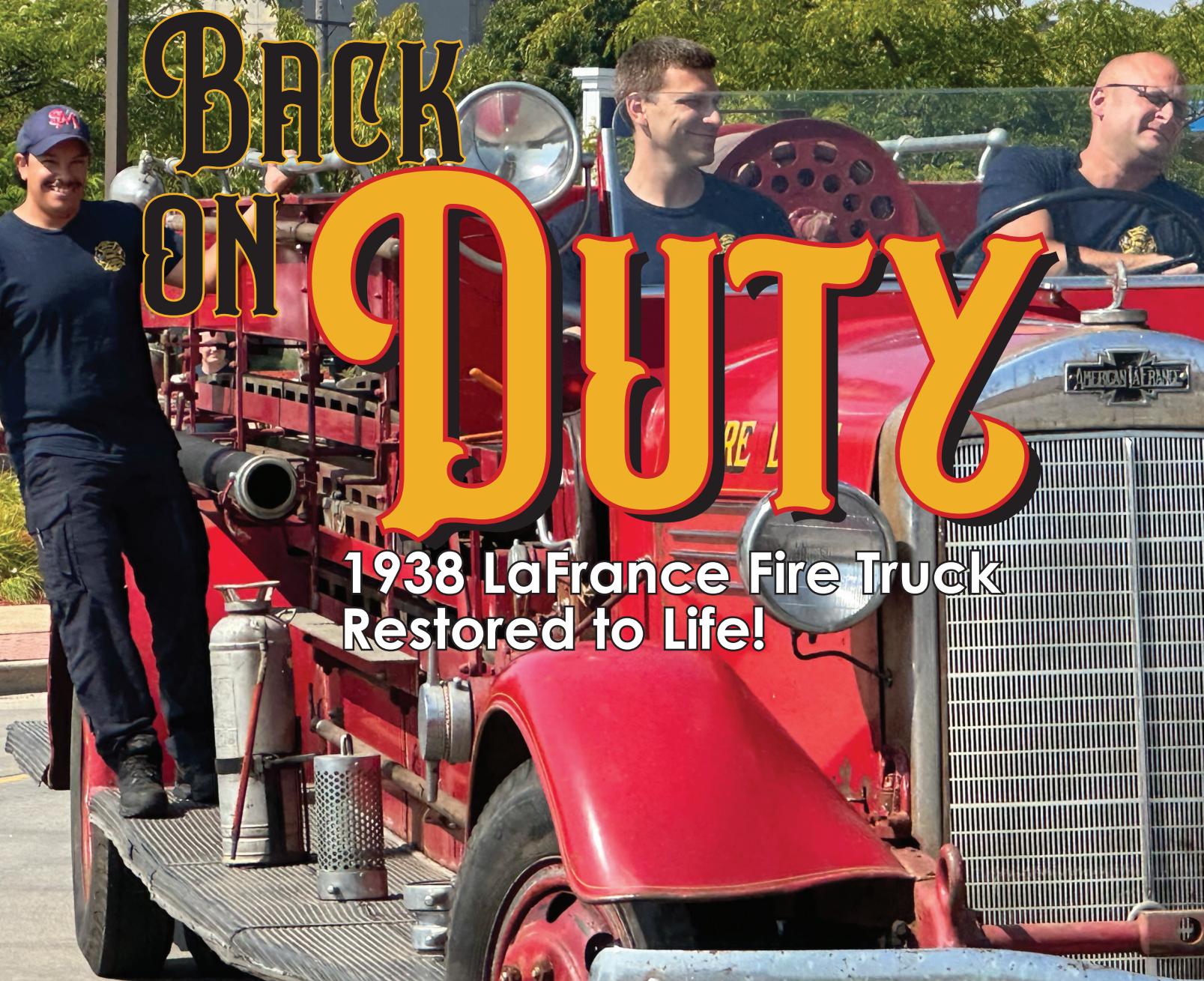


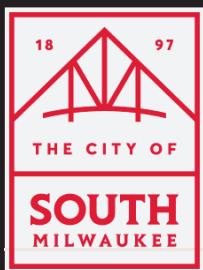
BRIDGES

CONNECTING OUR CITY OF SOUTH MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY



BACK
ON DUTY

1938 LaFrance Fire Truck
Restored to Life!



BRIDGES

CONNECTING OUR CITY OF SOUTH MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY

BRIDGES magazine is a joint publication of the City of South Milwaukee and the School District of South Milwaukee.

BRIDGES

CONNECTING OUR CITY OF SOUTH MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY

Business Spotlight
Virtue Coffee
Valor Wine

18 97
THE CITY OF
SOUTH MILWAUKEE

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
SOUTH MILWAUKEE

Youth Apprenticeship Program Making Big Impact

BRIDGES magazine is published twice a year in the fall and in the spring and is distributed by mail to residents of South Milwaukee. South Milwaukee High School students design and produce the magazine for printing.

For more information about BRIDGES magazine or to comment on an article email info@sdsm.k12.wi.us or call 414-766-5000.



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A Message from Mayor Jim Shelenske



It's an honor to serve as your Mayor. What truly makes South Milwaukee a great city is the people who call it home. A perfect example of that spirit was the incredible fundraiser held to support Human Concerns after the August floods. Your generosity and compassion continue to make our community stronger every day.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Ernie, Kathy, and Elyse Wunsch and their team at the Bucyrus Club & Event Center, as well as Bob Jelinek and the Bucyrus Museum, for graciously hosting the October 15 "After the Flood" fundraiser. Thanks to the generosity of more than 200 local businesses, organizations, and individuals, we raised over \$100,000 to help Human Concerns recover and replace what was lost.

Thank you all for your outpouring of support. It is moments like this that show the strength and heart of South Milwaukee.

A Look Back at 2025

I hope you enjoyed a wonderful summer with family and friends and took part in the many events that made

this year special, from exciting festivals to unforgettable concerts at Bucyrus Commons. As we close out the year, I would like to share some updates on key projects shaping our community's future.

Economic Growth and Development

South Milwaukee continues to move forward with new development initiatives that will help drive economic growth across our community.

Downtown and Neighborhood Projects

Several development projects and proposals moved forward throughout the year. The \$52 million Bucyrus Campus redevelopment completed renovations of one of the three vacant office buildings, with the Guidance Academy Elementary School opening in October. Next on the schedule is the renovation of the Heritage Building, which will include a Milwaukee County senior center and senior apartments above, as well as construction of a three-story multifamily building along 10th Avenue. The final phase of the project will convert the six-story Technical Building into apartment homes.

A proposed multifamily community at the former Everbrite site is under review, and we remain committed to the \$17 million mixed-use project at 10th and Marquette. Smaller efforts include converting a vacant medical office at 15th and College into 20 apartments.

New Businesses

Business activity remains strong, with eight new openings, 17 new business applications, and continued support from the Bucyrus Foundation Funds for downtown improvements, including a new student-designed crosswalk mural.

