

**Annual Meeting wrap-up**

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LAKE COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING

BRIDGE

Lake County's premier news source for healthy aging and contemporary living since 1972

January | February | March 2026 • Vol. LIII, No. 1

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A Legacy That Keeps Giving

How the Jerome T. Osborne and Georgeanne S. Osborne Charitable Trust continues to strengthen Lake County communities

Every devoted family man hopes to leave behind a legacy of love and generosity. Few, however, have created an impact as enduring and far-reaching as Jerome T. Osborne. More than a decade after his passing in 2014, the charitable trust he established continues to strengthen communities across Lake County.

The Jerome T. Osborne and Georgeanne S. Osborne Charitable Trust provides vital financial support to nonprofits serving a wide range of needs. In 2025 alone, the trust awarded grants to 50 charitable organizations, supporting causes that span from homeless animal care to services for children with disabilities—and nearly everything in between.

Osborne's path to philanthropy began

with humble roots. He grew up as a soybean farmer and went on to found Osborne Inc., a ready-mix concrete company that remains in operation today. Over time, he also invested in and developed properties throughout Lake County, many of which grew substantially in value. The success he built during his lifetime ultimately became the foundation for a charitable mission that continues to give back decades later.

According to trust administrator Sunny Masters, each grant application is carefully reviewed by a board of trustees personally appointed by Osborne. Made up of Osborne family members, the board brings a range of perspectives and passions to the decision-making process—helping ensure funds reach a diverse array of causes.



On June 12, 1943 Jerry and Georgeanne wed and went on to have seven children—Jerry Jr., Rick, Kimberley, Mike, Georgeanne, Greg & Jackie.

See OSBORNE on page 2

March for Meals 2026 set for Saturday, March 28!

Annual event to raise dollars for Meals on Wheels

The Council on Aging will present Lake County's 19th edition of March for Meals on Sat., March 28, 2026, from 8–10 a.m. at the Great Lakes Mall.

March for Meals raises awareness and funds for the Council on Aging's nutrition programs for Lake County seniors and is part of a national campaign for Meals on Wheels America.

This event will be one of hundreds of local programs across the country

that reach out to their communities to build support for Meals on Wheels. The Council on Aging needs the community to take part in the fundraiser to help support an ever-growing number of seniors reaching out for nutritional support. Home-delivered meal services not only provide a nutritious meal, but also a friendly visit and safety check by one of the agency's dedicated meal delivery volunteers.

**Raffle baskets!**

Beginning March 1, individuals will have the chance to purchase tickets online at march4meals.org to win any one or more valuable raffle baskets. Then on the Saturday morning, March 28, the

See MARCH FOR MEALS on page 2

Osborne from page 1

"We probably had about 90 applications last year," says Masters. "A lot of the decision is prompted by what the organization needs the money for and how much funding they're requesting." After thorough consideration, grants are awarded either for specific projects or to support general operating needs.

In 2026, many organizations will benefit from trust funding for innovative and impactful programs. Among them is the Painesville YMCA, whose Adaptive Aquatics Program serves individuals with developmental disabilities, and Hannah's Harbor, a workforce training thrift store operated by Hannah's Home to help single mothers gain independence and reenter the workforce.

Other nonprofits, such as Fieldstone Farm, rely on the trust for general operating support rather than project-specific funding. Without these grants, basic equine care and therapeutic programs would be difficult to sustain.

Masters notes that the Osborne family prefers to stay out of the spotlight, choosing instead to highlight the work of the nonprofits they support. "It's more about their story than it is about our story," she explains. "We're here to help. These are people driven by passion and doing the right thing. Their stories are more powerful than anything we could say."

She is continually impressed by what nonprofit organizations are able to accomplish with limited resources. "Many of them operate on a shoestring budget and still find a way to make it work," says Masters. Donations from the Osborne Charitable Trust often open doors that wouldn't otherwise exist. "They're doing things they haven't been able to do before."

After a 30-year career in the nonprofit sector, Masters has dedicated her retirement years to administering the trust. Having worked closely with Lake County organizations for decades, she finds the role

In 1947 Jerome T. Osborne formed Osborne Inc., his ready-mix concrete company, a risk inspired by his prediction there would be a significant growth of a building and development in the concrete area.



deeply rewarding. "I can't believe how lucky I am," she says. "It's fabulous. I love it."

The little boy who once raced ponies at the Lake County Fairgrounds and collected stray golf balls to resell at Lost Nation Golf Course likely never imagined the thousands of lives he would touch nearly a century later. Through his family's ongoing dedication, Jerome T. Osborne continues to help build a stronger Lake County.

"We are here to support nonprofits in our community," says Masters. "We believe a strong community includes strong nonprofits."

The annual deadline to apply for a grant is typically in August, with 2026 applications opening in January. Nonprofit organizations in need of funding are encouraged to apply at osbornetrust.org/grant-application.

Article by Sophia Filipiak

March for Meals from page 1

online winners will be drawn, along with a number of additional baskets drawn live at the mall!

The indoor event will begin with registration at 8 a.m., followed by the walk kickoff at about 8:45 a.m. The walk route is a one-mile indoor loop, but walkers can walk as far as they are able during the event. In addition to camaraderie and walking for a great cause, participants will enjoy morning coffee, a goodie bag, an opportunity to try for additional raffle baskets, grand opening celebration with the Lake Catholic High School Drum Line, and fun musical entertainment by DJ Jesse Webb.

Commemorative t-shirts will also be available for prepurchase by going to march4meals.org and completing the online entry form.

seniors. Teams can be made up of friends, family, coworkers and neighbors, and can set fundraising goals to build excitement for the event. To register as a team or as an individual, simply complete the fillable online entry at march4meals.org. Pledges for walk teams may also be made directly online this year!

We need sponsors to support the effort!

The Council on Aging is actively looking for sponsors of the 2026 event. When you become a sponsor, you play an important role in supporting these meal programs while promoting your business and raising your profile as a community leader. Please complete the fillable sponsor form at march4meals.org.

All dollars raised through March for Meals benefit Lake County meal programs for local seniors. However you decide to help us on Saturday morning, March 28, your efforts will equal more awareness and funds to help put an end to senior food insecurity. Please join us!

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Welcome from the CEO

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first quarter 2026 edition of Bridge. Shortly after the agency was founded in 1972, it began publishing this newspaper to offer information pertinent to Lake County seniors, their loved ones and caregivers.

Rising printing costs, mailing fees, and other expenses continue to challenge the agency as it moves forward, particularly given the limited funding available for the newspaper. Our board is deeply grateful for the support of the Jerome T. Osborne and Georgeanne S. Osborne Charitable Trust, whose generosity along with that of our Bridge patrons and advertisers have made this edition of our paper possible. To this day, the newspaper remains an important resource for the Lake County community, as we work to provide readers with information and resources that support older adults, their families, and caregivers while promoting all aspects of healthy, valued, and creative aging.

Through the compassionate work of our staff, volunteers and board of trustees, the Council on Aging continues to help our older population achieve an optimal quality of life, enjoying new friendships, and participating in the society around us. Along with a caring community of partners, we are able to deliver essential senior services that help individuals find ways to make aging manageable and enriching.

Every day, our staff works to improve the experience of aging in Lake County. It's important work, and I thank our team, our board, and especially our beloved volunteers for their dedication to make the Council on Aging a great success. By the way, if you are interested in helping or volunteering with us in any capacity, perhaps 2026 is the year you choose to get involved by becoming a volunteer or exploring our volunteer opportunities. We would be grateful to hear from you, and would truly appreciate your consideration.

