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October 2017

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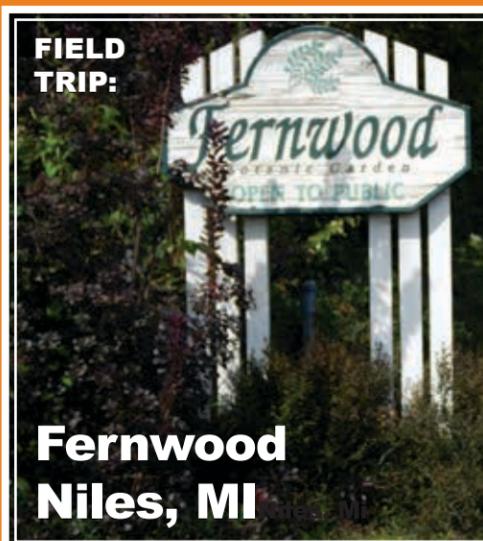


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REGIONAL NEWS

Cass County Shrine Club to host 2017 Fall Turkey Shoot

The Cass County Shrine Club will host the 2017 Fall Turkey Shoot beginning at 10 am each day on October 28 and 29 and November 4 and 5 at the club, 69185 Union Road in Union. The public is welcome.

All shells are furnished for 12, 16, 20 and 410 gauge shotguns. The event will award prizes including a \$1000 shoot on the second Sunday. The event will include line shoots, pie shoots, money shoots, in-house raffles, food and beer.

Proceeds from the event are for the benefit of the Cass County Shrine Club.

Under the Harvest Moon

Celebrate the crisp autumn season of Michigan in downtown Dowagiac at Under the Harvest Moon, Saturday, October 14, from 10 am to 4 pm.

This fun and family-oriented festival showcases vendors of antiques, handmade goods, fall produce and sweet delicacies. View our display of vintage farm tractors and vote for your favorite scarecrow. There's also street entertainment, a pumpkin pie eating contest and Caruso's caramel apple and cider bar.

To receive information on booth vendor space, call the Chamber at 782.8212.

Annual Ride-A-Thon Scheduled to Benefit We Can Ride 4-H Club

Explore the trails of Russ Forest while you support Berrien County 4-H's therapeutic horseback riding program. On Saturday, October 7. We Can Ride 4-H Club will host its annual Ride & Walk-A-Thon at Russ Forest County Park in Dowagiac. Ride-A-Thon is the

club's largest fundraiser of the year. Russ Forest is located at 20379 Marcellus Highway Decatur, MI 49045 (eight miles east of Dowagiac).

We Can Ride 4-H Club is part of the MSU Extension's Proud Equestrian Program that enables youth with disabilities to learn horseback riding skills, showmanship techniques and stable management. While you benefit from riding your horse or by walking on the many beautiful trails at Russ Forest, We Can Ride 4-H Club will benefit from pledges and donations. This year's event coincides with National 4-H Week as well! This is a wonderful event to participate in and enjoy a fall day in southwest Michigan.

Registration and check-in will take place from 9 am - Noon at the park's west entrance. Parking of horse trailers and all vehicles will be done at the east entrance. There will be lunch and refreshments for participants. Additional fun activities will be provided throughout the day for non-riders. Free T-shirts will be given to those collecting \$35 or more in pledges (on a first-come, first serve basis).

To learn more about We Can Ride's Ride-A-Thon and to obtain a registration form, visit http://msue.anr.msu.edu/county/berrien/berrien_county_4_h. For more information call Christina Knapp at 269-369-1969.

Michigan Lake and Stream to host 57th Annual Conference

The Michigan Lake and Stream Association will host its 57th annual conference on Friday & Saturday, April 20 & 21, 2018 at Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville, MI. Registration for the 57th Annual Conference will start

in January 2018. For more information email info@mlswa.org.

