

NEIGHBORS

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inside...

Regional News.....Page 2
Regional Events.....Page 3
Floyd's PostcardsPages 10-12
The Last WordPage 15

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Neighbors

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REGIONAL NEWS

Christmas Bake Sale

The Mason-Union Branch Friends of the Cass County Public Library will hold the annual Christmas Bake Sale on Saturday, Dec. 12 from 9 am to 1 pm. Santa will arrive at 10 am with small gifts for the children.

Christmas by Candlelight

The 30th annual Christmas by Candlelight will be held Monday Dec. 7 at 6 pm at Cassopolis United Methodist Church. Dessert will be served at 6 pm with a program in the sanctuary to follow. All Women are welcome to come and embrace the “Reason for the Season.”

Community Christmas

The Cassopolis/Vandalia Chamber of Commerce will host its 11th annual Community Christmas Celebration on Saturday, Dec. 5 for pre-school age through sixth grade children. The event will feature a hot lunch and a variety of Christmas surprises. For more information call 574-575-6524.

Dowagiac Candle-light Parade

On Dec. 4 in the City of Dowagiac, the following Candle-Light Parade events will occur:

6 pm As you await evening festivities, savor the hot chocolate and sweet delights available from our street vendors.

6:15 - 7 pm Gather ‘round the Beckwith Park for our Tree-Lighting Ceremony, preparade entertainment featuring ACTION Chorale & Positively Dance, and community caroling led by ACTION.

7 pm Listen for the tolling bell of the Town Crier and join Borgess-Lee Memorial Hospital and the Chamber to usher in the Candle-light Parade, a magical evening you'll long remember!

Christmas at the Bonine House December 11 - 13

The Underground Railroad Society of Cass County (URSCC) announces the fourth annual Christmas at the Bonine House on Dec. 11-13. Hours will be Friday and Saturday from 2 - 8 pm and Sunday from noon to 6 pm.

The historic James E. Bonine House on the corner of Penn Road and M-60 in Vandalia will be dressed in holiday finery, with each room decorated by URSCC members and friends. Visiting the Bonine House has become a holiday tradition for the whole family, to see the decorations and the progress on restoration of the Victorian home. Admission is free, donations most appreciated.

Loan workshop

SCORE Michiana is partnering with Chemical Bank to present Small Business Loans: the SBA Advantage, a free workshop at the Niles Public Library Wednesday, Dec. 9 from 9 to 10:30 am.

The event will be at the Niles Public Library, 620 E. Main.

You'll learn everything you need to know about SBA Loans from representatives from Chemical Bank the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Speakers are James Zablocki, VP, Commercial Lending, and Lauren Thurston, Commercial Loan

1000th customer for Fiber Internet

The Cass County Council on Aging (COA) officially became Midwest Connections' 1000th fiber internet subscriber recently. The local non-profit had fiber internet and telephone services installed at their Lowe Center facility in Cassopolis.

Bob Cochrane, CEO of the agency, said the COA relies heavily on the Internet to deliver services to area seniors. “We offer WiFi access at the Lowe Center, which is very popular with our guests. We also assist with tax returns, and these have to be filed online. Last year we had reliability issues with our service and it was challenging to get the returns filed.”

Midwest Connections, a service of Midwest Energy Cooperative, began offering fiber Internet in two small areas of southwest Michigan early in 2014. The member-owned electric cooperative, based in Cassopolis, is implementing a fiber-based communication system across its electric grid to power utility solutions into the future. It is leveraging that investment to extend high-speed Internet to co-op members across southwest Michigan.

Midwest Connections plans to



Ken Schult (right), Administration Team Leader and Chief Financial Manager for the Cass County Council on Aging, gets an overview of the new fiber installation in the agency's server room. Gary Martin, an installation tech with Midwest Connections, installed the fiber internet and phone service last week.

bring fiber Internet to its entire southwest Michigan service territory over a five-year construction period. As the company comes to the end of the first year, interest is growing at a fast pace.

The company divided its southwest Michigan territory into 23 zones, based largely on electric substation service area. Construction is currently complete or underway in six zones, and the

first two zone builds for 2016 have been announced. A crowdsourcing approach is being used to guide future construction plans, and Midwest members are actively working to spread the word to bring service to their area more quickly.

For more information about Midwest Connections, visit TeamFiber.com or call 844-493-4237.

Officer, Chemical Bank, Brian Picarazzi, Senior Area Manager, Michigan District of the U.S. Small Business Administration, and Ed Lockman, Chair, SCORE Michiana.

Topics will include:

- Learn about the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the programs that are available for small business owners and those that want to start a business.
- Learn why you would want to pursue a SBA Loan and what the benefits are for you and your business.
- Learn how and what information is needed to apply for a SBA Loan.
- Learn about the process of applying for a Small Business Loan.
- Learn about assistance available from SCORE Michiana.

Preschoolers discover “Winter Birds” at St. Patrick’s County Park

Preschoolers and an accompanying adult will learn about winter birds found in Indiana from 9:30 to 11 am on Thursday, Dec. 17 at St. Patrick’s County Park in South Bend. The class includes story time, hands-on nature activities, an outdoor hike and a craft.

Nature Munchkins is a program series for 3- to 4-year olds to explore nature with a parent or other adult. Siblings outside the age bracket are not allowed to attend. The Nature Munchkins series is offered by the St. Joseph County Parks.

Program fee: \$5 per adult/child and \$3 for a second child. Registration and payment is required Monday prior to program. For more information please call 574/654-3155.

Park offers Winter Programs for Home School Families

This winter, the St. Joseph County Parks invite home school families to explore animal teeth and skulls while investigating the mysterious “Case of the Bone Chewer”!

Three programs will take place at Bendix Woods County Park from 10 to 11:30 am. The fee is \$3 per child.

Wednesday, December 9: Visit the crime scene to gather clues, study bones up close, and create a list of

possible victims in your detective booklet.

Wednesday, January 13: On the trail of the mysterious “Bone Chewer”, collect more clues from the crime scene and examine skulls to identify the victim.

Wednesday, February 10: We are closing in on the criminal! Study tooth patterns and discover more clues that the bone chewer left behind. Make a button as a reward for solving the case!

The programs are geared towards children five to ten years old, although older and younger children are welcome as well. Advance registration is required by the Monday prior to the program.

Bendix Woods County Park is located on State Road 2, nine miles west of the US 20 Bypass in South Bend.

6th annual Holiday Artisan Market

The Lubeznik Center for the Arts in Michigan City (IN) is hosting its 6th annual Holiday Artisan Market. The Gallery Shop will spill into LCA’s main lobby until Jan. 2, 2016 to accommodate thousands of unique items for the holiday season.

The 2015 market features gift-giving possibilities at every price point by artisans from the Midwest and across the country. Items include contemporary hand-blown glass sculptures created by the Hot Shop Glass Blowing Studio in Valparaiso, IN. Out of Kalamazoo, MI, Skyler Brez creates whimsical felt-cuffed bracelets and scarves. Kahn’s designs are versatile for any personality type, laid back or fashionista. For the Bohemian family member pick up a pair of earthy earrings created by Californian Karen Mahmoudi. Each earring is created out of sterling silver and polymer clay. The market also offers unique toys for children. Ann Thompson from Portage, IN creates precious sock bunnies.

Lubeznik Center for the Arts is located at 101 W. 2nd St., at the lakefront in Michigan City, IN. Weekday hours are from 10 am to 5 pm (CST). Weekend hours are from 11 For more information please visit lubeznikcenter.org or call 219-874-4900.

On the cover

The first snow of the year hit with a vengeance recently, covering roads, trees and fence rails and posts ... like the ones in this photo taken on Birch Road.

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Fred Stein

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REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

- December 2 — Borgess Tree of Love tree lighting at Farr Park, Dowagiac, 5:30 pm

December 2 — Mother Son Book Club, 6 pm, New book club for moms and their sons in elementary school. Call Stephanie for more info. Cass District Library Main Library, 357-7822

December 4 — Dowagiac Area History Museum Fall Lecture Series presentation Studebaker goes to War, 783-2560 or www.dowagiacmuseum.info

December 4 — Dowagiac Christmas Tree lighting, Beckwith Park, 7 pm

December 4 — Dowagiac Candle-light Parade, downtown, 7 pm.

