



## "A Fancy Story Time"

### Special date this month

It's true that all of the Library's Story Times for children ages 2 through 6 are special to the participants, but some have unusual themes that set them apart. Such is the case for a session, titled "A Fancy Story Time," which is scheduled at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 20.

"The idea is for the kids, and the adults who accompany them, to

*See STORYTIME on page 5*



## Manager's Monthly Bulletin

### Erik Tungate

On behalf of the entire staff of the City of Oak Park, I would like to **THANK YOU** for approving Proposal #2012-05.

Because of you, I recently signed an order to bring back three laid off public safety officers and I'll be able to firm up our budget and continue to provide high quality city services. While we now have some breathing room and are on a viable finan-

*See MANAGER on page 3*



## Immediate benefit from proposal's approval

### 3 Public Safety Officers already set to return

Oak Park residents made a significant financial investment in their community's future Nov. 6 and just a few weeks later the initial dividends are being received. Thanks to approval of Proposal 2012-05 in the General Election, three of the Public Safety officers who were laid off last summer because of a municipal budget shortfall are already returning to duty. All three will be back in service early this month.

A 53.6% to 46.4% majority of the exceptionally large local turnout of voters, some of whom waited in line for two hours or more to cast their ballots at Oak Park's 10 polling locations, said "yes" to paying as much as 7 additional mills in property tax for the next seven years in order for the City to establish a separate pension system exclusively for Public Safety officers. This step will remove a huge financial burden from the annual General Fund Bud-

get, which provides for all citizen services, including the Public Safety Department's police, fire fighting and EMS operations.

While the first fiscal year in which the new millage will be levied, 2013-2014, won't begin until next July 1, the passage of Proposal 2012-05 assures a level of future municipal financial stabilization that enables the City to use money from its existing, though shallow, emergency reserves for rehiring the three officers now. In addition, the assurance of revenue in 2013 from the new millage means Oak Park can retain three currently-serving officers whose positions are funded by a federal grant that will expire next year. The City has been approved for another such grant, but would have been unable to provide the matching dollars necessary to actually receive the funding had the proposal been defeated.

Proposal 2012-05 was approved by a  
*See BENEFITS on page 2*

## Lights before Christmas

*During the holiday season, the Toledo Zoo is transformed into a winter wonderland. The Lights Before Christmas holiday event features over one million lights, over 200 images of some of your favorite animals, carolers, holiday treats, the Swanton Area Railroad model trains, and visits with Santa. Registration deadline is Thursday, December 13th at 5pm.*

*Date & Time: Monday, December 17th*

*Bus will leave at 4pm and return at 9pm to the Oak Park Community Center*

*Cost: \$21 adults(12+)\$19 child/senior(2 - 11 & 60+) Fee includes entry & transportation  
Call the Recreation Department to sign up today! 248-691-7555*



## BENEFITS

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margin of 7,541 to 6,524, a clear-cut majority. These numbers express more than the passage of a ballot proposal, according to City Manager Erik Tungate.

“The results are further proof that Oak Park is an absolutely amazing place where the residents care deeply about their community and its services,” he said. “Our voters have supported millage proposals over the past half-dozen years despite the negative effects of the economy on their personal finances. Even though the economic environment has steadily declined they have consistently sacrificed by approving additional levies.

“The passage of Proposal 2012-05 is probably the most remarkable testimonial yet to residents’ commitment to Oak Park. It represents a substantial investment of dollars over seven consecutive years in an era when many residents are in difficult financial situations.

“Similarly, we are making commitments to our residents. We do not intend to ask for more millage increases in the foreseeable future. We will continue to provide the very best and most efficient citizen services possible, and the additional revenue generated by the ‘yes’ vote will enable us to improve in many areas. We will hire more Public Safety officers as conditions allow, in accordance with the priorities set by the people of Oak Park.

