

Granger welcomes home bronze medalist Sarah Hildebrandt



Photo courtesy of Penn High School

St. Joseph County Police welcomed home and congratulated local 2021 Olympic bronze medal winner Sarah Hildebrandt on Wednesday, Aug. 25 with an escort to Urban Swirl & Scoop for photos, autographs and free ice cream.

"Great job, Sarah, you made us all very proud!" said the officers. The public was invited to share in the celebration of her accomplishments. On Facebook, staff at Urban Swirl extended a big "thank you to everyone who came out to support our girl, Sarah! We hope you enjoyed the free ice cream, the fun welcoming parade, DJ, and more! It was a blast."

"A special thank you to the crew that made the parade possible: Mishawaka & Clay Fire Department, Mishawaka, St Joseph County and South Bend police departments, Mission Barbecue, Big Perm U93 and anyone else that was involved in the coordination and extra efforts that went into pulling off an epic welcome home party."

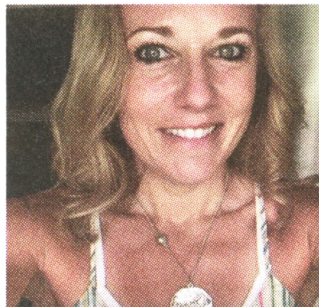
The Urban Swirl team added: "Congratulations also to Annie Drews on your Olympic Gold medal for women's volleyball! You've made Michiana proud! Another Penn graduate making history!"

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So many inquiries

By Kenneth E. (Ken) Lindsay, Harris Township Trustee
'My son-in-law lives in a subdivision in Harris Township. He has groundhog holes in his yard. Please come out and take care of it.'

Hundreds such requests find their way to my township office. After a while, I started keeping track of them because there were so many.

Townships are one of the smallest units of government, and have a very narrow set of responsibilities which do not include groundhog holes. As we've been exploring in this article series, Harris Township (HT) has a role in fire protection, welfare, cemetery maintenance and parks. Responding to related requests is pretty straight-forward. It's the unrelated ones that pose a challenge.

Residents expect services. They don't always know who is to provide them, so they start dialing. It is understandable. "People think we are the government," said a representative of Granger Paths, a nonprofit organization which works to address the lack of sidewalks in Granger. I'd contacted them in 2015 to discuss my vision of developing a township-owned vacant field on Elm Road into a park, as a destination on the Granger Path. At the time, their comment seemed odd to me. Now I understand.

As a public service, and to reduce the number of misdirected calls, this article touches on common inquiries and where related information might be found.

If you get to the right place with less effort, great. Governments are only authorized to do certain things, so getting to the wrong place is no good for you or them. Since everything they do costs money, which typically comes from taxes you pay, it might even save you some cash in the long run.

Let's start with street repair, which is both common and illustrative. Why can't they fix the roads? Agreed. Now who are "they"? The easy part is "not the township." [Disclaimer: That much I know; the rest I think I know.]

Next it depends on the road, so let's say you're driving to the Heritage Martin's when you spot a problem. Is it on a public road or a private surface such as in the Heritage Square complex? If private, it's unlikely any government is responsible. If on Gumwood Road closer to the state line, that would be the domain of St. Joseph County. If Gumwood nearer to Heritage Square, it might be maintained by the City of Mishawaka, which has been annexing into the area. But if around the corner on State Road 23, the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) is responsible.

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As a rule of thumb, the “they” follows formal responsibility, which is in turn funded by taxes. If the issue is in a subdivision, remember to think about the neighborhood homeowners’ association (HOA). If in the City of Mishawaka, perhaps start there, especially for streets, police, fire protection, water and sewer, and code enforcement. Outside city limits, St. Joseph County might play a role. And so on.

It frustrates me that it isn’t easier for requests to reach the right place. That said, townships don’t have the authority or funding to solve the problem. The 311 model was developed as one solution to the general problem, and is used by the City of South Bend. Access is by dialing 311, but also via a related website. Unfortunately, none of Harris Township lies within South Bend city limits, so 311 is of no help to HT residents.

For county services, there’s a Citizen Request Tracker feature on their website (www.sjcindiana.com), but for some reason you need to create an account to use it. There is no single phone number to call, so you’re left to a) pick a department to dial, or b) contact your County Council representative or c) County Commissioner. There are some maps on the county website to help to that end; look for the acronym GIS.

The county is the source for help with voting (Voter Registration), property records including assessments and tax bills (Assessor, Treasurer), dog licensing (Humane Society), permits and zoning for sheds and fences, and complaints about unsafe buildings (Building Dept.), signs (Planning and Zoning), electronics disposal (Household Hazardous Waste Dept.), and drainage issues (Drainage Board). Business licensing may involve the Health Department.

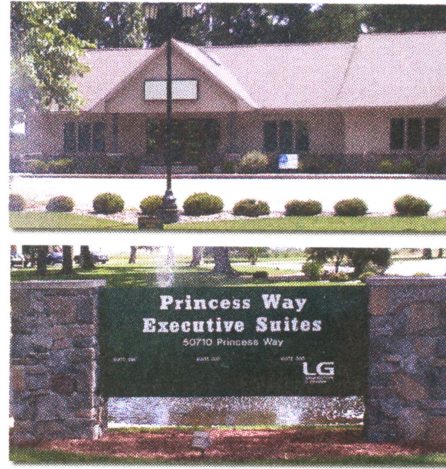
The county does not currently have a way to address tall grass. A program to address code enforcement violations is being proposed as part of the 2022 budget. For more information, contact Abby Wiles, executive director of the Area Plan Commission at 574-235-9810.

- When you’re curious what is being built, you can try Planning and Zoning, the Building Dept. or the county website’s Active Permits page.
- Power line issues should be directed to Indiana Michigan Power.
- The cleaning of paths and sidewalks depends on which it is, but the one along State Road 23 is an INDOT responsibility.
- Halloween hours are published by the Board of Commissioners and are typically available in local media.
- The Harris baseball and softball complex at Currant and Brick roads has no affiliation with the township.

Because I reply to each inquiry, I’ve learned too much about such things. Many thanks to Abby Wiles for validating some of the referenced county information. Perhaps at some point a more detailed set of guidance with phone numbers and links will be posted at the township’s website at www.HarrisTwp.com. You can also find the township on Facebook.

None of this guidance is meant for emergency situations. The good people staffing the local 911 center are always ready to take your emergency call and dispatch the proper help.

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