



*Detroit Free Press*

**COMMUNITY  
IMPACT  
REPORT 2021**

# Detroit Free Press

FREEP.COM REACHES

# 9,400,000

AVG. MONTHLY ONLINE VISITORS

## OUR REACH

THE FREE PRESS REACHES PEOPLE IN ALL 50 STATES  
AND MORE THAN 200 COUNTRIES

SOURCE COMSCORE MEDIA METRIX U.S. MULTI-PLATFORM, FREE PRESS READER SURVEY, 2021

---

## READERS AGREE

THE FREE PRESS HAS A POSITIVE MISSION TO HELP  
THE COMMUNITY BY KEEPING PEOPLE INFORMED

*“I like that the Free Press is working to expose corruption  
and injustice like journalism is supposed to do.  
You don’t see that very often today.”*

*“The Free Press is vital to our region. We need you! Thank you.”*

*On guard since 1831.  
freep.com*



# Our commitment to Michigan

**D**ear readers,

*When I sat down to write this letter a year ago, I looked back on the tumult of 2020 with an assumption that 2021 would be less intense, more normal and free of some of what we all dealt with in the year just ending. We celebrated the notion of seeing 2020 in the rearview mirror.*

*It didn't work out that way.*

*Despite lifesaving vaccines widely available across Michigan and the nation, COVID remains with us. The threat of variants, the still-high numbers of unvaccinated people getting very sick, a growing pandemic death toll and overtaxed hospitals and health care workers remain an exhausting part of everyday life.*

*While we thought the 2020 election might finally be behind us, the threats to our democracy grow. Organized efforts to undermine free and fair elections continue here and across the country. We still are dealing with the implications of the Jan. 6 insurrection and the efforts at the time to bring down our democracy.*

*A lesser group of journalists than my colleagues at the Free Press might find the relentless nature of 2021 exhausting. (And truth be told, it has been.) But instead of giving in, Free Press staffers dug deeper, worked harder and sought out even more effectively the stories that make a difference for Detroit and Michigan. The work of this staff is the key reason for dramatic growth in our overall audience and our digital subscriptions in 2021. The commitment of Free Press journalists to getting to the truth — regardless of the issue — defines our work and our purpose.*

*My colleagues do their work with thoughtfulness, sensitivity and grace, as evidenced in our deeply reported and beautifully told coverage of the horrific shooting at Oxford High School, but they are not afraid to ask the tough questions either, as was the case during our recent investigative coverage of Detroit City Council members, lead in pipes in Benton Harbor, and discriminatory patterns in arrests for obstructing police.*

*We have covered COVID 24/7, documenting the effect of vaccines and the relatively low numbers of shots given in Michigan. We have taken you inside hospitals and covered all the politics and policies related to the virus. We devoted a special edition to the truth about vaccines. You can count on that coverage until the pandemic truly is behind us.*

*This is our third annual report on the impact of the Free Press and its journalism. We do this to test ourselves, to be sure we are remaining true to our values and obligation to be our very best every day, to get after the stories that matter here, across Michigan and often beyond. And we do it to share with you our most important work.*

*I want to take this opportunity to again thank you, our readers, for supporting us by subscribing. And if you haven't signed up yet, you can do so at [freep.com/impact](https://freep.com/impact).*

*It is a privilege to live and work in this remarkable place. You can count on us in 2022.*

*Best wishes for a great holiday, please be careful, get boosted ...*



**Peter Bhatia**

*Editor and Vice President, Detroit Free Press  
Michigan editor, USA TODAY Network*





# Free Press stories that made a difference in 2021

Anjanette Delgado | DETROIT FREE PRESS | USA TODAY NETWORK

After such a difficult year in 2020, we had hoped to be in a better place by now – the end of 2021. Still, this year brought hope. It came in the form of a vaccine, and our deliberate, fact-based reporting that addressed people’s hesitations without judgment helped many make the decision to get the shot and convince others to do the same. In the spring, when shots were scarce, one tweet from our reporter covering the vaccine rollout helped dozens to get immunized at Ford Field that very day. It came in the form of donations, from readers who paid off a grandmother’s home to another who paid off a widow’s car repair bill.

It came in the form of water filters for Benton Harbor, jobs for veterans, university accountability and state government reinforcing transparency in an increasingly encrypted world.

The most important thing we do here at the Free Press is help to make our communities better. It’s our company mission and our test as a newsroom on guard for the people of Michigan. While we reach millions, we measure our impact as real-world change.

Sometimes, too, that comes in the form of a reporter, standing on a woman’s porch and explaining her rights, giving her the information she needed to save her home from foreclosure.

Through steps big and small, and with each other’s help, we will see change.

Here are the stories that made a difference in 2021, told by journalists at the Free Press:

## **LGBTQ civil rights coalition condemns trans abuse in Michigan prisons and jails**

An LGBTQ civil rights coalition in March called on state officials to formally investigate serious allegations involving the rape and further abuse of a transgender woman in a Michigan prison and require the Michigan Department of Corrections to train its staff regarding transgender cultural competency and adherence to the law after we reported on the woman’s allegations and her lawsuit. Furthermore, it said the MDOC should join other states that provide the option of housing transgender people who are incarcerated in correctional

### **News tips**

What should we investigate?

