

ENGAGED

Summer Newsletter | Issue #14



THE CENTER FOR COLLEGE
AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



ALMA COLLEGE

Summer Stories:

- [2026 Highland Festival & Games](#)
- [Gratiot Countywide Master Plan Guides Community Engagement](#)
- [2026 Campus and Community Engagement Fair](#)
- [Alternative Breaks Serving Near & Far](#)
- [Gratiot County Young Professional Award Recipient](#)
- [Big Brothers Big Sisters Honoree](#)
- [Upcoming Events](#)

ALMA HIGHLAND FESTIVAL AND GAMES ALMA, MICHIGAN



2026 Highland Festival & Games

Over Memorial Day weekend, Alma College once again welcomed visitors to campus for the 2026 Alma Highland Festival & Games, continuing a tradition that has become a hallmark of both the College and the greater Alma community. Throughout the weekend, guests celebrated Scottish heritage through Highland athletic competitions, traditional pipe band performances, Highland dancing, clan gatherings, vendors, and activities for all ages.

For many members of the Alma College community, the Highland Festival is much more than a weekend celebration—it is a homecoming. Each year, the event brings people back to campus to reconnect with the traditions, friendships, and memories that make Alma special. Alumni return to familiar places and faculty and staff welcome them back, creating a shared sense of community that continues to make the Highland Festival a meaningful part of the Alma experience.

The festival also highlights the strong connection between Alma College and the surrounding community. The enthusiasm and support of those who call Alma home, along with those who return year after year, help create the welcoming atmosphere that has made the Highland Festival a treasured tradition. From celebrating Scottish culture to reconnecting with old friends and making new memories, the weekend reflects the spirit and hospitality that define the Alma College community.

As another successful Highland Festival comes to a close, the event serves as a reminder of the lasting traditions that bring people together and the many individuals who continue to make this celebration possible. The 2026 festival was another opportunity to honor Alma's Scottish heritage while celebrating the connections that make the College and community unique.



Gratiot Countywide Master Plan Guides

Community Engagement

By Carla Jensen

Knowledge of your community, and opportunities to get involved, are essential for developing a sense of belonging in any new place. As new students arrive at Alma College this fall, their First Year Seminar will help them begin to understand and feel at home in Gratiot County.

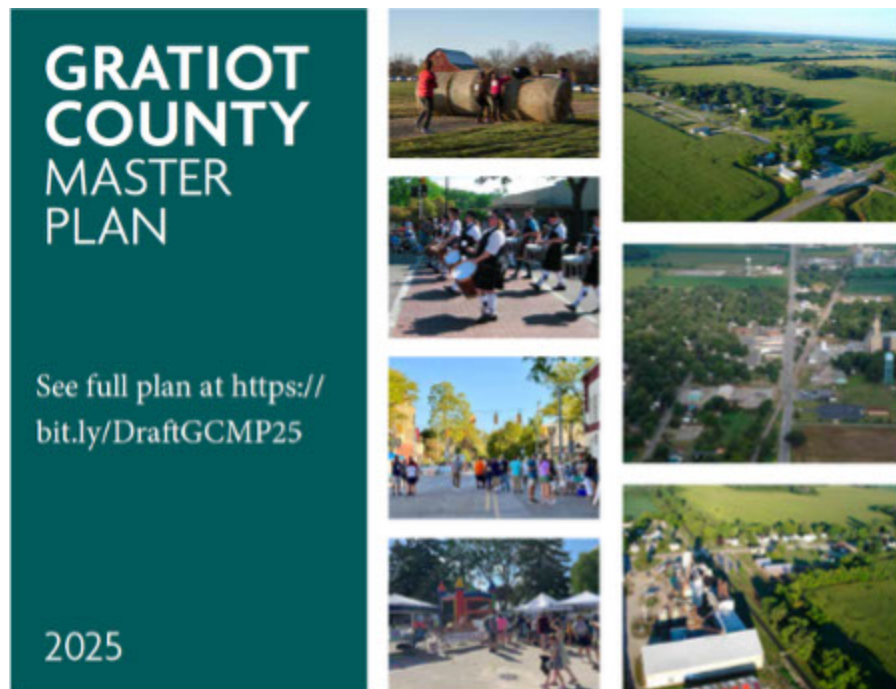
The *2025 Gratiot Countywide Master Plan*, developed collaboratively by all 23 local units of government in the county, with guidance from Greater Gratiot Development, Inc., identifies five “priority pillars” – areas of priority development and improvement throughout the County. These priority pillars will be the community engagement themes for this year’s First Year Seminar. Each First Year Seminar class will connect with local government, business, and nonprofit leaders to explore the community’s challenges and aspirations related to one of these five themes:

