



West Michigan man portrays Ernie Pyle
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JANUARY THAW ARRIVES IN WEST MICHIGAN PAGE A3

JOURNALISM AS THEATER

Secretary of State to reconsider new site

Search criteria will include centralized location

BY ERIC GAERTNER
THE MUSKEGON CHRONICLE

MUSKEGON — A plan is in the works at the state level that will likely result in a more centralized location for the proposed consolidated Secretary of State office for Muskegon County.

If finalized, the plan likely would blunt some of the criticism from residents and officials concerning plans to locate the office near the county's southern border.

According to a spokeswoman for Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land and local state lawmakers, the Michigan Department of Management and Budget is expected to solicit new bids for a lease for the consolidated "Plus" office. Preferred boundaries for a centralized location in the county — which would discourage the proposed southerly site — are being added to the search criteria.

In November, Land announced a "modernization" plan that would

merge the two current Muskegon County offices — 1485 E. Apple in Muskegon Township and 3297 Colby in Whitehall Township — into one. The plan was based on the state government's economic constraints and increased use of the department's online services.

The decision to reconsider the location for the Muskegon County consolidated office comes after weeks of public outcry over the announcement that the "preferred" location would be in The Pointes strip mall, 1072 E. Sternberg, Norton Shores.

That location has been criticized for its location 2.5 miles from the county's southern border, relatively close to an office in Grand Haven.

Kelly Chesney, a spokeswoman for the Secretary of State, said seeking a centralized location will be considered in search criteria used in rebidding. The search criteria will continue to include other factors such as proximity to a bus route, free parking and easy access for residents.

Chesney said the decision was made to add the centralized location "after listening to some of the concerns raised by local officials."

A staff member with the office of



CHRONICLE MAP

state Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores, confirmed that the boundaries in the search criteria are: on the north, where Business Route U.S. 31 and U.S. 31 intersect; on the south, Laketon Avenue; and, on the east and west, one mile in each direction from U.S. 31.

The request for bids has not yet been issued.

Since the target area is one part of the search criteria rather than a requirement, the "Plus" office still could be located outside the

boundaries.

The Apple Avenue office falls within the boundaries, and the building's landlord, Greg Wilkinson, has made it clear that he wants to keep the Secretary of State as a tenant.

State Rep. Mary Valentine, who helped line up a local contingent to testify before a state House subcommittee recently on the issue, said it makes sense to have the consolidated office on Apple Avenue.

"We're going to keep the pressure up," said Valentine, D-Norton Shores. "What I wouldn't want to see happen is for the pressure to let up and they put it at the Sternberg location anyway."

County board Chairman Ken Mahoney, who represents the northern part of the county, said he agrees that a centralized location makes more sense if the county is only to have one office. Mahoney and other White Lake-area residents have expressed their desire to keep the Whitehall office open.

"It's certainly a better idea than what they had," Mahoney said. "From up here, it's still a hike."

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THURSDAY

TOP LOCAL STORIES

BLUE LAKE TOWNSHIP Fire chief demoted

After admitting he cut a motorcycle brake line out of anger against another man, Kim Busman will remain with the Blue Lake Township Fire Department, but not as chief.

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BLUE LAKE TOWNSHIP Court to hear zoning case

What could be the final act in the long courtroom drama over zoning of the Owaspice Scout Reservation was played out this week in the Michigan Court of Appeals.

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MUSKEGON COUNTY Wanted: New leader

The Community Coordinating Council of Muskegon County is seeking new leadership. Director Jane Drake is resigning effective March 1 from the council, a collaboration of 45 human service and nonprofit agencies.

PAGE A4

STEVE GUNN Accountability needed

For a small department with a tiny staff, the Muskegon County Drain Commissioner's office has produced its share of headline-grabbing scandals in recent years. Those scandals should be telling us something about the questionable way we choose the leaders of small county departments.

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IF YOU CAN DREAM IT THEY WILL BUILD IT

BY FEDERICO MARTINEZ
THE MUSKEGON CHRONICLE

MUSKEGON HEIGHTS — Construction of a new boat launch began this week at Mona Lake Park in Muskegon Heights. The project is one of more than \$500,000 in improvements slated to be completed at the park by Memorial Day weekend.

