

# Alliance Quarterly

*Promoting a thriving film and video production community, attracting and retaining production work, and developing and supporting the production community in West Michigan.*

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 2, Number 4 — October 2006

**Horror fest Oct. 13-14**

*The Thriller! Chiller! film festival is finally here; come to Muskegon and rub shoulders with horror-flick celebrities.*  
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**Home-grown winner**

*Oceana County has asparagus treats, a Mrs. Asparagus, and now a winning documentary.*  
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**GVSU Summer Films**

*Several of these locally-produced films screen Nov. 16; meanwhile, writers have until Nov. 1 to mail entries for the 2007 season (see submission guidelines).*  
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**Cookies & pie-tin UFOs**



*Ludington crew has fun shooting for local-access cable.*  
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**Remembering heroes**

*A documentary from Storytelling Pictures honors members of the Dutch Resistance during WWII, including some who now reside in west Michigan.*  
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**Buster groove**

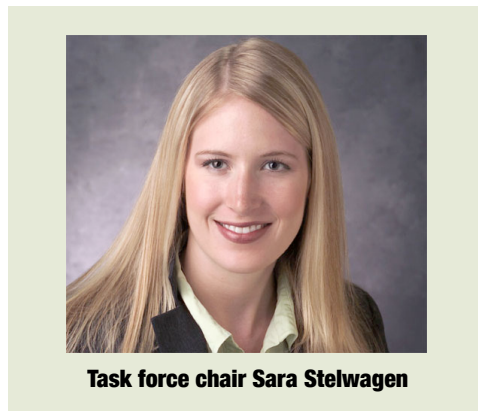
*Live organ music accompanies screenings at festival honoring the silent-era hero.*  
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## A Regional Film Office for West Michigan?

The WMFVA Board of Directors has charged a task force with looking into the feasibility of opening a regional film office here in West Michigan. Chaired by WMFVA member Sara Stelwagen, program coordinator of Leadership Grand Rapids at the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, the task force first met in early September. The task force will start with a marketing analysis of other film commissions across the country to compare to our area. They will examine such factors as services offered, staff needs, methods of funding, and regional economic impact.

Film offices exist to help filmmakers from both inside and outside a state or community find locations, permits, and whatever other services are needed. The Detroit film office recently closed, how



**Task force chair Sara Stelwagen**

ever, and the Michigan Film Office in Lansing serves the entire state. Is it time for a regional office to step in? "We want to find out if a film office in west Michigan can support filmmakers here and bring in out-state productions," says WMFVA Chair Deb Havens. "We want our crews working full-time on film projects, and our hunch is an aggressive local office run by a staff organized to get results may be the way to meet that goal."

If the task force's research supports the development of a film office, they'll draft a business plan for future operations. "I'm excited and honored to take on this project," says Stelwagen. "From my perspective, West Michigan has so much to offer the film industry and it's time to prove that our region does it better."

## First Thriller! Chiller! Premieres in West Michigan

Don't miss the Thriller! Chiller! Film Festival slated for October 13th and 14th at the Frauenthal Center for the Performing Arts in Muskegon. The horror-film homage features everyone's creep-out favorite films, plus appearances by a few of the celebs who helped make the unforgettable horror masterpieces of the 20th century.

WMFVA members Chris Randall and Keith Golinski of Fulvew Productions and WMFVA board member and indie filmmaker Anthony Griffin created the start-up venture. "We have featured some great modern classics of horror," says Randall, "so people can see them again in the theater and remember what horror movies are all about." The line-up includes *Ghostbusters*, *The Exorcist*, *Return of the Living Dead*, *Poltergeist* and *Halloween*. The festival kicks off with a free showing of *Night of the Living Dead* on Friday morning.

Thriller! Chiller! will host celebrities including James Winburn, the original stunt man behind the mask of Michael Myers in *Halloween*, and James Karen, actor from *Poltergeist* and *Return of the Living*

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*Dead*, for the entire weekend, and will announce other special guests as they are confirmed.

The festival's organizers have also selected some homegrown horror from Michigan filmmakers, many of whom will attend as well. Michigan-based distribution company Synapse Films is searching for new horror classics and will be available to talk about getting distribution; you can check out their films all weekend in the Beardsley Theater.

