

40 Years
of Service
Excellence

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SEAN McCANN

THE DSO CONNECTION

Marys Gustas & Brown: An Odd Couple?

This is one of a series of articles spotlighting former DSO staffers.

the
60th **DSO**

60th District Service Office

315 N Burdick St., Ste 100, Kalamazoo MI 49007 * 269-382-4676

How did a young woman raised almost entirely by and around Gull Lake Republicans come to be Mary Brown's choice for director of the DSO? That's easy: the DSO is a non-partisan organization and in 1982, the best applicant was Mary Gustas. The two Marys may not have been identical politically, but they cared strongly about social justice and they liked to get things done. Plus, Mary Brown could assign Mary to attend conservative events knowing she had the skills to speak the language and find common ground. Mary Gustas has clear memories of the range of problems she and her five interns helped constituents with: shut-off notices, housing needs, complications with the Department of Social Services (now DHS), and tax returns. Oh, the tax returns. Before long, Mary could do a State return in ten or fifteen minutes. She learned the

importance of maintaining relationships with people who can solve problems as well as the importance of having internal organization and structure which in those days meant files. Lots and lots of paper files.

Some of the legislative issues of the time were allowing child victims of abuse to testify by video, and the need to reorganize the system for recording child support payments because the current system was inaccurate and caused many punitive situations for families. Later, legislation was passed to allow counties to develop their own child support agencies. One of the best parts of working at the DSO was the intelligence and curiosity of the college interns whose questions would drive Mary to think differently. The worst part—and this took no thought at all—was working at Bingo games in Portage. This was one of the DSO's fundrais-



ers and she can still remember the oppressive cigarette smoke—all for a very modest profit.

This was also the time when far fewer people were being committed to the regional psychiatric hospital and the length of stay for patients was also reduced. Located downtown in the Dewing Building, the DSO was a natural place for severely mentally ill people to visit to get help with a resource or just to find some social contact. Mary had a small

*MARY GUSTAS,
Con't on page 2*



Spring 'Listening Tour'

Representative McCann recently held the first of three scheduled stops on his "Spring Listening Tour." On Thursday, April 4th, at the Eastwood Community Room, Sean heard constituents' concerns about taxes, education, healthcare and more.

Couldn't attend on April 4th? No problem, he is also hosting listening tours:

- ◆ Thursday, May 2nd at Westwood Fire Hall 6:00—7:30 pm.
- ◆ Tuesday, June 4th at a Downtown location TBD—Please stay tuned to our social media sites for location.

Meet Jenna Huffman, Our new WMU Intern

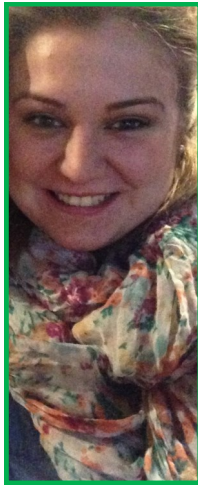
By Edie Trent, DSO Director & Jenna Huffman

Edie: When I took a call in mid-December from Professor Jan Maatman of WMU's Department of Public Affairs, Non-Profit Leadership program, I had an inkling of the treat we were in store for. Jan's reputation for preparing the next generation of non-profit executives is legendary, but the bright, energetic young leader who began her internship in January at the DSO is a great addition to our team beyond compare!

JENNA INTERN, Con't on page 2

Jenna Intern, *con't from page 1*

Jenna: I am involved with many things on WMU's campus. I am currently the Philanthropy Chair of Alpha Omicron Pi, a women's social fraternity; Public Relations Chair for Alternative Winter Experience; and a member of the Nonprofit Leadership Student Association. I am also a proud member of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and currently serve as a member-at-large on our tribe's senior youth council. Over my spring break, I represented our tribe at the National Congress of American Indians mid-year conference held in Washington DC. While there, I had the opportunity to meet with elected officials from all across the nation and get a tour of the Capital Building.



Jenna Huffman

Edie: While here with us at the DSO, Jenna is active on all our service fronts: constituent contacts and data records management, attending board meetings for both the CSC and the DSO, and venturing out into the community for agency knowledge and outreach. She has helped to produce this edition of the newsletter and performed related PR tasks.

