

The Lowell Ledger

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Wednesday, October 6, 2004

New state legislation may help local tool and die shop

"It gives us an opportunity to be more competitive in a global market." -Pat Quinlan

By Dan Schneider

Precise Engineering in Lowell could be among the first to take advantage of recent state legislation intended to help Michigan tool and die shops compete in a global market.

The Michigan Tool and Die Recovery Zone Act eliminates taxes on qualifying tool and die companies. The intent is to help the struggling industry recover from jobs lost overseas.

"It gives us an opportunity to be more competitive in a global market," said Precise owner Pat Quinlan. "A lot of companies in other countries are partially funded by their governments."

Quinlan said tool and die makers in Korea and Indonesia have especially drawn business away from American companies. The Recovery Zone Act establishes a renaissance zone around the

individual tool and die companies. Tax abatements remove the real and personal property taxes and the state single business tax.

Vergennes Township, where Precise is located on Lincoln Lake Avenue, approved a resolution giving Precise tax abatements for 15 years. If a few other municipalities do the same, the tax savings will take effect.

"This will give us some breathing room for a time while we work to be more efficient and a better global competitor," Quinlan said.

According to Ray DeWinkle, vice president of The Right Place, Inc., tool and die manufacturing is an important industry for local economies. The Right Place, Inc. is an organization in Grand Rapids that works to further the economic development of the Grand Rapids area.

New legislation, cont'd., pg. 10



Rick Barnard, left, and Troy Kremers discuss the timing of a test die press at Precise Engineering in Vergennes Township. The company has approval from the township to receive tax abatements through new state legislation intended to make tool and die companies more globally competitive.

City keeps Halloween activities on Sunday

By J. Lobdell
Contributing Writer

Every so many years, Halloween falls on a Sunday and the question becomes for many communities whether the activity should be observed on that day.

For the city of Lowell, police chief Jim Valentine has answered it by stating in a memo to the Lowell City Council that the city will observe Halloween on its regularly scheduled time, Oct. 31, despite the date falling on Sunday.

"This is really to help prevent any confusion," Valentine said to the council at its regular Monday night meeting. "Switching the date would create some confusion. Some

people would not know of the change and in the end, we could have two days of trick or treating instead of one."

Valentine said in 1999, when Halloween last fell on a Sunday, he did receive some pressure to change the celebration to a different day. After looking into the matter, however, Valentine decided it was best to leave well enough alone.

"I had some people who were concerned about what this particular holiday represents and that we are encouraging that it be celebrated on a Sunday," Valentine said, adding that those who are "very, very entrenched" in not partaking in Halloween activities wouldn't do so no matter what day it was celebrated on.

"Saturday would not be any more OK as much as Sunday would not be any more OK," he said. A couple of council

members mentioned they had heard of local churches and other groups making plans for their youth to participate in various activities, not all of which will be Halloween-related.

There will be trick or treating from 5:30 to 8 p.m. within the city limits. Children are encouraged to take safety precautions by wearing easy to see through masks, and watch for car traffic.

Valentine said his department will have extra patrols on for that weekend to keep the event safe and vandalism down. Anyone who has concerns about the planned activities should contact the Lowell Police Department.

Neighbors resist pole yard expansion

By Dan Schneider

Even in the early stages, Lowell Light and Power's plans to expand its storage area, the "pole yard," on North Washington Street are creating concern among neighbors there.

The utility is clear on the goals of the project. It will construct a storage area with self-contained spill collection for transformer boxes. It

wants to improve the layout of the site so service trucks can access it more efficiently and increase the storage space for poles, transformers and the like. New security measures may also be put in place.

But the utility hasn't drawn up any formal plans, yet.

"It's still very preliminary," said Lowell Light and Power general manager Tom

Richards. "We haven't even started with an engineer yet about what to build and how to lay it out."

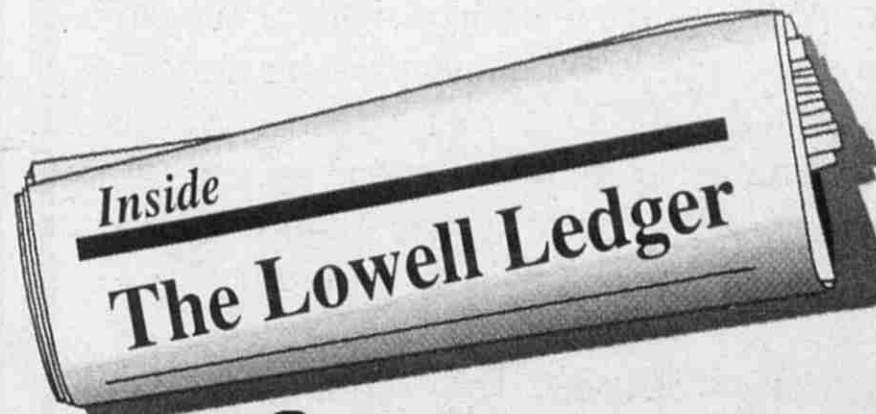
"The reality is we haven't put a pencil to the paper whatsoever."

