



The Benzie Kicker

Newsletter of the Benzie County Democratic Party

Vol. 22, No. 1, Spring 2018

Benzie County Democrats: working inclusively and creatively for the betterment of all

Election 2018

Our neighbors step up to the plate

For the first time in years, lots of Democrats are running for Benzie County Commission seats—five of the seven seats, in fact. We now have a shot at winning a board majority, so this is a super time to get involved in our local elections.

We've got a beautifully balanced, highly talented bunch: a 4th-generation Benzie farmer; a deeply experienced IT entrepreneur; a community service veteran; a former county commissioner and local news editor; and our lone Dem on the board, who's running for re-election.

So who are these good neighbors, and what are their districts?



Our main man **Coury Carland** is a Frankfort High School grad, was a candidate for sheriff in 2012, and won a commissioner seat in 2014. Our lone Dem commissioner richly deserves some like-minded board colleagues, don't ya think? Coury represents Benzonia Township—

County District 4. Reach Coury at carland82@gmail.com.

Next, ever-steady **Jeff Sandman**, another Frankfort grad, was a commissioner back in 2008, but had to split when he became *Benzie County Record Patriot* editor. He'd represent Homestead Township—County District 5. Reach Jeff at jeff.sandman1@gmail.com or at [facebook.com/votesandman](https://www.facebook.com/votesandman).



We're also pleased long-time Benzie grower **Don Smeltzer** is running again. He just missed in 2016, and Don is very much up for Round 2 in Blaine, Gilmore, Joyfield, and Weldon Townships—County District 7. Reach Don at smeltzerdonald7@gmail.com.

Then there are our wonderful newbies:



We're glad **Linda Farrell** is running for lots of reasons—like her gender and strong track record of community service, such as Advocates for Benzie County and Frankfort Tree Board. She'd represent Crystal Lake Township and Frankfort—County District 3. Reach Linda at

lindafarrellforbenziecounty@gmail.com.

And a big hurrah for **Mark Willette-Green**, who's run his own Up North IT biz for decades and is now ready to run for election. He says 2017 showed it's time to jump in and work for change. He'd represent Lake, Platte, and western Almira Townships—County District 2. Reach Mark at mgreen@vector-computers.com.



Listen up: These are races where a little extra time, effort, and money from us can make a big difference. If you live in one of these districts, do contact your good neighbor who's running and ask how you can help *now*. A terrific first step is to have a house party, invite a few people, help make some introductions, and maybe raise a few bucks for your most local candidate.

Live in a district with no Dem candidate? It's totally kosher to help out the candidate in the district next door. It's all about building a better Benzie and a stronger Benzie County Democratic Party.

Of course, Benzie Dems are already helping Matt Morgan run for Congress against Republican and fellow Marine Jack Bergman. We've endorsed Matt; Mike Taillard, running for our 35th District State Senate seat; and Kathy Wiejaczka, running for the 101st District State House seat. Mike is running unopposed in the primary; Kathy now has a primary opponent, Benzie Drain Commissioner Ed Hoogterp.

See you at the races!

—Jim Dulzo



*At Benzie Dems' March 22 **CloseUp Dinner**, Jim Dulzo presented Benzie Dems' donation to civics teacher Donna Balazovic (r.) The dinner, at Platte River Inn, raised almost \$2,000 to help send Benzie Central High students (l. to r.) Hannah Lilly, Mercedes Deeren, Ally Heinz, Thea Gray, and Annabelle Fortine to Washington, in April.*



March for Our Lives

The need for common sense regulation of weapons in the civilian population spurred America's youth to get involved after one of the most recent school mass shootings in Florida.

Many of our members travelled to either Traverse City or Manistee in March to support area youth in their demonstrations for saner regulations. Above, our Democratic candidate for the state senate, Mike Taillard, addresses participants at the Manistee march.

It's time to walk, knock, & meet Dems!

Finally, summer may actually be arriving! Think of warm days at the beach, kayaking, or searching Benzie for that great yard sale bargain. But also think of searching Benzie for Democratic votes for November's election.