“Our voters made sure they were fully informed about every detail of the proposal. I, the Public Safety Director,



other administrators and municipal elected officials met with numerous residents at a series of town hall meetings we sponsored for weeks before the election, as well as at multiple neighborhood block club meetings. As a result, they really stepped up to the plate for their community. We are going to keep doing the same for them.”

The projected first-year (beginning next summer) levy is projected at just less than 6.5 mills, which represents slightly more than \$200 for the average Oak Park home. The proposal language limits the life of the annual levy to seven years. It also caps the annual levy at the amount required to fund the Public Safety pension system, up to a maximum of 7 mills. The maximum will not necessarily be reached in any given year. By law, the revenue generated by the associated levy cannot be used for any other purpose.

## How to help when a water main breaks



When temperatures plummet to typical winter levels public service workers will be responding to more frequent water main breaks around the community than during any other time of the year. How quickly repair work can be started, day or night, depends on how promptly the DPW learns of a problem. And THAT time factor often depends on residents.

“Communication between the community and the City is very helpful in these situations,” said DPW Director Kevin Yee. “We want any resident who believes there might be a water main break in his or her neigh-

borhood to please notify us as soon as possible. If there is no repair team at the site when you notice what appears to be a break that might mean we aren’t yet aware of the problem.”

The DPW phone number is 248-691-7497. At times other than during the department’s regular business hours, 7 a.m.-4 p.m. weekdays, residents are requested to call the Public Safety Department’s non-emergency line, 248-691-7447. An officer will be dispatched to the scene and will immediately inform DPW officials if a break is confirmed.





## MANAGER

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cial path for the future, it doesn't mean we'll stop our pursuit to find additional cost savings and efficiencies throughout city hall. We owe you the utmost diligence and the work has already started. As evidence of that, I wanted to let you know that I recently refinanced street bonds that you authorized back in 2003. As a result of the refinancing, we'll be saving you an additional \$120,000 a year in interest payments. While that won't solve all of our problems overnight, it's a prime example of the many steps we're taking to save you money.

The November 6 election was difficult to say the least. Thank you for your patience and commitment to exercise your right to vote despite long lines at the polls that at times exceeded a two hour wait. As far as future elections are concerned, we're committed to providing you with a better voting experience, and over the next few months we'll be evaluating our election process for ways to improve service and reduce wait times. I'll be reporting on these process improvements as they're developed.

Despite the long wait times, the election also offered several highlights:

- More than half of Oak Park registered voters participated in the election; 15,427 voters – nearly 64.6% of those registered cast ballots.
- A dedicated team of more than 95 election workers helped conduct an election that I'm confident was both transparent and accurate.
- Increased absentee voting can help reduce wait times, and this year, 4,002 voters chose that option.

As always, I welcome your feedback and suggestions. The future has never been brighter for the City of Oak Park.

Again, **THANK YOU** for your support!

Respectfully,



Erik Tungate  
City Manager

## Scofflaws hinder snow-clearing efforts



***“When a snow emergency is announced, all vehicles must be removed from the streets and parked in drive-ways or the City’s emergency lots.”***

This long-standing Oak Park ordinance is virtually identical to versions in municipalities throughout the region because it is true everywhere that effective snow plowing depends on citizen cooperation. Fortunately, the majority of this community's residents make sure they're part of the solution when heavy snowfalls cause problems. Unfortunately, too many others are part of the problem.

“Our snowplow operators always try to do the best job they can on every neighborhood street, as well as the city's main roads,” said DPW Foreman Gary Shermetaro. “The most thorough clearing is only possible where they can work from curb-to-curb. This simply cannot be done on any part of any street on which vehicles remain parked at the curb.

“Residents who ignore the snow emergency ordinance prevent efficient plowing and cause situations that are at best inconvenient and can actually become hazardous. As just one example, plowed-in cars can create obstacles to Public Safety fire trucks. There are many reasons why failure to cooperate is unfair to everyone who lives along and/or drives

on the street.”