Richards said the utility is waiting to do so until it has a clear idea of what restrictions and obstacles the project will have to take into consideration. One obstacle is that

the site lies in two municipalities.

The city of Lowell owns the land, and annexed some of the area at the end of N. Washington in the '90s, but a spur remains part of Vergennes Township. During informal discussions at its Sept. 20 meeting, the Vergennes

Pole yard expansion, cont'd., pg. 8



Harvest Celebration
This Weekend
... Page 10

Historic Home Tour...
Page 11

"Dinner With Friends"... Page 13

Pole yard expansion, continued...From Page 1

Township board was not in favor of the city's further annexation in the area.

Residents near the site are worried about what the project might entail. A petition signed by 27 people, mostly living in the Vergennes spur, opposes any expansion of the pole yard. Primary among their concerns is that it would compromise the natural beauty of the area. There are mature trees, interesting topography and overlooks of the Flat River near the pole yard site.

Resident Brian Drake was concerned the project would require cutting down tall pine trees on the site. He feared increased security measures would include unsightly fences and lights.

"We've never had a streetlight and we kind of like it that way," Drake said. "Also, lately I've noticed a lot of traffic, their truck traffic going back and forth."

Increased truck traffic may cause the road to deteriorate more rapidly, and with no sidewalks, residents are worried about safety issues.

Richards said major expansion is not planned. But since the utility needs to make upgrades—the spill-proof transformer storage is in response to new federal requirements—it should make the facility capable of handling future needs.

"It's not like we're going to be turning this into some kind of major facility, it just needs to be enlarged some and

improved so that it works better for what we need to store," Richards said. "In the end we're going to have a better, more organized facility that

Financial Focus, continued...From Page 5

at the end of 2008, after which dividends will again be taxed at your personal tax rate.)

Other Inflation Fighters...

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will meet our needs."

The utility's expansion potential is, according to Richards, limited.

"I don't predict a lot of

growth," he said. "We are not likely to become a very large utility unless we become a very large community."

Richards said the utility

will seek to minimize the impact on the neighborhood. Residents want to have input on plans before changes are made.

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THE LOWELL LEDGER-WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2004 -PAGE 9

Cherry Creek Elementary teaches children to put their feet first

Less than 10 percent of Michigan's children walk to school. A generation ago, it was the majority. Now, approximately 25 percent of morning traffic is parents driving their children to school. Many school days begin and end with a traffic jam.

Cherry Creek Elementary hopes to change that scene

for at least one day this month. Friday, Oct. 8, is International Walk to School Day and they are joining more than 100 schools statewide in promoting that students arrive on foot.

"Walking to school addresses many quality of life issues for students," said Marilyn Lieber, vice president of Community Programs

for the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports. "It addresses the need for daily physical activity and provides an opportunity to teach valuable pedestrian safety skills, lessons on the environment and the importance of community."

Cherry Creek Elementary principal Maureen Dorrough said, "We are finding that

our students who walk or bike to school arrive at school refreshed and eager to learn."

One of the strengths of the initiative is a "Walkable Community Survey" that parents fill out while walking their child to school. The survey focuses on the safety of the walk, with questions about sidewalks, busy streets,

"scary" dogs, and safe neighborhoods, so the community can work to improve those elements to promote walking.

The long-term goal is to improve conditions for safe pedestrian and bicycle commuting and to promote the benefits of a walkable community for all. Traffic is re-

duced; speed is decreased in many neighborhoods; students participate in routine, daily physical activity, which potentially improves students' alertness and behavior; students learn traffic safety skills; and there are "more eyes on the streets," which helps reduce crime and increases neighborliness.

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AARP members rally to demand lower drug prices

Michigan's three bridges into Canada were the sites for simultaneous rallies on Sept. 27 by hundreds of AARP members tired of the high cost of prescription drugs.

Those attending the rallies at the Ambassador Bridge (Detroit), Blue Water Bridge

(Port Huron) and International Bridge (Sault Ste. Marie) heard civic, political and AARP leaders support their demand that a U.S. Senate bill to legalize safe importation be brought to the floor of the Senate for a vote now.

That bipartisan bill, also

known as the Pharmaceutical Market Access Act, is popularly called the Dorgan-Snowe bill after its sponsors, and is co-sponsored by senators Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow. Speakers at each rally decried the high cost of prescription drugs and cited safe and

legal importation as one part of a solution to the problem.

Lillian Kumata, AARP Michigan executive council member in Sault Ste. Marie, cited AARPs' "steadfast commitment to making prescription drugs more affordable for all Americans," and con-

demned skyrocketing prices. "The cost of prescription drugs is soaring, rising by double digits year after year," she said.

