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Evening of Team Building
October 15, 2009

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YMCA
We build strong kids,
strong families, strong communities.

www.bluewaterymca.com

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Fans enjoy evening with MSU coach

Izzo stops for YMCA fundraiser

By **JIM WHYMER**
Times Herald

Jim LaBuhn admits Michigan State University football is his real passion.

But the St. Clair resident and 1973 MSU graduate couldn't pass up a chance Thursday to see Spartan basketball Coach Tom Izzo on Thursday at McMorran Arena.

"This is great for the community to bring in somebody like Izzo," LaBuhn said. "They should do more of this in the area."

"I've heard Izzo talk before, and he's a great storyteller. It won't take long, and he'll fit right in with this crowd."

A crowd of more than 500 attended the Blue Water YMCA's Strong Kids, Strong Communities Evening of Team Building.

Proceeds from the event support the YMCA's youth programming and scholarships.

Bands from Croswell-Lexington, Port Huron and Port Huron Northern high schools performed at McMorran.

"We're very pleased with (the turnout)," said Mark Walker, who helped organize the event with YMCA Executive Director Denise Brooks. "We were shooting for between 400 and 600 people."

"Izzo is a great guy. The best thing is he has the same values as the 'Y' does."

Following a brief speech at the Coaches' Clinic in the YMCA gym, Izzo was escorted to



COACH SIGNS: Bonnie Barrett of Fort Gratiot shows a photograph of her daughter, Colleen Connolly, taken with Michigan State University basketball coach Tom Izzo, who is seen behind the photo, during the championship parade when Connolly was an MSU student. Izzo signed the photo during a YMCA fundraiser Thursday inside McMorran Arena.



Times Herald photos by MELISSA WAWZYSKI

TRAVELING: Cheryl Hachee, left, of Fort Gratiot waits as Michigan State University basketball coach Tom Izzo signs a small basketball for Michelle Gapshe, right, of Clyde Township during a YMCA fundraiser Thursday inside McMorran Arena.

MORE IZZO, 1B

MSU BENCH BOSS, OTHERS SPEAK AT COACHING CLINIC

McMorran by Brooks. He spent close to an hour signing autographs, posing for pictures and talking with fans.

Bonnie Barrett of Fort Gratiot

had Izzo sign a very memorable photo.

Barrett's daughter, Colleen Connolly, had a picture taken of herself next to Izzo during a victory parade in East Lansing after the Spartans' national championship in 2000.

Connolly, a MSU grad, sent the photo home when she heard Izzo was coming to town. She is

scheduled to return home Sunday to run in the Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Marathon.

"This is a great party," said Barrett, who attended the Final Four earlier this year in Detroit to see the Spartans. "I have been looking forward to this night for a long time. Coach Izzo was very

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TIMES HERALD, PORT HURON, MICHIGAN



Times Herald photos by MELISSA WAWZYSKO

CENTER COURT: Michigan State University basketball coach Tom Izzo is seen above on a large screen during his speech at a YMCA fundraiser Thursday inside McMorran Arena.

IZZO

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nice.

Izzo, 53, slipped in the Port Huron appearance before the Spartans take to the court tonight for their first practice as part of Midnight Madness.

The Spartans have reached the Final Four five of the past 11 years, including the 2000 title. They lost in last year's final to North Carolina.

"Once I get started with practice, I don't have time for anything like this," Izzo said. "I enjoy doing these events. You get a chance to meet so many people.

"I really don't have a planned speech every time. Probably halfway through, I might start talking about something that came up from a conversation I had earlier with a fan."

Brooks said the Evening of Team Building committee targeted Izzo from the start.

"When we started talking about this event, Izzo was the guy and the only one



MIC'D UP: Michigan State University basketball coach Tom Izzo gives a speech during a YMCA fundraiser Thursday inside McMorran Arena.

we wanted," Brooks said. "He was great talking at the Coaches' Clinic and great here with the fans.

"This is a great opportunity for the community to meet an individual who is also all about team building."

Izzo said he likes the challenge ahead as the Spartans are ranked in the nation's top five by several pre-season magazines and Web sites.

"I think we're ranked a little high, but that definitely has to do with reputation,"

Izzo said. "We have good players, but good players win games. Good teams win championships.

"In the Big Ten, Michigan will be improved and Ohio State will be very good. Purdue could be the team to beat. They have six players back who were starters at some point during the season last year."

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