

JULY 10-12, 2026

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Basketball

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The 2025 Norwich Gus Macker tournament honored newly inducted Gus Macker Hall of Fame members Steve Benenati and Jeff Abbott during opening ceremonies. (Photo from the Norwich Family YMCA)



Springbrook and Achieve played a game of unified basketball for the Norwich Gus Macker's annual high noon game at Dream Court in 2025. This year will be the second annual "Battle of the Badges" game between the Norwich Police and Fire Departments. (Photo by Morgan Golliver)

Game On: Norwich Ignites for the 29th Annual Gus Macker

**MORGAN GOLLIVER
BOBBY MERCILLIOTT**
EVENING SUN SPORTS WRITERS

The 2026 Norwich Gus Macker tournament returns July 10-12, marking its 29th year of celebrating the love of basketball. Despite a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event has demonstrated remarkable resilience, uniting the community once again.

The tournament's origins trace back over three decades, when then-sports director and current YMCA Executive Director Jamey Mullen collaborated with the mayor to identify a signature event to revitalize Norwich. Mullen recalled exploring various options, including a marathon or a river-based event on the Chenango, before the street basketball concept took hold.

"Then this street basketball tournament came to life, and it exploded," Mullen said.

What began 52 years ago as a simple driveway game created by Scott "Gus" McNeal has since grown into a nationwide phenomenon.

Norwich has fully

embraced this legacy, establishing itself as a premier destination for the tournament and a "brand identity" that is recognized by basketball enthusiasts from New York to Las Vegas as a true "staple of Gus Macker."

2026 Registration holds steady as interest remains strong:

Even though the Norwich Gus Macker tournament always focus on quality over quantity, the participation is growing. Last year's tournament registered 315 teams while in 2025, there were 286 teams, showing an increase. As the deadline approached for this year, there were only a little over 100 teams, showing a bit of a stand still. Following the Monday deadline, there were close to 300 teams.

Even with that jump, the Norwich Family YMCA and Macker decided to extend the registration deadline until Thursday of the same week, where at the end of Thursday and end of week total tallied to 312 teams. The numbers include both mail in and online registration and



show roughly the same as last year.

Registration numbers also calculate that this tournament is youth driven with 61% of the participants being under the age of 14, the new generation of Macker players.

"We're still a heavy youth-focused tournament," Mullen said. "Our 5-9 year olds, 12.9% of all our players are 5-9 10-14 year olds make up 47.6%. This year we have so many kids in that bracket, potentially. And usually that bracket is co-ed because there's not just girls or not

just boys. There's going to be some logistics, we're going to have multiple courts in the under 8 and the under 10 divisions."

These divisions will line court A, which starts on Main Street and down, where the baskets will be lower to support Macker's motto of "Anyone can play".

Registration and the bracket tents this year are sponsored by UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital.

"Any time that we can partner together in our community, it's a win-win.

We already do a lot for Chenango Memorial with our cardiac rehab program, the PT program, then also we do a lot of clinics together. So, we're happy about that," Mullen added.

Garry Root, UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital Director of Marketing and Public Relations, reciprocated that same positivity of partnering with the YMCA and Gus Macker, as well as other community events.

"The Hospital has been involved for many years and this year, we wanted to ramp up our sponsorships since the hospital is growing," Root said. "Gus Macker is just one of those events and we also look to sponsor other community events such as Colorscape, Day of Caring, etc."

With registration continuing to trend upward and younger age divisions leading the way, organizers believe the tournament is well-positioned to continue its nearly three-decade tradition in Norwich.

Resurgence of Youth:

The under eight division is not just occurring in Norwich, it is occurring across the nation, Gus Macker founder Scott

"Gus" McNeal said.

"We're at another boom phase like the '90s but with kids," McNeal said. "Kids in the past were watching the tournament and now they're playing. There's also more spectators per player and has been a change in apparel sizes to us offering little kids sizes in the Gus Threads tent. It's positive all around for kids and family."

Out of the 313 teams this year, 892 players represent youth with 45.2 percent being 10-14 years old with 11.6 percent aged 5-9, and 19.3 percent 15-19 years old.

"A lot of younger kids are starting to cycle back through again," Jamey Mullen said. "Kids of parents that used to play when they were kids, We see that in Norwich. You're just seeing generation after generation, which you want to see because it feeds the program and keeps it going."

In terms of experience, 18.7 percent have youth camp and YMCA experience while 16.3 percent have no experience at all and 14.5 percent of Adult

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In honor of Lauren Howell, a community treasure



Lauren Howell with Kathy Revoir helping out at a past Gus Macker registration together. Both ladies were dedicated volunteers for the tournament. (Submitted photo)



Norwich Gus Macker volunteers Jeff Abbott, Julie Brown Wallen, and the late Lauren Howell. Howell recently passed away this past April. This year's Gus Macker tournament will be in honor of Howell and her volunteerism. (Photo from Norwich YMCA Facebook)

There have been so many people and lives touched among the 29 years of the Norwich Gus Macker tournament. Many memories, laughter, and tears of a community of lifelong volunteers who give their heart and soul to their community. An inspiring educator and a devoted community member, Lauren passed away this past April at the age of 67, leaving behind a profound impact on the thousands of students she taught and the countless neighbors she served. Her commitment to Norwich was unwavering; even when illness struck, her passion for this community did not waver. She gave everything to the causes she believed in, refusing to step back when she was needed most.

The Gus Macker tournament, in particular, was a reflection of her spirit. She and her husband, Mark, were a steadfast team, both passionate volunteers who found joy in the very fabric of the tournament. While Mark could be found on the court refereeing, Lauren was the heart of the registration process.

“Lauren has been one of our longtime volunteers and it just shows that when it comes to volunteers, you don’t have to be a basketball player or an athlete to volunteer and make this event special,” Jamey Mullen, YMCA Executive director said. “ Often times, she would partner with the Muserilli’s in hosting a team dinner on Saturday night and would always bake for us. I know she meant a lot to us, so we just wanted to honor her in a special way.”

