

# NEWS BRIEFS

## Shoveling snow into the street is against the law

The return of winter is a good time to review state laws concerning snow removal.

Michigan’s Vehicle Code section 257.677a notes that residents are prohibited from shoveling snow from their sidewalks, cars or other forms of property into the road. This means that residents must shovel, snow-blow or plow excess snow onto their own property and not a nearby road or shoulder.

Doing so could obscure the vision of drivers and otherwise make the road more dangerous to operate on.

Shoveling or otherwise moving snow onto a roadway in Michigan is subject to a civil fine up to \$100.

Additionally, driving with an obscured windshield is illegal in Michigan. Drivers are expected to clear any snow from their front and rear windshields before hitting the road. It’s also recommended that drivers remove the snow from the roof of their car to ensure other drivers’ visibility and safety on the road.

Drivers who are caught driving with a snow-obscured windshield could be issued a traffic ticket.

## Employers will see tax savings in coming year

Most Michigan businesses will pay less in unemployment insurance taxes in 2025, the Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency (UIA) announced last week.

Effective Jan. 1, registered employers who are current with their filings to UIA will be taxed on a smaller portion of the wages they pay to employees, called a taxable wage base. When calculating first quarter payments, due April 25, qualified employers will be taxed on the first \$9,000 in wages per employee. That is a \$500 reduction in the current taxable wage base of \$9,500, which has been in place since 2021.

“Michigan’s strong, sustained economic growth has resulted in healthy payments into the Trust Fund,” said UIA Director Julia Dale. “Projections show the Trust Fund will continue to be strong for the foreseeable future, and now is the right time to provide tax relief to large and small businesses that are part of the state’s robust business community.”

The lower taxable wage base is triggered when the unemployment insurance Trust Fund balance is at or above \$2.5 billion on June 30 and the next calendar quarter.

## CRUISERS

Continued from Page 1

tinue. “There were still people on the waitlist, and I knew we had to keep it going,” he said.

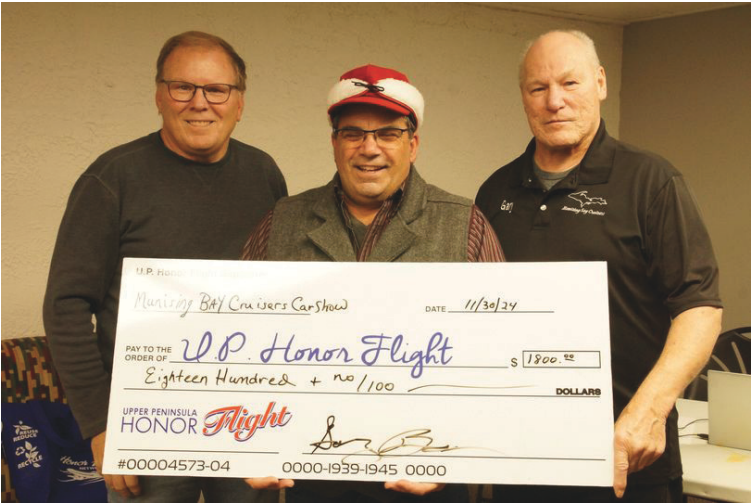
The September 2024 Honor Flight was a memorable event, despite logistical challenges caused by weather delays.

“We had to postpone the flight by a day, and even then, we left Escanaba late,” Knauf said. “Our time in Washington was abbreviated, but the veterans still visited the most important memorials. The dedication of the volunteers ensured the trip was meaningful for everyone involved.”

Knauf stressed the vital role volunteers play in the success of the Honor Flight program. “The amount of support from volunteers is incredible,” he said. From guiding veterans at the airport to narrating tours in Washington, D.C., every detail is handled by individuals committed to honoring those who served.

“This program wouldn’t be possible without the dedication of our volunteers and the generosity of the community,” Knauf said. “They make the Honor Flight what it is — a meaningful tribute to those who served.”

Among the veterans on the September flight was Munising native Pete Lindquist, an Air Force veteran who served from 1966 to 1971 during the Vietnam War. Specializing in electronics, Lindquist worked on navigational aids for aircraft and was stationed



Munising Bay Cruisers

**Munising Bay Cruisers president Gary Bovan, right, and vice president Scott Mitchell, left, present a check for \$1,800 to Scott Knauf of Upper Peninsula Honor Flight.**

at bases in Mississippi, Florida and Okinawa, Japan.

Reflecting on his Honor Flight experience, Lindquist described visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as particularly poignant. “Even though I’d been there 30 years ago, it hit me in the gut,” he said. “Living through that era and seeing the names of so many who served — it’s overwhelming.”

Lindquist also expressed gratitude for the volunteers who made the trip possible. “The number of people who step up to support this program is incredible,” he said. “From the guides in Washington to the people cheering us on at the airport, everyone’s commitment is inspiring.”

Lindquist attended the flight with his son, Joe, and noted the camaraderie among the veterans as another highlight. “Interacting

with others who served during different eras brings back a sense of connection that’s hard to describe,” he said.

The Munising Bay Cruisers’ \$1,800 donation continues their dedication to supporting local veterans. Founded in 2013 by Gary Bovan and Tom Condon, the organization has become a well-respected fixture in the community. Each year, they host the annual Munising Bay Car Show to raise funds for causes benefiting veterans.

“We created the car show to support the All Veterans Memorial and other veteran-focused initiatives,” said Bovan, the group’s president. “Many of our participants are veterans themselves, and this is our way of giving back.”

