

BENTON TWP.

# LMC to honor four alums at commencement

**BENTON TOWNSHIP** — Lake Michigan College will honor four alumni with awards during the 67th annual commencement exercise at the LMC Mendel Center at 2 p.m. Sunday, the college announced.

Alumni Service Awards will be presented to Brenda Kniebes of Coloma and Dr. Susan Lentz of Coloma.

This award is given to alumni who have made important contributions personally or professionally to the community or Lake Michigan College.

Clarence Beckwith Distinguished Alumni Awards will be presented to Valerie Dell Huber of Johnstown, Ohio, and Dr. Mark Kuriata of St. Joseph. Named in honor of the first president of Lake Michigan College, the award is given to alumni who have accomplished significant personal and professional success.

Kniebes, who grew up in Coloma, has taught elementary school at Decatur Public Schools for more than 30 years, first music classes and now second grade. She continues teaching and mentoring children in after-school programs.

Kniebes helps organize the Decatur Van Buren/Cass County Girls on the Run program. Each year, more than 500 third, fourth, and fifth grade girls participate in the after-school program, which encourages healthy values and goals.

Kniebes and her husband have seven horses and, as sponsors of the Four Flags 4-H Club, Kniebes mentors 4-H members in handling the responsibility of a horse.

In 2002, Kniebes started Soup Suppers in Coloma as a way to raise money for the North Berrien Food Pantry.

Kniebes studied music performance at Lake Michigan College before earning a bachelor's degree in mu-



KNIEBES

LENTZ



HUBER

KURIATA

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sic and a master's degree in elementary education at Western Michigan University.

LMC alumna Susan Lentz has brought her experience in gene and cancer research back to LMC students, teaching science and non-science majors how life functions at the cellular level, the mechanisms of communication among cells, and an appreciation for the biological underpinnings of health.

Lentz was a non-traditional, first-generation student when she started classes at LMC, and worked in the chemistry department as a lab assistant for Dr. Paul Stright. She says that LMC helped her gain confidence in her academic and leadership skills and made for a smooth transition to Western Michigan University, where she earned her doctorate in biology.

After WMU, Lentz was awarded an NIH postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Texas, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in

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## ALUMNI AWARDS

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Houston. There she studied a transcription factor involved in medulloblastoma, a form of children's brain cancer.

The Coloma resident has taught at LMC for 10 years.

Valerie Dell Huber said that when she was taking LMC courses in comprehensive social science, she may have been daunted to think that 30 years later she would be working in Washington, D.C., with Congress and the White House to draft legislation as the president of the DC-based National Abstinence Education Association (NAEA). But today the agency she co-founded provides advocacy for children and for the schools, health departments and other organizations across the country that provide mentors and risk-avoidance education to youth.

Huber credits her time at LMC as part of the foundation for her accomplish-

ments. LMC introduced her to the interplay between social policies and their very real impact on people. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree in history with an emphasis in political science and a master's degree in education at Cedarville University in Ohio.

After college Huber developed a new outlet for everything she had learned: she had four children. She was a very involved parent, and it became clear to her that her children's friends and peers didn't all have the same advantages as her own and other children.

The first agency Huber founded was REACH, a youth empowerment organization that served 25,000 students per year in southwest Ohio. Next, while working at the Ohio Department of Health, Huber co-founded HOME (Helping Ohio Marriages Excel) as she recognized that strong marriages are an essential foundation for raising healthy children.

She lives in Ohio with her

husband. Her children live in Boston, Arkansas, and Ohio.

Dr. Mark A. Kuriata is an osteopathic dermatologist who owns and practices at Advanced Dermatology in St. Joseph. Through Michigan State University, Kuriata is also a clinical assistant professor in the Department of Surgical Specialties and program director for a dermatology residency training program in partnership with Lakeland Regional Medical Center. As part of this program, Kuriata trains residents in his practice.

Kuriata discovered his love for dermatology as a physician's assistant in Rochester, N.Y. After medical school, he was chosen for one of only eight osteopathic dermatology residencies in the United States at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine/Northeast Regional Medical Center in Kirksville, Mo.

Kuriata grew up in Dowagiac, and was encouraged by the medical community in St. Joseph to return to the

area to start his practice in 1999. Since then, Advanced Dermatology has flourished. After five years, he was able to expand into a new office building on Maiden Lane, and he now employs a staff of more than 25 people.

Kuriata was named a "Fellow of Distinction" by the American Osteopathic College of Dermatology in 2013.

Kuriata has a doctor of osteopathy degree from the Des Moines University College of Osteopathic Medicine, a bachelor of science in medicine from Western Michigan University, and an Associate of Applied Science from Lake Michigan College. He said that LMC was "a springboard that catapulted me to reach my goals and provided me with the confidence to ask questions."

Kuriata lives in St. Joseph with his wife Shelley. They have four children, Elyse, Chris, Alex, and Zach, many of whom have worked with him at Advanced Dermatology over time.