stories. Such moments—whether on or off the airwaves — create familiarity, intimacy, and a sense of community belonging.

Mr. Nelson intends to keep Chardon BIZ going to continue building that sense of community for a long time.

He has no shortage of people whose stories he wants to share.

“This is not a job, this is not a requirement, this is not a hobby. This is an obligation,” Mr. Nelson said. “I think the stories of our local businesses, the authentic story behind the businesses, need to be available in all mediums.” ■

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Chardon authors Jeff Grau, left, and his brother, Chris Grau, authored a book, "Christmastime in Chardon," that was based on their video from a snowy morning in their home town.

# Christmas book is a local best-seller

By MICHELE COLLINS

Chris Grau was awakened by a snow-fall very early one morning, and the beauty he saw outside his window inspired him to take some video of the pristine snow-covered scene.

That video, a tribute to the beauty of Chardon and its square, inspired his brother to write a song and both brothers to write a book.

"Christmastime in Chardon," a storybook


for all ages, was created by the Grau brothers to share with readers the joy of wintertime in their picturesque hometown.

The book includes scenes from that original video.


Chris Grau and his brother, Jeff Grau, have been partners in Lake Erie Video Productions, Inc., in Chardon for the past 30 years.

During their regular work day, they create

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**“I think the song and video were really well-received because they are nostalgic. It appealed to people who live in Chardon now, and to people who were former residents. They are proud of their square and its beauty.”** — Jeff Grau

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TV commercials, sales, training and even wedding videos.

But in their spare time, the two creative brothers wrote a song and now a book currently for sale at stores around Chardon Square.

“My brother is really the creative force behind the song. He put music and lyrics to the video of the snowfall I had taken,” said Chris Grau, who also happens to be the mayor of Chardon.

Jeff Grau said the video scene was so pretty, so nostalgic, that he wanted to have something

to go along with it to share with the greater Chardon community.

Jeff Grau asked his neighbor, singer and performer Makenna Hagan, to sing his original song. He then recorded her singing it, and edited it with the video.

“I think the song and video were really well-received because they are nostalgic. It appealed to people who live in Chardon now, and to people who were former residents. They are proud of their square and its beauty,” said Jeff Grau.

The brothers shared the musical video on Facebook, and before long, they said it had more than 5,000 views.

Because the video was so popular among Chardonites, the brothers put their heads together to come up with a way to make the song and the winter scenes even more available to the public.

“We took the lyrics from the song, and we made that the story, the text, for a book,” said Chris Grau.

“Then I manipulated still photos from the video to look like paintings,” said Jeff Grau. “Those photos became very pretty scenes on the pages.”

The book, “Christmastime in Chardon,” was printed in November, 2022, and four Chardon retailers offered it for sale, Sweets on the Square, D is for Delicious, Beans Cafe, and The Nest.

The book, which retails for \$12, has already sold out.

“We really are looking at a way to print it that keeps the costs down, so everyone can enjoy the book,” said Chris Grau.

The Grau brothers’ parents are especially proud of the book their sons created.

“My mom bought a bunch of the books and gave them out to everyone she knows as Christmas presents,” said Chris Grau.

He added that his children and especially, his granddaughter Maizy, age 2, have enjoyed the book.

“It is just so wonderful to see my daughter reading the book to my granddaughters,” said Chris Grau, whose daughter and grandchildren live in Tennessee.

“My 10-year-old was excited about the book, but it wasn’t quite as miraculous to my 14- and 17-year-olds,” laughed Jeff Grau.

But the brothers are proud of the comments they received from viewers of the video, listeners of the song, and now readers of the book.

“We really have a special town, and a beautiful square in Chardon,” said Chris Grau. “This is one way to thank our city and its businesses for making it so special at Christmastime.”

“It’s Christmastime in Chardon, just look and you’ll agree, the lights all shine so bright, such a winter delight, take some time and stroll through the trees,” says the song.

Perhaps during such a stroll, Chardonites will stop in one of the local stores to buy a book celebrating the beauty of Chardon from two brothers who have now shared its charms in a variety of ways. ■

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# Hanging Rock marks the spot of 1823 execution

By KRISTA S. KANO

**M**ore than a century before happy parents and children began flocking to Chardon for the annual Maple Festival, families assembled here for a much grimmer gathering.