Shermetaro points out that a relatively small number of scofflaws can severely hamper the efforts of professional crews that work overtime with state-of-the-art equipment to make the community's roadways safer and more navigable following snowstorms. He puts special emphasis on the word relatively.

“While the number of people who ignore the ordinance makes up a minority of the overall population, it's far too high,” he declared. “These residents make impossible for our workers to clear the streets as well as everyone wants and needs. They apparently think it's not a big deal to do so, but it definitely is important. We have received an increasing volume of complaints from people all around the community about others being bad neighbors and causing problems by leaving vehicles at curbside that have to be plowed around.”

Being considerate to neighbors should be reason enough to get cars off the streets during heavy snowfalls, but it's not the only incentive. In recent winters Public Safety officers have intensified their enforcement of the regulation, issuing tickets and, in some cases, having vehicles towed at owners' expense.

“No matter what is required to motivate folks to obey the ordinance, the bottom line is that compliance helps the DPW do a better job for the entire community,” Shermetaro said. “Citizen cooperation makes a major positive difference!”

***NOTE: When a snow emergency declaration is issued by the DPW it is immediately posted on OPTV-15 & 16, the City's web page (ci.oak-park.mi.us) and social media outlets. The information also is sent to all metro area TV and radio stations.***

## Power Outages: They can happen here!

It has been nearly a decade since the most widespread and long-lasting loss of electricity affected the lives of tens of millions of Americans, but no one should have forgotten the essential lessons learned when that event darkened the entire northeast quadrant of the country.



According to the Public Safety Department, from a resident's perspective, the two most important "takeaways" from the summer of 2003 are these: 1- Major and potentially dangerous power outages can happen here; 2- The most effective way of coping with such an event is to be prepared in advance. Regarding the first point, it should be understood that a power outage does not have to be massive in scope to cause big problems. This area actually has experienced a number of localized outages over the years which, though dwarfed by the 2003 disaster, created dangerous conditions and major inconveniences. These incidents have resulted from ice storms, heavy snowfalls, high winds and combinations of all three phenomena.



Winter is the season when outages are most common and tend to be more hazardous than those experienced at other times of the year. Situations arise that are unique to cold weather, such as denying families the ability to heat their homes during periods of extremely low temperatures. People respond to this and other challenges in ways that can seriously threaten family safety, including taking steps that increase the potential for home fires.

Regarding the need to be prepared, the department has provided a list of specific measures residents can put into place in order to cope as safely as possible with a power failure that occurs during extreme winter weather. Residents should:

- Maintain emergency food and water supplies in a home shelter, and keep a battery-powered radio and a supply of

extra batteries in the same location.

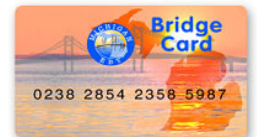
- Keep multiple flashlights around the house, along with extra batteries, in locations that are known by all family members; especially in bedrooms.
- Make certain that everyone knows NOT to use candles for light during an outage – flashlights only!
- Know in advance how to properly connect any generator that you use, and how to operate it according to manufacturer's instructions. Decide how and where to locate the generator, keeping in mind that it should never be used inside the house.
- Keep a screen in front of any fireplace you will use during a winter power outage, so you will be sure of preventing sparks from escaping into the living area.

Questions about power outage preparation can be directed to Public Safety's Community Programs Coordinator at 248-691-7504.

## Food program application help available

<http://www.mibridges.michigan.gov/access/>

Residents who believe they might be eligible for Michigan's "Food Assistance Program" ("food stamps" or Bridge Card) but have not yet applied can get help at the Library. Trained volunteers from Forgotten Harvest, a non-profit organization located in Oak Park, are available on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month to help individuals apply.



Appointments are recommended and can be arranged by calling 248-210-4159. Initial appointments are at noon, final appointments are at 6 p.m. Applicants also can walk in to seek assistance during these same hours on the specified days.

The Library's reference desk has large white folders listing the information that is needed for making applications. The volunteers use state-issued laptops to help people apply, using one of the Library's study rooms that are located in the computer lab.