The 2024 Munising Bay Car Show, held in September, drew

## THWAITES

Continued from Page 1

serves as the manager of Boarders Inn, overseeing daily operations and providing leadership that her colleagues say reflects her dedication and compassion.

“Stephanie’s dedication to Christmas for Kiddos reflects who she is — compassionate, organized and deeply committed to her community,” said Angela Gerou, owner of Boarders Inn.

Outside of work, Thwaites is a proud mother of two sons: Zane, 21, a 2021 graduate of Munising High School, and Drake, 13, who is special needs. Both boys are adored by the community, each one with a heart reflecting their mother.

Brenda Ekberg, a paraprofessional at Munising Public Schools who works with Drake, said, “Stephanie must be a very special and amazing person — otherwise, God wouldn’t have entrusted her with watching over Drake while he’s here.”

You can often find Zane supporting his mother in her community tithing, while Thwaites, her fiancé, Brian DeLongchamp, and Zane all remain active supporters of Munising and the surrounding community.

Thwaites founded Christmas for the Kiddos in 2020 after noticing that several Alger County programs were being transferred to Marquette. “I knew we needed something here that was just for us, for our families and our kids,” Thwaites said. “Munising

is home, and this program had to stay here.”

This year’s program saw 88 families adopted, providing gifts for an estimated 200 children. All elements of the program remain anonymous, preserving the dignity of the families and volunteers involved. Thwaites said that word of the program’s success has spread far beyond Alger County.

“We’ve had requests come in from as far as Iron Mountain, Manistique and even Muskegon,” she said. “But this program has always been — and will remain — focused on families here in Alger County.”

Families picked up their presents this week at the Alger Parks and Recreation Department, which serves as the hub for the program. The department provides a dedicated space for gifts to be dropped off, organized and picked up, ensuring the program runs smoothly.

“We are proud to provide space for Christmas for Kiddos and support Stephanie’s incredible work,” said Bob Wilkinson, a member of the Alger Parks and Recreation board. “The program has become a cornerstone of our community, bringing joy and relief to families during the holidays.”

This year, Thwaites noted a significant shift in the types of gifts requested. “What surprised me most was how much the requests changed,” she said. “Last year, so many kids asked for video games or gaming accessories. This year, it was outdoor things — sleds, basketballs, bikes and sports

equipment. It was pretty amazing to see.”

This shift toward outdoor activities was not the only noticeable change. Thwaites also observed a growing need for basic essentials among families. “What stood out to me was how many families asked for essentials like socks, underwear and bedding,” she said. “It’s humbling and a reminder of how impactful this program is.”

Despite the program’s growth, Thwaites emphasized how seamlessly the community stepped up to meet the increased need. “There were some anxious moments where I wasn’t sure we could keep up with all the requests,” she admitted. “But I should know better by now — our elves always step up, going above and beyond to make sure no family is left behind.”

The program’s elves — volunteers and donors — are an integral part of its success. “One of my favorite parts is seeing the elves’ excitement when they drop off their gifts,” Thwaites said. “Their eyes light up just as much as the families who come to pick up the presents. In a lot of ways, I think the impact on the elves is even greater than on the families. It’s just so heartwarming to see.”

Thwaites’ leadership has long been a source of strength for the Munising community. Prior to Christmas for the Kiddos, she spent five years (2015-19) leading the Thanksgiving dinner initiative, which provided warm meals to anyone in need. “It started small, in the basement of a

participants from across Michigan, Wisconsin and even Canada. Proceeds from the event were used to support the Upper Peninsula Honor Flight.

“Local businesses sponsor awards, and their support is key to making this event possible,” Bovan said. “This year’s donation reflects the generosity of our car owners, sponsors and participants, all of whom are committed to honoring our veterans.”

Knauf expressed his gratitude for the donation, noting how funds like these are used. “Each flight costs about \$140,000,” he said. “This covers airfare, meals, transportation and items like jackets and hats for the veterans. Donations like the one from the Munising Bay Cruisers are essential for keeping this program going.”

Looking ahead, Knauf is planning the first all-woman veteran Honor Flight in the Upper Peninsula, set to take place next year. “We’re accommodating 175 women veterans on this flight,” he said. “The younger veterans will serve as guardians for those who need assistance. It’s going to be a special experience tailored to honor their unique contributions.”

As the Munising Bay Cruisers continue their mission to support veterans, their partnership with the Upper Peninsula Honor Flight exemplifies the power of community in honoring those who served. “This is more than a car show,” Bovan said. “It’s about showing our veterans that their sacrifices are remembered and appreciated.”

church, but by the final year we served 422 meals from the high school kitchen,” she said.

Munising Mayor Christine Berry praised the ripple effect of Thwaites’ work. “Christmas for Kiddos is such a great program that Stephanie Thwaites founded. It’s also so great that so many folks participate in spreading holiday cheer to families in the area.”

The community-wide response to Christmas for the Kiddos reflects the kind of spirit that defines small towns like Munising. From parents and teachers to business owners and volunteers, each person plays a role in ensuring the program’s success.

As families unwrap their gifts this Christmas, Thwaites hopes the program’s true impact will resonate. “It’s not just about the presents,” she said. “It’s about showing people that they matter — that our community is here for them, no matter what.”

Looking ahead, Thwaites remains focused on finishing this year strong. “Right now, I’m just trying to get through this,” she said with a smile. But if history is any indication, her leadership will continue to shine brighter with each passing year, reminding Munising of the power of connection, compassion and community spirit.

“Stephanie is someone who leads by example,” Gerou said. “Her work doesn’t just bring gifts to families — it brings hope, kindness and the reminder that we’re all in this together.”

For families across Munising, that reminder is what makes the season truly bright.