Replacing Pick 'N Save

We are in active discussions with multiple grocery store chains to bring a full-service grocer to South Milwaukee to replace the Pick 'N Save. A market analysis was recently approved, and we are committed to finding the right fit for our community. Thank you for your patience as we work toward this important goal.

City Finances and the 2026 Budget

This fall, the Common Council and City staff have been working on the 2026 operating budget, which is scheduled for final approval in late November. With increased state revenues and reduced debt payments, we expect the City's portion of property taxes to decrease next year.

Fees for Street Department special pickups and the Self-Deposit Station will remain unchanged in 2026.

Public Library: Looking Ahead

Since 2024, we have been exploring ways to sustain and expand library services for the long term. Following a third-party study and committee

Continued on next page

Mayor's Message continued

review, the Common Council is considering a potential 2026 referendum to increase the tax levy to support additional staffing, hours, and programming at the South Milwaukee Public Library.

Infrastructure Improvements

We have made major progress on replacing lead service lines citywide.

Since 2024, 1,216 lead lines have been replaced.

In 2025 alone, 1,000 lines were replaced, with crews using temporary asphalt on Milwaukee Avenue to minimize closures and reopen roads within 24 hours.

For 2026, two additional projects covering approximately 580 services are planned, pending Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources approval.

If funding remains consistent, we expect to complete this citywide project in 2026. Thank you to the residents and the South Milwaukee Water Utility staff for their patience, hard work, and dedication throughout this effort.

Engineering Department: Year in Review

Our Engineering Department had another busy and successful year, leading improvements across both our concrete and paving programs. Major projects included replacing the intersection at 17th and Rawson, reconstructing two alleys, and completing a large sidewalk improvement effort. Several local streets – Michigan Avenue, 6th Avenue,

and Marquette Avenue – were also rebuilt, featuring new storm sewers and better ADA accessibility.

In partnership with the School District of South Milwaukee, the department also made important upgrades to enhance pedestrian safety near Rawson School.

Looking ahead, residents in the 2nd District can look forward to continued progress next year, with plans to upgrade 9th Avenue.

Public Safety

Our Police Department continues to live by its mission: *"In partnership with the community, we strive to enhance the quality of life through the reduction of crime, fear, and disorder."*

This year, we welcomed two new officers and introduced Snoopy, our new facility dog, who has already visited most of our public schools and community groups. I am proud to report that overall crime is down 9 percent this year and 19 percent over the past two years. These positive trends are the result of the dedication of our officers and the strong partnership we share with our community. Thank you for helping us make South Milwaukee a safer place to live.

Health and Community Well-Being

The South Milwaukee Health Department has had an outstanding year of outreach and collaboration.

Partnering with local organizations, the Health Department brought Tom

Farley to speak about substance misuse and recovery at the Bucyrus Club, an event that drew hundreds of attendees.

Through the South Shore CARES initiative, local health departments have launched South Shore Care Cards, available at coffee shops and libraries, providing resources to support mental health. You can find additional information at southshorecares.com.

Looking to 2026: Celebrating 250 Years of Independence

On July 4, 2026, America will celebrate its semiquincentennial, marking 250 years of independence. We invite local artists, schools, families, and community groups to take part in a patriotic fire hydrant painting project beginning this spring. Let's showcase our community pride and creativity as we celebrate this historic milestone together.

A Message of Gratitude

As we close out 2025, I want to thank every resident, volunteer, city employee, and business owner who contributes to making South Milwaukee such a special place.

Wishing you and your family a joyful autumn and holiday season.

Here's to making 2026 our best year yet!

Sincerely,
Jim Shelveske
Mayor,
City of South Milwaukee

BACK ON DUTY



South Milwaukee's 1938 LaFrance Fire Truck Restored to Life

The South Milwaukee Fire Department is proud to announce that its historic 1938 American LaFrance fire truck is running once again. Through the hard work and dedication of the City of South Milwaukee Street Department, the vintage engine was successfully brought back to life and made its first public appearance at the department's recent Open Doors event.

"This truck represents more than just a piece of equipment — it's part of our city's firefighting heritage," said Fire Chief John Litchford. "To see it running again, thanks to the outstanding work of our Street Department, is truly special. We're committed to restoring it fully and sharing it with the community for years to come."

The 1938 LaFrance once served as a



frontline apparatus for the South Milwaukee Fire Department,

"This truck represents more than just a piece of equipment — it's part of our city's firefighting heritage," -

Fire Chief John Litchford

from 1938 through 1955, responding to emergencies across the city and standing as a symbol of service and dedication. Its return marks the

beginning of a larger restoration project that will preserve the truck's history while allowing it to shine in modern community events.

Looking Ahead to Heritage Day

The next phase of the project will continue the restoration process — polishing, repairing, and preparing the LaFrance for future

appearances. The department's goal is to have the vehicle parade-ready in time for the South Milwaukee Heritage Day Parade, where

residents can once again see the fire truck proudly representing the city.

[Mayor James Shelenske also praised the effort:

"The restoration of this historic fire truck brings our community together around a shared piece of history. It's a reminder of how South Milwaukee honors its past while looking toward the future."

The Fire Department invites residents to follow the progress of the restoration and join them at Heritage Day for the official parade debut.



City Adopts Forward-Thinking Zoning Code

On May 6, 2025 the South Milwaukee Common Council unanimously adopted a complete overhaul of the city's zoning code – the first major update in over 30 years. The new code promotes context-sensitive density increases and encourages thoughtful growth along key corridors.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. I own a single-family home, may I add a second unit?

A: All residential properties in the Z-2 and Z-3 zones may develop a second dwelling unit, either attached or detached from the principal structure.

Q. What districts allow multifamily housing?

All Z-4 zones and some areas in Z-3 zones along arterial roads support higher-density development, permitting three-or-more dwelling units on a property. One and two-family homes are allowed throughout Z-3 zones.

Q. How much of my property can I build on?

In Z-2 zones, no more than 50% of a lot may be impervious, which includes all hard surfaces. In Z-3 zones 60% is the maximum impervious coverage allowed and 90% in Z-4 zones. In all zones, building setbacks were reduced.

Q. Can I add a third story to my house?

Building heights in all zoning districts depends on the street width, how far the building is set back from the property

line, and how tall adjacent buildings are. In general, the further back from the property line, the taller a building may be.

Q. Can I increase my detached garage size or add another accessory structure?

A: The number of accessory structures is not limited. The aggregate ground floor area of all accessory structures may not exceed the ground floor area of the principal structure. Heights may not exceed the principal structure and the maximum height in any zone is 24 feet. Other factors also apply to heights.

Q. Can I add a front porch?

A: Front yard setbacks were reduced in residential zones, allowing for porch additions on most homes, also factoring how far adjacent buildings are setback.

