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**MCA's Mission**

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

**2016 Community Action award nominations due March 11**

MCA will host its annual Community Action Awards presentation April 28 as part of the annual Day at the Capitol event. All member agencies are invited to nominate an agency client and/volunteer for recognition. Recipients receive an inscribed trophy and \$100 gift card.

Nomination forms have been sent to all member agencies and are also available on the MCA website [here](#). Nominations are due **March 11**.

**Governor's Economic/Education Summit March 15, Grand Rapids**

The Governor's Economic and Education Summit (GES2) will take place Tuesday, March 15, in Grand Rapids, featuring keynote speaker Jaime Casap, chief education evangelist at Google. The event is designed to encourage collaboration between the education and business communities to attract, retain and develop Michigan's professional talent.

The summit brings together educators, business leaders and workforce professionals from across Michigan with the goal of expanding the state's ability to compete in the knowledge-based economy of the future.

The event runs from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Devos Place Convention Center, 303 Monroe Ave. NW, Grand Rapids.

For more information or to register click [here](#).

**Community needs assessment, strategic planning training March 29-30, Okemos**

Michigan Community Action will conduct a two day intensive training session March 29-30 in Okemos on designing and managing a community needs assessment and strategic planning process. The training includes presentations, facilitated discussions and small group exercises.

Day one will focus on the community needs assessment and will cover options for research design, strategies for engaging diverse shareholders in the assessment process, using the Community Action Partnership's Community Commons website for data collection, interpreting data and how to get the most out of the final report.

Day two will focus on strategic planning and will cover strategies for engaging internal and external stakeholders, how to conduct a "SWOT" analysis, aligning mission and programs, how to move from selecting goals to writing action plans and how to design an implementation process that translates planning into action.

Both days will also cover compliance with organizational standards and how to apply ROMA principles to both processes.

The training will be conducted by **Dr. Jarle Crocker**, director of training and technical assistance at Community Action Partnership (CAP) and **Natalie Kramer**, CAP program and policy associate.

**AMCAB rehabs historic building for local housing needs**



Built in 1915, the former Holy Family Orphanage of Marquette is being renovated into low income housing.

When renovation of the former Holy Family Orphanage, a longtime eyesore in the city of Marquette, begins this spring, it will serve as another example of Alger-Marquette Community Action Board (AMCAB) responding to the housing needs in the Upper Peninsula communities it serves.

AMCAB isn't the first or only Community Action Agency to become involved in developing housing, but few if any agencies are engaged to the same extent it is.

"We're simply responding to what our community tells us is needed," says AMCAB Executive Director Amy Lerie, who says the need is based on the geography and demographics of Alger and Marquette counties. The cities of Marquette (population 21,441) and Munising (2,309) are central to AMCAB's service area, which covers 8,474 square miles, is sparsely populated, geographically isolated and has limited public transportation.

Because people need to be where services and jobs are available, demand for housing in the two communities is robust - pricing many low-income families and senior citizens out of the markets.

"That's where we come in," Lerie says.

AMCAB has partnered with Farmington Hills-based Home Renewal Systems LLC to redevelop the historic former Holy Family Orphanage in downtown Marquette, using \$12.6 million in Low Income Housing Tax Credits and \$2.2 million in Historic Tax Credits.

The facility, built in 1915, had fallen into disrepair since it closed in 1981 and was targeted by the Marquette County Land Bank as a potential blight elimination project.

Upon completion in 2017, the renovated property - The Grandview Marquette - will provide 56 affordable housing units, with one quarter set aside for homeless families and those with special needs.

The Grandview Marquette will be the fourth housing project developed with AMCAB's involvement in the past 20 years. The first development was Lost Creek Apartments and Town Homes, a 151-unit development for residents 55 years or older, followed by The Preserve at Orianna Ridge, an 80-unit mix of one- and two-story apartments and townhomes for families. Rents there are based on household income, and 20 of the units are set aside for homeless families and those with special needs.

