

MLICA Scoop

LAND IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTORS ~ MICHIGAN CHAPTER

2020 ISSUE 2

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From the Lead Plow, Adam Cook, President MLICA

As the wild ride that 2020 has been comes to a close, I hope everyone has a Blessed Holiday Season and a Happy New Year. As crazy as this year has been, I feel that the entire state of Michigan has been blessed with fantastic weather. Several contractors within MLICA that I have talked to have had record years, and almost all of the farming industry has seen as good of a year as they could hope. Even through all the craziness that has happened, there is always a positive light to look at.

Even though this year we are unable to have our annual convention, I'm thankful we were able to have one of the most memorable field days ever. I'm glad we had the turn out and participation that we had, while maintaining the safety regulations as needed at the time. It was a head turning project, that has been talked about nation-wide. It was truly an amazing thing to be a part of.

With the convention being cancelled, we are looking into possibly shifting the meetings and activities to a summer time meeting at this time. We're exploring options such as a potluck/picnic, or even a golf outing. Depending on where or how we do it, we may include some presentations or speakers as well. Keep an eye out for that to be planned in the coming months, as the LICA board

knows the importance of continuing the comradery and fellowship among members. We can all hope that the release of the COVID-19 vaccine will provide a downward trend in cases so we can all see a more typical summer of 2021.

Speaking on the LICA board, it appears that things will go unchanged this year as a result of us not being able to hold our member-attended annual meeting. This is how the National office will be handling things as well as the other states. It's been quite the term for me as President, from all the meetings leading up to the field day, and working around complications that COVID has thrown our way with shut downs and executive orders. I'm hoping for a little more simplicity with 2021, but if this year has taught me anything, it's that you can't expect "normal" to happen. I look forward to it regardless. I also want to take a quick moment to send congratulations to my friend Bob Clark for becoming the first 3 term president of National LICA. It may have come in a "by default" sort of manner, but I honestly can't think of a more deserving person to hold that honor. Bob is truly a "face of the industry" type of person who does a great job in all that he does.



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Diary of an Executive Director

2020 has definitely been a year of unusual circumstances, bringing struggles to everyone in some way or another. Anyone with school age children knows the many struggles parents, including myself, are going through with virtual learning. I have been blessed to be at home hovering over my daughter's shoulder, making sure she's attentive during twice daily class Zooms and submitting assignments with attachments included. Thank you for the grace as I have struggled to find a balance to publish this newsletter and send out renewals in a timely manner.

With all the COVID 19 safety measures and regulations Governor Whitmer put into place earlier this year, the MLICA Board and Field Day Committee faced some tough decisions, but we persevered

and were able to host a wonderful field day event down in Riga, Michigan. A lot of time and effort went into planning the field day. You can see photo highlights and Adam's article covering the field day on the next two pages.

Everyone should have received dues renewal notices by now. Please remember to send the bottom portion of the notice with your payment, so we can make sure our directory is up to date.

Although we were able to host our field day with extra precautions in place, we have to forego our winter convention and annual meeting due to current state restrictions. We are looking forward to planning a summer picnic for all of you. In the meantime, wishing you all a healthy and happy new year!

UPCOMING EVENTS

**MLICA 2021 WINTER CONVENTION
& ANNUAL MEETING**

CANCELLED

**NATIONAL LICA 2021 WINTER CONVENTION
CANCELLED**

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TO BE DETERMINED**

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2020 Field Day: Making History

CONTRIBUTED BY MLICA PRESIDENT ADAM COOK

**ED Note: Early in the planning process, the grand scale of the project led us to ask Ehsan Ghane of MSU Extension to partner with MLICA to turn our field day into a public event. A Field Day Committee was formed to handle all the details. Unfortunately, hosting our field day in Riga, MI came with many challenges. Persistent wet weather in 2019 and COVID-19 in 2020 both caused delays. Due to the state restrictions limiting the event to 100 attendees at the time, MSU Extension was not able to participate on site. Even with strict COVID Safety Guidelines, we were able to safely complete our field day event. Attendees were checked in as part of the process. MLICA VP Russ Talaski, was dubbed our COVID Safety Officer during the event, reminding everyone to practice social distancing. With 250 masks, four gallons of hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes for each piece of equipment on hand, we did our best to keep everyone safe.*