December 5 — Cassopolis Vandalia Chamber of Commerce 11th Annual Community Christmas Celebration, 574-575-6524

December 5 — Smith's Chapel annual Christmas program, 7 pm.
- December 3 — Free Christmas Concert with Harpist Elizabeth Carpenter, 6:30 pm, Cass District Library Howard Branch, 487-9214

December 7 — 30th annual Christmas by Candlelight, 6 pm, Cassopolis United Methodist Church; program in the sanctuary to follow.

December 8 — Mother Daughter Book Club, 6:30 pm, New book club for moms and their daughters in elementary school. Call Stephanie for more info. Cass District Library Main Library, 357-7822

December 9 — Small Business Loans: The SBA Advantage, 9-10:30 am, Niles Public Library, 620 E. Main.

December 9, January 13, February 10 — 'The Case of the Bone Chewer' winter program for home school families at Bendix Woods County Park, South Bend, 10-11:30 am, advance registration required, 574-654-3155 or www.sjcparks.org/bendix.html

December 10 — Arm Knit Scarf Class, 6 pm,
- Bring 2 skeins of thick/bulky yarn to this free class. Cass District Library Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

December 11-13 — Christmas at the Bonine House, corner of Penn Rd. and M-60, Vandalia, 2-8 Friday and Saturday, noon-6 Sunday

December 12 — Mason-Union Branch of the Friends of the Cass County Public Library Annual Christmas Bake Sale, 9 am - 1 pm; Santa arrives at 10 am.

December 12 — Giving Tree Ends, Donations of new hats, gloves, mittens, scarves, and toys will be collected at the library. Cass District Library Howard Branch, 487-9214

December 12 — Santa Visit and Bake Sale, 9 am to 1 pm (Santa from 10-1), Visiting with Santa is free and parents are welcome to take their own pictures. Cass District Library Mason/Union Branch, 357-7821

December 17 — Nature Munchkins program
- on winter birds, 9:30 - 11 am, St. Patrick's County Park, South Bend, 574-654-3115

December 21 — Ornament Craft, 2 pm, Free kids craft. Cass District Library Main Library, 357-7822

December 22 — Cocoa & Canvas for Kids, 2 pm, Limit 12 kids and registration is required. Call to sign-up. Kids will paint a picture with instruction. Cass District Library Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

December 28 — Lego Building, 10 am, Cass District Library Main Library, 357-7822

December 28 — Family Bingo, 2 pm, Cass District Library Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

December 29 — Movie: Pan, 6 pm, Cass District Library Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

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LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

A half-full mug of cocoa



by JANE BOUDREAU
Ho Ho Ho, Neighbors! By now I bet most of you are caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Christmas is my favorite holiday. I love everything about it ... making shopping lists, planning menus, decorating and everything merry-making. In the afternoon I have Christmas music playing whether it's on my iPad or TV music channels, and in the evenings I love Hallmark and TCM holiday movies. I can't help it, I just get a little sappy at this time of year. My hot mug of cocoa is half full. :)

It's hard for so many of us to get through the commercialism of Christmas. It seems to start earlier and earlier. Our stores are filled with holiday items as soon as the Halloween merchandise is cleared off the shelves. Our mailboxes are stuffed with catalogs and our email inboxes are full of ads, 'ideas' for gift giving and flash sales. Every magazine is filled with an overabundance of articles on decorating and recipes and features on people who live in homes we can't help but envy, decorated beyond what we have the time or budget to do. I really do not spend a lot of thought or worry about any of these issues, I have learned how to make them work to my advantage.

I really do love the excitement and anticipation of the holidays, just as I did when I was a little girl. We are still sometimes overwhelmed with too much way too early. But I make my lists and peruse those magazines, ripping out pages with ideas and decorating tips and recipes I may want to try. Store and window displays always make me smile and sometimes you simply can't beat shopping early. Some people are super good about shopping for gifts all year long, not so much me. I love the holiday atmosphere; the music, the Salvation Army



volunteers. All of it makes me feel very warm and fuzzy inside. So I suggest that rather than getting frustrated, grab hold of the reins and go for it. Check off some boxes on your To Do list and enjoy some hot cocoa and sugar cookies while you're at it!

I like to get organized to keep everything moving smoothly as I prepare for what I want to be THE best Christmas ever! I think the little bit of time you invest in getting your ducks in a row saves you an enormous amount of time and energy later in the game. I have a tendency to jump into gift shopping and then I have a menagerie of unsorted bags piled high in a spare room. Nothing makes sense.

My Tip #1, put your presents in the appropriate gift box (that I hope you have already purchased ahead of time). Make sure you enclose the gift receipt if you have one, or keep all of your receipts in a folder or envelope. Then write the name of the recipient on the box and stack them away until you are ready to start the fun of wrapping gifts---and yes, I said fun!

My Tip #2. Get yourself a box or bin, it doesn't have to be fancy. A little basket or plastic container, something large enough to hold all of your gift wrapping needs: a few rolls of Scotch tape, scissors, some felt tip markers in red and green, ribbon or jute twine, gift tags and bows. You can keep this container in the area you like to wrap gifts (I do mine on my kitchen island). When you are ready to call it a day, everything goes back into the bin and you can tuck it in a closet or under a bed, whatever works for you.

My Tip #3. Keep your rolls of wrapping paper in a small hamper, tall basket or even a plastic bucket, anything that can hold several rolls upright to help you see what you have at a glance. I guess you can call this a tip of it's own but it's just so simple. To keep those rolls of wrapping paper neat, secure and unwrinkled, take the cardboard roll from a used up roll of toilet paper or paper towels. Cut a slit all the way through the roll lengthwise, like a little cuff. When you are finished gift wrapping and still have more paper to use, slide this cuff over the middle. It will keep the paper neat and ready for your next use. No sticky tape to peel off which always tears away precious paper.

Tip #4. Wrapping paper can be expensive. And wrapping packages takes time. I love using gift bags when I can but forget the ones you see in the stores. I go to a Dollar Store and buy up as many plain white gift bags as I can. I have a few Christmas themed rubber stamps and three little pads of ink in red, green and brown. I stamp my little brain out on these bags to hold smaller gifts. Some inexpensive tissue also jazzes everything up and if you have one or more items in the bag, loosely enfold those in tissue, maybe even winding some twine or ribbon around--it makes the recipient feel like they are getting an abundance of love and thought. And they are! To keep my enthusiasm up I often wrap gifts and then at another time add cute tags, ribbon and bows. The first part is about doing a neat job, the second about creativity. By having a breather in-between, you will be much more inclined to put

your personal touch on the package.

One last thought on this subject and **My Tip #5**. Use your wrapped presents as part of your holiday decor. After all, by now you have carefully selected cute and festive paper and have lovingly added your sweet touch...it's not the time to hide things away (the exception being those for young kiddos, then you have to tuck them away from their prying little fingers!). I actually have to do this with my daughters well into their 20's. lol! So, have a pile of gifts on the hearth, some small packages on a cabinet or shelf or on a non-essential stool or chair in the kitchen or dining room. They will be an added festive touch and brighten any room.



In my photos of holidays past, I'm sharing some little spaces I've decorated for Christmas. I like to make little vignettes, or groupings that don't take up a lot of room but make a statement. For a long time I simply took what I had: candles, figurines, and many a snowman, of which I have a big collection, and scattered them on every available surface. When things are spread out in a room, or worse, throughout the house, you lose the visual impact.

My Tip #6. Make little arrangements on anywhere you have the space. I like something cute on my dining table, coffee table a corner of my kitchen countertop, even a window sill. Whether you do this sparingly or go all out, mix things up; a sparkly candle with a basket of pinecones and potpourri, or a simple collection of angels nested on a bed of greenery. It catches attention this way. Grouping in odd numbers always look a bit more attractive as well, not sure why.

