

Kent COUNTY Detail

May/June 2009

John Ball Zoo



Zoo Attendance: This year's overall attendance at the Zoo is ahead of last year by 13% (123,640 in 2009, compared to 107,967 in 2008) and the month of May is up 18% (77,809 versus 63,317 in 2008). This May was the second strongest monthly attendance in the Zoo's history and it is on track for another record attendance this year. For more information about the John Ball Zoological Garden, visit

http://www.accesskent.com/CultureLeisureAndTransit/Zoo/zoo_index.htm.

Parks

Splash! at Millennium Park: The Parks Department is again working through the Kent Intermediate School District to help low-income families visit the Millennium Park beach and splashpad free of charge. Now in its fourth year, the *Splash!* program recently distributed brochures to the County's public elementary schools, asking principals to distribute one brochure to each child on the free or reduced lunch program. Each brochure contains three coupons for free admission to the beach and splashpad. While the number of brochures distributed each year has increased slightly, from 24,715 in 2006 to 27,950 in 2009, the number of coupons redeemed for free admission has grown dramatically. In 2006, the first year of the program, an estimated 2,146 coupons were redeemed, valued at \$4,304 in free admissions. In 2008, a total of 10,903 coupons were redeemed, valued at \$21,141. Overall, 12.5% of total visitors to the beach used *Splash!* passes for free admission. The increased use of passes most likely relates to increased awareness of the program and of Millennium Park itself. Also, the *Splash!* program brochure underwent redesigns in 2007 and 2008 to improve its appeal and to better communicate the program's intent.



The Millennium Park website offers an interactive online activity for kids (or kids at heart) where a "playground" can be built by the user. Check it out at <http://www.millennium-park.org/kids/build.htm>

Health Department

Health Notes

A service of the Kent County Health Department

May 2009: *Staying calm in the face of H1N1*



The recent weeks brought a spectrum of reactions to the increasing number of cases of H1N1 flu. While the current circulating strain of the flu appears to be no more dangerous than seasonal flu, there is a lot that we don't know about how it might change.

In response to ever-changing information about this new flu, public health officials urge people to stay cautious. There is no reason for fear: Governments and health care providers have been preparing for the possibility of a pandemic for years; scientists are learning more about H1N1 flu each day and a vaccination may soon be in the works; and existing cases have responded well to anti-viral medicines.

In the mean time, there are practical steps that everyone can take to avoid getting ill. These include:

- **Washing your hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water to help protect you from germs. While not a substitution for proper hand washing, you can also use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Covering your cough and sneeze:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your inner elbow when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- **Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth:** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.
- **Keeping your distance:** Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
- **Staying home when you're sick:** Stay home from work and school when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

The Kent County Health Department has placed links to general information and guidance on H1N1 flu at www.accesskent.com/h1n1flu.

Health Department Sees Record WIC Participation: March and April saw record participation for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program. WIC provides nutrition education, breast-feeding promotion and education, health care referrals, and supplemental foods to families that meet program requirements. The supplemental foods that participants receive help them meet daily nutrient needs such as vitamins A and C, folic acid, calcium, and iron. In March, 20,562 clients participated in the program, followed by 20,892 in April. These numbers are expected to go up, according to WIC Program Supervisor Christopher Bendekgey, who indicates that the spring, summer, and fall months typically have higher participation numbers. He also attributes the increases to the economy. Fortunately, Health Department WIC staffers have not had difficulty handling the extra business. Efficiencies from the new MI-WIC software, implemented last fall, have aided staff in handling the increase in traffic.

Cooperative Extension

MSUE Hosts Essential Needs Task Force Food Subcommittee Position



Since November, the Kent County MSU Extension office has hosted the first-ever dedicated staff position for the Essential Needs Task Force's Food Subcommittee. The Essential Needs Task Force (ENTF), started by the Kent County Board of Commissioners in 1982, is a coalition of public, private, and faith-based organizations and individuals working together to address the basic needs of Kent County citizens. The ENTF Food Subcommittee, comprised of over 25 area organizations, works to ensure that all people of Kent County have access to safe, affordable, and nutritious food. Its Coordinator aids food assistance agencies in organizing and implementing efforts to alleviate food insecurity in Kent County.