Send story ideas and news tips to [city@freepress.com](mailto:city@freepress.com) or [investigations@freepress.com](mailto:investigations@freepress.com), or call 313-222-6601.

The safest way to send secure information is by U.S. Mail. You can reach us at:

**Newsroom Tips**  
Detroit Free Press  
160 W. Fort St.  
Detroit, MI 48226

OPPOSITE PAGE:

**Colandra Boyd-Hopson faced eviction earlier this year after falling behind on her monthly land contract payments on her Detroit home. An anonymous donor paid the nearly \$16,500 debt remaining on her home after reading about her situation in the Detroit Free Press.**

ANTRANIK TAVITIAN/DFP

facilities that are in accordance with their gender identity. The LGBTQ civil rights coalition includes the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan; Affirmations LGBTQ Community Center; Equality Michigan; LGBT and Allies Caucus; OutCenter of Southwest Michigan; OutFront Kalamazoo; Ruth Ellis Center; the Rev. Lindsey Anderson, Love Rising Lutheran Church in Detroit; Matthew Bode, faith leader in Detroit; Stand with Trans, and Trans Sistas of Color Project. The MDOC has declined to comment.

### **Ford continues to pay drivers affected by DPS6 transmissions years after our investigation; AG joins case**

Two years after we published the “Out of Gear” investigation into Ford, we’re still hearing from grateful Focus drivers. “I wanted to let you know that today Ford bought my Focus back!! I’m very happy with my settlement — only a few thousand less than what I paid for it in 2014 —and more importantly, I’m glad to be rid of that lemon! THANK YOU SO MUCH! I’m indebted to you for your great work on this whole transmission fiasco.” The investigation, first reported in July 2019, shows Ford knew before putting Focus and Fiesta cars on the road that the transmissions used in them for nearly a decade were defective. In the wake of our reporting:

*“I’m glad to be rid of that lemon! THANK YOU SO MUCH! I’m indebted to you for your great work on this whole transmission fiasco.”*

- Three members of Congress immediately called for federal safety regulators to investigate.
- Ford extended the warranty on 600,000 of the vehicles’ transmissions in August 2019.
- A federal judge approved a class-action settlement in March 2020 that requires Ford to buy back vehicles for up to \$22,000 apiece and spend a minimum of \$30 million in payments to owners and former owners who may not qualify for the buyback program.
- In February, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel joined half a dozen county prosecutors in filing a legal brief urging the state Supreme Court to hear a case against Ford brought by consumers who say the company violated the state’s consumer protection statute. “Consumers will benefit from this Court hearing this case and correcting a long-standing misinterpretation of consumer-protection law,” Nessel wrote in the brief. The case involves an estimated 12,000 consumers from Michigan and throughout the U.S. who opted out of the class action and chose to sue Ford on their own.

### **Ford develops policy of lending F-150s with generators**

The Free Press was the first media outlet to report the use of F-150 generators during a February storm that left Texans trapped for days without electricity,





**Ryan Karczewski of Royal Oak said he had twice replaced the clutch in his 2014 Ford Focus SE and thought he needed a third. A class-action settlement approved in March 2020 requires Ford to buy back vehicles and send at least \$30 million in payments to owners and former owners.** RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS



heat or lights or the ability to run refrigerators or stoves despite freezing temperatures. After Ford saw this and an 18% spike in online searches for the F-150, the company developed a policy of lending the trucks during crises. F-150 owner Randy Jones, whose story went global after ours hit the wire, credited us with inspiring Ford to react. “I just can’t believe all the coverage you have created. ... Many others have shared stories using their trucks similarly now. I guess you started a ‘Movement.’ ... Ford’s quick decisions may have helped someone and their family during a rough time. I can’t help but give you some credit for that.”

**Sailor Tim Prophit gets his boat, “Fast Tango,” ready at the Port Huron Yacht Club on July 22 for an upcoming race. Prophit, of St. Clair Shores, is working to grow and diversify the sailing community in metro Detroit.**

RYAN GARZA/  
DETROIT FREE PRESS

### **Youth sailing program receives a \$5,000 charitable gift from a reader**

Challenge the Wind, a nonprofit youth sailing program, received a \$5,000 gift from a reader in metro Detroit after we wrote about sailor Tim Prophit and his support of the program. The organization reaches out to families through schools, churches and community centers. Now about 50 kids and 30 adults (predominantly families of color) who might otherwise never think of sailing are learning each summer on Detroit’s waterfront. “Tim is the kind of person who doesn’t talk talk talk but do do do,” said Harry Jones, the program’s director. He and Prophit work together to grow and diversify the sailing community in metro Detroit. People in the program crew on boats from Bayview, Detroit Boat Club and Crescent Yacht Club in Grosse Pointe.







