

# RT '18

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Noah Currier, 2018 Salute to Veterans Keynote Speaker engages the audience with his powerful story





**Paralyzed Veterans  
of America**  
Michigan Chapter



PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA  
**MICHIGAN CHAPTER**

www.michiganpva.org



## About this Issue:

This fall was a wonderfully busy time for the Chapter! Be sure to read through this issue to get caught up on all the great things happening at the MPVA!

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Secretary..... Clark Shuler	Director..... David Peck
Treasurer..... Timothy Agajeenian	

### MPVA Staff

Executive Director  
*Jaelyn Kochis*  
[jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org)

Administrative Assistant  
*Brenda Wheater*  
[chapterhq@michiganpva.org](mailto:chapterhq@michiganpva.org)

Director of Government Relations  
& Advocacy  
*Michael Harris*  
[mharris@michiganpva.org](mailto:mharris@michiganpva.org)

Financial Officer  
*Linda Highland*

Sports & Recreation Director  
*Scot Severn*  
[ssevern@michiganpva.org](mailto:ssevern@michiganpva.org)

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of America*

### VETERANS BENEFITS DEPARTMENT

McNamara Federal Building, 477 Michigan Avenue, Room 1233, Detroit, MI 48226

Phone: (313) 471-3996 or (800) 795-3608

Service Officer Stephanie Strickland  
Service Office Secretary Marilyn Kittrell  
Central-Central Area Manager Anthony Steele  
(202) 374-2032 Washington, D.C

### Disclaimer:

The Rollin' Times is a publication of the Michigan Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America. It is designed to inform the members of the PVA and other interested parties on veterans' issues, legislation, legal decisions, medical technology and other matters deemed to be relevant to the disability community.

The contents of this publication do not always reflect the views or policies of Michigan PVA, and no endorsement or approval is made or should be inferred with respect to products or services advertised herein. Consult an appropriate professional before making use of any product or service mentioned.

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## Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America

46701 Commerce Center Drive  
Plymouth, MI 48170  
(248) 476-9000 Fax (248) 476-9545  
Toll free: (800) 638-MPVA (6782)

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) is a chapter of the Washington, D.C.-based Paralyzed Veterans of America. A Congressionally chartered veterans service organization, MPVA has been assisting veterans with spinal cord injuries or diseases, including Multiple Sclerosis and ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, better known as Lou Gehrig's Disease), in Michigan since 1961.

MPVA programs include:

- Veterans' Benefits
- Wheelchair Sports and Recreation
- Spinal Cord Injury Research
- Equipment Donation
- Advocacy to eliminate architectural barriers and protect civil rights for persons with disabilities
- Referral Services for assistive devices, housing, employment and transportation
- Literature on a variety of topics including self-care, independent living, and disability rights.
- The Pump Guide: an online directory of gas stations throughout Michigan that will pump gas at the self-serve price for persons with disabilities.
- MPVA is a nonprofit organization and receives no federal funding. MPVA relies on grants, sponsorships, and private and corporate donations to support its programs.

The MPVA headquarters is in Plymouth, Michigan. Our service officers are based out of the McNamara Federal Building in Downtown Detroit.

*The Ad Agency*

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# President's Report

By: Michael Harris, President, MPVA

## The winner of the Wheelchair Division sets a course record at this year's Marathon

This year's Detroit Free Press/Chemical Bank Marathon took place on October 21st, 2018 and welcomed over 40 hand-cyclists and wheelchair push rim racers to take on the 26.2 mile course that twists throughout Detroit and Canada. Once again the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America were proud sponsors of the Disability Division of the race.

The temperature at the start of the race was a chilly 35 degrees but that didn't seem to bother the hand-cyclist/runners, many in shorts, anticipating an exciting race across Detroit and Canada.

Last year, Tom Davis of Fremont Indiana, led the Detroit marathon's Disabilities Division to the halfway mark — then hit a manhole cover, flatted a tire and had to quit. This year, he had no such trouble as he rolled to victory in the 41st Detroit Free Press Marathon.