Cass Fellowship Bible Church to host spaghetti supper

On October 27 from 4:30-6 pm Cass Fellowship Bible Church will host a Spaghetti supper fund raiser and a free movie at 6:30 pm. The Spaghetti supper will be \$8/ plate (spaghetti, salad, garlic bread & dessert) and \$4/ children under 10. The movie will be "Case For Christ." Hope to see you there.

For more information contact Mary Neddeau at 574-206-6357.

Cassopolis Pioneer Log Cabin Museum to host state meeting

The Log Cabin Society of Michigan will have it's annual board meeting at the Cassopolis Pioneer Log Cabin Museum on M-60 at Stone Lake on Sunday, October 15 from 2 - 4 pm.

The museum will be open to the public for tours on every Friday through Sunday from Noon - 4 pm.

"The Company" forced to cancel A Como Cabaret Christmas

For the past 20 or so years "The Company" has welcomed in the holidays at Battell Center in Mishawaka. The preparation for this years, "A Merry Como Christmas, Singin' and Dancin' into the Holidays" was underway with the cast, crew and musicians lined up. All but a very important part of the production, the piano player! Our past pianist became unavailable for this year.

It is an understatement to say we are heartbroken! Our fervent hope is that we will find an answer to this problem,

but for now our 2017 holiday production has to be canceled. Thank you all for your kind patronage and "The Company" looks forward to seeing you in 2018.

Meals on Wheels needs drivers

The local Meals on Wheels program needs at least 12 to 16 volunteers (volunteers work in pairs) on a weekly basis. Some volunteer teams consist of business employees.

The program delivered over 12,000 meals on wheel meals as of July, 31 2017. These meals provide the sustenance many seniors might not be able to get without this program. In addition, the daily visit is often the only socialization some of these seniors get on a weekly basis.

To volunteer, call Leslie Vargo at the Cass County COA 269-445-8110.

Effective Relationships and Stress Management workshop planned

The Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) will host a workshop on relationships and stress management on Tuesday, October 17, from 11 am to 12:30 pm at the American National University/SCORE Office, 1030 E. Jefferson Blvd. in South Bend. There is a \$20 registration fee.

When a person starts a new business or is overly engaged in their career path in search of success, it may be extremely time-consuming and can be draining. As a result, much damage can be done to family, emotional, physical, financial, and spiritual health. The focus of this workshop is to address these potential challenges and discover ways to attain an enjoyable life for both you and those who



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REGIONAL NEWS

are close to you, while you build your business or career.

Presenter Roger Laidig is retired from a 30-year career at Laidig, Inc., a global manufacturing construction company, as Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing. He is currently in a part-time position as an adjunct professor with emphasis in leadership at Purdue School of Technology in South Bend, Indiana.

To register or for more information email michiana@scorevolunteer.org.

Park offers "Owl Prowl" program

Women are invited to Bendix Woods County Park in South Bend for a short presentation on the unique adaptations of owls. Participants will go on a 1-mile hike through the woods to listen and look for owls. The evening will end with s'mores by the campfire. The program will be Thursday, October 12, from 7 to 9 pm, at the Hardwoods Picnic Shelter at the Park. Cost is \$5. Registration and payment are required by October 10. To register call 654-3155.

Preschoolers discover "Bats" at St. Patrick's County Park

Preschoolers and an accompanying adult will learn how to identify bats found in Indiana from 9:30 to 11 am on Thursday, October 19 at St. Patrick's County Park in South Bend. The class includes story time, hands-on nature activities, an outdoor hike and a craft. Please dress for the weather.

Nature Munchkins is a program series for 3- to 4-year old's to explore nature with a parent or other adult. Siblings outside the age bracket are not



Chinese Yam (above), Black Swallow-wort (top right, and Oriental Bittersweet, (right).



allowed to attend. The Nature Munchkins series is offered by the St. Joseph County Parks.

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

Oh My Vine!

Chinese Yam, oriental bittersweet, and black or pale swallow-wort, oh my! What do all these plants have in common? They are all invasive vines that have been found here in Cass County.