## Story makes a difference for veterans, abuse survivors

Sales boomed at two Detroit businesses — one that employs and benefits military veterans and another that employs and supports female abuse survivors — after we wrote about Ford giving them \$100,000 in leftover leather it found while demolishing one of its buildings. Pingree Detroit hired more veterans and needed to bring on a second shift to meet demand for its leather coasters, footwear and other items. “Thanks for being the difference,” co-founder and CEO Jarret Schlaff wrote.

## \$3M Milan Dragway sale closes, getting everyone’s bills paid

Following months of uncertainty, Milan Dragway has been liquidated and the money used to pay some \$2.5 million in unpaid bills and liens. The goal of the sale was also to turn the 136-acre property 50 miles southwest of Detroit over to a buyer who would execute a vision for the little farming community that has known the sound of race cars since 1963. Racers were devastated when it closed. “Oh my God, it’s everything Harold has been wanting his whole life,” said Elizabeth Devine, whose husband, Harold Bullock, bought the track. “Everything we do revolves around racing and motors.” The attorney handling the sale said

**Left to right: Jim Conner, Ford 3D process director, helps Nathaniel Crawford II and Jarret Schlaff, co-owners of Pingree Detroit, prepare to transport donated leather hides worth thousands of dollars.**

PROVIDED BY CHARLOTTE BODAK FOR FORD MOTOR CO.





**Alexandria McCurtis, Xavier Johnson, 14, Darius McCurtis and Sebastian McCurtis, 3, stand outside their Detroit home on April 20. They were facing foreclosure on the home Alexandria McCurtis had inherited from her grandfather. A Free Press analysis showed that about a third of Detroit homeowners still carried more than \$95 million in tax debt despite a program designed to help. ANTRANIK TAVITIAN/DETROIT FREE PRESS**



the Free Press story made a difference.

### **Box company gets inquiries from all over the world after story highlights innovative design**

Rudy Youell, 64, of Columbus, Ohio, patented a simple-yet-unique box design called P2 Packaging in 2016 that's now licensed to companies in Michigan, South Carolina and Indianapolis and used to ship car parts all over the U.S. and the world. On average, each box design may be reused six times, according to the company and two customers we interviewed. By custom designing it to carry hundreds and thousands of car parts, there is no empty space that requires filler. Or, in the words of packaging experts, no one is paying to transport air inside the boxes. Every inch is packed. Fewer boxes transport more materials. Fewer people are needed to haul fewer packages. Less factory space is needed to store boxes. Recycling costs plummet. The impact on the environment, too, is notable. Companies everywhere contacted Youell after a story in the Free Press went global. "What's wild is I've had inquiries from Germany, Belgium, UK, India, Spain, Italy, France," he said. "You got the word out globally!"



**In a year that was so difficult for so many businesses, P2 Packaging and owner Rudy Youell made things easier with custom-built product boxes at Anchor Bay Packaging in New Baltimore.**

RYAN GARZA/  
DETROIT FREE PRESS

### **Grandmother avoids losing her home over \$11,000 in back debt after reporters show up on her porch and explain her rights**

When a Free Press analysis showed about a third of Detroit homeowners still carried more than \$95 million in tax debt despite a program designed to help, reporters hit the streets and knocked on doors. One woman who answered their knock was Callie Logan. A 68-year-old grandmother who collects only \$610 a month from Social Security, she had more than \$11,000 in back debt and had never heard of the tax break. Reporters explained her rights and she was able to wipe all the debt away. "I've been so worried about losing my home," Logan said. "There was a lot I didn't know. I wasn't trying to dig in and get anyone to do something for me. I just wanted to save my house from foreclosure." For help applying, go to [waynemetrol.org/propertytax](http://waynemetrol.org/propertytax) or call 313-244-0274.

### **Eastern Michigan University launches efforts to combat sexual assault; Dingell introduces bill**

Eastern Michigan University announced an audit of its Title IX program in 2020 amid our questioning and reporting on numerous sexual assault reports at the



school. Following an illuminating Free Press sex assault investigation, the filing of more charges and federal lawsuits, the university is now taking multiple steps to quell campus sexual assaults including:

**Five women who came forward to testify about campus sexual assaults now lean on one another for support. Eastern Michigan University took steps to reduce sexual assaults on campus after a Free Press investigation.**

KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/  
DETROIT FREE PRESS

- Mandatory Title IX training for students.
- Expanded bystander training.
- The creation of survivor handbooks.
- The creation of an employee resource guide.
- Trauma-informed response training.
- Clery Act training for 100-plus university administrators.
- The return of a program to escort students or employees on campus during late-night hours.

Additionally, following our reporting on sexual assaults reported at EMU, the University of Michigan and Michigan State University, U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Dearborn, introduced legislation to force schools to investigate rumors of assault, not just reports, and lower the bar to make them liable if they don't.

## **Michigan sends water, filters to Benton Harbor as news media draw attention to elevated lead levels in water**

The state of Michigan is providing bottled water, going door-to-door to ensure distribution and proper installation of faucet lead filters and testing of the blood-lead levels of children after 20 nonprofit organizations appealed to the federal government to take action and several media organizations, including the Free Press, amplified their call. The ongoing exposure to high lead levels for Benton Harbor residents, 85% of whom are Black, hearkened many back to the Flint water crisis of 2014, and was framed as an environmental justice issue.