We will gather on Saturday, March 28 to celebrate the 19th anniversary of March for Meals at Great Lakes Mall. This is our primary fundraiser for our meals program and I hope that we can count on you to join us! Your generosity has brought us a great distance in the march against senior hunger and I am grateful for the continued support we receive from our community. Please see how you can get involved with our March for Meals in this issue of Bridge.

Thank you for your confidence in us.

Joseph R. Tomsick

Mission Statement

The Lake County Council on Aging provides aging adults and their support system with services and opportunities that enable them to achieve an optimal, self-defined quality of life.

The Council on Aging maintains a policy of equal opportunity in matters of program, contracting or employment regardless of national origin, sex, race, handicap, politics, religion, color or age.

Lake County Council on Aging

8520 East Avenue, Mentor, Ohio 44060
Open Monday through Friday 9:00 am – 4:30 pm

www.lcco.org

LAKE COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING

BRIDGE

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Contact us by email
through our website.**Features**

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A tribute to Commissioner Richard J. Regovich

A legacy of service, compassion, and unwavering commitment to Lake County

The Lake County Council on Aging honors the life and legacy of Richard J. Regovich, who passed away Nov. 26, 2025 surrounded by his loving family. His loss leaves a profound emptiness in the community he cared for so deeply.

Rich began his public service on the Willowick Planning Commission, then served on the Charter Review Committee and Willowick City Council before becoming mayor of Willowick for more than six years. Under his leadership, the Lake County Council on Aging began operating a meals kitchen at the Willowick Senior Center.

In 2022, Rich was elected the 81st Lake County commissioner and was re-elected in 2024.

He was a steadfast supporter of the Lake County Council on Aging, recognizing the critical role the



organization plays in the lives of older adults.

At the agency's recent annual meeting—just weeks before his passing—Rich delivered heartfelt remarks expressing his deep appreciation for the work of the agency and the resources it provides.

Beyond his public roles, Rich was a devoted husband to his childhood sweetheart, Lynn, and a proud father to Brian and Lizzie.

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MONEY MATTERS

A Roth conversion is worth considering

By Paul Pahoresky, Board Vice President, Lake County Council on Aging

A traditional to Roth IRA conversion is not about chasing trends or reacting to headlines. It's about clarity, control, and positioning yourself for the long game. When done thoughtfully, a conversion can be one of the most powerful planning moves available to disciplined investors and business owners.

At its core, a Roth conversion is a trade: paying taxes today in exchange for tax-free income tomorrow. That trade becomes especially compelling when current tax rates are historically low, income is temporarily reduced, or future tax exposure is likely to be higher. Once funds are inside a Roth IRA, qualified withdrawals are entirely tax-free, and that certainty carries real value in an uncertain tax environment.

Another often-overlooked benefit is flexibility. Roth IRAs are not subject to required minimum distributions during the owner's lifetime. This allows assets to continue compounding uninterrupted, preserving optionality well into retirement. For those who don't need immediate income, that flexibility can translate into a more efficient and intentional withdrawal strategy later on.

Roth conversions also play an important role in legacy planning. Heirs receive Roth assets income-tax-free, which can significantly enhance the after-tax value of what



is passed on. In many cases, this creates a cleaner, more predictable transfer of wealth across generations.

Of course, conversions are not one-size-fits-all. The tax impact must be modeled carefully, and timing matters. Partial conversions over multiple years often make more sense than an all-at-once approach, allowing taxpayers to stay within favorable tax brackets while steadily repositioning assets.

Ultimately, a Roth conversion is less about tax avoidance and more about tax management. It rewards patience, discipline, and foresight—qualities that tend to serve investors well, regardless of market conditions. When aligned with a broader financial plan, it can quietly strengthen both retirement security and long-term peace of mind.

Paul Pahoresky is the managing member of PRP & Associates. He can be reached at 440-974-1040 x14 or at paul@prpassoc.com. Consult your tax advisor for your specific situation for additional information and guidance on these topics.

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Scrub a Dub Dub with Council on Aging's Homemaker Services

By Patricia Wem, Homemaker Program Manager, Lake County Council on Aging

Some nursery rhymes have a way of sticking with us. Many of us still remember, "Rub-a-dub-dub, three men in a tub..."—even if the details fade with time.

At the Lake County Council on Aging, our Homemaker Program may not include the butcher, the baker, or the candlestick maker, but we do provide something just as important: dependable homemakers who help seniors maintain a clean, safe, and comfortable home.

The Homemaker Program offers light housekeeping services twice a month, allowing seniors to remain in the comfort and security of their own homes. Cleaning can be physically demanding, and for individuals with mobility or stamina challenges, everyday tasks like scrubbing a bathtub or mopping floors can place unnecessary strain on joints and muscles. Our trained homemakers take care of these chores, helping to ease that burden.

A cluttered home can also increase the risk of falls. Homemakers help maintain clear pathways and remove obstacles, giving seniors—and their loved ones—greater peace of mind. As the saying goes, an

ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Regular dusting and vacuuming of main living areas and bedrooms can improve indoor air quality as well. Dust and allergens may aggravate respiratory conditions or allergies, while routine disinfecting and sanitizing of surfaces helps reduce the spread of germs that could lead to serious illness or worsen conditions such as COPD or asthma.

Beyond the physical benefits, a clean home creates a sense of calm. An orderly environment can reduce stress and anxiety, support focus and cognitive function, and lessen confusion—all of which contribute to overall well-being.

For more information about the Homemaker Program, please call the Lake County Council on Aging at (440) 205-8111.

You won't be welcoming nursery-rhyme characters into your home—instead, you'll meet friendly, trusted homemakers like Angie, Cathy, Danielle, or LaTonya, who are ready to help with the everyday tasks that make home feel safe, comfortable, and truly your own.



Donate to Council on Aging

You have lots of options when it comes to giving. Every day, our agency helps isolated seniors in Lake County, stay safe, healthy and in touch with a caring community around them.

Please consider a tax deductible donation by calling our office at (440) 205-8111, or going online at www.lcco.org.

There are a number of ways to donate, including a gift of cash, check, or money order. Alternative contributions include securities, such as common stock, preferred stock, or US Savings Bonds or through an individual retirement account (IRA) or other such retirement charitable gifts.



Try something new at Lake Metroparks this winter!

Today's seniors are using free time for a variety of active leisure activities—hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing to name a few. We no longer want to watch life and opportunities pass us by, we want to get out and participate! With this in mind, Lake Metroparks is joining the fun by creating opportunities to introduce active people to the outdoors. Many activities can be done on your own as you explore the parks or register for a group program.

We have more than 60 miles of trails to hike, nine different parks along the river, five ponds to fish, six lakefront parks to explore and cross-country ski and snowshoe rentals.

To experience the many adventures that can be had right here in Lake County, visit lakemetroparks.com.



LAKEMETROPARKS.COM

34th ANNUAL QUILTS 2026



March 27–April 26

Lake Metroparks Farmpark
Kirtland, Ohio

Open 9 am to 5 pm Tuesday through Sunday

Farmpark presents one of Ohio's finest quilt shows with approximately 200 quilts and quilt-related works on display. Includes a judged show of quilts completed by regional artists from Northeast Ohio and neighboring states.

Quilt Inspiration Series—free lectures on Sundays at 2 pm

March 29 Stories in Fabric by Betsy Bauman

NEW!

April 12 Nature Inspired Quilts by Nelly Vileikis

April 19 1-2-3 Color My Quilt by Nelly Vileikis

April 26 A Feast From the Fragments by Sabastianna Costanzo

Quilt Vendor Days: April 17 & 18

Farmpark's daily activities

All included with Farmpark admission

Exhibitors wishing to enter the show—entry forms are due February 19.