Q. Does the new code have design standards?

A: Site design standards ensure new buildings and site improvements are safe, attractive, and environmentally friendly. They include requirements and guidelines for building materials, landscaping, screening, parking lots, lighting and signage, applicable to commercial and industrial uses. The type of building and fencing materials and outdoor lighting apply to one- and two-family residential uses.

Q. Zoning codes are known to be inflexible. Has the new code addressed this?

A: Updated zoning

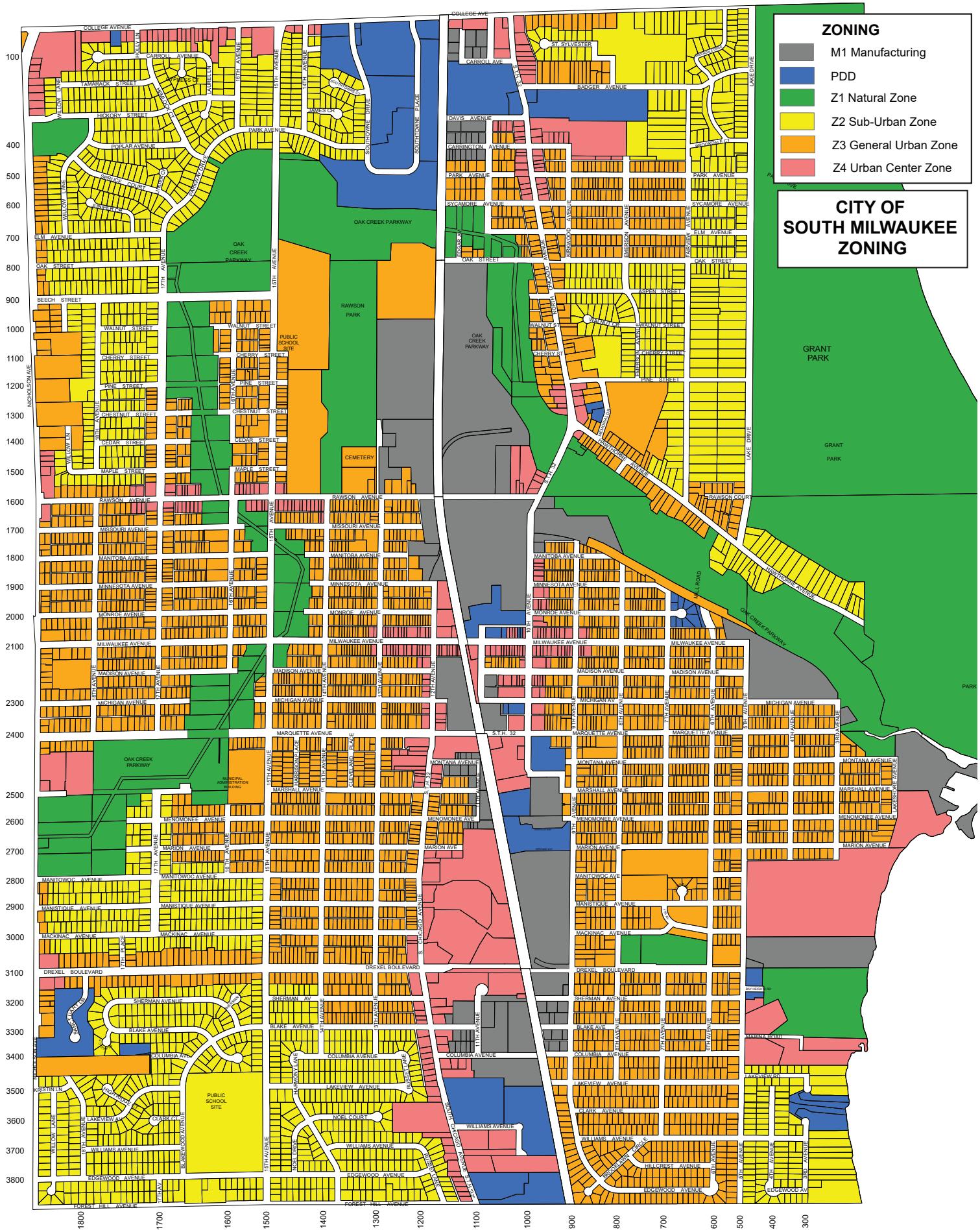
Zoning Code Change

- Removed single-family-only districts
- Removed minimum lot sizes and added minimum lot widths
- Permit 1- and 2-family homes in Z-2 and Z-3 districts
- Permit multifamily homes with 3-or-more units in Z-4 and along arterial streets in Z-3 Districts
- Removed conditional uses and simplified land use categories
- Added shared parking language for commercial uses
- Improved outdoor lighting standards
- Added site design standards

regulations for setbacks and building heights promote development that aligns with the surrounding context. To accommodate practical challenges in implementation, the code also provides administrative flexibility for minor deviations in height and setback standards—minimizing reliance on formal variances and expediting approvals for smaller-scale projects.

The city believes this code balances flexibility and clarity, making it easier for residents, developers and business owners to invest in their future.

For more info visit www.smwi.org and navigate to the Economic Development Department's zoning page.





2025-2026 Holiday Garbage and Recycling Schedule

Garbage Pickup Weekly: South Milwaukee Street Dept. 414.768.8075
Recycling Pickup Bi-Weekly: John's Disposal 262.473.4700

Garbage and Recycling Pick-Up Dates for 2025-2026 Holidays

Holiday	Regular Pick-Up	Rescheduled Garbage Pick-Up	Rescheduled Recycling Pick-Up
Thanksgiving Day (2025)	Thur., Nov. 27, 2025	Sat., Nov. 29, 2025	Sat., Nov. 29, 2025 / Yellow
Christmas Eve (2025)	Wed., Dec. 24, 2025	Fri., Dec. 26, 2025	Fri., Dec. 26, 2025 / Yellow
Christmas Day (2025)	Thur., Dec. 25, 2025	Sat., Dec. 27, 2025	Sat., Dec. 27, 2025 / Yellow
New Year's Eve (2025)	Wed., Dec. 31, 2025	Fri., Jan. 2, 2026	Fri., Jan. 2, 2026 / Orange
New Year's Day	Thur., Jan. 1, 2026	Sat., Jan. 3, 2026	Sat., Jan. 3, 2026 / Orange
Martin Luther King's Day	Mon., Jan. 19, 2026	No Schedule Change	No Schedule Change
Memorial Day	Mon., May 25, 2026	Fridays, May 22 & May 29, 2026	Fridays, May 22 & May 29, 2026 / Yellow
Independence Day	Sat., July 4, 2026	No Schedule Change	No Schedule Change
Labor Day	Mon., Sep. 7, 2026	Fridays, Sept. 4 & Sept. 11, 2026	Fridays, Sept. 4 & Sept. 11, 2026 / Orange
Thanksgiving Day (2026)	Thur., Nov. 26, 2026	Sat., Nov. 28, 2026	Sat., Nov. 28, 2026 / Yellow
Christmas Eve (2026)	Thur., Dec. 24, 2026	Sat., Dec. 26, 2026	Sat., Dec. 26, 2026 / Yellow
Christmas Day (2026)	Fri., Dec. 25, 2026	No Schedule Change	No Schedule Change

2026

RECYCLING SCHEDULE

To identify the recycling week where you live, check the recycling collection map on the City's website or call the Street Department.