It was a beautiful Tuesday morning this last September when several crews from the Michigan LICA organization began working on their 2 day field day demonstration project near the small town of Riga, Michigan, in the southeast corner of the state. The project, hosted by Brian Goetz (pictured at right), was a culmination of well over a year of planning by a committee of LICA members and associates, as well as, countless hours of design work by Tom Van Wagner (pictured below), a well respected drainage expert from the Lenawee County Conservation District.



signed, he knew he had to approach the other members of the board with the possibility of a field day, and we are grateful he did. This field day project was the perfect stage to showcase everything that LICA stands for. We were able to teach, and provide new information to our members and the public alike, in an area that needed it most. Nestled in the heart of the Lake Erie algae bloom area, it is part of the River Raisin water shed that dumps directly into the western edge of the Lake. This area was the perfect place for this one of a kind system.



Around 2 years ago now, when MLICA board member Keith Cottrill heard of the upcoming project being de-

The system, highlighted by it's revolutionary 5 acre retention pond (pictured above), became the first of its

2020 Field Day: Making History Continued

kind to be built as a drainage system, paired with subsurface irrigation, while allowing for virtually no water run off outside of the property. As water drains throughout the wet months, through the 20-foot spacing grid tile system, it is pumped into the retention pond, and stored. During the dry summer months, when irrigation is needed, the pond then gravity-feeds a pressurized pipe, that feeds the upper end of the tile mains, causing subsurface irrigation by filling the tile lines. Through this design, no water leaves the field, meaning no nitrate or phosphate runoff, in an area that is of concern.

4" pipe over the 2 day demonstration, helping to finish the 210,000 feet-plus project in about a week. With the use of 5 different plows, and lots of support equipment, it was quite the sight to see. Members worked hard to teach and demonstrate throughout the event as well, making it highly educational for the public.

The event saw coverage from National LICA, Farm Bureau (*Janelle Brose pictured below with Laura Campbell filming National LICA President Bob Clark*), Drainage Contractor Magazine, as well as a slew of other freelance writers, and gained plenty of public interest. Thanks to



Through generous associate donations (*listed above*), as well as volunteered time from members and their crews, MLICA was able to install over 120,000 feet of

all involved, and especially Brian Goetz, the 2020 LICA field day will be remembered as one of the most successful and informative we've held.



2020 Field Day Continued



With a total of five tile companies in attendance, Michigan LICA received the largest amount of donated tile for one field day in the last decade. Pictured above is a plow installing River Valley Pipe. Pictured directly below is a plow installing Baughman tile.



Pictured below is Grandpa Mike Cook driving Morgan Cook around the field day site, showing her the different things to see.



