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PABC Newsletter #2 — December 2013

Helping the Homeless in the "Thumb" of Michigan

PABC Latest News and Statistics

PABC currently has 14 guests, though a family of 3 and a family of 4 have told us they may need to come within a few days. It is difficult for homeless families to remain together as the Veterans shelter in Akron does not accept women or children, and the other shelters in Huron, Sanilac and Tuscola Counties do not accept men. Just last week, a man and his son who had been with us for five months found a stable place to go.

PABC has been in operation for 3½ years now. In that time we have housed 242 persons, 96 men, 86 women and 60 children. We have provided 19,124 bed-nights, 9,517 for men, 5,440 for women and 4,167 for children. (the total number of nights that all of the people stayed). We have talked to 125 additional people (more than the 242), whom we either offered to help or for whom we found a better solution. Many times, the fact that a person has a definite place to go for the night allows them to concentrate on less sure, but more long-term solutions.

Our garden brought in a large crop of potatoes, kale, beans,

peas, beets, squash and other vegetables. Our chickens continue to keep us supplied with fresh, fertile eggs. We have had almost no trouble with mice this year, thanks to about 10 cats that seems to have adopted us. We see them with mice, squirrels, rabbits and an occasional bird. We do not need that many cats here. However, Huron County has no animal control service to take them away, and it is illegal to just drop them off far away or terminate their existence. Anyone who wants a cat is welcome to them!

We still plan to establish the automated scheduling system described in our May 2013 newsletter. We have been preoccupied with legal issues (see below) and turnover in our volunteer staff.

We are still looking for volunteers to serve as mentors and case-managers for the guests here. We would be glad for someone who wants to come to help one person a couple of times per week—or someone who wants to live here full-time and work with as many people as reasonable. Please call 989-738-7700 if interested.

Legal Case: Zoning of Church Chickens

Even though we have never had a neighbor complain about our chickens in the nine years we have lived here, we were found guilty of having “chickens in a business district” in a Jury Trial at Huron County Circuit Court on June 11, 2013. We were sentenced with \$425 in fines and costs plus \$500 reimbursement of prosecution costs plus 50 hours of community service. The fines were paid and the community service was fulfilled by the end of October: Norman Edwards made a new RecoveryInTheThumb.com website for the recovery community in Huron, Sanilac and Tuscola counties.

Even so, the case is far from over. The instructions to the

Jury were simply to determine if we had chickens and if they were in a business district. In various pretrial conferences, we were barred from bringing up the issue of whether zoning applies to unincorporated churches, or whether 40 chickens constitute the type of agricultural use that is barred from a business district. We made these two arguments in a Motion for Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict on July 1, 2013. The Jury was not asked to consider these matters of law.

The motion was heard and denied on July 15. The detailed legal arguments of that motion were not specifically addressed, either by the prosecution or the judge. However, that motion extended the time to file an appeal

—which has now been filed and a brief submitted. We are presently awaiting the Prosecution's (appellee's) brief which is due by January 1, 2014. After that, we can expect the Huron County Circuit Court's ruling. We can ask the Michigan Court of Appeals for leave to appeal to them, and ultimately ask the Michigan Supreme court for leave to appeal there. Either may simply decline to hear the case.

The rules for preserving and presenting legal arguments are rather complex. It is possible that our appeal will be rejected for one of those reasons, rather than ruling on the substance of the case. We will have to wait and see. Simply put, our argument is that zoning laws do not affect what unincorporated religious entities do on their own land. The courts have already recognized that zoning does not apply to military bases, schools, prisons and certain other

entities because they are governed by other laws. Whereas, churches, when they are not corporations, are not controlled by any state laws. It is only as churches choose to incorporate that they come under the great amount of legislation affecting corporations.

Our goal is to be a good neighbor and not cause trouble for the township. The case contained no complaints about our chickens bothering anyone. We believe that in order to carry out our mission to help the poor, we will need to exercise the freedom of religion that our founding fathers intended. This is more true now when many of the other shelters are based upon government grants and their accompanying restrictions, which tend to come and go quickly during this time of federal budget crisis and change.

Thanksgiving Dinner at PABC

The PABC staff hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for its Guests and the local recovery community. The Guests contributed quite a few delicious dishes. Some Guests were able to be away with family for the day, others had family visit here. We're sorry, but most everyone got through the food line before the camera man!