"The WMFVA board of directors is proud to acknowledge the upcoming festival as a sign that our filmmaking industry in west Michigan is growing," says WMFVA chair Deb Havens. "We salute the creative genius of our awesome members Chris, Keith and Anthony in leading the way!"

Tickets are now on sale; weekend and day passes are available. WMFVA members receive a \$5 discount on weekend passes; type "wmfva" in the code when purchasing your passes online to receive the discount. See [www.thrillerchiller.com](http://www.thrillerchiller.com), or go to: [premier.ticketsplus.net/r.asp?goto=search/superres.asp?strKeyword=thrillchill06](http://premier.ticketsplus.net/r.asp?goto=search/superres.asp?strKeyword=thrillchill06)

## Good News, Bad News from Mich. Film Office

*Alliance Quarterly welcomes the first column from MFO Commissioner Janet Lockwood. Our thanks to her for keeping us up to date.*

2006 is the slowest year in the memory of the film commissioner. At the most recent meeting of the MI Film Advisory Commission (September 13), one of our IATSE business agents reported that commercial business is down fifty percent from five years ago. Poor Michigan is suffering from both a lack of incentives and the worst economy in the US, according to the economic experts.

Everybody keep your chins up, it will get better. One of the MFAC members, Marcia Fishman of SAG, is organizing a Town Hall forum with ad agencies and clients to discuss the drop in business; she's hoping for an early 2007 date. And while the incentive package is still mired in the Senate Finance Committee with our only chance of passage being in what is called the Lame Duck Session after the election, an incentive package will in fact eventually be in place in Michigan. I'm sure of it.

There is good news: both *Dreamgirls* (DreamWorks) and *Transformers* (also DreamWorks et al) have shot or will be shooting in Detroit in September and October. *Ocean of Pearls* is shooting entirely in the Detroit Metro area. Several other small indigenous films are talking about shooting in Michigan soon, with or without incentives. And the West Michigan Film Video Alliance continues to strongly represent West Michigan.

With no student assistant in the film office—Gaby moved on to bigger and better things in Denver—the director is falling behind. Please be patient if you've sent in a request. You will get a response, it just may be slower than usual; my apologies.

For bits and pieces of other news, read the MFAC Minutes online later this month. Click on the MFAC section at [www.michigan.gov/filmoffice](http://www.michigan.gov/filmoffice)

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## Board Elections Coming in January

Three positions will open on the WMFVA Board of Directors in 2007 as terms end for Deb Havens, John Harper Philbin, and Mark S. Schroeder. The election will be held at the first meeting of 2007, scheduled for January. Members can nominate themselves or other members for election; in addition, the board will appoint a member with particular professional skills or who represents regional interests. A notice inviting members to run for office will be posted online in November.

If you are interested in serving on the board, you can contact any board member for information about the duties and responsibilities. Remember, you are welcome to attend any monthly board meeting to check out the process for yourself. For a schedule, see the WMFVA website.

## Arts Council to Screen GVSU Summer Films

The Grand Haven Area Arts Council will host a special screening for short films produced in Grand Valley State University's (GVSU) Summer Film Project on Thursday, November 16, 6:00–8:00 PM, in the Arts Council's newly refurbished building, 1045 Columbus, Grand Haven. The screenings will take place during GHAAC's Celebration of Trees week, when their entire facility will be full of all sorts of Christmas trees, and will feature these films:

*Flickering Blue* (2003, 22 minutes, drama)

A lonely, reclusive old man ventures out on a walk in the hope of reconnecting with people. Starring James Karen. Written by Angelo Eidse. Directed by Harper Philbin.

*A Moment of Grace* (2004, 21 minutes, drama)

An American doctor working in a Palestinian refugee camp risks her life to save a premature baby. Starring Pauley Perrette. Written by Samantha Humphrey. Directed by Alba Francesca.

*The Gospel According to Roy* (2005, 28 minutes, comedy)

A young man confronts life and relationships outside the small town that embraced him as the sec-

ond Son of God. Starring John Hawkinson. Written by Andy Graham. Directed by Harper Philbin.