Chinese yam is a twining vine that has unique spade-shaped leaves, inconspicuous flowers, and small "air potatoes" on the vine. While this plant does have an edible tuber, it can be buried up to one meter deep. Though the leaves may look like field bindweed, Chinese yam lacks the showy white flowers.

Oriental bittersweet is a vine that can girdle trees and suck out the nutrients, eventually killing the tree. The leaves are variable in shape, but are always toothed and often slightly glossy. Oriental Bittersweet has bright orange roots and red berries clustered at where

the leaves meet the stem, which can persist through the winter.

Last, but not least, we have pale or black swallow-wort. This plant is a danger to our pollinators due to a milkweed-like seedpods on the vine. Butterflies will lay their eggs on the vine, but when the eggs hatch the larvae cannot feed off the pod. These vines are identifiable by their small flowers found along the plant and have small shiny oval to heart shaped pointed opposite leaves. The roots of the swallow-wort are also toxic to mammals.

If you think you have one of these vines on your property, contact Kimberly Barton at the Cass County Conservation District 269-445-8641 ext. 5 or kimberly.barton@macd.org. She can help you identify the plant and help you develop a management plan for these pesky plants. Invasive species are a nuisance to deal with, but when caught early, eradication and management are easy to implement.

The SWxSW Corner Cisma is a grant-funded organization working to help land owners, local governments, and concerned citizens understand and manage the invasive species threats in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. If you have invasive species on your property, or if you would like to have a Cisma representative speak for or work with your organization, please contact the Cisma Coordinator Eleanor Serocki at (269) 657-4030 ext 5 or at eleanor.serocki@macd.org. The Cisma is funded in part by the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program, through the Departments of Natural Resources, Environmental Quality, and Agriculture and Rural Development.

Housing sales in Cass County up 40 percent

The Housing Market in Cass County & SWMI

In August, Cass County had a bumper crop of home sales. There were 87 overall home sales which was 40 percent higher than the 62 in August 2016. The bumper crop helped to bring the year-to-date, overall home sales up to 2 percent higher than in 2016 (441 vs. 432). In July, the year-to-date sales were down 4 percent.

The number of waterfront homes sold in August increased 65 percent (28 vs. 17). Year-to-date, waterfront home sales were up 18 percent (132 vs. 112).

Non-waterfront home sales rose 31 percent from 45 in August 2016 to 59 in August 2017. Year-to-date, non-waterfront home sales were down 3 percent below sales in 2016 (309 vs. 320).

In August, the average selling price in Cass County for all homes jumped 17 percent to \$213,985 from \$183,474 in August 2016. The median selling price for all homes also increased 17 percent to \$167,500 from \$143,400 in 2016.

The average selling price for waterfront homes slipped 1 percent to \$336,130 from \$339,647 in August 2016. The median selling price for waterfront homes increased 11 percent to \$337,400 from \$305,000 in August 2016.

The average selling price for non-waterfront homes in August soared 25 percent (\$156,017 vs. \$124,475). The median selling price increased 2 percent to \$127,000 from \$124,000 in August 2016.

The median price is the price at which 50 percent of the homes sold were above that price and 50 percent were

below.

In Cass County, the number of bank-owned or foreclosed homes as a part of all closed transactions has declined since May when the percentage was at 9 percent to 5 percent in August. This was the lowest percentage reached in 2017. The highest percentage in August previously was 18 percent in 2016.

For comparison, the number of bank-owned or foreclosed homes as a percentage of all transactions remained at the lowest level, 4 percent, in August. The previous lowest percentage in August was 10 percent in 2016. The highest percentage in August 2009 was 36 percent.

Throughout SWMI, after four months of selling prices holding fairly steady, the average and median selling prices dropped. The average selling price in August fell 12 percent from July (\$196,723 vs. 224,705) and the median selling price slipped 3 percent (\$159,500 vs. \$164,819).

The number of house sold in August was the highest for the year at 418. In July, only 330 homes were sold.

We continued to see new benchmarks set in 2017 where the number of houses sold in August, number of houses sold year-to-date, total dollar volume, year-to-date average selling price, August median selling price and year-to-date median selling price outpace previous market years back to 2006.