Jenna: I will be with the DSO until late Spring. So, please stop on in to say hello! Or, please introduce yourself to me at our upcoming DSO Spring Brunch on May 19th.



Mary Gustas, *con't from page 1*

group of people with mental illness for whom she was able to provide some of what we now call "case management." Mary's work in each of these areas prepared her for her next job as Senior Support Enforcement Officer at Kalamazoo Friend of the Court. Mary held a variety of positions over the years before finding her way to the Comstock Community Center (CCC) in 2002. As executive director she oversees a setting to which people of all social classes and ages gravitate. Vanity being what it is, the administration found that participation in adult programs increased by 10-15% when they dropped the word "senior."

The CCC has sponsored trips to Florida, Savannah, GA and Ireland. Activities at the center include ceramics, exercise, and line dancing. The older participants are mostly middle-class (only 20% are low-income) while

Through Our Door Winter 2013 Who are we serving?

We are conveniently located in Downtown Kalamazoo, in the 300 block of N. Burdick, just a few doors south of the Rickman House. We welcome drop-in visitors, as well as phone calls and emails. We serve "face-to-face." Here are a few examples of recent constituent service work:

- A senior "snowbird," wintering in Florida, needed to track down her new driver's license that was supposed to have been sent to her winter home. We checked in with the Secretary of State, to discover that inadvertently, an apartment number had been omitted and it had been returned to Lansing. We arranged to have it resent.

74% of the families that make use of the center are living at the poverty level. The CCC operates a food pantry two days a week, offers scholarships to center classes, and has a 12,000 square foot childcare facility open to any families, regardless of where they live.

Mary grew up in Kalamazoo (her parents owned the Columbia Hotel—she compares herself to the storybook character Eloise) and she has mostly worked within an hour of her hometown. Her early work with Mary Brown taught her the importance of both relationships and systems. Though her work at the DSO was pre-computer and depended on personal contact, she knows that these relationships are no less important now. Computers only organize the files and send letters more quickly, but it is usually a human being who will help another human being in need.

By Deborah Gang

- A constituent was being allowed to restore a revoked drivers' license, however, she did not have a copy of her birth certificate from Illinois. Her adopted parents had never created a birth record for her. We contacted our local Probate Court who was able to work with their parallel systems in Illinois to make this happen. The constituent's sister was also able to get her birth certificate as well.
- The DSO became aware of a family whose child with a mental health concern is receiving treatment in Kalamazoo, but is a resident of another Michigan county. The family was having trouble navigating the funding and insurance coverages for these therapies which have regional boundaries for financial responsibility. We contacted the state offices that could help define and clarify the case management plan.

40 years: Serving the people and cutting the red tape!

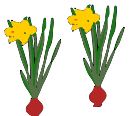
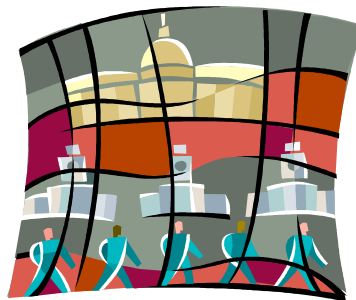
Do you know how unique we are?

The 60th District Service Office (DSO) has earned a reputation over the years for first rate, timely, and “in person” service. In very, very few of the other 109 districts in the Michigan House of Representatives, can a constituent walk into a local store-front office in their own district and speak with someone directly about an issue that involves a state office and get personal assistance.