*Story Time* (2006, 17 minutes, drama)

A recovering alcoholic struggles to get her life back together after losing custody of her daughter. Starring Janalee Keegstra. Written by Elizabeth Grant. Directed by Robert Hurst.



## ASPARAGUS! Wins at Rural Route Fest

Celebrating farm life—specifically, asparagus farm life—*ASPARAGUS! (A Stalk-umentary)*, a film by Anne de Mare & Kirsten Kelly, won the Rural Route Film Fest this July in New York City. Kirsten Kelly, who grew up on an asparagus farm in Oceana County, explored the roots and stalks of this local industry in this documentary, which also won the Waterfront Film Festival's first Audience Choice Feature award. In September the film also headlined a festival at the Wealthy Theatre emphasizing sustainable and community-supported agriculture.



The documentary tells the story of Oceana County's struggle to remain the self-proclaimed "Asparagus Capital of the Nation" in the face of a global economy. Lynn Glaser, who captured the 1987 "Mrs. Asparagus" title, and John Bakker of the Asparagus Board attended the New York event, followed by an after-party at which "Aspara-tinis" were served: goodies made from Michigan asparagus. Congratulations on yet another award, Anne and Kirsten! For Rural Route festival details, see [ruralroutefilms.com](http://ruralroutefilms.com)

## 13th GVSU Short Screenplay Competition

Grand Valley State University will hold its 13th Annual International Short Screenplay Competition, with the GVSU Summer Film Project producing the winning script. Any writer may enter, whether professional, amateur, faculty, or student, and any story or genre is welcome (including adaptations, as long as the writer has secured rights).

Submissions to this year's screenplay competition must be postmarked by November 1st, 2006. The winning film will be produced by students in the GVSU film/video program, and the writer will receive a \$300 cash award.

Scripts can be up to 15 minutes/pages in standard screenplay format, and will not be returned. There is no entry fee, no entry form, and no limit to the number of submissions. The winner will be announced in January at [www.gvsu.edu/filmvideo](http://www.gvsu.edu/filmvideo).

To submit a screenplay, assemble the following:

1. Full screenplay
2. One-paragraph synopsis
3. Short answers to these five questions:
  - a. What is the hero's goal?
  - b. What stands in the way of the hero accomplishing his/her goal?
  - c. What is exceptional about the hero?
  - d. How does the hero grow from start to finish?
  - e. What is the overall theme?

Submit entries to:

Screenplay Competition  
School of Communications  
Grand Valley State University  
Allendale, MI 49401

Note that email submissions will not be accepted. For more information please contact Professor John Philbin at [philbinj@gvsu.edu](mailto:philbinj@gvsu.edu).

## Membership Committee Looks to '06 Bash, Beyond

WMFVA's new Membership Committee, which met for the first time in September, has looked at ways to improve membership benefits and services in 2007, and planned—mark your calendars—this year's Holiday Bash, scheduled for Thursday, December 14, 2006 (location TBA).

This annual members-only party gives you a chance to meet your colleagues and show off your projects. Expect free food and beverages and a fun way to kick off the holiday season! If you have materials you'd like to submit for screening at the event, contact Anthony Griffin at [Anthony@wmfva.org](mailto:Anthony@wmfva.org).

The survey of members conducted by Amy Poggi and marketing intern Stacy Papes yielded a number of ideas. For example, actors want more workshops

about getting on-camera experience, and screenwriters have requested a way to pitch their scripts to local producers and filmmakers. Other suggestions include a contest for best west Michigan films, and headshots on the website (especially for actors). The committee considered these ideas and has made a list for the WMFVA board of directors.

Many thanks to Membership Committee members Jason Fishell, Anthony Griffin, John Loser, Andrew Towers, and chair Amy Poggi. To contribute time, services, or ideas, please contact any committee member or come to the next meeting, scheduled for Monday, October 16, 7:00–9:00 PM. Watch for the location announcement online.