Since fall 2018, more than 60 homes in the city of 10,000 people have tested for lead levels in their drinking water that exceed the federal government's action level of 15 parts per billion. One home tested for 889 parts per billion, nearly 60 times the federal safety limit. Government has failed residents at every level for years, said Nick Leonard, an attorney with the Great Lakes Environmental Law Center. Tips: [kmatheny@freepress.com](mailto:kmatheny@freepress.com).

### Mis- and disinformation reporting cited in Election Integrity Partnership report on 2020 election

Free Press coverage was cited in "The Long Fuse: Misinformation and the 2020 Election," a report by the Election Integrity Partnership on its findings and recommendations for future actions. The Digital Forensic Research Lab, Graphika, Stanford Internet Observatory and the Center for an Informed Public formed the partnership to defend the 2020 election against voting-related mis- and disinformation. This coverage was funded by a grant from the American Press Institute.

Absentee ballots are processed by officials in the Detroit Elections Department Absentee Ballot counting room on Nov. 4. Free Press coverage was cited in "The Long Fuse: Misinformation and the 2020 Election," a report by the Election Integrity Partnership. KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/DETROIT FREE PRESS





## People get vaccinated against COVID-19 when shots were scarce

The state health agency asked our health reporter to alert people through social media that there were extra doses of COVID-19 vaccines for people who could get to Ford Field in Detroit before 6 p.m. She tweeted it, and the response was mind-blowing: 1.27 million impressions, 62,542 engagements and — best of all — dozens of people responded saying it helped them get shots during March, when doses of vaccine were still scarce and people were driving hours to find one.

## Pandemic religion coverage archived at Western Michigan

Several Free Press stories about how the pandemic affected churches, killed religious leaders and altered how bodies are handled after death have been archived at Western Michigan University. The articles are now part of the university's research project "Pandemic Response and Religion in the United States" and available for public viewing in a scholarship database.

**James Maier volunteers for the Alternatives for Girls outreach team. The Detroit nonprofit received donations and a monthly donor after a story about its outreach.** JUNFU HAN/DETROIT FREE PRESS



## Alternatives for Girls gets \$1,000 in donations and a monthly donor

Alternatives for Girls, a Detroit nonprofit that helps homeless and high-risk girls and young women avoid violence, teen pregnancy and exploitation, received \$1,000 in donations and a monthly donor after a story explained its street outreach. The group hands out care packages and drug harm-reduction kits containing hygiene products, needle-cleaning kits, water, snacks, wipes,





**McLaren Flint staff and family and friends gather during a candlelight memorial and prayer for Santa Staples, a registered nurse in the operating room who died of COVID-19. The Free Press' "We Will Remember" obituary series and memorial wall honors the lives and contributions of Michiganders who were not necessarily public figures or celebrities, but who were loved and made a difference. RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS**

condoms and information. "People like to think that problems such as human trafficking don't exist in their neighborhoods," said volunteer Marissa Graziano, "but until you really see some of these statistics and experience it for yourself, you see that it is everywhere and it is in our backyards."

### **Coronavirus obituary series inspires donations, connects lost loved ones**

Our "We Will Remember" obituary series and memorial wall honors the lives and contributions of Michiganders who were not necessarily public figures or celebrities, but who were loved and made a difference in this world before





GRANDPARENTS  
Have faith  
DESSERT COME FIRST  
support is the greatest  
BEDTIME NEGOTIABLE  
KISSPOWERS BELONG  
to parents always  
*along love for*  
PLAY LOTS OF  
KITCHEN GAMES

**JUST  
DO  
IT.**



dying of COVID-19-related complications. Nearly 750 names are on the wall and readers continue to reach out to thank us for providing a small bit of comfort during such a trying time. We've heard of many connections made through sharing these life stories, including a church that raised funds for seven children who lost their parents and a man who found his long-lost cousin.

### **Detroit police to add to sex crimes unit, encourage reporting**

Shortly after the Free Press published a column calling for the Detroit Police Department to make reducing the rate of sexual assault a top priority, reach out to survivors and add staff to investigate sex crimes, Chief James White announced he would add capacity and engage in a high-profile campaign intended to encourage survivors to file reports. For years prior, the DPD had downplayed sexual assault, touting reductions in other violent crimes and barely mentioning the rate of sexual assault complaints, which remain steady year over year — or increase. Sex assault stats have often been skipped at the Police Department's weekly crime report to its civilian oversight board. Thirty personnel have been assigned to sex crimes, compared with 60 in homicide, even though rape happens three times as often.

### **Reporter's case study included in U.S. Census Bureau's training materials for journalists**

The U.S. Census Bureau included a case study written by the Free Press in materials used to train other journalists to cover the 2020 decennial population count. In the training materials, we explain how journalists can use American Community Survey data to identify year-to-year changes in population and housing characteristics. This case study involved income trends in Michigan.

