

NEIGHBORS

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Neighbors

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REGIONAL NEWS

Federal Employees to meet

The National Association of Active & Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter will hold their monthly meeting on March 24 at 1 pm at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe at 269 782 2769 or e-mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net.

Beckwith Theatre Company presents "God of Carnage"

Find out what happens when adults stop being polite and start getting real in Yasmina Reza's Tony award-winning dark comedy "God of Carnage" at the Beckwith Theatre in Dowagiac on April 3, 4, and 9-12. When a fight breaks out between two boys on the playground, their parents meet for what begins as a civil discussion. As tempers spark and truths are exposed, an all-out verbal brawl ensues. For mature audiences only.

The show will be performed on Friday & Saturday, April 3, 4 at 7:30 pm; Thursday, Friday & Saturday, April 9-11 at 7:30 pm; Sunday, April 12 at 2 pm. Tickets for the shows are \$10; Call 269-782-7653 to make reservations.

The Beckwith Theatre is located at 100 New York Avenue, Dowagiac.

For more information, visit the Beckwith Facebook page or call the Beckwith Theatre at 269-782-7653.

The Relevance of Lincoln at SMC

Former Michigan lawmaker Cameron S. Brown will present "The Relevance of Abraham Lincoln" at Southwestern Michigan College on Wednesday, March 25, at 11:30 am in the event theatre of the Student Activity Center in the Charles O. Zollar Building on the Dowagiac campus. His talk is free and open to the public.

Before holding elective office, Brown was vice president, marketing for Freeman Manufacturing Co., an orthopedic soft goods manufacturer headquartered in Sturgis. He spent 18 years with the company. Brown served five terms as a member of the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners. He was elected board chairman three times. From 1981-86, he was a member of Sturgis City Commission. In 1998, Brown was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives from the 59th District and re-elected to a second term in 2000 between Glenn Oxender of Sturgis and Rick Shaffer of Three Rivers. Brown was elected to the Michigan Senate from the 16th District in 2002 and 2006.

Cass County Play Groups

Cass County Play Groups are held in the Play Group Room in the Early Childhood Wing of Squires in Cassopolis, located at 725 Center St. Please use the York St. entrance to the back side of the building and enter in the Play Group Room Door. If Lewis Cass ISD or Cassopolis Schools are closed/delayed, the Play Group will be cancelled.

Community Play Groups will be held at the local libraries named. If the school district the library is in or Lewis Cass ISD is closed/delayed, the Play Group will be cancelled. For more information please contact Vicki Foote at vfoote@lewiscassisd.org or call (269)445-6283.

Play group activities include: Play Groups at Squires 9:30-11:00 March 11, 18, 24 and 25; March 18

44th Annual Salad Smorgasbord, style show & quilt sale

The Edwardsburg Presbyterian Church's 44th annual Salad Smorgasbord & Style Show will be Thursday, March 19 at 6:30 pm in the Edwardsburg High School Gym.

Tickets for the Smorgasbord & Style Show are \$9 each are on sale now. Limited sales to 400 tickets.

This year's quilt raffle is an original design by Arlene Peterson "Stars and Stripes." An open Red Star is displayed on a white background, bordered by a large red square. The flip side of the quilt is a field of red, white and blue pin-wheels with silver thread running throughout. Tickets for the quilt raffle are \$1 each or 6 for \$5.

A large variety of door prizes have been donated from many local businesses. If you would like to help or have something you would like to donate, please contact our chairpersons Cookie Bailey, Patty Patzer or Pam Boepple. You may also leave a message with Brenda McKinley at 238-6564 or facebook the Edwardsburg Presbyterian Church.



Parent Coalition Meeting

Community Play Groups 9:30-10:30
March 10 at Edwardsburg Library
March 17 at Cass District Library-Main Branch

Grape growers' spring meeting

Berrien County MSU Extension in 2015 will be hosting several in-season Integrated Pest Management meetings for all grape growers. The first of these grape meetings, the Spring Kick-off Meeting, will be held at SWMREC on March 24 at 1791 Hillandale Rd., Benton Harbor, MI. Presentations will include: Tom Zabadal on rebuilding winter injured vineyards, Rufus Isaacs on early season IPM, and Annemiek Schilder on early-season disease management including dormant sprays. Discussion will follow each speaker, so growers are encouraged to bring questions. Dinner will be served after the educational presentations, at 4:30 pm.

Registration includes dinner, and is \$13 per person for pre-registration (before March 20) and \$18 per person thereafter.

Online registration are available at events.anr.msu.edu/swgrape15budbreak.

Basket Workshop

The Dowagiac Area History Museum will host a Potawatomi Black Ash Basket-making Workshop on Saturday, March 14 from 10 am to 2 pm. The event, part of the community-wide One Story Read project, is a collaboration between the museum and the Education Department of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.

It will cost \$10 to participate and make a basket, but the public is welcome to come and observe the process and interact with the instructors for free. Pre-registration is encouraged and space is limited to 20 participants. People who wish to make a basket should plan on arriving at 10 am.

One Story Read is a grass roots community-based program designed to build awareness of contemporary issues through literature. One Story partners currently include The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, Dowagiac Area History Museum, Dowagiac District Library, Dowagiac Dogwood Fine Arts Festival Committee, Dowagiac Union Schools, and

Southwestern Michigan College. This year's book selection is The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian by Sherman Alexie. The 2015 One Story events are based on various themes explored in Alexie's semi-autobiographical book. Information and event listings are available at www.onestoryread.com.

Register for the Black Ash Basket-making workshop in-person at the museum or by sending payment and information to the Dowagiac Area History Museum, P.O. Box 430, Dowagiac, Michigan 49047. For more information, call the Dowagiac Area History Museum at 269.783.2560 or visit www.dowagiac-museum.info.

Beginning farmers on-line training offered by MSU Extension

People who are starting new farm businesses, or thinking about it, will benefit from participating in the MSU Extension 2015 Beginning Farmer Webinar Series. You will gain knowledge needed to plan your start-up farming operation, or add a new enterprise to an existing farm. A series of 2-hour evening webinars covering a wide variety of farm-related topics is available, including: "Getting started with..."

...Hop Production, March 11
...Season Extension, March 16
...Marketing, March 18
...Small Fruit Production, March 23
...Beef Cow-Calf Production, March 25
...Direct Marketing, March 30
...Managing Soil, Irrigation and Fertilization Interactions, April 1
...Cover Crops in Field Crop Rotations, April 6
...Poultry Production, April 20
...Small Farm Equipment, April 27
...Beef Feedlot Management, April 29

A fee of \$10 per webinar is required, or you can register for the entire series for \$100. Webinar recordings will be provided to all registered participants. Participate from the comfort and convenience of your own home or office. Registration, a brochure containing details on each individual program, and on-line or mailed payment options can be found at <http://events.anr.msu.edu/beginningfarmerwebinars/>.