I have to say something about themes. My tree ornaments are a mish mash of treasures my husband and I found in the very early days of our marriage...nothing fancy. Then we added handmade gifts that our four children made from their little handprints stamped on construction paper to small wreaths made of shredded wheat cereal and tons of glue! We've added ornaments from places we have travelled to and of course, as our taste has changed, I've gone from homespun to blingy to nature inspired. Still, I enjoy hanging each and every ornament and the memories they bring back. My personal favorites are the old and traditional glass ornaments that were passed on to me when I lost my par-

ents. Many are older than I am. They are precious to me.



I think it's very special when we can use nature to decorate our homes. We love flowers from our garden in summer bouquets so why not take a walk around your garden and gather up pinecones, acorns, evergreen sprigs and branches. Display them in a pretty dish or on a tray. And that's **My Tip #7**. I have a friend who gathers long sticks on her walks, spray paints them white to resemble birch and pokes them into her outdoor planters that also include evergreen and berries that have been given a little sprinkling of silver glitter. 'Inside the house I love using what I can find at the grocery store.

For My Tip #8: I might poke some cloves into oranges and limes to make a fragrant fruit bowl. Throw in some cinnamon sticks for added natural fragrance. Potpourri is very inexpensive and much better for your health than air sprays. You can take the idea a little further by making an arrangement of seasonal fruits like apples, pears, pomegranates, and interesting squash. Place them in a basket or on a large platter with greenery as a little nest. Add a candle or two and you have a lovely table centerpiece. Use your imagination and perhaps what you have right outside your door. And have fun while you save money!



If you've been reading my column each month you know I have a thing for pretty dining tables whether it be for special occasions, casual dinners or holidays. I'm not pretentious by any means, I simply love the opportunity to be creative and make guests feel special. I've also found so many ways to do a beautiful table on a dime, and I've written about those in the past. You can find inexpensive dishes, napkins, candles, platters, vases and just about anything you need for making a beautiful table that reflects your style at stores like Marshall's, TJ Maxx, HomeGoods and Hobby Lobby just to name a few. I

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

love my Winterberry dishes from Pfaltzgraff and I collected each and every plate little by little over the years. Until I had enough, I alternated simple white plates with the Winterberry — I'm crafty like that! My silver is all mismatched, collected over time by many visits to antique and thrift shops. I pick up napkins, place mats and tablecloths on sale or clearance. Just a few ideas where you might be able to stretch the budget.

And that brings to **My Tip #9**. There is no reason to not use your everyday dishes, Mine are quite plain. If you want to jazz them up, lay your napkins on top of the plates and place your silverware on top. No need to take the traditional route for placement all the time. In fact when we deviate from the rules it's often quite interesting. My Tip #9: Paper napkins are absolutely wonderful but be sure to get something strong. One of the things I like to do to jazz up paper napkins and take them up a notch is to pull out your holiday stamps and a few ink pads and stamp something cute on them. Snowflakes, stars, Santa's...the ideas are all there in your stamping aisle at the local craft shop. I have a whimsical reindeer stamp that I've used on everything from napkins to gift bags and tags, to the envelopes of my Christmas cards. People love my little reindeer. Sometimes I even color his little nose in with a red pen! :) So, the idea is to have fun and not worry about what the Jones' are doing.



I'm going to consolidate gift giving with baking because so many of us who love to bake also love to give it away. I do it year round because I would be bigger than a cow if it were in my home! At Christmastime it has been a very longtime tradition to give food as a gift to those we love, including family, friends and anyone else you love or who cannot bake to save their lives.

Sometimes a cute inexpensive tray from the drugstore is the perfect way to hold a variety of your cookies and candies. Handy little glassine bags and small boxes can be found at craft stores as well as little baskets that you can line with tissue paper. Presentation is important now because you really want it to look like a gift, not a bag of leftovers. Use colorful ribbon and bows to embellish your goodies. And by all means, use those stamped bags I've been extolling the virtues of!

Some of the easier treats to make and bake for me are Almond Bark Pretzel Rods (as seen in this picture), bar cookies which can be sliced up to fill several boxes/bags. And try some sweeter party mixes like Puppy Chow and Muddy Buddies, as well as an

assortment of cookies. Never rule out your own toasted nuts or maybe some caramel popcorn. And that is **My Tip #10**. All of these treats are not only very simple, they use a minimal amount of ingredients and each batch can be spread out for a great number of recipients. Happily, they all can be made ahead. Can it can any better?

And speaking of 'make ahead,' My **Tip #11**. I have and love recipes for 'make ahead' cookie and pie dough that you can freeze. You can Google them or type them into a Search on Pinterest if you do that sort of thing. I love that I can make up the dough, and then at a later time have the fun part of rolling put, cutting up, baking and decorating. Like my method of wrapping gifts one day and decorating another, you don't tire yourself out to the point of losing the joy. It also helps when you're busy, the process of making cookies or pie is half done. Yay!



My Tip #12: You may have heard of that very thoughtful gift of giving a Mason or Ball jar you've filled with all of the dry ingredients used in a cookie or cake recipe for example, even soups. I love the idea and we can take it one step further to make life easier for ourselves. For your own baking, mix all the dry ingredients for a particular recipe and store it in large jars or plastic bags tied up tightly until you are ready to make the whole batch. You're halfway there when you are ready to go and then clean up is a snap. Here I go again, dividing everything into halves! Which brings me to My Tip #13. Never feel like everything has to be homemade. I'm not a fan of preservatives but that doesn't mean everyone is, so if you are making a huge batch of cookies, cakes or pies, go for the shortcuts of store bought mixes, pre-made cookie dough and pie crusts as well as canned fruits. I really love the decorating part and it was always the highlight of baking with my daughters when they were young. They lost interest during the actual baking in the oven. Most mixes are perfected beyond belief so you will get a lot of bang for your buck, and your time and energy can be spent elsewhere. Or you can just sit back and watch It's A Wonderful Life.

My last few thoughts are on gift giving and doing that on a budget. I simply can't tell you what to buy your husband or mother in law but I have a few ideas for gifts that may be perfect for many of those on your list simply because they take thought, can be tailor made, and have your personal touch. Oh, and did I also say not break the bank? Again, think gift bags as they can contain a variety of different shapes and sizes. And think of those odd numbers, for some

strange reason they are just better.

So, My Tip #13. Gift bag ideas for your favorite people:

- 2 pretty candles and a jar of matchsticks (Yankee Candle and White Barn Candle Co. carry them).
- A cute mug with a few tea bags and cinnamon sticks tied in a bundle
- A manicure kit from your fave drugstore, a few bottles of nail polish and a bottle of polish remover
- A package of soup mix, a few wooden spoons and a pretty potholder
- a clay flower pot, spade and some seed packet.

For the guys in your life

- A gift bag with shave cream, a nice razor and aftershave cologne
- A knit cap, small ice scraper and insulted coffee mug
- Grill tools, oven mitt and a Bobby Flay BBQ book (maybe a spray bottle for good measure!!!)

Just a few ideas.

The last of my crazy ideas, **My Tip #??** (I've forgotten at this point!)