MPVA had the opportunity once again to greet the Achilles Freedom Team of Wounded Veterans who brought veterans from across the country to participate in this year's marathon.

Tom Davis was the first hand-cyclist to reach the finish in time of 1:15:54 followed closely by Freddie De Los Santos with a time of 1:15:55, and Omar Duran finished third with a time of 1:24:07. Holly Koester was the first female hand-cyclist with a time of 2:31:46. It was great to see that four women participated in this year's Marathon. Andrew Barnhart was the first wheelchair racer to reach the finish line with a time of 4:13:49.



*Brenda Wheater and Michael Harris await the Disability Division winner to cross the finish line at the 2018 Detroit Free Press Marathon.*

Guiding the handcyclists were more than 60 bicycle escorts supplied by cycling clubs across southeast Michigan, and coordinated by the Royal Oak-based Wolverine Sports Club.

The addition of the bicyclists seemed to be a hit with the participants who can sometime encounter problems with their race equipment ranging from flat tires or broken chains that can hinder their race time. Likewise, the bicycle escorts came across the finish line expressing their admiration and marvel over the tough feat that hand-cyclists and wheelers has accomplished.

Jaelyn Kochis, MPVA Executive Director, who served on the Board of the Detroit Free Press Marathon, stated "I am always impressed by the athletes that participate in this race. Each year,





*MPVA and friends pose at the finish line at the 2018 Detroit Free Press Marathon.*

I witness the work that goes into the race from both planning for the event and for the dedication and commitment that the athletes go through to complete the marathon.”

There are only 50 spots available for the wheelchair division so if you want to guarantee participation in 2019 Marathon than I would recommend that you register as soon as possible.

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America would like to congratulate each and every person who competed in this year’s Marathon. We look forward to next year’s event and supporting the 2019 Disability Division.



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# Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

## Reflecting on Veterans Day 2018

On November 7, 2018, the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) celebrated Veterans Day by hosting our Annual “Salute to Veterans” event, at the Suburban Collection Showplace, in Novi. Nearly 200 guests gathered to pay tribute to Michigan’s Veterans of the past and present.



*Eastern Michigan ROTC poses for a photo at the 2018 Salute to Veterans event*

Most people see Veterans Day as a day off from work. At MPVA, we see it as an opportunity to properly thank veterans for their service to their country. We see it as a celebration to honor America’s veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.

The Keynote Speaker at this year’s dinner was someone who has been a part of the PVA’s mission for the last few years—Mr. Noah Currier!

It took Noah Currier all of six years to get out of his “funk.” Six years after the traumatic accident that paralyzed him from the chest down, former Marine Cpl. Currier finally found the drive to get back into competitive sports—and has been “Oscar Mike” (“on the move”) ever since.

After joining the Marine Corps in 2000, Noah was among the first soldiers deployed to Afghanistan



*Jaclyn Kochis and Brenda Wheater get together with the Oscar Mike team for a photo at the 2018 Salute to Veterans event*

following the attacks of September 11. As a gunner for Charlie Company, he was subsequently deployed to Iraq in 2003 as part of the leading combat units, the “tip of the spear.” He returned to Camp Pendleton after seven months in Iraq—days later, a trucker fell asleep at the wheel and Noah suffered a C-6 spinal cord injury.

Six years later Noah finally let go of the funk that was holding him back and, as he says, “became addicted” to sports. Thanks to friends at Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans), Noah regained his motivation to play competitive sports. Since then, Noah has been involved in weightlifting, rowing, skydiving, skiing and his personal favorites, rugby and hand cycling.

It’s therefore appropriate that Noah would found a company named after the military term “Oscar Mike.” Oscar Mike is a military apparel company that makes, designs, and prints its military-themed T-shirts and “hoodies” in the United States. The company officially launched on Veterans Day 2012.