Why Longer Stays Are Needed

We have been frequently asked why some families and individuals stay at PABC for many months. That is a good question that deserves some explanation. Even though government housing programs typically can place a person with minimal income into housing in only a few weeks, not all of our PABC Guests qualify for those programs. Various difficulties take some or all of those programs “off the table” and sometimes homeless people suffer multiple difficulties at the same time. Most of the programs require that the recipients have some kind of income—whether from a job, disability or cash assistance for a child. Here is a brief description of some causes:

Waiting for Disability Income

Those applying for disability income have a very broad range of actual work ability. Some cannot work at all, some could do certain work—maybe part-time, others really don’t know if they can work, and yet others probably can work. The “don’t know if I can work” problem is very real. Many kinds of injuries and diseases have recovery periods that doctors cannot accurately predict. But even so, the lure of receiving a regular check—regardless of one’s work ability—strongly appeals to those who have financially struggled for a big part of their life.

The issue is further complicated by an overloaded disability system that now has twice as many people as originally anticipated. The time required for new people to enter the federal disability program is now two to three years. Almost everyone needs to apply three times, and involve a lawyer for their final application. This is true whether they are clearly disabled, or whether they have something relatively minor, like arthritis, but seem to be able to do whatever physical activity they desire.

Indeed, in all but the very worst cases, most people who become disabled must have an interim plan of survival until they get their first check. Some try to stay with relatives, some in a hospital and others in adult foster care. Some go from place to place, surviving wherever they can. The question is, “How will they survive until their first check comes in?” If they work much at all—especially in an official capacity where there is withholding from their pay-check, that can actually disqualify them from receiving disability. (Whereas, after people receive disability, they can work half-time without losing benefits.) If they can survive until their first check, they can be in rather good economic shape: The first check frequently includes back disability payments from the first day that they applied, amounting to several thousand dollars. People have been known to use that as a down-payment for a house, and then use the regular income stream to qualify for a loan.

But none of the above helps a person who is still waiting on that first check—and does not know whether or not they will even qualify. For example, some of our guests have had back injuries which caused them to lose their present job and not be able to get another job. But then, over the space of a few months, neither they nor their doctors were sure exactly how likely they were to recover. Similarly, maladies like seizures, chronic heart problems, etc. may surface for a while and then appear to go away. Does one try to work anyway and lose the chance to apply for disability? But the longer one waits to apply, the longer it will be before any assistance comes.

A long stay at PABC has given some people a chance to receive the disability they applied for, or to find out that they are able to work and to get a job.

Past Evictions

Many government housing programs allow the landlords to reject a potential tenant if they have been previously evicted within a certain number of years. By “eviction”, we mean the full legal process. In Michigan, if a landlord wants a tenant to leave, they issue them a “Notice to Quit”, either for non-payment of rent, or because they simply want their rental unit empty. If the tenant leaves on time, then there is no eviction court proceeding. But if the tenant does not leave, then the landlord must obtain a judgment for possession through the courts—an eviction. If the tenant does not leave at the specified time, then the Sheriff can actually remove them and their possessions to the curb.

Why do people get to the point of eviction? Why do they not get help before the situation gets that bad? The rules of some rental assistance programs require an eviction to be in progress before they will help. They do this to prevent people from applying for rental assistance frivolously. But for those who struggle with rent due to circumstances beyond their control, remaining in their place after a Notice to Quit has been issued is one way to apply for rental assistance. If the assistance does not come—government programs simply run out of funds sometimes—or some other problem arises, the tenant may end up with an eviction on their credit report. Many tenants are not aware of the long-term consequences of this until it is too late.

Felonies and Lack of Driver’s License

Some PABC Guests have been both skilled and hard workers, but have had great difficulty finding a job due to previous felonies or the lack of a driver’s license—which usually comes from driving and substance abuse. Many jobs applications request prior felony information and employers use criminal background check services.

Similarly, many jobs require a driver's license. Some involve driving, but other employers just conclude that a person without a driver's license will not likely show up to work regularly—which has at least some basis in fact.