Tom Revoir added on and will be honoring Lauren at this year’s opening ceremonies with a special tribute to her volunteerism and community efforts.

“Lauren did everything for Norwich, helping with every event with Macker being just one of them,” Tom Revoir, YMCA Sports Director, said. “ She cried when she got sick and couldn’t help with Gus Macker. She always wanted to help.”

As this year’s tournament goes on, the spirit of the event will be anchored by the enduring memory of Lauren’s warmth and commitment.

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Game On: Norwich Ignites for the 29th Annual Gus Macker -

Continued from page 1 ►

recreational experience. Even with limited experience, Macker is still fun for all.

“It shows that people still love basketball,” Mullen said. “When Dr. James Naismith invented the sport of basketball in Springfield, Massachusetts, he had no idea how his sport would be a successful tool to bring people to town and raise money still today.”

Another big achievement in terms of the numbers this year is the increase of female participation, which was at a decrease last year.

Gus Macker Sees Steady Climb in Female Sign-ups:

After seeing just 32 percent of female players signed up for Gus Macker last year, this year’s numbers increased. 431 females signed up for Gus Macker this year, pushing the increase to 34.5 percent, which is a bit better.

Tom Revoir, the YMCA Sports Director, quoted the WNBA could be impacting the number of females playing basketball in general.

“I think more girls are playing now because of the impact of WNBA star and former Iowa alum Caitlin Clark,” Revoir said. “It is impressive to see that the number of females is more than half the boys.”

From Youth to Adult: Full Court Breakdown

With the abundance of Youth and under 10 divisions, the court layout for this year’s Gus Macker tournament is as follows;

- 26 courts:
- Red A: 10 teams of Male 6-10 years old
 - Red B: five teams playing in a Round Robin with the top four teams advancing, Male 6-10 years old
 - Red C: 11 teams, Male 6-10 years old
 - Red D: 11 teams, Male 6-10 years old
 - Red E: 13 teams, Female 6-10 years old
 - Red F: 13 teams, Male 11-12 years old
 - Red G : 15 teams, Male 11-12 years old
 - Red H: 12 teams, Female 11-12 years old
 - Red I: 12 teams, Female 11-12 years old
 - Red J: 18 teams, Male 13-14 years old
 - Red K: 18 teams, Male 13-14 years old
 - Red L: 14 teams, Female 13-14 years old
 - Red M: 14 teams, Female 13-14 years old



Volunteers and Gus Macker staff share a high-energy moment with Steve Benenati and Jeff Abbott as the 2025 Norwich Gus Macker tournament was underway. (Photo from Norwich Gus Macker Facebook)

- Red N: 11 teams, Male 15-16 years old
- Red O: 13 teams, Male 15-16 years old
- Red P: 16 teams, Female 15-16 years old
- Red Q: 14 teams, Male 17-18 years old
- Red R: six teams, Female 17-18 years old
- Yellow S: 13 teams, Male 19-24
- Yellow T: Male 19-24
- Yellow U: Male 25-29
- Yellow V: Male 30-34
- Yellow W: Male 35-39
- Yellow X: Male 40 +
- Top Mens: 14 teams
- Top Women’s: 13 teams

New innovations implemented from other Macker tournaments:

This year, Jamey Mullen had been “moonlighting” at other Gus Macker tournaments across the nation, where he picked up on new ideas. He really liked two major ideas that he brought back to Norwich; milk crates and online signups.

To honor his dedicated support at numerous Gus Macker tournaments, founder Scott “Gus” McNeal shared a special tribute to Mullen.

“Mullen has built a great rapport with our Gus Macker staff and has been a great spokesperson for Macker,” McNeal said. “He really does great with building relationships and talking peer to peer. I always tell organizers for New York tournaments to reach out to him for help.”

Milk Crates:
Mullen got the milk crate idea from a Macker tournament in Chillicothe, Ohio, roughly nine hours from Norwich. The tournament had teams in the upper 100s, just shy of 200 teams.

“So, the milk crate helps keep everything together, the scoreboard, stopwatch, clipboard, bracket, rule sheet, whistle, and even the basketball,” Mullen said. “That was something Chillicothe did and I thought it was a really good idea.”

Online sign ups:
Mullen also implemented online sign-ups for tech savvy people, but that didn’t roll out as expected. “People have been signing up on it, but Norwich is still old school with people sending us a text message, an email, a phone call,” Mullen said. “They’ll come to the front desk and sign up in the binder, so people aren’t used to the online option. If somebody signs up online, we’re just getting their name and contact information and we would reach back out to them.”

Getting volunteers to sign up every year is a challenge, but in the end, the community comes together to put on a successful event.

“The Norwich Gus Macker has been running the event for so long, and I feel that we do a very good job with our event,” Mullen said. “I would put us up against any Gus Macker in the country for quality of event and our workers and everything.”

New York has three Gus Macker tournaments so far each summer with Norwich continuing to be the leading tournament across the state with celebrating 29 years. Only Michigan has celebrated the tournament longer with the tournament’s origins dating back to 1974 in the McNeal driveway and then Ludington, Michigan has celebrated the tournament

for 36 years.

Sponsors:
The Sponsors of the tournament include: NBT Bank, Charles J. Husted, Inc., Rentals to Go, Preferred Mutual, Army National Guard, Subaru, The Evening Sun, 12 WBNG, WCDO, NYCM Insurance, Springbrook, BlueOx, Stadium Sports Bar and Grill, Residential & Commercial, Park Place Sports Bar and Grill. PennySaver, Red Roof Inn, The Storage Center, Ninas, Build Block CNY, R.C Smith Foundation, UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital, etc.

“These are the different businesses that support the event. So, depending on their level, we’ll give them, a team or two to enter into the event for free for their generosity,” Mullen stated.