Most recently, AMCAB partnered with Millennia Development to rehabilitate Snowberry Heights, an 11-story, 191-unit development for low-income elderly persons in Marquette.

AMCAB partners with for-profit private developers for each project.

"As a nonprofit, we don't have the resources and expertise that they do," Lerie says. "We open doors in the community because everybody knows who we are and we bring instant credibility and recognition to the project."

AMCAB's involvement in housing development was inspired by Ron Calery, executive director of Chippewa-Luce-Mackinac Community Action Agency, who is well-known as a pioneer in developing affordable housing.

"He recognized the need and developed solutions long before AMCAB," Lerie explains. "He taught others, including my predecessors, how to get involved in affordable housing development."

"I think it's fitting tradition and benefits those we serve in the best possible way by creating a safe, affordable home for those who need it."

**Coalition recognizes legislators, leaders for energy assistance advocacy**



John Stephenson, Northwest Michigan Community Action receives the CTKMW award from Chrissy Beckwith, director of government affairs, SEMCO Energy.

The Coalition to Keep Michigan Warm recognized legislators and community leaders Feb. 24 in Lansing for their work on energy issues for low-income families. Coalition members also met with state lawmakers to raise awareness about the energy assistance needs of Michigan's low-income households.

The event on the capitol grounds recognized Michigan Public Service Commissioner (MPSC) **John D. Quackenbush** as the 2016 State Advocate; **Laura Oblinger** of Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce and **John Stephenson** of Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency with the 2016 Innovator Award; and **State Sen. John Proos** (R-St. Joseph) and **State Rep. Bill LaVoy** (D-Monroe) each with the 2016 Legislator of the Year Award.

More than 580,000 Michigan households received some type of state, private and federal funds for home heating assistance in 2015, according to Coalition Chairperson **Jamie Curtis** of the Salvation Army. Nearly twice that many are eligible for some type of agency or program assistance.

"Too many low-income families are still struggling with winter heating bills," Curtis said. "While the economy is better for some, low-income workers and families still find themselves living paycheck to paycheck and deciding which bills to pay. For them, staying safe and warm during the winter months can be exceptionally hard."

"We can't forget that some individuals and families need our assistance in order to make it through the winter," said Quackenbush. "I look forward to continuing to work with the coalition on energy solutions for Michigan residents and families."

The coalition recognized the Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency (NMCAA) and the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce for their annual joint partnership of the Traverse City Sleep Out, which raises awareness and funds with area celebrities camping out for the night at the start of the heating season.

"No family should be cold in their own homes during a Michigan winter, and I thank the Coalition to Keep Michigan Warm for recognizing the work NMCAA does to find energy solutions for the families in our area," said Stephenson. "We will

Tuesday March 29 - Wednesday  
March 30,  
9 a. m. to 4 p. m.  
Michigan Community Action  
2173 Commons Parkway  
Okemos, MI 48864

Register [here](#).

For attendees needing overnight accommodations, two hotels are within a short walk from the MCA office: Click on the links below for details:

[Comfort Inn](#)

[Holiday Inn Express](#)

### **Did You Know?**

*Those most affected by the rental housing crisis in Michigan are families with children. Twenty-eight percent of the total rental population in Michigan pays at least half of their income on rent.*

### **MCA Officers/Board Members 2015-2017**

**John Stephenson**

President  
Northwest Michigan CAA

**Louis Piszker**

Vice President  
Wayne Metro CAA

**Jill Sutton**

Secretary Treasurer  
Mid Michigan CAA

**Toby Berry**

At-Large Officer  
Jackson CAA

**Arthur Fenrick**

Lower Peninsula Rural Officer  
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**Kerri Duff**

Upper Peninsula Officer  
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**Charlotte Smith**

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Kalamazoo County CAA

**Bill Raymond**

Director's Council Chair  
Ottawa County CAA

**Eric Schertzing**

CAA Governing Board Officer  
Capital Area Comm. Services

**Caroline Ross**

CAA Governing Board Officer  
EightCAP

### **Catalyst welcomes input, story ideas**

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. Success stories? Recent events? People news?