Exactly two hundred years ago, in 1823, the population of Chardon was a mere 375, yet on May 15 of that year, in the middle of a field, an estimated 4,000 to 8,000 people circled around a rock the size of a small car to witness the county's first and only public execution.

Over the years, the execution has become local legend, taught in schools and told around campfires to wide-eyed children.

Four years ago, the city officially marked the spot of its exact location with a historical marker yet-to-be constructed leg of the Maple Highlands Trail.

But with the September, 2021, completion of this connector, known as Maple Highlands Trail Phase III, cyclists now ride on off-street paths behind the cemetery to Burger King on Water Street to continue on the trail.

Along the way, they pass a pond, where a small path leads to what has become known as

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The historic Hanging Rock site is identified by a marker near the Maple Highlands Trail.



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“the Hanging Rock,” and the marker approved by the Ohio History Connection and funded by the Pomeroy Foundation Grant.

Obtaining the marker was an arduous process, the City of Chardon’s Planning & Zoning Administrator Steven Yaney explained, involving considerable research. Mr. Yaney, who grew up outside of Chardon, first learned of the hanging at a Leadership Geauga local history program presented by Dr. Bari Oyster Stith, director of historic preservation programs at Ursuline College.

**“Just because a hanging was there doesn’t make it significant,” Mr. Yaney said. “The biggest thing about it was the impact it had on the residents at the time. It was the first major court case in Geauga County that really shows how they brought the judicial system from the East Coast when they moved out west. It was showing that it wasn’t vigilante justice.”**

## The crime, the time, the execution

Through Dr. Stith and his own research, Mr. Yaney learned how on Feb. 1, 1823, Benjamin Wright Jr. went to the home of Sophar Warner in Leroy Township to settle a dispute over a \$15 debt and Mr. Warner’s possession of Mr. Wright’s hunting rifle.

A struggle ensued, and Mr. Wright stabbed Mr. Warner with a large jackknife to a depth of 2.5 inches, witnessed by Mr. Warner’s 13-year-old daughter.

The Painesville Telegraph later reported that Mr. Warner died on Feb. 9, 1823, leaving behind his wife and seven children.

According to handwritten court documents, after a four-day trial in March 1823, a jury found Mr. Wright guilty of first-degree murder and ordered that “Benjamin Wright Jr. be taken to the common jail of the county, and that he be there confined until the third Thursday of May, following, and that he be taken from thence to some convenient place within the town of Chardon between ten o’clock, A.M. and twelve o’clock, noon, of said day, and that, within the hours aforesaid, he be hung by the neck until he be dead (sic).”

On March 26, 1823, the Telegraph wrote, “During the whole trial, the prisoner manifested the greatest firmness and composure;

but a few moments before the jury pronounced their verdict, a tear was observed to fall from his eye.”

Six days after the execution, the Telegraph reported that the sheriff, Jas. R. Ford, told Mr. Wright that “his hour had come, and hoping he had no ill will towards the officers of government who had a most painful duty to perform.”

Thousands watched as Mr. Wright’s mother kissed his hand, before following Mr. Wright down South Street to a meadow where a gallows was constructed.

“Without any visible emotion, and in a firm tone of voice, Wright replied, ‘I have no feelings but those of complacency towards the ministers of the law. Do your duty,’” the Telegraph reported.

Later, Mr. Wright took the opportunity to address the crowd saying, “It is an unhappy affair that has brought me to this place, and I wish you all to be warned by my fate – I never determined in my own mind – here he paused for a moment, his eyes indicating the deepest distress, then adding – to take the life of any human being,” according to the Telegraph.

Mr. Wright hung for 25 minutes before he was taken away and the gallows was dismantled.

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## The aftermath

"Many spectators who turned out for what they felt was going to be a social event were very disappointed and struggled with the gruesomeness of the event," Chardon's application to the Ohio History Connection noted. "Emily Nash of Troy wrote in her journal, 'As for me, I felt that he deserved to be hung so I could see him struggle for life, but it was an awful sight I never hope to see again.'"

Fifty years to the day of the execution, the Geauga Republican published a first-hand account, written by the author who was 14 years old at the time of the execution.