For more information on AARP Michigan, go to the web site at www.aarp.org/mi.

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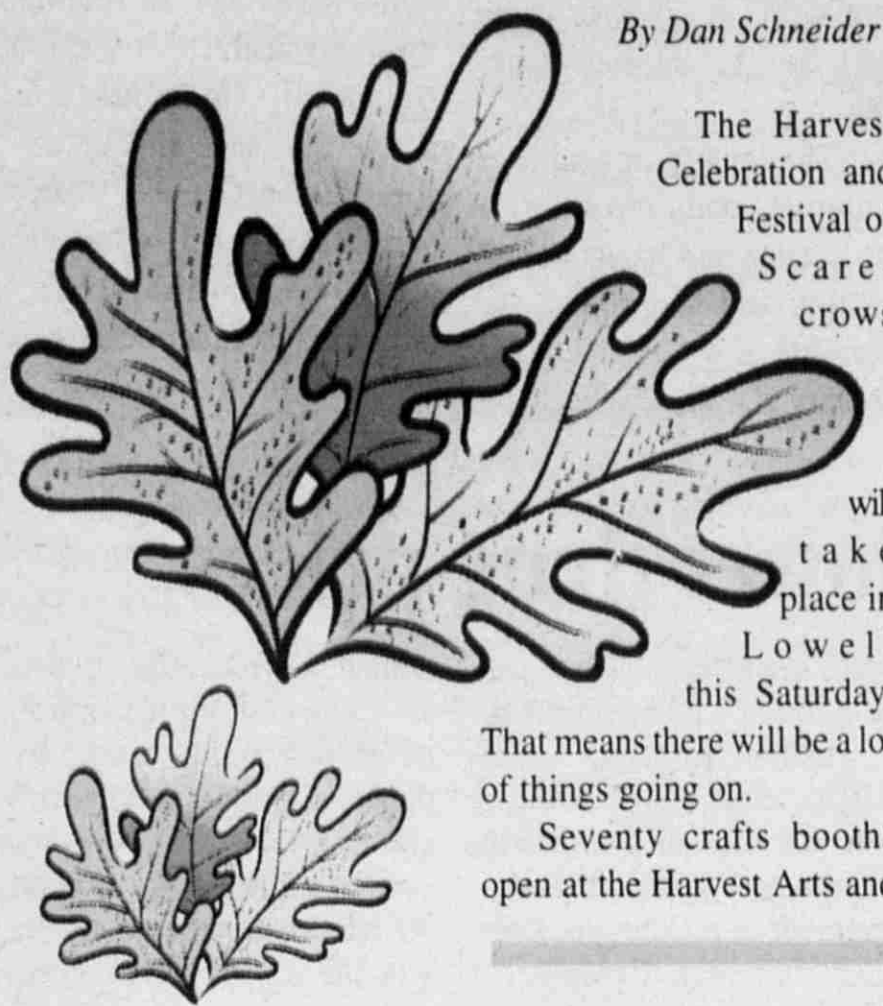
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It's Harvest Celebration time in Lowell

By Dan Schneider



Crafts Show in the Foreman Building at the Kent County Youth Fairgrounds at 9 a.m. The show is open until 4 p.m. Simultaneously there will be scarecrow building at the fairgrounds. The "Scarecrow Hoedown" is the event that started the festival. This is the fifth year of the construction of scarecrows to decorate Main Street. Scarecrow building goes from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Materials are provided by the Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce; all that's needed are the people to put them together.

Another event starting at 10 a.m. is the second annual Lowell Area Historical Museum's historic home tour and free admission day at the museum. While people are building scarecrows at the fairgrounds, and touring historic homes around town, it's going to start smelling like chili on N. Broadway. Cooking begins at 11 a.m. for the third annual Larkin's Chili Madness Chili Cook-off. Judging will be at 3 p.m. The cost is 50 cents to taste each entry from 4 to 7 p.m. Larkin's is accepting entries in the cook-off through Friday. The entry fee is \$25. All proceeds from this year's event go to the Lowell Area Fire Department.

The Flat River Antique Fair will take place from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Riverwalk Plaza. New to the fair this year is food. The Flat River Grill will be selling wood-fired pizzas and a new local company, Palmetto Pirate Catering, will be selling barbecue pork and rib chunks. The name is "a combination of South Carolina because it's the Palmetto State and my husband is kind of a boater, a sailor, and he likes pirates," co-owner Kathy Smith said. "We'll cook probably just about anything we can but primarily we cook barbecue. Because we're pretty portable at this time, what we decided to do is to get into some local events to get people in the community aware of us."

That means there will be a lot of things going on. Seventy crafts booths open at the Harvest Arts and

will take place in Lowell this Saturday.