## First Locally-made HD Program Airs

WMFVA member and WZZM-TV 13 editor Matthew Schirado recently wrapped up the technical challenges of online editing for Michigan's first locally-produced HD program and commercial. *Great Lakes Adventure* aired in mid-September on WZZM 13 and 39DT. The special delved into the effects our Great Lakes have on our economy, tourism and lifestyle, and offered a tour of Michigan icons Mackinac Island and the Mackinac Bridge.

The individual stories in the show were shot and edited in HDV from Sony XDCam HD 350 cameras with an optional \$22,000 Canon lens. Schirado, as online editor, assembled the program, adjusted the audio mix, built the HD titles, opening sequence, intros and teases, and the hi-def 3D-animation opening. "Everything was captured via Sony's XDCam HD Transfer software for Final Cut Pro (FCP) 5.1.1 over FireWire, to a single internal SATA drive on a Quad G5 with 4 Gigs of RAM," says Schirado. "This setup was only available a week before we started on the project, loaned to us by our corporate parent, Gannett. Very few production houses are using XDCam HD with Sony's Transfer software anywhere in the country, and version 1.0 is still a bit buggy." In addition, Schirado trained the rest of his crew in FCP, which they'd never used before.

The whole project required tenacity and troubleshooting. "We used two 23-inch Cinema Displays for pixel-accurate monitoring of the HDV image, but did not have a reference HD monitor available," Schirado says. "Using a Miranda converter box, we output HDV-via-FireWire, converted to uncompressed HD-SDI, and recorded to a Sony HD-CAM recorder."

Schirado believes WZZM-TV 13 is the first to locally produce an HD program in Michigan, and wants to know if you hear otherwise. He's happy to answer any questions; email him at [mschirad@iserv.net](mailto:mschirad@iserv.net). See a promo at [www.wzzm13.com/GreatLakesHD.html](http://www.wzzm13.com/GreatLakesHD.html)

## WWII Documentary Features West Michigan Heroes

Storytelling Pictures, a West Michigan-based film and video production company, has announced *The Reckoning: Remembering the Dutch Resistance*, a new documentary that recounts the brutal Nazi occupation of the Netherlands as seen through the eyes of six individuals; three of these, Diet Eman and John Knight of Grand Rapids and John Muller of Holland, Michigan, emigrated to west Michigan after the war. The full-length documentary features their experiences in Europe during World War II.



The film's makers, Corey Niemchick and John Evans, sought to capture "the essence of the resistance movement, the war, the Jewish persecution and the Holocaust. We aim to convey the deep sense of responsibility these Dutch few felt for helping the Jewish community survive the Nazi atrocities." The Dutch consul in Grand Rapids, Henry I. Witte, says the film achieves this aim with sensitivity, passion, and professionalism.

Working in partnership with Cornerstone University, the filmmakers pulled together funding from major foundations in west Michigan, including those whose founding families have ties to the Netherlands: the Meijer Foundation, the DeVos Foundation, the Van Andel Foundation, the DeVries Foundation, Peter C. Cook, and the Barnabas Foundation.

Premieres have been arranged in Toronto, Amsterdam, Chicago, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Ashville and New Orleans, and the DVD release is scheduled for January 1st. *The Reckoning* will also be made available to educational institutions as part of a distribution partnership with Cornerstone University.

For more more, see [www.storytellingpictures.com](http://www.storytellingpictures.com).



## Frozen Stupid Draws Warm Response

The third premiere in the WMFVA Presents... series at the Wealthy Theater featured Traverse City filmmaker Rich Brauer's *Frozen Stupid*—and produced our first flat-out, thumbs-up financial success. Although the WMFVA is not a profit-driven organization, our commitment is to build an audience for screenings of independent film made in west Michigan. The measure of our success is filled seats, and the numbers are trending upwards.

The screening attracted a number of families as well as fans of Brauer's work. During the question and answer period, Brauer revealed that, in addition to national and international sales, over 2,000 DVDs have been sold out of the bait store where he shot several of the movie's scenes. (Where besides west Michigan can you find such a distribution path?)

Brauer generously donated a portion of his DVD sales to the WMFVA. Thanks, Rich, for your continued membership and support.

If you have a film you would like to screen under WMFVA Presents... sponsorship, please contact Anthony Griffin at [anthony@wmfva.org](mailto:anthony@wmfva.org).