Looking at the year-to-year picture, the number of houses sold increased 8 percent over the number of houses sold in August 2016 (418 vs. 388). Year-to-date, the number of houses sold was up 6 percent with 2442 this year compared to 2314 in 2016.

Even with more houses selling in August 2017, the total dollar volume was

very close to that in August 2016 (\$82,230,523 vs. \$81,956,166). Year-to-date, the total dollar volume was down 7 percent at \$429,465,503 at the end of August 2017 compared to \$460,371,934 in 2016.

The average selling price in August was \$196,723 which was a 7 percent decline from August 2016 when the average selling price was \$211,227. Year-to-date, the average selling price was up 5 percent (\$209,539 vs. \$198,950).

The median selling price of \$159,500 in August 2017 was a 9 percent increase over the \$146,700 set in August 2016. Year-to-date the median selling price rose 10 percent to \$153,500 from \$139,900 in 2016.

The active listing of homes for sale decreased 14 percent at the end of August 2017 with 2036 homes for sale compared to 2363 homes for sale in August 2016. This kept the 6.6-months supply of homes for sale the same as in July. The lack of inventory becomes more significant when the inventory level was 3821 in August 2009 compared to 2036 in August 2017 which is a 47 percent decline.

Overall in SWMI, the mortgage rate dropped slightly to 3.975 from 4.06 percent in July. Last year in August, the rate was 3.56. Nationally, the Freddie Mac mortgage rate in August was 3.82 versus 3.92 percent in July for a 30-year conventional mortgage.

This data reflects home sales across Berrien, Cass and the westerly 2/3 of Van Buren counties and should not be used to determine the market value of any individual property. If you want to know the market value of your property, please contact your local REALTOR®.



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REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

October 4 - Storytime, 10 am, Wednesdays this fall, recommended age 3-5 yrs old, enjoy stories, songs, activity/craft, and more. Cass District Library-Mason/Union Branch, 357-7821

October 5 - Storytime, 10 am, Thursdays this fall, recommended age 3-5 yrs old, enjoy stories, songs, activity/craft, and more. Cass District Library- Main Library, 357-7822

October 6 - Storytime, 10 am, Fridays this fall, recommended age 3-5 yrs old, enjoy stories, songs, activity/craft, and more. Cass District Library-Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

October 7 - We Can Ride 4-H Club's Ride & Walk-A-Thon, Russ Forest County Park, Dowagiac, http://msue.anr.msu.edu/county/berrien/berrien_county_4_h, 369-1969

October 8 - Centerville Antique Show and Sale, 8 am - 3 pm, St. Joseph County (MI) Fairgrounds, \$4, 715-526-9769, zurkopromotions.com

October 11 - Card Making Class, 1-3 pm, Adults only, registration is required due to limited space, call to sign-up. Cass District Library- Main Library, 357-7822

October 12 - Dowagiac Town and Country Garden Club meeting, 6 pm, COA "Shoreline Landscaping" by Korie Blyveis from the Cass County Conservation District, 782-5492

October 12 - Owl Prowl program for

women, Bendix Woods County Park, South Bend, 7 to 9 pm, \$5, register by Oct. 10, 574-654-3155

October 14 - Under the Harvest Moon, 10 am - 4 pm, downtown Dowagiac, 782-8212

October 15 - Log Cabin Society of Michigan annual board meeting, Cassopolis Pioneer Log Cabin Museum, 2 - 4 pm.

