

Daily News

Tuesday, June 29, 2021

Longtime health officer for Clinton, Gratiot, Montcalm counties retiring

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on June 29, 2021

STANTON — Marcus Cheatham used to joke that he enjoyed everything about working in public health, but he never wanted to work during a pandemic.



Marcus Cheatham, pictured at a Montcalm County Board of Commissioners meeting in 2018, is retiring after nine years as the health officer for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which oversees public health in Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties. — DN file photo

“I knew the politics would bust out and how hard that would be,” he said. “And then it caught me right at the end.”

Cheatham is retiring this week after nine years as the health officer for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which oversees public health in Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties. His retirement comes at the end of a still-receding pandemic, which despite its challenges, he says brought out the best in his colleagues and in the community as a whole.

“My wife and I had been talking about me retiring, but I knew when this thing hit I would stay and see it through to the end,” he said of COVID-19. “I think what surprised me is the health department team was so ready for this and exceeded any reasonable expectations. I don’t mean I was surprised that the team did good work, I knew they would.

I was surprised it was so much better than anything I could have imagined. They blew me away. They were really heroes.

“There were a lot of other heroes too, like school personnel who kept families safe and schools open, people in community organizations and businesses who helped people who were hurting, and city and village officials who protected their public,” he added. “People took some BS from a few knuckleheads, but they stayed at their posts and did their jobs and saved a lot of lives. That is the highest standard of public service there is.”

Cheatham and his wife moved from Oregon to Michigan in 1985 to go to graduate school at Michigan State University. He earned his PhD in political science and worked as a pollster for MSU.

“I hated it — there was so much BS!” he admitted.

He then started doing health surveys for local health departments as a side gig and discovered he really enjoyed working in public health. He began using his statistical skills to do epidemiology.

“I worked in various roles at Ingham County and at Mid-Michigan and I really liked being part of local government,” he said. “The idea of service, of putting the community first resonates with me. I like the people you meet in local government who are there because they care — they are not getting rich, but they do it because they care about the community.”

Cheatham was hired as health officer of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in June 2012, at a time when local government — and thus the health department — were still recovering from the 2009 recession.

“That really hurt the economy and it ham-stringed local governments,” he recalled. “That recession hurt the health of the community and weakened our ability to recover — you could see it in the statistics and you could see it in people’s lives. But I’m also proud to have been able to help those who have lead us toward recovery in some small way. I don’t think we are back yet, but we are on the way.”

Cheatham said while some people might think Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties are all similar, rural counties, it’s actually a much larger, diverse area than many realize.

“The three counties are so unique, it’s awesome,” he said. “I just love the community. Mid-Michigan is a beautiful place and people care for it and each other and pull together every day to make it better. It’s been such a privilege to get to know everyone and have the chance to help people achieve their goals.”

The health department is currently doing interviews for the next health officer and Cheatham believes he timed his retirement just right.

“The health department is back in full operation, we are back to face-to-face and working alongside our co-workers and serving the public we care about so much,” he said.

In announcing his retirement to the Board of Health, Cheatham noted that Michigan’s old model of public health, which was in place when he began as a health officer, has been in a state of transition since the Flint water crisis and continues today following the COVID-19 pandemic and new initiatives coming out of Washington.

“The old system is ready to be being remade,” he said. “It is a good time for a fresh start and new ideas suited to new times.”

Regarding retirement, “I’m excited about what comes next,” he told the Daily News. “Obviously local governments, including health departments, can only do so much to help their communities without support from state and federal

partners, so I'm looking forward to advocating for policies that strengthen community health. I don't have a specific perch nailed down yet, but something like a role at the American Public Health Association might fit the bill.

"Part-time of course," he added. "I am actually retiring!"

Cheatham, who currently earns an annual salary of \$114,214 is officially on the job through the end of this week.

Clinton County Commissioner Bruce DeLong is the chairman of the Board of Health.

"He really does care about public health," DeLong said. "He's been a great guy to work with and there's great cooperation between him and the three counties. I wish him well."

"It's been a pleasure to work with Marcus for the last nine years," added Health Department Public Information Officer Leslie Kinnee. "I've come to admire his commitment to public health and his genuine concern for the well-being of the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties. I wish him the very best in his retirement and future endeavors."

Daily News

Thursday, July 1, 2021

Braddock named new health officer for Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on July 01, 2021



Liz Braddock

STANTON — The Mid-Michigan District Health Department is losing its environmental health director, but is gaining a new health officer.

