



Winterfest: Everyone is invited to Oak Park's seasonal party

When the initial Winterfest was designed by the Recreation Department in 1995 no one anticipated that it would become an every-January feature. To the contrary, the event was considered just another component in a series of special programs presented throughout that year to commemorate the City's 50th anniversary.

Because popular demand always has been a major factor in determining the department's menu of events for the community, the Winterfest schedule soon was transformed from "one and done" to "annual fun."

This year's edition, set from 1 to 3 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 20, will be the 18th consecutive. As always, all residents are invited to participate, everything is free of charge, and there's plenty of "everything" for all ages to enjoy: attractions and activities both outdoors -- on the lawn area on the west side of the Community Center and in Shepherd Park -- and indoors.

"We'll have bonfires and s'mores, horse-drawn sleigh rides, a petting farm and an ice-carving demonstration," said Recreation Director Cristin Spiller. "There will be

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New Library Series

focus: human differences, similarities

Some essential questions about the fundamental characteristics that are shared by different groups within the human family – and about diversity – will be addressed by a Library workshop series, designed for children ages 6 through 11, in the coming weeks.

For the third consecutive year Oak Park's literary and cultural center is participating with the University of

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Manager's Monthly Bulletin

Erik Tungate

By approving Proposal 2012-05, you have given us a second chance to fix our finances and build a solid foundation for the future. With that in mind, I wanted to let you know I am doing everything possible to make sure our City runs as cost effectively as possible. That means we are executing cost savings across the

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Michigan Museum of Natural History in the popular Family Reading and Science program. The museum, which is in Ann Arbor, is hosting the American Anthropological Association's exhibit, *Race: Are we so different?* now through May. The Library series is directly associated with the exhibit and its purpose, said Youth Services Librarian Catherine Ricard.

"The exhibit is designed to spark conversations about race, race relations and social justice," she explained. "The Family Reading and Science workshops follow this theme with a focus on the question, 'What is culture?' They explore the science behind things that are seen cross-culturally, such as music and food. The series is titled, *Just Like Us? Exploring Culture, Biology and the human experience*.

"These are hands-on educational sessions, structured

for children in the specified age range. Participants must be accompanied by an adult."

Following are the dates and respective themes of the three workshops, all of which are scheduled at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays. Note that each of these will be presented in the Community Center:

Jan. 23 – *"What Makes Us Different? What Makes Us the Same?"*

Feb. 20 – *"Everybody Cooks"*

Mar. 20 – *"Can You Feel the Beat?"*

The series will close out with a Discovery Day field trip on Saturday, March 23 to the museum in Ann Arbor, Ms. Ricard said.

"This is done every year and it's an exciting and educational outing for ages 6 through 100. There are many enriching hands-on activities and games designed for families. We include free round trip transportation, from the Library.

NOTE: Registration is available at the Library and by phone (691-7480). Children may be signed up for any or all of the workshops, but they must be registered because space is limited.

Learning Together program starts them REALLY young!

A number of Library events and activities over the years have been structured to include very small children. Other than for occasional special swimming classes though, has there ever been one geared for kids from infants to 3-year-olds?

There is just such a program coming in the near future. It's a series of six cost-free gatherings called Learning Together Play groups and the target age range is birth through 3 years.

"These play groups are designed to increase parent-to-child, parent-to-parent and child-to-child interaction, and to promote literacy and learning activities," said Youth Services Librarian, Catherine Ricard. "Included are 90 minutes of hands-on activities such as stories, songs, music and dancing. Parents will develop their understanding of how children learn; their physical abilities, relationships, sense of self, communication and understanding of the world.

"A parent educator leads the program, which is presented by Great Parents, Great Start of Oakland. And, of course, every young participant must be accompanied by a parent."

Sessions are scheduled on Thursdays from 10 to

11:30am on the following dates: January 31; February 7, 14, 21 and 28; March 7. Pre-registration is required and space is "very limited," Ms. Ricard cautioned. To sign up for all six sessions, parents should call Jean Locque of Great Parents, Great Start at 248-209-2519.

New Morning Story Times scheduled

The Library has announced the dates of upcoming Story Times for children ages 2 through 6 accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

All sessions in the next morning series are slated for 11-11:45am on Tuesdays, January 22 through February 19. Registration begins January 2 and is required for these sessions.