We welcome your input and feedback. Please send your comments and ideas to:  
[Click Here](#)

continue advocating for families and working with the coalition to ensure that families are safe and warm during the winter months.

"As committed community partners, the TC area chamber is honored to be recognized for our joint partnership efforts that improves our community and the lives of families and individuals," said Oblinger. "This proves the business community and non-profit sector can work together as a team for the good of our community."

Two lawmakers who were name Legislator of the Year expressed ongoing support for coalition efforts.

"Legislators are in a unique position because we support policies and programs to help families better afford their heating bills," said Sen. Proos, "and we can help them navigate state and local agencies to find a program that will meet their needs."

"We need to help families who don't have the economic resources that others have, and may be struggling to meet the basic needs of their families," said Rep. LaVoy. "We need to make sure that any energy plan for Michigan addresses the needs of low-income families, while also continuing to support the work of the coalition and their efforts helping and advocating for Michigan families."

To join the coalition, visit [www.coalitiontokeepmichiganwarm.org](http://www.coalitiontokeepmichiganwarm.org) and receive regular updates about energy assistance throughout the year.

The event at the state Capitol is only one way in which the coalition works with state lawmakers to improve the delivery of energy assistance. Since 1987, the Coalition to Keep Michigan Warm has worked to improve the availability of financial and human resources to meet the energy assistance needs of Michigan's low-income households. The members perform this mission through the exchange of information, developing new ideas, public education and advocacy.

### **SE MI county residents get water assistance with WRAP**

Low income customers will receive help paying their water and sewer bills with the Water Residential Assistance Program (WRAP) in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. WRAP is a Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) regional program administered by the Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency in Detroit.

To qualify for WRAP, customers must be 150 percent below the federal poverty line of \$36,450 for a family of four. GLWA helps customers by paying one-third of the cost of their average monthly bill and freezing overdue amounts.

If payments are made on time for six months, half of the customer's arrears, up to \$350, would be paid off.

If customers continue for another six months, the remaining arrearages, up to \$350, would be paid by the program.

In addition to payment assistance, some residents may qualify for up to \$1,000 to help fix plumbing or leak issues.

Residents who use 120 percent of the average water consumption, due to leaky pipes or faucets, are eligible.

The programs are designed as a support rather than a hand out, says Sue McCormick, CEO of GLWA.

"It's not just here's \$25 for your bill," she says, but more like, "Let us help you on a path to self-sufficiency."



### **Energy assistance helps Northwest residents build self-sufficiency**

Winter winds and frigid temperatures can cause discomfort for low income households that cannot afford high energy prices. Last fall, the Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency (NMCAA) distributed \$550,000 to 752 families across its ten county region to help pay energy bills as part of the fuel energy assistance program.

NMCAA also helps clients learn about budgeting and strategies for saving money on heating bills.

"We really try to look at someone's whole situation and not just focus on the bill," says NMCAA program coordinator **Tish Garthe-Shiner**.

The program is designed reduce shut offs through preventive intervention with clients and to help them develop a self-sufficiency plan and accountability structure. On average, \$887 is available to each household for energy assistance.

### **NCAF'S Legislative Conference is March 15-18 in Washington D.C.**

The National Community Action Foundation's annual legislative conference will host congressional speakers and other national leaders to discuss current issues in Washington, D.C.

The conference is a great opportunity for those in Community Action to come to the Capitol to meet with their representatives, other congressional leaders and national Community Action champions.

Prior to the conference, NCAF will work with participants to prepare for their Hill meetings. It will also have a special session Wednesday for Hill prep.

**When:** March 15-18, 2016

**Where:** Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill

For more information, please visit the website by clicking [here](#).

To register, please click [here](#).

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