October 17 - Movie Night: Spiderman Homecoming, 6 pm, Free popcorn and water provided! Cass District Library-Howard Branch, 487-9214

October 17 - SCORE workshop on relationships and stress management, 11 am - 12:30 pm, American National University, SCORE office, 1030 E. Jefferson Blvd., South Bend, \$20, michiana@scorevolunteer.org

October 18 and 19 - Book Sale, 11 am-7 pm, All proceeds benefit the Cass District Library. Cass District Library- Mason/ Union Branch, 357-7821

October 18 - Fall Family Fun Night, 6 pm, Enjoy making caramel apples and doing other fun fall themed activities, Cass District Library- Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

October 19 - Nature Munchkins program on bats for 3- to 4-year olds (and parents), St. Patrick's County Park, South Bend, 930 to 11 am. \$5 for child/adult. 574-654-3155

October 19 - Book Club, 10:30 am, Join this new book club! Meetings will be on the third Thursday of the month, Cass District Library- Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

October 19 - Fall Family Fun Night, 6 pm, Enjoy making caramel apples and doing other fun fall themed activities, Cass District Library- Howard Branch, 487-9214

October 21 - Book Sale, 9 am-1 pm, \$2 per bag day! Cass District Library-Mason/Union Branch, 357-7821

October 21 - Beaded Jewelry Making Class, 1-2:30 pm, Ages 10 and older, Limited space, call to register. Cass District Library- Main Library, 357-7822

October 23 - Lego Club, 6-7:30 pm, Anyone is welcome to build and play with the Legos provided by the library during this monthly program, Cass District Library- Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

October 24 - Fall Family Fun Night, 6 pm, Enjoy making caramel apples and doing other fun fall themed activities, Cass District Library- Mason/Union Branch, 357-7821

October 24 - 5 pm, National Association Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting, Super Buffet, Benton Harbor. All retired /current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome, Jean Rowe, 782 2769 or jeanrowe70@comcast.net.

October 25 - Case of the Broken Shell, 10 - 11:30 am, St. Patrick's County Park, \$3, 574/654-3155

October 26 - Fall Family Fun Night, 6 pm, Enjoy making caramel apples and doing other fun fall themed activities, Cass District Library- Main Library, 357-7822

October 27 - Cass Fellowship Bible Church spaghetti supper fund raiser and free movie, 6:30, 574-206-6357

October 28, 29, November 4, 5 - Cass County Shrine Club 2017 Fall Turkey Shoot, 69185 Union Rd., Union, 10 am

November 15 - Case of the Broken Shell, 10 - 11:30 am, St. Patrick's County Park, \$3, 574/654-3155

December 5 - 1:30 pm, National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 annual holiday dinner at Coach's Bar & Grill, Stevensville. All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome, no RSVP needed. No business meeting, new officers will be sworn in. Next meeting March 28, 2018. For information call Jean Rowe, 782 2769 or jeanrowe70@comcast.net

April 20, 21 - Michigan Lake and Stream Association 57th annual conference, Crystal Mountain Resort, Thompsonville, MI, info@mlswa.org

HEALTH & FITNESS

Does it have to hurt?

By **BRENDA HARRIS**
Cass COA

Why is it when a person starts out on a new fitness program it has to hurt? Well, have you been using every muscle in your body or just getting by?

The old saying is "if you don't use it, you will lose it." Of course we use other muscles, such as our biceps, which helps us put a spoon of food to our mouth, is that exercising?

So what can you do to help the hurting and the pain when I start out on a new fitness program?

Listen to your body and progress slowly. Using common sense and a smart attitude towards starting out on a fitness program will help.

The following tips will help you towards success.

- **Get assessed.** The first thing you should do is ask

a knowledgeable fitness professional (a personal trainer or physical therapist, for example) to analyze you through postural analysis, and flexibility and strength tests, to determine what areas of your body need special attention.

- **Take it easy.** Take it easy and give your body time to adjust to the stress you're putting on it by starting a new activity slowly and progressing gradually.
- **Take your time.** Taking your time and be sure to do a well thought out, activity-specific warm-up and cool-down each time you work out.
- **Balance and Flexibility.** The lack of balance and flexibility is a major cause of injury. Incorporate a flexibility class, which blends strength with flexibility, movement with stability, and balance with coordination, into your weekly schedule. Other options can include exercise ball, yoga, Pilates, tai chi or stretching classes. Just

remember if it hurts, don't do it.

