

Friday, March 28, 2008

They got government: *Citizens Academy launches the newest class of future public servants*

BY CATHY NELSON PRICE
of the Daily News

There weren't any caps or gowns, but they did get diplomas.

The 25 members of Midland's 2008 Citizens Academy graduated Wednesday night, just as lively and inquisitive as they were nine weeks ago, when Mayor Pro Tem Tom Adams promised them they'd eventually know more than he did about the city's various departments.

Adams was back on the dais for the final session, along with fellow council member Maureen Donker, City Manager Jon Lynch and City Attorney Jim Branson. They were the panel of experts available for the "Phone An Official" option of what constituted the academy's traditional final exam — a spirited version of "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?"

Like its "Millionaire" namesake, the game had a camera-savvy moderator, City Clerk Selina Tisdale, ("City In 15" and all those televised council meetings) who did her best Meredith Vieira impression reading the multiple-choice questions. Some were easier than others, and

some of the answer choices were tongue-in-cheek, but overall they revisited what the class had learned about city functions from council meetings to water treatment to fire safety to snow removal and beyond.

The class was divided into five color-coded teams, and each member got a time in the hot seat. As the overhead multiple choice questions (looking a lot like the ones from "Millionaire") flashed on the screen, the contestant had the choice of answering, polling his or her team, or phoning an official. To the strains of the popular television show's suspenseful music, they made their choices. Correct answers were rewarded with "Mayor Money," faux hundred dollar bills with the smiling face of Mayor Bruce Johnson, presented

to them by city Utilities Director Noel Bush.

By game's end, the Purple team had the most correct answers, but the competition had been fierce. "From the way you people are turning on each other," joked Lynch, "you must really want to win. We didn't have that last year!"

Earlier, Lynch had praised the class for its eagerness to dig into

the detailed why's and how's of city functions.

"You guys were great; it's been wonderful to have those kinds of questions asked," he said. "You are now Citizens Academy Ambassadors. When your friends and neighbors have questions about the city, you know where to steer them. There are lots of opportunities for you on boards and commissions."

Members received their diplomas with pride and some levity. "I want to thank my mother and father," deadpanned Luis Gonzalez, SVSU chaplain, as he hummed "Pomp and Circumstance."

Clearly, though, the academy had left its mark. "I came from a town of about 12,000 in Minnesota, where government was a lot different," said Patty Carlson. "I learned so much. I'm thinking about take the Sheriff's Academy program next,

and maybe applying for a board or commission."

Northwood University sophomore David McAtee, the academy's youngest member, still marvels at the dedication of both city staff and fellow classmates, most of whom showed up even during the snowstorm that accompanied their visit to the fire station.

"It's amazing to me that they work in 24-hour shifts," he said, referring to the firefighters. "I don't know how a person survives that kind of schedule."

A management information systems major, McAtee sees public service in his future.

"I want to either be on a board or work for the city," he said.

As he'd done at the opening session, an obviously moved Tom Adams thanked the class for its "excitement, attentiveness and enthusiasm," and added, "It's very gratifying for staff and elected officials to know that people in this community are willing to put nine weeks into this program, to be better citizens."

"I have no doubt," he said, "that you'll be helping this city in a number of ways."



Courtesy photo/Rickey Wilson, Wilson Photography

The 2008 City of Midland Citizens Academy graduates at City Hall on Wednesday night.

Zilwaukee Bridge

Detour extended due to snag

ZILWAUKEE (AP) — A \$3.3 million project on the Zilwaukee Bridge has hit some road blocks, forcing motorists to steer around the bridge for at least another two months.

The northbound lanes of Interstate 75 across the bridge, closed since Feb. 18 to replace bearings that allow it to expand and contract in changing weather, were due to reopen by the end of March.

But Midwest Bridge Co. of Williamston has determined more than 30 new bearings weren't designed correctly by an engineer hired by the Michigan Department of Transportation, said company President Steve Zynda.

The project has been halted while MDOT and Midwest Bridge officials assess the situation, Anita Richardson, an MDOT spokeswoman for the Bay Region, told The Bay City Times for a story Thursday.

Zynda said he doesn't know who was at fault in designing the bearings, which already have been made. Each bearing weighs a couple thousand pounds, is circular in shape and 3 feet in diameter.

"This bridge is a really complicated bridge," Zynda said. "It's probably the most complicated bridge in the state."