### **Woman avoids eviction when reporters explain new pandemic rules, resources**

People were being evicted from their homes back in December 2020 despite government-mandated protections for renters during the coronavirus pandemic, many because some judges were ignoring the new rules. As a part of the reporting, we helped a woman avoid eviction by explaining the new rules to her and connecting her with resources. A judge had failed to do that when Neva Green appeared in court. "You don't know what to do," said Green, 51, of Melvindale. "I didn't know anything about the programs." She admits she didn't notice the number for legal help on her eviction notice. "I was so depressed and stressed. I can't work, I done caught this and they about to kick me out. Where am I going to go?" Green qualified for a no-cost attorney and applied for aid. The state paid \$2,900 to her apartment complex for her past debt and some of her future rent, her lawyer said.

---

OPPOSITE PAGE:  
**Neva Green, of Melvindale, avoided eviction after Free Press reporters told her about new COVID-19 protections for renters and helped connect her with resources. The state paid \$2,900 to her apartment complex for her past debt and some of her future rent.**  
MANDI WRIGHT/  
DETROIT FREE PRESS



## Owner saves commercial properties from tax foreclosure

An owner saved his commercial properties from tax foreclosure after an article published in collaboration with Outlier Media advised people to check the status of their properties. “Had I not happened to run across your article advising taxpayers to check the status of their delinquent issues, my properties could have been seized and sold at auction with no other warning,” Frank Imani Jamal said. Officials with the Wayne County Treasurer’s Office said more than 4,000 unoccupied properties and vacant land that owed at least three years’ worth of unpaid property taxes as of June were at-risk of foreclosure.

“Had I not happened to run across your article advising taxpayers to check the status of their delinquent issues, my properties could have been seized and sold at auction with no other warning.”

**Frank Imani Jamal**

## Student gets to be a reporter, writes essay on her experience at the Ford F-150 Lightning reveal

Thirteen-year-old Allegra Blackwood, of Ann Arbor, got the assignment of a lifetime when she was invited to shadow a reporter covering Ford’s reveal of the F-150 Lightning. Allegra hopes to one day become a professional journalist and an author. “It was magical,” she wrote in an article that published in the Free Press. Ford and UAW executives agreed on the spot to talk with her when she approached them at the event. These were not pre-arranged interviews. “Never in my wildest dreams did I think that they would take me seriously. I was just a young girl with a dream of being a writer.”

## Legislature moves to ban use of text messaging encryption apps by state agencies

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed into law a bill passed by the Michigan House and Senate banning the use on state-issued phones of text messaging encryption apps that can be used to evade the Michigan Freedom of Information Act. The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Steve Johnson, R-Wayland, told a Senate committee he saw the need for the bill after reading a series of articles in the Free Press about the use of Signal by top officials at the Michigan State Police. Signal is an “end-to-end” encryption app, meaning it bypasses the state server and the company that provides the app keeps no record of the text messages sent. Once deleted, text messages sent using Signal are essentially gone without a trace — evading both the Michigan Freedom of Information Act and legal discovery.

## Readers pay off family’s home

An anonymous couple donated \$16,500 to pay off a Detroit woman’s home after reading about her in the Free Press. The woman, whose husband died of the coronavirus last year, lives in the house with her mom and sister, both of whom have cerebral palsy, and her daughter and grandson. They were close to losing the home when the donors stepped in. “Sitting on sidelines, when we

could do something, wasn't an option," they told us.

### **Vaccine project persuades dozens to get vaccinated**

A series of stories explaining the coronavirus vaccines and how they work, answered concerns carefully with nonjudgmental language and called for a “benevolent conspiracy” of the vaccinated to help the unvaccinated get shots gained national attention. More importantly, though, it made readers feel more empowered to make healthy decisions, changed opinions on the vaccine, convinced dozens to get vaccinated and gave hundreds the information they needed to persuade others to do so. Given that this is a highly polarizing issue and the vaccine first became available months before the series, leaving those without it largely hesitant or resistant at the time, we were encouraged to have convinced dozens — or maybe more than admitted so in a survey that accompanied the coverage. We distributed thousands of free copies of the 11-page print project throughout metro Detroit. The package was built with input from readers and Columbia University’s Health Language Lab to write from a place of empathy. To get a COVID-19 vaccine, text your ZIP code to 438829.

### **Reader pays Flint widow’s \$3,000 car repair bill**

A reader paid off a Flint widow’s \$3,000 car repair bill after learning about her story while reading about IRS troubles and tax refund delays related to the pandemic. “Is the car going to break down before the money gets here?” asked Tonya Williams, 69, who is raising her two grandchildren. “I pray a lot, let me say that.” Her tax return was filed Feb. 27 and as of late November she had yet to receive her federal income tax refund and continued to face delays.

*Anjanette Delgado is the senior news director for digital at the Detroit Free Press.  
Twitter: @anjdelgado.*





**Tania Allen, 42, of Harrison Twp., is a neurodiagnostic technologist at Henry Ford hospital in Detroit. She talked on July 9 about her slow recovery since contracting COVID-19 in November 2020. Stories that explained how vaccines work prompted many readers to get vaccinated. KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/DETROIT FREE PRESS**

## **Thank you**

Thank you to all of our subscribers. Your support of public service journalism helps make our communities better, more equitable and more democratic. If you haven't subscribed yet, please consider doing so at [freep.com/impact](https://freep.com/impact).