While people are building scarecrows at the fairgrounds, and touring historic homes around town, it's going to start smelling like chili on N. Broadway. Cooking begins at 11 a.m. for the third annual Larkin's Chili Madness Chili Cook-off. Judging will be at 3 p.m. The cost is 50 cents to taste each entry from

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2nd Annual Lowell Historic Home Tour this Saturday

By Dan Schneider

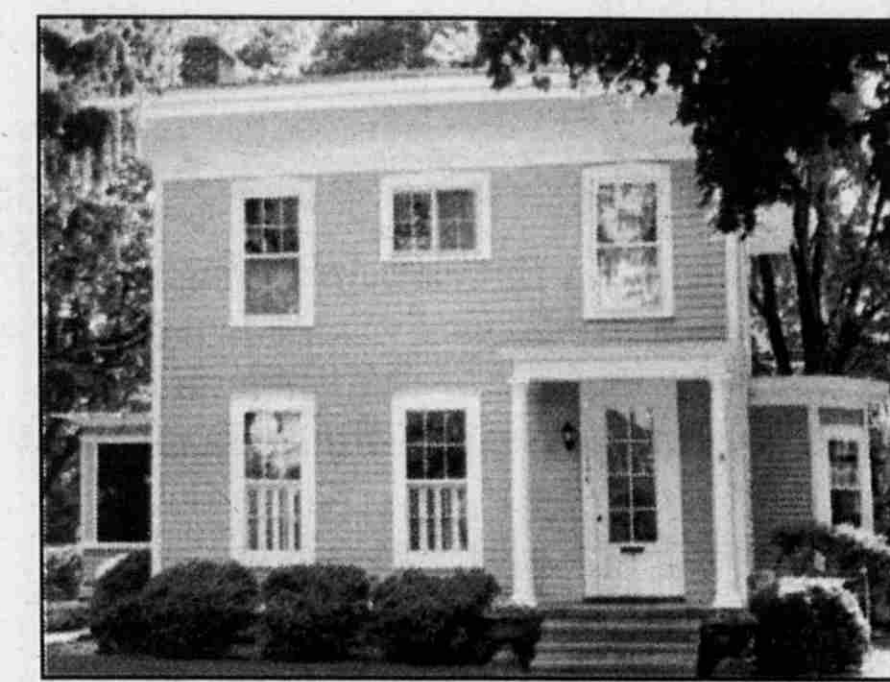
A lot has changed in Lowell since the houses featured



401 North Division

in this year's second annual historic home tour were built. In 1872, when it was built, Jim and Kathy Maatman's home on Hudson Street had views of the Flat River. There were once windows in the at-

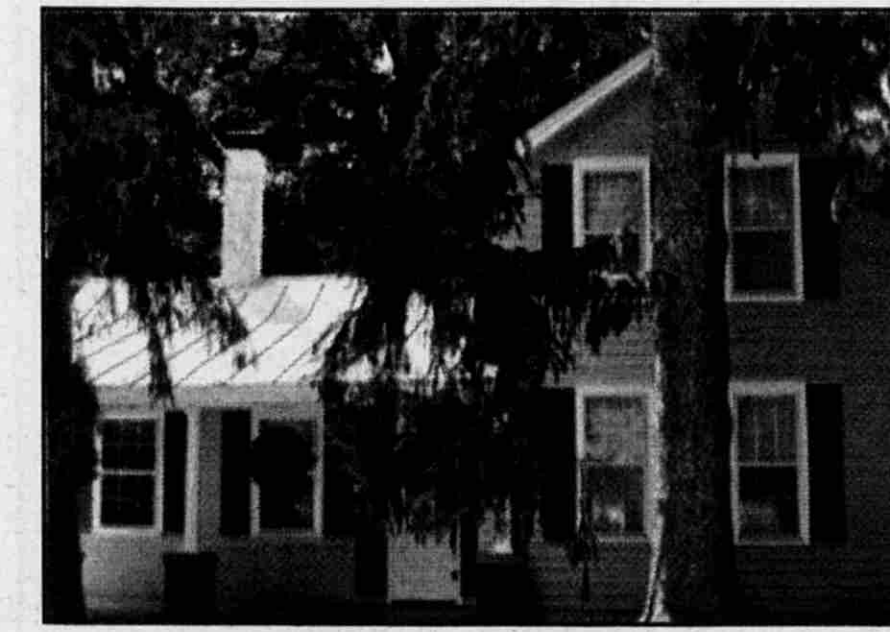
lookouts," Kathy Maatman said. The windows were boarded over, since the construction of other buildings between Hudson and the river had blocked the view and



