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MEAP timelines leave school districts little time to reflect on results

by Thad Kraus

If the idea was to give school districts the gift of time, the state failed.

Michigan schools administered the MEAP test in October and were told their district results would be available in December.

December came and went. January came and went. February nearly came and went before the test results were delivered.

A caveat came with the delivery. Schools could review the results but could not release the results.

Permission to release the results to the media and to go public was not granted until April 3.

"It leaves schools six weeks to deal with the results. Not enough time to help students in their current grades now," said Lowell's director of curriculum, Roger Bearup. "Getting results in December would have provided schools with enough time to break down

the results and implement instructional things to help students now."

The state's reason for delaying the release of the information was so school districts could look at scores and data and have an opportunity to appeal if they felt something was not right.

"How do we help improve on the scores when there is not time to reflect on what we've done?" Bearup explained.

Murray Lake Elementary principal Brent Noskey noted that ideally the turn around time from implementation to delivery of results should be closer to that of the Measurement of Academic Progress.

Results from those reading and math tests were delivered within 72 hours.

While that is an unreasonable expectation for the MEAP, four months is also considered an unreasonable time frame.

As for the Lowell School

District, it accomplished one year's growth in one year's time.

In addition, there was no significant decrease (seven to 10 percent) in any grade level or core subject area.

Lowell student's proficiency grades were "very, very good" according to Bearup.

All elementary district averages in English, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies were 90 percent or above except for fifth grade math which scored 89 percent.

Middle school seventh grade scored 90 percent or above in all four core curriculum areas, while sixth grade and eighth grade scored in the 80 percent proficiency level in all subjects.

The class of 2015's math cohort scores dropped from 2005 to 2008. In 2005 the proficiency rating was 95 percent. In the fall of 2008, the same class, now in the sixth grade had a

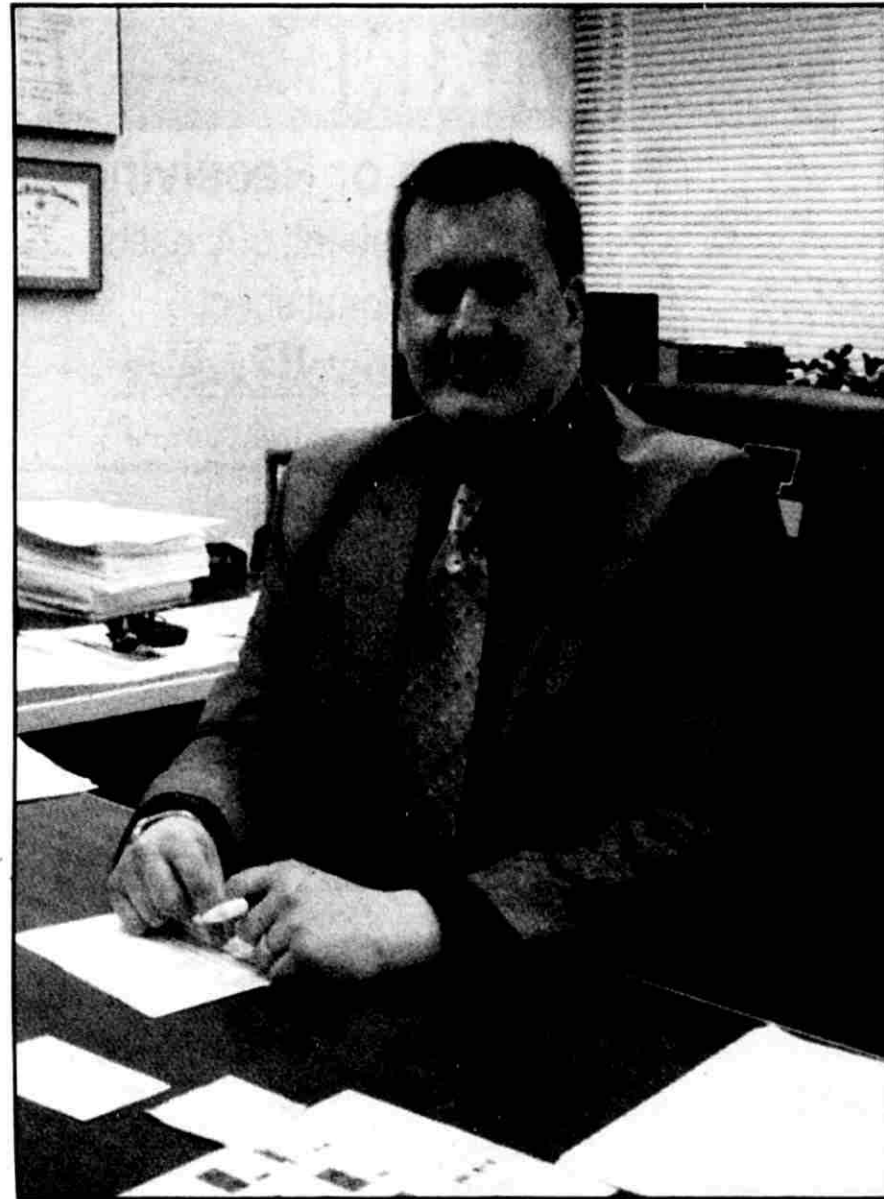
math proficiency rating of 83 percent.