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1. *Housing Gratiot* – housing development and access
2. *Gardening Gratiot* – workforce development, recruitment, and retention
3. *Caring for Gratiot* – childcare availability and youth programming
4. *Ready, Set, Invest in Gratiot* – infrastructure and industrial development
5. *Protect & Visit Gratiot* – Environmental protection, recreation, and tourism

All incoming students will also complete five hours of community engagement as part of their First Year Seminar – exploring engagement opportunities in the areas they are most interested in.

Each year, Alma College welcomes new students, who call Gratiot County home during their formative college years. Upon graduation, some take what they've learned to communities near and far, where they become ambassadors for our community. Others choose to stay, building families and careers and becoming vital members our community and economy. At Alma College we understand that the experiences and futures of our students and those of our neighbors are closely connected – interconnected like the strands of the Alma College tartan. Thank you for welcoming Alma College students into our community. If you have questions about the Alma College First Year Seminar, please contact the 3CE at ccce@alma.edu. For more information about the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan, contact Greater Gratiot development at info@gratiot.org.





2026 Campus and Community Engagement Fair

This year's Campus and Community Organization Fair is on September 2nd 5pm-7pm on the Thomas Andison Chapel Lawn! *If your organization would like to interact with our students at this event*, we invite you to learn more about the fair and register using [this link](#). All organizations must register using the link in order to attend. The fair is a great opportunity to talk with a diverse group of students about what your organizations does and how they can help your organization achieve its goals through volunteering, internships, and other opportunities. We hope to see you and your organization there!





Alternative Breaks Serving Near & Far

By Carla Jensen

In 2025-26, 272 students participated in Alternative Breaks, completing more than 2,800 hours of service engagement. The 12 student-led group service trips included local, national, and international volunteer projects, from the Forest Hill Nature Area in Gratiot County to Coral Reef Restoration in the Caribbean island of Bonaire. Mid-Michigan service sites included: Forest Hill Nature Area, RISE Advocacy, Karma Kat Café, City of Alma, Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, Habitat for Humanity, and many more.

Why do students love Alternative Breaks? Let's hear from a few of the students who participated in local volunteer projects this year:

“This experience benefited myself, my college town, and the environment. I learned a lot, put in a lot of effort, and left feeling great.” – TJ

“I would encourage students to get involved in serving the Gratiot County community. It is really rewarding to leave a place better than you found it and to give back to a community that plays such a big role in supporting Alma College. Without Gratiot and Isabella County, our college would not thrive the way it does, so it's important that we take care of it.” - Julia

“I feel very grateful for the opportunity to grow and learn in such a meaningful way. This experience reinforced the importance of stepping outside my comfort zone and the value of community engagement. I look forward to applying these lessons in my future endeavors!” – Yaw

Thank you to all the local organizations who hosted college volunteers. If your organization is interested in having an Alternative Break group serve with your organization, please contact the 3CE at ccce@alma.edu. Alternative Fall Breaks will run October 10-13, 2026, and local Alternative Winter Breaks December 12-15, 2026.