“BlueOx gets the tournament started with their third knockout contest,” Mullen said. “They do that on Friday evening just as people are downtown and getting fired up and excited and out on the streets participating. Using the courts and creating their own little games and little tournaments before the tournament even starts, which is a great thing. It’s called the Gus Macker basketball tournament and people think that it’s one big tournament. No, it’s almost 28 different tournaments going on.”

“We’re happy that they [UHS] are a part of our event,” Mullen said. “UHS and the YMCA are two strong community not-for-profits that have both been in existence for over 100 years each. So, we’re on 163 years for the Y, and the hospital is over 100 years old themselves.”

Live Event NY: is your source for quality event services & production in the Central New York area, have expanded their outreach throughout the community. They help provide tables, chairs, sound systems, and sponsor the Kids Zone near Norwich Copies Plus parking lot.

“We’re trying something new this year with Live Event NY, where we want to put a tent in between each basketball unit, so our scorekeepers have a spot to sit with table and chair and flip chart,” Mullen said. “If it’s sprinkling or raining, our volunteers are under a tent, and if it’s too sunny and they need a little shade, we’ve got the tent there as well. Officials can go in there too.”

Thank you to all the sponsors and community support for helping this tournament go on for the past 29 years.

2026 Macker Schedule Friday, July 10:

The tournament setup will be throughout the day, with registration opening from 4 p.m to 7pm in the Norwich Firehouse. Registration is sponsored by UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital. At 5 p.m., the concession stands will open, where vendors will be serving food, just in time for the BlueOx Knock-out competition at 6 p.m.

Battle of the Badges:
After Springbrook and Achieve took to the court for a unified basketball game at noon last year, the Battle of the Badges game returns for a second time. The first time was played in 2024 in a friendly heroes game between the Norwich Fire and Police

Departments. The Battle of the Badges game also shows a great opportunity for the two departments to be seen outside of an emergency situation.

“Nice for the public to see us as humans; we like to support the community as much as they support us,” stated Chief Perry from the Norwich Fire Department.

Saturday July 11:
Registration will be from 7 am to 11. Am. Opening ceremonies will take place at 8 am with remarks and introductions from Scott McNeal and his Macker staff. There will be an opening prayer by Zach Thorp. With the national anthem being played over the speaker, the Do or Die Shot taken by Mayor Robert Jeffrey rounding up the events. Games will begin at approximately 8:30 a.m., depending on the brackets. The Dream Court will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., while Live Event NY’s Kid Zone will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sunday July 12:
Games begin at 8 a.m. as the Dream Court runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and the Kids Zone from 10 to 5 p.m.

Excitement from Gus himself about coming to Norwich:

Scott “Gus” McNeal and his staff are excited and always anticipate coming to Norwich for the tournament, where even the newbies are looking forward to attending.

“Our newer staff members are excited to come to Norwich and we have been talking and bragging about the Norwich tournament and how fun it is,” McNeal said.

Look for McNeal and his staff to be extra flashy this year with better outfits, going with the Semi-pro theme.

Catch McNeal around the tournament on Friday night and challenge him to a game of “GUS” on Saturday morning before opening ceremonies on the dream court.

Good luck to all players.

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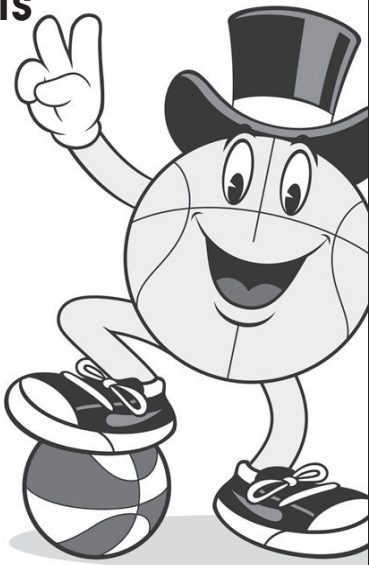


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Husted Trucking goes the extra mile for the Norwich Gus Macker Tournament

BOBBY MERCILLIOTT
EVENING SUN SPORTS WRITER

NORWICH — After the Norwich Family YMCA requested help with moving the Gus Macker basketball baskets from Rochester to Norwich, NY on social media, the community came out in a big way.

Charles J. Husted, Inc., out of Mount Upton, NY, answered the call and was on the job.

“When we saw the ad on Facebook, we jumped at the opportunity to help!” said Bridget Rice from Husted Inc.

For the company, the decision was made easily to help.

“Gus Macker is a big event that brings people across our state and beyond, and when there was a need, we were happy to step in and help make it happen,” Rice explained. “Participating in such a big event for this community holds special meaning. “It means a lot to be able to contribute in



Charles J. Husted Inc, out of Mount Upton, NY, answered the call to transport the Gus Macker baskets from Rochester to Norwich, NY for this year's Gus Macker tournament. (Photo from Norwich Gus Macker Facebook)

a hands-on way to something that’s such a fun long-standing part of the community”.

Both the Gus Macker tournament as well as the Norwich YMCA play such a vital role in the area, which is why Husted is proud to support the efforts as well.

“They [Gus Macker and the YMCA] both play an important role in bringing people together, creating excitement in the area, and

supporting a tradition that many people look forward to every year,” Rice said. It’s something special to see that kind of dedication and community spirit here in our county”

While the assistance also benefits the company through community involvement, the motivation runs much deeper.

“We feel it’s more about being able to step in and help when there’s a need and make sure the setup

goes smoothly. Being part of the process and helping it all come together is something we’re proud of, and it feels good to be part of something that brings so many people together.”

With this many team members at Charles J. Husted, Inc, the company has personal and sentimental values to the tournament.

“A handful of us here at Husted were former players, refs, or were out there

cheering on our friends and family from the curb. While our playing days are behind us, it means a lot to now support the event in a different way behind the scenes,” Rice stated.