"We have to look at the grade level content, our curriculum, and changes in the test," Bearup said. "The MEAP results don't give districts answers, but raises questions. Our goal is to address those areas."

Bearup said while the district is very happy with the overall scores, it is never satisfied.

"The goal is to always get better, but improvement is measured in smaller increments when your proficiency ratings are above 90 percent proficiency," Bearup said.

While county and state writing scores continue a trend of decline, Lowell saw consistent improvement in writing with few exceptions. Fourth grade writing slipped from 60 to 59 percent proficiency. Third grade fell from 76 to 73 percent and sixth grade proficiency dropped from 85 to 80 percent.



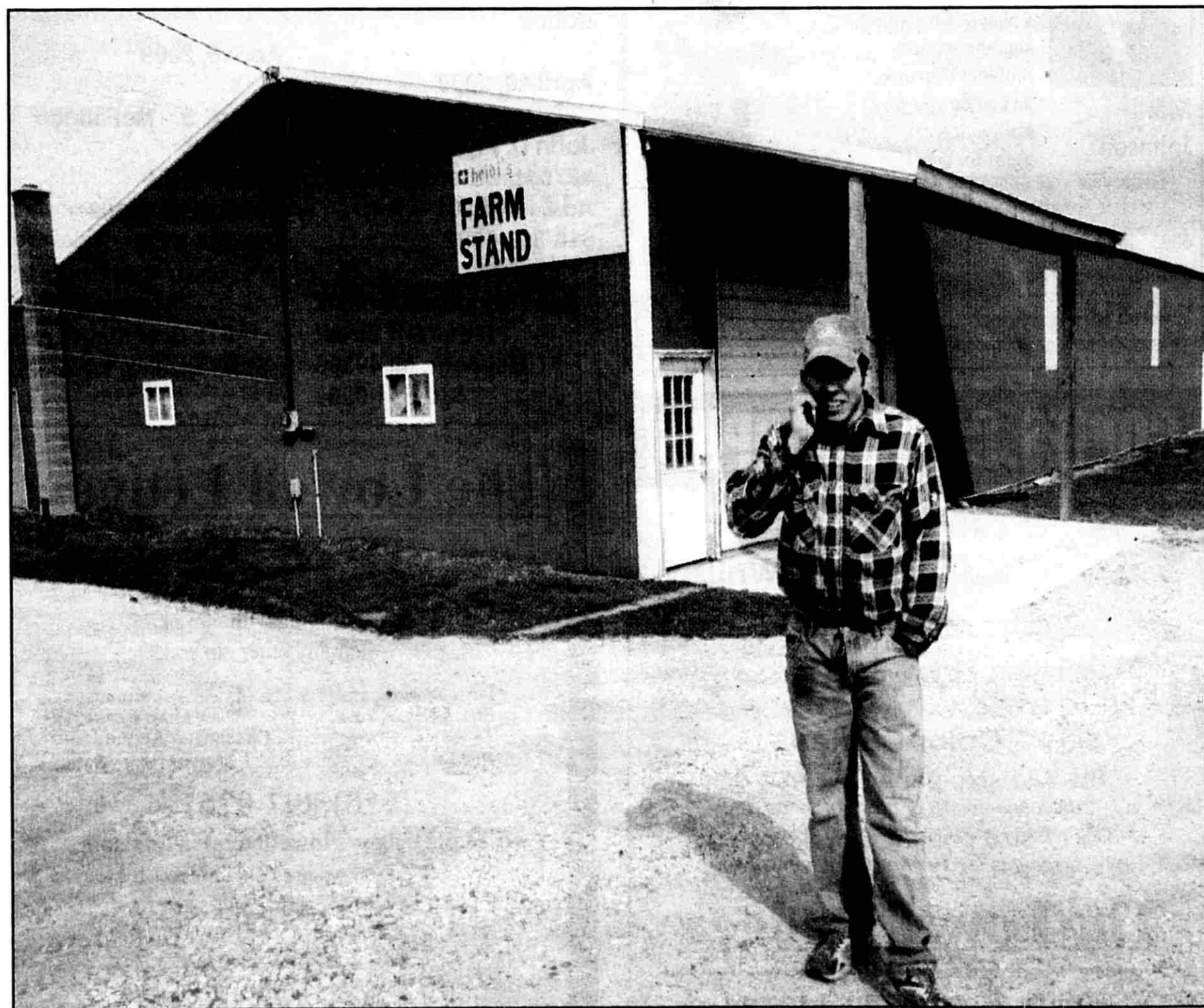
Curriculum director Roger Bearup.