- **If it hurts, don't do it.** No exercise should hurt your bones or joints. If it does, stop doing it and ask a knowledgeable fitness professional to help you determine why. Chances are you're either performing a movement improperly, or you've got a muscle imbalance or postural problem.

- **Find a great instructor and fitness personnel.** The next step is finding a great instructor and fitness center. The best way is to attend classes in which the instructors take the time to teach you good technique and is certified. Don't be afraid to ask questions about what you are doing and if any thing hurts STOP and ask why?

Remember, a workout doesn't have to be painful, so use common sense and have fun!

Are you sitting or moving?

By **BRENDA HARRIS**
Cass COA

What is the No. 1 predictor of people who will keep off weight? They exercise regularly. You need to keep moving and not just sit and wait for the weight to jump off! Yes, you can lose weight without exercising. But we also know that you can't keep it off without exercise.

How do I get started to get a move on it? The secret is a pedometer, a small, inexpensive, low-tech device that doesn't require any expertise. You just snap it on and check it every now and then. It is easy to hook on the pedometer and let it

become part of your daily routine.

Have a daily goal of steps. Start out by recording each day how many steps you take. Then increase your daily goal of steps to burn more calories. For example, if you usually walk 10,000 steps a day, increase it to 18,000 steps. After just 8 weeks, you should see improvements in your weight, body fat, cholesterol, and fitness.

Try making new habits

- Walk instead of sitting when waiting for someone at an appointment.
- Park your car as far away from the building as you can.

- Stay away from passive activities such as watching TV.
- Take your dog for more frequent walks.
- Do household chores more often.

When you reach your limit:

It's not good enough to assume that when you reach your goal weight, you will buckle down and keep it off. You need to be specific about what helped get you to that goal weight. Think about what has worked for you and what exercises you liked doing. These will help you maintain that goal and new habits..

Remember, if we fall back into our

old habits, that weight WILL come back. Think about the following: Are you eating bigger portions than you were before? Have you developed an afternoon snack habit? Are you walking a lot less lately? Have you stopped taking the stairs?

These are just a few of the different questions you might ask yourself if your weight seems to be creeping back on.

So, what is the secret to keeping weight off? To maintain weight loss, stick to some new habits such as eating healthier snacks. By doing this you should never need to use the emergency brake and start all over.

PASTA ITALIA CON CHEF DONATO

Verduri (veggies) with seasoning!

Verduri is the Italian word for vegetables. Don't you get tired of eating vegetables with little or no flavor, I do. I like to cook vegetables with other herbs and seasonings and also combining them with other vegetables.

Here are some of the ways I like to make vegetables.

Zucchini con pomodori e basilico

Ingredients

3-4 zucchinis washed and sliced into 1/4" rounds
4-6 cloves of peeled garlic slightly smashed
1/8 cup of olive oil
1/8 teaspoon of red peppers flakes
large handful of chopped fresh basil (can substitute dried oregano)
2 fresh tomatoes cored,seeded and chopped
salt and pepper

Directions

In a skillet saute the garlic cloves in olive oil until the garlic browns a bit.

Remove the garlic and add the zucchini and pepper flakes and cook, flipping it over and stirring often until it starts to slightly soften, add the tomatoes and cook a few minutes more, then add the chopped fresh basil.

Salt and pepper to taste

At this point you can also add some grated parmesan cheese on top before serving.



Calvorfioro-Cauliflower

Ingredients

1 head of cauliflower washed and cleaned cut into florets
1 onion peeled and diced
6 cloves of garlic minced
1/4 cup of olive oil
white pepper
salt
butter or smart balance-4 tablespoons
2 cups of chicken stock

1 cup of parmesan

Directions

Saute the onion in the olive oil in a large pot until the onion softens. Add the garlic and cook 2-3 minutes more, add the cauliflower with the stock and cover and bring to a boil. Cook until the cauliflower softens and remove the lid and let the stock reduce to about a cup. Put the mixture into a food processor and puree. Put in casserole dish and add the butter and cheese and salt and pepper to taste.