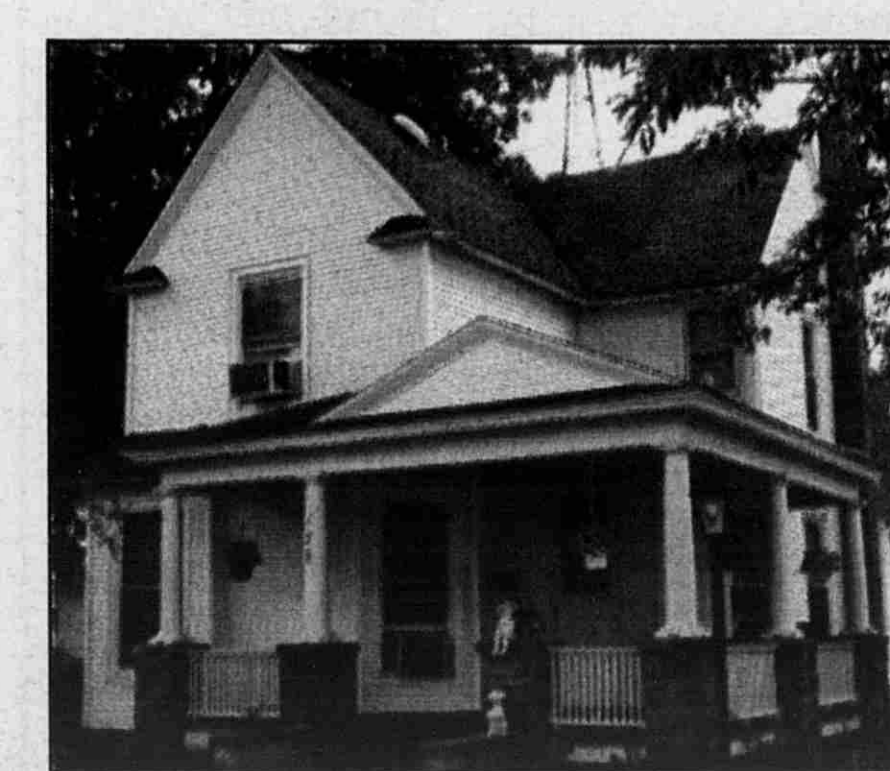
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thwarted their existence. But the Maatmans learned of the existence of these windows about 15 years ago when an 80-year-old woman, whose grandparents built the house, happened to stop by. This woman rang the doorbell and was invited in. From her memories of visiting the house as a child, she



329 North Monroe

told the Maatmans most of what they know about the history of the house. The Ball house is another home on the tour. It was built about 115 years ago on M-21 when the road wasn't much of anything. It was there when workmen used hand shovels

to build the road, a Works Progress Administration project. It stayed there as the road gradually grew, became paved and developed. But it isn't there any more. Harold and Rose Ball, who have lived in the house 50 years this July, moved the structure to North Division Street eight years ago.



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quested dental work in the following subtle fashion: "Pull any teeth that are needed. I'll settle up with you later."

The note confirmed the Barbers' suspicions that a small room near the entrance to the house, one with different wood trim from the rest of the house, had been used for a dentist's office by the house's original owner. The house was built in the 1880s or possibly 1890s. The Barbers had to do some extensive work to improve the looks of the house after it had been split up and rented out

Overgrown trees had also covered up most of the front of the house. It's in better shape now. The Barbers rent the house out; it is the only rental property on the tour. The eight homes featured in this year's Lowell Historic Home Tour will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$10 in advance and are available at the museum, at the Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce, at the Lowell Ledger and at various businesses downtown. Tickets are available the day of the tour for \$12 but



724 Riverside Drive

for several years. They bought the house in 1992. "We tried to just restore the woodwork back to the way it had been because it had been painted 20 or 30 times,"

will not be sold at any of the historic homes featured. The museum will be open with free admission during the hours of the tour.

*** Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself. —William Faulkner

SYNOPSIS REGULAR MEETING OF THE LOWELL CITY COUNCIL SEPTEMBER 20, 2004

Minutes of the August 7, 2004 meeting were approved as corrected and the accounts payable were approved.

The following motions were approved:

- Motion to approve the Dickinson Wright proposal involving a two year contract to be prepared by staff for Attorney services with the City's option of a two year renewal
- Motion to approve the bid of \$1,000 from Bartlett Tree Service to remove the tree in the public right of way in front of 623 North Jefferson.
- Motion to accept the recommendation of the Airport Board and approve the bid from Tip Top Gravel for \$2,779.44 to provide crushed asphalt for the Airport entrance road.
- Motion to adjourn at 8:32 p.m. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be Monday, October 4, 2004.

Complete minutes are available at Lowell City Hall, 301 East Main Street, Lowell, MI 49331.

Betty R. Morlock, City Clerk City of Lowell

New legislation, continued...From Page 1

DeWinkle said tool and die jobs are high-skilled and high paying enough that workers in the industry add significantly to the local economies. The high wages paid at die shops support other jobs in the community. "That's why these jobs are so important," DeWinkle said. "We think that the tool and die industry needs to take advantage of every tool they have available."