As individuals and families struggle to make ends meet in the current economy, food assistance organizations continue to experience significant increases in demand. The United Way's 2-1-1 referral hotline received 16% more food

assistance requests in 2008 than 2007. The ACCESS food pantry network reached a record in late 2008, serving over 8,000 households in one month. These figures demonstrate the imperative, now more than ever, for organizations in our community to coordinate their activities to make the most efficient use of resources.

The ENTF Food Subcommittee and its Coordinator strive to do just that. The Food Subcommittee meets monthly to share resources and ideas, establishes and implements an annual work plan to address the most pressing community needs, and coordinates research on the needs of food insecure households and food assistance agencies to inform its work. The Subcommittee is currently working to expand transportation for low-income people to low-cost grocery stores, administering a survey to food pantry staff and clients to determine their needs for nutrition education, developing concepts that will expand the capacity of the food assistance system, and organizing community education activities like the annual Hunger Awareness Day to be held June 2.

For more information on the ENTF Food Subcommittee and Hunger Awareness Day activities, visit www.accesskent.com/ENTF/food or contact Liz Gensler, Coordinator, at gensler@msu.edu or 616-336-3287.

Editorial questions or submissions: Melanie Grooters, County Detail Editor
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Community Night In the "Grand Ideas Garden"

775 Ball Ave NE
Grand Rapids MI

What's the BUZZ???

FUN ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES!

Free Popcorn and Lemonade!

**Every Wednesday evening from
6:00 pm-7:30 pm**

Contact Kent/MSU
Extension for more
information.
(616)336-3265



Schedule

[June 17 "Story Time in the Garden"](#)

What better place to explore a good book than among the sounds of the birds and gently cascading waterfall? Kids will love to join storyteller and Kent/MSU Extension Director Betty Blase in a delightful story packed full of "voices!"

[June 24 "Fantastic Food—Keepin' it Healthy"](#)

Come enjoy learning about helping your family's snack time to be healthy and nutritious with Stephanie Marino, Kent/MSU Extension Educator.

[July 1 "Bugs and Beasties of the Yard and Garden"](#)

Tonight, Kent/MSU Extension Junior Master Gardener Coordinator, Nancy McIntyre, will weave fun into bug hunting in the Grand Ideas Garden.

[July 8 "Jungle Sounds"](#)

What are a bunch of colorful birds doing in the Grand Ideas Garden? Come and find out with Daniel Davis, Kent/MSU Extension Grand Ideas Garden Coordinator, while you enjoy the sounds of the jungle!

[July 15 "Sizzlin' Hot Summer Means Grilling in the Garden!"](#)

Have you ever tasted tender crisp grilled veggies or sweet and salty grilled fruit? Rebecca Finneran, Kent/MSU Extension Horticulture Educator and Grand Rapids Press Columnist, will tune in your taste with succulent garden creations from the Grill.

[July 22 "Public Safety Night"](#)

Bring your kids to check out a police Cruiser and Grand Rapids Fire Truck. Carol Townsend, Kent/MSU Extension Educator, will lend a hand in teaching how to be a safe community with our local public safety heroes.

[July 29 "Creature Feature"](#)

Learn about the enjoyment of pets and caring for your animals at home with Kent/MSU Extension 4-H Educator, Glenda Kilpatrick. Some furry friends will join us too!

[August 5 "Music in the Garden"](#)

The colorful sounds of Latin music will compliment the vibrant colors of the Grand Ideas Garden as Kent/MSU Extension Administrator, Helen Gutierrez, hosts this session!

[August 12 "Story Time in the Garden"](#)

An evening with an expert storyteller will thrill kids of all ages during this presentation with Kent/MSU Extension Educator, Dave Treul.

[August 19 "Game Night"](#)

Don't go back to school yet! Enjoy one last hurrah in the Grand Ideas Garden with Kent/MSU Extension 4-H Educator, Glenda Kilpatrick, exploring some active games for the kid in all of us!