



# CAPsule

Winter 2008

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY ASSOCIATION

## MCAA Board of Directors

**Ronald B. Borngesser,**  
Oakland Livingston Human  
Services Agency  
President

**Steve Walker,**  
Genesee County Community  
Action Resource Department  
Vice President

**Gary Gilbert,**  
Mid Michigan Community  
Action Agency  
Secretary-Treasurer

**John Stephenson,**  
Northwest Michigan Human  
Services Agency  
Lower Peninsula/  
Rural Officer

**Kenneth Shelton,**  
Muskegon-Oceana Community  
Action Agency  
At Large Officer

**Carolynne Carlson,**  
Gogebic-Ontonagon  
Community Action Agency  
Upper Peninsula Officer

**Dale Huggler,**  
Northeast Michigan  
Community Service Agency  
CAA Governing  
Board Officer

**Molly Kaser,**  
Community Action Agency  
Jackson-Lenawee-Hillsdale  
CAA Governing  
Board Officer

**Shenetta Coleman,**  
Department of Human  
Services-City of Detroit  
Urban Officer

**Trenda Rusher,**  
Washtenaw County  
Employment Training &  
Community Services Group  
Directors Council Chair

**Executive Director**  
James E. Crisp

## Legislators of the Year to be Honored at April Event



State Rep.  
Steve Tobocman



State Senator  
Mark Jansen

MCAA has named State Senator Mark Jansen and State Representative Steve Tobocman as the 2008 Legislators of the Year in honor of their work for affordable housing in Michigan. They will be honored during the association's Legislative Conference April 22-23 at the Radisson Hotel in Lansing.

Senator Jansen represents 28<sup>th</sup> District which includes much of Kent County outside of the City of Grand Rapids. Representative Tobocman of Michigan's 12<sup>th</sup> District (parts of Detroit and Wayne County) serves as House Majority Floor Leader. Both legislators were early supporters of the Michigan Housing and Community Development Fund which seeks to establish a source of revenue to spark affordable housing development in the state. Each has been an advocate for foreclosure assistance and prevention measures during the housing crisis that has gripped the state during the past year.

### NCAF's Bradley to comment on elections

Also scheduled to speak at the April conference is lobbyist David Bradley of the National Community Action Foundation. Mr. Bradley is well known on Capitol Hill and in the Community Action network for his authoritative knowledge on the origins and

contents of the federal Community Services Block Grant which supports many Community Action programs and activities. His history of the Community Action movement is a



David Bradley

popular two and a half day workshop in which he blends historical footage and archives from the 1960s to the present time to show the continued relevance and importance of the work that began as a major component of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Mr. Bradley will be the conference luncheon speaker on April 23, one day after the pivotal Pennsylvania presidential primary.

MCAA is pleased also to announce a late addition to our April speaker lineup: **Lieutenant Governor John Cherry** will address the membership in a lunchtime presentation on April 22.

Lt. Governor Cherry is serving in his second term in the Granholm Administration, following many years in the state legislature. Throughout his career, Lt. Governor Cherry has been a strong advocate of families and education, most recently leading the Lt. Governor's Commission on Higher Education & Economic Growth, which has brought higher education into the larger discussion of creating and retaining jobs here in Michigan.



Lt. Governor  
John Cherry

For more information, please visit [www.MCAA.org](http://www.MCAA.org).

## MCAAA Joins National Campaign to “Root Out Poverty”

Michigan Community Action Agency Association has joined with community action agencies across the nation in a campaign to reduce poverty. “Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America’s Community Action Network” calls for action to promote economic security for all Americans, especially those who are poor. Published by the Community Action Partnership, a national organization with more than 1,000 member agencies, “Rooting Out Poverty” was released nationally in New Orleans during the Partnership’s 2008 Winter Management and Leadership Training Conference last January.

“With input from community action agencies that work in the trenches daily fighting poverty and promoting economic security, ‘Rooting Out Poverty’ contains effective and realistic strategies that will help create a strong economy for all Americans,” said **Ronald Borggesser**, president of the Michigan Community Action Agency Association and executive director of the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency. “We are confident these suggestions will benefit the state of Michigan and provide a blueprint for enhancing the lives of our low-income families.”

The report offers five action themes and more than two dozen specific recommendations and strategies to help children, families, senior citizens, and other individuals who are vulnerable to poverty, economic deprivation, and other significant barriers to economic self-sufficiency. They include the following:

**Maximize participation** - maximum feasible participation of those who are seeking economic self-sufficiency.

**Build an economy that works for everyone** – an economy that provides a wide range of jobs and addresses financial and economic conditions of all residents.

**Invest in the future** – provide the training now to develop the knowledge and skills that today’s children and workers will need for the jobs and industries of tomorrow.

**Maximize equality of opportunity** – facilitate access to key opportunities for personal and professional growth and advancement.



Ron Borggesser, MCAAA president and CEO of Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency, introduces the “Root Out Poverty” campaign at a January press conference in Lansing.

### Ensure healthy

**people and places** – ensure access to adequate health care and homes that are weatherized to prevent high heating and cooling costs.