Township records show Precise Engineering paid \$901.26 in real and personal property taxes in 2003. "It's a very small amount of money for us," said township clerk Mari Stone. "We're more concerned about improving the economic viability of the community." The main benefit Precise will get from the act is the

abatement of the state's single business tax. Locally, Lowell Area Schools, Kent Intermediate School District and the Kent District Library will all be reimbursed by the state for any tax revenue they lose as a result of the abatements. The legislation makes this tax freedom available to only a limited number of businesses. DeWinkle said Precise Engineering had to be up-to-date on its knowledge of the industry to be in a position to benefit from the legislation. "Precise Engineering had been doing their homework ... that's why they were able to take advantage of this," he said. In order to qualify for the abatements, Precise had to already be taking steps to improve its efficiency. It had to

be a member of a tool and die coalition, for instance. Coalitions allow different manufacturers to work cooperatively, dividing large jobs and enabling each member to do the jobs they're best equipped to do. Precise specializes in medium-sized difficult progressive dies. It is a member of the United Tooling Coalition, a group of 17 tool and die shops located throughout Michigan. The municipal governments where these companies are located all must approve the tax abatements before they take effect. "Several of our members have already been approved," Quinlan said. "There is a lot of support for this tax abatement and for the industry." So far, Quinlan said, all the municipalities have ap-

proved the abatements for the full 15 years the legislation allows. The abatements will not go into effect until all the municipalities with United Tooling shops give their approval. The United Tooling Coalition started as a pilot program in 2003. It was in response to a University of Michigan study that predicted hard times for industry in the face of global competition. Only companies with 50 employees or less can qualify for the tax abatements. Precise had employed 55 people

a year and a half ago, but the recent overseas competition has cut its numbers to 44. Precise would continue to get its tax abatements for the full 15 years even if it hires more employees—the point of the legislation is to create more

Still no communication on sign ordinance businesses & city

Still no communication on sign ordinance businesses & city

By J. Lobdell Contributing Writer

It was hoped that a dialogue between the city and Westside business district would evolve but, instead, discussions over signage have come to a halt. Lowell Planning commission member Deb Hinton, assigned to the task of working with Lowell business owners on resolving signage issues primarily with auto dealers, said she has not received any contact from those involved since the initial request was made more than two months ago. At that time, Daryl Kuiper, of Vennen Chrysler,

came before the Lowell Planning Commission representing several dealerships along W. Main Street asking that the current sign ordinance be reviewed. Many of the businesses along the corridor utilize balloons, banners and pendants to attract customers to their lots, Kuiper had told the commission in June. Such signage is forbidden, according to the city's ordinance, leaving several businesses forced to pay fines for violations. The commission suggested those interested from the business district contact Hinton to work on a proposal change. Kuiper had indicated he was going to inquire into

other municipalities' sign ordinances and get back to her, but no contact was made. In the meantime, Hinton said she believes the city is being taken advantage of with a moratorium given to the businesses until the issue is resolved, and that the moratorium should be revoked and the businesses fined. City manager David Pasquale offered to contact the businesses directly and said if nothing has been done by the planning commission's Oct. 25 meeting, the moratorium will be revoked and violations issued. Sign Ordinance, cont'd., pg. 13

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Lowell football tells familiar story against Northview: 42-0

By Dan Schneider

Northview's junior class built a "Dukes of Hazzard"-themed float for the Wildcats' homecoming game last Friday against Lowell.

The float featured the general, Robert E. Lee, in Wildcat colors, soaring off a jump and through the uprights. On the float, a cardboard squad car painted to represent the Red Arrows was stuck behind in the dust.

The float took second place when it paraded around the field at halftime, but this was after Lowell had reversed the story line on the field.

Lowell was up 35-0 at the half. They were the dynamite Arrows favored by the Duke boys, who never used guns on the show because they were always on probation by the corrupt Hazzard County sheriff's department. Lowell was General Lee flying through the air and leaving Northview looking like Roscoe P. Coltrane, crashed and fuming in the dried-up riverbed.

Northview did manage to frustrate Lowell's running game, holding them to 102 yards. They held running back

Ryan Esbaugh to 54 yards on 12 carries for the game. Two of those carries were for touchdowns, however. Lowell quarterback Keith Nichol, usually as much a threat on the ground as in the air, managed only 14 yards on 15 attempts.

"Up front we've got to get back to doing some blocking," Lowell coach Noel Dean said.

Except for allowing a sack that cost Lowell 18 yards and forced a punt on their second drive, the offensive line kept Nichol protected. Nichol threw nine completions on 11 attempts for 160 yards and two touchdowns in the game. His passing also converted a few third and long situations for Lowell.