Looking in the future, Charles J. Husted, Inc. is committed to continue supporting the Norwich Gus Macker Tournament.

“We hope this is just the start of many years of donating our truck and

driver to help make the event possible!”

When the baskets returned home, Tom Revoir, Jamey Mullen, Husted Trucking, Burrell’s Excavating and Mike Fradenburg, Jay Lautrup, and Todd were big helpers in unloading the baskets near the fire department and City depot in time to be set up this coming weekend, July 10-12.

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Good Luck To All Gus Macker Players!



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The Burrell family welcomes all of the teams, their families, and friends to this year's tournament and extends their gratitude to the volunteers who make the tournament a success and to the Norwich Family YMCA for all they provide for our community and for bringing Gus Macker back to Norwich to kick off Summer 2026.



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2026 Gus Macker Schedule of Events

Friday, July 10, 2026

Team Registration –
4:00 pm to 7:00 pm
Norwich Firehouse

Concession Stands Open.....5:00 pm

Knock-Out Competition

6:00 pm & at: Top Men’s And Women’s Court



Saturday, July 11, 2026

Team Registration –
7:00 am – 11:00 am
Norwich Firehouse

Opening Ceremonies.....8:00 am

Prayer: Pastor Zach Thorpe of City Church Norwich

National Anthem: Sung by

Do or Die Shot: Norwich Mayor Robert Jeffrey

GAMES BEGIN.....8:30 AM

DREAM COURT
10:00 am – 4:00 pm

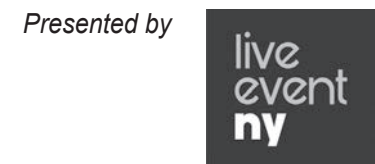
KIDS PLAY AREA
10:00 am – 5:00 pm



Sunday, July 12, 2026 GAMES BEGIN 8:00 AM

DREAM COURT
10:00 am – 5:00 pm

KIDS PLAY AREA
10:00 am – 5:00 pm



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Welcome to Norwich, New York! 29th Annual Norwich YMCA Gus Macker 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament July 11 & 12, 2026

The Norwich Gus Macker 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament has been a staple in the City of Norwich since 1996. For 31 years, our community has prepared to host a Gus Macker tournament—missing only two years during the COVID pandemic. In 2026, we are proud and excited to welcome Gus Macker back for Year 29 on the streets of downtown Norwich.



The Norwich Gus Macker returns to East Main Street on July 11–12, 2026, welcoming family and friends, neighbors, alumni, and visitors home to Norwich. Open to youth and adults of all skill levels, the tournament offers an exciting opportunity to showcase basketball talent while celebrating community and tradition..Start planning, start practicing, and get ready for an unforgettable summer weekend in Norwich, New York.

To our players—welcome to a tournament that celebrates sportsmanship, competition, and community. Whether this is your first Macker or your twenty-eighth, we hope you enjoy the energy of downtown Norwich, the camaraderie of your teammates, and the thrill of the game.

To our families, friends, and fans—thank you for being here. Your cheers, your support, and your presence help make this event special, year after year.

Congratulations to the Gus Macker organization on over 52 years of basketball excellence. And welcome to Norwich—home of New York State’s longest-running and largest Gus Macker tournament, and one of the longest-running Macker events in the entire country.

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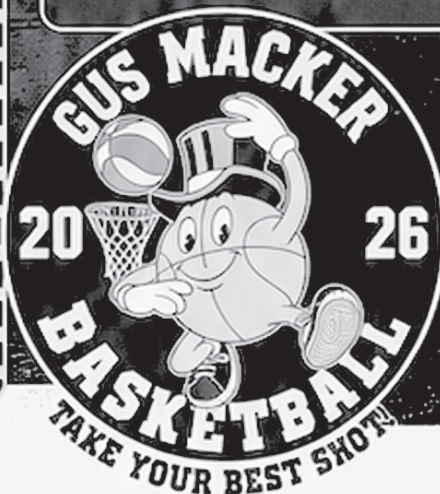
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City of Norwich Mayor Robert D. Jeffrey to take the infamous “Do or Die Shot”

BY MORGAN GOLLIVER
EVENING SUN SPORTS EDITOR

Every year, across the nation at Gus Macker tournament opening ceremonies before the games begin, the infamous “Do or Die Shot” occurs. It is a silly and special moment as the basketball gets passed around the crowd and drum roll roars for a special person in the community to shoot a basket. If they make it, the tournament goes on. But if they miss it, the tournament is canceled and everything has to be packed up. However, the participant gets multiple tries.

The Norwich Gus Macker tournament honors this silly quirk and has featured participant such as AK from Sidney, Former Mayor Brian Dolliver, The Gawronski family, and last year’s very special moment that will never be forgotten between newly members of the Macker Hall of Fame Steve Benenati and Jeff Abbott.

This year, newly elected Mayor Robert D. Jeffrey has been chosen to take the infamous shot. Jeffrey, a Norwich 2024 alum, played on the Norwich basketball team and even in Gus Macker tournaments himself, is proud to represent Norwich in this moment both on a personal level and a professional level.

Back in the late 90s, Mayor Joe Bivano had approached Jamey Mullen and the YMCA with coming up with an idea to bring more tourism to Norwich. That idea came to life as the Norwich Gus Macker tournament, which has been a staple of the



Mayor Robert Jeffrey gus busting at last year's Norwich Gus Macker tournament. Jeffrey is partaking in the infamous “Do or Die Shot” during opening ceremonies before games begin on Saturday, July 11 and then refereeing throughout the weekend. (Photo from Norwich Gus Macker Facebook)

summer for the past 29 years.

Jeffrey reiterates that ‘staple’ statement as he appreciates how Macker has been a major celebration to the City of Norwich.

