

## In This Issue

[Weatherization Day at Capitol](#)

[GCCARD brings logistics to Flint water crisis](#)

[NCAF's David Bradley in Michigan Nov. 24 to speak](#)

[Wayne Metro Named "Top Workplace" by Detroit Free Press](#)

[Executive Profile: Lori Offenbecher](#)

[MCA Officers/Board Members](#)

## Quick Links

[MCA Website](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Legislative Priorities](#)

[Member Services](#)

[Follow MCA on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.](#)

We'd like you to become a "follower" of MCA. Keep up with news and events, media coverage and action alerts. Click on the links below to "follow" MCA today.



## MCA's Mission

To serve member agencies and strengthen their capacity to alleviate the causes and circumstances of poverty.

## Did You Know?

Only 10 percent of families served by MEAP through a CAA in 2014 returned for assistance in 2015, indicating the true value of the program: helping families get through a crisis and returning to self sufficiency.

## Wayne Metro CAA named "Top Workplace" by Detroit Free Press

Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency (Wayne Metro) is one of 35 midsize organizations named to the "Top Workplaces 2015" list by the Detroit Free Press.

Wayne Metro has 136 full-time employees, 136 part-time employees and an extensive group of dedicated service members and volunteers. With a budget close to \$35 million per year, the agency operates more than 60 programs, including homeless and emergency services, community and economic development, crisis interventions, financial and asset development programs and youth and family services.

"As a growing agency, our team members continue to work diligently to provide important programs for families living in Wayne County," says **Louis Piszker**, Wayne Metro CEO. "Our reputation for being easy to work with, fiscally responsible and programmatically strong is fueling our growth and we are making every effort to bring the maximum number of resources to help to those who need it most."

The Top Workplaces recognition is based on employee feedback. WorkplaceDynamics, LLP, partners with the *Detroit Free Press* to conduct extensive surveys of team members, which are used to select the Top Workplaces list. In November, the Free Press will publish a full Top Workplaces special section, including in-depth features on some of the Top Workplaces.

## MCA Officers/Board Members for 2015-2017

**John Stephenson - President**

Northwest Michigan

**Louis Piszker -Vice President**

Wayne Metro

**Jill Sutton-Secretary Treasurer**

Md Michigan

**Arthur Fenrick**

Lower Peninsula Rural Officer Southwestern Michigan

**Eric Schertzing**

CAA Governing Board Officer Capital Area Comm. Services

**Caroline Ross**

CAA Governing Board Officer EightCAP

**Charlotte Smith**

Urban Officer

Kalamazoo County

**Kerri Duff**

Upper Peninsula Officer Gogebic Ontonagon

## Have a Catalyst story idea?

Is there a story or issue you'd like to see covered in Catalyst?

Let us know what's happening in your agency or region. Recent events? People news? We welcome your input and feedback.

Please send your comments and ideas to:

[Click Here](#)

## Capitol Weatherization Day event, demos draw legislators

The north corridor of the Capitol building in Lansing teemed with legislators and MCA members Oct. 29 during Weatherization Day 2015. The event demonstrated the benefits of the Weatherization Assistance Program and commemorated National Weatherization Day (Oct. 30).

Legislators learned that at least 1,500 homes will be weatherized in Michigan in the upcoming year, saving families \$250-\$450 in utility costs. **Robert Jackson**, director of the Energy Office, Michigan Agency for Energy, spoke on the governor's energy policy and praised the weatherization program's long history of success helping low-income families reduce energy costs.



Robert Jackson, director of the Michigan Energy Office, greets legislators and CAA staff members at Weatherization Day at the Capitol.



State Rep. Edward Canfield (R-84), second from right, learns how an infrared camera is used to detect heat loss, from Roger Strickladden (left), Dale Congdon (second from left) of ACSET and Abe Dehlin (right) of Menominee Delta Schoolcraft CAA.

## GCCARD lends helpful logistics to Flint water crisis

Getting water filters to Flint residents quickly might have been a logistical problem, were it not for the infrastructure already in place by Genesee County Community Action Resource Department ([GCCARD](#)), which is playing a key role in the response to Flint's water crisis.