Sprinkle the top lightly with a little of the cheese and breadcrumbs and bake in oven at 350 for about 30'

Broccoli

Ingredients

1 head of broccoli washed and cut into florets
1 tablespoon of garlic powder
1 tin of anchovies
1/8 cup of olive oil
1/2 teaspoon of red pepper flakes
salt to taste
4 tablespoons of smart balance or butter

Directions

Put all the ingredients at once into a large pot. Cover and cook over medium heat until the broccoli starts to soften stirring often, then remove the lid and continue cooking until the desired doneness and the some of the water from the broccoli cooks away.

At this point you can also add some parmesan cheese to taste.



LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

Saying goodbye to summer

by JANE BOUDREAU

Hey Neighbors! It's me. It feels like I was here just a few weeks ago. And that reminds me of a recent trip to the Rite Aide store in my lake town. With pretty much just that and a grocery store to get provisions, I'm constantly in and out. After the same employee checked out my purchases three days in a row, I laughed and said, "I feel like I'm here everyday." She replied with little sigh, "Yeah, me, too." We both then had a good laugh.

Lake life can be slow, especially during the week. I start to notice the predictability. The woman down the street who walks her dog over to the edge of the woods precisely at 4 every afternoon. The people that check their roadside mailboxes within three minutes of the postman's truck leaving. The same early morning joggers who always seem to go by when I'm standing in the garden in my PJ's looking ratty, urging my dogs to get it over with. I love a friendly town, but when I'm looking like what I really look like at 8 am, I don't even want a glance much less a wave.

Well, how did I get on that subject? Oh yeah, it's October and everything is getting very quiet. I love to sit outside with Milo and Layla, knowing in a month or two they will be shivering and want to get out and back in. Not that I need the dogs as an excuse to get outside right now, but they really take immense pleasure in lifting their legs on anything vertical. Numerous times. Even the female ("I want to be like my big brother."). It seems important to them to save a little bit to get at every tree, bush, bird-bath and lawn chair as they can possibly do. It's almost like you can't tell when they have finished. This is a fact of life if you are a dog owner. And if you think this is a little too much info, my daughter takes her pup to a dog park in the city. He has developed an unhealthy habit of lifting his leg on people. Yes, people. It must be that vertical factor. Or maybe there aren't enough trees. Being dog lovers, these people haven't reacted badly, but I'm sure they avoid good 'ol Squall as much as they can.

But I also love raking leaves, really! Okay, I like using the blower more, but that usually gets my allergies going like crazy. In the city all we have to do is rake the leaves down to the curb, and a big old truck comes by every few days and sucks them up. I'm not a big fan of bagging them. Frankly, I just pray for a westward wind to blow them into the woods.



Nesting inside is fun in the fall. I want to make things pretty and cozy, as I'm going to be stuck looking at it for a



good six months. Fall is colorful, our decor is especially beautiful when it picks up some of the rich colors Mother Nature provides outside of our windows. A table set with dishes that don't match, but look festive together is my idea of creativeness and fun. By using mismatched dishes you can never really run out of ideas. Neutral placemats and napkins can be used over and over, they are the backdrop most times. Bringing in natural elements like apples and pumpkins really get that autumn vibe going. And candles, I can never have too many. I like to keep a few scented ones burning here and there, but on your table when you are having a meal, try to use unscented as they don't overwhelm the fragrant smell and taste of your food.



One of the great things we have going for us here in the 'Land of Four Seasons', is that we can change out our clothes much like we do with our home. A cozy throw on the sofa is the equivalent of a snugly sweater on a cold evening. Flannel shirts are comfy and a staple for both men and women. And boots. How I love boots! I've had this pair for about six or seven years. The height is perfect to tuck your jeans in and the heel is about all I can handle without tripping and falling on my face. In the snow and

slush, I like my Hunter boots. A little on the expensive size, but they will outlive you. I have a pair of waterproof and

super warm Northface boots that feel like slippers. These are basics and will get you through the rain, snow and cold just perfectly.