“Gus Macker really kick starts the summer for all the other event that we have in downtown Norwich,” Jeffrey said. “Gus Macker is really that catalyst, where you bring tens of thousands of people over a two-day period and they’re all celebrating the sport of basketball. I can’t tell you of any other city that’s shutting down their Main Street to see thousands of people watch basketball and that is such a large component for tourism here in the City of Norwich.”

Jeffrey also added that Gus Macker week-

end helps financially as well.

“There’s lots of people coming here to this community for the first time,” Jeffrey said. “They’re getting their first impression. They’re going to local businesses, purchasing fuel, in the shops. You certainly see that consumer spending and that sales tax revenue increase in the city as well as all over Chenango County, over the two-day tournament as well as lodging in the hotels downtown and even in Airbnbs. Gus Macker provides a significant economic boom to our area.”

As a former student-athlete at Norwich High School and a Gus Macker player, Jeffrey has fond memories of his time around the tournament.

“It was almost like

Christmas morning of that Friday, getting a hard sleep and looking forward to watching all the different teams and get out there and play,” he said. “To my family and myself, it was the excitement of the summer and it’s almost like you waited since last Gus Macker to go out and play again. It’s just really special for my family, especially my siblings. None of us are playing this year, but it’s more of a volunteerism weekend for us.”

As a former basketball star, Jeffrey has picked up a basketball here and there and is practicing on what shot he might take.

“I asked Tom [Revoir] what are you looking for the shot and he said I could pick my shot,” Jeffrey said. “Well, I can’t



Mayor Robert Jeffrey will take the “Do or Die Shot.” (Submitted photo)

dunk so that’s an automatic ‘No’ and I know that nobody has ever missed the shot and I don’t want to miss it because I was told that if I do that the weekend is canceled. So, I got to figure out where I’m going to take the shot from and I’m real-

ly looking forward to taking a shot. It’s kind of a surreal moment for me for somebody being around Gus Macker most of my life now.” Good luck, Mr. Mayor, who will also be officiating as a Gus Buster all weekend as well!

Local passion, big-time hoops: Norwich Alum revives Macker spirit in Rochester

BY MORGAN GOLLIVER
EVENING SUN SPORTS EDITOR

The recent return of the Gus Macker tournament to Rochester, held June 27–28, was strengthened by a connection to a community.

Kate Ryan Pellett, a 2003 graduate of Norwich High School and the YMCA of Greater Rochester's Vice President of Strategic Administration, was a pivotal behind that return. Inspired by the long-standing tradition of the Gus Macker in her hometown of Norwich, Pellett brought a personal commitment to building that same legacy in Rochester.

The weekend was vibrant and challenging, as the tournament coincided with the city's renowned Jazz Festival. Navigating the logistics during such a busy time for Rochester added an extra layer of excitement to the event.

After the tournament ended its run in the city in 2019 due to the challenges of sustaining a vol-

unteer base and the widespread disruptions caused by COVID-19, the YMCA of Greater Rochester took a bold step to bring it back. This year, Rochester proudly became the third city in New York State to host the iconic Gus Macker tournament.

For Pellett, she said the event is close to her heart. While her work keeps her busy and she isn't always able to make it home, she cherishes knowing that the tournament is held in the same weekend each July in Norwich. She loves returning to the event, noting that it brings vibrancy in a place that doesn't have that.

She recalled the challenges of navigating the tournament in the era before smartphones, when finding friends across the courts required more luck than planning, and now enjoys the ease of coordinating through text, as well as the tradition of watching friends' kids compete in the same event that once defined her own summers.

It became clear early on that the goals of the Gus Macker and the YMCA of Greater Rochester were perfectly aligned: the tournament serves as an ideal vehicle to drive people back into the heart of the community, fostering the same deep-rooted spirit of local pride found in tight-knit communities like Norwich. A highlight of the planning process was the collaboration with Norwich's own Jamey Mullen. Pellett hailed Mullen as the "poster child for Gus Macker" due to his unwavering dedication to the event and organization throughout the entire weekend. Pellett and her staff noted that they benefited immensely from the opportunity to learn from Mullen's expertise during the planning and execution phases.

Following the tournament's success, the spirit of community continued to travel. Organizers from the Norwich YMCA, supported by the team at Husted Trucking Inc.,



Norwich's Jamey Mullen poses for a photo with YMCA of Greater Rochester Vice President of Strategic Administration and Norwich alum Kate Ryan Pellett and former Norwich resident Beth Branham Groot. (Photo from Norwich Gus Macker Facebook)

arrived to carefully transport the basketball courts from Rochester back to Norwich, quite literally transferring the love and the legacy of the event to a place that has held the tournament for the last 29 years, the staple of New York Gus Macker.

As Pellett noted, when the tournament is done right, it becomes much more than just a series of games. Basketball serves as the catalyst for something greater. It provides a dedicated way for the community to come together, bridging neighborhoods and bringing people into the heart of the city while reinforcing a

sense of community. Beyond the competitive excitement, the event was intentional in its design to provide a safe, welcoming environment for youth and families.