Now that it's May, Benzie Dems are hitting the trail weekly for door-to-door canvassing. Every other year, our volunteers knock on thousands of Benzie County Dems' doors, and talk to friendly folks about our great Democratic candidates for local, state, and national offices. This year, given what Republicans are doing to democracy, governments, and people, our boots-on-the-ground effort is more critical than ever.

We'll focus primarily on winning the five county commission seats where our neighbors are running, plus the 101st District Michigan House, the 35th District Michigan Senate, and the 1st District US House seats. Also on the August 7 Primary Election slate are the governor, attorney general, secretary of state, and two Michigan Supreme Court seats. There's a huge amount of work to do, and it will take many volunteers.

If you've done this before, you know it's a fascinating, positive experience. Almost everyone you speak to is warm and friendly, regardless of political leaning. In fact, folks often express their appreciation for our work—they see that we care enough about our community to actually speak face-to-face to friends, neighbors, and strangers. We try to always travel in pairs, with a driver and a door knocker—so if you're new to this, driving is a great way to break in and see that this is actually fun, not some daunting, daring task.

Here's the really good part! By helping us kick off the 2018 campaign, you'll make new friends as you reconnect us with our base—we're only visiting strong and leaning Democrats. I can't promise you won't talk to a few uninterested voters, but I can say you won't have a door rudely slammed in your face.

We welcome all Democratic Party candidates to schedule use of our office for organizing their own

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campaign walks, meetings, receptions, and other events. Contact Chair Jim Dulzo to get on the schedule. Check the calendar at our Web site, benziedemocrats.com. Just click on the blue "31" button and see what's open.

Please keep an open mind about door-knocking. I predict you'll like it—and appreciate the exercise, too. Please phone or text me at (231) 651-0604 and I'll get right back to you. As our schedule shapes up, you'll find canvassing events on our Facebook page and in our Party emails.

Let's do this! To build a **BIG BLUE WAVE**, we all need to jump in!

—Mike Ross, Vice-Chair

Dems HQ is a valuable resource!

Benzie Dems Headquarters in Honor is the focal point for our activities: a place to get together and socialize, as well as to organize our election and community activities.

Thanks to our interior designer, Elizabeth Guzman-Shrake, and a band of volunteers, Headquarters now boasts a dazzling color scheme, comfy furniture, pictures and posters, and a very nice vibe. It's so welcoming!

Sparked by our digital projection system, HQ was a great place for 2018's winter activities: the Michigan Dems' statewide House Party in January, which raised good money for state House campaigns, and our three Chili Friday Movie Nights, which were big hits thanks to the hearty food and cool movies like "Standing in the Shadows of Motown" and "Reefer Madness." It was so good to get together in our place, with people we know, and new people we met. We'll do it again next year. Thanks to those who made food, set things up, hosted, and cleaned up.

During this election season, we're happy to share HQ with local candidates who need an operating base. It's our in-kind donation to their campaigns, and the least we can do for folks willing to serve as candidates.

Headquarters is also available for other, friendly non-profits—for free! Just ask and we'll try to arrange it.

Renting and operating headquarters costs about \$6,000 a year, so along with regular membership funding, we are soliciting donations for our Building Fund. So far, this year, we've raised about three-quarters of what's needed to keep the place open. You can donate any time



County Commission candidate Mark Willette-Green (l.) and his wife, Virginia, chat with Keira Duvernoy and Jan Gulliver Kline.

at benziedemocrats.com. Our Headquarters is at 9330 Honor Hwy. (US-31), one driveway east of the Cherry Bowl Drive-In. Our current office hours, which will expand soon, are Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday noon to 4 p.m., and Thursday 1 to 5 p.m. Call us there any time, at 231-325-0008. If no one is in, leave a voice mail and someone will get back to you quickly. And for more pictures of the big fun we had at Headquarters, visit benziedemocrats.com or find us at [facebook/benziecountymocrats](https://www.facebook.com/benziecountymocrats). See you at HQ!

