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STATE
Michigan Library Association's new campaign encourages residents to fight book bans

By Gina Joseph
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Book banning and censorship efforts have been going on for 2,000 years. A timeline of book bannings and censorship by Freedom to Read shows that books have been under fire for centuries. A Chinese emperor is said to have killed hundreds of Confucian scholars and burned all of the books in his kingdom during his reign in 212 BC, so history would begin with him. The Bible and works of Shakespeare, even Beatrix Potter and Mickey Mouse have come under fire. England banned Potter's collection of children's classics because

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STATE
Growing acceptance



PHOTOS BY GINA JOSEPH — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Tucker Jasso, CEO and founder of For The Love of Charlie, a licensed medical marijuana processing facility, talks to residents Wednesday at Baldwin House Senior Living in Clinton Township about her experience with cannabis products.

More older adults using cannabis for aches, pains

By Gina Joseph and Anne Runkle
MediaNews Group

A growing number of older people in Michigan are seeing the benefits of cannabis use to address the aches and pains that come with age. "We have a ton of seniors who come in here," said Jerry Millen, owner of the Greenhouse of Walled Lake, a cannabis retailer. "We cater to them," he said, adding that he employs older adults as bud tenders, or sales consultants, who help educate senior customers about the benefits of cannabis use and how to use the products effectively. In addition to helping with pain management, many seniors find cannabis products help with insomnia, he said. Cannabis and marijuana are general terms used to describe a group of plants known for their relaxing and calming effects. They can be smoked or consumed as gummies or other edibles. Two of the most well-known components of cannabis are cannabidiol (CBD) and tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Experts say CBD won't make you feel high and is often used for pain relief and may reduce inflammation. It's also credited with relieving nausea and has other medical benefits. THC has many of the same medical benefits as CBD and is responsible for the high associated with cannabis. At a recent presentation at Baldwin House Senior Living in Clinton Township, Shirley McKernan was among a number of seniors eager to hear what Tucker Jasso had to say about the benefits of cannabis. Jasso is the founder of For the Love of Charlie, a licensed medical marijuana processing facility.



Sharon Decker, who has arthritis in her wrist, was among the residents at Baldwin House interested in learning more about holistic medicine.

"I'm 88 years old," McKernan told the crowd attending the presentation Wednesday afternoon. "I can walk down the stairs and I don't get out of breath, but I get up every morning in pain. "I just want to get rid of the pain," said a teary-eyed McKernan, who was joined by at least a dozen other seniors with similar problems. "Cannabis has become mainstream, and many of our residents have been asking how they can secure products in a convenient and safe environment," said Robert Gillette, president and founder of Baldwin House, which scheduled presentations for their residents in both Macomb and Oakland counties, including in Clinton Township, Pontiac and Hazel Park. "Cannabis also offers an excellent alter-



Jasso

native to opioids and other prescription drugs," he said. Sharon Decker has arthritis in her wrist. John Mucaria served in the U.S. Army and has problems with his knees. Another veteran has a friend suffering from migraines. All of the residents at the presentation wanted to know more about Jasso's experience with cannabis and her company's mission to improve the quality of life for mature adults, veterans and people with disabilities. "I know a lot of people have preconceived notions about medical marijuana," Jasso said. "I was one of those people until a few years ago." As she explained to the group, her first experience with cannabis occurred when a neighbor named Charlie was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given about a year to live. "It's a pretty hard cancer to go through, not only for the person who has it but the family, too," Jasso said, noting that Charlie and his wife were retired teachers who were once active and fit, so it was not uncommon for neighbors to see the two of them walking up and down the road or working somewhere on their 10 acres. That is, until Charlie got sick. As the months passed, Charlie's condition worsened. He was not eating and he reached a point where he didn't want to take the pain medication in order to have a clear mind during his final days. It was then that Jasso asked his wife if Charlie had ever tried medical marijuana and after discussing it further, Jasso offered to find out more about it. A few calls later, Jasso connected with a caregiver licensed

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— Robert Gillette, president and founder of Baldwin House Senior Living



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Books

FROM PAGE 1

the stories of Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny only portrayed middle-class rabbits. While Germany banned the mouseketeer's comic books because Mickey was said to be an anti-Red Rebel.

While books have been under fire for centuries, the heat has become unbearable for libraries and librarians.

So, they're fighting back.

This past week the Michigan Library Association (MLA) launched its MI Right to Read campaign encouraging residents to protect their First Amendment right to read whatever they choose — by opposing censorship and book banning.

"The majority of Michiganders support the work our public libraries do and want to see various perspectives portrayed in the content available at their local libraries," said Debbie Mikula, executive director of the Michigan Library Association. "Michigan's public libraries are centers for community, and we want to ensure that librarians across Michigan can do their jobs and serve the needs of all individuals."

Michigan's Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II concurred.

"Every family in Michigan has a different background, and our youth deserve to see themselves reflected in books available at their local public library," said Gilchrist. "Reading unlocks creativity, courage and imagination. Having diverse content available at our public libraries is crucial in making Michigan a better place for our kids to learn and grow."