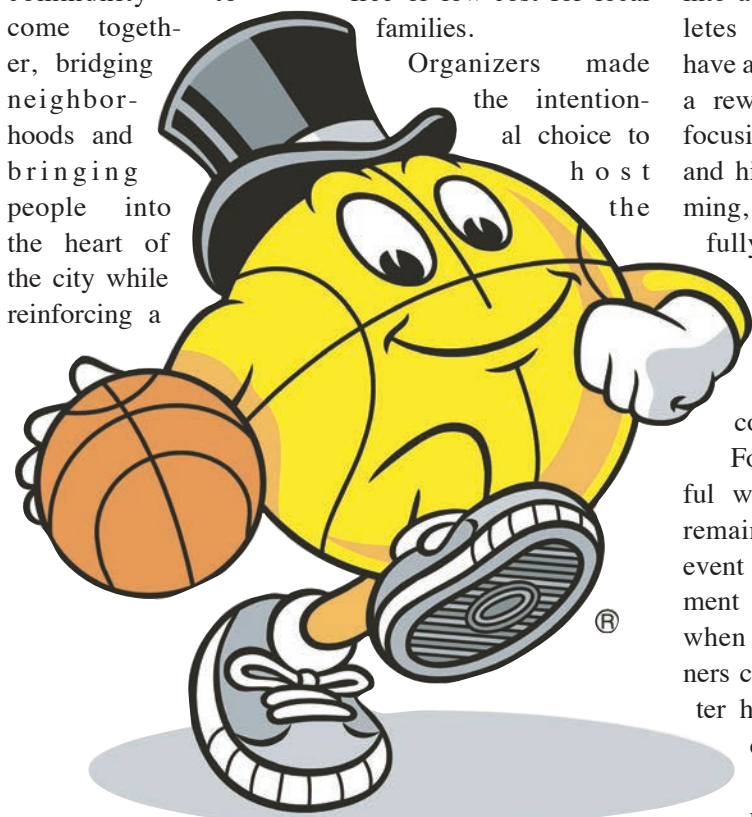
The success of the event was tangible: 142 teams and 568 players took to the courts. Furthermore, the tournament secured \$75,000 in sponsorships, with all proceeds dedicated to bolstering urban involvement by covering membership and activity costs to keep programs free or low-cost for local families.

Organizers made the intentional choice to host the

tournament at Red Wings Stadium, located in the center of the city. It was a thrilling experience for the community to witness two distinct sports converging in one location, as the high-energy atmosphere of the Macker transformed the home of minor league baseball into a vibrant basketball hub.

The Macker is more than just a tournament; it is about community, grit, and the pure joy of the game. For the planning team, seeing these efforts coalesce into a space for local athletes to compete—and have a blast doing so—was a rewarding success. By focusing on accessibility and high-energy programming, the event successfully highlighted the spirit of the game, ensuring that participants of all ages and skill levels felt connected.

Following a successful weekend, the energy remains high, with the event standing as a testament to what is possible when community partners come together to foster healthy living, youth development, and a lasting sense of pride.



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NORWICH — Preferred Mutual Insurance Company is proud to once again support the Norwich Gus Macker Basketball Tournament as sponsor of the Preferred Mutual Dream Court, celebrating community spirit, local connection, and an exciting weekend in downtown Norwich.

The Norwich Gus Macker Basketball Tournament is more than a weekend of basketball — it is one of Chenango County’s most anticipated summer traditions and a big win for the entire community. Each year, the event brings players, families, volunteers, local businesses, and fans together in the heart of the City of Norwich for a weekend of competition and connection.

As a longtime business in Chenango County, Preferred Mutual is proud to sponsor the Preferred Mutual Dream Court, a meaningful part of the tournament experience



Members of Springbrook, ACHIEVE, Team Preferred, and Gus Macker staff gather on the Preferred Mutual Dream Court following the 2025 exhibition matchup at the Norwich Gus Macker Basketball Tournament. This year’s sponsored game will be the Battle of the Badges between the Norwich Police and Fire Departments. (Submitted photo)

where players have the opportunity to take the court in front of an enthusiastic hometown crowd.

This year, the Preferred Mutual Dream Court will again host a featured exhibition matchup between two local community organizations. The Norwich Police

Department and Norwich Fire Department will face off at noon on Saturday, July 11, bringing added excitement to the court and celebrating the community partnerships that help make the tournament so meaningful.

“At Preferred Mutual, we are proud to support

events that bring people together and strengthen the communities we call home,” said Preferred Mutual Community Engagement Specialist Robin Martin. “The Norwich Gus Macker Basketball Tournament is a wonderful example of community spirit in

action, and we are excited to be part of it each year.”

Preferred Mutual extends its appreciation to the Norwich Family YMCA, tournament organizers, volunteers, players, families, and fans who help make the Gus Macker Basketball

Tournament a continued success in our community.

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In business since 1896, Preferred Mutual is headquartered in New Berlin, New York. The company has maintained a Financial Strength Rating of “A” (Excellent) with a “Stable” outlook by AM Best for 23 consecutive years and was recognized as a Top Workplaces USA award recipient in 2024, 2025, and 2026. Learn more at www.preferredmutual.com.