The elephant in the classroom—

Years of Republican control of most of Michigan's government has harmed public school funding and, along with it, students' achievement.

Eighteen years ago Michigan ranked 8th-highest nationally in per-pupil spending. By 2016, however, Michigan was 24th, thanks to per-pupil, inflation-adjusted spending cuts of \$663 per pupil, even as the U.S. average grew by about \$1,400 per student.

The effect is dramatic: Advanced Placement Test scores now rank our schools 29th in the country for academic achievement, while another rating puts us at 32nd, based on performance, funding, class size, safety, and instructors' credentials.

The Republican state Legislature's response during this decline: cut corporate taxes by 86 percent, or \$1.7 billion, and exempt 100,000 businesses from paying any corporate income tax at all.

Meanwhile, our 1990s-era "school choice" voucher

system is failing our K-12 students, even as it diverts funding from traditional public schools. Seventy percent of charter schools academically rate below traditional public schools.

Gary Miron, of Western Michigan University, says the original idea for charter schools was to have small, locally controlled, locally operated schools pursue new ways of educating kids. But it didn't happen. Today, Michigan has more public charter schools operated by for-profit companies than any other state. Miron found that for-profit companies run 79% of Michigan's charters, twice the share of the next-highest state. At least six states actually ban for-profit charter management.

A *Detroit Free Press* investigation found that Michigan charter schools are failing most of their 140,000 students. One reason is the state's remarkably weak charter regulations. The investigation turned up



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Calendar

May 19: Monthly Meeting, 9:30 a.m., HQ.

May 31: Film Fundraiser, Garden Theater

Jun 16: Monthly Meeting, 9:30 a.m. Lake Ann Township Hall downtown followed by voter registration in the park.

Jun 23: Candidate Fundraiser: Kathy Wiejaczka, picnic @ Rob Bollenberg home.

Jul 4: Parades in Beulah and Frankfort.

Jul 15: Candidate Fundraiser: Debbie Stabenow at private home (TBA).

Jul 21: Monthly Meeting, 9:30 a.m., HQ.

Jul 22: Candidate Fundraiser at Lily Farm.

Aug 7: PRIMARY ELECTION DAY.

Aug 12: Fundraiser for County Commission, State Senate and State House races.

Aug 18: Monthly Meeting, 9:30 a.m., HQ.

Aug 25: MDP Nominating Convention.

Aug 25: Coho Parade in Honor.

Sep 15: Monthly Meeting, 9:30 a.m., HQ.

Oct 20: Monthly Meeting, 9:30 a.m., HQ.

Nov 6: ELECTION DAY & VICTORY PARTY, HQ.

Nov 17: Monthly Meeting, 9:30 a.m., HQ.

Dec 1: Holiday Season party and potluck.

No regular meeting in December.

The *Kicker* is published and paid for by the Benzie County Democratic Party. It is not authorized by any candidate or candidate committee.

In this issue:

MEET OUR COUNTY COMMISSION CANDIDATES!
WHY WE LOVE OUR HEADQUARTERS
WALK, KNOCK, AND MEET DEMS
ELEPHANT CRUSHES SCHOOL FUNDING

Elephant, *continued from p. 3*

wasteful spending, double-dipping, school officials and employees steering lucrative deals to themselves or insiders, schools continuing for years despite poor academic records, and, crucially, no state standards for the operators.

In 2011 Governor Rick Snyder called for even more “school choice.” He tasked Richard McLellan, founder of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, with making a new proposal; McLellan then drafted the “Michigan Education Finance Act.”

Supporters say the proposal is packed with school choice, but critics say it will completely dismantle public education.

What makes schools successful is “process” not “choice.” “Process” means good teacher training and preparation; district support, including equipment and time; teacher support, including salary and fringe benefits; and most of all, administrative and parental support in the classroom.

To meet society’s future needs, we must fund and fix our education system now. Proficiency in reading, writing, science and math is vital for students seeking technology and trade skills, as well for those preparing for college. —Ron Dykstra and Doreen Fitzgerald