JANUARY						
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DECEMBER						
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South Milwaukee Library Events



Teen Programs:

Teen Dungeons & Dragons

Monday, December 15th from 4-6:30pm

Curious about D&D or are a seasoned player and want to try something new? Teens in grades 6-12 can join us once a month for a one-shot campaign! Dice and Level 5 character sheets will be provided. Adventure awaits at the South Milwaukee Public Library!

Teen Cocoa-in-a-Jar

Saturday, December 20th from 12-1:30pm

Winter is the perfect time for this delicious treat. Customize and take home your own hot chocolate mix with a variety of mix-ins from candy canes to marshmallows. For Teens grades 6-12.

Kids Programs:

Gingerbread Houses

Thursday, December 4th at 4 and 4:45pm

Thursday, December 11th at 4 and 4:45pm

For kids ages 0-12 and their families. Registration will be required and will be limited – please sign up for only one

time slot.

Storytime & Crafts

Tuesdays at 10am

Join us for stories, music, activities, and a simple craft. For kids 6 and under and their caregivers. (No storytime on December 23 or 30.)

Music & Movement

Wednesdays at 10am

Join us for music, dancing, flannel board activities, and a story! For kids ages 0-3 and their caregivers. (No Music & Movement on December 24 or 31.)

LEGO Club

Third Thursday of the Month at 4pm

For kids ages 5-12.

Projector Playtime

Fridays from 9am-4:30pm
Play with our interactive projector in the youth room play area!

Adult Programs:

Family History for Beginners & Experienced Genealogists: How to Do Genealogy

Saturday, December 6th at 11am

New and experienced genealogists alike are sure to enjoy this workshop with

South Milwaukee Public Library

1907 10th Ave, South Milwaukee, WI 53172
(414) 768-8195

Hours

Monday: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Tuesday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Wednesday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Thursday: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Friday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Sunday: Closed

Vicki Ruthe Hahn, owner of Stateline Genealogy Club! No registration is required to attend this program.

Winter Garlands DIY Workshop for Adults

Thursday, December 11th at 5:30pm

Come to the library to make DIY winter garlands made of pinecones, berries, cinnamon, dried oranges, stars, and greenery to give your home a cozy and wintery vibe. No prior crafting experience is necessary and all materials will be supplied by the library. And because no winter craft night would be complete without a sweet treat, we will also have a hot cocoa bar! Registration is required. This program is for adults 18+.

Barreless Barre Beginners

Tuesdays at 9:30am

An adult fitness class using chairs, resistance bands, Pilates balls, and optional weights to aid in movement that is based in Pilates, yoga, and dance exercises. All are welcome.



Welcome Officer Snoopy

In September of 2022, Chief William Jessup decided to start a K9 Unit at the South Milwaukee Police Department. This would be the first K9 Unit the police department has had in over 30 years. In mid-2023, Officer Matthew Edwards was selected as the South Milwaukee Police Department's K9 handler, and Officer Edwards and Captain Fournier then selected Rocket, a 1-year-old Dutch Shepherd, as the first canine in the newly formed K9 Unit.

Rocket is a K9 patrol dog, and patrol dogs are trained in locating and apprehending suspects, detecting narcotics, tracking missing persons, searching for items/articles, business & residential searches, and interacting with the community. Rocket quickly showed that he was the right dog for the job, and was certified in all of these competencies. Rocket and Officer Edwards have been patrolling the South Milwaukee Community ever since, and they have been utilized not only in the South Milwaukee Community, but surrounding communities, as well. Since starting with the police department, Rocket has made a positive impact on the South Milwaukee community by reducing crime, apprehending criminals and strengthening the department's relationship with the citizens we serve.

In early 2025, the South Milwaukee Police Department was presented with an



Snoopy's role as a facility dog is to assist people by providing comfort and support to employees and citizens.

opportunity to bring on a second K9. Partners with Paws, in Fredonia, Wisconsin, is a non-profit organization that donates facility dogs to police departments, fire departments, schools, and hospitals. Enter Snoopy, a 4-month-old Standard Poodle, which is assigned to Captain Fournier. Snoopy's role as a facility dog is to assist people by providing comfort and support to employees and citizens. Snoopy is utilized at the station and out in the community, meeting with community members, going to the local schools, interacting with children, and providing comfort to those who need it. Snoopy has been with



the South Milwaukee Police Department for 3 months now, and he is a huge hit with our police officers, as well as our community members.

We are excited about the benefits of our new K9 Unit and look forward to further strengthening our relationship with the community we serve. SMPD and You-Stronger Together!

A Commitment to Student-Centered Design



As we kick off the new school year, Lakeview had the opportunity to welcome back many amazing returning staff and some new faces this year! We have embraced this as an opportunity to come together as a staff to implement our SDSM vision:

The South Milwaukee School District, in collaboration with our community, is committed to offering every student genuine opportunities to cultivate curiosity, empathy, and a lifelong love of learning. Our goal is to empower learners to explore their passions, develop essential skills, and build the confidence needed to successfully achieve their aspirations. Strategic and intensive work designed to improve student learning.

Our core response is a commitment to student-centered design focused on enhancing the student experience so every one of our learners are striving and we are closing achievement gaps along the way. This isn't just an initiative—it's a foundational shift in how we approach teaching and learning.

We are investing in targeted professional development and collaborative practices to ensure our instruction is intentional and impactful:

Activities designed to create a sense of belonging and purpose for all students.

Data-Driven, Targeted Instruction: Through professional coaching cycles,



First graders check their first drafts drawing maps of Lakeview Elementary School.

staff are diving deep into student performance data to pinpoint the specific skills and strategies each student needs to master. This data-first approach ensures that all instruction is focused and relevant.

Collaborative Planning for all students: Our staff is dedicating time to co-planning to create lessons that provide every student with the targeted instruction and supports they need. This collaborative effort is essential to ensuring every learner reaches mastery of grade-level standards.

In-the-Moment Adjustments: Staff are engaging in continuous professional learning to sharpen their skills in data analysis and assessment. This means teachers are not just assessing at the end of a unit; they are actively identifying how to adjust instruction while teaching to engage every student and

address needs immediately. **Building on Foundational Skills:** In both literacy and math, we are consciously building on successful habits, skills, and routines established in previous years. This consistency provides a strong foundation for new learning.

A critical component of this work is empowering our students to be active participants in their learning through rich discussion and discourse across all content areas. Students learn best when they can articulate their thinking and grapple with complex ideas.

In literacy, for example, we are systematically building curiosity and conversation throughout our units. You will see students regularly engaging in activities like:

Turn and Talks: Providing a structured, low-stakes way for students to process information with a partner.

