



War threatens to unravel Gaza society

NATION & WORLD, 8A

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A mural on the outside of the building in downtown Marionville that Jim and Martha Brangenberg bought and renovated. The couple hope to bring “flourishment” to Marionville with the renovation of the 150-year-old downtown building.

PHOTOS BY NATHAN PAPES/SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

Potential candidate lobbied school board

Pushed for support of LGBTQ students, staff

Claudette Riley
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins has repeatedly addressed the Springfield school board in meetings. Now he wants a seat at the table.

In multiple appearances in recent years, Sherman-Wilkins has spoken in support of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts; advocated on behalf of students from historically under-represented groups; and called on the board to issue a specific statement of support for LGBTQ students and staff.

He also delivered pointed criticism of board actions and comments members made during meetings and other public appearances.

“I’ve seen some troubling trends with the school board not just here in Springfield but nationwide. There has been a lot of partisanship,” he said, of running for a seat. “For me, enough is enough.”

He said he wants to serve to do “what is best for our youth, what is the best for our district, what is the best for our public schools and not just our students but our teachers.”

Sherman-Wilkins has raised the ire of at least one sitting board member

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Chamber shifts away from endorsement of candidates for council

Marta Miese
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

After decades of financially supporting and endorsing candidates for City Council elections, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce will move away from the practice, as well as dissolve its political fundraising PAC, the Good Government Committee.

Instead, the Chamber will focus on recruiting and providing training and business-issue education to all candidates and educating voters through a new committee, according to a news release.

Currently, candidates who were endorsed by the Good Government committee hold six of the nine positions on City Council, including mayor.

The Chamber started endorsing candidates for council and school board in 1999. In 2010, the Good Government Committee was created as a

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Couple renovates 150-year-old building

Greta Cross
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

Standing along the sidewalk in downtown Marionville, Martha Brangenberg waves at a family she was chatting with before opening the front door of Central Place.

“Those were our neighbors,” Brangenberg says with a smile.

Martha and her husband Jim Brangenberg moved to Marionville in December 2020 and have already made an impact on the community. Last summer, the Brangenbergs purchased a nearly 150-year-old building in downtown Marionville to house their ministry, iWork4Him. In addition to serving as the ministry’s headquarters, the couple hopes the building, which they have deemed Central Place, will serve as a rental and gathering space for community members.

The Brangenbergs are hosting a ribbon-cutting for Central Place, which is located at 22 E. Washington St., on Tuesday, Dec. 5 from 4-5 p.m.

God said, ‘Settle here.’

The Brangenbergs never planned on moving to Marionville. Originally from Minnesota, the two met in high school and married soon after. For the past 20 years, Martha and Jim lived in Florida, where they started iWork4Him, a ministry podcast that intersects faith and work, in 2013.

Four years ago, the Brangenbergs’ daughter married a man from Marionville at The Coleman Vault, a wedding venue that is only a few doors down from Central Place on Washington Street. And a few years later, the house next door to the Brangenbergs’ daughter’s went up for sale.

“We travel a lot for our ministry and going all the way back to southwest Florida is a long ways,” Martha said. “She (our daughter) was just like, ‘Just have this house and you can rest here and have it as a second place to land.’”

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Martha and Jim Brangenberg talk about the building they bought and renovated in downtown Marionville on Nov. 8.



The lobby area of Central Place in downtown Marionville.

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Renovate

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We really liked that idea, but the house needed a lot of work.”

For about a year, Martha and Jim renovated the house near their daughter's.

“We thought we'd just come here temporary and then get another place in Florida,” Martha said. But plans soon changed.

“We just felt like God said, ‘Settle here,’” Jim added.

After completing renovations, the Brangenbergs had another task: figuring out where they would manage their podcast, because conducting interviews in their bedroom wasn't cutting it. Fortunately, their son-in-law's father was aware of a building at 22 E. Washington St. that was for sale, so they decided to check it out.

Between 1979 and 2006, the downtown building was the Marionville Library Branch, but when the Brangenbergs toured it, the building was empty. Like their house, the building needed a lot of work, but they saw its potential. They ended up paying \$55,000 for the 2,200-square-foot building.

Honoring history

The Brangenbergs completed the majority of the renovations over the

past year, doing most of the work themselves. Martha said they only hired sheets to help fix the roof, hang the sheetrock and lay the flooring.