The Board of Health on Wednesday morning voted 4-1 to appoint Liz Braddock to oversee the health department's three-county jurisdiction of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties.

Clinton County commissioners Bruce DeLong and Bruce Washington and Montcalm County commissioners Michael Beach and Adam Petersen all voted "yes" to hiring Braddock while Gratiot County Commissioner Chuck Murphy voted "no" (Gratiot County Commissioner George Bailey was absent).

Braddock was previously interviewed by the Board of Health's Personnel Committee on Monday along with two other finalists, Anne Hawkins-Badge and Rashmi Travis (two other candidates also applied for the job, Shawna Enbody and Jeffrey Lodholtz).

Braddock earned a bachelor's degree in ecological science from the University of North London, England, and a master's degree in environmental science from Middlesex University, London. She has worked as the local health department's environmental health director since 2017, where she is responsible for 16 staff who provide services to 52 townships in Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties. As environmental health director, Braddock has overseen multiple local projects involving PFAS, E. coli and other water quality efforts. More recently, she was heavily involved in the local health department's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year and a half.

Braddock previously worked as chief of field activities in environmental health services for Oakland County's South Oakland Health Center in Southfield from 2015 to 2017, as supervisor of environmental health services for Oakland County from 2004 to 2015, as a sanitarian for Oakland County from 2002 to 2004, as a sanitarian for Berrien County from 2001 to 2002 and as a laboratory specialist for PhycoTech in St. Joseph from 1998 to 2000.

Travis earned a bachelor's degree in microbiology and a bachelor's degree in communications, public relations and corporate communications from the University of Michigan, and a master's degree in public health in behavioral and community health sciences with a concentration in maternal and child health from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.

Travis most recently worked as health officer and director of integration for the Jackson County Health Department from April 2019 until this past March.

According to an MLive article, Travis resigned on March 19 after it appeared that the Jackson County Board of Commissioners was considering firing her. Commissioners had previously cut that health department's budget by \$500,000 in 2019 (four months after Travis began working there) and they cut another \$112,000 for the 2021 fiscal year. Meanwhile, Jackson County saw some of the highest levels of COVID-19 cases in Michigan in 2020. At that same time, county commissioners approved a resolution allowing its sheriff and prosecutor not to enforce "unconstitutional prohibition" during the pandemic, as well as a resolution stating that county government would not intervene against businesses choosing to violate pandemic orders by re-opening — messaging that conflicted with the county's own health department, according to MLive.

Travis previously worked as assistant administrator in population health administration for the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) from 2016 to 2019, as bureau director of family, maternal and child health for MDHHS from 2014 to 2016 and as health officer for the Allegan County Health Department from 2001 to 2014.

Hawkins-Badge is currently the academic affairs director of laboratory safety for Ferris State University in Big Rapids. She has a master's degree of public health in industrial hygiene and a doctorate in health science.

The Board of Health's Personnel Committee agreed that Braddock, Hawkins-Badge and Travis were all excellent candidates, but they focused on Braddock and Travis as the two finalists. After much discussion, the Personnel Committee voted 2-1 on Monday to recommend Braddock for hire, with Petersen and Washington voting "yes" and Murphy voting "no."

"I think Liz brings that boots-on-the-ground, in the trenches, is here in the district already experience that is worth just as much, if not more," Petersen noted. "Liz is very down to business and I appreciate that about her."

"We felt that they were all very strong candidates and that we had a good pool to choose from," Washington reported during Wednesday's Board of Health meeting. "Two of those candidates had more direct experience in the field of local public health and we felt that was very important. We felt that it was very close ... but we chose to recommend Liz Braddock to be our new health officer. We felt that she has a good strong connection with our staff. She has formed relationships with the community and she has got a good rapport with the board. We feel confident that she's a quick learner and will be able to adjust and adapt as necessary."

"I'm very confident in our decision," Petersen agreed.

In voting "no," Murphy said he supported Travis instead "because of her being a health officer in two different counties, but it was a hard decision."

Contract negotiations are now underway and Braddock will tentatively take on the job of health officer Monday, as this past week was Health Officer Marcus Cheatham's final week on the job before he retired.

OPEN MEETINGS ACT VIOLATION

After the Board of Health's Personnel Committee conducted the three finalist interviews Monday morning, they went into closed session to discuss the interviews and who to hire.