### DHS Director Lends Support

“I applaud the Community Action Partnership and support its efforts to reduce poverty in Michigan and the nation,” said **Ismael Ahmed**, director of Michigan Department of Human Services.

“Poverty is, I believe, the most important issue of our time. About 20 percent of people in Michigan, including a half-million children, live in or near poverty. Almost 30 percent of people in Michigan live in low-income families. Today’s report and call to action is a ray of hope for a better tomorrow for all Michigan families.”

The report offers solutions and strategies for promoting quality child care; employment and training opportunities, especially for those lacking basic skills; responsible health, energy, and conservation policies; assistance to seniors and vulnerable adults.

“While some Americans are enjoying our nation’s economic well-being, far too many are not,” said **James Norman**, partnership board member and chairman of the steering committee for the

National Conversation on Poverty and Economic Security.

“The number of poor people in the United States ranges from conservative estimates of 15 million to more than 35 million. Community action agencies have a track record of 40-plus years effectively helping poor people and families, and our new campaign will enable us to educate, advocate, and help even more.”

Michigan’s 30 community action agencies will use the report to refine services aimed at improving the lives of low-income families and help them achieve a higher level of self-sufficiency. Many of the report’s recommendations are currently being implemented in all 83 Michigan counties. The report will also serve as a blueprint for structuring a broader approach to poverty reduction, focusing less on emergency services and more on addressing the underlying causes of poverty.

Based in Washington, DC, the Community Action Partnership is a national association representing the interests of the 1,000 community action agencies across the country that are helping low-income people change their lives and embody the spirit of hope. For more information about the partnership and CAAs, visit the association’s Web site at [www.communityactionpartnership.com](http://www.communityactionpartnership.com)



MCAAA executive director Jim Crisp takes part in a January 25 press conference at the State Capitol on the upcoming conversion of television broadcasts from analog to digital. The distinguished gentleman sitting behind Jim is Hall of Fame broadcaster Ernie Harwell, who has appeared in public service announcements regarding the Feb. 2009 conversion.

## MCAAA Works with Broadcasters on DTV Conversion

Last fall, William Donahue, a Michigan State University communications professor, approached MCAAA to help get the word out to low income residents about a technical development that would render many television sets inoperable in a little over a year. According to Congressional mandate, broadcast (over-the-air) television transmission will change from analog to digital signals (DTV) on February 17, 2009. Many older televisions sets are not capable of receiving a DTV signal.

Currently, there are approximately 600,000 Michigan households that rely exclusively on over-the-air, analog television signals to receive news, weather, and entertainment programming as well as emergency-related information. Many of those households will include low income families. Professor Donahue, working with the Michigan Association of Broadcasters (MAB), wanted to work with an organization that had statewide access to those families to help spread the word about the upcoming conversion to DTV broadcasts and provide information on what they could do to ensure no disruption of service. As a result, he and MAB staff members conducted a breakout session at MCAAA’s Winter Quarterly Meeting in Grand Rapids to acquaint Community Action staff with the situation and help outline a plan of action.

The federal government is offering a discount coupon worth \$40 toward the purchase of a converter box, which cost in the range of \$40-\$70 and are available at electronics stores and retailers such as Best Buy and Circuit City. To obtain a coupon, consumers may call (888) DTV-2009 or apply online at [www.dtv2009.gov](http://www.dtv2009.gov). Coupons are limited to two per household.

Experts say that DTV will provide a sharper picture and better sound quality, even on an older set. For more information about DTV and the conversion, go to [www.michigandtv.com](http://www.michigandtv.com) or [www.DTVanswers.com](http://www.DTVanswers.com).

## CAAs to Receive Funding from MichCon for Wx

MCAAA and MichCon, the natural gas subsidiary of DTE, have entered into an agreement to weatherize homes of selected low income customers of the utility.

According to the agreement, MichCon will provide block funding to MCAAA, which in turn will distribute it to member agencies in the utility’s service area. Residents who receive services must be MichCon customers and meet existing CAA guidelines to qualify for weatherization services. All services must result in reduced use of natural gas.

The agreement excludes homes that need extensive repairs unless other funds can be leveraged to pay for repairs that don’t directly reduce natural gas use. MichCon will track the resident’s before and after natural gas usage.

MichCon serves 1.3 million residential, commercial, and industrial customers in Wayne and Oakland Counties in SE Michigan, a wide swathe of West and Northern Michigan, and some areas in the Upper Peninsula.

The agreement with MichCon expires on December 31, 2008, but will automatically renew for one year, pending agreement of both parties.



*Winter Meeting Recap*

**Highlights of MCAA's January 22-23 Meeting**

Charles Ballard, professor of economics at Michigan State University and author of *Michigan's Economic Future*, provided a sober but ultimately hopeful description of the state's prospects at MCAA's Winter Quarterly Meeting in Grand Rapids.

According to Professor Ballard, the main reason for the state's economic decline has been the loss of 250,000 manufacturing jobs since 2000. "These were primary jobs, on which a lot of other jobs depended," he said. The ripple effect of manufacturing job losses has placed Michigan at the top of the nation's unemployment figures.