-Information provided by Preferred Mutual Insurance Company

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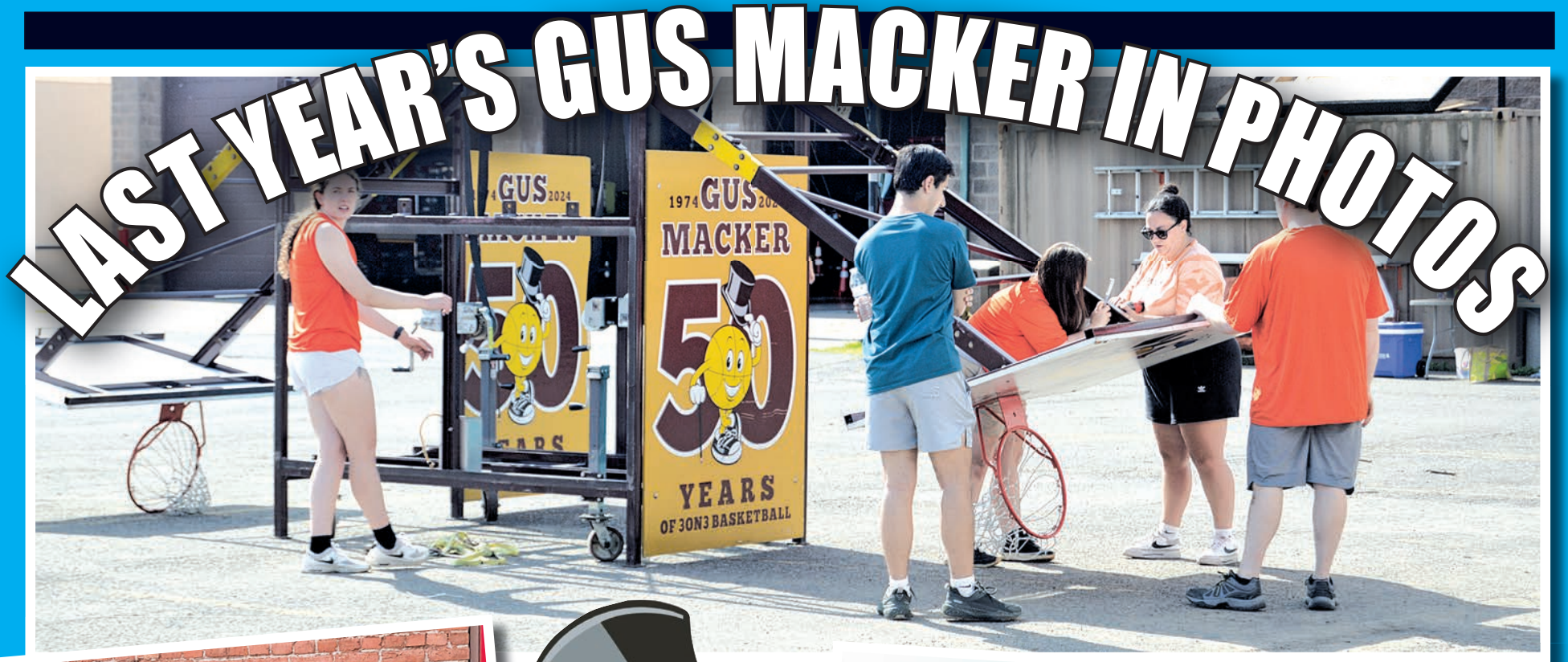
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Blueox Energy’s knockout contest is back for the third consecutive year

NORWICH — Blueox Energy is excited to return as the sponsor of the Knockout Contest during the Gus Macker basketball tournament in Norwich this weekend. Now in its third year, the contest has become a favorite event for players and spectators alike, with nearly 50 participants joining the fun last year. All ages are encouraged to come out for a competitive co-ed game of knock-out.

The Knockout Contest will begin at 6 p.m. on Friday evening and is free to participate in. Everyone who enters will receive a prize, and contest winners will also take home gift cards to the Gus



All smiles from Blueox’s second annual knock-out competition. The second annual knock-out competition saw a division of 14 + teens and adults as well as two groups of kids competing on Friday night. (Photo by Morgan Golliver)

Macker Gear Tent.

“We’re proud to continue supporting an event that brings our community together,” said the team at Blueox Energy. “The Knockout Contest is a fun way to get everyone involved, and we look forward to another great turnout this year. We get kids, we get adults and the music selection always adds to the fun!”

Blueox Energy invites tournament participants, families, and fans to stop by, join the competition, and enjoy a weekend of basketball and community spirit.

-Information from Blueox Energy

The new Front Broad Street entrance is NOW OPEN to all patients!



Good Luck to All Gus Macker Participants



Robert C. Smith was born in 1923 and was a life-long resident of Norwich, New York. He attended St. Paul’s Catholic School and graduated from Norwich High School. He entered the U.S. Army and achieved the rank of corporal. After his military service, he went to business school in Rochester, New York (McKechnie-Lunger School of Commerce, known today as Rochester Institute of Technology School of Business). Robert began a life-long career with Victory Markets, the predecessor to the Great American Food Store chain based in Norwich, New York. He was very involved in his community and served many years as a Residential Chairman of the Community Chest, now known as The United Way.

Prior to his death at age 84, Robert established the Robert C. Smith Foundation. During his working career he had made many fortunate investment decisions which allowed him to create this foundation. The foundation’s purpose is to assist in the maintenance of charitable and religious organizations to benefit the people of Chenango County.

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From the 90s Peak to the Present: The Enduring Pulse of Gus Macker



The Norwich Gus Macker tournament got its start in 1996 with dunks and memories of playing in an actual hurricane. This year marks 29 years with a new generation of youth players impacting today's game. (Photos from Norwich Gus Macker Facebook)

BY MORGAN GOLLIVER
EVENING SUN SPORTS EDITOR

The Norwich Gus Macker 3-on-3 basketball tournament burst onto the scene in 1996, a year defined by both high-flying dunks and the literal chaos of a hurricane that swept through the area. Despite the weather, 200 teams and 1,800 players showed up, united by a love for the game. At the time, that community spirit was the spark, with no way of knowing that 29 years later—even after being sidelined for two years due to COVID—the event would still be going strong.

Founder Scott “Gus” McNeal has faced significant challenges in the post-pandemic landscape. While the 90s offered a different, perhaps easier, era for grassroots basketball, the community continues to stand behind the Macker brand, ensuring the tournament remains as fun and profitable today as it was during that inaugu-

ral, storm-tested year.

Scott “Gus” McNeal founded the Gus Macker brand in his own driveway in 1974 in Lowell, Michigan. What started as a small, local endeavor eventually expanded across the nation, helping to spark a movement that culminated in the rise of 3-on-3 basketball. This streetball culture helped pave the way for the sport’s official Olympic debut at the 2020 Tokyo Summer Games, where the United States women’s team—featuring WNBA stars Kelsey Plum, Jackie Young, Alisha Gray, and Stefanie Dolson—claimed the inaugural gold medal, while Latvia took home the gold for the men.

Reflecting on the evolution of the game, McNeal noted that the 90s era was easier to manage compared to the complexities of today.

“In the 90s, you managed your own court and called your own game,” McNeal said. “Today, it is difficult to secure

the logistics and staff necessary to cover the tournament, especially in a post-COVID world. We are also competing with AAU and travel ball, while rising costs and shifting tournament attendance make things hard to navigate in today’s society.”