District writing scores in grades five, seven and eight increased by an average of five percent.

"The MEAP is still a good test and provides

useful information. It's also better now at providing individual information on each student," Bearup concluded.

Lowell Township approves farm market expansion



Aaron Kaeb runs Heidi's Farm Market in Lowell Township.

by Emma Palova

The Lowell Township Planning Commission approved Heidi's Farm Market expansion Monday night under an existing special use permit.

The farm market located at a business intersection on Alden Nash and Cascade Road has experienced steady growth since 2006. Owner Aaron Kaeb requested the expansion of nonfarm products, extension of hours for the corn maze in the fall and the addition of a petting zoo. The market will also expand parking with a grassy area. This year, Heidi's is also adding a bakery.

"We are extending our hours after dark," he said. "Our customers were staying longer last year tying up the parking lot. We didn't have enough parking. We will plant grass to support parking."

The request for the extension of hours is slated

to attract teenagers to the corn maze.

The commissioners questioned whether the expansion was big enough to justify a public hearing and more permitting.

"You have greater and grander plans in 2009," said chairman Dave Simmonds.

The sale of nonfarm products will increase from 25 to 33 percent and will include jams and jellies, canned goods, popcorn, arts and crafts.

Under the special use permit, the market will also have a petting zoo of up to 10 animals that must be caged. Commissioner Dennis Sanford was concerned about the proximity of animals to a food operation, as well as traffic.

"We're going to have more traffic," said Sanford. "And I am concerned about having a petting zoo next to a food operation."

However, Kaeb said the petting zoo is a minor part

Heidi's, cont'd., pg. 3

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Walk, continued ... From Page 7

science in there."

The Michigan native has long had an ongoing love affair with Lake Michigan since childhood.

After growing up in other parts of the state, Niewenhuis obtained her bachelor of science degree from Calvin College in Grand Rapids and her master of science from Wayne State. Most recently, she received masters of fine arts in fiction writing from Spalding University and her short fiction has appeared in a variety of publications including The Antioch Review and the Bellevue Literary Review.

"I think you need to find something you're passionate about and I'm very passionate about Lake Michigan," she said of her latest adventure. "I trained for seven months before starting out. I'm not a runner but found myself getting up three to four days a week running because I was thinking about the lake and thinking about this project and you need to find something that really clicks with you to motivate yourself. I know I'll complete this and will be looking for the next thing really."

Her preparation also involved reading as many books on the history surrounding Lake Michigan as she could, including Peter Annin's "The Great Lakes Water Wars" about the Great Lakes Compact that was ratified by all states and the two Canadian provinces last year, as well as books by others who had taken road trips around the lake.

She expects her book will also serve to tell the

story of her anticipated self-discovery along the way.

"It's a time to reflect to think about my life up to this point and about what comes next, when I have the empty nest," said Niewenhuis, who, along with husband Jim, has two sons, Ben and Lucas. "It's kind of a tipping point."

Niewenhuis began the first, 72-mile segment armed with a backpack, maps, a GPS (global positioning system) unit and a cell phone as well as lodging reservations.

That leg ended in Union Pier, Michigan, but without meeting interesting people and experiencing the enormous obstacle on the east side of Chicago known as the BP oil refinery, which at over 100 years old, was once the largest in the nation when it was owned by Standard Oil and later, Amoco.