GCCARD was chosen to spearhead the distribution of water filters provided by the state at the recommendation of the state Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity, which knew the agency had the capability to get the filters to residents quickly and efficiently.

Matt Purcell, GCCARD's finance director, said the filters were distributed at GCCARD offices, as well as delivered and installed for senior citizens.

"This is an example of how adaptive Community Action Agencies are," Purcell said.

GCCARD distributed nearly 10,000 water filters to residents in October after lead was discovered in the municipality's water supply. The department is also preparing to distribute replacement filters as the need arises.

"Our staff was pleased to play a key role in the crisis intervention in the City of Flint," says Purcell, "but we would not have been as successful if not for the involvement of our partners and their committed staff. This was an example of community pulling together in a time of need." He says the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity, United Way of Genesee County and Genesee County Health Department were all key partners in the effort.

"We're in contact with folks on a daily basis," he explains, through such programs as commodity food distribution and Meals on Wheels. Purcell believes GCCARD's timely and effective handling of the filters distribution further enhanced its standing within the Genesee County community and among the area's elected officials.

## NCAF's David Bradley to speak on Community Action history, War on Poverty

MCA will welcome David Bradley, executive director of National Community Action Foundation, for a one-day seminar on the "History of Community Action and the War on Poverty."

Meet Bradley and learn about the political and economic issues that led to the passage of the landmark Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the creation of the CAA Network.

The seminar is Tuesday, November 24, at the MCA Okemos Conference Center from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. For more information, please visit our registration website. [Click here.](#)



## Executive profile: Lori Offenbecher Breaking down barriers for people in poverty

The mistaken belief that people in poverty are there simply because of their own poor choices is not new, says **Lori Offenbecher**, who joined the Carobased Human Development Commission ([HDC](#)), 26 years ago and became executive director in 2010. She saw it when she first joined the agency as a case manager for domestic violence services in the late '80s. Now, as the organization's leader, overseeing its services in Huron, Lapeer, Sanilac and Tuscola counties, she says the belief persists.

"Conditions that keep, or place, people in poverty have changed over the decades," Offenbecher notes, "and it should be realized that the majority of families are only one crisis away from poverty, be it due to a health-related issue or the loss of a job."

In the Thumb area, economic upheaval changed the face of poverty when many autoworkers, who were accustomed to living a middle-class lifestyle, were displaced when the manufacturing industry took a downturn. Many people were suddenly struggling to make ends meet as they did not know how to navigate the social services safety net or were too embarrassed to ask for assistance.

Last year, the agency served approximately 11,000 people through 70 programs, including foreclosure prevention counseling, homeless services, home-delivered meals and Early Head Start.

"As a Community Action Agency," Offenbecher explains, "it is not only our mission to provide programming that promotes self-sufficiency, but also to educate our communities in the causes of poverty and to enlist their support in alleviating its effects."

A prime example of educating and garnering support is the agency's establishment of a free, weekly meal that is sponsored by the agency and supported by businesses, churches and civic organizations. The meal, Spoonfuls of Plenty, not only provides sustenance and a gathering place for a sense of community, but also is an eye-opening experience for many of the volunteers.

"I served food and had the opportunity to be a recipient of gratefulness from the people attending that evening," said the city mayor who volunteered at one of the meals. "The experience was very rewarding and unique in receiving their gratitude, while feeling ashamed that I hadn't participated in such a good program prior to



Lori Offenbecher

that evening." Offenbecher says that it is stories such as this that make her position so rewarding and kindles her passion to help people move toward self-sufficiency.

"The successes we see daily are what keeps me motivated to stay in Community Action," Offenbecher says. "To those employees new to Community Action, I would advise them to always be flexible, which is a major key to success in our jobs, and willing to put in the time to learn."

During her time at HDC, Offenbecher believes she has performed just about every function the agency offers, other than to weatherize a house.... she says, she is not ruling it out!

Michigan Community Action  
2173 Commons Parkway  
Okemos, MI 48864  
Phone: 517.321.7500  
Fax: 517.321.7504  
[info@mcaaa.org](mailto:info@mcaaa.org)