- Do anything and everything in advance, especially cooking for the big day. Do your side dishes a day or two before your celebration. When I have run out of refrigerator space I have put my side dishes and cold items in the car in our garage. Ha!
- Set your table the day before if possible. If not, gather up everything you need from plates to silverware to glassware. And also pull out the bowls and platters you will be using so you are not hunting through your cabinets at the last minute.
- Clean your house a few days before the big day, it's not going to accumulate a lot of dust after that point. I always wanted everything to be freshly done and could be found vacuuming an hour before company arrived. The only thing you need to worry about is tidying up the bathrooms as everyone will be using them.
- Get yourself ready first and foremost. You can touch up your hair and make up later and by all means. Wear an apron so you don't have to change your clothes when the gravy splatters all over you.
- Have some simple appetizers planned. No one expects to sit down for dinner the minute they arrive and some guests will arrive on an empty stomach. Doing so will also gives you a chance to relax with your company for a little bit, have little bite and drink or two before you head back to the kitchen for the last of the preparations.
- It's tried and true advice to enlist help in the kitchen. I personally don't like more than one or two people helping me out, my kitchen is not the biggest. Ask your very best friend and/or someone who loves you unconditionally so you can bark orders and rely on them to do the dirty work-like washing dishes and taking out the trash. Just kidding. People like to feel needed. And I always have fun chatting and laughing with someone while I'm slaving away. It's also a good excuse to have a glass of wine at 11 a.m. Cheers!
- Remember to relax. Turn the heat down in the oven and hold back on rushing the rest so you have time to interact and enjoy the fun. I also ask my kids to help clear the table after dinner so I can sit longer and visit



with my guests. Taking a walk after dinner with those who want to is so refreshing as well. Forgive those who want to take a nap on the couch. I hold off on dessert for an hour or more after dinner is cleaned up. We have a bit of an appetite back then and the coffee wakes us up. We have additional guests who have had other dinner plans that come later, too. We often bring out more snacks and appetizers. In my home the celebrating goes on until late. And I sit back, have fun and watch my family and friends having a great time. :)

- Last but not least, keep your expectations reasonable. You can see the photo of my living room from Christmas of 2014. It's so small that we had to move the coffee table out to accommodate our ever growing family. That's okay, it's not about all of the fussing you've done, Christmas morning is a celebration and a time to reflect on the true meaning the season. Everything else falls to the wayside.

As you can see, I have an enormous number of ideas. I know this is not the first time you have heard many of them It just makes me happy to think some of you will be inspired to try a few new ideas or just simply enjoy the traditions you have and add to them. My philosophy is to start planning and putting those plans into action a bit earlier---it's really not a bad thing. I also want so many of you to feel that you don't have to be a Rockefeller to have a festive home and beautiful gifts that keep you on your budget.

It has been a wonderful year contributing to Neighbors. I am so thankful to Phil Vitale for having the confidence in me to write these columns without knowing what he was in for. I'm also chuffed by so many of you readers who have sent emails with questions, ideas and sincere compliments. In the coming New Year I would love to include some of your decorating ideas, gardening tips, recipes and just about anything that you want to put out there. Are you on board?

I'm going to sign off now. Thanks to all of you for reading. I'm so excited to see how 2016 unfolds for all of us in this beautiful part of the Midwest we call home. I wish you joy, peace and happiness this holiday season. Bless all of you.

From my family to yours ...
Jane, Alan, Jeff, Kevin, Emily & Abby. And of course Milo and Layla, our precious pups, and Nina, our vulture. I mean parrot.

**All photos are taken by myself and can be used by permission only.*

**You can contact me directly at blondiesjournal@gmail.com with questions, comments or to just say Hi!*

**You can also visit my blog at Blondiesjournals.blogspot.com.*

HEALTH & FITNESS

Avoid these holiday pounds!

By Brenda Harris
Cass COA

Holidays! Does that mean putting on extra weight? For a lot of us YES it does, because we can't push ourselves away from the goodies. Yes, you need to be strong willed, and stay in control of your food intake. Holidays involve many parties and dinners. When you're not in control of the food that's served; and there is a tempting spread before you, eating healthy can be tough. You need to shift your focus from saying no to making smart choices among the foods that are served at parties. Here are some ways to help minimize your weight gain for the holidays.

Eating:
Allow you're self to eat some unhealthy items, do eat less than you normally would. Don't lose self-control and over eat. When it comes to holiday eating self-restraint only goes so far when Mom or Grandma push it in front of you and say eat more. It helps if you eat your designated portion, then put a piece of gum or mint into your mouth. This might STOP the temptation to go back for seconds.

Drinks:
Alcohol has a lot of calories, watch the amount of drinking you do. Try to do smaller amounts in your glass and drink slowly. Remember you can always go to flavored seltzer water!!

Dips:
The dips you get at parties are most likely made from sour cream. But, if you are making it yourself use yogurt, which dramatically cuts down on calories.

Exercise:
Exercise is also essential when trying to keep your weight down. It is hard to find the time to exercise with shopping, wrapping, baking, decorating and partying. The holidays are super busy. Unfortunately, exercise is the first thing to be cut out of your busy schedule. STOP RIGHT THERE!! Don't do that to yourself. You need to take the time to do something good for yourself. If your regular time doesn't work then find

or make a new time even if it's shorter. The old saying "if you don't use it, you lose it!!" So be FLEXIBLE, and redo your schedule and exercise.

Sleep:
Yes, you've got a lot going on, but how will you ever get it all done if you're dragging -butt all day long? Remember, the lack of sleep inhibits concentration and makes us 'less efficient and more irritable.' What if I can't sleep? Try some relaxation techniques to relax you to physical and mental state to where you can fall asleep.
Happy Holidays!!!

Sneak stretching into your life

By Brenda Harris
Cass COA

Like flossing your teeth, stretching is something you know you should do. After each workout, you always intend to cool down and stretch. But there are only so many hours in a day; and once you've crammed in the cardio and strength work, your exercise time slot is often used up. Does it sound familiar? If you are feeling guilty, relax. The good news is that you can stay limber by loosening up your approach to stretching. Of all the components of physical fitness, flexibility is the most neglected. However, it's the easiest to fit into your daily routine if you're willing to be, well, flexible. Many people don't stretch because they think they are not good at it. You don't have to push yourself to be more

limber or to be able to do all the contortionist moves your yoga or aerobics instructor can do. Your main goal should be to maintain your current flexibility. There are many stretching opportunities. If you keep one basic concept in mind; taking advantage of downtime. Whether you are standing in line at the cash machine or waiting for an elevator, you can do shoulder rolls, bend your knees to stretch your calves or simply clasp both hands behind your back to stretch your arms and chest. Once you start stealing snatches of stretch time, you will find yourself becoming limber without trying. Here are some examples of sneaking stretches in your busy life and the Ground Rules doing them:

The Ground Rules
■ Breathe slowly and easily through

every stretch.
■ Pay attention to your body. You should feel slight muscle tension that diminishes once you've held the pose for about 10 seconds.
■ Hold each stretch for about 20-30 seconds.
■ If a move is painful, ease up on it.

Examples of Stretches
■ While blow drying your hair; use a counter or even the toilet seat as a ballet bar: Place your heel on the level surface to the side or in front of you, flex toes hard to engage hamstrings, and lower chest toward that thigh. Switch sides and repeat.
■ At work, while sitting at your desk, lock your fingers, sit up straight and extend arms over your head, pushing palms toward the ceiling.

■ While you're watching TV or reading a book, sit on the floor or in bed and place the soles of your feet together. Let knees gently drop out to the sides to lengthen groin and inner-thigh muscles.
■ Place right palm on cabinet or cupboard at chest height and take one step forward and place left hand on shoulder to feel the stretch. Tilt head slightly to the left. Switch sides and repeat.
■ At the gym, sit on a bench and twist your body gently to the right, looking back over your right shoulder as far as you can. Repeat on the other side to stretch abs, torso and neck.
These are just a few stretches to start you out. Be creative and try new moves that feel good and are safe.

Speeding up a slow computer

Computer moving at turtle speed? Here are some ways to speed things up (specifically for PCs).

1.) Run "Check Disk" This gem is found by clicking the "Start" menu (lower left corner of screen) and clicking on "Computer". Proceed by right clicking on "C" drive (C:). Click on "Properties", then the "Tools" tab. You'll see the heading "Error Checking" in the first section. Click on "Check now". You'll see two options for "check disk" to "Automatically fix file system errors" and "Scan for and attempt recovery of bad sectors". I always select both and proceed to scan. It will run a scan the next time you start

or reboot your computer. After the first scan, it won't run again until you tell it to do so.