## Grand Valley Pictures Presents *Story Time*

The GVSU Summer Film Project for 2006 offers the world premiere of *Story Time* on Wednesday, November 15, 8:00 PM, at the Wealthy Theatre, 1130 Wealthy SE, Grand Rapids. The event is open to the public for \$5 admission.



*Story Time* is about a recovering alcoholic who struggles to get her life back together after losing custody of her daughter. The

film stars West Michigan actress Janalee Keegstra in a script by Elizabeth Grant of California. The project was directed by independent filmmaker Robert Hurst (see photo), working with Hollywood cine-

matographer Jack Anderson and an all-student crew from GVSU's film program. A behind-the-scenes "making-of" documentary will also be shown. Reception at 9:00 PM in the lobby with the director, cast and crew.

## Filmmaker News Notes

### *Aliens Invade Ludington*

On September 2nd, Trinja Henrickson called for actors and extras for a fun, one-day shoot; the plan: a contemporary version of the *Headless Horseman*.

The script that ended up being produced was *Aliens Invade Ludington*. It is a short (10 min) spoof about aliens invading Ludington. They come to town and steal away a young woman who has a pan of seven-layer cookie bars. (At first it was titled *Aliens in Really Bad Costumes*, but that is a title to trip over). We shot the whole thing on Saturday the 23rd here in Ludington. The cast of 5 was a great group: Helene Dallas, Craig Bouwens, Randy Galasewski, Taleah Greve, and Ryan Wobma. All but one was met through WMFVA connects.



The sets and costumes were all hand made, and made to look as such. We had a wonderful time, as did the shopkeepers downtown. Many were asking to be invaded to be included in the movie. I wrote the script, produced, directed, made chili and bread, and am now in edit... I love it all, though.

I plan to have the edit complete (with pie tin UFOs) by the 6th of October, and show it on my local cable-access show, *First Curve TV*, as part of the Halloween episode. I will mail out free copies to anyone interested in viewing it outside of the Ludington area. Also, I plan to arrive with some of the cast to the Chiller Thriller loaded up with free copies.

—Trinja Henrickson, [trinja.com](http://trinja.com)

### *Comic Evangelists* Makes AFI Film Fest

Kalamazoo filmmakers Dann Sytsma and Dan Jones, co-directors of *Comic Evangelists*, received word recently that the American Film Institute has accepted the film into its prestigious AFI Film Fest. Sytsma, formerly of Grand Rapids, and Jones, who also produced, filmed on location in Kalamazoo and Toronto, ON.

The pair will travel to LA for the festival some time between November 1 and 12. "We've secured means for Dan Jones and I to travel and stay at the festival, and we are now trying to figure out a way for the rest of the cast to go," said Sytsma. WMFVA sends its best wishes to the filmmakers and crew. Contact Dann Sytsma at [dtsytsma@charter.net](mailto:dtsytsma@charter.net).

### Erebus Spot, Next in Line Now Showing Online

I had honor of being one of several producers for the new TV spot for Erebus Haunted Attraction out in Pontiac. Rowdy Soul (Chris O'Hara, Dallas Griffin, Aaron Picot) put it all together ([rowdysoul.com](http://rowdysoul.com)). I also DP'd the shoot and co-camera'd with the multi-talented Brian Posslenzny out of Grand Rapids ([grandrapidsfilmconnection.com](http://grandrapidsfilmconnection.com)). Mark France, Ken & Melissa Clark of Midnight FX provided the incredible makeup and effects, and stunts, too ([myspace.com/midnightfx](http://myspace.com/midnightfx)). Checkety-check it out: [www.myspace.com/rowdysoul](http://www.myspace.com/rowdysoul) —A.E. Griffin

*Next In Line* is now online for viewing. Great actors, great crew and great film community! American Accent, who scored the film, are an amazing group with incredible songs. Congratulations to you all. [www.video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2006180050254320300&q=Next+in+Line](http://www.video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2006180050254320300&q=Next+in+Line) —Jim Robinson

### *SnowTrails* Enters Fourth Season

*SnowTrails TV's* fourth season started with a September 26th broadcast on WGUV, and will then roll out in twenty markets across the country, mostly in New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania. During the third broadcast, we won our 2nd Telly for a trail story. —Video Mike Grant

### *broken*

Derek Justice and David DeLeon spent just under a grand to make *broken*. The dark, feature-length tale of a traumatized youth who takes up drugs and art explores tenderness and abuse, acknowledgment and indifference, and the ways in which momentary events shape our lives.