Mike Koster caught one of the touchdown passes for 21 yards. He had three receptions for 51 yards in the game. Jason Welsch had the reception on the other touchdown from nine yards out.

Brad Shea led Lowell in receiving with 53 yards on two receptions.

Mike McElroy made his second defensive score of the season. He returned an interception 38 yards for a touchdown. Jeremy Holliman's only



With the Arrows struggling on the ground, quarterback Keith Nichol was called upon to pass. He did this successfully, with an 82 percent completion rate for 160 yards.

rushing attempt of the game was for 12 yards and a touchdown.

Red Arrows wearing clean uniforms played most of the second half.

Northview, meanwhile, struggled throughout the game to get much offense going.

"I think we've played extremely well offensively all year long but we faced a heck of a defense tonight," Northview coach Scott Robertson said.

This Friday is Lowell's

homecoming. The Arrows will host Greenville.

"They're a pretty good team and we're looking forward to playing them," Dean said.

The Yellow Jackets were the only other undefeated team in the OK White going into last Friday's game against East Grand Rapids. Greenville held the Pioneers scoreless in the first half of that game but East took control in the second to win 21-0.

Lowell's homecoming game starts at 7:30 p.m.



Lowell's Ryan Esbaugh broke wide open for this nine-yard touchdown run, one of two he had in the game.

People are like stained glass windows: they sparkle and shine when the sun's out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is light within.

—Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Lowell hoopsters hammer Crusaders 53-23

By Dan Schneider

The Lowell girls varsity basketball team hit the court scoring and stayed ahead in last Thursday's matchup between OK White undefeateds.

Three-point shots fueled the Arrows—Devon Collins and Keni Gallert had four each—as they trounced Unity Christian. The final score was 53-23.

"They hit a few shots early and then it just kind of steamrolled," Unity coach Scott Soodsma said. "They shot unbelievably well from the three-point line."

Lowell was 10 for 15 from the three-point line. Meanwhile, Amy Oberlin,

Lowell's usual inside scoring threat, had no points in the game.

"She was definitely part of the game but she didn't have any scoring opportunities, just kept the ball moving to the people who did," said Lowell coach Dee Crowley.

Inside the key was the only place the Crusaders got the better of Lowell. They outrebounded the Arrows, 27-26.

Lowell's defense, however, forced 28 turnovers in the game. Leading scorers for the Arrows were Gallert with 18, Collins with 14, and Brook VanEck with 12.

The game wasn't what the

Arrows expected when they hit the court against a team that had been 5-0 in the conference.

"I expected we'd be able to beat them but I expected a little better game," Crowley said.

Lowell was up 17-5 after the first quarter and 34-9 at the half.

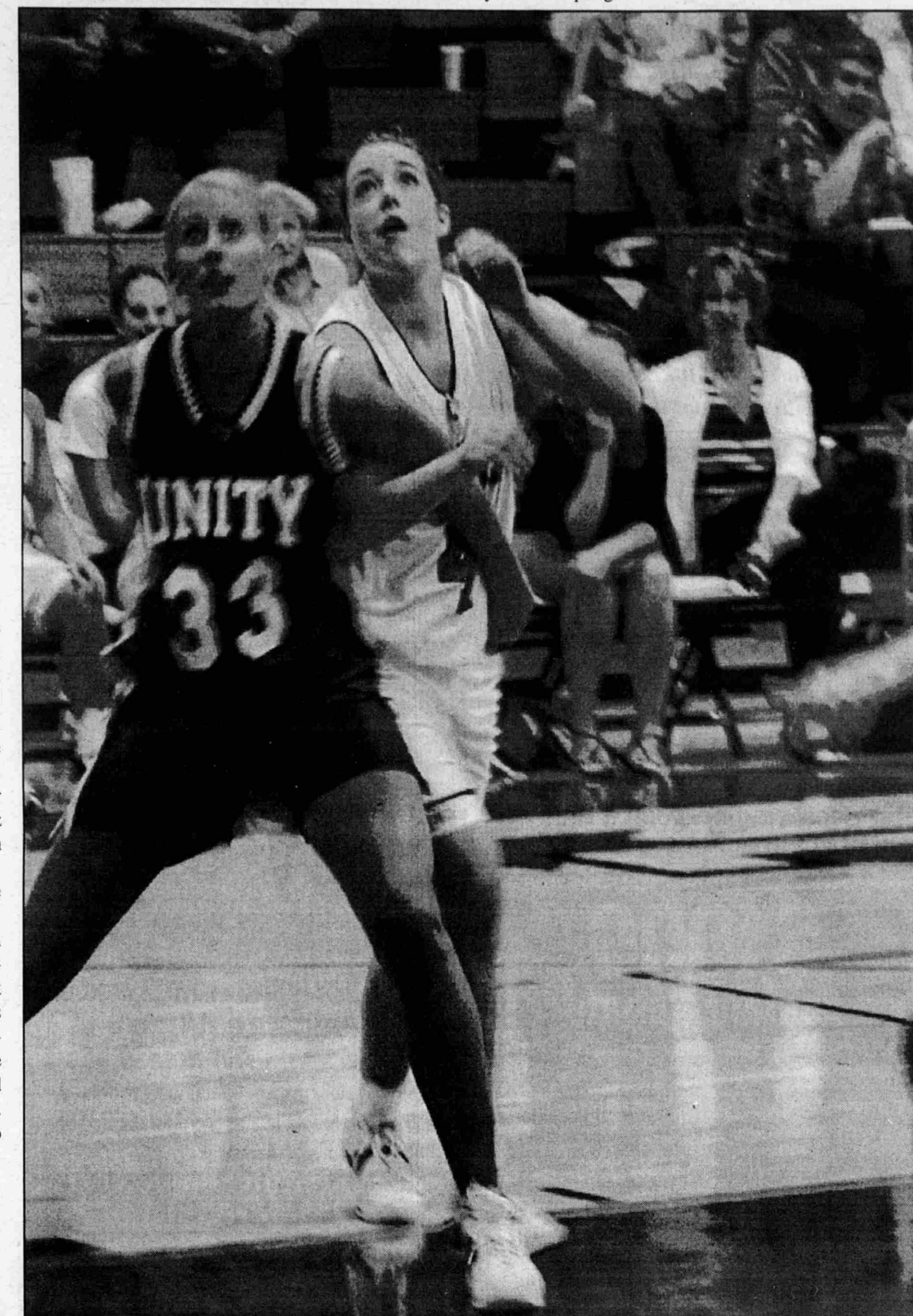
Posting a 59-30 win at Greenville last Tuesday and one against Unity solidify Lowell's standing at the top of the OK White.