The Daily News, which was covering the interviews via Zoom, texted Petersen to state that a public body is not allowed to go into closed session to discuss who to hire and that doing so was a violation of the Open Meetings Act. Petersen brought this to the attention of Washington, who was chairing the interviews.

After 20 minutes elapsed, Washington returned the closed session discussion to a public discussion. Washington said there had been “uncertainty” about whether they could discuss the interviews in public, but he said he returned to open session after the notification from the Daily News. The hiring discussion then proceeded in public.

At Wednesday morning’s Board of Health meeting, DeLong — who had not been present at Monday’s interviews — said he had heard about what happened Monday, but he said he believed the Personnel Committee was legally allowed to discuss who to hire in closed session and that he had even confirmed this with a county administrator. Murphy — who was present at Monday’s interviews — agreed with DeLong on Wednesday.

The Daily News, which was covering Wednesday’s meeting via Zoom, interjected again with an explanation of the Open Meetings Act, which states that a public body can only go into closed session “to review and consider the contents of an application for employment or appointment to a public office IF the candidate requests that the application remain confidential” and that afterward “all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to a public office shall be held in an open meeting.” After interviews, any discussion about who to hire must also take place in public as this is a deliberative action by a public body.

The Daily News also emailed Board of Health members a link to the Michigan Attorney General’s Open Meetings Act guide.

“Elisabeth, I searched it already. You are correct,” DeLong wrote back in response.

Health officer who delayed retirement now gets his chance

Natallie St. Onge

Lansing State Journal

USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

Marcus Cheatham had planned to retire in 2020. Then COVID-19 hit.

He knew he couldn't step away from his post as health officer for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which covers Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties.



Cheatham “I had to do the one thing that I never really wanted to do, which was serve during a pandemic,” Cheatham said.

He used to joke about working during a pandemics, he said. Now, having experienced it first hand, he'll finally retire on July 2 after serving nine years

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Officer

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in the health officer role.

Cheatham came to Michigan to study at Michigan State University, where he earned a doctorate in political science.

At the time, Cheatham worked as a pollster for MSU's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research. Ultimately, he didn't like political polling. "It was just a horse race," he said.

Then, the institute started to do research for local health departments. Cheatham enjoyed the work and the people he was meeting. He never went back to politics.

For 18 years, Cheatham worked with the Ingham County Health Department, serving as a health analyst and assistant deputy health officer. He says he fell in love with local government.

"They're just there because they care about the people that they are serving. That's the culture I really resonated with," he said.

Cheatham came into his role at the Mid-Michigan health department with the idea to start a community health worker program. The Affordable Care Act was just taking place.

"There was a ton of innovation happening in public health, forming partnerships with health care and a drive to put preventive services in communities where people really need them," Cheatham said of the time.

Cheatham said his team worked for years to accomplish that goal.

"I don't think we accomplished all that we really wanted to, but I know the community health care workers made an enormous difference in the lives of the people they serve in the community," he said.

Dwight Washington, the District 6 Commissioner in Clinton County, has been working with Cheatham since 2016.

"He is very passionate about public health and the well being of the public," Washington said, recalling that provided him a solid foundation of what to expect as a commissioner when he was just starting out.

The way Cheatham "steered the ship" for Clinton County during the pandemic was memorable, Washington said.

"I'm really impressed and inspired by the way he was able to stay focused on the big picture and not get distracted, but manage the smaller picture as it was necessary," Washington said.

One of the reasons Cheatham ex-

celled, Washington said, was his ability to look at things from a local, regional and even a federal level.

However, the hard work brought challenges, especially during the past year and a half.

"Public health was subjected to a lot of attacks," Cheatham said.

Some staff members were mistreated, yet Cheatham said his team excelled, doing more than he ever thought they would.

"I don't think people know or understand what public health really accomplished" during the pandemic, he said.

From contact tracing to dealing with people violating public health guidance and the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, Cheatham said his team has seen it all, with no breaks for more than a year.

"I feel so humbled to have had the chance to work with them," he said.

Cheatham said his team was better than he realized. "I was amazed by all that they accomplished ... That was something to see," he said.

Mid-Michigan's Medical Director Jennifer Morse was motivated by Cheatham when she started at the department six years ago.

"We have a lot of limitations in public health, through lack of funding and resources, but he has never seen that as

an issue," Morse said. "If there is a need or an idea or anything, he gets really excited about it and works hard to find a way to address it."