*Michael Harris, MPVA President, expresses his sentiments on Veterans Day at the Salute to Veterans event*

We could not be more appreciative to Noah and the Oscar Mike team for being a part of our Salute to Veterans event! His story is incredibly inspiring, and Noah has a unique ability to share his journey to a room full of people and make you feel as though you are just sitting across the table from him. The impression he left on all those who attended will not be forgotten. I can certainly say that we plan to keep in touch with Noah and know that he will continue to inspire everyone he comes in contact with. I encourage you to take a moment and look up the Oscar Mike Foundation and see what all they have accomplished: <https://www.oscarmike.org>. You will be undoubtedly impressed.

I would be remiss if I did not take time to say thank you to some other very special people for making this event possible. I would like to thank Rich Luterman for his continued support to our organization as the events Master of Ceremonies—we hope you are always able to join our Salute program! I would also like to recognize the Novi High School Choir for joining us and

singing our nations anthem! This group of students is so unbelievably talented and we were awed by their gift of song! We are also so indebted to our bagpiper, Jim Lyon, who has joined us now for countless Salute programs! He is so wonderful and talented. Furthermore, we are so grateful to our dedicated group that makes up our Color Guard from AMVET Post 2006! Thank you to all of you for making our program special.

Everyone's contributions truly made a difference! I would especially like to thank the following list of sponsors who made our event possible:

Brain Injury Association of Michigan

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## Wicked Jeeps of Southeast Michigan

It takes a community of people to keep a nonprofit mission alive. Without supporters like those from our Salute, or those who graciously offer to host events where proceeds

come back to our organization, we would not be able to enhance the lives of veterans with spinal cord injury or disease.



Wicked Jeeps of Southeast Michigan is one such organization. This past fall, Paul Wisniewski, President of Wicked Jeeps of Southeast Michigan, contacted us and expressed interest in having their 3rd Annual Wicked Hunt benefit our mission. Obviously, a message like that is a dream come true to us at the MPVA!

On November 17, 2018, the MPVA attended the Wicked Jeep event at the Shark Club of Waterford where over 200 people came to enjoy a fun day of scavenger hunting in their unique and sharp looking Jeep brand vehicles. It was something we had never experienced before and left us awestruck!

Similar to the MPVA, Wicked Jeeps group has chapters across the nation that has a governing board and volunteers that help keep their mission going. The Southeast Michigan Chapter is by far one of the best in the country. Not only do they consist of dedicated and benevolent members, but they also host an array of super unique and entertaining events that welcome all.

The event was their largest turn out to date, raising \$7,280 in proceeds that will directly go back into the MPVA's programs!

We are truly thankful and honored to have been tapped for support from this wonderful group of people. Once again, I would like to encourage you to check out their mission as you may want to get involved: <http://www.wickedjeepssemi.com/>.

On behalf of all of us at the MPVA, I would like to express our most sincere gratitude to Paul and the entire Wicked

Jeep of Southeast Michigan Family! We wish you all the most wonderful holiday season!



*Our friends from Wicked Jeeps of Southeast Michigan present a check for the MPVA to Michael Harris*



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**Photo:** Stephanie Strickland, PVA Service Officer

**Written by:** Anthony Steele, Central-Central Area Manager

## Respite Care

**D**uring this busy time of the year when the holidays are upon us, the following information concerning a service that is provided by the VA may be helpful.

The SCI&D respite care is recognized as an important consideration for families and caregivers of physically-dependent veterans. Each veteran using attendant care is offered respite care on the SCI&D unit in a VA medical center having an SCI&D center, unless a veteran requests its provision in another setting. The duration of any respite care admission, absent complicating medical factors, is not to exceed 14 days. However, the total of all respite care for a veteran in a year, absent complicating factors, generally does not exceed 30 days. When we think about respite care concerning our veterans with SCI&D, these services provide caregivers a planned period of relief from the physical and emotional demands associated with providing care.