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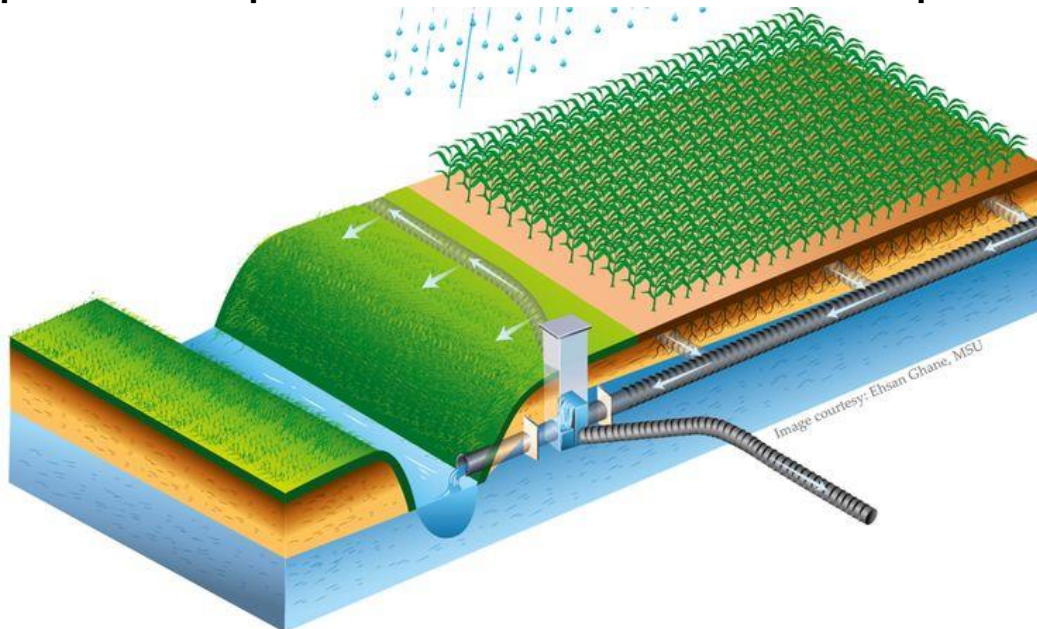
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USDA GRANT PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL WATER QUALITY

SUBMITTED BY EHSAN GHANE, MSU EXTENSION SPECIALIST AND MLICA LIASION

Grant will support the development of an online tool for farmers to improve water quality.



Saturated buffer. Photo by Ehsan Ghane, MSU.

Michigan State University (MSU) Assistant Professor and agricultural drainage Extension specialist Ehsan Ghane will lead a U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Innovation Grant (NRCS CIG). The project seeks to improve agricultural water quality by accelerating the adoption of saturated buffers.

A saturated buffer reduces nitrate loss from subsurface-drained fields. Too much nitrate in surface water causes low levels of oxygen (hypoxia), resulting in fish kills.

As part of the project, researchers will develop an online, user-friendly tool to improve the design of saturated buffers on specific farms. Farmers want to protect water quality while producing crops. This tool will show them the water quality benefit of a saturated buffer on their farm.

The online tool will show the best saturated buffer design that removes more nitrate at the lowest cost. The tool will also quantify nitrate load reduction on specific farms. This information can be used to build nutrient trading programs where farmers receive payment for reducing nitrate loss from their farm. Nutrient trading programs will incentivize saturated buffer adoption, thus accelerat-

ing adoption of this practice.

The online tool will undergo testing by farmers and practitioners to make sure the tool is user-friendly and practical before being released to the public. Once the tool is developed, Michigan State University Extension will offer a workshop, factsheet and training video to educate people on how to use the tool.

A well-qualified team with diverse backgrounds will help to achieve the grant goals. Pouyan Nejadhashemi, MSU Foundation Professor, will lead the development of the online tool. Research Associate Manal H. Askar, Research Specialist Babak Saravi, and graduate student Yousef AbdalAal are also on the research team. Ricardo Costa, MSU Extension educator, will co-lead the educational component in Michigan. Other key partners include North Carolina State University, Iowa State University, Purdue University, and the Iowa Soybean Association. For more information on the grant, read “MSU researcher receives USDA grant to develop improved drainage systems for farms.”

This article was published by Michigan State University Extension. For more information, visit <https://extension.msu.edu>.

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MISS DIG ACTION REQUESTED

BY MIKE COOK

I hope all members are utilizing the online MISS DIG locate or RTE for locating utilities. You know the law requires us to do so for every project. We are also by law to check the Positive Response Portal PRIOR to excavating. The COVID pandemic has led to delays in locators responding to our requests, of which we have no recourse. I reached out to Scott Everett for possible solutions or assistance that we as contractors could use. He has researched the MISS DIG law and found that we have no rights for these delays. SO, he is requesting information from MLICA members of problems you have had, so he may take some action. What he needs is simple!

Text to him @5172043328 the ticket number you had delays with or had to resubmit because locations were past the 3 days required by law. He can see your problem on the Positive Response Portal which can be assessed with any ticket number. Not convinced; check my big one. 2 delays, and then we were cleared, only to hit a major fiber. It was then marked after the fact. #A002920094. I'm not sure what will come of this problem for me.