It is possible to have a criminal record expunged after five years if there is only one felony, but some felons do not even know this. Of those who know, nearly all would need to hire an attorney to do it for them. So they end up with a “which came first, the chicken or the egg” scenario: they need to have their record expunged to get a job; they need a job to get their record expunged. Similarly, Michigan has “driver's responsibility” laws which frequently add \$2000 in costs in addition to the hundreds of dollars of fines for a driving offense. If these are not paid, the person will lose their license. So they need a job to pay their fines to get a license, but they need a license to get a job.

Family Difficulties

While most of these are struggles between couples, they also include difficulties between children and parents or siblings. The obvious and simple issue is that when a family is able to afford the expenses of living in one place, and then disagreements cause some of them to leave, one or both groups may no longer have enough economic resources to be self-supporting. Rent, utilities, vehicles, childcare, household appliances and other things may have been formerly shared, but now each needs to pay for their own. In addition, there may be child support, legal and other expenses that did not exist before.

PABC encourages people to reconcile where possible, explaining the biblical principles of marriage and friendship. This succeeds to varying degrees. At times, especially when one party is heavily involved in some addiction, there is little that can be done. The non-abusing party may already be encumbered with the debts and difficulties of the other.

For example, sometimes a person may happen upon a piece of mail in their home and learn for the first time about thousands of dollars of joint debt. Investigation shows it was spent on gambling, alcohol or some other addiction, and the spouse kept the bills hidden for months. The whole experience can be devastating. Should one try to help the abusing spouse out of their difficulties? Or should one cut their losses and run? In Michigan, a person cannot generally charge their spouse with stealing. They must settle the issue in civil court, which costs more than the problem they are trying to solve. A divorce is necessary to truly separate finances.

Dealing with a massive family problem, finding new housing and finding new means of support all at once can be devastating. Often, these events are compounded by depression or illness. A few months living at PABC allows

Guests to deal with all these issues as they are able.

Severe Debt

Like so many other struggles, debt can come about from one's own doing, from family/friends or from unfortunate circumstances. Cosigning for loan that seemed sensible can unexpectedly dump a load of debt on the cosigner. One who lost his job and can no longer make his car payment might find his vehicle repossessed and the repossessioners selling it for much less than the vehicle loan values, sticking him with the deficiency—thousands of dollars of debt in addition to the loss of the vehicle. Unexpected medical expenses, student loans, court fines—whether they are for the individual or a family member—also take their toll. Some people simply lose their jobs and continue to live their former lifestyle on credit cards till they can no longer make the minimum payments.

When creditors take debtors to court and get judgments against them, they can then garnish their bank accounts (take all of it), garnish their tax refunds (take all of them) or garnish their paychecks (take up to 25% each paycheck—provided they are left with at least a minimum-wage income). Garnishments, child support, court fines and income taxes all operate largely independent of each other. Each can take a big slice out of a regular paycheck without taking into account the other withholdings. People can end up with so little of their check left that they cannot meet basic living expenses. That leaves them little motivation to work, because a person without a job does not have to make the payments and many benefits are available to the unemployed. Nevertheless, the people are better off working and paying amounts they owe rather than having no productive purpose and big debt the rest of their lives. PABC believes it is good to provide an inexpensive living place for people who will work.

Finally, some people do need to file for Bankruptcy. The Bible teaches that **all** debts shall be released every seven years without court cases (Deuteronomy 15). God never intended people to be life-long slaves to debt, even if it was completely their fault. We encourage people to get help with bankruptcy if that appears to be the best path to stand on their own, economically.

Need of a Social Environment

Some of our PABC Guests seem to do better in an environment where they have daily responsibilities, attend daily Bible classes and have a social environment. They avoid or minimize substance abuse and depression in such an environment. After many months in this positive environment, they are often better able to develop goals and plans for the future. PABC hopes to continue to help them as long as they are making progress.

Summary

When reading through the above problems, there is a tendency to think: “Those people should have thought about what would happen before they got themselves into that kind of trouble.” But whether the people got into their trouble from their own evil or foolishness, or got there from another person’s evil or foolishness, the legal punishment for their error is not life in

poverty/homelessness. Their needs to be a way for them to make the transition from their former difficulties to a means of legal living on their own. If there is none apparent, the results are frequently mental breakdowns, crime, prostitution or suicide.

Providing transitional housing in a caring environment is often just what people need to get a job, pay off their fines, save up for a rental deposit, receive their disability, etc.