“It was the first time in my career, we got to work with our hands instead of our mouths,” Jim said. “It was great.”

Not a square inch of the building went untouched by the Brangenbergs, which resulted in the discovery of a few antique items, including old Pillsbury feed signs, an intact cold cream jar and many Pepsi cans from the 1970s.

Throughout renovations, Jim and Martha understood that locals might feel hesitant about their intentions and the changes they were making to the downtown building. They experienced this first-hand while fixing a bench that sits along the edge of Central Place's parking lot.

“I was going to tear it out because it was a serious safety hazard,” Jim said. “My buddy said, ‘You can't tear that out. The guys used to sit there and smoke cigars, waiting for their wives to get off at the shoe factory. You can't tear that bench out. People have been using that bench forever.’ I was like, ‘Okay, well then I'm going to fix it.’”

Martha guessed that the bench was about 60 or 70 years old, with wood that was falling apart.

“The first thing we did was start taking off the old wood and you could just hear people (hold their breath) and then we restored it and stained it and I kept the tin box which the flowers sit



A conference area in the newly renovated Central Place building in downtown Marionville.

NATHAN PAPES/SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

in,” Martha added. “It's exactly the same footprint as it was before, just fresh. I feel like that was saying, ‘We're going to honor it. We don't want to just wreck everything, but let's make it better.’”

Another part of the building they honored was the walk-up window in the main foyer. Jim said when the building served as the library, this window is where folks checked out and dropped off books. Now, it serves as a window into Martha's office.

“People kept referring to it (the building) as ‘The Old Library,’ so finally Jim was like, ‘I think it's supposed to be called Central Place because it's at the corner of Central and Washington.’ No matter what is housed in here, it can

still be a central place,” Martha said.

Stimulating the community

In addition to housing iWork4Him, Central Place offers six office spaces available for monthly rental. Each room is numbered, locked and has its own Wi-Fi. The building also features a conference room and two bathrooms. Office rentals are \$275 per month, which includes 30 minutes of business mentoring, Martha said.

The Brangenbergs hope to provide more to the Marionville community than just what is inside the walls of Central Place. In effort to help connect local businesses, Martha established Marionville Business Connect, an organization for local business owners. The first MBC meeting is Thursday, Nov. 16 from 4-5 p.m. at Central Place.

Jim and Martha also expressed interest in starting a podcast dedicated to community news in Marionville, especially with the mayoral election coming up in 2024.

“We're trying to use this as a center to bring flourishing back to Marionville,” Jim said about Central Place. “We're just trying to figure out, ‘How do we serve the community that God has seemed to plop us into?’”

Greta Cross is the trending topics reporter for the Springfield News-Leader. Follow her on X and Instagram @gretacrossphoto. Story idea? Email her at gcross@gannett.com.

Chamber

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partnership between the Chamber and the Home Builders Association of Greater Springfield. The news release said that over time, financial support for candidates has shifted from PAC contributions to direct business contributions, diminishing the need for committee.

The Chamber announced it would stop endorsing school board candidates last year.

The PAC was previously funded through an optional 10% dues fee from

Chamber members. Now, that optional 10% will go to the Chamber's Springfield Civic Engagement Fund for ongoing local research to support growth of the community.

Committee for the Future

The Chamber board will continue to use the Committee for the Future (CFF) PAC to advocate for local issues. All the current funds from the Good Government PAC will be transferred to the CFF before the end of the year.

These funds will only be used to campaign for issues and ballot initiatives, not support candidates.

The dissolution of the Good Govern-

ment Committee and creation of the new recruitment committee are expected to be complete in early 2024.

“This transition allows us to prioritize Chamber member education and invest in the strong business climate we have in the Springfield community,” Matt Morrow, president of the Chamber, said in the release. “We look forward to continuing our work through an engagement model that benefits candidates, members and the broader community.”

New PAC on the scene

Last week prominent, long-time Springfield leaders announced the for-

mation of a new PAC — United Springfield. The PAC is co-chaired by Jim Anderson, who served as president of the Chamber during the time endorsements began from 1988 to 2014.

United Springfield will support candidates for school board and council that aim to unite, not divide, Springfield children, citizens and community, Anderson said. The group's stated goal, according to previous News-Leader reporting, is to preserve a united, non-partisan local government and protect civil discourse.

Marta Mize covers local government at the News-Leader. Contact her with tips at mmize@news-leader.com.

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