"I well remember the awful exhibition, the vast crowd assembled from far and near, to witness the dread spectacle of seeing an unhappy fellow-being pay the penalty of broken law with the forfeiture of his life (...) We can never pass this spot where this dread scene was enacted without an involuntary shudder come over us. Away in the north part of Leroy, near the bank of Grand River, beneath the shade of an apple-tree is to be seen the grave of the first and only one that ever suffered the extreme penalty of law in old Geauga.

"For 50 years, the ripe fruit and falling leaves of autumn have dropped over the grave, and the waters of the flowing river have murmured their requiem to the memory of Geau-

ga's condemned one (...) Geauga's inhabitants have never witnessed the like since."

## Remnants

Since that day in 1823, the Hanging Rock had been located on private property, until the city purchased the land for the Maple Highlands Trail. It currently sits under heavy brush and even Mr. Yaney, who knew its general location, searched for two hours on a spring day before finding it.

Mr. Yaney explained that while no one who was at the execution is still around to verify the rock, it is the only rock of substantial size in the area where they know, based on historical accounts, the execution occurred.

The wood from the gallows, once disassembled, was repurposed to build the porch of a home on South Street, then owned by J.O. Worallo. A later owner of the home tore down the porch but kept the wood, and passed it down to the current owner of the home, who donated a piece of the gallows to the city. The rotten wood is currently sitting atop a filing cabinet in Mr. Yaney's office at Chardon City Hall.

The wood was to be taken to the hanging rock for the trail and historical marker's ribbon-cutting ceremony. It was thus returned to the site for the first time in 200 years. ■

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# Chardon bustles with activities year round

By ANASTASIA NICHOLAS

**W**ith an abundance of festivals, celebrations and traditions unique to Chardon – and city organizations always innovating new ones – the city bustles with activity all year.

Chardon Restaurant Week kicks off a week of outstanding food and exclusive deals from local restaurants. With each receipt turned in, Chardon Restaurant Week will donate to Next Step, a local charity that offers support, housing and meals to young adults in the community who are in need.

Restaurant week continues into Sweets

September, which celebrates the city's chocolatiers and candy shops, and Pizza Week in January.

In 1926, a local merchant on Chardon Square, Art Carlson, wanted to increase awareness of maple syrup production as well as the price, which, at that time, sold for 50 cents a gallon, according to the Geauga County Maple Festival.

He and his friends began planning the first Geauga County Maple Festival. About 100 years later, the maple festival is one of the most notable events on the square.

Summer means happy times, sunshine and Concerts in the Park. Every Friday brings

a different type of tunes to the square. Area bands arrive to play country, polka, rock, grunge, Beatles, and '70s and '80s TV themes – just to name a few – and food trucks come along for the ride.

The Chardon Flea Market, hosted by the Chardon Square Association, is held each year in June. With more than 100 vendors, bargain hunters can find antiques, collectibles, produce, plants, kitchen items, glassware, new and old books, vintage jewelry, toys, furniture, yard art, and more.

The money raised from the 2002 flea market helped the Chardon Square Association maintain the beauty of the park by purchasing flower baskets, holiday decorations, and more, Chardon Square Association Sylvia McGee said.

On Saturdays in June through August, Chardon Square is a bastion of health with the Chardon Farmers Market and Community Yoga on the Square.

June also boasts Chardon Tomorrow's Bikes and Hikes, Movies on the Square: Hotel Transylvania 4, Geauga Park District's Caveman Crawl 5K Run at The West Woods park, and a movie night at Observatory Park featuring Star Wars: The Force Awakens.

Decades after the maple festival, the Chardon Square Arts Festival had its debut. Now in its 42nd year, the juried outdoor arts festival hosts more than 100 artists who come from both the area and out of state.

August is never a dull month as the popular Chardon BrewFest takes place on the square days later, drawing beer enthusiasts to enjoy scores of samples as well as food from local eateries and live music. The event is family-friendly – often, a whole family arrives while only one partakes in the beer.

The Chardon Square Association's Harvest Handmade Market and Kiwanis Cornroast take place in September on the square. Attendees can browse about 75 creative booths for handmade and vintage finds.

Chardon Tomorrow, an organization that works to preserve and enhance the city's character by encouraging investment, hosts Hungry for History in October, an informative tour around the square with food from local restaurants.

The next day, the Fall Fest is held on the square, featuring s'mores, scarecrow making, face painting, a balloon artist, live music, cider and hot dogs, and more.