Each program begins at 7 pm eastern time and will last about 2 hours. A high-speed internet connection is

required. You will receive webinar connection information after you register. Contact the Alger County MSU Extension office at 906-387-2530 or isleibj@anr.msu.edu for more information.

Smith's Chapel open house rescheduled to June 13

The open house at Smith's Chapel near Niles has been rescheduled to June 13, from 10 am -2 pm.

Learn about the history of the oldest church in Southwestern Michigan. The chapel is located at 29858 Redfield Rd., Niles, MI 49120. For more Information call 932-5242.

Rent-a-Sap Bucket: Celebrate Sweet Times at Bendix Woods

At Bendix Woods County Park in Indiana, businesses and families can participate in the Rent-a-Sap-Bucket program. Contributions support historical programming and supplies for the maple sugaring operations. For a \$35 donation Rent-a-Sap renters will receive the following items: 1 complimentary ticket to the Sugar Camp Days Pancake Breakfast on March 21 and 22, 1 gift coupon for a pint of maple syrup made at the Bendix Wood's sugar house, one two pound bag of popcorn, 1 gate park entrance pass and a chance to win canoeing and disc golf passes. The first 50 participants to register will have their names placed on a sap bucket in the sugar bush.

The deadline to purchase the Rent-a-Sap Bucket is March 13. To register, send your name, address, phone number and a check for \$35 made out to St. Joseph County Parks. Attention Rent-a-Sap Bucket, 32132 SR 2, New Carlisle, IN 46552 or call Bendix Woods County Park at 574-654-3155 for more information

COA adds new programs

To better serve our community, the Cass County COA will offer an additional program. Beginning Monday, March 30, the COA will host an evening version of the Caregiver's Support Group. The afternoon program has been well received since its inception several years ago.

The evening sessions, beginning on Monday, March 30, will be held the last Monday of each month, from 6 -7:30 pm at the Front Street Crossing, 227 S.

REGIONAL NEWS

Front Street, Dowagiac. Questions can be directed to Keryl at 445-8110, ext. 222.

Volunteers needed for work at state parks in southwest Michigan

The Department of Natural Resources is looking for volunteers to help staff restore native habitats at state parks in southwest Michigan. Volunteers will help cut invasive, non-native shrubs from high-quality woodlands and prairies. This activity is a great way to enjoy time outdoors in the winter while restoring unique ecosystems. No experience is necessary.

Workday dates, locations and times include: Saturday, March 21: Fort Custer Recreation Area (Kalamazoo), 10 am-1 pm, and Sunday, March 29: Warren Dunes State Park (Berrien), 1-4 pm.

Volunteers should bring work gloves, drinking water and appropriate clothing for outdoor work, including long pants and sturdy, closed-toe shoes. A supply of work gloves will be available, as well as all necessary equipment.

For workday details, maps and directions, visit the DNR website www.michigan.gov/dnrvolunteers and click the link Calendar of Volunteer Stewardship Workdays. All volunteers are asked to register using the form available on the DNR website or via email. Any questions should be directed to Heidi Frei at 517-202-1360 or frei@h@freih@michigan.gov.

Midwest Energy Scholarship Program deadline near

High school seniors are invited to apply for one of the four \$1000 Midwest Energy Cooperative scholarships to be presented this spring. To qualify, the stu-

Midwest Energy seeks applications for annual Youth Leadership Summit

High school sophomores and juniors are invited to apply for the 2015 Youth Leadership Summit (YLS), April 22-24 at SpringHill Camp in Evart, MI. Presented by Michigan's electric cooperatives, YLS is a high-energy, interactive experience designed to help young people grow as leaders. Students from throughout Michigan will come together to test themselves with a combination of hands-on classroom exercises and individual and group challenges. They will also explore career opportunities, test their decision-making skills as an elected official, and learn what to expect as they prepare for life after high-school. The camp is located just south of Cadillac on 515 acres of northern Michigan forests and rolling hills.

Four Midwest Energy students will be selected to represent the cooperative at YLS, and up to two of those students will be selected for a once-in-a-lifetime Washington, D.C. trip with the 2015 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour, June 13-18. This all-expenses-paid trip provides students with the opportunity to watch history come alive as they explore the museums, memorials and monuments of our nation's capital, and meet face-to-face with their elected officials. YLS applications must be received by March 20, 2015.

For more information on or to apply for either program, visit TeamMidwest.com or contact Nicole Barfell at 269-445-1112.



Ethan Mendenhall (orange sweatshirt) takes his team-building skills to the next level as he works together with other Michigan students to cross the 30 foot high-ropes course during the 2014 Youth Leadership Summit. Mendenhall, now a senior at Edwardsburg High School, represented Midwest Energy at YLS and was selected for the 2014 Washington DC Youth Tour.

dent's immediate family must currently receive monthly electric service from the cooperative at their primary residence. Scholarship selection is based on academic performance, extra-curricular activities, community involvement and/or employment, and honors and awards. Applicants are also asked to submit a short essay. A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.5 on a four-point scale is required and an official transcript will be required for final approval. Scholarship applications must be post-

marked by Friday, March 13, 2015 and winners will be notified in April.

Midwest Energy gives \$30,000 to strengthen schools

Midwest Energy Cooperative, in partnership with Touchstone Energy, awarded Strengthening Schools Grants to 18 public schools across its service territory in January. Just over \$30,000 was awarded to enhance student learning through support of academic/classroom needs and special projects.

Locally awards were presented to the following schools and projects:

- Edwardsburg High School, \$2500 for supplies for the robotics team
- Edwardsburg Primary School, \$350 for 1st grade field trip to WNDU weather station
- Howard Elementary, Niles, \$1000 for state science standard leveled library of nonfiction books
- Three Rivers High School, \$400 for positive school climate initiative.



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REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

March 12 -- Zentangle Drawing Class, 6 pm, Space is limited, call to register. Cass District Library- Edwardsburg Branch, 663-5875

March 13 — Origami, 10 am, COA Lowe Center, Cassopolis, 445-8110

March 14 — Potawatomi Black Ash Basket-making workshop, 10 am - 2 pm, Dowagiac Area History Museum, \$10, 783-2560, www.dowagiacmuseumu.info

March 14 — Inviting Bluebirds to your Backyard, 2 pm, St. Patrick's County Park, South Bend, \$3, 574-654-3155

March 17 — St. Patrick's Day Celebration, Noon, COA Lowe Center, Cassopolis, and at Front Street Crossing, Dowagiac, 445-8110

March 17 -- St. Patrick's Day Story Hour, 6 pm, Families are welcome to attend this special story hour. Cass District Library- Main Library, 445-3400

March 18 — Hooked on Travel, 1 pm, Front Street Crossing, Dowagiac, 445-8110

March 19 -- Movie Night, 6 pm, Free and open to the public. Call for title. Cass District Library- Howard Branch, 684-1680