"It definitely puts us in the driver's seat starting the next rotation," Crowley said.

The Arrows have Cedar Springs left to play in this round of the OK White. That game will take place Thursday at Cedar Springs.

"We just want to stay consistent and play at a high level, respect our opponents but play our best," Crowley said.

Lowell played Ionia in a non-league game on Tuesday.



Lowell's Meghan Beachum tries to get position for a free-throw rebound late in last Thursday's win over Unity Christian.

Boys cross country breaks through with win over Knights

By Dan Schneider

The Lowell boys cross country team posted its first win of the season with a 19-36 victory over Kenowa Hills last Wednesday.

"They had a tight pack. We took the first three places for the guys, and our fourth and fifth guys weren't too far behind," said Lowell coach Clay VanderWarf.

Taking the first three spots for Lowell were Eric Shumm (17:23), Mitch Solon (17:42) and Steve Ellison (17:44). Lowell's other scoring runners took sixth (Jon Riddle, 18:22) and seventh (Andy Mark, 18:29).

Missing the first two places made it tough for the girls team. But they claimed their third dual win of the

season, 27-32 by taking the next three spots and burying Kenowa's fifth runner. Karen Judd finished third for Lowell in 21:11; Monica Fitzpatrick, fourth in 21:28; and Abbie Debiak, fifth in 21:29.

Other scoring runners for Lowell were Brittany Dietz (seventh, 21:51) and Rebekah Woods (eighth, 22:32).

The girls team is 3-1 in the OK White; the boys are 1-3.

Both teams finished eighth in the Carson City-Crystal Invitational at Fish Creek Sportsman's Club. The girls scored a 256 and finished behind Kenowa Hills, whose score was 253. The boys scored a 296, finishing behind Jenison.

Both teams travel to Northview on Wednesday.

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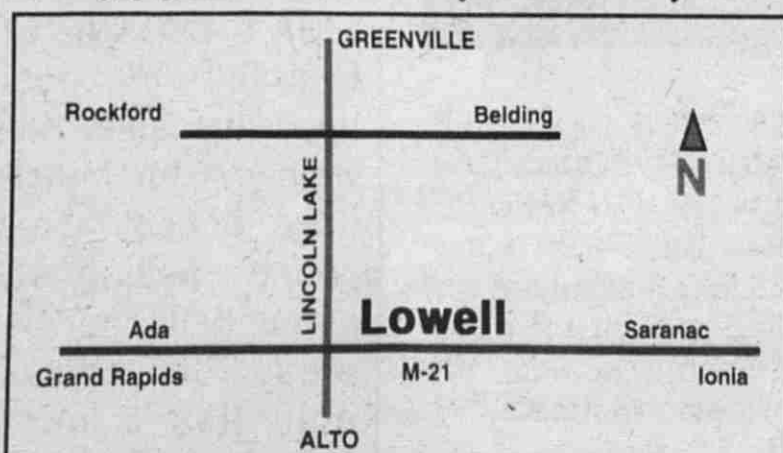
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