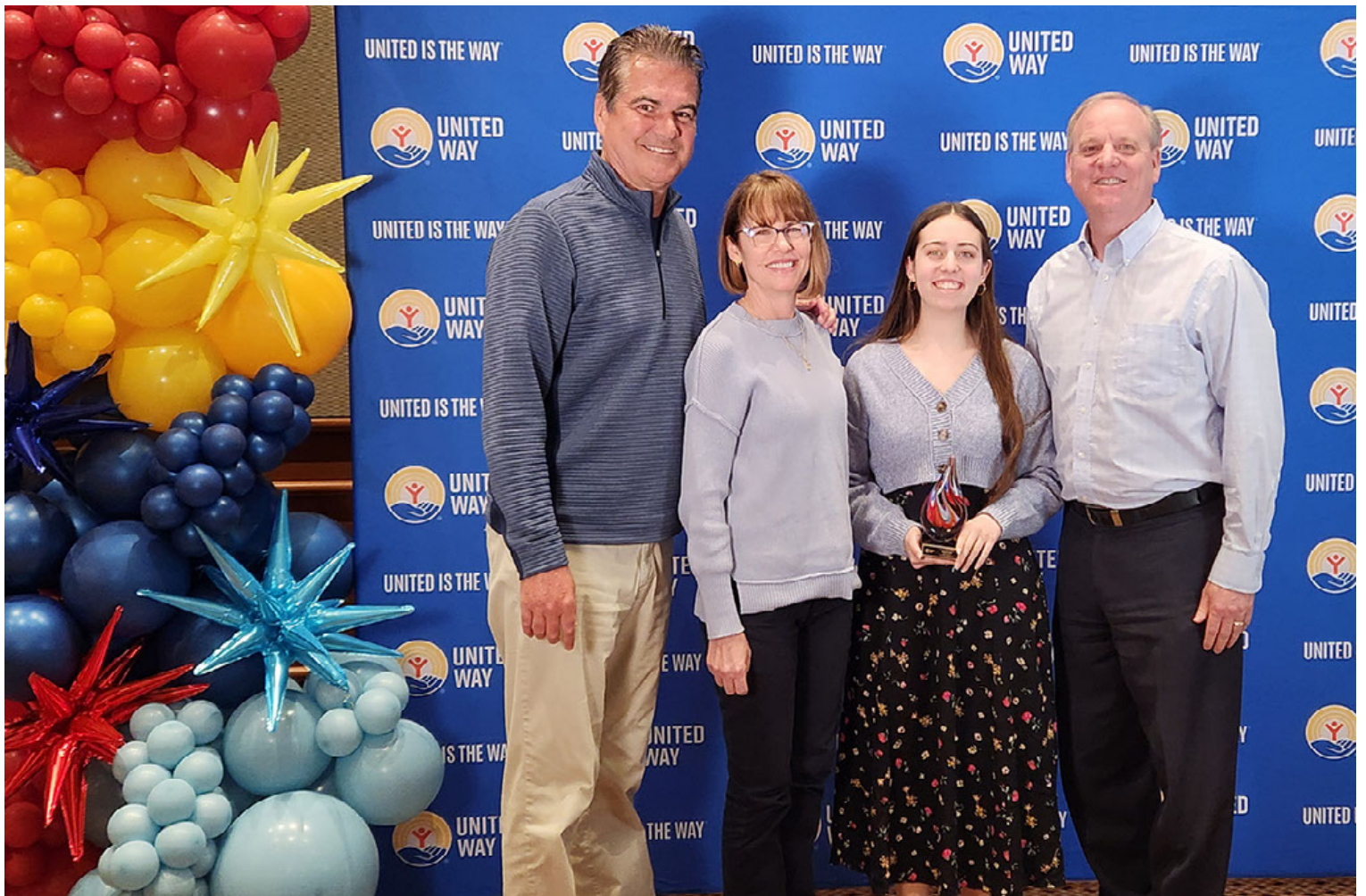
Gratiot County Young Professional Award Recipient

Paige Garberson works at Alma College in the Advancement Office, supporting fundraising and data management efforts, while completing her Bachelor of Business Administration with a major in Accounting from Northwood University. She recently completed the Gratiot County Young Professionals Leadership Development Workshop, a six-month investment in her professional journey, and has enjoyed being actively involved in the community through events hosted by the Young Professionals Network.

Paige credits her commitment to community involvement and professional development to her parents, Greg and Heidi Garberson, who owned and operated Redbird Pet Food Center in Alma for 36 years. Growing up around a family-run business, she saw firsthand the value of hard work, continuous learning, and giving back to the community. These values continue to shape her approach in her role at Alma College and guide her ongoing professional journey.

The Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce Young Professional of the Year award recognizes an emerging leader who demonstrates excellence in their profession while actively contributing to the community. The recipient shows leadership, initiative, and a commitment to professional growth while making a positive impact through community involvement and engagement.





Big Brothers Big Sisters Honoree

Our next honoree is someone who turned a single moment of interest into meaningful, ongoing impact. Paulina Rivet first connected with Mid Michigan Big Brothers Big Sisters as a freshman at Alma College in 2024 and quickly stepped into a mentoring role as a Lunch Buddy, where she has made a lasting difference in a child's life.