A drop-in evening edition is offered at 6:30pm on Thursday, January 17. No registration is required.

Story Times, in addition to specially-selected tales read by the youth librarian, also feature rhymes and other activities.

Each of these programs are free of charge.

City Hall construction on schedule as 2013 begins



Contractors are continuing to make excellent progress in every phase of construction as the new City Hall/Public Safety Building takes shape just west of the 55-year-old edifice it will replace.

That is the “bottom line” message in a year-end report submitted in December by Kevin Yee, Director of Public Works/City Engineer, to City Manager Erik Tungate. It means that the project is advancing on pace to reach completion “as targeted,” in August of 2013.

In a subsequent update, Yee said that: “The steel contractors have finished and the roofing work will be done in early January, if it hasn’t already been completed by the time this edition of The Branch is posted on our website. The masonry work has begun on the front (south side) of the structure and will continue over much of the winter.

“In specific terms, the entire steel skeleton of the building, including the roof decking, is now in place and the bricks and blocks that will flesh it out, so to speak, are steadily being added. The masonry activity will be ongoing except during periods of falling rain or snow.

Less visible to passersby but equally crucial to construction progress is the underground utility work being conducted in the rear of the building. This phase, which primarily involves water and sewer lines, is due for completion by the end of January. Electrical utility work has already been finished.

Meanwhile, the construction management firm for the project is “winterizing” the site by placing specifically designed heavy-duty plastic wrap over all window openings in order to enclose the structure against the seasonal weather elements.

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ballooning, face-painting, entertainment and a family photo booth inside the building. Refreshments and hot chili will be available to everyone. Raffle prizes will be awarded, including Pistons, Tigers and Red Wings tickets.

“Residents are familiar with our department’s motto, ‘We have something for everyone!’ Winterfest exemplifies this pledge and it has throughout its history. The program always has been an outstanding family event and this tradition continues January 20.”

Further information can be obtained by calling (248) 691-7555 or visiting www.ci.oak-park.mi.us.

Community Center upgrades nearing finish line

Internal and external improvements to the Community Center, funded by the same voter-approved bond issue as the new City Hall/Public Safety Building project, will be completed before Winterfest is staged at the location on Sunday, January 20.

Yee reported that the “phase-one” area of the refurbishment program is now open. This comprises the south (front) entrance, main service counter, employee area, rooms 1 and 3, and the building’s easternmost public restrooms. He said a few finishing touches are being applied to the south entrance vestibule and several other minor items are being addressed that also will be ready for Winterfest.

“The work in the main area of the building, including rooms A and B, is finishing up, except for the smaller rooms at the east end, near the Library,” he said.

His year-end construction report was capped off by the following prediction: “...I still expect a reducing change order at the end of this project of approximately \$20,000, bring the construction cost well below the budgeted amount.”

Oak Park Recreation Presents:

Winterfest 2013

Sunday
January 20
1-3pm

Everything is FREE!

Event will be held Indoors & Outdoors

Oak Park Community Center

14300 Oak Park Blvd.

Activities Include:

**** Bon Fire & S'mores * Ice carving Demonstration *
*Ballooning & Face Painting * Horse-drawn Sleigh Rides*
*Entertainment * Refreshments * Chili *
*Petting Farm * Family Photo Booth *
Raffle prizes (Detroit Red Wings, Tigers, Pistons)
* and more!****



Scam Alert



New Year, new tax season, new round of fraud efforts

Most people associate the beginning of a new year with getting a fresh start in positive ways, such as pledging to shape up physically and to quit bad habits. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous people view the annual changeover as a fresh opportunity to perpetrate certain swindles.

For example, con artists who specialize in offering fraudulent services related to income tax payments begin actively preying on potential victims every January and continue their nefarious efforts through mid-April. While they consider any adult of any age to be “fair game,” their primary targets are senior citizens.