Although, this is one of the components of the SCI&D Centers system of care, which includes such components for those that are under its registry, the Veterans HealthCare Administration (VHA) provides similar programs as well. For instance, the VA's Geriatrics and Extended Care Services has a respite care program, which provides service that pays for a person to come to a veteran's home or for a veteran to go to a program while their family caregiver takes a break. While a veteran gets respite care, the family caregiver can run errands or go out of town for a few days without worrying about leaving the Veteran alone at home. We all know the importance of having these programs, as they contribute to the veteran's well being and their quality of life. The PVA tries to work with our

veterans, and the clinical staff to ensure that these services are provided as needed.

Respite Care is for Veterans who need skilled services, case management, and assistance with activities of daily living (e.g., bathing or getting dressed) or instrumental activities of daily living (e.g., fixing meals and taking medicines); while our SCI/D veterans fit this bill, we are aware of how the respite care program can help lower the stress the veterans and their family caregiver may feel when managing a veteran's long term care needs at home. The respite care program is just one of the many services provided to our veterans, and we are truly thankful for those that it benefits.

If you should have any questions concerning this topic, please feel free to contact your National Service Officer, Stephanie Strickland at (800) 795-3608.





The MPVA would like to recognize Pacific Life Foundation for their support of the MPVA and it's mission!



*Michael Harris (middle), MPVA President, poses with Mike Kosch (left), Pacific Life Retirement Solutions RVP, and Mike Cho (right), Morgan Stanley, CRPS, CPFA after being honored with a \$5,000 Pacific Life Foundation Grant.*



# Government Relations & Advocacy

By: Mike Harris, Executive Director, MPVA

## Air Travel:

### Sometimes Bumpy, Sometimes Smooth, Always a Challenge

Access to air travel and handicapped parking are probably the primary complaints from Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) members and others with disabilities. For more than 30 years, the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) has prohibited discrimination based on disability in air travel. Despite this progress, many travelers with disabilities still encounter significant barriers when they travel by air including damaged equipment, delayed assistance and lack of seating accommodations.

Unfortunately, access in the air travel industry has failed to keep pace with the advances made in other forms of transportation. Not subject to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), airplanes don't include many of the accessibility features that some of us might take for granted in city buses, subways and trains.

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) has been diligently advocating for improvements to the air travel process for all people with disabilities. Spurred by the need to make changes in light of these problems, PVA has worked to harness the power of the disability and veterans communities to work with Capitol Hill, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the airlines to improve the treatment of all passengers with disabilities.

Although the DOT must investigate every complaint filed with it, even if the airline is found to be at fault, enforcement is limited to administrative action and civil fines. Unlike most civil rights laws, the ACAA lacks a guaranteed private right

of action. Consequently, people with disabilities typically receive little, if any, redress to their specific grievances.

Efforts are being made to try and improve the air travel experience for people with disabilities, including new legislation that would offer support and some changes to the ACAA.

#### PVA filed Lawsuit against DOT:

In August of 2017, the PVA filed a lawsuit against the DOT for abruptly rolling back a rule intended to make airline travel safer and easier for passengers with disabilities. The rule, which requires domestic airlines to track and report data on lost and damaged wheelchairs and scooters, was delayed by the Administration without seeking input from people with disabilities.

DOT originally published the rule in November 2016, following a five-year rulemaking process that included input from air travelers, consumer and disability advocacy groups, and airlines. The rule was scheduled for implementation in January 2018.

In March 2017, DOT abruptly delayed the rule's implementation date by one year, until January 2019, without providing the public any notice or opportunity to comment, in violation of the *Administrative Procedure Act*. DOT claimed the delay was necessary due to implementation "challenges" faced by the airline industry.

However, the only evidence of these challenges DOT presented was a single email the agency received from the airline industry.

In September of 2018, on behalf of PVA, *Democracy Forward* appeared in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to argue against the DOT's' abrupt and unlawful rollback of a rule intended to make air travel safer and easier for passengers with disabilities.

In the court hearing, a panel of judges emphasized DOT's "significant legal problems" in delaying the rule without appropriate public notice and opportunity for comments. "You are the government after all," one judge noted, "can't the government do what is right because it is right?"