Lake County Senior Centers

Eastlake Senior Center
600 349th Street, Eastlake
440-975-4268

Fairport Senior Center
1380 East Street, Fairport Harbor
440-354-3674

Kirtland Senior Center
7900 Euclid-Chardon Road, Kirtland
440-256-4712

Madison Senior Center
2938 Hubbard Road, Madison
440-428-6664

Mentor Senior Center
8484 Munson Road, Mentor
440-974-5725

Perry Senior Center
2800 Perry Park Road, Perry
440-259-3772

Wickliffe Senior Center
900 Worden Road, Wickliffe
440-373-5015

Willoughby Senior Center
36939 Ridge Road, Willoughby
440-951-2832

Willowick Senior Center
321 East 314th Street, Willowick
440-585-5112

THANK YOU! OSHIIP volunteers

Agency helps Lake seniors save \$50,000 in out-of pocket costs

During the 2025 Medicare open enrollment period (October 15 to December 7), the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) benefits specialist and four Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program (OSHIIP) volunteers, through the Lake County Council on Aging, helped 242 seniors make informed Medicare decisions by providing free, unbiased information.

The volunteers listed below have been trained and certified through OSHIIP. All shared their time and expertise by providing information to resolve Medicare questions and reviewing 2026 plan options, saving approximately \$50,000 in out-of-pocket costs for Lake County seniors.

On behalf of the Lake County Council on Aging, we would like to thank each volunteer for their dedication, time, and knowledge. We truly appreciate you!

Kellie Blauman
ADRC benefits specialist

Rita McNeal
OSHIIP volunteer
Scott Gregory
OSHIIP volunteer

Lynn Manteuffel
OSHIIP volunteer & LCCOA board member

Amy McGinnis
OSHIIP volunteer



Volunteers from the Marous Brothers Construction Outreach Committee on November 14, 2025.

THANK YOU! Marous Brothers Construction

On behalf of the Lake County Council on Aging and the participating Lake County seniors, we would like to thank Marous Brothers Construction. For the third year in a row, the Marous Brothers Construction Outreach Committee, comprising 24 volunteers, dedicated their day to cleaning up leaves in the yards of eight Lake County seniors in November. This incredible team raked and bagged leaves, trimmed a few shrubs, and even cleaned out a handful of gutters, leaving each senior with a cleaner yard and a smile on their face. Thank you all for the time you spent, the effort you made, and the kindness you showed the seniors in our community.

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Beauty Salons
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 **Reservations or Info:
440-354-6100**



By Denise Powell, Volunteer & Community Engagement Specialist, Lake County Council on Aging

You are invited to volunteer in the new year!

As we welcome in a new year, and with it new opportunities to serve Lake County's senior and homebound population, we invite compassionate individuals looking to add a bit more community engagement into their lifestyles, to join our volunteer outreach programs. Lake County is home to a significant elder population. These treasured individuals often represent the heart of our communities, and your time and care can make a meaningful difference in how they live their vintage years.

Volunteers assist community seniors in many ways such as meal support through Meals on Wheels, pet food subsidy through our Pet Meals on Wheels partnership, fresh produce delivery, grocery shopping assistance, and friendly visitor-home visitation. They deliver holiday and shelf-stable meals as well.

Just a few hours of your time can

brighten someone's day, reduce loneliness, and help seniors maintain independence and dignity. Volunteering is not only about giving help—it's about building connections. Volunteers often form rewarding relationships, gain wisdom from life stories, and experience the joy that comes from making a genuine human connection.

Whether you are a homemaker, professional, retiree, or business community member, consider looking into giving back, there is a place for you in our program. Training and support are provided, and schedules are flexible to fit your availability.

Join us in creating a caring, supportive environment for those who have already given so much to our community.

To get started volunteering contact Denise Powell at (440) 205-8111 or dpowell@lccoa.org.

The joys of volunteerism

Volunteerism is often described as giving time to help others, but those who volunteer know it offers just as much in return. Beyond making a difference, volunteering brings purpose, connection, and personal fulfillment.

Volunteers often share that they gain:

- A renewed sense of purpose by focusing on what truly matters—helping people and strengthening the community
- Meaningful connections with others who share similar values, often leading to lasting friendships
- Personal growth, including new skills, greater confidence, and improved well-being
- A deeper sense of gratitude and compassion, which often carries into everyday life



At its core, volunteerism reminds us of our shared humanity. In giving time and care, volunteers enrich not only the lives of others, but their own as well.

The Lake County Council on Aging extends its sincere thanks to the volunteers who already support its programs and invites others to join them in making a positive impact. Volunteers play an important role in helping older adults maintain independence and continue aging safely in place.

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Expires March 31, 2026

NUTRITION SERVICES

By Linda Llewellyn, Director of Community Services, Lake County Council on Aging

Healthy pets make happy seniors

The Pet Meals on Wheels program provides a monthly supplemental supply of pet food to seniors who receive home-delivered meals. This optional service helps ease household expenses by reducing the cost of pet food—an increasingly important benefit as food prices continue to rise for seniors living on fixed incomes.

When seniors have enough pet food on hand, they are better able to focus on their own nutrition and well-being and are less likely to share their meals with their pets. In this way, the program supports the health of both seniors and their companion animals.

Pets play a vital role in the lives of many older adults, particularly those who live alone. They offer companionship, routine, and emotional connection, helping reduce

feelings of loneliness and isolation. Caring for a pet can also encourage seniors to stay active and engaged, providing a sense of purpose and daily structure.

One of the greatest challenges seniors face as pet owners is the rising cost of veterinary care. Even routine services such as vaccinations or grooming can become difficult to afford, while unexpected medical or dental needs may feel overwhelming.

Support from the Jerome T. Osborne and Georgeanne S. Osborne Charitable Trust helps address this need by funding veterinary and grooming services for pets in the program. This assistance allows seniors to keep their pets healthy—and by extension, continue benefiting from the companionship and comfort these animals provide.

Patricia J. Schraff, CELA*
John P. Thomas
Lindsay C. Jones
Claudia Rose Brown
Megan E. Gross
Madeline K. Bartsche
Timothy J. Gibbons (of counsel)
Leslie E. Wargo (of counsel)



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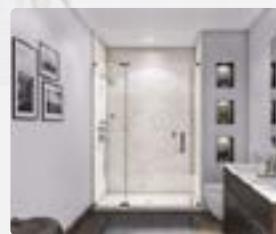
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Meals on Wheels America commends Council on Aging for Sharing the Love

Community gathers food for 9th annual
Blizzard Bags promotion

In November and December, the Lake County Council on Aging participated in the annual Subaru Share the Love Event as a member of Meals on Wheels America—one of four national charities supported through the promotion.

A key part of the Council on Aging's participation is the Blizzard Bag Food Drive, the agency's largest community effort connected to Share the Love. The drive provides seniors receiving Meals on Wheels with a two- to three-day supply of shelf-stable food for use during winter storms or other emergencies that may temporarily prevent meal delivery. These emergency blizzard bags help ensure clients have food on hand when volunteers are unable to safely reach their homes.

To support the drive, the Council on Aging partnered with Lake County senior centers and local Subaru dealerships, including Adventure Subaru and Ganley Subaru,



to collect nonperishable food donations. Through the Blizzard Bag Food Drive, the Council on Aging earns a share of the 2025 Subaru Share the Love Event donations raised by Ohio Subaru dealers.

The Council on Aging is grateful to its community partners and donors for helping provide nearly 200 seniors with emergency food supplies this winter.

"We are thankful to Meals on Wheels America and Subaru of America for their continued support," said Joe Tomsick, Council on Aging CEO. "For the ninth year, generous community donations have helped ensure our clients have food available when winter weather makes meal delivery impossible."