Here, according to expert sources including Internal Revenue Service authorities, are four of the currently most prevalent schemes that taxpayers should be prepared to defend against:

- In a new IRS scam aimed at seniors, the fakers tell the victim they can get his or her Social Security payroll taxes refunded for an up front fee based on the size of the rebate, plus a percentage of the refund. Naturally, they claim it will be a big refund and will inflate their “fee” to match it, producing and filling in a tax form as alleged evidence. NOTE: The law doesn't allow a refund of taxes paid into Social Security and taxpayers that fall for the con may end up having to pay penalties for filing a fraudulent return.
- Many intended victims will receive a “we owe you money” e-mail that supposedly comes from the Internal Revenue Service. The typical subject line reads something like “Tax notification” or “2007 fiscal activity refund” and invites you to click on a link that takes you to what appears to be a genuine IRS website. However, the site is an IRS scam which, as usual, asks for personal details. Importantly, it can be quickly identified as fake. It has the same links as IRS pages, but when you click on them the page simply refreshes instead of taking you to the link. NOTE: The IRS does not send out refunds this way. If the IRS wants to get in touch, it sends a letter. The only way it collects your bank account details is if you choose to put them in your tax return. Period!
- Another tax scam offers a reward to you for filing your return early rather than alleging that you will be paid a refund. A phone caller will ask for bank details. NOTE: Not only does the IRS not seek such details by phone, it also does not pay rewards for early returns!
- Yet another currently common sneaky trick is an e-mail that offers taxpayers \$80 for filling an online customer satisfaction survey. Of course, you're expected to enter all your personal details on the form. Don't fall for this

-- it's a scam.

There are many more IRS scams -- more than 1,000 at the last count! Some of them have been around for years, yet still find victims. So, what should you look for that will help you spot one of these swindles? First of all, keep in mind that IRS scammers try in a number of ways to convince you their call or e-mail is genuine. Remember that just because something looks official doesn't mean it is. Here are some of the tricks they use to try to fool you:

1. They invent a phony refund sum that sounds convincing; not too big and not too round. Something like \$134.80 would seem legit. If you click it, all it will bring you is a piece of spyware that installs on your computer.
2. They use forms with numbers similar to those the IRS already uses; with a jumble of numbers and letters, they appear more genuine. However, they are the very opposite of genuine.
3. They use the official IRS logo and, very often, copy whole sections of text from the IRS's website.
4. They use real names and copied signatures of senior IRS people, most recently the Director of IRS Exempt Organizations, or the names of actual independent groups such as the Taxpayer Advocate Service.

Following are some simple guidelines regarding how the IRS operates that will help you avoid tax scams:

- Remember that the only genuine IRS website is www.irs.gov. If any link contained in an e-mail takes you to a page that isn't on this site, then you are not visiting the IRS website. IMPORTANT: You should only type www.irs.gov into your browser yourself and not get there by clicking a link.
- The only e-mail the IRS sends out concern general newsletters, events and that sort of thing. The IRS will never ask for financial information or discuss anything related to individual tax accounts via e-mail.
- The IRS never asks for PIN numbers, passwords or other confidential information for any reason or by any method -- not even face-to-face.
- Tax refunds are claimed through filing an annual tax return not a separate application form.

One final warning for the tax season -- Beware of advance refund loans: Organizations offering to loan you the money that you're expecting to get as a tax refund this year may be perfectly legitimate, but many lenders charge huge rates of interest, plus administration fees, processing fees, and other costs. If you choose to take such a loan, you basically will be paying to borrow your own money.

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board, streamlining City operations, as well as attracting new businesses to improve the City's commercial tax base so the overall burden placed on our residents is lessened as much as possible. Below are some of the highlights of our actions to date:

Cost Savings:

- Refinanced 2003 street bonds saving the taxpayers \$1.8 million over the remainder of the 15 year term.
- Changed our health care provider removing unnecessary bureaucracy and saving the City as much as \$400,000 a year.
- Investigating and implementing ways to share services with nearby communities (i.e., payroll, recreation, etc.).

Streamlining City operations:

- Reorganizing City staff to align them to needs of the community as determined by the COBALT survey conducted earlier this year.
- Creating a Human Resources office to eliminate unnecessary processes in various departments.

Business Attraction:

- Hired an Economic Development Director beginning in mid-January who will do the following:
 1. Create a business attraction plan to redevelop empty storefronts and the 100 acre parcel located at 8 Mile and Greenfield.

Senior Roundup

Programs spotlight health, anti-fraud action

The 50-Up Club is starting this year with programs addressing two topics that are crucial to its members throughout every year -- taking steps for better health and against scams.