March 19 —Edwardsburg Presbyterian Church's 44th annual Salad Smorgasbord & Style Show, Edwardsburg High School, 6:30 pm, \$9238-6564

March 21 -- The Ultimate Book Bash Party, 12:30-3 pm, Many activities await for elementary kids and families! Cass District Library- Main Library, 445-3400

March 21, 22 — Sugar Camp Days Pancake Breakfast, Bendix Woods County Park, South Bend, 574-654-3155

March 24 – 6 PM – National Association of Retired Federal Employees, SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting, Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). For information, call Jean Rowe at 269 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

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March 24 — Wine Glass Painting, 1 pm, COA Lowe Center, Cassopolis, 445-8110

March 24 — Integrated Pest Management for grape growers, 4:30 pm, SWMREC, 1791 Hillandale Rd., Benton Harbor, \$13-18, events.anr.msu.edu/swgrape15budbreak

March 25 — The Relevance of Abraham Lincoln, 11:30 am, SMC Zollar Building, Dowagiac.

March 25 — Hearing Tests, 1 pm, COA Lowe Center, Cassopolis, 445-8110

March 26 — Easy Home Repairs, 10 am, COA Lowe Center, Cassopolis, 445-8110

March 26 — Creating Confident Caregivers, 12:30 pm, COA Lowe Center, Cassopolis, 445-8110

March 30 — Caregiver's Support Group, 6 pm, COA Front Street Crossing, Dowagiac, 445-8110, ext. 222

March 30-31 —Spring Book and Bake Sale, 11 am- 7 pm, Don't miss this annual sale, free crafts for kids will be available. Cass District Library- Howard Branch, 684-1680

March 31 -- Spring Story Hour Begins this week, Call your local branch for day and time, Cass District Library- Main Library, 445-3400

March 31 — Brain Fitness, 10 am, Front Street Crossing, Dowagiac, 445-8110

April 28 – 6 PM – National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 will hold their monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). For information, call Jean Rowe at 269 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

May 26 – 6 PM – National Association of Retired Federal Employees, SW Michigan Chapter 572 will hold their monthly

meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired /current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe at 269 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

June 13 — Smith's Chapel open house, 10 am - 2 pm, 29858 Redfield Rd., Niles, 932-5242

June 23 – 6 PM - National Association of Retired Federal Employees, SW Michigan Chapter572 will hold their monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). For information, call Jean Rowe 269 782 2879 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

July 18 — Sister Lakes Triathlon, details tba

July 25 — Steve's Run, Southwestern Michigan College, details tba

July 28 – 6 PM National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter will hold their annual picnic at a site to be selected. Main food & drink will be provided, please bring a dish to pass. For information, call Jean Rowe at 269 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

August 25 – 6 PM – National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 will hold their monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). For information, call Jean Rowe, 269 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

September 22 – 6 PM – National Association Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter will hold their monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). For information, call Jean Rowe, 269 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

October 27 – 6 PM National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 will hold their monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). For information, call Jean Rowe, 269 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net.

SPECIAL FEATURE: DOWAGIAC ICE FESTIVAL



Ice Festival a big hit in Dowagiac

As always the annual Dowagiac Ice Festival held this winter was a huge success. Dozens of ice and wood carvers created amazing displays and area restaurants and shops attracted visitors from all over the county and the surrounding countryside. Thanks to reader Bob King for the photos

NATURE NOTES

Bluebirds every day in SW Michigan!

Provided by the Cass District Library
Local History Branch

Contrary to popular belief, eastern bluebirds are present in Southwest Michigan during the entire year, including the winter months of December, January, and February.

This popular songbird is often met with surprise on snowy days at birdbaths and feeding stations!

Randy Schrubba of St. Joseph submitted the accompanying photo of eastern bluebirds, eating meal worms that were set out specifically for them next to his heated bird bath.

Adult male eastern bluebirds have blue backs and orange-red chests, females have gray backs and lighter orange-red-chests. Both sexes appear in the photos.

Meal worms are also eaten by American robins and other birds that feed insects and other invertebrates during the warmer months. Additionally, berries are a very important part of the bluebirds diet during winter.



Michigan Bluebird Society coordinator to speak

Meet John Harville, Berrien/Cass/Van Buren County Coordinator of the Michigan Bluebird Society at 2 pm, Saturday March 14 at St. Patrick's County Park. Participants will learn about the natural history of the Eastern Bluebird, bluebird house construction and how to establish a Bluebird trail.

Program fee \$3/person.

Pre-registration and payment is required by March 9. For more information or to register please call 574/654-3155.

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HEALTH & FITNESS

In many sports, size matters ...

By Gary Andert
Outpost Trading Post

Oh my, how us Americans have been the brunt of jokes for years about our fascination for bigger is better. Bigger cars, super-size sodas and larger meal portions have been easy materials for late show host and comedians on both sides of the “pond.”

But, there are certain sports products that have helped us to perform better in certain athletic endeavors. I recall the difficulty of skiing western powder snow with a 207 cm length, 63mm waist width skis. We surely thought it was fun but at the same time remember the thigh burn and sore legs the next morning.

Then, shape skis came. Skis got fatter and fatter. And early rise/rocker tips became the norm. For most ski shops in the West, the minimum waist width skis they sell are the 90mm variety. Today’s powder skis are in the 100 to 115mm waist width measurement. These skis become “hero skis” for those skiing in above boot top snow conditions. They do not submarine under the snow, but float above it and with “rocker” in the tips and tails, these skis turn on a dime and save your legs for

more adventures on the next day.

Twenty-nine-inch wheel mountain bikes have been the most popular cross country terrain models for the past ten years. The “29ers” roll over trail obstacles like a monster truck, hold the corners like and Indy race car and with their lower tire pressure give you better traction and less flats. And the 29er rolls faster than the 26” grandpa size rim. For those that have a clearance issue for a bike frame that accommodates a 29” wheel, the bike industry has introduced a 27.5” diameter wheel. Now the most vertically challenged rider can have a mountain bike that is almost as fast as the 29” big brother.

As some sports evolve, they sometimes get better and sometimes revert to, well not so good. I will now jump on my high horse. As a long time flat water kayaker, I have been appalled at the preponderance of sub 11’ kayaks I see on the water. Most of these “water-craft” (and I use that term very loosely) should be paddled on ponds only. Most 9’ and 10’ kayaks are built as cheaply as possible. They have inferior seats that are non-supportive and very uncomfortable. The materials they are

molded of are so thin the hulls flex as you paddle, which slows you down. Some of these “boats” are molded by the same people that make trashcans, which may explain their cheap construction. And some, gasp!, have no foot-braces! This omission, I believe, should be against the law. You cannot comfortably paddle a kayak without footbraces. If you are new to the sport, or plan to only paddle once or twice, I suggest you rent a boat. Don’t waste your hard earned money on a kayak that will be grossly inefficient in paddling in a straight line and be so slow you might believe you are dragging an anchor. A kayaks length has a huge effect on a kayaks ability to track straight. You’ll also find that a suspended seat (look for one screwed to the hull) is far more comfortable and supportive than a molded in seat. Kayaking is supposed to be fun! In fact, with the proper length of kayak you will having so much fun you will not realized what great exercise you are getting.

