

News from Small Town (Tawas)

Middle America

Issue #13

October 28, 2022

By Michael Gilfix

Earthquake shakes Gilfix office in Palo Alto!

At about 11:45 am on Tuesday, October 25, I was working on this issue of “News from Small Town Middle America”. Suddenly, our building was shaking and an earthquake alarm went off. I was amazed at how unfazed I was. The shaking was sizeable, but nothing catastrophic, at least around here.

We are always amused at how non-Californians view our earthquake susceptibility. We have no hurricanes, no tornados. Yes, we have wildfires, but other parts of the country are catching up with us.

On the serious side, we do worry that there will someday be a big one. Our heads are not in the sand, but we are ill-equipped to deal with it when it happens.

In the meantime, wherever you live, watch out for hurricanes, flooding, fires, and other vagaries of life. At the same time, revel in your community, your friends, and your health.

Iosco County News Herald – October 19, 2022

“Local News Matters”

On every issue of the newspaper on page one, this phrase appears in red.

I could not agree more. Local news touches us directly, it gives us a sense of community. Hats off to small town newspapers!

Autumn Colors Match the Best in the Nation

This edition of the newspaper includes a number of photos of the AuSable river from the Michigan-famous Lumberman’s Monument and from the High Banks. The High Banks is a steep but climbable 200 foot slope of sand where beer parties abounded in my high school days. Our drink of the day, remarkably, was Pabst Blue Ribbon. Remarkably, PBR continues to be a favored drink of America’s beer drinking youth.

On one notable Saturday night, I was among a group of beer drinking party goers who were caught by the police. Rather than arrest and jail time, we were compelled to return

the next day and clean up the multitude of beer bottles that were thrown into the woods. In retrospect, that was a wise police decision. Setting aside underage drinking (!), the punishment nicely fit the crime.

Here is a photo of the AuSable River from the Lumberman's Monument/High Banks



Ongoing Talks about the Marijuana Ordinance

There is remarkably little resistance to a Tawas City ordinance that would permit and regulate marijuana facilities. One insightful comment: "It's a legal product in our state and people sell it illegal anyways. Also, no one is getting tax money from the black market." My guess is that each small city in the county will have two or three outlets.

Here is an insight from California: the black market continues to abound because legal outlets have to charge extremely high taxes.

County Commissioner Arrested for "Impersonating an Officer"

The arrested individual has many legitimate links to police and fire departments, but took it upon himself to say that he was a deputy with the sheriff's office when a minor incident on a school bus took place. The sheriff busted him.

Increased Taxes (Millage) for Police is not Getting Popular Support

Apparently, there will be a fourth effort to raise property taxes to support the county sheriff's office and the county prosecutor's office. Voters shot down similar proposals twice in 2020 and again in August 2022. The county is experiencing staff shortages, as well as budget shortcomings, as are police departments all over the nation. In Iosco County, however, it is much less an anti-police motivation than anti tax.

High School Creates a Girl's Golf Team; Wherefor Academics

As every issue of the newspaper illustrates, girls sports are highlighted, encouraged, and honored with stories, photos, and personality highlights in every issue.

The second section of the newspaper is entitled "Iosco's High School Sports." Typical of small town newspapers, sports is featured. Sports coverage sells newspapers because so many high school students have their photos in the newspaper as members of a volleyball, basketball, football, or other sports team.

For an educationally ideal world, similar focus would be placed on academic achievements. The local high school has a 92% graduation rate, which is very good, and a high percentage go off to good colleges.

Okay, I admit it: it's hard to get attention with a photo of a couple of straight A students studying or somehow exhibiting their success. This is a perennial problem all over the nation with no end in sight.

Local Veterans Obtain Grave Markers and American Flags

The county Veteran's Affairs Service Officer obtained a grant to purchase 1,100 new American flags and 600 brass grave marker/flag holders to be placed on graves of veterans in the county. The article stresses that the flags and the holders were made in the United States. "I could have paid less for [other] American flags but they were made in China."

There is ongoing, visible support for veterans and serving in the military in this community, as is the case, perhaps disproportionately, in small towns as well as in the south. This compares with attitudes in so many urban communities where military service is disfavored.

\$5,000 for 24 Hour Police Protection

The deal between the Tawas City Police Department (TCPD) and Alabaster Township is now cemented. The officers will now have 22 additional square miles to patrol. This seems like a great deal for the Alabaster Township – 24/7 police coverage for \$5,000 a year. Interestingly, the police chief sees this "as a very positive step for the TCPD, as well as employee morale".

Local Politics

The Sunrise Side Republicans Women's Club met at the pizzeria in Oscoda on October 25. A full page ad solicits votes for Democrats locally and throughout the state. The last issue of the newspaper had an even larger ad for Republican candidates. And remember: the newspaper cut off any letters to the editor about politics or candidates until after the election.

US Gypsum Food Drive in Alabaster – 9th Annual; My once-employer

Hunger is very real in the community. About half of the kids in high school qualify for free lunches, based on economic status. This is one of many local, volunteer steps taken to address the problem.

One of my many jobs as a teenager was working in the lab at US Gypsum in Alabaster. I had the midnight/All-night shift where I took samples of gypsum ore off the conveyer belt

and tested the samples to be sure the quality met standards. I used my quiet hours to read, study Russian, and feel sorry for myself about how boring it was. Yet, it was one of the best jobs in town.

County Seeks Bids for Snow Removal Services

Wow, does this bring back memories! As a kid, we eagerly welcomed heavy snowfall. Not only would the schools be closed, but my friend Jimmy and I could shovel sidewalks for a quarter. Yet, I am happy to be spared snow days here in California.

Fishing Report

While fishing off the pier was slow, anglers had success with Walleye and Perch “inside the bay near Jerry’s Marina.”

The Goal of my Tawas News is to educate and amuse you about my home town, East Tawas, Michigan. It is to remind you that small towns still thrive in America, that they are sometimes struggling, often vibrant. It is based on my hometown weekly newspaper, personal memories, and occasional, very personal observations.

The Inspiration: The inspiration was Garrison Keillor’s “News from Lake Wobegon” on his NPR show, Prairie Home Companion. Lake Wobegon was fictional, quietly poignant and lol enjoyable.

Tawas is not fictional; it is very real. It is similar to Lake Wobegon in many ways – the farmers, the pastors, the community where everybody knows everybody’s business.

The town of East Tawas is located on Lake Huron on the lower peninsula about 110 miles north of Flint, Michigan. The population is around 2,723. It hasn’t grown much from my childhood in the 50’s and 60’s. The adjacent town of Tawas City has a population of about 1,726. Why 2 separate towns? Don’t ask.

So, enjoy, and let me know what you think. Share it with friends and family. I am happy to add anyone to the mailing list, so send me names.

©2022 by Michael Gilfix, All Rights Reserved
©News From Small Town (Tawas) Middle America