

August 11, 2023



Dear friends,

August is National Black Business Month, a time to show recognition of and appreciation for local Black-owned businesses. Did you know that Black business ownership is up almost 30% compared to pre-pandemic levels? What's more, Black women are currently starting businesses as a higher rate than any other group. While conditions are improving, Black-owned businesses and Black entrepreneurs still face distinct challenges. For example, despite the increasing numbers of Black-owned businesses, just 1% of Black business owners obtain business loans in their first year, forcing 44% to fund their ventures themselves. Take time this month to show appreciation for your favorite local Black-owned business. Stay safe and healthy (and cool).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob".

small business **SPOTLIGHT**



Vero's in Racine to Hold Grand (Re)Opening

Vero International Cuisine in Downtown Racine closed in early 2017 for remodeling and expansion. Complications resulted in the work not being completed, and in December 2018, the restaurant closed down again, for what was expected to be several months, so that the project could be finished; Vero then ended up remaining closed throughout the Covid pandemic. Now, they are ready to reopen, bigger and better than ever, with an expanded second floor for overflow seating and private parties. A "Grand Opening" celebration is scheduled for Friday, August 18.

In Case You Missed It



Wirsch Calls for Brewers Audit as Team Seeks Public Money for Renovations

With the state budget approved and signed into law, one of the biggest topics on the Legislature's agenda this session involves funding for renovations to American Family Field, home of the Milwaukee Brewers. Often, when the state appropriates a large sum of money to an agency, a project or a cause, we will require an audit or perhaps periodical audits to ensure that taxpayer funds are being used prudently, for its intended purpose. The Brewers/American Family Field (formerly Miller Park) have not been audited by the state since 2002. Before the Legislature debates any sort of funding plan for the Brewers, we should know the full picture of

who we are dealing with. That's why this week I sent a letter to the Republican co-chairs of the Legislature's Joint Audit Committee, Sen. Eric Wimberger (R-Green Bay) and Rep. Robert Wittke (R-Racine), requesting that they direct the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau to conduct a financial audit of the Brewers, American Family Field, and the Southeast Wisconsin Professional Baseball Park District. I'll update you if/when I receive a response to my request.



Governor Evers Calls Special Session on Child Care Crisis, other Workforce Measures

On Tuesday, Governor Tony Evers called a Special Session of the Legislature, beginning at noon on September 20, to address the growing crisis in child care, as well as several other workforce issues, like paid family medical leave and job and skills training.

Wisconsin's early child care industry has been headed toward crisis prior to the pandemic; Covid-19 exacerbated problems like tight profit margins and low-wage workers leaving the industry. The bottom would have likely fallen out with the Child Care Counts program. Governor Evers created Child Care Counts early in the pandemic, and it provided the financial stability to help more than 3,300 providers stay open; recruit and retain more than 22,000 staff; and continue delivering quality care to more than 113,000 Wisconsin children. The program will run out of funding at the end of this year. Evers had proposed a \$340 million investment in the program as part of his 2023-2025 state budget, but that was removed by the Republican majority on the Joint Finance Committee (JFC). Democrats in both the Senate and Assembly offered amendments to restore program funding in the budget, but those were also voted down by Republicans. Without continuation of Child Care Counts, it's believed that 25% of Wisconsin's daycare businesses will be forced to close; others will face increased rates, a reduction in wages, and layoffs. Parents will be priced out of child care, further depleting an already tight labor force.

With this special session, the Governor has given Republicans a "do-over", a chance to get it right on child care, paid family leave, and more. They should take it.



It's Déjà vu, as Legislature Again Debate State Funds for MIA Project

I can't believe that we are still talking about this issue, but here we are. Since 2015, the UW Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project (MIA Project) has sent teams of faculty, staff and students from a number of different fields to assist in the discovery, exhumation, identification and return of the remains of missing-in-action American service members. The Project is funded mostly by the U.S. Department of Defense, with fundraising efforts adding to the DOD money. Because it is largely DOD funded, the Project receives its assignments from DOD. Around 2018, members of the Project approached the Legislature about possible state support. State funding would allow the Project to choose its own assignments, allowing it to focus more on Wisconsin's more than 1,500 MIA service members. In 2019 and 2021, there were bipartisan bills to appropriate \$180,000 each year to the Project, and Governor Evers included this funding in his budget proposals. Both times, Republicans adjourned the Legislature without passage of the bill and stripped the money for the Project out of the budget. Fast forward to 2023. This time, Governor Evers proposes \$500,000 for the MIA Project in his budget. Again, Republicans remove it and obstruct attempts by Democrats to put it back in. This week, the Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs held a public hearing, and wouldn't you know it, there on the agenda – Senate Bill 8, allocating \$180,000 per year for the MIA Project. Leaders from veterans groups all over the state testified in support of this bill, and they all asked the same question: “Why did I have to come here again to support this bill? Why hasn't it gotten done already”?



Look Who I Ran Into at the Wisconsin State Fair

On Wednesday, I was at the Wisconsin State Fair for a meeting of the State Building Commission, and who do you think I see? Kenosha's own Peter Barca, who was there for a meeting of the Governor's Cabinet. I was happy to get the chance to wish him a "Happy birthday" in person.



Parkside Renovations Approved by Building Commission

While we did have some fun, we took care of some important business, too, taking action on 29 different state building and renovation projects. That includes elevator renovation in the student center and upgrade of fire alarm systems in resident life facilities at UW-Parkside, which were both approved.



Motorcycle Club, Ken's Smooth Kutz Sponsor Backpack Giveaway

On Sunday, August 13, Ken's Smooth Kutz and the Wolfpack M.C. Kenosha Motorcycle Club will hold an annual backpack giveaway for kids heading back to school. The event goes from noon to 2 pm at 5003 30th Avenue in Kenosha. Backpacks and supplies available while supplies last.