Continued on next page



'It's helped me get ready for the real world'

Educators Credit Union Opens Branch at SMHS

Aljey Leka, a senior at South Milwaukee High School, was working his teller job during the lunch hour at Educators Credit Union. He was telling two young women at the counter how they could participate in a raffle for Six Flags Frightfest tickets.

Then, from the speakers above, the bell rang. Time to get to class – for Leka, too, which is just down the hall.

Leka is a Youth Apprentice at Educators Credit Union's newest branch – next to the library at South Milwaukee High School.

Twenty years ago, when the school was built, there were plans for a bank branch in the halls of the school. Those plans were finally fulfilled when, last spring, the School Board signed a memorandum



Aljey Leka, a senior at SMHS is also a teller at the newly opened Educators Credit Union in the high school.

of understanding with the credit union to locate a branch in the building and to hire two Youth Apprentices at the location to learn about working at a financial

institution.

In accordance with the District's Five-Year Strategic Plan, high school counselors work with both the student

Continued on next page

A Commitment - Continued

Stop and Jots: Giving students time to capture their thinking in writing before sharing.

Sharing Our Wonderings: Encouraging students to pose questions, fostering a culture of inquiry and critical thinking.

Socratic Seminars

This year, our elementary schools are doing a deep dive into math practices and looking at our resources and instructional practice in math to ensure all students thrive in that area as well. In math, that means you will see students regularly engaging in

activities like:

Number talks: A strategy for the class to talk in depth about how to solve grade-level math problems fluently and efficiently.

Counting trajectory assessments: A method for teachers to accurately measure each student's understanding of place value and number sequence, including skip counting and larger quantities

Solving problems with a higher "depth of knowledge" that require deep student thought

and discourse.

At Lakeview, we are working to bring that all together through a focus on community projects like the renovation of our outdoor garden by our second graders. Student-led conferences, student goal setting, and lots of increased opportunities for students to learn and know the academic standards and show what they know in multiple ways. Keep an eye on Lakeview this year for some continued work to grow our students and watch them thrive!

Educators continued

and their families for purposeful planning to develop meaningful post-high school plans. We want them to be prepared for the career of their choice whether that requires post-secondary education or the opportunity to enter straight into the workforce. SMHS's Youth Apprentice Program offers on-the-job training in career paths that are in high demand in the local industry. During the 2024-25 school year, 10 percent of the graduating class were Youth Apprentices - the most ever.

"Last year I had a talk with my counselor about what my career looks like after high school," Leka said. "That's when I found out about this. I love it. It's opened a lot of new opportunities for me."

The branch officially opened on October 6 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Students and staff can learn financial literacy, open accounts, conduct transactions, and more at the location. New accounts opened at the branch get receive a SMHS student-designed debit or credit card, a co-branded t-shirt, and access to a fee-free ATM near the Sullivan Gymnasium when the branch counter is closed.

The raffle Leka was talking to the two students about is a financial literacy program where students answer a 'question of the day' every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday when the branch is



Students and staff have access to banking services and get neat perks like a student-designed debit card.

open.

The SMHS branch is Educators' sixth high school location.

Being founded by teachers, having Educators Credit Union branches inside high schools is a small way to continue their commitment to students and education.

The branch is open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during lunch and staffed by a full-time Educators Credit Union staff as well as two SMHS Youth Apprentices.

Youth Apprentices from those other high schools also work for Educators and participate in group training.

Leka and fellow Youth Apprentice Benjamin Wilbrandt have worked for the credit union since July, attending training and working in other branches.

"We all group up for the training at the office," Leka said. "I've made a few friends from outside South Milwaukee."

Joe Brazgel, Educators' Chief Information Officer, is a 2007 graduate of South Milwaukee High School, and started his banking career as a Youth Apprentice.

"I was originally interested in the program for the opportunity to go to school half-day and work half-day. At the time, I was very interested in accounting, and this seemed right up my alley," Brazgel said.

He started at Prime Financial Credit Union in Cudahy as a teller.

"Without the Youth Apprentice program teaching me financial service skills, I wouldn't have the career I have today," Brazgel said.

He echoed the same experience Leka is having right now.

"I took Business Math my freshman year, accounting sophomore year," he said. He considered studying Actuarial Science, but liked his job so much he kept it, working at Prime for a decade.

"Everything to this day, I go back and say, I learned it from the youth apprentice program. I still reflect on the things it taught me," Brazgel said.

Leka, at South Milwaukee High School, is still learning. Now that his peers are also members of the credit union, he is clear about his job and personal boundaries.

"I try to keep it professional but also have my friend side," he said, with a grin.

"It's helped me get ready for the real world."



Students team with NASA in STEM Challenge

This summer, on a quiet airport outside of Page, Arizona, a weather balloon carrying a device built by students from South Milwaukee lifted off into the clear desert sky.

The onboard camera captures the balloon slowly rising off the tarmac. The airport slips away, and the desert and winding Colorado River are front and center as the curvature of the earth bends from one edge of the frame to the other. It floats through the atmosphere for seven hours, a silver ribbon high above the ground.

We get to see all of this – and the data collected by the other systems – all because of a dozen or so 6th- to 8th-grade students.

STEM education (science, technology, engineering, and math) is growing in South Milwaukee with the goal to have all students to have opportunities to problem-solve, communicate, and collaborate. At the middle school additional course offerings were added in STEM Entrepreneurship. The referendum approved by voters in 2024 was dedicated to making sure students are Safe, Supported, Successful was dedicated to adding STEM instruction at elementary and to maintain and expand offering for all students. It's the last link in a K-12 STEM program that will prepare students for high tech careers in Wisconsin. The teenage



The SMMS TechRise team after presenting their project at a virtual science fair at NASA.

engineer at SMMS guided by STEM Teacher Isabel Mendiola, were just one of 60 teams nationwide (and the only one in Wisconsin) accepted into the NASA TechRise Challenge – a contest for students in sixth to 12th grades to team up with their schoolmates to design an experiment.

The images were a bonus. The device they built was an atmospheric probe that can “smell” chemicals 78,000 feet above the ground. All of it was designed, assembled, programmed, and tested by middle school students between February and May last spring.

“The project we worked on is a device that monitors VOC levels in the atmosphere. VOCs are volatile organic compounds that are basically dangerous gases that cause health problems like allergies, asthma, and even cancers,” said Fathima Sayyed, who is

now a freshman at the high school.

The teens met twice a week after school. On Tuesdays, they did the work – soldering sensors to computer boards and writing the programming that would be installed in the device. On Thursdays, they held Zoom meetings with NASA engineers to report their progress and troubleshoot any issues the students ran into.

As winter turned to spring, the students tested the device physically and checked the software before packing it up to send to NASA.

Then in May, the students (and only the students) – roughly a dozen in total – had to present and defend their project during a virtual science fair held for NASA personnel. That was the last step before the launch in June.