2.) Run "Disk Cleanup" This is located under "Computer". Go to the "Start" menu, open up "Computer", right click on the "C" drive (C:), click "Properties", then click "Disk Cleanup", which is located under the "General" tab. When you click this, it will analyze what can be cleaned up and give you results. Go through and read what each one would do for you and select at your own preference.

3.) See how much memory your

Computing over Coffee

By Ed Marshall

Got a computer-related question for Ed?
Email him at ed@computingovercoffee.org




computer has and think about upgrading if it's less than 2 GB (Gigabytes). You can find out how much memory is in your computer by going to the "Start" menu, right clicking on "Computer", clicking on "Properties" and looking under the "System" heading for "Installed Memory (RAM)". You can find the proper type of memory for your computer by checking with the place where you purchased your computer or as an option go to www.crucial.com and run the "Crucial System Scanner". The system scanner will give you information on the memory your computer has in it, as well as their prices (as they do sell memory). This will tell you how much memory your computer can hold. Before purchasing through the website, if you choose to do so, be sure to shop around for the best deal.

4.) Run a Malware & Anti-Virus scan. Sometimes this may be the culprit that is slowing down your computer.

There are a variety of antivirus programs, so each one may be a little different. If you need help scanning your computer, refer to the "Help" section of your antivirus program.

5.) Remove old or unwanted programs. New computers will often come with "bloat ware" and other programs that you'll end up not using (such as free games or so many hours/days of X, Y, Z program before you have to pay). If you never use it or are not sure why it's even there, you should be able to safely remove the program by going to the "Programs and Features" section within the "Control Panel" on your computer.


6.) Delete your cookies and temporary Internet files. In a previous article, I addressed how to do these things. Removing these will definitely help speed things up.
Until our next cup!
~Ed



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BUSINESS & FINANCE

Old man winter and safe driving

By **VICKI BROSSMAN**
Kemner-Iott Benz Agency of Cass County

Another Michigan winter has arrived and it's time to brush up on your winter driving skills. Here is a short quiz. The answers are at the end of the article.

- 1. When driving in winter conditions remain at least ____ car lengths behind snowplows.
A. 3
B. 5
C. 6
D. 8
- 2. True or False? Snowplow drivers have good visibility with few blind spots.
- 3. Passing a snowplow is dangerous because:
A. The snowplow creates a ridge of snow to its side that can cause you to lose control of your vehicle.
B. The plow kicks up a snow cloud which causes total white out conditions.
C. It may be difficult to see the blade of the plow which can extend several feet ahead of the truck and up to 30 inches beyond the truck's width.
D. All of the above.
- 4. When driving in snow you should avoid using your:
A. High beam headlights
B. Low beam headlights

- C. Emergency flashers
D. Rear window defroster
- 5. True or False? In a rear-wheel drive vehicle, you can usually feel a loss of traction or the beginning of a skid. With a front-wheel vehicle, there may be no warning.
- 6. If you are in an accident, you should:
A. Turn on your emergency flashers
B. Call the police
C. Notify your insurance agent as soon as possible
D. All of the above.

Is your car ready? Check your tires, battery, heater, and antifreeze level. Install new wiper blades and keep your washer reservoir full. Keep the fuel tank near full to prevent condensation which may lead to a frozen fuel line.

Check your emergency kit — Make sure your kit includes warm clothing, boots, a stocking cap, gloves or mittens, a flashlight with fresh batteries, flares, a shovel, sand or kitty litter, blankets, first aid supplies, and non-perishable, nutritious snacks. Small candles and matches — a lit candle can provide warmth and with the proper precautions is much safer than letting the engine run.

Share your plans — Let people know where you are going, what route you will be taking, and when you plan to arrive. Stay alert and know exactly where you

are at all times in the event you need to call for help. Watch for roads signs and landmarks. Your cell phone will do little good if you don't know where you are.

Yikes, it's slippery! Ice can form on road surfaces anytime the air temperature drops below 40 degrees, especially if it is windy. Bridges and overpasses can be the first to freeze. Watch for low or shaded areas as well as roadways where melting snow has had an opportunity to freeze. Black ice can be extremely dangerous causing you to lose control when you least expect it. Intersections can be another danger area - be sure to leave at least one car length in front of you when stopped at the intersection and be aware of what is happening behind you.

Blowing snow and whiteout conditions — Finding yourself in a complete whiteout can be terrifying. Don't panic; remain calm, alert and patient. Slow down gradually if you are uncomfortable with the speed you are traveling. Make sure your lights are on including your low beam headlights and fog lights. Avoid passing, changing lanes or crossing traffic. Don't stop on the travelled portion of the road - you could be the first vehicle in a chain-reaction collision. Keep your windows and mirrors clean. Try to get off the road and into a safe parking area.

Let's see how you did on the quiz:

- 1. D - 8 car lengths.
Snowplows drive slower than the posted speed limit. Snow from the snowplow can spray out reducing visibility.
- 2. False -
Never assume the snowplow driver sees you. Wing blades can obscure side vision and drivers cannot see out the back window.
- 3. D - All are reasons to avoid passing a snowplow.
- 4. A - using your high beam headlights can magnify the visual intensity of the falling snow.
- 5. True - Although front-wheel drive and four-wheel drive vehicles usually handle better in snow and ice, skids can still occur unexpectedly.
- 6. D - If you are in an accident, it is important that you complete them all.

Along with getting your car ready for winter, be sure your automobile insurance is ready for winter by reviewing your policy with your insurance agent. You don't want to find out after an accident that you don't have the coverage you thought you did.



Year-end financial reminders

Here are some important things to note as the year comes to a close

Provided by **Greg Schoenfeld**
Compass Wealth Advisors

As every calendar year ends, the window slowly closes on some notable financial deadlines and opportunities. Here are several to keep in mind before 2016 arrives.

Don't forget that IRA RMD. If you are older than age 70½ and own one or more traditional IRAs, you have to take your annual IRA required minimum distribution (RMD) by December 31. If you are being asked to take your very first RMD, you actually have until April 1, 2016 to take it — but your 2016 income taxes may be substantially greater as a result. (Note: original owners of Roth IRAs never have to take RMDs from those accounts.)¹

Did you recently inherit an IRA? If you have and you weren't married to the person who started that IRA, you must

take the first RMD from that IRA by December 31 of the year after the death of that original IRA owner. You have to do it whether the original account is a traditional IRA or a Roth IRA.²

You might want to divide that inherited IRA into multiple inherited IRAs before New Year's Eve, thereby promoting a lengthier payout schedule for younger inheritors of those assets. This move must be made by the end of the year that follows the year in which the original IRA owner died. Otherwise, any co-beneficiaries receive distributions per the life expectancy of the oldest beneficiary. Check with the IRA custodian to see if it will permit this.²

Can you contribute more to a 401(k), 403(b), 457 or TSP plan? You have until December 31 to boost your 2015 contribution. This year, the contribution limit on both plans is \$18,000 for those under 50, \$24,000 for those 50 and older.³

Can you do the same with your IRA? The traditional and Roth IRA contribution limit for 2015 is \$5,500 for those

under 50, \$6,500 for those 50 and older. (You must have employment compensation to make IRA contributions.) Some taxpayers earn too much to make Roth IRA contributions — above \$131,000 AGI, an individual filing as single or head of household can't make a Roth contribution for 2015, and neither can joint filers with AGI exceeding \$193,000.⁴

Ever looked into a Solo(k) or a SEP plan? If you have self-employment income, you can save for the future using a self-directed retirement plan, such as a Simplified Employee Pension (SEP) plan or a Solo 401(k). You don't have to be exclusively self-employed to set one of these up — you can work full-time for someone else and contribute to one of these while also deferring some of your salary into the retirement plan sponsored by your employer. Contributions to SEPs and Solo 401(k)s are tax-deductible. December 31 is the annual deadline to set one up, and if you meet that deadline, you can make your contributions for the current year as late as April 15 of next year.⁵

You can contribute up to 25 percent of your net self-employment income to a SEP for 2015 — up to \$53,000. For a Solo 401(k), the same \$53,000 limit applies — but you can reach it by contributing a mix of Roth or pre-tax salary deferrals and up to 25 percent of your net self-employment income (20 percent if your business is an LLC or sole proprietorship). You are allowed to defer up to \$18,000 in salary and up to 20 percent/25 percent of net self-employment income into a Solo 401(k) for 2015, and up to \$24,000 and up to 20 percent/25 percent net self-employment income if you are 50 or older. (If you contribute to another employer's 401(k) plan, the sum of your employee salary deferrals plus your Solo(k) contributions can't be greater than the aforementioned \$18,000/\$24,000 limits.)^{5,6}

Do you need to file IRS Form 706? If you are wealthy and your spouse passed away in 2015, this may be necessary.