"That was a lot of urban walking so it was nice to have a few days break after that," said Niewenhuis. "That was just east of Whiting between Whiting and East Chicago, which is actually not in Chicago at all, it's in Indiana."

The refinery goes on for "miles and miles" and they don't have sidewalks for people.

"A lot of places there weren't sidewalks," she said. "So I was walking along the side of the road, through weeds and trash. That refinery seemed to pave the shoulders with shards of hard, hard coke, and shards of metal."

Walking through the

heavy industry during the colder months and early on the journey was not done by accident.

"I couldn't see ending on that after seeing the beauty of everything," she said. "I wanted to get that over with. And then, to relate the rest of the lake to that."

Her planned timing also lands her in the Upper Peninsula in July when she expects to camp out at night.

"So I won't have to go X number of miles each day; I can go as long as I want; I can stop and have dinner and I can continue if I want," she said of not having to keep reservation deadlines. "If there's a full moon, I can walk on the beach at night. So I'm really looking forward to these two sections I can do back to back in July."

During a week-long break back at home in Battle Creek last week, Niewenhuis had so far dodged bad weather.

"I haven't been rained on or snowed on yet," she said Thursday, April 2. "So starting March 16, I really lucked out."

But with plans to begin her third leg Monday, April 6, her luck changed when a Sunday night snowstorm dumped about three to four inches onto her path, from the Lake Michigan shoreline east to Detroit.

Niewenhuis returned to Battle Creek after the first segment, which took five days to cover 72 miles, to pick up her eldest son Ben, a freshman at Calvin College.



Loren Niewenhuis of Battle Creek calls herself a writer and adventurer.

Together, the pair walked from Union Pier to South Haven, a distance of 53 miles.

"The second segment covered a lovely section of the lake," she said. "The shoreline was quite varied. It ranged from high, treed bluffs to sandy stretches, to eroding cliffs of clay and sand, to high dunes."

And, she said Ben "was great fun on the trek. Well, except when he wanted to jog the last mile that last day."

"It was nice to have a chunk of time with him to talk and follow up with conversions and to just be quiet with him, too," she said. "I'm looking forward to walking next week with Lucas."

Jim, however, has no plans to walk along the beach with his wife though they will all walk as a family across the Mackinac Bridge over Labor Day weekend, she said.

Among the most memorable people she's met so far is "the B&B lady" in Michigan City, Indiana, she said.

"She was just fantastic," said Niewenhuis. "She was so excited. She called community leaders - the mayor - to have breakfast with me the next day. They came and the reporter and the city councilmen and people from the community saw me off on the beach."

"I thought 'this lady is really a puppet master,'" said Niewenhuis. "I thought

it was fantastic. She had a local artist also come to breakfast with his wife. We had a lovely time talking about Michigan City and the lake."

In fact, the group along with some people from the community, saw her off at the beach where she ambled into the horizon.

Averaging 15 to 17 miles per day, Niewenhuis still has about 800 miles of walking ahead of her before she can settle down and finish her book.

"I consider this my job right now," she said. "It will be a finding yourself sort of book. A lot of that will emerge."

Follow her progress at LakeTrek.Blogspot.com.

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A FEW NOTABLE EVENTS FROM APRIL 9 - APRIL 15 • 2009

- Five dead in Florida boating wreck, seven injured, after 22-foot pleasure boat crashes into rear of tug boat.
- Philadelphia Phillies broadcaster Harry Kalas, dies after being found in the broadcast booth.
- Mel Gibson's wife has filed for divorce after 28 years of marriage.
- Court declares Democrat Al Franken winner in the Minnesota senate race against Republican Norm Coleman.
- Former Piston great Isiah Thomas is expected to be named head coach this week at Florida International.
- Mark Fidrych, "the bird," former Detroit Tiger great dies at the age of 54.
- Phil Spector found guilty of second-degree murder in the shooting death of a woman at his home six years ago.
- Cabrera wins playoff at the Masters against Kenny Perry and Chad Campbell.
- Obamas hold their first Easter egg hunt.
- The Obamas welcome their new puppy, a Portuguese Water Dog named Bo.
- Stimulus tallies 2,000 transportation projects. One in Kalamazoo underway, \$68 million project planned to widen interchange from four lanes to six lanes along Interstate 94.
- North Korea vows to restart its nuclear reactor and boycott disarmament talks.
- 20 year old Ace Pitcher Adenhardt, of the Angels, dies in a car crash.
- Navy Seal snipers take out three pirates to rescue American captain.
- Polar bear mauls woman at Berlin Zoo.