Warmer weather is right around the corner, so get the right gear for some fun in the sun and go outside and play!

Conquering exercise hurdles

By Brenda Harris
Cass COA

Our bodies are built for physical activity. Movement and regular work can trigger healthful changes thruout your body. On the other hand, going without exercise can cause a long list of health problems. Most of these problems show up during and after middle age. Most adults don’t get the minimum amount of aerobic exercise recommended by fitness experts and government guidelines. They suggest 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, or 15 minutes of vigorous exercise, such as jogging or swimming, five days a week, plus two sessions of strength training to build muscles.

Here are some exercise hurdles you may face and what you can do about it. **I NEVER HAVE ENOUGH TIME.**

Exercisers blame the lack of time for preventing them from exercising. Successful exercisers, on the other hand, made exercise a priority. An easy way to begin is by making every day routines more physically active. If time is a problem, doing a few brief bouts of moderate exercise can be as beneficial as one longer, continuous workout for improving aerobic fitness and maintaining a healthy weight.

I’M TOO OLD TO START NOW.

What?? It’s never to late to start exercising. No matter how old you are, your muscles will respond quickly to training. Men and women in their 80s and older who started resistance training in clinical trials gained strength as rapidly as younger adults did.

If you are a man over 45 or a woman 55 and have been sedentary, you should get a physician’s clearance before starting a vigorous workout routine. Even for moderate exercise it is best to see a doctor first if you have arthritis, diabetes, or another ongoing health problem.

MY HEALTH ISN’T GOOD ENOUGH.

Exercise is a proven treatment for diabetes, depression, high blood pressure, and many other problems common in older age. People who may be frail or a chronically ill may assume, incorrectly, that exercise isn’t safe. People with medical problems can safely workout out with the guidance from a doctor and a therapist.

I’M TOO TIRED FOR EXERCISE.

Did you know that starting a regular exercise routine can combat feelings of exhaustion? Aerobic activities can help rev up your metabolism. Strength training can make it easier to do everyday tasks, such as going up and down stairs, carrying groceries, and even weeding a garden. The old saying goes, “If you don’t use it you will lose it.”

I’M NOT OVERWEIGHT.

Thin people need exercise too! Exercise works in many ways to boost health and life span. Aerobic training and resistance exercise improve the body’s ability to manage blood sugar. Exercise can lower blood pressure, by keeping artery walls supple, and weight-bearing exercise builds bones to help them resist osteoporosis.

IT’S TOO PAINFUL.

Older adults may use discomfort or disability as a reason for not exercising.

Exercise doesn’t have to be done really hard to build aerobic fitness and muscle strength. Even walking briskly is enough for most people to reach the level recommended by fitness experts. If you have problem exercising, start out at a leisurely pace and build up to a harder intensity.

If joint pain is the problem, water

aerobics can lighten the load and make it possible to move in ways that otherwise might be painful. Some medical centers offer exercise for people with arthritis or other chronic pain problems. Exercising can also help manage improvement in measures of pain, fatigue, stiffness, sleep, depression, and anxiety.

Get ready set, jump those hurdles!

Getting results exercising

By Brenda Harris
Cass COA

Ever wonder if the exercises you’re doing are going to give you the best results for your body? Look no further! Here are three exercises everyone should do. These three moves offer body benefits -and they don’t require a gym to do them. Make them part of your fitness routine on a regular basis and you’ll be looking and feeling better.

#1 Exercise Squats

Why they’re effective: Squats are the go-to move for everyone who strength trains because they engage more muscles than any other move. Squats work the thighs (quads, hamstrings, outer thighs), glutes, and core (abdominal and the muscles that support your spine). You don’t need any equipment to perform squats; but you always have the option of adding dumbbells and /or a stability ball to add challenge. Another option is using the Total Gym. Using the Total Gym you are laying down which supports the back with less stress on the knees. How many should I start out doing? Perform 1-3 sets of 8-15 repetitions.

#2 Exercise One-Arm Dumbbell Rows

Did you know that the easiest way to look longer and leaner is to improve your posture? Rounded shoulders are common among women when the weight of the breasts pulls the shoulders forward and upper back muscles are weak. Most people only train what they consider to be a problem. They work the muscles on the front of the body because those are the muscle they see in the mirror. Also, strengthening your back muscles: the back lats help improve posture. This exercise also targets other muscles at once: the biceps, shoulders, and other back muscles (traps and rhomboids), which will help improve your overall upper body strength. Perform 1-3 sets of 8-15 repetitions.

Special Instructions

INHALE: With the palm facing the body, row the dumbbell up as high as possible (towards the armpit) as the elbow points backwards. **EXHALE:** Slowly lower dumbbell back down until arm is straight, but elbow does not lock, to complete one rep. Finish one set and switch sides.


#3 Bicycle Crunches

There has been a lot of research on the effectiveness of various abdominal exercises. Most experts agree that crunches are good, adding some simple elements can make them even better. The bicycle crunch is one of the most effective core exercises there is, working the abs, obliques, and hips. You may want to use a floor mat when doing the crunches.

Starting position begins by lying on your back with your knees bent, in line with the hips. Place hands behind your head and neck for support. Pull the naval in towards the spine throughout this movement. Bend your left knee in towards your chest while you crunch up and twist, bringing your right elbow towards the knee. Without resting, lower the left leg back down to the floor as the right knee comes in, twisting to the opposite side to bring your left elbow towards your right knee to complete one rep. Aim for 1-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions.

Get Results!


These exercises will help strengthen and tone the muscles that they target. Only cardiovascular exercise will burn the layer of fat that covers those toned muscles in the first place. Try this program 2-3 times per week, resting at least one day in between each strength workout, in combination with moderate cardio program (20-30 minutes a day, 3-4 days per week). You’ll notice you’ll feel stronger, stand taller and look better.



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BUSINESS & FINANCE

Protect your home from end-of-winter changes

by VICKI BROSSMAN
Kemner-Iott Agency

Mark Twain once said, “In the spring I have counted one hundred and thirty-six kinds of weather inside of four and twenty hours.” Are you tired of winter and ready for some warmer weather? I am! Along with the warmer weather comes melting snow, severe thunderstorms, and tornadoes. While you cannot stop these events from happening, there are a few things you can do to protect your home and your family.

