

## End of an era

### Year-round school program ends in Huron Valley Schools

By MIKE SCOTT  
Special to The Oakland Press

It was both a celebration and bittersweet event when Huron Valley Schools celebrated the final class of its year-round program with a picnic at Kurtz Elementary School in Milford.

The Huron Valley School board voted in March to close Baker Elementary School in Milford and end the year-round schooling program at Kurtz at the end of this summer because of continuing budgetary concerns over reduced funding from local property taxes.

Baker Elementary students who will not be middle-school age this fall will be transferred to Johnson or Kurtz elementary schools.

The elimination of the year-round program is expected to save the district \$247,000 and the savings will continue over time because of reduced needs for staffing, transportation, food service, and more. But the focus Wednesday was not tears but joy for what the program provided for 36 years.

"It was a benefit to many families because it gave students and parents a choice, and it allowed them to have different extended breaks throughout the year, not just in the summer or over the holidays," said Kurtz Elementary Principal Dale Phillips.

The year-round school program at Huron Valley Schools was one of the oldest of its kind in the country, and in its heyday in the 1980s and 1990s, as many as 400 to 500 elementary school students were part of it. At one point, the district even tried a year-round program for middle-school students, but it had a short shelf life because of the many athletic teams and other extracurricular school activities available to students, said district Community Relations Director Janet Roberts.

The number of year-round students at the start of last year's school season was about 170, Roberts said.

Established in 1974, the year-round program required a high level of parental involvement and school commitment. Voters' defeat of bond issues for new schools in 1972 prompted the Huron Valley Board of Education to first study the option. It was determined that students who went through the program would attend school for 45 days (not including weekends) then have 15-day vacations throughout the calendar year.

A focus of the year-round program was the reduction of summer learning



Oakland Press photos/VAUGHN GURGANIAN

Fourth-grader Bryan Sclabassi enjoys some cotton candy and a popsicle during the Huron Valley year-end celebration at Kurtz Elementary School in Milford.

lag and opportunities for remedial and enrichment experiences, Roberts said.

"Students liked the program because the education/vacation patterns are less stressful and more relaxing," retired Lakewood teacher Barb Petersmark wrote in 2003 as part of a program to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the district's year-round program. "Students find that they don't have to review previous lessons taught. Teachers have found that students' retention of the curriculum is often greater because of the short breaks."

Former Lakewood Elementary Principal Fred Forsythe, who served in

that role from 1974-1990, wrote in 2003 that, "I felt it was the enthusiasm of parent groups and the dedication of teachers that made this something special and kept (the year-round) program alive and well."

Then in an example of foreshadowing, Forsythe wrote, "Our next major milestone will be a 50-year celebration. For that to happen it is vital that parents continue an enthusiastic and vocal support, and staff members continue to believe this program truly offers a better educational experience."

It wasn't a lack of parental or staff support, but fewer dollars that ultimately



Third-grader Natalie Busen tries her hand at the Hoopla toss during the Huron Valley year-end celebration.

doomed the program, which thousands of Huron Valley elementary school students went through.

"Despite our efforts to maintain it, declining enrollment and budget constraints marked the end of the program this year," said Huron Valley Schools Superintendent Jacqueline Johnston.

The elementary school students who were on a year-round calendar will be able to make a smooth transition to their new schedule and continue their high levels of achievement, Johnston said.

Over the last few years, enrollment for the year-round program had steadily fallen. As a result, the year-round program was housed only at Kurtz Elementary beginning in the 2008-2009 school year after having been used at Highland, Lakewood and Kurtz elementary schools for many years.

Students in the year-round program attended school the same number of days and followed the same curriculum as other students.

The program also required dedicated teachers and support staff, Phillips said.

"It was a choice for many of our teachers as well for whether they wanted to participate in the full-time program," Phillips said. "And our support staff, such as IT professionals, librarians and more had to service both school calendars. It was a great team effort."

### TODAY'S MEETINGS

- Brandon Township Board of Trustees, 7:30 p.m.
- Berkley City Council, 7 p.m.
- Lathrup Village City Council, 7 p.m.
- Milford Village Council, 7:30 p.m.
- Northville City Council, 7:30 p.m.
- Oak Park City Council, 7:30 p.m.
- Orion Township Board of Trustees, 7 p.m.
- Rochester Hills City Council, 7 p.m.
- Royal Oak City Commission, 7:30 p.m.
- Southfield City Council, 7 p.m.

### AROUND OAKLAND

#### WATERFORD TWP. Car show to benefit orphaned children

A charity car show is 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 8, at the Dixieland Market Place, 2045 Telegraph. The event will raise domestic violence awareness and trust fund money for three children who were orphaned as a result of a tragic domestic violence situation. Call 248-435-3091. — Special writer Katie Bontinen

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#### ROCHESTER HILLS Entries due Aug. 10 for charity golf outing

Entries must be received by Tuesday, Aug. 10 for the Rochester Rotary's Charity Golf Outing. The outing will be at 10:30 a.m. Monday, Aug. 16, at Oakland University's R&S Sharf Golf Course, 2300 N. Squirrel Road. This year will benefit the Oakland University Center for Autism Research, Education & Support and other rotary charities. The golf day will feature 18 holes of golf with a cart and a box lunch. Contact Ronda Panczyk at 586-295-4115 or rpanczyk@gmail.com; or visit www.rochesterrotaryclub.org. — Special writer Katie Bontinen

#### BIRMINGHAM CPR class scheduled

A two-session American Red Cross Adult with AED, Child and Infant CPR class is 6 to 9 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 8 and Tuesday, Aug. 17 at the Community House, 880 S. Bates St. Learn to respond appropriately to adult, infant and child cardiac and choking emergencies and the proper use of a defibrillator. CPR certification cards issued upon successful completion of course requirements. The cost of \$53 with a \$15 materials fee is payable to "Live Safe Academy." To register, call 248-644-5832, or visit www.communityhouse.org.