Morse said Cheatham always approached things as what the community needs, rather than what they had the resources to do.

Morse said she'll miss his motivation and energy, as well as his calm nature.

"He's remarkably able to see their point of view and stay calm and collected" when faced with differing opinions, she said.

Before working in rural Michigan, Cheatham was a "Lansing guy." He didn't realize how beautiful rural Michigan was and how connected the communities were.

"I was really privileged to be able to work in Clinton, Gratiot, Montcalm. It changed my view, my understanding of Michigan," he said.

Cheatham isn't planning to stop working. He wants to turn his attention towards advocating for public health.

"I hope to partner with other public health retirees and really try to turn up some heat on these elected leaders who made it a lot harder to keep people safe," Cheatham said.

Contact reporter *Natallie St. Onge* at nstonge@lsj.com.

Daily News

Friday, July 9, 2021

Greenville recovery house founder asks Montcalm County for \$52,000

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on July 09, 2021

STANTON — The founder of a Greenville recovery house for those struggling with substance abuse is asking the county for help after sustaining a major cut in state funding.



From left, Ron Finegood, John Kroneck and Randy’s House founder Mike Helmer ask the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners on June 28 for \$52,000 of the county’s share of liquor tax money to help Randy’s House, a Greenville recovery residence, be able to continuing operating after a cut in state revenue. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Randy’s House founder Mike Helmer appeared before the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners on June 28 along with Mid-Michigan District Health Department Wellness & Prevention Services Supervisor John Kroneck and Substance Use Disorder Advisory Council member Ron Finegood. The three men requested \$52,430 from Montcalm County using a portion of the county’s share of state liquor tax revenue to help Randy’s House stay solvent.

“Last year, one of the funding sources, which was the federal block grant that came into Michigan, was mishandled by the state of Michigan and the state of Michigan made an adjustment which included 37 percent cuts in one year — boom — and permanent cuts,” Kroneck summarized.

According to Randy's House bookkeeper Lisa Day, based on current estimates for 2021, Randy's House will receive funding from Mid-State Services (\$66,572), private pay/co-pay (\$32,566) and a Montcalm Care Network grant (\$35,000) resulting in total revenue of \$134,138.

Annual expenses at Randy's House total \$314,930, including two recovery homes (\$47,700), state-certified coaching (\$74,792), administrative office staff (\$138,963), food pantry food (\$31,200) and operational costs (\$22,275), resulting in a net loss of \$180,792.

According to Helmer, he was advised by Mid-State Services that due to a block grant funding issue in December 2020, they were going to cut Randy's House funding by 25 to 30%. Helmer said this past February, he was further advised by Mid-State Services that funding for Randy's House was going to be bundled and limited to individuals from the mid-state region only. The resulting overall funding cut that Randy's House received was about \$525,000, or 82%.



Montcalm County commissioners Brendan Mahar, left, and Jeremy Miller listen and ask questions on June 28 regarding a \$52,000 request from Randy's House, a Greenville recovery residence. Miller met with local Substance Use Disorder Advisory Council members prior to the county board meeting to discuss funding solutions for Randy's House which sustained a cut in state revenue. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

As a result of the cut in state funding, Helmer asked the local Substance Use Disorder Advisory Council for help. They had a special meeting in mid-June along with Montcalm County Commissioner Jeremy Miller of Greenville and voted to support asking the county to appropriate \$52,430 to help Randy's House for Montcalm County's share of the house's services.

Montcalm County does not currently appropriate funding for Randy's House but does appropriate some funding for Mid-State Services which in turn gives some to Randy's House. Finegood noted that any money Montcalm County might give to Randy's House would stay in Montcalm County.

"They're doing some really good things to keep themselves solvent and this would be a huge piece for them," Kroneck told county commissioners.

Helmer told commissioners that Randy's House has had 130 residents (68 men and 62 women) since 2016, about 60% of whom were homeless at the time. While he said success rates are difficult to measure as some outcomes take years to achieve, he said a "large percentage" of those residents are currently doing well in the community.

"Our budget was balanced and we were doing fine," Helmer said. "This (state funding cut) came in the middle of the current fiscal year. We're looking at replacing some streams of revenue to keep us going. Is this a Band-Aid? To be honest with a nonprofit, it kind of seems like everything's a Band-Aid, we're always looking for alternative sources to keep our organization going.