- Can’t wait for the snow to melt? Here are some tips to protect your home from the melting snow:
- Clear the snow from your downspouts, basement window wells, and stairwells making sure the water will drain away from your home as the snow melts.
 - Remove the snow and debris from your gutters so the water will drain away.
 - Carefully brush heavy accumulations of snow and ice dams off the roof.
 - Check your yard making sure there are no obstructions or low areas that could cause melting snow and rain water to drain towards your house.
 - Clear your street storm sewer of debris and snow.
 - Check outside faucets for freeze damage. Turn the water on and place your thumb or finger over the opening. If you

can stop the flow of water, it is likely the pipe inside the home is damaged and will need to be repaired.

Do you have a plan in the event of severe weather? Each year tornadoes, lightning, high winds, flash flooding, and hail not only cause billions of dollars of damage, but serious injuries and deaths. Thinking ahead and being prepared will not prevent the weather from happening, but can help keep your family safe and decrease or eliminate the damage to your possessions.

How can I be prepared?

- The American Red Cross provides an Emergency Checklist available at www.redcross.org. Below you will find an abbreviated list:
- Create an emergency plan — meet with your family and discuss what could happen and how to respond.
 - Find safe spots in your house for each type of disaster.
 - Draw a floor plan of your home and mark two escape routes from each room.
 - Pick two emergency meeting places — (1) a place near your home in case of a fire and (2) a place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after a disaster.
 - Teach children how and when to call 911.
 - Choose a relative or friend out of the area to call if separated during a disaster.

Should I prepare a disaster kit?

- Yes. Use an easy-to-carry container such as a backpack or duffel bag. Some items that should be included in the kit are:
- Water — one gallon per person per day.
 - Non-perishable packaged or canned food and a non-electric can opener.
 - A battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries.
 - A change of clothing, rain gear, and sturdy shoes.
 - A first aid kit and prescription medications.
 - An extra set of car keys.
 - Cash or credit cards.
 - A list of family physicians and important medical information.

What can I do to minimize damage to my property?

- Your spring maintenance should include:
- Check for loose or leaky gutters. Make sure the downspouts are directing water away from the house to keep water out of your basement or crawlspace.
 - Have your roof inspected. Cracked, buckled, loose or missing shingles should be replaced. Flashing around plumbing vents, skylights, and chimneys need to be checked and repaired.
 - Weatherproof your windows and doors. Check all caulk lines and weather strip-



- ping; replace screens.
- Check the sump pump. Install a battery operated pump as a backup.
 - Trim/prune your shrubs and trees to prevent damage to your siding and roof.
 - Install surge suppression devices. These can help prevent damage to your electrical items caused by lightning or a circuit overload when power is restored after an outage.
- By being proactive, you can reduce the risk of a loss and help ensure the safety and well being of friends and family. If you do suffer a loss, be sure to contact your insurance agent as soon as possible.

Financial fraudsters preying on boomers & elders

If something sounds too good to be true, guess what: it probably is

Provided by **Greg Schoenfeld**
Compass Wealth Advisors

If you are in or near retirement, it is a safe bet that you would like more yield from your investments rather than less. That truth sometimes leads liars, scammers and fraudsters to pitch any number of too-good-to-be-true “investment opportunities” to retirees. Given all that and the classic money scams perpetrated on elders, you have good reason to be financially skeptical as you get older.

Beware of unbelievable returns.

Sometimes you hear radio commercials or see online ads that refer to “an investment” or “an investment opportunity” that is supposedly can’t-miss. Its return beats the ones achieved by the best Wall Street money managers, only the richest Americans who know the “secrets” of wealth know about it, and so forth. Claims like these are red flags, the stuff of late-night infomercials. Still, interest rates are so low today — and retirees so hungry for decent yields — that every once in a while, someone takes the bait. Sometimes the return doesn’t match expectations (big surprise); sometimes their money vanishes in a Ponzi scheme or pyramid scheme of sorts. Any monthly or quarterly statements — if they are sent to the investor at all — should be taken with many grains of salt. If they seem to be manually prepared rather than sent from a custodian firm, that’s a hint of danger right there. Beware of equity investments with “guaranteed” returns. On Wall Street, nothing is guaranteed.

Beware of unlicensed financial “professionals.”

Yes, there are people operating as securities professionals and tax profes-

sionals without a valid license. If you or your friends or relatives have doubts about whether an individual is licensed or in good standing, you can go to finra.org, the website of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (formerly the National Association of Securities Dealers) and use their Broker Check feature.¹

Beware of the pump-and-dump.

In the earlier days of the Web, you used to see online ads linked to this scam, but now email is the preferred route. This is the one where someone sends you an email — maybe it goes straight into your spam folder, but maybe not — telling you about this hot new microcap company about to burst, the shares are a penny each right now but they will be worth a thousand times more in the next 30 days. The offer may be entirely fraudulent, and you will simply say goodbye to whatever money you “invest” if you pursue it. Last year, McAfee’s Threats Report noted a big jump in the frequency of such emails.¹

Watch out for elder scams.

In addition to phony financial services professionals and exaggerated investment opportunities, we have fraudsters specifically trying to trick septuagenarians, octogenarians and even folks aged 90 and above. They succeed too often. To varying degrees, all these ploys aim to exploit declining faculties or dementia. That makes them even uglier. You still see stories about elders succumbing to the “grandparent scam,” a modern-day riff on the old “Spanish prisoner” tale. Someone claiming to be a grandson or granddaughter calls and says they are in prison in another country or stranded without a car or return ticket in some remote or hazardous location, could you wire or transfer me some money, etc. A disguised voice and a soupcon of personal information gleaned from everyday Internet searches still make this one

work. Some elder scams seem recycled from old television plots. On old episodes of Dragnet, people used to get busted for magazine subscription scams — either falsely selling them door to door or over the phone for “charity,” or checking mailboxes in the neighborhood to see who gets what magazine, then phoning the elder to tell them that they’ve actually been getting the last X issues for free, their subscription has expired, the grace period is over, now they have to pay via credit card. This scam is still being used, successfully. Another one from the Dragnet archive is the “fake FDIC inspector” scam, where someone calls an elder up, claims to be with the FDIC and spins a convoluted story about an investigation of his or her bank. The elder can help the “FDIC” by coming down to the bank and withdrawing a few thousand bucks — handing it over to the “inspector” parked a few hundred feet from the bank as evidence, of course.²

Widows and widowers may be vic-

timized by the “debt collector” scam — a crook looks at local obituaries, then calls up the bereaved and claims unpaid debts of the late spouse need to be collected very soon. The caller is quite pushy, and forcefulness is also a hallmark of the tried-and-true “home improvement” scam, in which a call or email mentions that the elder’s new refrigerator, air conditioner, septic tank, etc. has arrived and that a credit card number is needed to proceed with the installation.²

A little healthy skepticism can’t hurt. If you are recently retired or approaching retirement age, be aware of these scams and schemes - and inform your elderly parents about them, too.

Citations.