When Refusing is Right

The purpose of our homeless ministry is to provide shelter to people in need so they can make their lives better. We do not want to provide shelter to enable people to make their lives worse. If a person wants to stay at PABC to spend their available resources on substance abuse, insincere relationships, pointless strife or some other non-beneficial thing, we do not want to enable that behavior. It would be better for them to spend a few nights in the cold to realize where their lifestyle is taking them so they can desire to free themselves from their difficulty.

Sometimes, the people who call PABC are not involved in an abusive lifestyle, but they are victims of those who are—and have given up a home they rightfully should have because of another’s inappropriate behavior. If actual crimes have been committed against these people, or if they believe they are in danger, we urge them to contact law enforcement. But sometimes, they are just hiding from a difficult person. The difficult person may have designs on the victims property, may simply want them out of their shared housing, may be seeking a new partner or may simply be the kind of person that blames others for everything that goes wrong. They are usually verbally abusive to their victim, may misuse their victim’s property and may tell false stories to the victim’s friends, business relations or government agencies.

Even so, it is generally not best for the persecuted person

to simply pack up and find themselves homeless. It is not good for the persecutor, it is not good for the persecuted and it is not a good use of our resources to enable that difficult situation. Sometimes, we are able to encourage the victim to assert leadership and negotiate a solution to the situation. We may talk to both parties and help them begin to make peace. Other times, we refer them to government agencies or private counselors whom they both will heed. Sometimes, we realize that they need a little time to get themselves together before facing this difficult situation, and we bring them in as Guests for a few days. We pray for them, give them some biblical teaching and encourage them to realize a resolution is best for all.

Sometimes, they make peace and life appears better for everyone involved. Other times, we never hear anything again. And in a few cases, the result is a divorce, a separation, an eviction, a lawsuit or some other kind of parting of ways. But even these resolutions are probably better than a dysfunctional relationship that continues to get worse. After the breakup, everyone has a new chance to pursue a functional life—and each is hopefully wiser by learning from past mistakes.

Does dealing with these off-campus situations detract from our mission to provide housing for the homeless? To some degree, but it is the right thing to do for people who have a difficulty that will not be solved simply by giving them a place to stay.

A Real Person...

A young female former-PABC guest wrote the following—largely to help herself cope each day. She was the victim of a very difficult upbringing and struggles with many things. We taught her and helped her and she listened and tried. But many years of difficulty cannot always be quickly overcome. Without a PABC staff member whose main responsibility is to help Guests such as these, we had to eventually ask her to move on. This writing’s copyright (c) is held by the author, who gave permission for publication without her name.

May 25th, 2013

Sometimes we overlook the big things in life. We either over estimate or under estimate. We toss and turn in our sleep. We have unexplained aches and pains. Why is that?

Why do birds die if they eat ABC gum they find on the ground? Why do ants rebuild their colonies after they have been destroyed in the same spot?

Then we under look the big things in life. We either over estimate or we under estimate. We drink, we smoke,

we're broke. We wonder what our next move will be. Will I have a place to lay my head tonight, tomorrow and so on? Will I lose all sleep? Or dream bad dreams if I do sleep? Will it rain, will it snow? No body knows why summer won't come.

But why isn't there anything mediocre in life? Why can't we just be satisfied or content? Why's the problems too big, the amount of money too small and so on? Why's everybody asking, Why me?

June 6th, 2013

Many times I've cried alone. Many times I've wondered endlessly. Many things I've done wrong. Many things I can't believe. But until the day I met my maker, I'll just keep being me.

Later-When we make new friends, do the old ones forget us? When we think of someone, are they thinking of us too? When some new baby is born, do old people die? With every rain drop that falls, is they're an angel crying in heaven? When someone inhales, does someone exhale at the same time? When one relationship ends, does a new one start? When/if someone rises from the dead and comes back to earth, does someone go to hell? When the weak one gets stronger, does the strong one get weaker? When all else fails, try again, and again. And if that fails, try again.

June 7th, 2013

They say if you love something, let it go.

What if you love someone? And you let them go?

Will they come back to you? Is it worth the wait?

Are they worth all the tears? The wasted years, trying to get on by and to just survive? What for?

When you've known all your life, that he's your one love, your one true love, can you really let him go? Will he really come back?