The city's trick or treat is followed by Halloween on the Square. The Chardon Square Association hands out bags of candy in the gazebo, the Chardon Police Department hands out cider and doughnuts, and the Chardon Fire Department leads a parade around the square.

November commences with Geauga Park District's Holly Days Artisan Boutique at The West Woods, which traditionally features heirloom-quality ornaments and holiday décor,

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Every Thanksgiving, Chardonites dash through the city for a cause in the 5K Turkey Trot and Walk to Stop Trafficking. Proceeds from the 2022 run went to the Harriet Tubman Movement, which helps women in Northeast Ohio who have come out of human trafficking and prostitution.

Area organizations including the Chardon Square Association and Chardon Area Chamber of Commerce highlight all small businesses in the 44024 footprint during Small Business Saturday in November. A receipt from a shop, salon, studio or restaurant can be brought to the Heritage House in exchange for complimentary gift wrapping, hot cocoa and other fun activities.

The city rings in the holiday season in a charming Christmas lighting put on by the Chardon Square Association.

The square association keeps that yuletide cheer alive with the annual Home for the Holidays event. The square becomes a bustle of activity: ice carving, reindeer, horse-drawn carriage rides, a visit from the Lake County Captains and Mrs. Claus and her elves, and more.

Geauga Park District welcomes the public to celebrate the longest night of the year in its annual Winter Solstice Celebration at The West Woods, which features skits, music, crafts, snacks, and more. ■

# Chardon magazine

Chagrin Valley Publishing Co.  
525 E. Washington St.  
Chagrin Falls, Ohio 44022  
440-247-5335

The Good News  
14905 North State Avenue  
Middlefield, Ohio 44062  
440-632-0130

Publisher: H. Kenneth Douthit III  
General Counsel/The Good News  
General Manager: Toni Richmond  
Creative Director/General Manager:  
Amanda Petkiewicz  
Editor: Martha Sorohan  
Photographer: Michael Steinberg  
Writers: Michele Collins,  
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Ad Designers:  
Connie Gabor, Ashley Gier,  
Debby Duchscherer  
Chardon Area Chamber of Commerce:  
President: Susan Parker  
Executive Director: Melissa Ricco  
Additional copies  
of Chardon Magazine are available  
from the Chardon Area Chamber  
of Commerce at 440-285-9050,  
Geauga Times Courier at 440-247-5335  
or The Good News at 440-632-0130



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After we graduated from Case Western Reserve University School of Dental Medicine in 2013, Brandon served in the U.S. Air Force where he completed an Advance Education in General Dentistry residency at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, OH and then was stationed at Holloman AFB in Alamogordo, NM. During that time, Julia gained valuable experience caring for patients in those communities. When it came time to put down roots, we knew we had strong family ties in Geauga County and we are happy to call Chardon our home since 2019. Outside of the office, we enjoy exploring our local parks with our young children, traveling to visit our extended family, gardening, and spending time with our golden retriever, Leona.

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# Chardon Schools rank at top of Ohio School Report Card

By ANASTASIA NICHOLAS

The Chardon Local School District consistently ranks at the top of the Ohio School Report Card.

The district is comprised of five schools.



## CHARDON EARLY LEARNING CENTER

In the 2022-23 school year, 257 pre-K and kindergarten students were enrolled at Chardon Early Learning Center.

Enrichment activities that take place at Chardon Early Learning Center include charitable collections, Start with Hello Week, World Unity Day, and winter and spring musical performances.

A Preschool Open House gives parents the opportunity to meet school staff and learn more.

Students also act out the “Q” and “U” letter wedding, and partake in “One School One Book,” school counselor and social skills groups, Grinch Day, Field Day and preschool graduation.

The Chardon Early Learning Center, in partnership with Lake-Geauga United Head Start, participates in the Ohio Department of Education’s Heading to Kindergarten initiative, which supports successful transitions to kindergarten through relationships, information-sharing and alignment between early learning programs, public schools and community partners.

“Our preschool is a proud recipient of the 5-Star ‘Step Up to Quality’ rating, the highest possible rating in the Ohio Child Care Quality Rating System administered by the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services,” according to Chardon Local Schools.

## MUNSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Munson Elementary School has 271 students in grades one through three.