Among other observations, Professor Ballard called the growing national levels of income inequality since the 1970s "the greatest economic story of my lifetime," citing statistics that show the bottom 50 percent of earners have less income than the top 5 percent.

Despite the current economic situation in Michigan, Professor Ballard noted some encouraging signs. He cited health care, bio-tech, information technology, tourism, and alternative energy as sectors that show good potential for growth, and suggested that the automotive sector could come back, although in much reduced strength.

**Panel Discussion with State Agencies**

MCAA was delighted to host a number of state government officials, including two cabinet members, in a panel discussion of how state agencies are working within the community to address the needs of low income residents. The panel discussion was moderated by **Dan Piepszowski**, a member of the Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity, who was able to connect what the commission had been learning from the poverty forums it has been holding around the state with the priorities described by the panel members in the areas of supportive housing, prisoner re-entry, rural poverty, mental health and substance abuse, and foreclosures.

Panel participants included **Ismael Ahmed**, director of the Department of Human Services, **Patricia Caruso**, director of the Department of Corrections, **Mark Kielhorn**, Department of Community Health, **Margaret Garry**, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and **Sonia Harb**, chair of the Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity. Each panel member described how they were collaborating with CAAs to make their programs more effective and successful. "There is no savior in state government," said Mr. Ahmed, "We view our relationship with CAAs as a strategic partnership, not a tactic."

Other presentations at the Winter Meeting included the February 2009 conversion from analog to digital television broadcasts, community dispute resolution, diversity training in the workplace, and a number of sessions of interest to CAA weatherization personnel.



Economist Charles Ballard addressing MCAA members at the Winter Meeting in Grand Rapids.



Dan Piepszowski moderates the panel discussion on state agencies' anti-poverty programs.



Melanie Brown, the Governor's Regional Representative, discusses her role as the Governor's community liaison in Wayne and Macomb Counties. Ms. Brown is one of six regional representatives for the Governor's Office.

**Poverty Forums Held Across State**

*Michigan Poverty Summit, "Voices for Change," planned as a result*

Last December, the Governor's Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity began a series of six public forums to hear testimony from low income residents and agencies that seek to help them. During those sessions, the Commission heard from dozens of individuals who attested to the challenges of living in or near poverty in Michigan.

The public forums were held in Sault Ste. Marie, Kalamazoo, Clare, Detroit, Waterford (Oakland County), and Flint; the final forum was held on February 19. Each forum was supported by the area's Community Action Agency. A review of the testimony provided in these forums has led the Commission to call for the first ever Michigan Poverty Summit to address the conditions that were brought to light.

According to a draft report issued by Commissioner Dan Piepszowski, the testimony of residents and representatives of the human services agencies that serve low income populations featured a number of recurring themes on what it is like to be poor and living in Michigan. Among the themes expressed were a sense of shame, even if people were poor due to circumstances beyond their control; bureaucratic barriers or perceptions of apathy; mental health issues; serious injury or illness; prisoner re-entry;



Members of the Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity listen to testimony at the Poverty Forum held at the Chippewa-Luce-Mackinac Community Action Human Resource Authority in Sault Ste. Marie, MI. The Commission sponsored a series of six forums where they gathered first hand accounts of what it means to be poor in Michigan. Their findings have led to the planning of Michigan's first Poverty Summit in November 2008.

grandparents raising grandchildren; lack of reliable or affordable transportation; job displacement/lack of employment opportunities; affordable housing; child care issues; and other conditions that trap or lead people into poverty.

Building on the momentum and public interest generated by the poverty forum, the Commission, the Department of Human Services, the Michigan League for Human Services, and MCAA are planning the first ever Michigan Poverty Summit. The theme of the summit is

"Voices for Change," an acknowledgement of the brave testimony of many who participated in the Poverty Forums. The summit's steering committee will release more information about the Summit in early April. A web site focusing on the Summit and poverty in Michigan will be unveiled shortly thereafter.



MCAA CAPsule is a quarterly publication of Michigan Community Action Agency Association. Support generously provided by the Michigan Department of Human Services, Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity.

*Save the Dates*

When? November 12-13, 2008

What? MCAA Fall Meeting and "Voices for Action" Michigan Poverty Summit

Where? Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center and Cobo Hall

Why? To discuss and share ideas and develop action plans that will move toward the elimination of poverty.



MICHIGAN COMMUNITY ACTION  
516 S. Creyts Road, Suite A  
Lansing, MI 48917

PRESORT STANDARD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
LANSING, MI  
PERMIT NO. 979

**OUR MISSION:**

*To provide leadership, information,  
and advocacy to facilitate  
institutional change directed towards  
the alleviation of the causes and  
conditions of poverty.*



**Legislative Conference  
April 21-23, 2008  
Radisson Hotel  
Lansing, MI**

MCAAA Summer Conference  
July 29-31, 2008  
Boyne Mountain Resort

---

MCAAA Fall Meeting and  
Voices for Action Poverty Summit  
November 12-13, 2008  
Detroit, MI