After the flight, the device and all of its data was returned to South Milwaukee, and the

Continued on next page

STEM Challenge continued

students studied how the probe performed and what the data had to say about the atmosphere it flew through.

"It was really cool to see all of our work," said Kaylyn Crawford, who is also now a freshman. "(The payload) worked great and I'm really proud of that."

Crawford was interested in seeing the hardware they had engineered – the sensors they had soldered to circuit boards, the code they had programmed into the device that ran the system – and how well it functioned.

WorldView, the NASA contractor that launched the balloon, had its own system on board and shared data it collected – a control set of data for the schools to compare results.

That data is presented in pages and pages of spreadsheets – but the story they tell is anything but mundane.

"Our sensors are here at the end," Mendiola explained, scrolling to the right.

In five-second increments, the data tells a story from beginning to end - from pre-flight tests, to 78,000 feet, and back to the ground.

Displayed on a huge screen in Mendiola's STEM Lab, the results mirror WorldView's exactly.

"Every sensor that was there worked. We got beautiful photographs," Mendiola said.

Crawford said the TechRise experience has changed



The South Milwaukee students' probe had an on-board camera which captured the balloon's rise above the desert outside of Page, AZ. The balloon (right) was operated by a NASA contractor.

how she sees the world. She's interested in the medical world, but said she now has a hands-on perspective on how things work.

"It definitely changed a lot of things," Crawford said.

Current Middle School students won't have to be jealous of the TechRise team. They have their own NASA projects to work on. Mendiola was accepted into the 2025–26 Growing Beyond Earth® (GBE) Program, a national classroom-based citizen STEM initiative developed in partnership with NASA.

In her classroom is a plexiglass box, some pots, and seeds sent from NASA. Her current students are wiring CO₂ and humidity sensors into the box. That's the control box. Soon, another device will arrive that will simulate microgravity.

"As a new GBE teacher, I'll be leading our students in conducting NASA-aligned research trials across both the fall and spring semesters. We will explore how plants



can be grown in controlled environments to support space exploration and life beyond Earth," she said.

"This opportunity will provide our students with a chance to contribute to authentic research that supports NASA's long-term mission."

She has also applied to this year's TechRise Challenge – a chance to launch those plants on a suborbital flight.



Simple and Clean – Team Works Year Round to Keep Grounds Attractive and Safe

Old baseballs, tennis balls, and even a wiffle ball, line the dashboard of the District van that Noah Stalker uses to do his job. Plucked here and there from their hiding places in about-to-be-mowed sports fields, their new job is to roll in a train from one side of the windshield to the other in his travels.

On this particular gray day in an unnaturally warm autumn, however, the forlorn sports equipment stays put as he navigates toward the maintenance shed near Rawson Elementary School.

"The kids (college and high school student summer helpers) found those doing the trimming," he said as he made a turn.

The District's Strategic Plan also has goals for continuing the maintenance of buildings and grounds, which led to welcoming a new Head Groundskeeper last year.

Stalker has – a big job he shares with his seasonal assistant, Don O'Kray. As the two pose for photos for this article, it starts spitting rain on the neatly mowed ball field behind them.

"The biggest challenge of grounds," he said, is that despite what you've got planned for the week, weather and unplanned tasks are always ready to spoil those plans. "You've got to stay on your toes. You have to go with the flow."



Noah Stalker (left) and **Don O'Kray** are responsible for mowing 80 acres of lawn and sports fields. One recent special project was to remove nuisance trees in front of the Middle School.



That explains the caution tape that's nestled behind the driver's seat in the van, with the tools and assorted items he keeps there.

Stalker, a Kenosha native, has been doing this kind of work since he was 16, when he started his own landscaping business. He loves being outside and working with his hands – a stint in a Uline warehouse reaffirmed that –

and he's brought a decade of experience mowing grass, landscaping around buildings, plowing snow, and spreading salt (most recently for the Racine Unified School District) to South Milwaukee.

He and O'Kray, a 26-year Navy veteran and retired AT&T engineer and telecommunications trainer,

Continued on next page

Groundskeeping continued

work in the spring until the end of mowing season, taking care of the 80 acres of grass and sports fields that the two are responsible for mowing, trimming, and striping for sporting events.

"There are 20 hours of work (per week) just in the sports fields," Stalker said.

Whenever there's an athletic event at any of the District's various sports fields (soccer complex, Bucyrus Stadium, tennis courts, elementary ball fields, etc.) Stalker, O'Kray, and any other seasonal help available, head over to the field and ensure it looks its best before players and spectators arrive.

In between sporting events and special projects, Stalker has been focusing on the appearance of District buildings.

"When I got here, we just weedwacked for two to three weeks," he said. "You can pick any school, any job, there's plenty of work to do."

His work is most apparent in front of the Middle School. There, he removed

and wood-chipped a stand of weedy trees that had taken root over the years. Without the trees, the school's sign – stainless steel letters pinned to the side of the building – could be seen for the first time in years. He also pulled out the bushes that surrounded Lakeview Elementary's flagpole. That area is now a project for the Lion Landscapers – second graders who

After the growing season ends, Stalker begins preparing for the winter. That means salt. The District's salt bunker stores 15 tons of the substance to keep miles of sidewalks and acres of parking lots clear of ice during the coldest months. He also positions 38 pallets of sidewalk salt, split between each school, to be ready before students start walking



Practice balls rescued during mowing this year.

are learning about gardens and plants. "Simple and clean - that's how I like it," Stalker said. "Fresh mulch, no weeds in the beds.

Year by year, we're going to chip away at it."

He and O'Kray have made so much progress in such a short time that the School Board recognized the two in October with certificates lauding the good work they've done.

to school.

"Snow is my favorite season, I love plowing snow," Stalker said.

Everyone who has a driveway to shovel has a plan – how to clear the snow in the fastest way, where to concentrate, where the snow lands, etc. Stalker's job is to figure out how to manage huge parking lots like those at the high school (a lot of the snow is dumped into a retaining pond), as well as determine how and where to push the

snow at E. W. Luther Elementary School. Precisely the opposite of the high school, Luther has a long, narrow driveway that goes uphill, a small parking lot, and not a lot of places to put the snow. Then there's Rawson Elementary School, which has a ton of curbs that hide in the snow, just waiting to damage a plow. Throw in Lakeview Elementary School with its blocks and blocks of sidewalks adjacent to the school, and you get a sense of how much work a couple of inches of snow will create.

Because all the snow must be removed immediately, members of the maintenance team from around the district pitch in when the flakes fall, utilizing the five main plow vehicles and a front-loader that helps manage the mountains of snow left behind by the plows.

"We basically live on the weather apps. There are a lot of nights where you have to wake up at 2 a.m.," he said. "That's the challenge of winter. On the days it's not snowing, I'm going to the schools to see if they have sidewalk salt."