## Buster Keaton Silents Get Special Organ Treatment

The International Buster Keaton Society's 2006 Convention in Muskegon, Michigan, presented a special



treat when renowned organist Dennis James provided live accompaniment to three of Buster Keaton's silent films: *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924), *The Haunted House* (1921), and *Oh, Doctor!* (1917).

The convention was held October 6 and 7. Mr. James played the 1929 Barton Pipe Organ at the Spanish castle-style Frauenthal Center for the Performing Arts.

Honoring the great American comedy film director and actor Buster Keaton forty years after his death (1895-1966), the Convention also featured rare Keaton film and television footage, presentations by

Keaton historians, a tour of the Keaton family home and Actors' Colony in Muskegon, a presentation by Buster's granddaughter Melissa Talmadge Cox. More information on the Society's website, [www.busterkeaton.com](http://www.busterkeaton.com), and at [www.slapstick-comedy.com/2006/about.html](http://www.slapstick-comedy.com/2006/about.html).



*Courtesy of the International Buster Keaton Society.*

## WMFVA Finally Visible on IRS Radar

The WMFVA application for 501c3 non-profit status has finally been delivered to the IRS office for approval. Completing IRS form 1023 by supplying narrative and financial support information required a significant commitment of time and energy, to say the very least: the slightest inconsistency can result in automatic rejection. The WMFVA board thanks treasurer Paul La Vigne and secretary Allen Ruhlandt for their many hours of service on this project and their meticulous attention to detailed accuracy. Additional gratitude goes to Bob Goodrich, who provided the WMFVA with access to attorney Mike Nelson when the IRS's instructions just didn't seem to make much sense.

After many months of writing, re-writing, assembling support data, and fact-checking down to the last comma, the process is as complete as we can make it. As Allen says, "The ball is in their court."

## Job Workshop an Unqualified Success

More than thirty people from Grand Rapids, Holland, Lansing, Allendale, and Montague attended the September 7 workshop "Landing an Internship and/or a Job: Resumes, Demo Tapes, and Interview Prep."

The WMFVA event, hosted by the Communication Arts & Sciences Department of Calvin College, was the first of a series of evening workshops offered free to WMFVA members as a member benefit. The WMFVA will also continue to offer full-day, Saturday seminars for a modest fee.



Industry professionals and WMFVA members Amy Poggi, Paul La Vigne, and Ken Robinson provided insights on what to do—and what *not* to do—when preparing a resume and crafting a demo reel, as well as how to prepare and conduct oneself when interviewing for internships and jobs in our industry. WMFVA vice-chair Ed de Jong moderated a lively discussion and Q&A session with the presenters.

## Crews'n'More Testimonials

"Thank you! Our winning applicant came via your post! We hired Noemi Morales. A recent State grad, she'll produce public service announcements, shoot and edit special projects, and take the remote truck into the field, along with a variety of other production duties. WKTV also pays for membership of its employees in the WMFVA. Thanks."

*Tom Norton, General Manager, WKTV, Wyoming MI*

"The positive responses were overwhelming. It worked better than one could have hoped and I feel bad that I could not put everyone to work. If anybody is in search of production talent this seemed to be good resource."

*Video Mike Grant, 45Video, Snowtrails TV on PBS*

## WMFVA Halloween Special on October 31

Don't miss the next WMFVA *Presents...* slated for Halloween night (Tuesday, October 31) at the Wealthy Theatre! A haunting line-up of movie monsters will be screened in honor of the evening. Come in costume for a Horrible Fashion Show at the intermission, plus special prizes. Watch for details online.

## WMFVA Board

**Deb Havens — Chair**  
**Ed de Jong — Vice Chair**  
**Paul La Vigne — Treasurer**  
**Allen Ruhlandt — Secretary**

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