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What ELi Did This Month and What It Cost ^[1]

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By:

Alice Dreger, Publisher



This month (March 2018), ELi was again featured nationally ^[2], this time by the Lenfest Institute for Journalism, which describes itself as "the first-of-its-kind organization whose sole mission is to develop and support sustainable business models for great local journalism." In fact, this monthly report we've been bringing you since January was mentioned in the profile ^[3] as one of the ways we are a model for transparency in local journalism!

And now here's that monthly report:

In March 2018, we had 14 local people work as reporters for us, and together they brought 40 news reports on a wide variety of topics (not counting calendar entries). It cost about \$6,000 as explained below. We continued to enjoy wide community support financially, having now reached over 600 individual donors [4] and with local internet provider LightSpeed [5] continuing its generous support of our website [6].



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ELi's Calendar editors Val Thonger and Ken Sperber kept ELi's calendar humming, bringing bulletins on upcoming public meetings, arts events, and much more, thanks in part to area tipsters sending in event info. Roz Arch continued helping us produce our free weekly e-mail newsletter [7], which is generously sponsored by Crunchy's [8].

Let's start with feel-good stuff:

At ELi, we are committed to nonpartisan reporting, but that doesn't mean we don't enjoy reporting that makes us all feel pretty good. There was a nice chunk of that in March at ELi. Sarah Spohn let folks know that the high school musical this year [9] would be "High School Musical," and Emma McIlhagga, who was in the show, helped out with photos for that story.

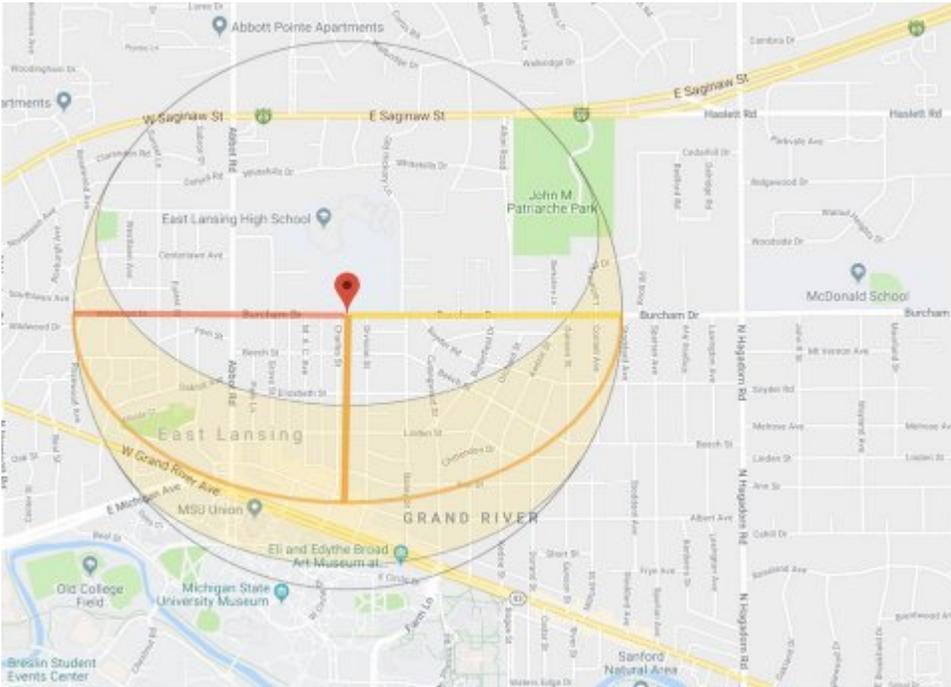


Sarah also brought us a report of Iorio Gelato ^[10], over on Trowbridge Road, working to give back to the community, and she explained why a Ten Pound Fiddle concert was on the bucket list of graduating student Monte Pride ^[11]. Chris Wardell featured for us another performer in that concert??Michigan Songwriters II??namely Ypsilanti-based singer-songwriter Sam Corbin ^[12].

Chris also let us know about the upcoming East Lansing appearance of Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter Tim Eriksen ^[13], and he explained why singer-songwriter Joe Shields is also known as Joe Cartoon ^[14]. ELi's Arts & Entertainment reporting is made possible with generous support coming from the Responsible Hospitality Council and local restaurants ^[15].



The ELHS girls basketball team made it to the state finals. We recruited a new reporter, ELHS sophomore Lucas Walters, to report what happened in Grand Rapids during the semi-final [16], with ELHS senior Kepler Domurat-Sousa providing photos. The next day, which happens to have been my 52nd birthday, I teamed up with my spouse Aron Sousa to report on the finals [17]. Our girls lost but hey, that means they were second in the state, and team captain Jaida Hampton received the top award in the state!



Aron also brought us an unexpectedly popular article on the annual return of Burcham-Henge [18]. (You have to read it to get it.) Chris Wardell brought us the good news that we can now recycle Styrofoam [19] in East Lansing, and Ann Kammerer brought us the story of Drew Choma's Team Drew Bottle Service [20], a unique East Lansing recycling endeavor. ELI at-large reporter Jessy Gregg reported on the possibility that ELFCO will reopen as a year-round farmers' market [21] in East Lansing.