### **PVA Score Victory in Wheelchair Case**

On October 23, 2018 the U.S. Department of Transportation announced a new compliance date for large domestic airlines to report the number of wheelchairs and scooters enplaned and subsequently damaged as a result of air travel. The announcement is in response to a PVA-supported provision in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 that requires the reporting requirement to become effective within 60 days of the bill's enactment.

According to DOT announcement, covered airlines will need to submit reports by January 15, 2019, for the period of December 4th through December 31st. This is approximately one month earlier than the original delayed deadline. Importantly, the reports will include numbers from the holiday travel season.

Following a lawsuit brought by *Democracy Forward* on behalf of PVA, and subsequent Congressional action in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, DOT has now reversed course and agreed to stop delaying a rule intended to make air travel safer and easier for passengers with disabilities.

### **Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2018, Designed to Protect Passengers with Disabilities**

On October 5, 2018 President Trump signed into law the bipartisan Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2018, which includes a number of key reforms to protect the rights of disabled airline passengers and resolve some of the issues that disabled passengers encounter at the airport and on the airplane.

The bill's passage comes as PVA and other national disability rights groups have been actively lobbying the U.S. Congress to strengthen the ACCA, the 1986 law that prohibits commercial airlines from discriminating against passengers with disabilities.

#### **Here's what travelers with disabilities will get out of the FAA Reauthorization Act:**

- Increase civil penalties for bodily harm to a passenger with a disability and damage to wheelchairs or other mobility aids;
- Require that DOT review, and if necessary, revise regulations ensuring passengers with disabilities receive dignified, timely and effective assistance at airports and on aircraft;
- Create the Advisory Committee on the Air Travel Needs of Passengers with Disabilities to identify barriers to air travel for individuals with disabilities and recommend consumer protection improvements;
- Require that the new Advisory Committee review airline practices for ticketing, preflight seat assignments and stowing of assistive devices, and make recommendations as needed;
- Mandate the DOT develop an Airline Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights, in consultation with stakeholders, describing



rights of passengers with disabilities and responsibilities of air carriers; and

- Study In-Cabin Wheelchair Restraint Systems, in coordination with disability advocates, air carriers and aircraft manufacturers, on the ways in which individuals using wheelchairs can be accommodated with in-cabin wheelchair restraint systems.

Wheelchairs replace functionality and provide independence. Having your only means of leaving the plane get lost or damaged is demoralizing. It is a significant issue for all travelers with mobility impairments, and one MPVA will not relent on until it's fixed. Persons with disabilities don't pay lesser costs for travel, so their flying experience should be the same as everyone else's that travel by air.

Unlike most other civil rights laws, the ACAA lacks a guaranteed private right of action. Consequently, people with disabilities typically receive little if any redress to their specific grievances.

The FAA Reauthorization of 2018 holds a great deal of promise for equal access. This legislation makes needed improvements to the ACCA and provides increased opportunities for stakeholders to work within the airline industry and DOT to improve the air travel experience for passengers with disabilities.

Throughout the years, MPVA has worked closely at the local level with Delta Airline and Wayne County Airport Authority to make positive changes. Partnerships we form within the airline industry can bring the ACAA to life, enabling passengers with disabilities to have a positive flying experience.

Such cooperative efforts have created the accurate perception that ACAA implementation need not be an adversarial activity, but can be accomplished through partnerships and direct communication among those having a stake in compliance.



## Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America Issues Statement on Passing of Former President George H.W. Bush

**M**ichigan Paralyzed Veterans of America mourns the passing of George H.W. Bush, the 41st President of the United States, who played a significant role in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

When signed into law, the ADA was hailed as the most sweeping civil rights legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Twenty-eight years after its passage the importance of the ADA cannot be denied. It has propelled into the spotlight: accessibility, universal design, and the idea of equal opportunity for those of us who live with disabilities. In the process, we have discovered that an accessible society benefits everyone.