The northbound lanes may remain closed until Memorial Day, Richardson told The Saginaw News.

Motorists should use I-675 as an alternate route for the duration.

Richardson said both north and southbound lanes will be closed in phases again next year to replace the bearings.

The Zilwaukee Bridge, which opened in 1988, was plagued with problems during its construction, leading to a federal probe and cost overruns of \$44 million.

Correction

The Midland Daily News strives on a daily basis to be factual and accurate in all reporting and writing. This space is reserved for any corrections of fact to appear.

Number was wrong

The telephone number in a March 16 story on Family and Children's Services was incorrect. The correct number is (989) 631-5390. The story appeared on page D6.



Daily News/MANDY MCCONAHA

Andy Young, 19, of Midland, points out different animal track vinyl stickers to West Midland Family Center preschool children (left to right) Cameron Hierholzer, 5, Savante Sullivan, 4, Caleb Falkowski, 4, and Joslyne Johnson, 5, where he installed, with the help of his father Gregg Young, loon, raccoon and gorilla tracks on the classroom floor. Andy received a grant that helps individuals with special needs start up their own businesses. Andy, with the help of his father, produces vinyl stickers and stencils of 21 different animal tracks for his fledgling business, Andy's Animal Tracks.

Making an impression

Animal tracks make pathways for new business

BY CHERYL WADE
of the Daily News

Thanks to a Midland family's new business, West Midland Family Center preschoolers will follow a trail of animal footprints between sinks and bathrooms in their classrooms. And when the Great Lakes Loons play at Dow Diamond, there just might be life-size loon prints on the field.

Gregg and Marianne Young have created Andy's Animal Tracks, which sells stencils and vinyl replicas of life-size animal footprints that can be used to adorn playgrounds, walkways and children's bedrooms. Son Andy has a developmental disability, and the business was established so he could earn money from it.

Andy, 19, is nearly an Eagle Scout. He and his dad got the idea for the animal footprints as an Eagle project. Gregg's dad had operated a business painting games and maps on school playgrounds. So father and son put homemade stenciled images on playground pavement at five Midland elementary schools and at MidMichigan Medical Center at the end of the pediatrics unit.

The outdoor stencils were painted with the same kind of "traffic paint" the City of Midland uses for white and yellow lines on streets, Gregg said. Wendy Plewa, preschool director and teacher at West Midland Family Center, saw the prints and

suggested this could become a business.

Gregg searched online and in books for animal footprints and sketched them. Then he scanned the hand-drawn images to create digital files.

The Youngs approached the Arnold Center and Community Mental Health for Central Michigan for a "microenterprise" grant to help launch the small business. The resulting grant covered costs of prototyping and marketing the product as well as business management. The Youngs found Graphitek, a New York company that makes the vinyl stick-on prints, and Stencils Online, a New Hampshire company that makes the stencils in various sizes using the digital files.

The Youngs now sell 21 footprints, including the wolverine, loon, koala bear, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, elephant, gorilla, grizzly bear and three varieties of dinosaurs.

"We picked unusual ones because we thought

they would be more interesting for people to see," Gregg said.

In the process of creating them, the Youngs learned lots of fun facts about the animals' tracks. For example, each of the koala bear's front feet has two "thumbs" for climbing. Two of the fingers on the back feet are fused, with claws that serve as grooming devices. The tyrannosaurus rex track is 34 inches by 34 inches and looks, to Gregg's mind, like a big chicken track. The loon has three-toed, webbed feet.

At West Midland, where the Youngs installed raccoon, loon and gorilla tracks Thursday, Plewa said the three sizes of prints will help children learn about colors, sizes of objects and the animals that make the tracks.

The Loons were the Youngs' first customers. Vinyl prints will serve as a heat barrier in the summer on bathroom doors in the picnic pavilion at left field, said Matt McQuaid, the stadium's head groundskeeper. Prints also could make a pathway to a proposed Lou E. Loon's house, where the friendly mascot would sign autographs. Prints might decorate the field, too.

"Over the course of the year (they'll) pop up here and there," McQuaid said. "There are all kinds of possibilities."

Reporter Cheryl Wade may be reached at cwade@mdn.net or (989) 839-4272.

For more information on Andy's Animal Tracks:

Call (989) 839-0566 or visit <http://andysanimaltracks.com>.

The website is in the process of being developed.