School activities include book fairs, author visits, literacy night, One School One Book and Zones of Regulation.

It also has Autism Awareness, Kindness and



Start with Hello weeks, as well as career week and career vehicle day.

Other enrichment activities include a third-grade wax museum project, winter and spring musical concerts, community service projects and visitors during the week of Veterans Day.



## PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

About 240 first- through third-grade students attend Park Elementary School.

There, they partake in enrichment activities including book fairs, Literacy Night, One

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School One Book, food drives for local pantries, monthly lunches with the principal, winter and spring music concerts, assemblies, author visits, Start with Hello, Lake Farm Park, magician acts and Field Day. They also meet Veterans Day visitors

The PTO sponsored-events include Color Run, Sweets with Someone Special, Sugar Plum Shop, holiday classroom parties, an all-school carnival, skating parties and family bingo.



## CHARDON MIDDLE SCHOOL

About 750 fourth- through seventh-grade students attend Chardon Middle School.

Grades four through six are organized into classrooms led by teaching teams. Two teachers lead fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms and four teachers are in sixth grade classrooms. The model is designed to help students achieve independence as they move through the school.

Student clubs and activities include Just

Run, Power of the Pen, JuniorBots team, Science Olympiad, jazz band, and builders club, drama club, lacrosse club, ski club, Robotics Club and more.

Also offered are Kindness Club, a student-led initiative to spread positivity throughout the school, and Math Counts, a national middle school coaching and competitive mathematics program – just to name a few.

Enrichment activities include a science and fine arts fair; school social events including Back 2 School Bash, Glow-in-the-Dark Dance and Turkey Ball Tournament; charitable collections; a seventh grade Chicago trip; Start with Hello Week; parent university educational presentations; book fairs; winter and spring choir and band concerts; school counselor and social skills groups; holiday shop; World Unity Day; and a seventh-grade clap-out.

Future readiness activities include the American Heart Association's STEM Goes Red, Young Entrepreneurs Institute Pitch Challenge and Junior Achievement Economic Success Program.

Chardon Middle School also sponsors the Life Unleashed leadership program for seventh grade, which is partially funded by a Spring 2022 Chardon Schools Foundation grant.

## CHARDON HIGH SCHOOL

About 1,150 eighth- through 12th-grade students attend Chardon High School.



CHS offers required, recommended, elective, Advanced Placement (AP), College Credit Plus, prerequisite and co-requisite courses to students.

Clubs and activities include drama, Envirothon, Model UN, Spanish Club, Student Council, thespians and many more.

Unique clubs, including Coloring Club, senior-directed One Acts and indoor track and field are also offered. Great Pals is a club for students striving to build peer relationships and appropriate communication skills. Hilltopper Minds Matter helps students develop community and promote mental health awareness and wellness.

Future readiness programs include Circuit of Success, a nationally-recognized eighth-grade program; College Credit Plus; the career-based CREW (Creating Reliable Educated Workers)

**Continued on page 34**

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## Continued from page 33

program; a freshman mentoring program; the Auburn Career Center joint vocational consortium; and Topper Time, advisory time implementing graduation seals.

CHS emphasizes the 4 E's of future readiness – Employment, Enlistment, Enrollment and Entrepreneurship – after high school graduation. Chardon schools are continually focused on delivering an exceptional educational program that prepares students to engage meaningfully in one or more of the 4 E's.

In the class of 2022, 75% of graduates planned to attend a two- or four-year college or university and 25% of graduates entered the workforce or started their own businesses, or enlisted in the military.

As part of CHS' career programming, students may attend Auburn Career Center to earn certifications in more than 20 two-year technical training fields. Auburn Career Center offers high school juniors and seniors programs in construction, cosmetology, welding and emergency medical services.

Chardon Local Schools partners with Lakeland Community College for College Credit Plus courses on Chardon High School's campus.

Of Chardon's 233 members of the class of 2022, 22 had graduated from a two-year program at Auburn Career Center and five had earned associate degrees through College Credit Plus. ■

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# Chardon celebrates 25 years of Mel Harder Park

By **DANIEL SHERRIFF**

**W**hen the pandemic slowed everything down in 2020, there were very few accessible venues for the residents of the city of Chardon.