On July 26, 1990, in front of a throng of people with disabilities assembled on the White House lawn, Bush signed the ADA into law. The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), along with hundreds of other major disability organizations, strongly supported the enactment of the ADA and helped shape the final regulations published in the summer of 1991.

MPVA is proud to be part of the legacy of the ADA. MPVA has used the ADA as a useful tool to advance wheelchair access to municipalities throughout southeastern Michigan with the proper installation of curb ramps on all city streets. It also allowed MPVA to reach a historic settlement agreement with the University of

Michigan to ensure all spectators will have an enjoyable experience while attending events at Michigan Stadium.

For the 61 million Americans with disabilities, 5.3 million of them veterans, the ADA has changed the views of disability, ensuring all Americans can access their communities without facing architectural barriers.

We join our fellow veterans in saluting former President H.W. Bush and thank him for his honorable and distinguished service to our

country. His spirit and legacy will live on forever in multitudes of lives that were touched by his compassion and commitment.

Thank you, President Bush.





# Sports & Recreation

By: Ray Brown

## 2018 Buck Pole



*Board Member, Ray Brown, shares a huge smile with a group of dedicated volunteers at the 2018 Buck Pole.*

**N**ovember 15th is opening day for firearm deer hunting in Michigan. Hunters will express their excitement as they can't wait for the alarm to sound so they can take to the woods at Ray C's Harley Davidson of Lapeer!

County and Wheelin' Team 457 have a different agenda, however--The Buck Pole! I awoke at 2:30 AM that day with my mental checklist flashing at warp speed. With the truck loaded up, I set off and met the crew at 5:30

AM for breakfast. After a warm meal and hot coffee, and some much needed laughter, we riddled off a few directions and departed in convoy across town to the Buck Pole.

The setup was smooth, a directors dream! The six meetings with staff, volunteers, and vendors had certainly paid off. This was the 14th year for hosting this event and new goals had been set. Vendors had been added and the





*The 14th Annual Buck Pole button.*

event had taken on significant growth as we doubled in size this year. There was even an outdoor show combined with the buck pole

I opted to bring my single rider golf cart which proved its worth and saved me from having to roll further than necessary in my chair and much time. There was 14 hours of measuring deer, listening to the excitement of the successful hunters, visiting vendors, posing for pictures, doing interviews, selling our infamous raffle tickets, and educating the public about the disabled world and all that is available to make it possible to enjoy the great outdoors!

The weather, in my opinion, was the best we've had in a long time! It even snowed—something deer hunters love! Although it was cold, we had plenty of warming stations and there was the beautiful Harley showroom and lodge to warm up in. Inside was set up a bake sale, silent auction, hot coffee, and, of course, chili and crackers.

Before we knew the day had flown by and we had 22 beautiful bucks hanging on the buck pole with an American and a Marine Corps Flag flying alongside. The young Marines parked 760 cars for us, so it was only fitting to recognize them (maybe it's because I'm a Marine, too).

We stopped measuring deer at 8:00 PM, drew for prizes, and announced all the winners and awards. High fives and hugs followed, and we headed home. My commute home was a slippery winter drive but it gave me time to reflect on what a fantastic event this has become and how the MPVA Chapter always has our back!

I would like to say thank you to all who participated and wish good hunting to you....Cause this is how we roll!



# ReWalk®

## Are you a Veteran with a service or non-service connected Spinal Cord Injury?

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## Valuable Dates for 2019



### **Holiday Office Closure:**

December 21st at Noon—January 3rd, 2019 at 8:30 AM



### **MPVA Holiday Party**

January 19th

11 AM — 3 PM

Lunch Served at Noon, games and raffle to follow

MPVA Office

46701 Commerce Center Drive

Plymouth, MI 48170

RSVP to: Brenda Wheater at (800) 638-6782 or chapterhq@

michiganpva.org



### **Presidents Day Office Closure:**

February 18, 2019



### **MPVA Bowling Membership:**

Revel & Roll, Ann Arbor, MI

Date: March (TBD)



### **Martin Luther King Day Office Closure:**

January 21, 2019