Notes of appreciation to Council on Aging staff

"I first want to say 'thank you' for everything the Council on Aging did for my parents when they were alive. I'm sure you do not hear this enough, but the assistance and services your agency offers within our community are one of a kind. So, I wanted to say thank you for everything you did for my parents and continue to do for our county...and now, for me and my wife!...Keep up the great work!
~Medicare open enrollment client

"We would like to thank everyone for all you do for the seniors and community. We greatly appreciate the time and effort everyone puts forth to educate us with Programs and Awareness Days you sponsor. The last two awareness days (Senior Tech and Scam Prevention) were well prepared and organized. Alliance for Working Together (AWT) deserves special thanks for allowing us to use their technology and space. The cleanliness was very impressive. ~Bob & Kathy

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Enjoy good food with friends at Lake County Council on Aging meal sites



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The Lunch Place at Madison

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Madison Senior Center
2938 Hubbard Road
Phone: (440) 428-7002

The Lunch Place at Painesville

Lunch starts: 11:30 am
Extended Housing Building
270 East Main St. – Lower Level
Phone: (440) 354-6700

The Lunch Place at Wickliffe

Lunch starts: 11:30 am
Wickliffe Senior Center
900 Worden Road
Phone: (440) 373-5017

The Lunch Place at Willowick

Lunch starts: 11:30 am
Willowick Senior Center
321 East 314th Street
Phone: (440) 946-8822

If you are age 60 or older and are looking for companionship and healthy, nutritious food, then schedule time to eat a meal with a friend or come and make new friends at your local Lunch Place.

The Lunch Place serves hot lunches five days per week, Monday through Friday, providing 1/3 of the daily-required recommendations of USDA. There is no charge, although a suggested voluntary donation of \$1.50 is accepted. A reservation in advance of the meal is required.

More information about the Lunch Place can be obtained by calling the numbers listed.

NUTRITION SERVICES

Community champions step up for seniors

Local leaders and volunteers take part in March for Meals activities across Lake County

By Linda Llewellyn, Director of Community Services, Council on Aging

March is recognized nationwide as March for Meals, a time when communities come together to support Meals on Wheels programs and the seniors they serve. The annual campaign highlights the importance of nutritious meals, friendly visits, and safety checks for older adults who wish to remain healthy and independent in their own homes.

The Lake County Council on Aging will host two special initiatives this March in support of Meals on Wheels services.

The first is the annual March for Meals fundraising event on Saturday, March 28, at Great Lakes Mall.

The second is Community Champions Week, held during the third week of March. From Monday, March 16, through Friday, March 20, community leaders and volunteers will take part in hands-on activities at local nutrition sites. Participants will help prepare and pack meals, deliver meals alongside experienced volunteers, serve Lunch Place guests, and see firsthand how Meals on Wheels supports seniors throughout Lake County.

Community Champions Week locations include:

Monday, March 16—Willowick
Tuesday, March 17—Painesville
Wednesday, March 18—Madison
Thursday, March 19—Mentor
Friday, March 20—Wickliffe

These experiences give participants a meaningful look at how nutrition services reduce food insecurity, ease isolation, and provide vital social connection for seniors. Meals on Wheels offers more than food—it delivers regular human contact, wellness checks, and engaging activities that support both physical and emotional well-being.

Community Champions Week has also helped raise public awareness, strengthen partnerships, and encourage volunteering and donations that directly benefit Lake County seniors.

Public officials, business leaders, faith community members, first responders, and others interested in participating are encouraged to contact Linda Llewellyn, community services director, at lllewellyn@lccoa.org or (440) 205-8111, ext. 241, to secure an opportunity to serve as a community champion.



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COMMUNITY SERVICES

By Tim Rieder, Social Work Manager, Lake County Council on Aging

Safe and stable housing support available for eligible seniors

The Jerome T. Osborne and Georgeanne S. Osborne Healthy Living Project has provided opportunities to enhance the Lake County Council on Aging's goal to assist senior clients of our agency with specific services to promote their overall well-being. Some of the services provided to seniors in need have included the following:

- **Appliance repair:** Repair or replacement of essential appliances.
- **Minor home repairs:** Repair of minor electrical, plumbing or structural issues.
- **Durable medical equipment:** Purchasing of items not available through agency's H.E.L.P. program.
- **Laundry assistance:** Provide one-time or reoccurring assistance to seniors who face barriers with ability to maintain laundry.
- **Heavy cleaning:** One-time assistance intended for clients facing eviction or who are being denied a supportive service based on home conditions.
- **Transportation:** Assistance via Laketran voucher or private transportation service when appropriate.
- **Utility assistance:** One-time assistance for seniors with a

past-due or shut-off notice. The Lake County Council on Aging social workers will assess an individual's need for assistance to determine if eligible for assistance provided through this generous funding. Other eligibility requirements that an individual must meet to be considered as a recipient include:

- Be an active client of Lake County Council on Aging.
- Be 60 years of age or older.
- Be a Lake County resident living in the community.
- Have an income at or below 250% of poverty level (\$3,137 monthly).

The individual must agree to an assessment by a Council on Aging social worker who will determine appropriateness of assistance. Meeting all of the preceding eligibility requirements does not guarantee assistance will be granted. Each request is subject to a thorough review.

The Lake County Council on Aging is grateful for the generous support from the Osborne family and partnerships with other community providers in completing these projects. The program has made a positive, lasting impact on seniors' lives and their home environments.

SAVE THE DATE!

March 28, 2026
March for Meals event

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Strength, service, and heart—thank you COA social workers

The Lake County Council on Aging has a dedicated team of licensed, professional social workers who can help seniors in our local community become connected with the assistance needed for them to achieve an optimal, self-defined quality of life.

The social workers conduct in-home visits to help assess and identify areas of need and refer to Council on Aging services or resources from other community providers. The social work team collaborates closely with other community organizations to ensure seniors are knowledgeable about what resources are available to them to access.

The social work team remains available to the senior and their support system to ensure services meet the care needs of that individ-

ual and to coordinate any further assistance. If you are interested in assistance or know someone who may need help, please contact the Lake County Council on Aging at (440) 205-8111.

March is National Social Work Month. The Lake County Council on Aging extends its appreciation to the outstanding social workers at our agency and all those social workers in the community who make a difference in the lives of the senior population in Lake County.

Tim Rieder, LISW-S

Beth Swain, LSW

Connie Brocone, LSW

Cristina Cognati, LSW

Denise Griebel, LSW

Elvira Toader, LSW

Kim Rae, LSW

Selena Baur, Social Work Intern

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By Jackie Oliverio, Manager, Aging and Disability Resource Center, Lake County Council on Aging

Medicare Advantage open enrollment

Meet with our specialist before March 31

Medicare's annual fall open enrollment period may have ended in December, but did you know that from Jan. 1 through March 31 each year, there is an open enrollment period specifically for those enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan?

This open enrollment period applies to individuals who:

- Currently have a Medicare Advantage plan and are considering switching to a different Advantage plan, with or without drug coverage.
- Currently have a Medicare Advantage plan and are considering switching to original Medicare.

Despite the many commercials and advertisements that make it seem like choosing a plan will be easy, many people find the process

overwhelming and confusing. We can help.

The Council on Aging's benefits specialist is available to review 2026 Medicare Advantage plans with you. By working with our specialist, you will never feel pressured to make changes or be "sold" a plan that is not right for you. This service is free and provides unbiased information to help you understand your options and enroll in a new plan, if you choose to do so.

During your appointment, you may also be screened for Extra Help and Medicare Savings Programs, as well as other state and federally funded benefits such as Medicaid or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

Call (440) 205-8111 to schedule an appointment today.