If it comes back, it was meant to be!

June 8th, 2013

I'm homeless. I face the same things a lot of people face. And I also face a lot of things that most people don't. I have nights crying myself to sleep. I have a 2 year old daughter. I'm a recovering alcoholic. I also have a type of autism known as Asperger's. I've slept on the streets and when I had no other place to go, I was taken to P.A.B.C. I have friends. I have enemy's. I work a part time job at minimum wage. But, God is good to me. Just when I'm on the edge and about to fall, I'm gently lifted and slowly

placed back on my feet. You give me pen and paper, I give you the truth. Bluntly. But honest and somehow comforting. I was first homeless at 18. I slept a night on a bench in the rain. Then I went to a shelter in Sandusky, MI. After I got my own place, I got married. I became pregnant. Then a victim of domestic violence. I'm now a single mom, homeless with mental illnesses. But I'm alive. Somewhere in between there, I bounced to 11 to 12 different places. I'm now 21. Life is a challenge. But as for me and my challenges in life, I face them head on. For all things are possible through Christ.

June 10th, 2013

Some things in life aren't meant to be understood. Some things in death are also not meant to be understood. Then why do we try so darn hard to understand the things we're not meant to understand.

Then there's the misunderstood people. And their situations. The lives we live for the ones we love, wherever they may be mean more to us then trying to understand why we do what we do.

June 11th, 2013

Waiting in life on life's terms. Waiting for nothing. Waiting for everything. Life's a big waiting game. Seems like life's on hold. When you pick up the phone, when you go to catch a bus, when your trying to get your own home to even a job.

But why wait, do it today, do it now. Get on the phone, get on the bus. Move on and move forward. Don't wait and sit on the sidelines.

Later-On the road to recovery. Its a long hard road. Lots of turns and u-turns. Lots of blind spots and pot holes. Occasionally I come to dead ends. There's pedestrians crossing. Ghosts walking. I try to walk the line but I stumble and fall. God, don't let me get run over. Guide me on this long hard road. I could go on and on. The roads never end. But my road has just begun. I'm on a new journey. And I cannot do it alone.

June 13th, 2013

Don't we all take the simple things for granted in life?

Having a job, a home, a child?

We don't realize how lucky, scratch that, how truly blessed in life we are.

Were too busy with satanic lies and distractions. Were too busy being selfish and forget to be grateful.

We tend to get tied up in self pity and we don't understand

just how fortunate we are to have what we have.

Instead of complaining about what's missing, try counting your blessings.

Can I get an Amen?

June 14th, 2013

Life's too short. Live it up. Don't wait. Don't sit. Don't stare. Don't not care. The fat lady ain't sang her song. She's got some weight to gain first. Play with time. Don't be a passerby. Why? Because life's too darn short.

June 15th, 2013

Stuck. Stuck between right and wrong, yes and no. Stuck in the mud. Stuck on the side of the road. Thumbs up, smiles upside down. Stuck in the middle? Do I go with her real dad, who don't want me? Just to have a family, a broken family? So many decisions to make, choices with consequences. Were just stuck in life. Don't know where to go or what to do anymore because I'm stuck in between myself and the world.

June 16th, 2013

"Follow me," says the Lord. Teach me says his people to follow you, lead me not into temptation Lord. I don't want to follow the drama. Lead me away from the cruelties of this world. I will follow you. So lead me Lord, because I am so willing and so wanting to follow you.

Later-Little one, Little one. Watch, watch them grow. Little one, little one, what you reap, you also sow.

Later—dreams and hopes and desires. Emptiness and being bitter. Have faith they say. Have faith in what? Living a lie? Being shallow and fake? I'm utterly disturbed with the brokenness and sorrow inside. It's sometimes more than I can bare. Sometimes it's dark and cold, and I'm all alone. There was this whole I dug, and I dug it deep. I was heading no where fast. Addicted to pain and misery. Alcohol and sex. Sick of crying, tired of trying. I help someone only to be stomped into the dirt in return. Why try? Why not just give up and give in? Let the temptations begin. Swim the never ending oceans, dreaming and hoping again. Missing people. Going away all the time. Whatever.