But one outside place where everyone could still go was Mel Harder Park, built in 1998 and named after famed Cleveland Indians' pitcher Mel Harder (1909-2002).

"I think it is a cool piece of history," said Chardon Parks and Recreation Director Adam Rogers. "There are a lot of people who still recognize that player. In many ways, by having his name behind that park, it reflects the importance he had on this community."

Nicknamed "Chief," the right-hander set franchise records for wins (223), games started (443), innings pitched (3,426.1) and most amount of career games pitched (582) with the club.

Harder's records of wins, games started and innings pitched were eventually broken by Bob Feller.

He pitched with the organization for 19 seasons and later served as a pitching coach for

**Continued on page 36**



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## Continued from page 35

15 more years with the Indians.

He passed away in 2002, four years after the park opened and was named in his honor.

For 22 years, the Mel Harder Park offered multiple uses with a pavilion, gazebo, concrete restroom and two baseball fields.

But prior to the pandemic, the Chardon City Council approved a proposal to renovate the park.

According to Rogers, Woodford Excavating was contracted to construct Phase II of the Mel Harder Park with a bid of \$323,661.

"It was more so to tap into the unused space that we already owned and the unused land that was already owned by the city and to increase the desire for the residents for a new expanded park area," Rogers said.

The renovations added a parking lot, walking trail and a multi-purpose field -- all completed during the pandemic.

"It gave them even more space," Rogers said. "It gave our soccer leagues two more fields to play on and it was home for a flag football league for a while. It has been a very popular addition to the park and has added a lot of benefits for the residents."

Now, not only youth baseball and softball teams compete at the Mel Harder Park, but local soccer clubs such as the Chardon Youth Soccer League and the Geauga Soccer Federation play there as well.

**"It provides youth sports activities for the community. It is a great thing," said Rogers. "Youth sports all the way up to professional sports benefit multiple people in multiple ways and I am glad to be a part of organizing that here."**

The multi-purpose field is made of grass, so only the youth soccer leagues have made use of it. The high school teams have several grass fields where they already practice and play their games on Chardon Memorial Field.

Rogers did not rule out the possibility of the high school soccer teams using the multi-purpose field, but for now, the Hilltoppers' soccer teams are staying put.

He added that the lacrosse programs have discussed using the multi-purpose field.

"All we want to do is see the field get used by the community and the residents, and maintain it to where it is a safe space and fit to enjoy," Rogers said.

Three years after the renovations were completed, Rogers said that they may not be the last for Chardon's beloved community park.

"There is nothing in the works at this time, but there is never an intention to let the park stay stagnant. There are always intentions to improve it," he said. ■



# Geauga Parks

A number of outstanding scenic trails and parks are located in Chardon and the surrounding area. Managed by the Geauga Park District, the trails and parks provide area residents with miles of trails and acres of green space for a variety of outdoor activities.



**Big Creek Park in Chardon Township includes a popular 2.8-mile mountain bike trail.**

## Big Creek Park

*9160 Robinson Road, Chardon Township*

This 644-acre park is bisected south to north by the scenic Big Creek, creating a landscape of varied relief. Nine trails total 3.8 miles, plus a 2.8-mile mountain bike trail through the woods.

Recreation areas include a campground, nature-based playground, activity field backstop, sand volleyball court and tetherball. And recently added features include a reservable lodge, a nature-based playground, and a unique “tree house” camping opportunity.

Accessible by two separate entrances, Tupelo Pond/Bridle Trails in Big Creek Park adds an additional two trails totaling 2.9 miles. A section of the statewide Buckeye Trail also passes through Big Creek Park.

Most of this park is forested with rich beech-maple woods and carpeted with colorful wild-



**Whitlam Woods in nearby Hambden Township is a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts.**

flowers each spring. Numerous species of songbirds migrate from the tropics to nest in this mature forest, which also shelters many kinds of woodland animals among the trees.

The uplands are divided by small streams, exposing the glacial deposits and bedrock in their ravines. In the area where the valley of Big Creek narrows, hemlock trees line the cool steep slopes. Distinctive plant species are found on the clay slumps and among flood plain areas.

A certified Monarch Waystation butterfly garden is also located at the Meyer Center pergola. The species of plants in the garden bloom during every month of the summer and attract a variety of pollinators.