Heating assistance available

Contact Council on Aging for HEAP application

When it comes to living in northeast Ohio during these winter months, we are all too familiar with the cold temperatures that come along with them. One of the biggest challenges you may face is that, as temperatures drop, heating bills go up! The Ohio Department of Development and the Lake County Council on Aging want to remind older Ohioans that assistance is available to help with their home energy bills. The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) helps Ohioans at or below 175% of the federal poverty guidelines for a household of up to eight members and 60% of the state median income for a household of nine or more members to pay their heating bills.

Applied directly to the customer's utility or bulk fuel bill, the benefit can help manage heating costs. Older Ohioans may go to their local area agency on aging office for help with assembling the required documents and completing their HEAP application. They may also visit www.energyhelp.ohio.gov to apply online or to download a copy of the application.

When applying, individuals need to have copies of the following documents:

- Most recent utility bills
- A list of all household members



(including birth dates and Social Security numbers)

- Proof of income for the past 30 days for all household members (12 months for certain income types).
- Proof of U.S. citizenship or legal residency for all household members.
- Proof of disability (if applicable).

HEAP benefits are applied to an individual's energy bill after January 1. Applications for the HEAP program must be received by May 31, 2026. If you need immediate assistance with your energy bills or have received a shut-off notice, please contact your local energy assistance provider, Lifeline, Inc., at (440) 354-2148.

For more information or assistance with applying for a HEAP benefit, contact the Lake County Council on Aging at (440) 205-8111. Appointments are strongly encouraged to guarantee staff availability.



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May this year bring happiness, good health, and more time with the people you love.

Make the memories, say the things that matter, and rest easy knowing some things in life should be as solid as a headstone... and others as comfortable as a casket pillow.

Here's to a wonderful new year!



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Council on Aging distributes emergency meal kits

As winter was approaching, the Lake County Council on Aging (LCCOA) took proactive steps to ensure seniors across the county remain safe, nourished, and prepared in the event of severe weather. Extreme cold, high winds, heavy snow, or freezing rain can make roads impassable, preventing volunteers from delivering home-delivered meals and forcing the temporary closure of Lunch Place congregate meal sites.

To address these challenges, LCCOA distributed shelf-stable emergency meal kits to seniors in advance, providing a critical safety net when regular meal services are disrupted.

The agency prepared and distributed individual shelf-stable meals and breakfast meals. These meals were provided to 1,030 seniors who receive home-delivered meals or participate in Lunch Place programs throughout Lake County.

Each senior received a five-day emergency supply consisting of a five-meal main entrée kit and a five-breakfast meal kit. The main meal kits include prepared, shelf-stable items such as chili with beans, pasta with garden vegetables in tomato sauce, chicken salad, and similar meals, along with applesauce, vegetables, fruit juice, a cracker snack, and powdered milk. The breakfast kits include dry cereal or oatmeal, peanut butter, a protein bar, fruit juice, and powdered milk. Together, these kits ensure that each senior has a nutritious breakfast and main meal available for five days during emergencies or winter weather situations.

Because the meals are shelf-stable and require no refrigeration, seniors can safely store them at home until needed. This preparation provides peace of mind and helps ensure seniors remain nourished and secure when unexpected storms or dangerous conditions prevent normal operations.

“Our top priority is the well-being of the seniors we serve and



Thousands of shelf-stable emergency meals were stored and distributed with the support of the AWT Foundation.

the safety of the volunteers who deliver meals when weather conditions turn bad,” said Joe Tomsick, chief executive officer of the Lake County Council on Aging. “These emergency meals ensure that seniors have the nutritional support they need when a winter storm makes it impossible for us to operate normally.”

LCCOA also extends its appreciation to the AWT Foundation in Mentor for partnering with the agency by providing essential storage space for pallets of emergency meals. Their support helped streamline logistics and ensure timely distribution to seniors.

The Lake County Council on Aging is deeply grateful to the Jerome T. Osborne and Georgeanne S. Osborne Charitable Trust for its continued commitment to the well-being of older adults in the community. Their generosity made this emergency preparedness initiative possible and reinforces the agency’s mission to safeguard the health, safety, and independence of seniors—especially during the challenges of the winter season.

With these emergency meal kits in place, LCCOA is confident that seniors across Lake County will be better prepared, protected, and supported throughout the winter months.

Navigating change for older adults in Lake County

By Ron Graham, MPH,
Health Commissioner

As the health commissioner of Lake County General Health District, I am honored to serve our vibrant, resilient community—especially our older adults, whose wisdom and experience enrich the lives of everyone around them. Our region, like much of Ohio, is experiencing significant changes in public health and community life. I want to address some key issues directly impacting older adults, including vaccination, injury prevention, health care access, and the broader challenges of an aging population.

Vaccinations

Protecting yourself and others

Vaccinations remain one of the most effective ways to safeguard your health, especially as new variants of seasonal illnesses like influenza and COVID-19 continue to emerge. Older adults are at increased risk for complications from these illnesses. If you haven't received your recommended vaccines this year, please contact your health provider or our office. We are here to answer questions.

Preventing fall injuries

Safety starts at home

Falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults, often resulting in hospitalizations, loss of independence, and long-term pain. Prevention is possible, and it begins at home. Simple modifications—removing trip hazards, installing grab bars, ensuring adequate lighting—can dramatically reduce risk. Visit <https://www.ncoa.org/tools/falls-free-checkup/> for “falls free check-up” today.

Remember the Council on Aging in your estate!

To leave a bequest is to make a permanent statement of your values. It is by this act of charity that the world will remember what you cared about and what you stood for. If providing for seniors matters to you, consider a gift to the Lake County Council on Aging in your estate plans. Call Kip Jochum at (440) 205-8111, ext. 257 to get started today.

[ncoa.org/tools/falls-free-checkup/](https://www.ncoa.org/tools/falls-free-checkup/) for “falls free check-up” today.

Health Care Access

Navigating changes and improving services

Healthcare is changing, and we recognize that navigating insurance, appointments, and specialty care can be challenging. Our district partners with local hospitals and clinics to improve access, streamline referrals, and offer transportation assistance for medical appointments. Telehealth services are expanding, making it easier to connect with providers from the comfort of home. Visit <https://lclifeline.org/> for referral to community resources.

Impact of an aging population

Building a supportive community

Ohio's population is aging, and our community is no exception. This shift brings opportunities and challenges—demand for healthcare services, housing adaptations, and social support will increase. We are working proactively with partners to build a community where older adults can thrive, with age-friendly environments, increased volunteer opportunities, and robust support networks.

Your voice matters

Public health is a partnership. If you have concerns, questions, or suggestions about services or community needs, please contact our office at (440) 350-2543. Together, we can respond to changes and ensure that Lake County remains a place where people of all ages can live healthy, fulfilling lives.



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Lake County YMCA

Creating connection, wellness, and belonging for older adults

At the Lake County YMCA, we believe that healthy aging begins with connection. Each year, thousands of older adults walk through our doors seeking opportunities not only to stay active, but to stay engaged, supported, and socially connected. In a time when many seniors face the risks of isolation, loneliness, and declining physical activity, the Y offers a welcoming community where every person is valued, encouraged, and included.

Across our Y branches, older adults participate in a wide range of programs designed to support whole-person wellness. From SilverSneakers® classes and chair yoga to aqua arthritis therapy, tai chi, and low-impact strength training, our fitness programs meet seniors where they are, helping them maintain mobility, improve balance, and stay independent longer. Many members share that the Y is

the place they feel most connected, forming friendships through group exercise, morning coffee socials, lifelong learning opportunities, and volunteer engagement.

Beyond wellness classes, the Y also provides evidence-based health programs, including blood pressure monitoring and Rock Steady Boxing, helping adults manage chronic conditions in supportive group settings. Our staff are trained to provide encouragement, accountability, and personal attention, offering a sense of safety and belonging that extends far beyond the workout.