Anyone needing help with emergency food can call Forgotten Harvest's main number, 248 967-1500, and then dial "0" during the recorded message. Forgotten Harvest's staff will provide information about emergency food distribution sites that are located near callers' homes.

## Where to report problem events

- To report a *downed power line*, notify **Public Safety** by calling **9-1-1**.
- For all information about repair progress only call **DTE Energy** at **800-477-4747**.
- To report a *water main break*, between 7:30 am and 4 pm Monday through Thursday call the **DPW** at **248-691-7497**. During any other time period call **Public Safety** at **248-691-7447**.
- To report a suspected *gas leak*, call **Consumers Energy** at **800-477-5050** (web page is [www.consumersenergy.com](http://www.consumersenergy.com)).

## STORY TIME

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dress up in their fanciest clothes just for fun,” explained Youth Librarian Catherine Ricard. “Because of the season everyone will be bundled up in layers of heavy clothing, but we expect to see some really fancy duds once the jackets and sweaters come off.”

This will be a stand-alone edition of the popular program. It will be conducted on a drop-in basis – no registration necessary – unlike the multiple-session versions that are scheduled at various times through the year. All Story Times are cost-free and all feature rhymes, movement and a fun craft, in addition to stories. The Dec. 20 craft will, (of course), highlight all kinds of fancy clothing.

“Story time programs are excellent opportunities for kids to build their vocabulary and letter knowledge,” Ms. Ricard said. “They are a fun way to develop these important early literacy skills.”

*Questions should be directed to 248-691-7480.*



# Scam Alert



## Phony disaster relief appeals make dishonorable "top ten"

Every year consumer advocacy and anti-fraud organizations publish lists of the recent most frequently reported swindles. Some are top-10, others are top-5 and a few are dirty dozen. The most commonly committed scams appear on all lists.

In late 2012, in the wake of mass devastation wreaked by Hurricane Sandy on the east coast, it should be no surprise to anyone that fake fund-raising campaigns to supposedly help the huge storm's victims have put the category of disaster relief swindles on every current dishonor roll.

Historically, thousands of Americans have responded to calls for assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters, and there always have been unscrupulous people who take selfish advantage of this urge to help when one occurs. Right now there are numerous appeals for donations to help people in New York and New Jersey and the FBI and other agencies have issued a warning that many of these are fraudulent.

Here is what experts say you should be aware of whenever you receive an appeal to assist disaster victims:

“In a time of need, money is usually the best possible type of donation to provide. Scammers know this and they also know the sympathetic nature of most Americans makes many of those people vulnerable. Often these cheaters will use the Internet, sending out e-mails with a link to a fake web site that asks you to make a donation. If you access the site you'll be asked to use your credit card or debit card on-line.

“If you provide such details as your card number the scammers likely will have enough information to gain access to your money. As a result, no one will benefit except the crooks behind the phony charity. You will lose whatever funds they can get to, and none of it will ever be donated to the cause you wish to support.

“Keep in mind that when a request for a disaster relief donation comes via e-mail, it probably is a scam. If you

want to help the victims of Hurricane Sandy, for example, take the time to research a legitimate relief fund before donating any money.”

### Beware scams based in honest online dating sites

Another current top-10 swindle is especially insidious because it operates with the context of legitimate Internet operations: dating web sites. More specifically, it uses honest, well meaning people-connecting businesses to hook potential victims.

Participants in online dating web sites provide personal profiles for prospective dating partners and thereby gain access to hundreds of other profiles posted by men and women who take the same step. Meanwhile, this also gives online scammers access to all of the members!

The typical online dating swindle depends on a bond developing between a perpetrator and another member. If such a connection grows stronger over time, the intended victim becomes increasingly vulnerable. The scammer, during the same time span, will indicate that he or she is well-off financially. At some point, he or she e-mail or telephone the target while “out of the country on business” and ask for a cash loan in order to take care of a few things. The scam begins in earnest when that person asks to have the money wired.

