

News from Small Town (Tawas)

Middle America

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About Small Towns and Newspapers

You know you are in a small town when everyone knows all the news before it's published; they just read the hometown paper to see whether the publisher got it right.

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Visibility is a Wonderful Thing – Sports Photos

In the “Winter Sports” section, I counted 185 different kids whose photos are included in multiple team pictures. This includes most of the very small communities in Iosco County.

Think about this. You would never get this kind of attention in any larger urban area.

Honor Roll Visibility in Tawas

No fewer than 33 members of the senior class at Tawas Area High School are on the honor roll for the first quarter. This is approximately 1/3 of the student body. In the 8th grade, 38 students were on the honor roll.

“In my day” (I can’t resist!) about 10% of the student body made the honor roll. Grade inflation? Other motivations?

I suppose this is a good thing since so many students can report honor roll success when applying for scholarships and for college. At the same time, the inclusion of so many students on the honor roll dilutes the honor of being on the honor roll. College admission offices are wise to this.

Short Term Residence Restrictions Are Approved

Short term residence (STR) issues exist in every popular or semi-popular community in the nation. It is a raging topic in Palo Alto, California where I live. Neighbors worry about invading renters who won’t respect the neighborhood. Many housing advocates are concerned that STRs artificially inflate the price of homes while restricting the availability of long term housing for residents.

In Tawas, 30 properties are allowed within the single family residential zoning area that is East Tawas.

Recycling Comes to Town

It is very challenging for small communities to have a viable recycling program. Addressing this, the Board of Commissioners voted to hire a consultant to create a “county-wide recycling program.”

It will be interesting to see if this can work. I am not optimistic. Even larger communities with seemingly vibrant, coordinated recycling programs have trouble maintaining economic viability.

Local Theater is Vibrant

Local theater groups thrive in both Tawas and Oscoda. There is also the Northeastern Academy of Dance which just presented a “whimsical” portrayal of *The Little Prince*.

This is important because it negates the urban-dwellers perception that small communities lack culture. And what’s better than seeing your friends and neighbors on stage dancing, acting, and singing their hearts out?

Brilliant Marketing – Local Cannabis Business

Puff Cannabis continues to get headlines because it developed a program to offer free jackets to local children. We wonder if the jackets are branded with Puff Cannabis?

Local residents are encouraged to drop by a Puff Cannabis outlet in the county to drop off the jackets. They did something similar over Thanksgiving when they had over 1,700 turkeys donated at their various locations in Michigan.

Who knows, someone dropping off a jacket just may be interested in the product. I bet that never occurred to the owners.

What Does “Rural” Really Mean?

Interestingly, 94% of the state of Michigan is considered rural. It is not surprising that only 20% of the population lives in these rural areas.

A new state program is going to invest in economic and agricultural development in rural areas throughout Michigan. Some of this focus will be on Iosco County, which is a prototypical rural area.

Drugs, Drunk Driving, and Drug Related Manslaughter

Many individuals were sentenced by local judges for possession or sale of diverse drugs.

In an all too typical scenario, a 35 year old woman was sentenced to serious prison time for selling drugs that were a mix of fentanyl and pain medication tramadol. The purchaser died as a result.

According to the police, about 1 gram of fentanyl was found in her possession. This amount is apparently divided into 10 packets, each of which sold for at least \$20.

While communities like those in Iosco County have fewer resources than larger areas, they have more than their share of drug sellers and users. Perhaps expanded economic development (see above) will address this, but I doubt it.

4-H Clubs Thrive

There are many 4-H “startups” in the county. For kids ages 5-19, there will be the Small Animal Club (rabbits, poultry, guinea pigs), the Gitty Goat Club, and the Lamb Club.

Iosco County claims victory in the Michigan Big Tree Hunt – an Eastern Cottonwood in the Tawas woods measures 150 inches in circumference (that’s 12 1/5 feet!). A local hunter found it, measured it, and won after reporting its size and sending in a photo.

This makes me think of the giant redwoods that we have and enjoy in our nearby mountains. Some are a thousand years old and are astonishing in their girth, height, and longevity. Not only do they survive fires, fires effectively release seedlings that sprout new trees. Nature is a wonderful thing!

“Straw for Sale”

I expected the cost of a bale of hay in Iosco County to be dramatically less than it is near me in California. It turns out that I am wrong. A bale of hay at a local California distributor costs much less than the advertised price by a farm in Iosco County where the price is \$32 a bale. Ya never know!

Flag Pole Refurbishment is Highlighted

The local American Legion Honor Guard asked for and received help replacing “the rope/pulley system on their 35-foot steel flagpole.” It is located on 2nd Street in Tawas City.

The article featured three large photographs and ample, detailed coverage.

A speaker expressed gratitude “for proudly displaying our country’s flag.”

Notes from the Author

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.