- 1 - marketwatch.com/story/dont-fall-prey-to-retirement-scams-2014-04-01 [4/1/14]
- 2 - forbes.com/sites/sungardas/2014/09/09/what-everyone-should-know-about-financial-fraud-against-the-elderly/ [9/9/14]

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HISTORIC POSTCARDS

Historic postcards depict rich scenes of early area life

In this issue of Neighbors, Jerdon Real Estate of Dowagiac, owned by Floyd Jerdon and his son Tom, has provided antique postcards of a few of the many lakes in our area. Floyd and his wife Donna started collecting post cards more than 20 years ago, and since Jerdon Real Estate specializes in marketing lake property, it was a natural fit that Floyd's interest be directed to the lake cards. The collection now numbers many thousands.

Jerdon has recently used many of his postcards featuring the Sister Lakes area in a book written by RL Rasmussen. The book, which retails for \$19.99, is in its second printing by the publisher, Arcadia

Publishing.

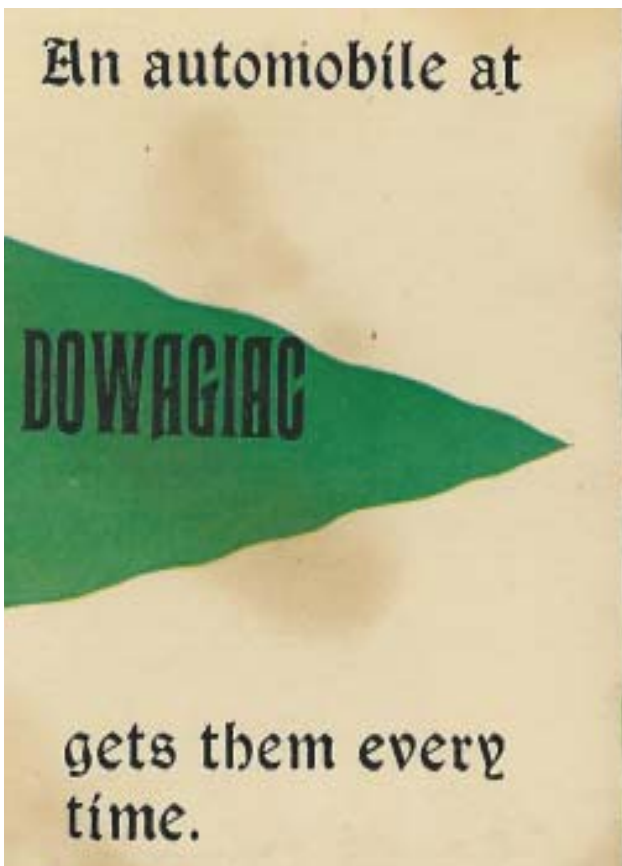
Among other places, the book may be purchased at the Jerdon Real Estate office on M-62 West, and at Whistlestop Gifts, which is operated by the Dowagiac Chamber of Commerce.

For more information or to get a copy of Jerdon's book, visit the website: www.arcadiapublishing.com

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In this edition of Neighbors we have selected postcards showing images in the area of Dowagiac

In future issues, we will couple additional cards from one or more of the area's lakes with views of nearby communities and countryside.



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LOCAL LORE AND HISTORY

More History from George R. Fox

Provided by Cass District Library, Local History Branch.

Continue transcribing from historical information collected by the late George R. Fox (1915-1963), formerly of Dowagiac and Three Oaks. Fox was noted for his many historical and archaeological works, and was curator of the Chamberlain Museum in Three Oaks.

In 1941 Fox compiled “An Audit of the Scenic, Historical, and Recreational Facilities of Cass County and Dowagiac, Michigan”. Limited copies were printed only from a mimeograph machine). The project was sponsored by the Dowagiac Chamber of Commerce under the direction of the State Board of Control for Vocational Education.

This month, I pulled information from page 74 of that document, dealing with some “unincorporated villages”.

Adamsville
1. Adamsville is on US-112 [now US-

12], 5 miles east of Edwardsburg on Christiann Creek. It is 1 and one-half miles [north of] the Indiana-Michigan state line.

2. Adamsville was laid out in March 1833 by Sterling Adams for whom it is named. He platted 79 lots on the east bank of Christiann Creek.

3. The west half of the village, on the west bank of Christiann Creek was platted by Moses Sage in May, 1834 as Christianna. He laid out 48 lots and a public square; two years later George Stevens made an addition with 50 lots, while two months later in the same year L. Johnson added an addition of 140 lots; making 417 lots for what is now Adamsville.

4. Adamsville was first called Adamsport.

5. Christiann Tavern Golf Course of 18 holes is at Adamsville on the west side of Christiann Creek.

Brownsville
1. Brownsville is two and one-half

miles south and three miles east of Cassopolis.

2. Pleasant Grubb in 1834 built a gristmill on the site of the village, damming the waters of the creek draining Diamond Lake.

3. The town is named after the Brown Brothers who bought out Pleasant Grubb.

Union

1. Union is in the extreme southeastern part on highway US-112 [now US-12].

2. Union was started about 1860 [actually several years before, in 1853] and owes its name to the war enthusiasm of that time.

3. In 1853 William B. Dibble had a small grocery at this point. The first general storekeeper was Daniel Williams. [Editors note: Jonas Hartman opened a general store at Union as early as 1831; George Meacham was Union’s first postmaster in 1841. Village moved in 1853 to current site. Said to be named after

strong sentiment for the union of the United States, prior to U.S. Civil War].

4. A marker commemorating the Chicago-Detroit Military Road [now US-12] stands in Union.

Williamsville

1. Williamsville lies just southwest of Birch Lake, six miles southeast of Vandalia.

2. Williamsville is named for Josiah Williams who laid out the village in 1848 with 9 blocks and 84 lots. Williams was progressive and put an alley in every block. [On the 1872 Atlas of Cass County, Michigan it is referred to as “Williams Town”.]

3. Josiah Williams was the first storekeeper in Williamsville.

4. Williamsville is on Mud River also called Porter Creek, draining Birch Lake which flows into and through Shavehead Lake, thence to Long Lake and ultimately the St. Joseph River.

James E. Bonine Carriage House Restoration Underway

Quaker abolitionists James E. and Sarah Bogue Bonine are surely smiling. The restoration of their Victorian Home at Penn Rd and M-60 in Vandalia, as an events and Underground Railroad (UGRR) education center, is progressing beautifully, with the iconic front porches to be added by early summer and upstairs library to open in late spring. As well, work has begun to restore their Gothic Revival Carriage House across M-60 at Calvin Center Rd, that will allow the public to experience a genuine Underground Railroad Station.

It is said that over 1500 fugitive slaves (now called freedom seekers) came through Vandalia from 1840-1860, helped to freedom by Quakers, free blacks and other abolitionists residing there. Many arrived via the Underground Railroad, two lines of which met in Cass County — the Illinois Line through Illinois and the Quaker Line through Indiana.