"We started Randy's House on a dream and \$5,000," he added. "We spend a lot of time in ERs with people, we help a lot of people get treatment, we help a lot of people get to detoxes. We do a good job with the amount of resources we have. We do a lot of good in the community. We're here making this ask because everybody's been supportive all along the way. I hope that we don't have to come back next year and ask for anything."

Commissioners voted 8-0 (with Commissioner Brandon Stowell absent) to include Randy's House request in the county's upcoming budget talks, which are set to start at 1 p.m. on July 14. County commissioners will aim for having the upcoming fiscal year budget completed by late August for county board approval in September. The county's next fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

The county board will meet for its next regular meeting at 4 p.m. Monday on the third floor of the Montcalm County Administrative Building in Stanton. All meetings are open to the public.

Avoid mosquitoes and West Nile Virus



Posted on Wednesday, July 14th, 2021 and is filed under [Health](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- Michiganders have been heading outside in droves, ready to enjoy all that our State has to offer this time of year, from biking and hiking to barbequing and relaxing at the beach. We often enjoy these activities with friends and family, but after the hot weather and heavy rainfall we have had recently, we should be prepared for uninvited guests.... pesky mosquitoes.

Mosquitoes are not just annoying, they are known carriers of West Nile Virus (WNV), a disease that is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird.

Most people who contract WNV have no symptoms, but some may become ill three to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Symptoms of West Nile virus can include high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, stiff neck and a severe headache. More serious complications include meningitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and brain linings) and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). These diseases usually require hospitalization, can be life threatening, and even fatal.

One of the best ways you can protect yourself and your family is to use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered repellent containing DEET or Picaridin (following manufacturer's directions). Use of repellent is especially important between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active and most likely to bite. Be sure not to use repellent on children under two months old. Instead, dress your child in clothing that covers arms and legs and cover the crib, stroller and baby carrier with mosquito netting.

Additional precautions include:

Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and socks when heading outside.

Treat clothing with repellent.

Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens and repair those with tears or openings.

Empty water once a week from mosquito breeding sites such as bird baths, buckets, unused wading pools and old tires.

Additional information can be found at www.cdc.gov/westnile. Visit

<https://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases> for information about current WNV activity in Michigan, including a summary of where WNV infection has been detected in mosquitoes, animals and people.

Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot, and Montcalm Counties.

Lakeview Area News

Thursday, July 15, 2021

Keep an Eye Out for Ticks

By Leslie Kinnee, Public Information Officer, Mid-Michigan District Health Department

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department is reminding members of the community to keep an eye out for ticks. While ticks are tiny, they can pack quite a punch, especially the blacklegged/deer tick, which can transmit Lyme disease.

Symptoms of Lyme disease include fever, chills, headache, muscle and joint pain, and a bull's-eye rash at the site of the bite. If not properly diagnosed and left untreated, infection can spread to the joints, the heart and the nervous system.

The best defense against Lyme disease is prevention. If possible, avoid shady, moist areas in

wooded and grassy locations, as these are the preferred hiding spots for ticks. If you do need to venture into these areas, walk on well groomed trails and avoid contact with overgrown grass, brush, and leaves.

Other prevention tips include:

- Apply repellent containing DEET or Picaridin to exposed skin, following manufacturer's instructions.
- Spray clothes with permethrin, which kills ticks on contact.
- Wear enclosed shoes, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt.
- Tuck pants into socks or boots.
- Use tick prevention products on your pets.

After returning from

potentially tick-infested areas, check yourself for ticks and shower immediately to wash off and find ticks that may be on you. Ticks can attach to any part of the body, but are commonly found in the hairline, ears, waistline, groin, armpits and sock line. Do not forget about your pets; be sure to check them for ticks as well.

If you find a tick attached to you or your pet, remove it promptly to decrease the chance of infection. Using fine-tipped tweezers, grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible. Slowly and gently pull upward with steady, even pressure. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the area and your hands with soap and water and apply an antiseptic to the bite wound.

If you experience a fever, rash, or muscle or joint aches within several weeks of removing a tick, be sure to see your doctor. Patients treated with appropriate antibiotics in the early stages of Lyme disease usually recover quickly.

If you find a tick and would like to know what kind it is, visit [Michigan.gov/lyme](https://www.michigan.gov/lyme), where you can view photos of ticks commonly found in Michigan. There you will also find instructions how to submit a photo of a tick to Michigan Department of Health and Human Services for identification. A limited number of free tick submission kits are available from your local health department