Research options carefully when quitting smoking

There are many reasons to quit smoking and the tax increase that occurred last week may be a good one. The Centers for Disease Control track the impact of price increases on smoking cessation efforts by smokers. The agency is able to predict the latest tax increase will help over one million smokers nationally to kick the habit. While expense is an issue, health is the reason cited by most smokers as their motivation to quit.

Whether it is cost or better health, the American Cancer Society has reviewed data that shows over 84 percent of current smokers want to quit and nearly half - 48 percent - will try to quit in the next 12 months. There are over 1.6 million smokers in Michigan, which keeps our state in the top 10 percent of smoking prevalence in the US. Ahead of Michigan are Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia, which are the top three tobacco producing states.

Because smoking is the result of an addiction

and because quitting takes several attempts, there is no shortage of companies and products trying to cash in on helping smokers quit.

Every month there are new pills and new devices sold over the Internet that claim they can help

it's difficult for smokers to assess what works.

There are many individuals as well as businesses and clinics that offer everything from hypnosis to laser treatments and seed therapy to physiological feedback for

that looks promising, it is important to look beyond self-reported claims of success. Spend the time to find independent sources to confirm the results. Check with your physician or other trusted health care professional.

help you determine the effectiveness of various treatments, products or methods. Go to: www.cdc.gov/tobacco, www.cancer.org - guide for quitting smoking, www.attud.org or www.quitnet.com. These agencies do not sell products or services, rather they report on the results of research shown to improve health.

Hospitals, health plans and physicians use clinical practice guidelines established by the US Department of Health and Human Services when counseling smokers on how to quit. The publication is entitled "Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence" and it was last updated in May of 2008. Included in the ten key recommendations are a) group, individual and telephone counseling b) numerous FDA approved medications and nicotine replacement therapies and c) incorporation of social support as part of treatment.

Counseling in the form of free cessation classes are available in Lowell starting April 28 at Lowell Family Medical Center. The curriculum follows national guidelines on counseling and is facilitated by a nationally certified tobacco addiction and treatment specialist. Tobacco Free For Good classes have been offered in Kent County since 1998 and available in Lowell since January of 2007.

Classes help smokers develop their own plan to quit based on their smoking history, current smoking patterns and the environment in which they live and work. Other topics include: review of medications and nicotine replacement therapies; understanding withdrawal symptoms; coping with stress; managing weight control and fitness; and preventing relapses. Anyone with questions can call 616-446-7058 or go to www.tobaccofreepartners.org to register.



smokers overcome the cravings and finally get them to become smoke free. Most of these products and devices are not reviewed by the FDA, the Federal Drug Administration, for safety or effectiveness so

smoking cessation. Some services are performed in private offices while others use conference centers to accommodate large groups.

Whether you are searching on the Internet or see an advertisement

Some alternative and complimentary methods can be helpful; others are only looking to sell you a quick fix.

When it comes to smoking cessation, here are a few websites that can

Most Secretary of State offices to offer ATM

In the latest wave of customer-friendly service enhancements, Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land announced that most branch offices soon will offer the convenience of on-site cash machines.

ATMs will be at 118 total offices, which include the 30 offices that participated in a successful pilot program to gauge customer demand. Installation of the automated teller machines

already has begun and will be completed in June.

"We've made customer service our No. 1 priority from the start, and we're not letting up," Land said.

"Saving Michigan residents a trip to the bank before visiting one of our offices is a great way to ensure conducting Secretary of State business is as quick as possible."

In addition to offering ATMs in offices, Land recently announced

customer-service improvements that include creating six more PLUS offices by upgrading existing offices, putting Self-Service Stations in eight traditional offices and allowing people to buy their driving record at every branch.

Since Land took office, she has created SUPER!Centers and PLUS offices, which offer additional services, expanded hours and the ability to pay with a MasterCard or Discover card. She also has broadened the services available online so

customers can skip the trip to a branch office entirely. The Self-Service Stations allow people to renew their license plate tabs with a swipe of a major credit or branded debit card.

The service fee for using an ATM at a Secretary of State office will be \$2, of which a portion will go to the state's general fund.

Visit www.Michigan.gov/sos for more information about branch office locations and services, as well as other Secretary of State programs.

Secretary Land: "Cash machines add convenience for customers."

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