The UGRR was a series of houses, barns and other structures called “stations” where freedom seekers were given shelter, food and clothing before being taken by “conductors” to the next station.

Well known stations in Penn Township were the Stephen Bogue House at M-60 and Crooked Creek Road, the William Jones House at M-60 and Gards Prairie Road and the Bonine Carriage House, built around 1850. It has seen use as a barn, an Oliver dealership and a branch of Buchanan Feed Mills; but the structure itself is original, except for some of the foundation, which was replaced by cement in the 1930’s.

The Underground Railroad of Cass County (URSCC) a 501c3 non profit, purchased the Bonine House and the Carriage House in December, 2010. Because the Bonine House was near collapse, efforts of the organization focused on saving it, and restoration is ongoing. The Carriage House will function as a major exhibit museum of the period, and also allow visitors to experience what it was like on the Underground Railroad.

URSCC hired local contractors for the restoration. BullsEye Construction took out the southwest corner of the foundation, cribbed the corner and back of the structure, and installed new beams. Quality Masonry is rebuilding the foundation, inside with fieldstone and outside with cobblestone, all from the Bonine House. Two other buildings will be moved to other sites on the property, and the massive cement structure in front of the Carriage House will be removed, bringing back the original view from Bonine House.

Restoration is projected to be complete in 2017. Much more can be learned about the Carriage House, the Bonine House and the Underground Railroad in Cass County on www.urscc.org

Tax deductible donations to help restore the Carriage House and Bonine House can be sent to PO Box 124, Vandalia MI 49095 or donate on line using Paypal or a credit card.

Contact info@urscc.org with questions.



BullsEye Construction took down part of the 1930's foundation and installed new beams at the sw corner



The west outside of the foundation is being restored to match the east side, using cobblestones from the Bonine House front yard



OUR CHILDREN

Proficient writing is an all-important skill

by SANDY FLEMING

Proficient writing is neck and neck with reading and math skills when it comes to student success, college success, and even professional success. However, it's tougher to measure and quantify in school. It also devours class time, homework time, and teacher prep time since it takes a long time to produce, edit, publish and evaluate it. So even if your children are spending an equal percentage of time on writing as well as other subjects, chances are very good that they still could use your help in gaining that all-important skill. There are tons of ways you can help children build writing skills at home, and some of them are even kind of fun!

To make my point just a little bit more clear, take a moment to visit this link: <http://www.greatschools.org/gk/milestones/>. These videos show the type of work that children in grades K through 5 should be producing in each of the three core subject areas. Glance at the writing section in particular that matches your child's grade placement. And if your child is not yet started school or is past grade 5, take a look anyway. Most people are astounded at the quality of work that is expected at such an early age.

Many high school and adult students that I work with have questioned the value of learning to write coherently, using sound spelling and respecting the conventions of formal writing. They do not have to search very far to find situations when others are making judgments and decisions about them based on a written product. It happens all the time: college essays, application letters, resumes, even office memos and emails. The truth of the matter is that written communications such as these are sometimes all an employer or official has to go on to make crucial decisions about your child's future situation and well-being.

If writing exhibits poor spelling, bad grammar, faulty sentence construction, or unclear organization, the reader's opinion of the author is substantially decreased. Sometimes writing is so bad that it distracts the reader or even obscures the author's message completely. An applicant or worker can have the best professional skills in the world and be a perfect fit for a job or situation, and yet not even be granted an interview if their presentation on paper looks careless and sloppy. And that is exactly how poorly-written items look to others. They reflect badly on

the person who wrote them. It doesn't matter if your student struggled in school, or if he or she was trying their best, or if the potential employee would be perfect if he could just land an interview. The sad truth is that low-quality writing will slam doors of opportunity and condemn many people to lower-paying positions or otherwise damage their ability to reach their potential.

These facts should spur several different actions on our part as parents. The first is to teach a simple rule to the kids: never allow writing to leave your possession until it has been thoroughly proofread and is in the best shape possible. Writing is not an activity that is done one time and then finished. It is a process, and any piece that will be read by others deserves the same care. You just never know when your writing will impact your life. That being said, teach the children that the first time words are set to paper is called a rough draft for a reason. NO piece is ready for publication the first time it is written. It should be carefully edited and then proofread to make sure it conveys the desired message and that essential level of quality. This runs directly counter to most children's desire to "get it done" and turn it in. That is the attitude for which you need to be persistent in countering, especially for larger, more complex assignments. No leaving the big report go until the last minute! It needs to be researched, planned, drafted, edited, and proofread, all of which take time. The habits that are built during the school years will last a lifetime, so make them good ones.

And finally, parents need to pay close attention to their child's progress in writing. Educate yourself about the current requirements in writing for your child's grade level and school. Grades alone are not always good indicators; it's completely possible to get As even if the writing is poor. Be sure you are seeing samples of your child's work from time to time, and compare them to standards like the Common Core goals for the age group. Watch the scores on standardized and state testing, but remember that these don't tell the whole story either. The proof of the pudding is what your student's writing actually looks like. One goal to keep in mind is that all students in grade 11 need to take one of the standardized college tests (like the ACT or SAT), and that these tests include an essay grade. The students are expected to produce a reasoned, coherent, legible and

well-written five paragraph essay from a writing prompt in thirty minutes. It's a really smart move to start practicing for that exercise at least at the beginning of high school if not before.

I promised you some fun to help develop writing skills, so here are a few exercises and activities that you can enjoy with the kids to build crucial skills. It's a great idea to do these as a family, because they will benefit everyone!

Vocabulary Builders

It's tough to write if you don't know a lot of words, and studies have shown that students who struggle academically often know far fewer words than their more successful counterparts. Try some of these activities with the kids.

Play commercial word games regularly. Games like Scrabble, Boggle, and UpWords will help your child learn to call forth words in an instant instead of struggling to find the word, which will increase writing fluency. You can even enjoy games such as Hangman, puzzles like crossword puzzles and cryptograms, and computer games like Words With Friends or Bookworm. All of these will get players using their vocabulary and will teach them new words.

Read, read, read!

Every author uses a slightly different word bank to craft the stories, and the more people read, the wider their vocabularies range. Your child should be reading several books a week (or working on a longer book) all the time. In addition, continue to read aloud to your children as long as you possibly can. Don't quit just because they are learning to read on their own. When you read out loud, you add your own inflections and expressions and provide a great model as well as clues for their comprehension. You also will naturally choose literature that is slightly above their current reading skill level, so you open doors of thought and ideas that otherwise would remain closed to them. The library is a great source of books, and so is the internet. There are free books that you can download-many classics. There is absolutely no reason to skimp in this department.