We are also excited to share that the Lake County YMCA begin launch an adaptive swim program in 2026 for individuals of all ages with mobility, neurological, or developmental challenges.

For more info on these programs visit www.lakecountymca.org.



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Council on Aging offices get into the holiday spirit!

The holidays shined bright at the Council on Aging this past December with several special events for staff, visitors and clients!

The Council on Aging East Avenue office and Painesville location participated in a "Best Door Décor" contest. Almost every door was decorated as departments came together with themed décor that literally "decked the halls."

Realtor Chera Ihnat along with the Ihnat Home Team, hosted a Holiday Networking Breakfast and Wreath Auction benefiting Council on Aging on December 11. Chera and her amazing team arranged over 30 wreaths to be donated for the fundraiser! So many gorgeous wreaths were on display in the weeks leading up to the event, it really brightened everyone's day, staff & visitors alike. Kudos to Chera for hosting such a beautiful event to benefit Council on Aging programs.

For the 22nd year, the Lake County Council on Aging participated in Home Instead Senior Care's program "Be a Santa to a Senior!" Social work and Homemaker Program staff members along with the Aging and Disability Resource Center referred Lake County seniors to the program this year. Seniors created a wish list that went to a giving tree where the public selected and fulfilled the requests. Typical items included bath towels, dust pans, toiletries, stamps and clothing. These are seniors who might otherwise be



Just one of over a dozen office doors decorated by COA staff at the main office.

overlooked during the holidays.

And finally, the holiday wishes of seniors were granted through a collaborative effort by Lake County Council on Aging, the Alliance for Working Together Foundation (AWT) and Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging. Seniors were referred by Council on Aging social work and nutrition staff. Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging's Aging and Disability Resource Center coordinated the referrals and shopped for Santa. Alliance for Working Together provided a location for Santa to deliver the gifts where Council on Aging elves could pick up to deliver to the seniors.

What a wonderful way to celebrate the spirit of the season.

Mentor Rotary Foundation awards grant

Thanks to the generous support of the Mentor Rotary Foundation, the Council on Aging was able to purchase an Oliver Heat Sealing Machine that will play a vital role in a backup meals kitchen. This equipment allows the agency to safely and efficiently package meals and serve the community during emergencies.

In times of uncertainty, having reliable tools like this machine

strengthens the Council on Aging's ability to respond quickly and effectively. The commitment of the Mentor Rotary Foundation to community preparedness makes a meaningful difference for those who may need assistance.

The agency is deeply thankful to the board of the Mentor Rotary for their continued support and dedication to the Lake County Council on Aging.

Council on Aging improves daily social engagement with new desktop voice technology

The Lake County Council on Aging recently partnered with the Amethyst Care Research Team in the ADAPT Centre, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, to pilot a new desktop voice-technology system designed to support older adults in their daily routines. Several senior clients participated in the three-month program.

The unit, called "the Amethyst Companion," is an AI-powered voice technology designed for older adults and was installed in participants' homes for the trial period. This innovative solution operates as a speaker and microphone system that can have natural conversational interactions like a person. Key features include daily engagement on personal interests, medication reminders, answers to common questions (e.g., news, weather), emotional well-being check-ins, and caregiver notifications for emergen-

cies or detected changes in user activity. The Amethyst Care portal gives full visibility of progress tracking over time through its analytics hub. This allows caregivers to view how individuals are tracking over time and notice any changes in behavior.

Before the pilot program began, participants met with social workers from the Council on Aging to discuss the daily challenges of living alone as a senior. They shared concerns about remembering to take medications on time, maintaining regular meals, and the fear that if an emergency or fall occurred, no one would be aware or able to respond quickly. Although some had tried technologies such as emergency alert buttons and alarms, these tools were not always a good fit. Overall, participants felt that existing options did not fully meet their needs or make them feel comfortable, high-

lighting the importance of exploring new solutions.

Participants in the pilot study reported the following benefits:

- Structure and stability
- Keeping on track with taking medications on time
- Remembering to eat at regular intervals
- Motivation to wake up and complete daily routines
- Lots of laughter
- Conversations about cooking, coins, baseball games, and books

Below are some quotes from the Council on Aging pilot participants:

"It's nice to have another voice there that puts you in a good mood."
"I can talk to my machine, and it's not going to tell anyone else."
"She helped get me out of bed."
"It perks me up, and there is a lot of laughter. Laughter is good for you."



Amethyst CEO and cofounder Rebecca McManus demonstrates the Amethyst Companion voice-technology unit to Council on Aging CEO Joe Tomsick.

If you are a member of an organization that would like to pilot with Amethyst Care or schedule a demo, please contact rebecca.mcmanus@amethystcare.ie.

For more info about the technology, visit www.amethystcare.ie.

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Project Hope for the Homeless celebrates senior volunteers

Honoring the steady commitment of older adults

Project Hope for the Homeless proudly celebrates the extraordinary dedication of its senior volunteers—individuals whose steady compassion strengthens the mission of Lake County's only homeless shelter.

Fifty-one percent of the shelter's volunteers are seniors, including its oldest volunteer at 86 years young. These older adults bring decades of experience in caregiving, education, business, and corporate leadership. While many seek meaningful ways to remain active and socially connected, their presence offers far more: they provide wisdom, grace, and a stabilizing sense of dignity for guests facing homelessness.

Senior volunteers stand out not only for their compassion but also for their reliability and long-term dedication. Many serve for years,

becoming trusted, familiar faces to both guests and staff. Their steady acts of kindness, sometimes as simple as a reassuring smile or a listening ear, help create a sense of belonging that can be transformative for individuals experiencing crisis.

As homelessness continues to be a growing challenge in the community, these dedicated older adults remain a sustaining force within the shelter. Their contributions inspire hope, strengthen daily operations, and highlight the profound difference purposeful service can make.

Volunteer opportunities

Community members interested in volunteering or supporting the mission of Project Hope for the Homeless can learn more at www.projecthopeforthehomeless.org.

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Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging honors veterans with Empowering Care Program



As we begin a new year, Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (WRAAA) proudly emphasizes its dedication to those who have served through the Veteran Directed Care (VDC) Program—an innovative initiative designed to give veterans more control over their care and daily lives.

Launched in September 2023, the VDC program has already assisted more than 200 veterans across five counties. The program emphasizes dignity, independence, and choice. "Veterans deserve the ability to decide how they live and who helps them," said Tommy York, director of business development at WRAAA.

The VDC program allows eligible veterans to manage their own care by hiring trusted individuals—including family members or neighbors—to assist with daily activities like eating, bathing, dressing, personal grooming, mobility, and grocery shopping. There are no financial eligibility requirements, so even those on Medicaid waivers can participate. Veterans must also meet community care criteria, satisfy clinical requirements, and be evaluated by a Veterans Administration (VA) physician.

Each participant receives a personalized budget based on the VA's case mix rate, which is reviewed monthly to stay relevant and ef-

fective. Financial Management Service Agencies (FMS) handle payroll, tax filings, and IRS paperwork, while WRAAA's person-centered counselors support veterans in managing their services. Funds are not directly transferred to the veteran.

WRAAA CEO Dr. E. Douglas Beach, who championed the program's launch, reflects on its impact: "What we found is that we were absolutely right in our assessment of the program's benefits. Because of the dedicated staff we have here, we were able to make it one of the best programs of its type in the U.S."

The agency is actively seeking referrals in Lake, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lorain, and Medina counties, with a particular focus on increasing awareness beyond Cuyahoga, according to York. "We want every veteran in our region to know this resource is available," he says.

For more information or to make a referral, contact WRAAA at (216) 727-2852 or email Veteran-DirectedCare@areaagingsolutions.org.