June 18th, 2013

The healing power is out of control. It's up, it's down, it's in, it's out, it's yes, it's no. To my higher power, blessed be. To heal the lost from sea to sea. As I climb the mountain I'm about to fall. As I slip, I realize I have a hero inside myself. As I weep I know I have angels watching over me every step of the way. It's all about

being healed.

June 21th, 2013

*Confusion spins, it twirls and swirls. My mind plays games and I trick myself into believing it's love. I lie to myself and I cry to myself. I need to grow up. Stop giving in and give it up already. Dream another dream, if ever without the eye. Watching me and sucking out my soul. When it comes down to it, I choose the bed I made and I'm going to lie in it. When enough is enough, more rolls in. When there's nothing left to say or do, more gets said and done. The blood's supposed to wash me clean. Instead it stopped my heart. They say if you love someone let them go. If it comes back it was meant to be. They said to love one another. But all that does it make being sober a nightmare. When all you want is one more drink, one more quick f***, light up your last cigarette, cry yourself to sleep, fall in love, get stomped on, and carry me to my grave.*

June 26th, 2013

Still. The world stands still. It stands still waiting to be set free. Free from spinning out of control.

When we met for the first time and your eye caught mine, we were still. When you were born and I looked into your eyes for the first time, still, the world stood still.

Never needing to spin again. Still. The world stood still.

When you cry, I cry. When you smile, I smile. When you dance, I dance. Were in sync. Mother and daughter. Standing so perfectly still until the end of time.

Waiting for the world to start to spin once again. Waiting for you to let me catch your every fall.

As I watch you sleep, I wonder what dreams your dreaming. So small, but dreaming so big. Being still and soft to speak. At peace resting in my arms. I'll never let you go.

When the world stands still, watching you watch me climb to heaven, I'm always watching you. No matter when, where, how. Just be still and know I am here my dearest love. Momma's here.

June 27th, 2013

Screaming words of hate. Scream words of love. Search the endless oceans. Search the bottomless pits. I'm here for you. Do you see me? Or do you see with false eyes? I'm here with you now. Do you feel me as I catch your tears? Tell me the truth. I tell it to you bluntly. Filthy and broken. Sister they call you. Brother they call him. Hide in the dark and scream so loud. Words of hate, words of

love. Search for me, I'm always going to be right here.

Later-Creep and crawl. What's missing in us all? Tip-toe away from my foe. Don't be scared, be healed. Bless you!

June 30th, 2013

Anxiety. Stress. Drama. FATE! Tear me down, wash me away. But you can't kill my pride. For I am stronger than you. You may be able to send people to try to destroy me, and they may get me down, but only for a little while. Because I'm stronger than you and all your cursed ways and lies. You can steal my ability to fight back, but you can't steal my ability to give it up to the one who is

stronger than me. PTSD, Paranoia, no match for me. I have the one thing you'll never have. Courage to get back up when knocked down. Courage to start over. Courage to change the things I can.

July 2nd, 2013

Lost. Broken. Stolen. Empty. But I'm alive, so alive. That's something you can't take away from me. You can't kill me. When we walk away, when we forget to pray, God holds our sorrow and only He holds hope for another tomorrow. Pick up the pieces of what's left and keep going forward. You're alive aren't you?

Thanks for the Assistance!

Since our last newsletter in May, we have had individuals and groups give us many of the things we have asked for, as well as help in many other ways of their own choosing. We have received offerings of appliances, firewood, food, clothes, paper goods, toiletries, etc. People have come to make meals for the guests here. Some have sent presents.

We really appreciate this, and so do the Guests here. It is nice to know that someone cares for them—especially if they are recovering from a situation where they have been

abandoned by someone close to them.

For those interested in helping, we have sufficient food and clothing for a while. But we always have need of firewood, paper towels, paper napkins, toilet paper, feminine supplies, laundry soap and dish soap. We still could use another good vacuum cleaner and good riding mower and rototiller for next Spring. Utility bills are a never-ending expense—let us know if you would like to pay directly to our gas or electric company.

Port Austin Bible Campus
Newsletter #2 — December 2013
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Place
stamp
here

*This newsletter is being sent to people believed to have an interest in helping homeless people in Michigan's Thumb. If you would like to receive it via e-mail instead, would like to cancel or would like it sent to someone else, please let us know. Use the return address above, e-mail **PABC@portaustin.net** or call **989-738-7700**.*