She didn't stop there, Paulina also helps lead an after-school program each week, supporting even more students and mentors. Her kindness, initiative, and commitment to serving others truly set her apart.

Upcoming Events

Are you involved in an upcoming community event? We'd love to hear about it! Share your projects, programs, or activities with us to help spread the word and encourage others to get involved and make an impact.

Email us at arnoldkh@alma.edu or jensencr@alma.edu.

MFA Summer Reading Series-Benjamin Garcia and Shonda Buchanan

August 6, 2026 - 6:30 PM - Ballyhoo Books & Brew, 111 W. Superior St.

A summer residency public reading of work by Alma's MFA Faculty.

MFA Faculty Benjamin Garcia and Shonda Buchanan read from their award winning books and works in progress in celebration of the Summer Residency of Alma's MFA in Creative Writing Program.

MFA Summer Reading Series-Kara Zivin and Matthew Gavin Frank

August 7, 2026 - 6:30 PM - Ballyhoo Books & Brew, 111 W. Superior St.

A residency public reading by a visiting writer and a member of Alma's MFA faculty.

Michigan writer Kara Zivin shares the book she completed during her postgraduate study in Alma's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program, and MFA faculty Matthew Gavin Frank shares recently published and in-progress work during this public reading in celebration of the MFA's summer residency.

MFA Summer Reading Series-Leslie Contreras Schwartz and Amanda Johnston

August 8, 2026 - 6:30 PM - Ballyhoo Books & Brew, 111 W. Superior St.

A residency public reading by a visiting poet and a member of Alma's MFA faculty.

Austin, Texas visiting poet Amanda Johnston and MFA faculty Leslie Contreras Schwartz share recently published and in-progress work during this public reading in celebration of the MFA's summer residency.

MFA Summer Reading Series-Donald Quist and Jim Daniels

August 11, 2026 - 6:30 PM - Ballyhoo Books & Brew, 111 W. Superior St.

A public reading by members of Alma's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing faculty.

Donald Quist and Jim Daniels, faculty in Alma College's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, share recently published and in-progress work during this public reading in celebration of the MFA's summer residency.

MFA Summer Reading Series-Anna Clark and S. Kirk Walsh

August 12, 2026 - 6:30 PM - Ballyhoo Books & Brew, 111 W. Superior St.

A public reading by members of Alma's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing faculty.

Anna Clark and S. Kirk Walsh, faculty in Alma College's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, share recently published and in-progress work during this public reading in celebration of the MFA's summer residency.

MFA Summer Reading Series-Student Readings

August 13, 2026 - 6:30 PM - Ballyhoo Books & Brew, 111 W. Superior St.

Students of Alma's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing share excerpts from their program work.

A fun evening in which the current graduate students of Alma's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing share excerpts from their writing created during the program in celebration of the MFA's summer residency.

MFA Summer Reading Series-Megan Stielstra

August 14, 2026 - 6:30 PM - Ballyhoo Books & Brew, 111 W. Superior St.

A public reading by a visiting writer and Northwestern University Press editor Megan Stielstra.

Author and Northwestern University Press editor Megan Stielstra visits Alma College's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing to share publishing wisdom as well as recently published work during this public reading in celebration of the MFA's summer residency.

Venture Day 2026

September 8, 2026 - Thomas Andison Chapel

Session 1: 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Session 2: 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Session 3: 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Explore experiential learning opportunities and learn about the Alma Venture program

Venture Day 2026

September 9, 2026 - Thomas Andison Chapel

Session 4: 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Explore experiential learning opportunities and learn about the Alma Venture program

Poster Invasion

September 25, 2026 - 7:00 AM - Front Lawn of Heritage Commons (Inside Hamilton Commons in the event of Inclement weather)

Posters displayed and available for purchase

Admissions Fall Open House

October 24, 2026 - 9:00 AM - Alma College Heritage Center

Explore Alma College at our Fall Open House for prospective students and families. Register: <https://admissions.alma.edu/register/FallOpenHouse26>

Get the full Alma College experience! Kick things off with an admissions presentation, get real insight from current students and alumni, take an interactive guided campus tour, meet our faculty and staff, and learn how Alma's supportive community and spaces can help you thrive. Stop by the tailgate for lunch beside Bahlke Field before heading into the game to cheer on the Alma College Football Team. We'll bring lunch, you bring the spirit!



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