#### HAZEL PARK Event to benefit Shriners

A 5K run/walk will be held at the Hazel Park Raceway on Sunday, Aug. 15 to raise money for Shriners Hospitals for Children. Registration begins at 7 a.m. and participants begin the walk at 10 a.m. To learn more, visit www.detroitshriners.dojig.org/sheedy1. Call 248-569-2900. — Staff writer Jerry Wolfe

#### CORRECTION

It is the policy of The Oakland Press to correct or clarify stories. We urge readers to call the news desk at 248-745-4632 if they have personal knowledge of errors.

## Camp Casey events focus on families

By CHERIE W. ROLFE  
Special to The Oakland Press

A riding instructor advises a group of young riders at the stables inside Maybury State Park in Northville.

"Keep your heels down and toes up, never let go of the reins, and leave space for the horses — they're not all best friends."

But the children are making friends with the horses. For most, a horseback ride is a special treat, but for Austin Flowers, 11, of Waterford Township, this ride is a celebration of sorts.

Diagnosed earlier this year with rhabdomyosarcoma, a fast-growing, highly malignant tumor that accounts for more than half of the soft-tissue sarcomas in children, he has only one chemotherapy treatment remaining.

As he prepares to ride a horse named G.W. — short for George Washington — he dons a riding helmet. Because his chemotherapy treatment has made him light-sensitive, he also wears sunglasses.

Austin says it's all about trust between rider and horse.

"When you're going perfectly straight, you can see, but they can't, so they trust you. It's good to have an animal that can trust you and nice enough to let you ride it."

His ride was made possible by Camp Casey, a nonprofit riding camp based in Oakland County that brings horses and children with cancer together through events like its Trail Ride Cookout at Maybury on July 18.

### FYI

Contact Camp Casey and view the Today Show video at [www.camp-casey.org](http://www.camp-casey.org).

The cookout is all about families. Lauren Maiman, the camp's director of public affairs, describes it as an event to "keep in touch ... see recovery and growth" in families that have attended other Camp Casey events. They enjoy a typical summer feast of hot dogs, hamburgers and watermelon. Horseback rides on the park's trails leave every half-hour.

For Austin's brother, Travis Flowers, 18, the best part about the Camp Casey events is connecting with other families who are experiencing the same situation. Austin's sister, Amanda, 15, agrees. The best part of the day is "spending time with family," she says.

Camp Casey began in 2004 and was the idea of Molly Melamed of Ferndale, its executive director. While she was still a sophomore at Michigan State University, Melamed met Casey Footé, who died of bone and brain cancer in 2003 at 12. Melamed saw firsthand how much Casey enjoyed her rides and wanted other children to have the same experience.

Camp Casey serves children ages 2-16 and their siblings of any age. In addition to the cookout event, the camp hosts unique programs for children with cancer and their families.

Cowboy Camp Outs are horse-themed mini vacations



Austin Flowers, 11, of Waterford Township prepares for a horseback ride at Maybury Stables during Camp Casey's Trail Ride Cookout. For more photos, visit [theoaklandpress.com](http://theoaklandpress.com).

twice a year, and Outlaw Outings include trips to sporting events and other activities. The camp emphasizes that the whole family is invited, so no one is left out.

Because of privacy laws, the camp is not allowed to approach families directly. The camp makes contacts through pediatric oncology outreach programs at hospitals including Beaumont, Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit, and C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor, says the Amy Gill, the camp's equine and safety director.

The Flowers family connected with Camp Casey through a social worker at Children's Hospital in Detroit two months into Austin's treatment, says his mother, Rhonda. The family

attended a Cowboy Camp Out at Blackriver Farm and Ranch in Crosswell earlier this year.

At first, Austin needed some convincing. "He wasn't enthusiastic," says Flowers. "He likes dirt bikes and four-wheeling." "I told him, 'There's nothing like horseback riding,'" she continues. "Once he got up there and saw the horses, his whole attitude completely changed."

Camp Casey was recently featured on the Today Show. Although the camp received an influx of out-of-state-donations because of the national television exposure, it also has had better success finding families and interest from others who want to start similar programs, Maiman says.

The segment featured the Brown family from Detroit and their daughter, Maya, 8, who is in remission.

Camp Casey's resident horse, Moe, paid a "Horsey House Call" and gave rides up and down the street.

Maisha Brown says her children were "so surprised, so happy, everyone had a lovely time."

As for Austin, a fifth-grader at Riverside Elementary School in Waterford Township, the prognosis is good. The cancer has a 75 percent cure rate. Because Austin's cancer was found in stage one, the outlook is even better.

Austin — accompanied by his mother, sister and brother, also on horseback — waves as he rides off down the trail atop G.W.