A Personal Action Toward Health (PATH) workshop is scheduled from 9:30am to noon on Mondays, beginning January 14 and continuing through February 18. Registration for the cost-free program, which is sponsored by the National Kidney Foundation, is due by January 7. The Senior Center describes it as follows:

"PATH is for you if you or someone you know is living with ongoing health problems such as diabetes, anxiety, cancer, arthritis, hypertension or kidney disease. This six-week workshop is designed to provide the skills and confidence needed by people with lifelong health conditions to improve their health, manage their symptoms, and be better equipped to maintain normal activities."

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).

2. Organize and work with existing Oak Park business owners to improve their storefronts.

Needless to say, we are doing everything we can to improve our operations while maintaining our focus on reducing costs.

Your support is greatly appreciated. As always, I welcome your feedback and suggestions.



Respectfully,

Erik Tungate, City Manager

On Thursday, January 10, participants in a free program will learn how to protect themselves against swindlers and con artists. Fraud and Identity Theft Prevention, scheduled from 9:30 to 10:30am, will provide information about multiple common types of fraud schemes that frequently target seniors. Categories include work-at-home opportunities, foreign lotteries, home improvement, "secret shopper" and other check scams, charities and medical fraud. Information about protecting your identity and safeguarding personal information also will be covered.

Interested residents are asked to sign up by January 7.

Day trips are bound for a variety of destinations

Reservations are being accepted for four day trips to locations around the metro featuring a wide range of attractions. Here are the basic details, courtesy of the Senior Center:

- **Jan. 17 to the Detroit Institute of Arts for the Faberge Exhibit** – "Discover the story behind the renowned House of Faberge, the luxury brand created by preeminent jeweler Karl Faberge. The exhibition comprises

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Daddy-Daughter Dance will have a royal touch

"Princess on Parade"



The Recreation Department's annual social affair that's exclusively for dads and their little girls has an especially exclusive concept this year. The theme of the February 8, 2013 Daddy-Daughter Dance at the Community Center is "Princess on Parade."

Designed for fathers to "enjoy an enchanting evening (from 6 to 8pm) with the little princess in their lives," the traditional Valentine's Day-related event will feature

carnations, keepsakes, sweet treats and special dances for all couples. Instruction will be available from Living Arts Dance Company and music will be provided by Liquid Entertainment. The \$25 per couple fee also includes one 4x6-inch photograph per couple. There is a surcharge of \$10 for each additional participating "princess" accompanying a dad.

Questions should be directed to 248-691-7555.

COMMUNITY HAPPENINGS

Tuesday, January 1

New Year's Observance
City Offices Closed
Trash pick-up delayed by one day this week.

Monday, January 7

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/

Wednesday, January 9

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, January 11

Brush pick-up for holiday trees ends

Sunday, January 20

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See page 1 of this Branch issue, or *call the Rec. Dept.*
248-691-7555

Monday, January 21

Martin Luther King Jr. Day
City Offices Closed
City Council Mtg. rescheduled to Tuesday, January 22 at 7pm.

Tuesday, January 22

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/

Wednesday, January 23

Arts & Cultural Comm.
Join fellow residents in an effort to study & recommend plans for City-wide cultural programs.
Community Center Meeting Room #5 at 7pm

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more than 200 precious objects." The \$26 cost includes round-trip transportation leaving the Community Center at 9:30am and returning 2:30pm, plus a docent talk and audio tour.

- **Feb. 12 to Caesars Windsor** – The casino package includes transportation, a free lunch buffet or a \$15 coin voucher, coffee, pastries and special Mardi Gras entertainment. The bus leaves at 10am and returns at 5:45pm, the cost is \$23. NOTE: Each participant must have personal identification, in the form of a passport or enhanced driver's license, to present at the border.
- **Feb. 21 to the Play 7 Center for the Performing Arts, West Bloomfield** – The performance will be based on the true story of Minerva Roulhac, who was born in Florida in 1885, orphaned five years later, then raised in a close-knit African-American community. Because of her very light complexion she was able to "pass as white," and this is the story of the choices she made. The cost is \$26. Transportation departs at 6:15pm and returns at 10:15pm.
- **Feb. 28 to the Oakland University Musical Theater** – Included in the \$32 cost arte dinner at the quaint Victorian Tea Room, a dance and musical performance at Meadowbrook Estate, and transportation. The trip departs at 2:45pm and returns to the Community Center at 8:15pm.

Further information about these programs and trips can be obtained by calling **248-691-7577**.