# A special message to our funders and supporters

**Jewel Gopwani and Anjanette Delgado** Detroit Free Press | USA TODAY NETWORK

Philanthropic funders make possible several projects and coverage areas at the Free Press as well as our Summer Apprentice Program. We depend on grants and the backing of our subscribers and partners to sustain our public mission. This year, we collaborated with more media organizations and university programs to cover issues ranging from redistricting to environmental justice. Here are the ways we've put these contributions to work for Michigan:

## Report for America

The Free Press was proud to continue its work with Report for America in 2021 to offer strong coverage of the unprecedented economic challenges metro Detroiters experienced during the pandemic and to closely cover a multitude of consequential political stories, including the state's historic redistricting process.

Report for America is an effort by the GroundTruth Project to report on under-covered issues by placing corps members in local newsrooms across the country. GroundTruth Project pays for a portion of each corps member's salary, the Free Press pays for a portion and then we raise money to cover the balance.

In June 2022, the Free Press will welcome a third Report for America corps member, who will cover issues related to the wellbeing of children, including mental health, physical health as well as the juvenile justice and foster care systems.

## Economic mobility

The Free Press zeroed in on a key challenge for many residents in need: staying housed. We tracked the eviction moratorium, and a delay in deploying millions of dollars in federal aid intended for vulnerable Michiganders that was caught up in red tape. We served readers with daily updates as well as pieces intended to anticipate questions from renters who need the funding to stay in their homes. The popularity of these pieces illustrates the demand for explanatory coverage, practical resources and service journalism. These articles also prompted calls from renters seeking help, allowing the Free Press to connect renters with resources. We also highlighted activists and local nonprofits working tirelessly to help people stay in their homes. Ultimately, this work led us to put a spotlight on systemic issues that have made housing across Michigan largely unaffordable.

The Free Press is partnering with nonprofit media organization BridgeDetroit

## We'd like to thank our generous funders and supporters

Lipinski Journalism Fund at The Michigan Daily

Google

National Press Foundation

Report for America

Spencer Fellowship in Education Reporting at the Columbia University School of Journalism

Detroit Journalism Engagement Fund, a partnership of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan

U-M English Department

Hudson-Webber Foundation

Duchene Foundation

Ford Foundation



on this coverage, which is informed by BridgeDetroit's community priorities model. That model uses several inputs, including interviews with Detroiters and surveys of Detroiters conducted by the University of Michigan, to identify priorities of residents across the city. This model has helped the Free Press zero in on home repair as an important issue. That work has drawn calls from residents seeking to repair their homes and a deeper look at why weatherization programs are out of reach for many residents.

### **Fact-checking/political reporting**

After nonstop fact-checking during the 2020 presidential election, this work continued in 2021. In fact, reporting on the pillars of our shared democracy was a hallmark of our Report for America coverage this year. Michigan became a center for political misinformation. Our work debunked falsehoods about the 2020 election long into 2021 and covered legislative committee reports that showed Michigan's election results were accurate and trustworthy. We also thoroughly reported on proposed election laws, many of which would make it tougher to vote in Michigan.

This role also gives us the opportunity to provide in-depth coverage of Michigan's historic redistricting process. The new process was prompted by a 2018 ballot initiative that requires an independent commission to draw political districts for the U.S. House, Michigan Senate and Michigan House. The maps had previously been drawn by the party in charge of the Legislature, leading to political districts that have favored one party over another. The Free Press will continue its thorough coverage of what the new maps will mean for democracy in Michigan.

### **Apprentice program trains next generation of journalists**

The Free Press' annual Summer Apprentice Program selects high school students with a demonstrated interest in journalism to join the Free Press newsroom for a summer. In 2021, our newsroom operated remotely, and so the apprentice program went virtual. Six students joined our staff, taking part in journalism training, taking on assignments and pursuing their own story ideas. Among their stories in 2021: how gay pride events were bouncing back amid the pandemic, after school programs that got a boost in funding and how a host of new little libraries arose to help kids discover books that feature Black children. Through this program, apprentices improved their writing and interviewing skills, forged friendships with like-minded young journalists and built a network of professional journalists they can lean on throughout their careers. The 2021 apprentice program was possible thanks to the support of the Lipinski Journalism Fund, endowed by John and Holly Madigan, and The Michigan Daily.



### **How you can support this work**

We can't do this work without the support of readers and local funders. To support reporting on the well-being of children, economic mobility and fact-checking elected officials throughout 2022 with a tax-deductible contribution, go to <https://bit.ly/freepRFA>. You also can support local journalism by becoming a subscriber at [freep.com/impact](https://freep.com/impact).