'It Was Awesome. It was great, and it was kind'

How A New Elementary Resource and Experience-based Professional Development created a new tradition at South Milwaukee's Rawson Elementary School

When Avi walked into the first-ever Rawson Elementary Community Breakfast last spring, she didn't believe what she saw. The whole cafeteria was decorated, and tables were piled high with food.

The feast that she and her fellow second graders walked into was all donated, thanks to opinion letters they wrote to area businesses, sharing their newfound knowledge of eating and nutrition, and requesting donations for the community breakfast.

"I didn't really think that they would do this," Avi remembered. "I thought the teachers were just joking (that the food was donated)."

Like every other school in Wisconsin, Rawson Elementary has implemented the literacy standards required under Act 20. In South Milwaukee, a team of teachers spent the spring and summer of 2024 reviewing various resources that fit the needs of students and Act 20, and decided on Wit and Wisdom – a resource developed by Great Minds, a roughly 20-year-old public benefit company founded by educators.

Teachers in each of the District's four elementary schools introduced the resource in their classes during the 2024-25 school year – a full year before the July 1, 2025, statutory deadline.



Rawson students enjoy a community breakfast with food donated by local businesses.

The letters the students wrote and the ensuing community breakfast were project-based learning activities. The idea of using the letters as part of Wit and Wisdom's opinion-writing module, and tying them to an activity like a community breakfast, is a direct result of the professional development provided by San Diego-based Blue Dot Education. That training was aligned to the District's five-year strategic plan by making space to intentionally design experiences that are grounded in communication, collaboration, problem-solving, student ownership, and a sense of belonging.

"It was really special for us because we just started using Wit and Wisdom last year," teacher Shannon Dardis said.

"We felt really good seeing how the community breakfast connected to their learning."

After the letters were sent, one by one, replies trickled back to the classrooms and were read aloud for the entire class.

Teachers Jillian Rosanske and Kalla Hornick said their students would get so excited when a reply letter arrived.

"They would ask about the letters every day," Rosanske recalled.

Hornick agreed. Replies and donation pledges were a big deal and a point of pride. "You'd have students say: 'I wrote a letter to so and so, and I got the bacon.'"

It wasn't only the food, though. Since it was a community breakfast, students

Continued on next page

Kyle Olson: From a Kindergarten Camera Man to Hollywood Producer



When Kyle Olson started kindergarten at E. W. Luther Elementary School, he showed up with a camera in his hand. You wouldn't fault a teacher for asking little Kyle to put his camera away in his cubby or backpack. But that's not what happened.

"The teachers there, at a young age, were encouraging me and really praising that creativity," Olson recalled. "That's really where my interest in visual storytelling began, in those early days."

Today, Olson is an Executive Producer for film and television. He has worked on big-budget films like 2023's Barbie, HBO's Game of Thrones prequel series House of the Dragon, and Apple TV+'s World War II series Masters of the Air.

In 2019, he won an Emmy for Best Historical Documentary

It was Awesome - Continued

wrote to grown-ups inviting them to the breakfast.

Keira, a former second grader with a big personality and an imagination to match, found District Superintendent Deidre Roemer waiting in the cafeteria to join her for breakfast.

"I invited her, and then she came. I was talking and I said 'hey, can I have a job?' and she told me to write her a resume," Keira said. "I was like Yesss! ... and I did (write) a big,



Kyle Olson on set in high school and his portrait after winning an Emmy

for his passion project, The Last Signal. It's the story of a 92-year-old Navy veteran, Raymond Johnson, who believed he was the last surviving crew member of his ship. Olson captured Johnson's search, aided by a social media post made by

big resume (good enough) for like 30-year-old people."

"The students got that direct feedback," Dardis said. "They learned that there's a power in writing, and they really embraced the fact that they could have an impact and help to organize it."

More than half of the students in South Milwaukee are eligible for the free-and-reduced breakfast and lunch program – a measure of poverty. Putting on the community breakfast and talking about food and nutrition gave the second-grade teachers a perspective

Johnson's daughter, and his reunion with another surviving shipmate.

"We saw that project from the very beginning, from the pre-production and planning phase to the Emmy win, which was years in the making,"

Continued on next page

into their students' lives and habits, challenging some everyday assumptions.

"There are students who said they don't ever eat with adults," Rosanske said. "That was a new experience for kids."

Slobodan, a student who wrote to O & H Bakery, was surprised when eight of their signature Kringle pastries were delivered for the community breakfast.

"I was thinking that they wouldn't, but they did," he recalled. "It was awesome. It was great, and it was kind."

Olson Continued

Olson said.

He remembers growing up in South Milwaukee, watching the Emmy Award shows on television, and dreaming of being one of the people on stage. Now, his award gleams from the shelf behind his desk in his Los Angeles home.

"It means something to get an award from your peers," he said. "You're getting a pat on the back from the industry."

The award has opened doors to continue his career, and connected him to people from his past "in the best way," he said.

Olson credits his roots in the Midwest and the creative freedom and avenues for expression he had as a South Milwaukee student who received services through the Gifted and Talented program. He specifically named Jacquelyn Drummer, the coordinator of that program, as an early influence for him.

"It was an opportunity to go beyond the normal classroom setting and push myself," Olson said.

"Mrs. Drummer helped unlock a creative side of me that I have taken with me through my entire creative career."

He was also in one of the first graduating classes that got to use the then-brand-new 800-seat Performing Arts Center.

"One of the challenges that everyone has, especially in high school, is finding your tribe.

I was lucky enough to find that in the teachers who were supporting me and also in the



Olson working in Belfast, N. Ireland

theater program," he said. "To this day, I go to the theater any chance I can."

Indeed, Olson returned to South Milwaukee to help celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Performing Arts Center with a theater alumni gathering in the spring. He again brought his camera and produced profile videos and a mini-documentary about the weekend.

Olson said he was in Los Angeles just about a month after he graduated. He enrolled in Columbia College Film School and studied directing.

"I didn't know a single soul (in California)," he said. "It was a bit of a scary moment."

In the early months of his new LA residency, he met model and producer Tyra Banks and she hired him as a production assistant on America's Next Top Model during the peak of the reality television era. Becoming a PA is a big step, but it's the bottom rung of the television and movie industry. Olson made the most of the opportunity and worked his way up.

It's important, though, not to

Gifted and Talented Program Spotlight

SDSM's Gifted and Talent resources are used two-fold. First, common skills, like critical thinking, are supported in the general education classroom so that all students have an opportunity to hone those skills at high levels. Second, students who are in need of more support benefit from expanded programming or individualized acceleration through the Multi-tiered Systems of Support to receive instruction above and beyond the general curriculum.

His videos gracing the screen of the PAC again was a full-circle moment.

In his senior year, Olson wrote and directed a feature film featuring his fellow classmates and teachers, titled SMHS 007, which premiered to a sold-out crowd at the PAC.

"That movie was a very big deal for me," Olson said of the James Bond-style spoof film. "It was a chance to really test the waters before I graduated."

hide where you come from or forget your roots.