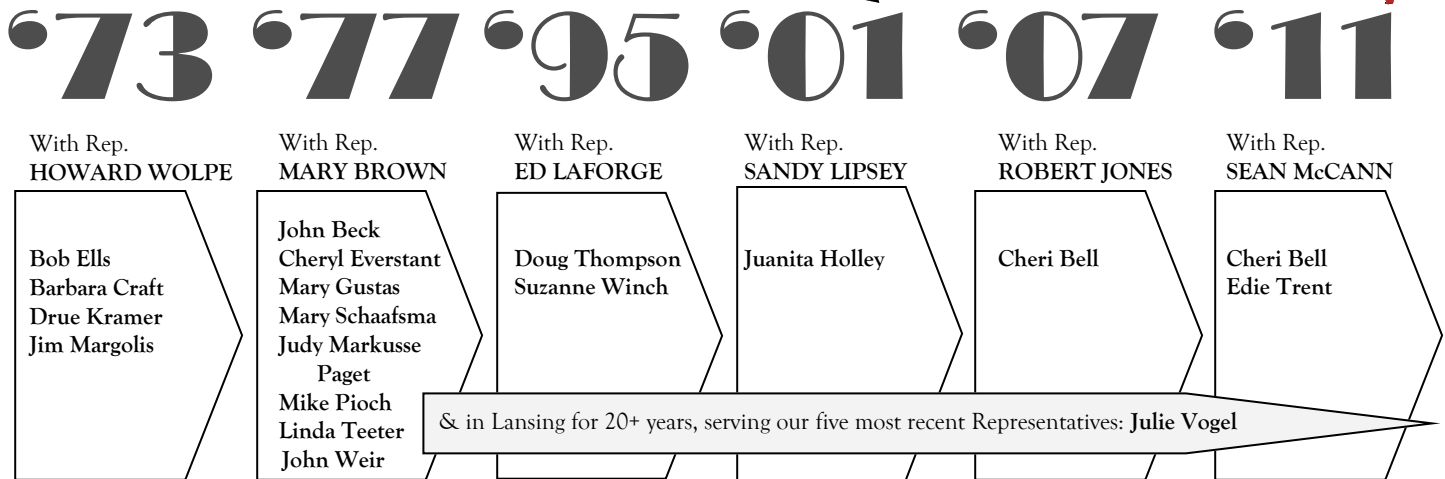
In 1973, the late Howard Wolpe envisioned the DSO as a way to help people feel less alienated from government since that was no other mechanism in place at that time to aid with bureaucratic red-tape and complexities at the state level.

Local supporters of the DSO believing in us, continue to make the DSO happen. Although the staff for the DSO is now provided by the state representative, the expenses to locate and run a local office are paid through fundraisers sponsored by the Board of Directors of the DSO. The 2013 annual budget for the DSO is \$17,550.

We are so appreciative of the commitment of the supporters of the DSO to continue to make this resource very locally accessible.



Our Timeline



How We Work at the DSO:

- We listen.** The DSO lends an ear to individuals or groups who seek to voice their concerns more effectively to local and state officials.
- Ombudsman.** DSO staff assists individuals navigating their way through the bureaucracies of local and state governmental agencies.
- Legislative Info Center.** The DSO seeks citizen reaction to pending legislation, keeps citizens informed of day-to-day occurrences in state government, and provides information on access to legislative research (www.legislature.mi.gov) in connection with specific bills.
- State Publications.** We make available numerous state publications which are available to constituents at no cost: copies of the Michigan constitution, landlord / tenants info, seniors' publications, coloring books & state maps. Teachers & group leaders may request in bulk.
- Referral Services.** The DSO provides a referral service to other agencies: local, state, federal, public & private for 60th District constituents.

May we add your email?

WhoRU@where.com?

Please help us build our email lists! We are looking to ways to extend our communications beyond physical mailers. We are asking our readers to provide the email address they would like the DSO to use for correspondence. Send yours please to etrent@house.mi.gov.

If there have been any changes to your snail mail address information, please send this along as well. We want to interact with as many folks as possible in our district, not just those who seek our assistance!

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State Representative

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Established in 1973, the 60th District Service Office is a non-profit corporate entity established for the purpose of providing Kalamazoo area residents with direct access to their government and increasing the responsiveness of the government to their needs and concerns. Services are provided without fee on an entirely non-partisan basis. While the staff for the 60th DSO is provided by the State Representative, it relies on the contributions of supporters to fund the daily operations.

It's Almost Time for the DillyDallyDaffodilDay The DSO Spring Brunch!

Sunday, May 19th from 11 am—1 pm

This year's Spring Brunch will be held at the homes of:

Sean McCann & Priscilla Lambert
4041 E. Hillandale



Debra Chope-Hughes & Bill Hughes
3915 Old Colony

It is not too late if you would like to be a sponsor of this upcoming event, please contact Mary Brown at (269) 569-5962.

You can SCAN to our website on your SmartPhone & Follow us on Facebook



60th WISHLIST—
These are items we'd love to have in the office.

- ◆ Paper shredder
- ◆ Bulletin board
- ◆ More suitable conference room table &/or chairs
- ◆ An iPad

