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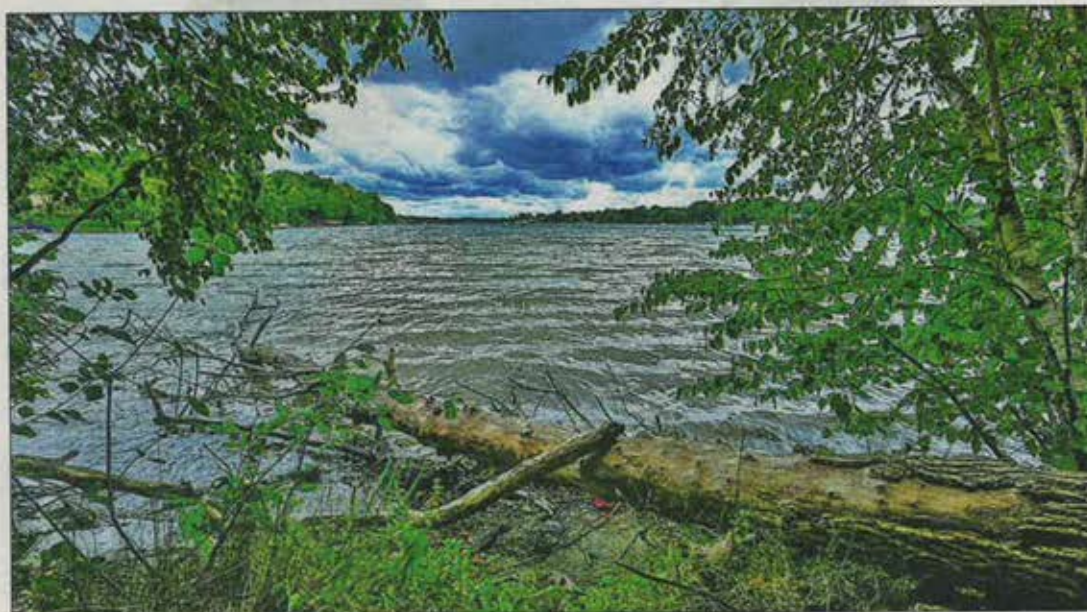
# West Bloomfield BEACON

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## Ex-mayor recognized for work on nature sanctuary



The Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary was opened in 1991. The area is composed of 50 acres of land and has frontage on two of the three lakes in the city. Former Mayor Leo Larkin was recognized by the City Council Aug. 21 for his work in securing the sanctuary.

Photos by Deb Jacques

BY MADDIE FORSHEE

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ORCHARD LAKE — After 26 years, the Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary remains one of the city's gems. With 50 acres of rolling hills surrounded by two lakes, it's a popular spot for residents and visitors. Former Mayor Leo Larkin

headed up the project of creating the sanctuary during his tenure in 1991. Since then, the sanctuary has grown to be a favorite local destination.

"It's a wonderful piece," said Larkin. "It has frontage on two of our three lakes, and it presents itself exactly as God gave it to us. It's a beautiful place."

See SANCTUARY on page 19A



## Local groups team up to teach teens about mental health

BY MADDIE FORSHEE

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WALLED LAKE/WEST BLOOMFIELD — High school can be a hard time for anyone, and sometimes mental health

takes a back seat, especially during the school year.

Friendship Circle's U\_Matter program has been around for two years, helping teens deal with social anxiety and isolation.

The West Bloomfield-based nonprofit

will be expanding its program to work with students at local high schools during the 2017-18 school year.

Friendship Circle has teamed up with the Andrew Kukes Foundation for Social Anxiety to expand the program to host

events in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District and the West Bloomfield School District. AKFSA has provided the program with a \$250,000 grant to use over five years.

See UMATTER on page 12A

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# UMatter

from page 1A

The UMatter program helps teens through events and programming, all with the message that everyone truly matters. In 2016, UMatter trained more than 300 individuals in suicide prevention and hosted a variety of events throughout the year that reached out to a few thousand people.

“We highlight that everybody matters,” said Yarden Blumstein, director of teen engagement at Friendship Circle. “Every person does matter. They shouldn’t think otherwise.”

“UMatter weeks” are hosted at local schools. For the 2017-18 school year, all three high schools in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District will be taking part in the program. West Bloomfield High School will also host a UMatter Week.

“During UMatter weeks in high schools, we create an atmosphere of living life on life’s terms,” said Blumstein. “We have had tremendous success.”

AKFSA is a West Bloomfield-based nonprofit that helps educate people about social anxiety, its causes and how to deal with it. The nonprofit was founded after its namesake, Andrew Kukes, committed suicide as a result of extreme social anxiety.

“I think anything that will bring the mental health discussion to the table is helpful,” said AKFSA Director and President Jeff Kukes. “It’s something I don’t think is discussed too much in high school. Our mission is to get people educated about social anxiety. I think this program will help to do that, especially for the people who need it.”

Kukes said he wanted to work with the UMatter program because during its UMatter weeks it hosts SafeTalks, a type of suicide prevention training that educates teens about mental health.

“We find that social anxiety is prevalent and begins to manifest itself in kids in high schools,” said Kukes. “We can help people there, and it will make a difference.”

During UMatter weeks, the

group sponsors teacher TED-Talks, where teachers talk to their students on a personal level about their experiences, and hosts essay contests, hallway decoration contests and suicide prevention training sessions.

“It’s really important that young people in our high schools really start to value themselves in a way that I’m seeing them not value

themselves,” said Sophia Lafayette, assistant principal at Walled Lake Northern High School. “(UMatter) is a great concept to promote with young people.”

Lafayette said that though schools host many programs to get students involved, she is happy to see one that asks students to be more introspective and focus attention on their mental health.

“We haven’t necessarily had something with this kind of take — where you look within yourself and say, ‘I’m important. I have value. I matter,’” she said. “This goes a little deeper.”

Dates for the programs haven’t been set. UMatter Week will take place in November.

Call Staff Writer Maddie Forshee at (586) 498-1093.



Photo provided by Kristin Sokul

Rabbi Yarden Blumstein, far left, director of the UMatter program with Friendship Circle, poses with the teen volunteer board. The volunteer-based program helps to educate teenagers about mental health.

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