"One of the best pieces of advice I got, leaving South Milwaukee to go to LA, is: Don't be afraid to tell people where you come from. Use it as a calling card. Be proud that you're from the Midwest," he said. "There is something to be said about the Midwest way of doing things, the work ethic. ... It's just intrinsically different, in a good way."

E. W. Luther Opens Time Capsule to Celebrate 60th Anniversary



The atmosphere was electric.

Every student watched with bated breath as E. W. Luther Principal Eric Wightman lifted the lid on the time capsule during the much-anticipated assembly in honor of the school's 60th anniversary.

As Wightman lifted the lid, there was no release of ancient air – nothing to indicate that the contents hadn't seen the light of day for a time period longer than the students could comprehend. How long had it been

"I'm excited to leave items explaining what students like about the school ... "and how good a place it is."

-5th Grader
Callie W.

sealed?

Ten years. Well, time, as Einstein proved, is relative. Every 10 years the school celebrates its birthday with



Students decorated crowns for an assembly when the time capsule was opened.

messages from students and trinkets to remember the "old" days. Included in this decade box was a photo of the student body from 2015. A plush minion – still a big hit with kids – arose from the box. A plush Luther Leopard joined him, as well as a program from the 40th anniversary celebration. Also reborn from the capsule was a Luther shirt, hoisted by Mrs. Eiting, who planned the lionshare of the 60th celebration, that was a respectable 40 years old.

"These (former)



students would like you to know what they were listening to on the radio," Wightman said, emphasizing the word "radio" the same way he'd introduce a new vocabulary word in the classroom.

Popular back in 2015 - the song "Happy" by Pharrell. Wightman

lifted a photo of a young Taylor Swift from the box, to a roar of applause and pleasure from the students. Also were copies of the South Milwaukee Voice Graphic newspaper.

"The stories are the same, but they



Linda C.



Henry S.



Callie W.

Luther Continued

used to come on paper," Wightman said. "Paper?" a tiny incredulous voice from the back called.

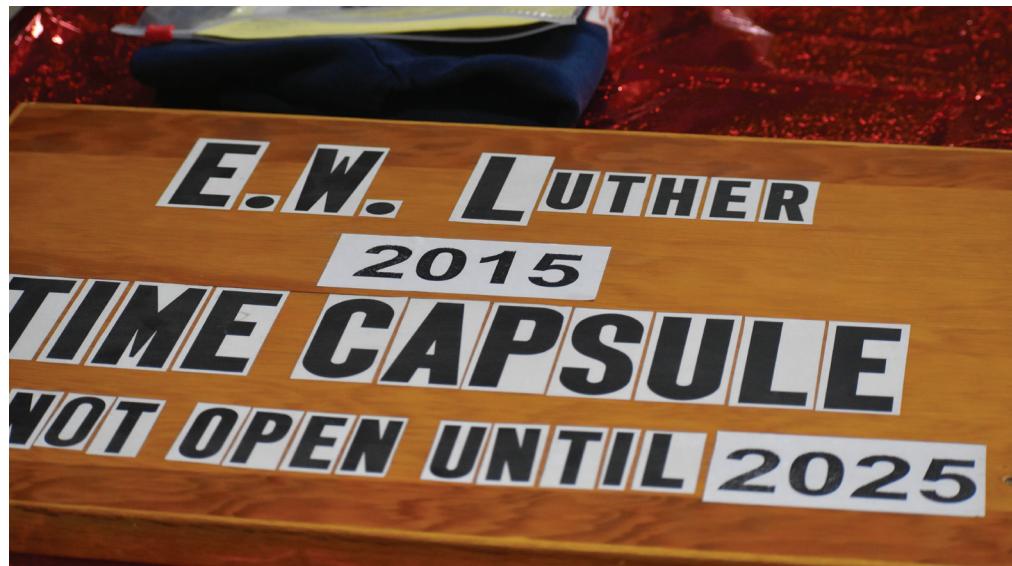
If those items don't sound old to you, consider the age of the building – which just got air conditioning in 2023 as part of high-quality air filtering system.

So much was different 60 years ago when the venerable school's doors first opened.

For instance, back in 1965, the Beatles released their first album. The Packers were on their way to win the Super Bowl (1966), and the Brewers were four years away from being founded – in Seattle. The Streets of Old Milwaukee exhibit was brand new. Lyndon Johnson was president, and we were way behind in the Space Race. That year, a cosmonaut became the first man to leave a spaceship for a spacewalk while the U.S. had yet to put a man in orbit. Time is relative.

"Now we have to fill this box," Wightman said, once he'd gone through the capsule.

Into the box went the first installment of the book Dog Man – the most checked out book from the newly-renovated Luther Library this



It's been 10 years since the time capsule was opened.

year. Joining it was a Bluey stuffed animal from the popular cartoon by the same name, a photo of the teachers on staff, favorite movies: The Lego Movie (released in 2014) The Minecraft Movie, and, of course, K-Pop Demon Hunters. Favorite songs: Golden and Soda Pop (from the K-Pop Demon Hunters movie), and more importantly, little written anecdotes about why they love their school.

Fifth grader Linda C. wasn't sure what would be in the time capsule before it was opened.

"I was thinking maybe it would be Pokemon cards," she said. "I was really excited to find out."

Fifth grader Henry S. was impressed with that 40-year-old shirt in the box, and how good it still looked.

"I thought it would have looked different... ripped," he said. He wished the box had photos of staff, so students could see who was still working in the building, and was glad his generation put a list of their teachers in.

Callie W., also a fifth grader, was really pleased about the notes that were going into the time capsule.

"I'm excited to leave items explaining what students like about the school ... "and how good a place it is."



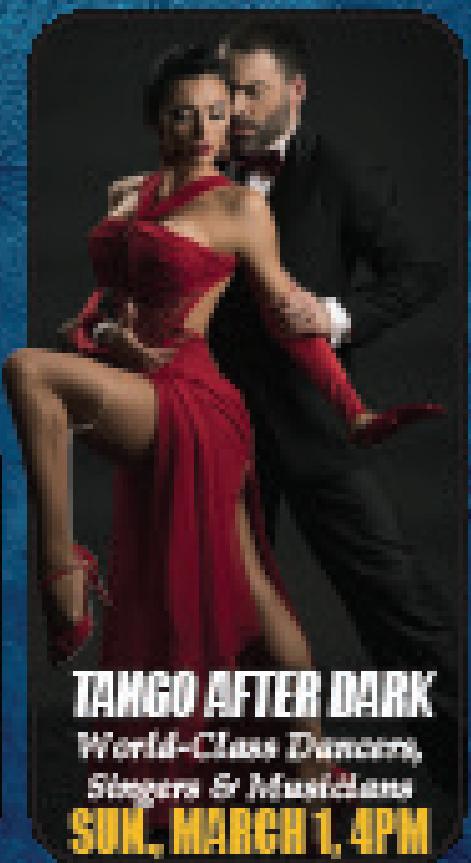
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