Executors of estates use Form 706 to notify the IRS of the size of an estate. If a gross estate and adjusted taxable gifts of a decedent exceed the estate tax exemption (currently \$5.43 million), the executor of that estate must file Form 706 after the decedent's passing. If the decedent's gross estate and adjusted taxable gifts are less than the estate tax exemption, Form 706 should be filed anyway to show the IRS that the unused portion of the decedent's estate tax exemption may be carried over to the surviving spouse. A new IRS rule says that executors filing returns after July 31, 2015 for estates exceeding the estate tax exemption must inform both heirs and the IRS about the value of certain types of assets so that tax won't be underreported should these assets be sold. (See your tax advisor for details.)^{7,8}

Are you feeling generous? You could gift appreciated securities to charity before 2015 ends — you may take a charitable deduction for them on your 2015 1040 form and avoid capital gains taxes on the shares. You may want to gift a child, relative, or friend — a single taxpayer can gift up to \$14,000 this year to as many other individuals as desired, and a couple may jointly gift up to \$28,000 to as many individuals as they wish. Just remember the current \$5.43 million/\$10.86 million lifetime exemption.³

- Citations.**
1 fool.com/investing/general/2015/09/29/mrd-requirements-for-your-retirement-accounts.aspx [9/29/15]
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For the Record: Sarett Nature Center

Sarett is a community nature center located in southwestern Michigan, along the Paw Paw River valley. Their primary focus is environmental education, but they also have over 1000 acres, 8 miles of trails including boardwalks, observation platforms, and an easily accessible barrier-free walkway, a nature center building, a tree top walkway and live native animals. The facility is located at 2300 Benton Center Rd., Benton Harbor. The building is open Tuesday-Friday 9 am - 5pm, Saturday 10 am - 5 pm and Sunday 1 - 5 pm. Trails are open dawn to dusk every day. General email: Sarett@sarett.com

The building also houses the Jordan Tatter Great Room that can be rented for a variety of events For more information call 269-927-4832. or visit www.sarett.com. Each year over 25,000 students attend programs at Sarett. Local school systems make use of environmental education classes like pond study, maple sugaring, dune and river exploration, natural communities, and winter ecology as a part of their curriculum. One of the most popular activities is birding. The Berrien County checklist contains over 300 species

Sarett Nature Center operates with a staff of 8-9 naturalists including full and part time staff members as well as seasonal interns.

NATURE NOTES

Snowy owl makes early visit to the area

Provided by
Cass District Library,
Local History Branch

On November 2, 2015 a snowy owl was sighted atop the Lake Township water treatment plant off Red Arrow Highway. That afternoon, Ann Miller of Bridgman stopped by the location, the owl had moved to a headstone at nearby Graceland Cemetery, and she took a photo.

Snowy owls spend the summer months on the arctic tundra of Canada, Europe and Asia. The species appears annually in Southwest Michigan, but numbers vary greatly from year to year, food supply to our north being a main component.

In Berrien County, snowy owls appear on average between November 15 to 20, thus, Monday's sighting is somewhat earlier than average. Sometimes the white owl is seen regionally as early as October.

During the last two winter season, unprecedented numbers of snowy owls moved south into the northern and central United States, and a few occurring in the Deep South.

During the last days of October, about a half-dozen snowy owls have been reported in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, found in a starving and emaciated condition, according to Jerry Menard, of the Chocolay Raptor Center, in Marquette.

Menard says that two of the large owls were brought in for rehabilitation and "are doing very well" and that the owls are soon to be released back into the wild.



Snowy owl, November 2, 2015 at Graceland Cemetery, Lake Township. Photo by Ann Miller of Stevensville.

HISTORIC POSTCARDS

Historic postcards depict rich scenes of our area's past

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

In this edition of Neighbors we have selected postcards showing images of the Round Oak Stove Co.

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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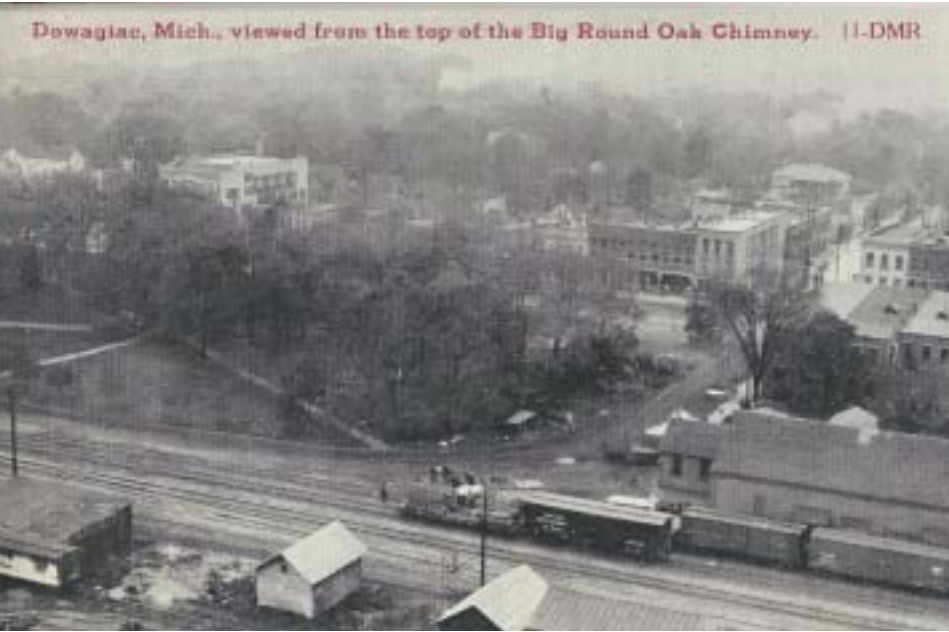


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OUR CHILDREN

Making a difference

by **SANDY FLEMING**

The holiday season is a wonderful time to examine your family's to the community. The habit of volunteering and giving begins in early childhood, and this is one area where children definitely learn what they live. You can raise children who give back to their community by setting a great example and by providing them with many different opportunities to give time and energy for the good of others.

The benefits of volunteering are enormous and often priceless. Not only do kids learn to be better members of their community, they also improve other skills. Volunteering teaches children and youth important values, such as the inherent worth of all people. It's an opportunity for learning and networking. Best of all, it builds job skills such as being on time for commitments, initiative to see what needs done and do it, and following through. Children who volunteer learn to meet the public, they learn to take direction from supervisors, and they learn to get along with coworkers. Volunteering builds people's self-esteem, confidence, and work ethic. So let's make it happen, and let's start this holiday season!