Please give Scott some feedback and USE Positive Response for your tickets regardless. Perhaps we can change the law to give us some rights.

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National Happenings

THE LICA BENEFITS PLATFORM

Earlier this year, National LICA announced the new LICA Benefits Platform.

The LICA Benefits Platform provides multiple benefits and savings for members. Once you sign-up for the LICA Benefits Platform you have access to savings on shopping, cash back program, travel and more.



The LICA Benefits Platform

The LICA Benefits Platform is not just "one benefit", it's a website with a variety of programs and discounts designed for our contractors. There is no registration fee, sign-up today!

These are just a few programs available through the LICA Benefits Platform.

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JUST ANNOUNCED: The LICA Benefits Platform is adding a new program!

Through the platform members can sign-up for Travel MedEvac. This program offers Trip Cancellation Coverage and/or Travel MedEvac Coverage. When the unexpected happens, having the right plan to fit your needs is essential. Whether it is covering the cost of a cancelled trip, hospital/physician expenses, or a medical evacuation – Travel MedEvac has a policy that matches your style of travel. Travel MedEvac policies cover both domestic and international travel and DO NOT have infectious disease exclusions. COVID-19 will be treated as any other sickness for all illness related coverages.

InsurChoice Voluntary Home and Auto Insurance Options

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PERSPECTIVES FROM THE BUSINESS SIDE OF DEALING WITH COVID

CONTRIBUTED BY MLICA PRESIDENT ADAM COOK

What a wild ride 2020 has put us through so far. I remember the initial shock of the COVID pandemic, sitting in Vegas at our last dinner of ConExpo with my dad, brother, and 3 of our employees, watching all major sports shut down, the stock market falling, and wondering if we could even get home. The roller coaster ever since then has been nothing short of... Memorable...

Thankfully, we have been blessed with good weather this year, and the ag market as a whole has been incredibly productive. Through these strange times, I feel that I, and hopefully our employees, have found some kind of a normalcy just by going to

work day in and day out. We've been sure to pay our guys well and make sure they know how much they are appreciated throughout this year as well.

Some things had to change, such as social distancing, and making sure the workers were careful at work as well as at home. We've had several instances where employees needed to be tested before returning to work. However, as a whole, I think things have gone as well as we could have asked. Nothing else about the rest of life seems to be the same, but tile is still going in the ground.

CONTRIBUTED BY MLICA CHAIRMAN BEN COOK

I know I don't need to tell any of you that COVID-19 has had a large impact on our lives and businesses for the 2020 season. From issues like getting workers, availability of parts needed to fix breakdowns, or more direct inputs for our business, like tile. It has even affected who we can see, where we can go, and how we can do business.

For the most part I feel that our business has been lucky. We have had a couple instances that could have been a major issue but some of our MLICA Associates and members stepped up. Probably the largest concern when the shutdown first occurred was whether or not we were considered "essential" so we could legally continue to work. At first, nobody could give us a straight answer. But within days, Scott Everett, our government liaison, was able to get us paperwork stating that what we did was essential. That also covered businesses that supply us with our material. So that took care of another potential problem we had, availability of

pipe and other business inputs. We had one major breakdown in May on our plow. Once we figured out what the issue was, we contacted one of our associate members to see how long, or if, we were going to be able to get the parts we needed, knowing that there was a chance that it might be a while. Luckily, they were able to get us the part within 24 hours. I could go on for pages on different ways that it has affected us, but I feel like you all realize most of it, so I won't.

With all that said, I want to stress the importance, in my personal opinion, of being part of an organization like MLICA. I honestly feel that the relationships that we make in an organization like this make all of us stronger and more prepared to handle things which come up (like this pandemic.) I hope everyone else feels this way too. I am saddened that we will not be able to hold our annual winter convention in Lansing this year, but I look forward to the next time we can all get together.