Public libraries are being targeted at an alarming rate by individuals and extremist groups to remove books that discuss topics such as racism, sexuality, gender, and history — cen-

soring different perspectives.

"I think it's great to get the word out to communities," said Jamie Morris, head of communications and strategy for Clinton-Macomb public library. "They need to know these things are going on in society."

One would think book banning and censorship was a thing of the past but it's actually a growing movement.

"From July to December 2022, PEN America found 1,477 cases of books being removed, up from 1,149 during the previous six months. Since the organization began tracking bans in July 2021, it has counted more than 4,000 instances of book removals using news reports, public records requests and publicly available data," according to an article by the New York Times.

In Michigan, Ottawa County's Jamestown Township, residents voted down a library millage in the last midterm election, forcing the closure of the only local library after staff refused to remove LGBTQ books from its collection.

"We read those stories and feel so bad for the people involved," Morris said, noting that librarians are leaving their profession because of what's going on and eventually that's going to impact communities that rely on their knowledge and training.

Librarians are required to have a master's degree in information science in order to be able to develop a collection that is well rounded and resonates with the community. If a reader wishes to challenge a book in the collection, that is their right. What follows the challenge is a procedure practiced by most libraries.

"We do get book challenges," Morris said, and that's perfectly fine.

Many of the challenges are motivated by a desire to protect children from inappropriate sexual con-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCHESTER HILLS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Rochester Hills Public Library Director Juliane Morian, stands in front of a display of new releases at the library, which in its 100-year history has never banned a book from its collection.



GINA JOSEPH — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Jamie Morris, head of communications and strategy for Clinton-Macomb public library, holds a few of the books that are on the banned book list including the Harry Potter series.

tent or offensive language or because the reader felt the material was unsuited for a specific age group.

When a challenge is made, the library reviews the book to determine its merit. It can take weeks as it involves a professional, in-depth analysis of the work. In the end it is up to the library director to make the informed decision to remove, relocate or retain a title based on the facts reviewed by the library staff.

"No book has ever been removed," Morris said, but she does recall a time when a book was moved to a different section of the library.

The same is true of Rochester Hills Public Library. In its 100-year history, no book has ever been

banned.

"As a staff we focus less on banning and more on the right to read and building broad collections of popular interest at Rochester Hills Public Library," said Juliane Morian, its director.

Minutes from public meetings show patrons appreciate the stance:

A resident who is a member of the LGBTQ community said that from a young age, she knew her identity and was born this way, not just experimenting with a lifestyle. She said she appreciates the library including people like her and representing her in collections and programs.

Another resident commented that change is hard, and it is hard to counter a belief that has

been taught to you for many years, but that recognizing LGBTQ individuals is long overdue. She said that no one of the LGBTQ community is recruiting anyone to a lifestyle and instead you are born into that identity. She said she appreciates the library's efforts to help youth figure out what they are going through with trusted material and professionally curated information resources.

A teacher in the community expressed high praise for the library being a good resource for students, especially in the summer months. She commented that some of the elementary students she teaches have revealed they are part of the LGBTQ community even at a very young age. She said not all family members support LGBTQ youth in their family units and having library resources that reflect the entire community is pivotal to the health and well-being of all adolescents.

They're not alone.

In a statewide poll commissioned by MLA, 75% of respondents said we need to protect access to books, especially for young people learning about different perspectives, and 83% of all respondents would support state legislation that would protect the right of the public to read what they wish to read in local public libraries and not have books banned.

One state has already approved such legislation.

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed a bill in June that makes his state the first to outlaw book bans, according to a story by the Associated Press. Any public library that restricts or bans materials because of "partisan or doctrinal" disapproval will be ineligible for state funding as of Jan. 1, 2024 when the new law goes into effect.

Morris said despite what some people think, public libraries have no agenda other than to serve the general public's information

needs, and provide them with access to the books they want to read.

"If you don't like a book, don't read it," she said. "There's no shame in quitting a book."

And if you do like a book, take a stand on its behalf.

The MI Right to Read campaign is urging Michigan parents to join the coalition of more than 1,500 members and speak out against book banning and censorship efforts happening throughout the state. The MI Right to Read website also has tips and resources for families looking to explore their local public library.

"We need help from parents and all community members when they see these types of efforts to limit or censor content at our public libraries," said Morian. "Parents should know that librarians want to partner with them during their family visits to the library to help guide children to age-appropriate content. We can also share resources they might not know exist at the library, like e-books, audiobooks, STEM kits and more."

Readers can make a difference.

Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" was threatened with banning by Boston's district attorney unless some of its questionable content was removed. The public's uproar over the threat, however, not only stopped the ban in 1884 but the sale of his books increased so much that Whitman was able to buy a house with the proceeds.

"Maintaining and strengthening trust in the public library is arguably my most important job," said Morian. "I believe your faith in this institution will crack the minute I allow books to be censored."

For more information about the campaign visit MIRightToRead.com/parents or the Michigan Library Association website at milibraries.org.



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