Vial of Life

Emergency preparedness
in a pouch

The Vial of Life is an emergency-preparedness program offered by the Lake County Council on Aging. This program consists of a small kit that is designed to speak for you when you can't speak for yourself.

This kit includes the senior's medical information, which can assist emergency personnel in administering the proper medical treatment. A red, magnetized pouch is placed on the individual's refrigerator, where first responders can readily locate the information.

For more information and to request a Vial of Life for yourself or a loved one, call the Lake County Council on Aging at (440) 205-8111.



New Laketran services aim to end senior isolation

Don't let the winter months keep you isolated. Over the past year, Laketran has launched several new services and programs designed to help seniors stay active in the community, reduce isolation, and make daily travel more convenient. From free rides to same-day service and expanded weekend hours, these programs offer more ways to stay connected and independent.

Through a partnership with the Lake County Commissioners, Laketran's new Seniors on the Go program provides free Dial-a-Ride transportation for Lake County residents age 60 and older. Seniors can schedule trips to grocery stores, pharmacies, food pantries, salons, barbers, parks, senior centers, and libraries. The program makes it easier for older adults to maintain independence and access the essentials that support a healthy, engaged lifestyle.

Need a ride today? Laketran's Rides on Demand service functions much like a rideshare, allowing customers to book same-day trips through the Rides on Demand app

or by calling 440-354-6100. This flexible option is ideal for errands, last-minute appointments, or spontaneous outings. Seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities ride for just \$3.50 anywhere in Lake County.

Laketran has expanded Dial-a-Ride service to include Sundays from 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. and extended Saturday service from 6 a.m. – 9 p.m. These weekend hours give residents more opportunities to attend church, visit family, shop, or participate in community activities—without needing to rely on others for transportation.

"Transportation plays a vital role in helping seniors stay active, independent, and connected," said Laketran CEO Ben Capelle. "By expanding these services, we're making it easier for older adults to get where they need to go—whether that's a medical appointment, a visit with family, or simply enjoying their community."

For more information or to schedule a ride, call (440) 354-6100 or visit www.laketran.com.

Catholic Charities new Lake County location

We are thrilled to share that Catholic Charities Lake County has relocated to 1544 Mentor Avenue in Painesville. This exciting new location will offer better community accessibility and opportunities to continue to serve the communities of Lake County as we have for nearly 80 years.

The Lake County office for Catholic Charities, Diocese of Cleveland, provides programs and services for families, children, older adults and people in need of immediate assistance. For Lake County's Spanish-speaking residents, we offer bilingual resources as well.

Catholic Charities Lake County invites older adults seeking connection or assistance to contact their office, particularly those who

struggle with language barriers or need support finding work. We have programs to help older adults build social connections and find community resources.

Our programs include employment services for young adults, adult case management for self-sufficiency, social-emotional development for children in preschool, and Families of Promise, a support program for children with incarcerated parents, including a program for the grandparents. We also offer mental health and substance use counseling services.

At Catholic Charities Lake County, we strive to help the individual and strengthen the family for help that lasts a lifetime. Follow us on Facebook or visit ccdocle.org to learn more.

Medicare Cards DO NOT EXPIRE



This is a common year end scam.

Other common scams include:



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www.proseniors.org/ohio-smp

Supported by the ACL, US Dept of HHS, as part of a financial award totaling \$949,633

Sheriff's Corner

By Sheriff Frank Leonbruno, Lake County, Ohio

The dark side of artificial intelligence posing risks to children

While the rapidly developing world of artificial intelligence (AI) offers increased learning, enhanced creativity, and improved comprehension for children, it also introduces new risks and dangers that families need to understand.

AI powers tools such as deep-fakes—technologies that can create highly believable fake identities. These can be especially convincing to young, impressionable children who may not yet understand the risks. Criminals can use these tools to impersonate another child, build trust, and gradually manipulate their target. Once that trust is established, a child may be pressured into sharing personal information, sending photos, or engaging in inappropriate behavior. This process is known as grooming, and it poses a very real threat to child safety.

Many seniors today are grandparents who help care for, or stay closely involved with, their grandchildren. It's important to remain vigilant about children's access to the internet, regardless of their age. Even toddlers can quickly learn to navigate smartphones and tablets. As AI becomes a normal part of everyday life, it also becomes part of children's digital experiences—bringing risks that should not be underestimated.

Don't be afraid to talk with chil-

dren about online dangers. Explain, in age-appropriate ways, how the internet can put them at risk. Teaching children to be cautious isn't about frightening them—it's about helping them understand that online threats can be just as real as a stranger approaching them on the street.

Here are a few practical steps families can take:

- Encourage healthy skepticism. Teach children to question messages they receive and to share anything that makes them uncomfortable.
- Set clear boundaries. Establish rules about what information can be shared and what should never be posted online.
- Use privacy and parental controls. Limit what children can access, who they can communicate with, and what they can share. If you're unfamiliar with these tools, take time to learn them—and regularly monitor activity.

Staying informed, alert, and involved in children's online lives is essential. Just as you wouldn't allow a stranger to approach your child on the street, don't allow unknown digital threats into your home unchecked. Your awareness and involvement can make all the difference.

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Explore the Hot Chocolate Trail!

Already tired of being cooped up this winter and looking for a fun reason to get out of the house and explore Lake County?

After the overwhelming success from last year's inaugural Lake County Hot Chocolate Trail, this tasty way to explore Lake County returns bigger and better! This flavorful journey takes folks into quaint coffee shops and cafes as well as some nontraditional stops where each business features their own unique take on hot chocolate!

This year's trail features 17 different locations with locations from Wickliffe to Madison and everywhere in between. The trail also features several recently-opened coffee shops and restaurants including Blu Bee Café in Painesville Township, Monarca Ice Cream

and Coffee in Madison Township, Halcyon Ledges restaurant in Perry and Señor Masa in Mentor.

The Hot Chocolate Trail is free, as participants can download a free digital passport on their phones and begin tasting their way through this sweet expedition. Scan the unique QR code at each location to earn 100 to 120 points at each stop (Tour Lake County member locations are worth 120 points each). Earn 1,000 points, in nine or ten visits, and earn a FREE, limited-edition TourLakeCOcoca mug!

Sip your way through the colder weather months and download the free digital pass today! The trail runs through February 14, 2026. For more info and to download the pass, visit www.tourlakecounty.com/hotchocolatetrail.

Plan launched to strengthen services for older adults

The Board of Lake County Commissioners is taking important steps to ensure older adults have the support they need now and in the future. In addition to providing over \$4.6 million in 2026 Senior Service Levy funding to 20 community organizations serving older adults, the county has launched a strategic planning initiative to make its aging-services network more coordinated, accessible, and sustainable.

The need for careful planning is increasing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year estimates, nearly 69,000 Lake County residents are age 60 or older, almost 30% of the population. More than 11% are 85 or older. Following state and national trends, the number and share of older adults in the county have been steadily growing and are expected to continue rising. The increase is particularly pronounced among residents age 85 and older, which is expected to drive higher demand for supportive services.

To address these challenges, the

board of commissioners undertook an extensive search and careful selection process to secure a consulting firm. The Osgood Group was chosen to lead a comprehensive review of aging services in Lake County. The firm is analyzing service data, interviewing more than 50 stakeholders, and launched a survey in December to hear directly from older adults and their families about their needs and priorities. The final plan, expected in July 2026, will guide funding decisions and improvements across all senior services.

This initiative builds on other successful county efforts, including securing over \$380,000 in federal funding for the AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP Program, which connects volunteers with local community efforts.

Through strategic planning and continued investment of Senior Service Levy dollars, the board of commissioners is committed to helping older adults remain safe, connected, and supported for years to come.