Detroit Free Press apprentices pose for a photo in Detroit on July 27. They are Cal Martinez, 17, of Dearborn, front; and, left to right, Sydney Neal, 17, of Canton; Chase Wade, 17, of Detroit; Clare Hong, 17, of Ann Arbor; Kenndall Wallace, 18, of Detroit; and Louisa Stuhc, 17, of Ann Arbor. RODNEY COLEMAN-ROBINSON/DETROIT FREE PRESS

## National Press Foundation funds environmental justice project

The National Press Foundation and the National Press Club Journalism Institute awarded a grant to the Free Press to report on environmental justice this year and next. This project examines how the principles of environmental justice, community input and disproportionate impact are (and are not) included in the permit approval process for pollutants.





**Detroit Right to Council Coalition member Evan Villeneuve, center, talks with volunteers (left to right) Geri Warren, Jerome Hunt and Shapri Hunt while describing the section of Martin Luther King I & II homes in Detroit where they were to pass out flyers about federal rental aid to residents on Sept. 24.**

RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS

### **Thanks to the Free Press' many partners**

The Free Press wants to recognize its partnerships with community organizations and other media organizations and groups. We appreciate each of these partnerships. Large and small, they have strengthened our connections with the community, enhanced coverage for Free Press readers and helped the Free Press identify important issues for coverage throughout 2020 and beyond. These partners include:

Michigan Community Resources

Bridge Michigan

Michigan Radio

BridgeDetroit

The Michigan History Center

Outlier Media, Chalkbeat Detroit

Detroit Public Television

ProPublica

The Detroit Chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists

Detour Detroit

Planet Detroit

Detroit Documenters

Columbia University School of Journalism

Columbia Journalism Investigations at New York's Columbia University

Documenting COVID-19 project at Columbia University's Brown Institute for Media Innovation and MuckRock

Type Investigations

### **Join us in 2022**

To learn more about supporting journalism in 2022 and funding efforts like the Free Press Summer Apprentice Program, internships for aspiring journalists and coverage of crucial issues like economic mobility, fact-checking and the well-being of children — or other coverage areas that contribute to a more equitable and informed community — please reach out to Peter Bhatia at [pbhatia@freepress.com](mailto:pbhatia@freepress.com). Subscribing to the Free Press is another way to support public service journalism and inspire change. Subscribe at [freep.com/impact](https://freep.com/impact).





13.1 DE 21  
4934  
Charles  
H  
4934

13.1 DE 21  
2000



# Marathon, Film Fest, Top 10 Takeover enrich the region

Steve Byrne Michigan.com

**W**e may not have had Canada, but the Detroit Free Press Marathon was back in person this year. So were other events and programs, if still in a modified fashion that included virtual options because of the pandemic's receding and then rising case counts. Together we adjusted and still managed to help enrich the lives of Michiganders this year. Here are the highlights:

## Detroit Free Press Marathon

The streets of the Motor City were once again filled with thousands of runners as the Detroit Free Press Marathon returned to live racing in 2021.

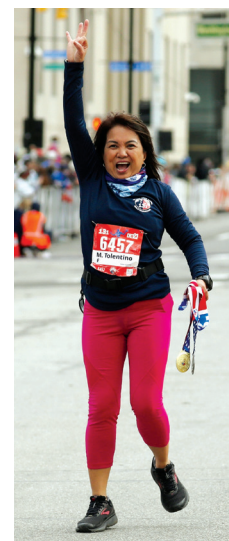
The preceding year, all components of the race were held virtually due to COVID-19 concerns. The pandemic did affect the 2021 race: For only the third time in its 44 years, the marathon was run solely in the city of Detroit, as border issues made it impossible to include a Canadian leg — a signature feature in the race's history.

But the limitations led to some positive additions on the U.S. side, including portions of the new course that traversed the Boston-Edison district, the District Detroit, Wayne State University campus and astride the Motown Museum. Returning were traditional Detroit components of the race, including Belle Isle, the RiverWalk, Indian Village and a start-finish in the heart of downtown.

There were more than 12,000 registered participants in the weekend's various live and virtual races. That included the full marathon, half-marathon, 5K, relays, a disabilities division for handcycle and push-rim participants, the Meijer Kids Fun Run and more.

As always, the marathon included a robust charity component, with more than \$800,000 generated by 32 official fundraising partners. Over the event's 44-year history, charities have raised about \$24 million. In 2021, the marathon also donated clothing to Fort Street Presbyterian Church (which is at the foot of the course), and leftover food and water to Forgotten Harvest.

The 2022 race weekend arrives Oct. 14-16, with the marathon itself happening on Oct. 16. Current plans call for a return of an international course. Registration for races opens on Jan. 1, with discounted pricing in the early-bird period.



**Maria Tolentino, of Canton, celebrates finishing the half marathon during the 44th Annual Detroit Free Press Marathon in Detroit.**

KELLY JORDAN/  
DETROIT FREE PRESS

OPPOSITE PAGE:  
**Charles Hanson, 76, of Grosse Pointe Farms, runs down Chicago Boulevard during the 44th annual Detroit Free Press Marathon on Oct. 17.** ERIC SEALS/  
DETROIT FREE PRESS



# REDFORD

FREEP  
FEST  
WED & THURS





### Freep Film Festival

For Freep Film Festival, its 2021 edition was about a return to theaters and other in-person events.