Obviously, the key is establishing trust, which normally has reached a relatively high level by the time the swindle is initiated. It is difficult for someone to believe that the person he or she has made a connection with is running a scam.

There can be a lot to gain from participating in dating web sites, but there also can be a lot to lose -- both financially and emotionally -- if you connect with the wrong person. The key to cutting your losses, at least on the financial side, is to be very cautious about a request from an online dating partner for you to wire money!



# Residents are responsible for sidewalk clearing

## on personal/residential propertiesv



The Code Assistance Division has issued a reminder that residents are responsible for the removal of snow and ice from their own sidewalks. This requirement is specified in a decades-old ordinance which states that:

- When a snowfall stops during daylight hours, snow and ice must be removed within 12 hours.
- When a snowfall stops during nighttime, snow and ice must be removed by 6pm the following day.

The regulation, as is the case in all neighboring cities, is aimed at enhancing pedestrian safety, explains Code Assistance Officer Kevin Jones.

“The basic purpose is safety; no one wants people slipping and getting hurt, and cleaning frozen precipitation off the sidewalks obviously cuts way down on that possibility,” he said. “Failure to comply with the ordinance may result in a citation being written and/or the City using a contractor to do the job at the expense of the property owner.

“Our primary focus is on informing residents, not taking punitive action. Code Assistance officers survey every area of the community after a snowfall to check for compliance. Wherever it’s appropriate we post notices of non-compliance, along with explanatory language. We then re-check those properties 24 hours later. Our procedure gives everyone a chance to understand the ordinance and its purpose, and an opportunity to take the necessary action.”

“The process acknowledges that some residents must deal with special circumstances that make it difficult for them to personally take care of sidewalk clearance. We recommend that people who physically cannot or should not clear their sidewalks themselves arrange in advance for neighborhood kids or a service to take care of it. Our approach is scheduled to enable residents to work that out.”



**NOTE:** Some residents can take advantage of a home chore service that is administered through the Senior Division of the Department of Recreation. A federally-funded program provides, among other services, snow removal to income-qualified residents age 62 and above. Disabled residents must meet income guidelines and also provide a physician’s letter defining their disability. Eligibility details and other pertinent information can be obtained by calling 248-691-7555. All services are subject to availability of program funds.

## COMMUNITY HAPPENINGS

### Monday, December 1

*Curbside leaf pickup ends*

### Monday, December 3

*City Council Mtg.*

Council convenes at City Hall in the council chambers. Regularly scheduled meetings begin at 7pm. Find info via the City web site:

[ci.oak-park.mi.us/](http://ci.oak-park.mi.us/)

### Wednesday, December 12

*Friends of the Library Mtg.*

Join fellow residents in an effort to support, sponsor, plan fun and educational programs, as well as coordinate annual book sales, for the Oak Park Library.

Community Center Meeting Room #5 at 7pm

### Friday, December 14

*Yard waste pick-up ends*

### Monday, December 17

*Lights before Christmas*

See page 1 of this Branch issue, or *call the Rec. Dept.*

**248-691-7555**

### Monday, December 17

*City Council Mtg.*

Council convenes at City Hall in the council chambers. Regularly scheduled meetings begin at 7pm. Find info via the City web site:

[ci.oak-park.mi.us/](http://ci.oak-park.mi.us/)

### December 24 - 25

*Christmas Observance*

City offices will be closed. No trash pick-up today. Trash pick-up delayed by one day this week.

### Dec. 31 - Jan. 1

*New Year's Observance*

City offices will be closed. No trash pick-up today. Trash pick-up delayed by one day this week.

Have a  
**"Community Happening"**  
 we should spotlight?

(eg. community groups, block club mtgs., etc.)

*Email us at:*

**[oakpark@ci.oak-park.mi.us](mailto:oakpark@ci.oak-park.mi.us)**