100 YEARS

Saluting Lake County Centenarians

Do you know someone turning 100 years old... or older?

Since 2014, the Lake County Council on Aging has been honoring those residents of Lake County who have turned at least 100 years old. If you know of someone marking this milestone birthday or even older, please notify us by completing the centenarian request form online at lcoa.org. Click on the "programs and services" tab, and look for "centenarian certificate request." You will receive a beautiful centenarian certificate from the Council on Aging, along with name and birth date recognition in our quarterly newspaper, "Bridge."

You may also drop us a note and include the following:

- Name of honoree
- Your name (as requestor)

- Your mailing address
- Your phone number
- Honoree date of birth
- Relationship to honoree

Send to:
Council on Aging
Centenarian Project
8520 East Avenue
Mentor, Ohio 44060

Privacy policy:

In order to protect the identity of participants from unwanted solicitation or contacts, we will only print the name, city and birth date of the centenarian. All other info you send will be kept confidential and is for use on a centenarian certificate only.

thank you



Thank you to Jerry Kotlarsic and Junkluggers of Cleveland, Mentor, and Solon for your amazing help with the Council on Aging East Avenue office. Clearing out broken and unstable office items made a big difference and has allowed the agency to open up much-needed office space.

We sincerely appreciate your generosity, support, and the time you contributed to help us!

"Our Aging World" radio show

Listen to the Council on Aging's radio show every Saturday afternoon from 2–3 p.m. on both 1330 AM and 101.5 FM.

Chief Executive Officer Joe Tomsick hosts "Our Aging World" and shares ideas and resources to make your life easier – with tips, tools and resources on

topics such as senior health, housing, finances, Medicare, Social Security, money saving programs, and other issues that affect older adults. The show is made possible through sponsorships and Integrity Radio.

You may also listen live online at tunein.com, search WINT.

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Help available to navigate VA benefits

If you are looking for information about benefits or services available to veterans and their families, the Lake County Veteran Service Commission can help.

We are NOT the VA, but as a county office we assist veterans and their families to determine eligibility for VA benefits and submit proper forms to the VA. We can assist in filing for service connected disabilities, pension with aid and attendance, and other VA benefits. We act as advocates through the entire process at no cost. There is no reason to pay anyone to assist you in obtaining VA benefits!

We also offer free door-to-door transportation services for veterans (& spouse/aide) to and from medical appointments and our office. All transportation is coordinated by Laketran and is provided through the collaborative efforts of our office, Laketran and the Lake County Commissioners.

Veterans can call Laketran at (440) 354-6100 to schedule rides

no less than two business days in advance. This includes rides to medical appointments, treatment, or adult day care located within Lake County. Additionally, Laketran transports to the VA Clinic in Willoughby, VAMC in Cleveland, as well as the Cleveland Clinic and UH facilities in Cleveland. Veterans are required to file their discharge with our office.

The Veteran Service Commission also offers temporary emergency financial assistance for unexpected financial emergencies. This assistance is not intended to supplement income or provide major home improvements, especially when equity or assets are available. Stated simply, it's to ensure there is food on the table, a roof overhead, utilities are on, and to maintain a safe and secure quality of life.

Call (440) 350-2904 or visit www.lakecountyohio.gov/veteranservices for more info. We are located in the Lake County Administration Building in Painesville.

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Lifeline services help community members to achieve self-sufficiency

Are You OK Program

This is a safety assurance program for Lake Co. seniors (60+) who may be isolated or living alone. Seniors can enroll in the program to receive daily automated monitoring calls designed to provide security and ease the concerns that friends and families may have for their loved ones' safety.

Helping Hands for Seniors Program

This program matches eligible Lake County seniors (60+) who reside independently in the community with vetted volunteers who will assist them with daily activities that are essential for their health and safety.

Kinship Navigator Program

We continue to offer one-on-one navigation and resource connections by appointment, as well as monthly workshops and support groups.

211

The 211 hotline is available 24/7 for help in connecting to health and

human services programs throughout Lake County.

HEAP Winter Crisis

This program runs through March 31, 2026 for those needing help with heating costs. Intake appointments can be scheduled by calling (440) 381-8230 or visiting <https://app.capointments.com/>. For more information contact our office at (440) 350-9160.

VITA Tax Clinics

FREE tax preparation clinics will begin in January 2026. Our clinic schedule will be released in early January and will have daytime, evening and weekend clinic times available. Clinics will be held in Painesville, Perry and Wickliffe, as well as in Newbury and Chardon. Other locations may be announced in early 2026! Contact 211 for more information and to schedule tax appointments!

For more information on any of these programs, please contact Andrea Johnson at (440) 354-2148 ext. 207 at andreaj@lclifeline.org, or at 211.

Lake County offers property tax relief

25, 2026. Payments can be made through the Lake County Treasurer's Office.

In community news, the Lake County Birthday Club, led by Treasurer Michael Zuren and Terri Bowes, is now collecting Valentine's Day cards and small trinkets for upcoming Valentine's parties at these same locations. These simple gestures—cards with kind messages or items like fidget toys and candies—brighten days for residents who may receive few visitors. Community members interested in donating or volunteering are encouraged to contact Terri Bowes at (440) 567-0991.

From tax savings to acts of kindness, Lake County exemplifies community support and generosity as we head into the new year.

Osborne Charitable Trust recognized at 2025 Annual Meeting

Several individuals and organizations recognized during the ceremony

The 2025 Lake County Council on Aging Annual Meeting and Awards Presentation drew a full crowd to the beautiful Pine Ridge Country Club in October.

Master of ceremonies Cameron Zwagerman introduced Council on Aging CEO Joe Tomsick, who gave a review of the agency's successes over the past year. Those in attendance were also welcomed by Lake County Commissioner Rich Regovich just weeks before his untimely passing. With sincerity and passion, he spoke about the good work of the Council on Aging, highlighting compassion and service to the oldest members of the community—a legacy that was also important to him.

Awards presentations were made in several categories, including the Senior Citizen Hall of Fame Award. This year, two individuals were inducted: retired Lake County Fair Board Director Jerry Merhar and retired treasurer of the Lake County Senior Services Levy Kip Molenaar, who served for more than 20 years in that role. The Lake Catholic High School Drum Corps and the Alliance for Working Together (AWT) received Helping Hands Awards from the Council on Aging.

A Special Recognition Award was given to the partners of the Lake County Mobile Food Pantry, which was established during the pandemic and concluded in September. Honorees included

Laketran, Lifeline, the Board of Lake County Commissioners, the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, and the Council on Aging.

The highlight of the afternoon was the presentation of the prestigious Ruth Densmore Senior Advocate Award to the Jerome T. Osborne and Georgeanne S. Osborne Charitable Trust, in recognition of its impactful financial support of nonprofit organizations such as the Council on Aging. This support has enabled the agency to continue the incredible success of its "Healthy Living Project." Originally funded by the Ohio Department on Aging through the Lake County Board of Commissioners, continuation of the project was made possible in 2025 through a grant from the Osborne Charitable Trust.

Work under this initiative is changing lives in Lake County every day. When low-income senior clients have nowhere else to turn and all other resources have been exhausted, they are given a second chance thanks to this restricted funding. Some projects have provided seniors with appliance replacements, roofing, front door replacements, medical equipment, and emergency grocery assistance.

For more information about the Lake County Council on Aging, visit www.lccoa.org.



Top: A capacity crowd enjoys lunch at the the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Council on Aging.

Middle left: Board members and CEO collaborate on the organization's vision and next steps.

Middle right: 93-year-old accordionist Don Densmore entertains the audience.

Bottom: Kip Molenaar delivers his acceptance speech for the Senior Citizens Hall of Fame.

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