Projects on Their Own

- If transportation is a roadblock to your children's volunteer efforts, here are a few ideas that they can do at home and without much adult assistance.
- Collect recyclables for a charity. Lots of organizations collect various product packaging parts to recycle for extra money or to protect the environment. Check with your local schools and churches to see what they are collecting and for whom. Examples include plastic lids, pop can tabs, and so forth.
 - Collect labels and box tops. There are several programs that exchange money to schools and other organizations for clipped labels or symbols from product packaging.
 - Collect pennies or small change and donate it to the group of your choosing. It adds up fast!
 - Create placemats for nursing homes or community dinners. Check with the organizers to find a home for

- your efforts, then purchase a package of plain 11 x 14" white paper. Use crayons or colored pencils to decorate the placemats with seasonal drawings. Work on this over a period of weeks during free time, and make placemats that will brighten the mealtime for someone who might be lonely.
- Visit <http://www.colorasmile.org> and print out coloring sheets. Have the kids enjoy coloring them, then return the sheets to the address on the website. This organization donates the artwork to senior citizens, the disabled, nursing homes, military personnel, and anyone needing a bit of children's artwork to brighten their day.
 - Make holiday cards. Have the kids make as many as they can, in any type of artwork and paper. Take the cards to a nursing home and pass them out.
 - Sign and send cards to military personnel. Check online for addresses for servicemen and women, for those in military hospitals, and for disabled veterans.
 - Collect food items for your local food pantry program. Try giving children a small budget to donate and take them shopping to choose how to use the money.
 - Teach your children to set aside money to give to others in some fashion. This could be the ten percent tithe to church or whatever amount seems right to you to give them the idea that their money can be partly used for the good of others.
 - Collect small bottles of toiletries to donate to the homeless or women's shelters in your area. Unused sample bottles or the small toiletries from hotel rooms are excellent for this.
- Child-Friendly Volunteer Activities
- Rake leaves or do cleaning for neighbors who need a hand. Check with local churches to find seniors or disabled persons if there aren't any near you.
 - Check with your local children's camp to find out when the next workday will be held. Camps always need sweat equity and usually hold workdays regularly. Tasks range from cleaning and yard work to painting and building.
 - Adopt a "grandparent" at a local nursing home. Call, visit, play cards or games, read together, and more.
 - Grow vegetables or flowers and give them to organiza-

- tions to distribute to those who could enjoy them.
- Put on a show at the local library or nursing home.
 - Volunteer at the local pet shelter. Some will allow children to interact with the animals with adult supervision.
 - Adopt a town monument, garden or portion of a park and keep it clean.
 - Collect used towels, pet toys, and food for the local animal shelter.
 - Go through the toy box and donate the gently-used items that never see the light of day.

Be a Joiner

There are a number of children's organizations with a focus on community service. Seek out and involve your child in Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, 4-H, service clubs, or church groups. Many fraternal organizations have Junior counterparts that welcome kids above a certain age. There are also youth boards for some non-profit agencies. Adults can sometimes bring children to help with projects for their own service groups, so check on the rules.

The Bottom Line

Even the youngest child can learn the importance of community service and can help with important efforts. And even the youngest child will reap the benefits of developing a lifetime habit of service. Toddlers and preschoolers can learn the importance of helping others, and activities like these with older children will cement the habit of volunteering. Kids learn what they live, and you as a parent can teach the value of volunteering by example. Imagine the problems, large and small, that can be impacted if everyone gives just a little bit over the course of their lifetimes! Here's a parting quote for you to consider: "How wonderful that no one need wait a single moment to improve the world." -Ann Frank. What will you do this holiday season to help your child experience the value of service?

Sandy Fleming is a writer and educator living in Edwardsburg. Visit her on the web at <http://www.learningnook.com>.

LOCAL HISTORY

Thomas Faxon Bond Civil War era letter

Provided by Cass District Library
Local History Branch.

At the time of this writing, in November, 1864, Thomas Faxon Bond was on furlough (on leave) from the 19th Michigan Infantry, having enlisted on August 6, 1862 at Dowagiac. Bond was wounded in his back on May 15, 1864 and spent considerable time in hospital. During October 1864 he was granted leave. His brother Frank died October 15, 1864. Thomas F. was granted furlough on October 28, coming home from Kentucky by rail, via Lafayette and Michigan City, Indiana, finally Dowagiac on October 30.

During the 1860s the extended Bond family lived in and around Dowagiac, specifically in Wayne and Volinia Townships.

It is believed that Thomas F. Bond lived in Volinia Township with his wife Clara and young child in 1864.

Thomas Bond was likely living on property that is located between the current roads Fosdick and Crane Streets, northeast of Dowagiac.

Original spelling, etc. has been kept.

Wednesday, November 9, 1864 —

Still with my own loved ones. But the time is fast drawing nigh when I shall have to leave them again. How can I ever endure another parting Good Bye. God grant that I may never have to leave them again. Helped my darling about fixing up the Chamber. A very heavy rain which continues all day, and night. How I wish the cistern was fixed.

Thursday, November 10, 1864 —

Still continues to rain in torrents through the forenoon and wind blew a terrible gale towards night, which threw down fences and turned up trees by the hundreds, and threw corn shocks in every direction, then turned cold and began to snow. I am so glad I am here with the blessed ones for it is such a comfort to them. What a joy there will be when I return for good.

Friday, November 11, 1864 —

The ground is covered with snow, and everything looks gloomy. But here comes Amos & Abbie [Huff] before breakfast from Father Bonds & now we will have the cistern fixed, and chimney built, which was completed by dark with Thede helping. It is such a relief to have it done for it will make the loved ones so much more comfortable. May God bless and care for them.

Saturday, November 12, 1864 —

We all got up feeling pretty well and Amos stayed until noon and helped me make some repairs when they took horse and bid us good bye again. I drew \$18 from the \$110 which he had in his possession and left \$5 for Clara. Our little Cherub was very sick all night and appeared very much like asthma. Poor little pet how he does suffer. Very cold night.

Sunday, November 13, 1864 —

A very cold morning and our little pet very sick. Appeared like worms and asthma. Applied warm cloths onto his stomach and gave him infactions[?] of warm water which seemed to help him. How glad I am that I came home. Father and Mother came up and stayed here, then went home and Jim came up and brought some wormwood, and stayed all night. Birdie feeling better.

Monday, November 14, 1864 —

Our little one much better, and called for his crust when he got up. Seems quite chipper. Oh! what a relief to have him feel better. Some of the folks from Father's went to the funeral of Mr. Bloodworths daughter. I fixed up the Stable door, and helped Clara some. Charley and Kate came with their children towards the

night and we had a good visit with them. But it snowed very hard through the night.

Tuesday, November 15, 1864 —

A cold morning but was pleasant in the forenoon. Thede brought Cynthia up in the morn and she stayed all day. Helped Clara some on my vest. Charley and Kate went away about noon. Only this day before I have to go away again, and leave my loved ones. How can I do it? Got ready and went down to Father's and stayed all night. Poor Darling how hard she works.

LETTER FROM CLARA TO THOMAS

Wednesday, November 16, 1864 —

A little more pleasant but so short to be with the dear ones at home. My loved one I can but lament this parting and still I will try to bear it bravely and precious one I hope you will too. Ever try to be cheerful and how I wish I could say something to relieve you of so much care and anxiety but my loved husband remember your wife & child and that they constantly will think & love you. Oh my loved one resist all evil temptations and help me to put full confidence in our heavenly father. God bless and direct us both. Clara.

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HOLIDAY RECIPES

By **GAIL ALEXANDER**
Michigan Lakes Team, 269-240-0145

Recipes for your Holiday Buffet

CHEESE BALL
Ingredients:
8 OZ CREAM CHEESE- ROOM TEMPERATURE
8 OZ FINELY SHREDDED MILD CHEDDAR
2 GREEN ONIONS
1 TEASPOON GARLIC POWDER
1 TEASPOON WORCESTERSHIRE

Directions:
MIX ALL TOGETHER AND FORM BALL. SERVE WITH CRACKERS

NANA'S VEGETABLE DIP:
THIS DIP RECIPES CALL FOR BEAU MONDE. THAT IS WHAT SETS THIS DIP APART FROM ALL THE REST. TRUST ME - IT IS WONDERFUL

Ingredients:
8 OZ SOUR CREAM
8 OZ MAYO
1 TBS DILL WEED
1 TBS MINCED ONION
1 TBS PARSLEY FLAKE
1 TBS BEAU MONDE

CHRISTMAS BROWNIES WITH CANDY CANE w/CREAM CHEESE FROSTING
MY PERSONAL FAVORITE

Ingredients:
1 PACK SUPER MOIST BROWNIE MIX- FOR AN 8X 8 PAN SIZE PLUS INGREDIENTS CALLED FOR ON BOX
8 OZ CREAM CHEESE SOFTENED
1 STICK BUTTER
4 CUPS POWDERED SUGAR
1 TEASPOON PEPPERMINT EXTRACT
RED FOOD COLORING
5 CANDY CANES

Directions:
BAKE BROWNIES ACCORDING TO DIRECTIONS BUT USE A 9X12 PAN TO MAKE BROWNIES EXTRA THIN.