During the era of rapid expansion, McNeal saw huge numbers of teams signing up. Today, tournaments often look to cap registration around 400 teams to maintain the quality of the event.

“The tournaments are much more manageable now than they were back then,” McNeal noted. “It is a better event that way, focusing on quality over quantity. It is also the right size for the communities we serve. We are becoming more aggressive in targeting smaller communities, like Norwich. We added 10 new cities this year, creating a big bump of 35 tournaments in this season alone.”

The 90s sparked a massive boom for bas-

ketball, and today, that trend has shifted to a new generation.

“We are in another boom phase, but it is driven by the kids,” McNeal said. “The kids from the 90s who played are now parents, and their children—or even grandchildren—are getting on the court. Additionally, our sales of Macker apparel are mirroring 90s levels, and the brand is seeing an increase in requests for tournaments in small towns.”

While technological advancements have transformed the world since the 90s, they have only been integrated into the Macker tradition in specific ways. Technology, McNeal explained, has primarily been incorporated at the local level.

“We have people who live stream games, especially from the dream court, but it remains a local initiative,” McNeal said. “Nationally, we do not have a large enough staff to fully promote



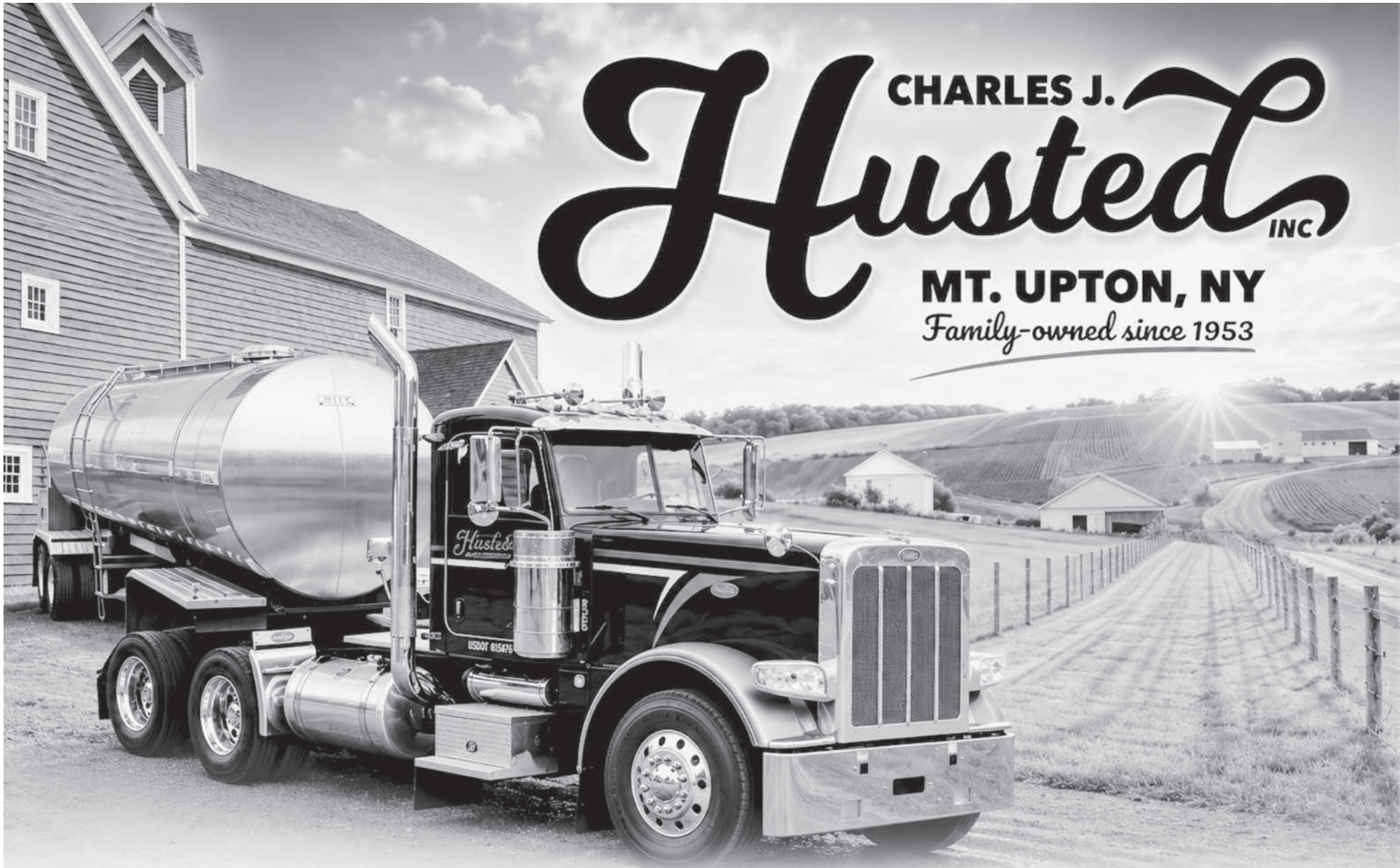
The Gus Macker retail and brand is still popular today, similar to the 90s amongst youth. (Photo from Norwich Gus Macker Facebook)

technological effects across the Macker brand just yet.”

Still, from the early days to the present, Macker remains a nationwide phenomenon that shows no signs of slowing down.

“I have aged,” McNeal added with a laugh. “I turned 70 in June and

I would love to see more brackets for players 60 and older, like the one Norwich hosted years ago with the Hair Club for Men group. Hopefully, Tom and Jamey can get that going again, but regardless, I am looking forward to the event in Norwich.”



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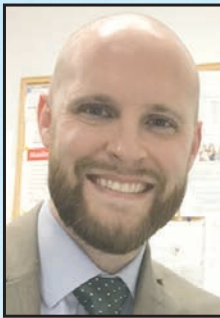
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