In 2020, the festival held only virtual screenings due to the arrival of the novel coronavirus. But this year, the eighth edition of the documentary-focused fest took a hybrid approach, hosting indoor and outdoor events, along with offering at-home streaming opportunities for most of its lineup. The idea was to keep safety at the forefront, while also giving documentary films fans viewing opportunities that would align with their own comfort levels in relation to the pandemic.

Thousands attended in-person screenings, and similar numbers watched movies at home. Highlights included the sold-out opening night world premiere of “Boblo Boats: A Detroit Ferry Tale,” and the U.S. premiere of “Who You Gonna Call?” a bio-doc about the Detroit-born music star Ray Parker Jr. As always, the lineup featured documentaries with strong local connections.

The festival also hosted a number of free screenings and free educational opportunities designed for metro Detroit’s filmmaking community. This included the inaugural Real Fresh competition, which spotlighted the work of student filmmakers at Michigan State University, Oakland University, University of Michigan, University of Windsor and Wayne State University.

This year’s fest also enjoyed collaborations with the Dlectricity festival, Documenting Detroit, Downtown Detroit Partnership and Detroit Black Film Festival. The Freep festival received financial support from the Knight Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Doris J. and Donald L. Duchene Foundation, and was honored with an Ace Certificate of Excellence by the city of Detroit’s Arts, Culture & Entrepreneurship office.

After running in fall 2021, the 2022 festival is moving back to its traditional home in the spring. The just-announced dates: April 27 to May 1.

**Martha Reeves talks with others while waiting for the showing of the ‘Boblo Boats: Detroit Ferry Tale’ movie during the festival’s opening night Sept. 22 at Redford Theatre in Detroit.** RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS



OPPOSITE PAGE:  
**People enter Redford Theatre on Sept. 22 to see “Boblo Boats: Detroit Ferry Tale” as the Freep Film Festival opened.**  
RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS



## Top 10 Takeover

In partnership with Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers, the Free Press has built a franchise around its coverage of the area's best restaurants — and presenting related events that allow readers to enjoy the food and atmospheres the celebrated venues have to offer.

But in 2021, the approach was a bit different. Free Press stories shifted to highlight chefs and restaurateurs who were making a difference in the community, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of naming its annual Restaurant of the Year, it introduced the inaugural class of Detroit Free Press/Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers Food Fighters — talented folks who use their culinary skills to make positive impacts on area residents.

In recent years, the Free Press has also released a Best New Restaurants list, which serves as a base for the Detroit Free Press/Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers Top 10 Takeover dining series. In 2021, takeovers were held at venues aligned with the Food Fighters honorees, and all revenue generated went to the restaurants and Forgotten Harvest, which delivers surplus food to needy families in metro Detroit.

The Free Press and Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers in 2021 also continued to partner on the Top 10 Cares Rescue Detroit Restaurants + Feed the Community program. Introduced in 2020 shortly after the start of the pandemic, the program — buoyed by donations from generous Free Press readers — raised nearly \$500,000 over the two years to provide more than 23,000 meals to front-line health care workers and community members in need, all while supporting restaurants that were struggling to stay afloat.

That total included nearly \$100,000 raised in 2021.

The program paid local restaurants — many suffering due to a downturn in business related to the pandemic — to prepare the meals, which were distributed free of charge to health care employees and others struggling in metro Detroit. The final installment featured Chef of the Year Phil Jones preparing 5,000 free meals for those in need.

### Among the other events we produce:

- Top Workplaces
- High School Sports Awards
- Wine & Food
- Shining Light Regional Cooperation Awards
- Breakfast Club

**For all event promotions,** contact Aaron Velthoven at 313-223-4347.



**Christine Austin (right), of Troy, talks with Chef Genevieve Vang of Bangkok 96 Street Food during the Detroit Free Press/Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers' Top 10 Takeover series featuring Bangkok 96 Street Food at the Detroit Shipping Co.**

RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS



**COOP owner Maxcel Hardy laughs with Karen Ostrowski, of Northville, as he makes his way around the room during the Detroit Free Press/Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers' Top 10 Takeover involving COOP at the 3030 Event Space in Detroit on Sept. 8.**  
RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS



We're the biggest newsroom in Michigan.

We're journalists and also volunteers and mentors, parents and community members, voters and citizens. Free Press journalists aim to tell the stories that matter to you and your community, to hold our elected officials accountable and to spotlight the people and places that make our city and state unique. Along the way, we have garnered some recognition, including 10 Pulitzer Prizes and four national Emmy awards.

But none of that matters to us as much as our mission:

**To be on guard for you.**

**Andre Felton, 59, changes his shoes to start work in the backyard at the home he's staying at in Detroit on Wednesday, April 28, 2021. Felton pays for his rent by helping with jobs around the house. Felton faced months of frustrations trying to get his ID, birth certificate, and Social Security card after nearly 40 years incarcerated. He eventually got help from the Here to Help Foundation, and now he's enrolled in truck driving school.**

KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL /  
DETROIT FREE PRESS