MIX FROSTING INGREDIENTS TOGETHER. FROST BROWNIES WHEN COOL. PUT CANDY CANES IN BAG AND HAMMER TO CRUSH, SPRINKLE ON BROWNIES

CHILL AND CUT.

JALAPENO POPPER SPREAD
YOU WILL BE ASKED FOR THE RECIPE EVERY TIME

Ingredients:
2 PKG (8 OZ EACH) CREAM CHEESE SOFTENED

1 CUP MAYO
1/2 CUP SHREDDED MON TERRY JACK CHEESE
1/4 CUP CANNED CHOPPED GREEN CHILI'S
1/4 CUP DICED JALAPENO PEPPERS- OR LESS IF DESIRED
1 CUP PARMESAN
1/2 CUP PANKO

Directions:
IN A LARGE BOWL BEAT FIRST 5 INGREDIENTS U UNTIL BLENDED AND SPREAD INTO 9 INCH PIE PLATE.

SPRINKLE WITH PARMESAN CHEESE. TOP WITH PANKO AND BAKE 25-30 MINUTES AT 400.

SERVE WITH TORTILLA CHIPS OR PEPPER SLICES.

CROCK POT MEATBALLS:

Ingredients:
1 BAG FROZEN MEATBALLS OR HOMEMADE. - 2 POUND BAG
12 OZ CHILI SAUCE
1.5 CUPS GRAPE JELLY

Directions:
MIX IN CROCK POT AND COOK ON LOW FOR 4 HOURS.

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THE LAST WORD

Rethinking the 'no-good-deed' thing

And then, suddenly, snow. I mean ... we were cruising along right nice there for a while with a lot of sunshine, balmy breezes and temps running in the high 50s to low 70s ... everyone was out walking and no one was even thinking about heading for a mall to start their annual orgy of Christmas excess.

And then, suddenly, snow.

I personally hadn't even hummed the first carol or made a list or anything.

Truth be known just one week before the snow fell I'd actually taken a shirt-sleeves walk around the campus at IU where I'd finished my college career so many hundred years ago.

It was quite a moving experience (no, not the kind of moving that so many of us have had where we rent a truck and haul our stuff, or worse yet, our kids' stuff, to a dorm or an apartment, nearly ending up in traction after forgetting the modern-day truism that no good deed goes unpunished), but moving in a good way.

It had been warm enough to walk around with a light sweatshirt on. The colors of the leaves had been spectacular, and the nostalgia of revisiting a place where I had studied a trade that would become my life's work was overwhelming.

I drove past the apartment where I'd lived; walked through Ernie Pyle Hall where the majority of my last year's classes had been; ambled past the Jordan River through Dunn Meadow where I'd wasted many a warm sunny day by procrastinating instead of studying.

And I'd found time to join friends in

a cold beer or six and a burger (just the way I remember except a lot more expensive now) at Nick's, the one landmark I'd missed more than any other (possibly because it was the one place I'd idled away so many of my waking hours).

Yep, I was feeling pretty mellow when I walked out of Nick's, across Kirkwood and round the back of the buildings to the parking lot where I'd left my car. Mellow enough that I was pretty shocked when a couple of cute young girls, co-eds no doubt, got to the car next to mine, pulled an overtime parking ticket from under the wiper and immediately went into a paroxysm of bawdy curses, violent gesticulations and, finally, an ocean of crocodile tears.

"I don't even know how I'm going to make rent this month," one told the other, "let alone pay this #@\$\$ ticket!"

They were obviously crestfallen, and at least for a short time, stunned to a throat-tightening silence.

I couldn't stand it.

I got out of my car and went to the rolled-up window on the passenger side and gently tapped. They were startled but rolled it down several inches.

As I saw the very real tears on both of their cheeks I made an instant decision, over-ruling my long-standing belief in the "no good deed" mantra ... and I pulled out my wallet, peeled a \$20 away from the mold and moths in that secret place where I stash \$20s and handed it into the car.

"Excuse me," I said. I couldn't help but notice your dilemma and, well, I'm an alum, and I remember what it's like to be

a broke college student ... so pay it back to someone else who can really use it when you get to be my age."

They were visibly stunned. They stammered their thanks and hugged each other and waved with tearful smiles as I drove out of the lot.

Now I don't know if it was a scam ... for all I know they do that every weekend to pick up some loose change ... but I hope I helped them out, and I know for sure that it made me feel good.

Even my wife, who after 45 years of marriage is pretty sure I'm the Grinch incarnate at Christmas, was impressed.

"Wow, she said when I got back into the car. "They're going to talk about that all night long ... some old, fat guy just ups and gives them \$20 when they needed it most. Guess Christmas came early for them, huh?"

So I came back home and got back to work. I didn't tell people about the incident (no one would have believed that a curmudgeon like me would pull such a stunt), and had all but forgotten it happened until last Thursday night.

That was the night my beloved spouse decided that *WE* needed to go out for the first of our annual Christmas gift-buying sprees ... an event that I particularly despise because it requires me first to go "shopping," a decidedly despicable activity at any time of the year, and secondly it was exacerbated this year by the fact that the weather was so nice and I was being forced into the retail world.

But she made it clear that she was not to be denied ... especially since the nuns she works for had sent out a notice

just that morning asking the entire workforce to join them this year in their holiday appeal by picking up any manner of warm clothing, household items and such for them to distribute to homeless veterans and their families.

So there I was that evening joining Sandy in a "good deed" at the discount store in Schoolcraft, the place where you can often get great deals ... like 10 paintbrushes for a dollar or six rolls of duct tape for 50 cents or a dozen stocking caps for \$2.50. "

Thirty bucks," we agreed, grimacing and pinching our pennies and as we mulled the bills we'd be spending on our own list of 756 grandchildren and kids and pets and neighbors and ... and ... and. And then something completely unexpected happened.

A complete stranger overheard us talking to a sales clerk about how to get the most bang for our bucks. He never said a word or even acknowledged us, but when we got to the checkout counter with our \$30 worth of merchandise, the sales clerk handed us a crisp \$20 bill.

"Go get more stuff," she said with a smile. "That guy who just left wanted to contribute. He threw this into your pot. He said to tell you Merry Christmas."

We were both stunned. I'm pretty sure I saw a tear leak from Sandy's eye.

And I know that after all these years of dreading everything Christmas, a complete stranger just taught me a lesson that I long ago forgot ... that yes, Virginia, there really is a Santa Claus ... and sometimes he can be every one of us. Merry Christmas to all.

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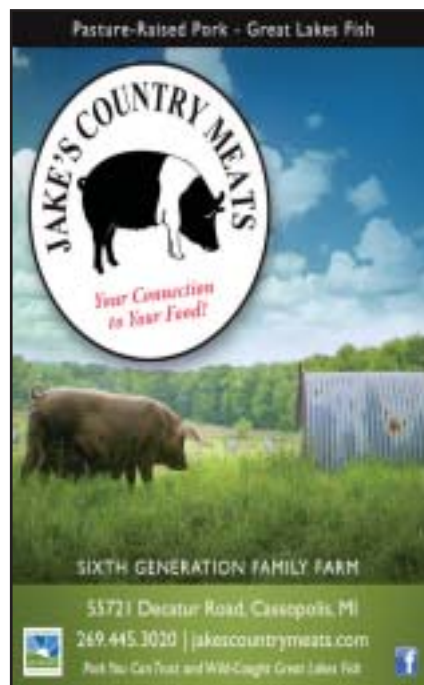
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