Reporting on local governmental decision-making:

ELI's Managing Editor Ann Nichols (J.D.) again by request went beyond her usual duties to serve as a reporter for us on the legal complexities of local decisions about marijuana businesses [22], as managed by East Lansing's Planning Commission. I let folks know that Planning Commission was running into the problem of lacking a quorum [22] a report that led to a number of people applying and the Commission going back to full operational strength.



I also let folks know that City Council would be making a decision on a "diet" for Harrison Road [23]

, and Jessy reported that City Council was thinking of getting rid of the 50/50 [24] alcohol-monitoring law. Jessy also reported on the City's consideration of how to make street parking safer in terms of emergency vehicle access [25], especially on game days.

Continuing her in-depth financial reporting for us, ELi's Chris Root explained why the City's pension problem triggered a review [26] by the State of Michigan and reported on what happened in the Council's latest discussion of possible new tax proposals [27].

I explained Council's reasoning for supporting pension service credit purchases [28] by City employees, and reported that the City's "public engagement" work [29] on the budget resulted in payments to external consultant Public Sector Consultants of about \$20,000.

Jessy brought us the news that City leaders were asking [30] residents to respond to the appearance at MSU of white nationalist Richard Spencer by attending a Diversity Festival. Jessy also brought us a report from the festival [31], which drew a large crowd to All Saints Church.



In other Council news, Jessy also reported for us on Council's decision to disband the Citizen Innovation and Technology Panel and what that panel noted in terms of tech problems and opportunities [32] in the City, and she told us about plans to fix Bailey Park [33].

ELi Schools reporter Karessa Wheeler looked at plans for the rebuilds of Whitehills and Pinecrest elementary schools [34], and Ann Nichols reported on what School Board was talking about with

regard to plans for Red Cedar Elementary, school security, and sex ed [35].

I provided three reports on the cancellation of the Great Lakes Folks Festival, with our first report breaking the news of the cancellation [36], our second providing the MSU Museum Director's take [37] on the "hiatus," and the third, an investigative report [38] looking into who really made the decision and why.

And more investigative and on-site reporting for you:

By request, Jessy investigated a question many readers have had: what is ELPS's position on children biking to school [39]? I covered ELHS students' protest of gun violence [40] and what student-activists consider a failure of gun control legislation.

We also followed-up on two long-running, big stories ELi broke. In the case of wastewater treatment plant workers suing the City over alleged contamination with mercury and asbestos, we reported that the City has now spent about \$200,000 fighting the suit [41]. We also brought the news that the plaintiff's attorney has said City Manager George Lahanas is misrepresenting a key issue [42] in the case.



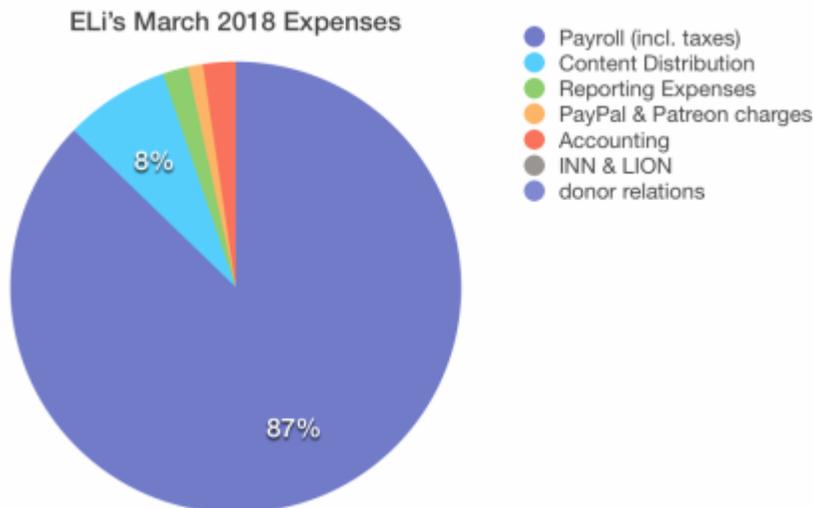
Finally, I reported that the federal government has ordered [43] East Lansing to repay HUD \$134,000 in grant funds following the City's failure to disclose a conflict of interest involving City Attorney Tom Yeadon and his partners.

What did all that cost?

In March, our expenses came to about \$6,000, and as usual, the great majority (about 87%) went to paying local people to work for us. In March, we paid 12 people to work for ELi (reporters, editors, tech), not counting the folks at Layton & Richardson who handle our payroll and tax reporting. (I volunteer all my services to ELi, as do some of our other staff/contributors.)

ELi's March 2018 Expenses

CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Payroll (incl. taxes)	5,221
Content Distribution	450
Reporting Expenses	109
PayPal & Patreon charges	65
Accounting	140
INN & LION	0
donor relations	0
Total	5,985

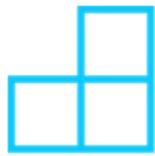


Because we did not reach our sustainability goal, we are now in a period where we are drawing down on the bank account. We will need to put effort into fundraising again soon, which unfortunately takes time away from reporting. If you'd like to contribute funds, please do so today [44]. Thank you!

Related Categories:

Your ELi ^[45]

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