## Whitlam Woods

*12500 Pearl Road, Hambden Township*

This 187-acre park, part of which is leased from the Geauga County Commissioners, is bisected by deep ravines of two streams that flow into Big Creek. Three trails total 1.1 miles.

Hemlock trees provide year-round greenery in ravines surrounded by a mature beech-maple forest, which cloaks most of the park. Lush growths of spring wildflowers carpet the woods, and a variety of birds and animals can be found each season.

Along the woodland margins, dense thickets

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**Bass Lake Preserve**

### Continued from page 37

and grapevine tangles provide cover to a variety of wildlife, including Ruffed Grouse, deer, turkey and fox. An old field is now covered with a second-growth red maple woods, and soft mosses and club mosses cover the ground.

In the shrubby meadow at the front of the park, Eastern Towhees, Indigo Buntings and Goldfinches nest, and American Woodcocks return each spring to perform their aerial courtship flights.

### Bass Lake Preserve

*11445 Lakeview Road, Munson Township*

This 606-acre park features the 160-acre Bass Lake, a treasured natural resource for many generations, and Spring Brook Sanctuary, a State Nature Preserve protecting Ohio's last known indigenous population of brook trout. Boating is allowed by permit; visit our website to request a permit. There is not a trail here, but the view from a bench near Bass Lake Lodge shouldn't be missed.

Bass Lake is a natural lake on the Chagrin River. The water level is maintained by a low dam on the Chagrin a short distance downstream of the outlet. The shallow lake lies in an ancient glacial flat and is largely surrounded by extensive wetlands. The sheltering wetlands have protected the lake from shoreline development, resulting in a multitude of exceptional ecological communities.

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line is mantled in trees, shrubs and marsh vegetation.

Bass Lake is an important stopover during the great spring and fall migrations of waterfowl and neotropical songbirds. Bald Eagles nest in the lowland woods near the lake. Beavers ply the swampy tributaries. Native brook trout still swim in small streams that flow into the lake. Wild rice grows in the marshy margins.

The lakeshore forest is characterized by red maple, silver maple, swamp white oak, pin oak and American elm. It is home to wild turkey, Ruffed Grouse, White-tailed Deer, Masked Shrew and Northern Long-eared Bat – species that illustrate a mature, complex ecosystem with significant diversity. Rare nesting birds in Ohio such as the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Dark-eyed Junco also habitually appear here.