Learn the Basics of Grammar

Sure, these are covered in school, but how much do YOU actually remember from seventh grade English? Here are some other ideas that can help. Try playing Mad Libs. You remember these! They are the stories with the missing words. You first have kids make the list of words such as a number word, a verb ending in

-ing, and so forth, then the random words are plugged into a story and create a remarkably silly passage. Mad Libs will help even the very young learn the parts of speech, and they also help students gain a sense of what "sounds right." If we allow our ears to guide us, they can really help us untangle sentences and make sure we avoid fragments and the like.

Sentence diagramming is a wonderful tool that is seldom taught in school anymore. It can be a little tedious, however. Try sentence building instead. Start with a short, simple sentence like "He ran." Add words and phrases to clarify and make it more descriptive, yet keep it grammatically sound. This can become quite the competition: who can create the longest sentence that is still sound?

Do proofreading practice online.

The internet is full of websites that have been posted with little thought to English grammar or spelling. Help your student find a few of these and rewrite them to make them more grammatically correct and clear.

And Write

There's no substitute for practice. Be sure your child spends time each day writing. It really doesn't even matter what they write. In fact, a variety will really build skills. Write stories, descriptions, directions, lists, poetry, riddles, jokes, opinions, and more. Make sure at least some of the writing practice is sustained over at least thirty minutes. Some can also be sustained over a period of days, like a larger school project. Try free writing: set a timer and have your student write until the bell rings. Any topic is fine, and there's no follow up to this exercise, just increasing lengths of time to put pencil to paper and keep writing.

Younger or less experienced writers can do "Five Sentence" exercises. Write five sentences about what you did today, what you had for lunch or what you would like to do tomorrow. These exercises naturally lead to writing paragraphs, and it's easy to expand from there. Just keep writing, and chances are very good that your student's skills will improve.

Sandy Fleming is an educational consultant and tutor living in Edwardsburg. If you'd like more information, activities, writing prompts and lessons, visit <http://buildwritingmuscle.com> ; there's even a free lesson on recognizing common sentence construction mistakes posted right now!

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THE LAST WORD

Coming to terms with ice fishing ...

February has to be the unkindest month of all. Teasing us with an unruly short number of days, it annually lingers well past its welcome, icing the walks and the streets, piling again and again in Alp-like peaks across the front of the garage apron and restricting access to the mailbox, the trash toter and the bag of Ice Melt that could, if I could only get to it without falling, it could keep the dynamic traction on my sidewalks at least a minimal step ahead of that of a greased banana peel.

But noooooo.

It's gotta February all over the place and remind us that we live in Michigan and that no matter what that fuzzy rodent in Pennsylvania says, it's still winter here, and it's going to stay that way for a while longer, thank you very much.

And that means ice. And snow. And cold. And frost. And frozen sleet. And ice-cold slush that's just waiting to crest the top of your boot and soak your socks into a soggy, dank pulp that, when pulled from the inside of a still-damp boot will approximate the odor of a hound that recently had an unpleasant encounter with a love-lorn polecat.

Cheer up, my wife told me when I was morbidly moping around and hoping for a thaw. It could get worse, she said.

And then I woke up and it was March. The lion part, admittedly, but it's still March. So I cheered up.

And sure enough it got worse, just like she'd predicted.

Sixteen degrees this morning, with a

northwest wind that knifes itself into my mouth and makes my nostrils feel like I've been snorting razor blades. Ice and snow on the roads and walks that squeak and crunch when the soles of my winter boots hike across it, sounding like a master symphony composed for mating cats and breaking glass.

March, huh?

Harumph.

A snowmobile buzzes across the lake ice in front of my house, coming to a stop at the ice shanty that grew out there about a month ago and doesn't show any signs of bearing fruit any time soon. A great bear of a fisherman emerges and exchanges greetings with the sledder. A bottle of some sort of liquid is passed between mittened hands.

Probably medicinal, I guess.

I try my best to imagine what it's like to be an ice fisherman. Now I'm not putting it down ... I'm pretty sure there are any number of people who don't understand my appreciation of sailing ... but if my memory serves me right, the only bite I got on my one ice fishing excursion was frostbite ... and I'm pretty sure I didn't leave anything out on the ice I need to go back after.

Sure, I'd caught a fish that one time.

Not much of a fish. I've since used bigger fish than that as bait. I had bigger fish than that in the fish bowl on my dresser when I was six years old. I've had bigger servings of Sushi.

I stand in the front window and stare in wonder at shanties and the hunched over fishermen sitting on buckets and makeshift seats all across the

frozen, alien lakescape.

What, I wonder, could possibly be the attraction of ice fishing? Why would a person don half a dozen layers of silk, Gore Tex, Thinsulite, cotton and wool and leave their warm house on a frigid day to go sit on a 500-acre ice cube in hopes of catching a bag-full of blue-cold blue gills?

It's certainly can't be the blue gills ... those same blue gills (and a thousand more of their slimy, wriggling kin) are sure to be right there in a few short months ... when a fisherman would be more likely to throw on a swim suit, spray one some DEET and a couple layers of SPF, row a boat to that very same spot and fish away a balmy, sunny and warm afternoon.

And I don't think it's the medicine (although I don't doubt it's effect on improving the body temperature or the relative sunny-ness of the fisherman's disposition) ... for that matter it's been my experience that most of the summer fishermen I know are likely to have a cold six pack of medicinal sunshine in the ubiquitous cooler at their feet.

So what could those fishermen's motivation possibly be?

I've heard it told that there are actually some fishermen who enjoy this masochistic endeavor. But I've also heard it told that there are actually some people who enjoy visiting the dentist, doing long division and discussing the relative merits of Congress.

Mutant genetics, perhaps.

Maybe it's that they, these poor, misguided misanthropes are so socially inept that no one will talk with them; maybe

they are so insecure that the prospect of communing with a hole in the ice and a couple half-frozen soon-to-be filets is more desirable than even artificially warm human interaction.

Or maybe they as a species, are prone to marrying pointy-toothed trolls who sharpen their tongues every morning in anticipation that their barbs, nags and accusations will drive the poor anglers away in desperation ... and the only solace they can find is on a frozen slab of remote ice where the wind whips away the sounds of their pitiful sobs?

Or is it that their homes are filled with an epidemic of pre-pubescent, cootie-carrying, crumb snatching imps whose only apparent reason for existence involves marathon doses of Barney reruns and over-amplified pop music created by talent-challenged teenage felons ... and short of committing a crime and accepting a long incarceration in a sensory deprivation tank in a plea deal, the ice is the only other place fit to serve their sentence in purgatory?

The iciness of their solitary sport makes me shiver. Just thinking about it makes me shudder.

I need a drink!

Suddenly I'm in the midst of an epiphany. I'm slammed by the realization that in a way, I'm not that different from them ... in a way, I'm and ice fisherman, too ... but unlike them, instead of sitting on the ice and trying to coax a blue gill into my cold fingers, I'm sitting at a warm bar moving ice around with my fingers and trying to catch an olive.

To each his own, I guess ...

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