Muskegon Heights City Manager Natasha Henderson has called it the city's "signature project," because officials hope the park improvements will draw more visitors to the city.

Eventually, city officials hope to invest up to \$5 million in the park, including construction of a new conference center. The improvements are being paid for with a combination of state and federal dollars.

AT A GLANCE

Building a better park

Muskegon Heights officials expect these improvements to Mona Lake Park to be completed by June:

- New boat launch.
- Installation of a new fishing pier.
- A covered picnic shelter.
- Bath house with fish-cleaning station.
- New sidewalks.
- Lighted fishing pier with handrails and benches.

The work will be done in phases as the city obtains funding, said Reatha Anderson, the city's director for planning and community development.

The first phase includes the construction of the new boat launch, and fishing pier, said Tom Grimm, president of Muskegon Quality Builders, the contractor hired by the city to oversee the completion of the first round of work.

Construction of the new boat launch will be completed this winter, Grimm said. His workers had been waiting for the lake to freeze.

"We can lay everything out on the ice without using barges and stuff," he said. "We take the sawhorses out there. It just makes construction a lot easier."

When completed, the new ramp will extend 60 feet from shore. Overall it will be 90-feet long and 36-feet wide, with two 5-foot floating dock systems. The floating docks will be on each side of the ramp.

The project architect is Hooker De Jonge Architects & Engineers of Muskegon.

Access to the new boat ramp will be tighter. A



COURTESY ILLUSTRATION

The vision: Last January, Muskegon Heights unveiled its plans for a revamped Mona Lake Park, complete with a beach and amphitheater.



CHRONICLE PHOTOS/CORY MORSE

Shelter: Dave Simpson, of Hofstra Masonry Inc., lays blocks Wednesday inside a tent made of plastic sheeting during construction of the bath house at Mona Lake Park in Muskegon Heights.



In a bubble: January's chill hasn't stopped the masons from doing their jobs.

new armed gate will be installed, although city officials have not determined how much users will have to pay. The facility previously operated on an "honor" system, which asked users to place contributions in an on-site bucket.

City officials have applied for \$5 million in

federal funding over the next five years to complete planned improvements, including construction of a 400-seat conference/education center and an amphitheater, Anderson said. The city has received more than \$600,000 in state and federal grant funds, most of which is being used on the first phase of the project.

Improvements also will include construction of two to three new soccer fields, the relocation of three basketball courts and construction of new baseball fields.

This spring, contractors will begin installing new sidewalk areas in the park and an asphalt parking lot that will better accommodate boats, Grimm said.

The renovations at Mona Lake Park come at the same time the city is trying to revitalize its downtown. Some have questioned the wisdom of building a convention center at the park instead of downtown.

City officials have cited several reasons for the

SEE PARK, A4

MLIVE.COM/MUSKEGON

TOP HEADLINES

NEWS

1. Law enforcement officials lament early release of prisoners
2. Michigan Supreme Court to hear child pornography case involving former Egelston Township treasurer
3. Good news: Mentor Michigan gives one of five Lloyd Carr scholarships to Muskegon High School student
4. Talks to continue on fire service consolidation proposals
5. Muskegon firefighters give up pay raises to help city finances

SPORTS

1. Muskegon Heights escapes with win over Grand Haven
2. Bob Kingsley: Jan. 13 fishing report
3. Tuesdays with Tom: Tiger pride
4. Muskegon-area boys basketball roundup
5. Muskegon Community College wrestler Matt Fetterley ranked No. 1 in country at 174 pounds

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

Read former "Biggest Loser" contestant Pete Thomas' weekly blog at mlive.com/tv. The Ypsilanti resident is still active on the show, which is in its ninth season.

CORRECTIONS

To help assure accuracy in The Chronicle, errors of fact in news stories published in this newspaper will be corrected in this space as promptly as possible. Regardless of cause, The Chronicle regrets all errors.



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CATCHING UP WITH
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