## Walter C. Best Wildlife Preserve

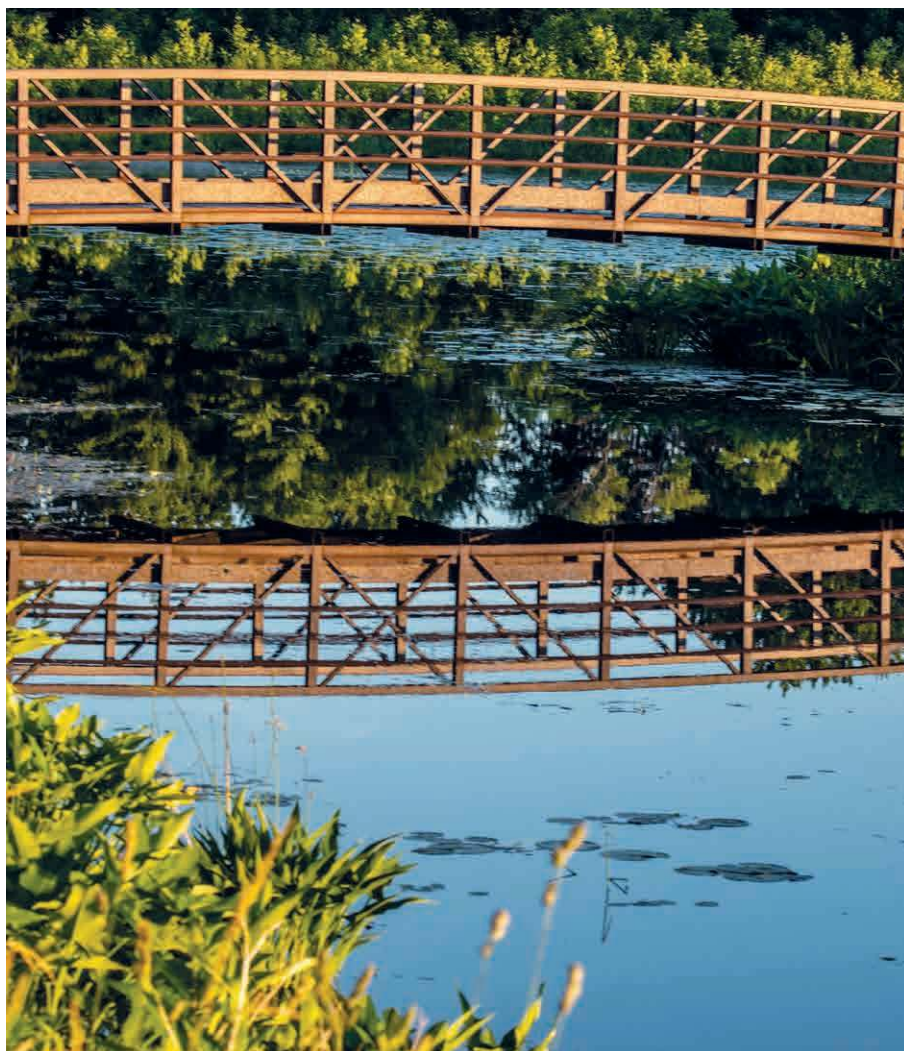
11620 Ravenna Road, Munson Township

This 101-acre park, donated in memory of Walter C. Best, founder of the nearby Best Sand Corporation, who built its 30-acre lake because of his interest in waterfowl, is home to a rich diversity of plant and animal life. Three trails total 1.6 miles.

Animals such as woodchucks, chipmunks and squirrels are readily seen, while deer, raccoon, Red Fox, mink and voles leave signs of their secretive presence. Muskrat and beaver are often seen in and around Best Lake.

More than 100 kinds of birds have been sighted here. While many are migratory visitors, the marshy meadows, thickets and wooded stream corridor harbor an outstanding va-

**Continued on page 40**



The Walter C. Best Wildlife Preserve boasts three different hiking trails.



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## Continued from page 39

riety of nesting songbirds. Nest boxes shelter bluebirds, tree swallows and wood ducks. The aerial courtship display of the male American Woodcock can be observed at dusk on early spring evenings.

In the water, aquatic plants provide a soggy “salad bar” for ducks and geese. Fish-eating birds such as grebes, mergansers, gulls, loons, terns and herons frequent. Keen observers may spot an osprey or bald eagle.

A patch of tall-grass prairie, using Ohio seed sources, offers an attractive nectar source for hummingbirds, many kinds of butterflies and other insects.

## The Maple Highlands Trail

If you're in Chardon, you can access this awesome trail from Mountain Run Station at 12601 Chardon Windsor Road or Big Creek Spur at 9280 Ravenna Road. Three sections of this trail, connected through the City of Chardon and the Village of Middlefield, stretch a total 21.1 miles across the entire county featuring two award-winning covered bridges to the south. Three links to this trail add another 1.08 miles. Horseback riding is only permitted along the south section.

With more than 20 miles covered, a wide variety of natural habitats are home to varying ecosystems where wildlife encounters happens all the time.

Depending on which way you're headed, The Maple Highlands Trail travels through a variety of habitats, including woodlands, wetlands, farm fields and Amish neighborhoods. Opportunities abound to spot Wild Turkeys and White-tail Deer, as well as turtles and snakes crossing the trail.



Three different sections of the Maple Highlands Trail connect the City of Chardon and Village of Middlefield.

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## Observatory Park



### Observatory Park

10610 Clay Street, Montville Township

This 1,100-acre park encourages visitors to explore Nature from the ground to the galaxies. Six trails total 3.97 miles.

Numerous site features include a trail with interactive pods representing each trail pro-

portionate to the sun, a trail with interactive stations representing ways to study weather, life-sized cornerstones of the Great Pyramid of Giza, earthen mounds, henge stones and, via a woodland trail, access to the Nassau Astronomical Station.

Rare and endangered flora and fauna live and play here in the shadows of observatories.

Observatory Park protects the watershed of the Cuyahoga River, and holds a diversity of habitats, such as old growth forest, wetlands and open fields.

An important species that has been found is the endangered Red Swamp Current. An abundance of wildlife here includes the rare Five-lined Skink. ■

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