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Ruben Auernhamer

December 19, 1924 - October 14, 2020



Ruben Richard Auernhamer, 95, was welcomed into Jesus' presence on October 14, 2020. Ruben was born in Vassar, Michigan on December 19, 1924, to Carl J. and Alma E. (Hecht) Auernhamer. Married to Mildred B. Loesel of Frankenmuth on October 14, 1950, it is fitting and representative of Ruben's loving dedication that he would join his wife in heaven on their 70th wedding anniversary. Millie predeceased him on January 16, 2020. He is survived by their 6 children and spouses, David (Betty) Auernhamer, Rev. Mark (Nola) Auernhamer, Heidi (Donald) Thorsen, Steven (Lisa) Auernhamer, Mary (David) Smith, John (Carrie) Auernhamer. He was "Opa" to 21 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren, frequently pulling each of them close for a hug, with a twinkle in his eye, to reassure of his love for them. Ruben is survived by his brother Howard (Edith) Auernhamer, sisters-in-law Nancy (Glenn) Auernhamer Klopf and Leona (Vernon) Guenther, and many nieces and nephews. He has now been reunited in heaven with his wife, parents, sister Lorna M. (Clarence) Kern, and brothers Ernest C. (Janet) Auernhamer and Glenn N. Auernhamer.

First and foremost in Ruben's life was his faith in Jesus Christ and his quiet, but determined resolve to share that faith with others. Ruben served in various capacities in the church, and he regularly invited others to trust and know Jesus. He had a tremendous heart for missions, and put that into action by participating in multiple short-term mission trips to Honduras through World Gospel Outreach. Ruben worked with the local chapter of Gideons International for many years, to help spread God's Word to all people. However, his greatest witness was to his children and grandchildren. The German hymns and prayers sung with them will be forever part of their memories.

Ruben lived a life filled with enthusiasm, curiosity, hard work and service to others. Growing up in the community of Richville, he learned and loved the life of farming. He worked side by side with his parents as they grew crops, vegetables and livestock for both sale and family sustenance. When Ruben was in his early twenties, his father sought to improve the farm's land by installing drainage tile. He purchased a trenching machine and placed Ruben in charge of this new farm operation. That was the beginning of Ruben's lifelong career, as he quickly developed and perfected the variety of skills necessary to tile and drain the many agricultural fields ranging throughout mostly Saginaw, Tuscola and Genesee Counties. Ruben spent more than 50 years in his profession as a drainage specialist and developed many personal and treasured friendships. Auernhamer Trenching grew as Ruben's son David joined him in 1978, and continues to thrive today with his grandson Adam now carrying forward Ruben's legacy. It was the people he met and the relationships he developed with his clients, whether farmers or engineers, that made Ruben the most happy in his business.

Family life was a priority for Ruben. He dedicated himself to his wife and children, fully supporting their activities and interests. He took great pride in sharing his love of the outdoors with all his children. Ruben loved to be in the woods, whether to cut wood, hunt, tap maple trees for syrup, or to go hiking. He enjoyed many incredible deer and bird hunting outings with his sons, and even an Alaskan wilderness backpacking adventure at the spry age of 75. Family camping trips to the western states and East Coast were highlights, as were family weeks at Camp Arcadia. Ruben loved adventure and his family always knew that when Dad got out the maps there was something fun being planned. He was well prepared for this final adventure, trusting the Bible as the only "map" that can guide the way, and confidently knowing that Jesus would be there to welcome him to his heavenly home.

If you wish to honor the memory of Ruben's life in a tangible way, please consider donating to World Gospel Outreach, Gideons International, Camp Arcadia, St. Lorenz Lutheran Church, or another Christian ministry of your choice.

Memorial service took place on Monday, October 19, 2020 at 11:00 a.m. at St. Lorenz Lutheran Church, 1030 W. Tuscola St., Frankenmuth, Michigan.

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The MLICA Scoop welcomes letters, subject to editing for accuracy and brevity. The MLICA Scoop also welcomes articles relevant to the land improvement industry. All letters and articles can be emailed to scook@michiganlica.org. Please include your name and phone number for verification purposes.