So let's move on to some recipes (cue drum roll). I have the best next door neighbors who share their garden goodies. I also had a goodhearted guy working on tuck pointing my chimney, and he would arrive in the morning with a bag filled with tomatoes. I couldn't use them fast enough, so one day I marched up to the grocery store for some onions, peppers, cilantro, and limes. I made enough salsa to share with everyone I ran into. Well, man can't live on salsa alone; I got creative and put together this veeeeeeeery simple appetizer for a family party. You can do this, too. And I think we all probably have tomatoes galore right now.

Here's my recipe:

Using a regular size muffin pan, press won ton wrappers in each to make a cup sort of shape. Spray with vegeta-

ble oil and bake at 350 degrees for about 7 minutes until lightly browned. Remove and let cool completely. Add your salsa and a slice of fresh mozzarella. I got fancy and sliced the cheese very thin. I then used a teeny little cookie cutter to make little flowers shapes (or clouds as I envision), and placed them on top. Voila, you have turned tomatoes into salsa; totally overdone, overused and hopefully not boring anymore.

Second and lastly, I wanted to share a stick-to-your-ribs pasta sauce which everyone should have in their repertoire. I used the traditional ingredients and methods, but of course I can't leave well enough alone. I have a secret ingredient I learned from a Canadian friend-Cinnamon. Yep. Well obviously it's not a secret anymore. I have to say I was skeptical, but it added a whole new dimension to the sauce. It's a subtle flavor and has a depth that is hard to describe. Not one person who has had my sauce has identified this ingredient. It's sort of like nutmeg in a white sauce,

or cardamom in a dessert. It enhances, but it's hard to put your finger on. Enough said, here ya go:

Jane's Bolognese Sauce

Ingredients:

1 pound Italian sausage
2 T butter
1 medium yellow onion
2 carrots thinly sliced
1 stalk of celery finely sliced
2 cloves garlic finely chopped
2 28 oz. cans diced tomatoes
1 T dried fennel
2 T dried Italian seasoning
1 T cinnamon
Pinch of S&P
1 pound cooked spaghetti
1/2 cup reserved water from cooked spaghetti



Directions:

Brown sausage in a large, deep skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat about 5 minutes, stirring often.

Remove to a colander to drain.

In the same pan add the butter and saute the veggies.

When somewhat soft add the canned tomatoes and remaining seasonings.

Simmer on medium heat 1 hour, stirring every now and then and scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon.

After 1 hour most of the liquid from the tomatoes should be evaporated.

Add 1/2 cup of the water in which you cooked the spaghetti ... this will not

add anything except starch to bind everything together.

Arrange spaghetti on plates and top with sauce.

I served this with crusty bread and butter. This makes a huge amount ... could easily serve 6. I love the leftovers!

Remember that the sauce is going to take an hour not counting the prep -- you do not want to be surprised if you decide to make this a half hour before dinner-time! (hate recipes like that). Enjoy!

And in closing ... are the pumpkins, pansies and mums not the best part of October? I love them. I love to have them in abundance.

My home in Chicago has your typical



walk-up porch and I always go to town making it look fun; pots of flowers on every step in the summer, lanterns and potted evergreens in the winter ... but the very best is fall.

Look at this color. And out on the lawn, tons of colorful leaves. And I mean tons ... most times I just wait for them to blow away.

See you in November!

~Jane

Jane Boudreau is a writer, blogger and newspaper columnist on Diamond Lake and in Chicago. She has another place in the mountains of NC, and this often causes her confusion about which state and time zone she is in. You can reach her at blndy9@yahoo.com.

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202-224-4822, www.stabenow.senate.gov</p> <p>Fred Upton, U.S. Representative
202-225-3761, www.upton.house.gov</p> | <p>John Proos, Michigan Senator 21st District
517-373-6960, senjproos@senate.michigan.gov</p> <p>Aaron Miller, U.S. Representative
517-373-0832, aaronmiller@house.mi.gov</p> <p>Dave Pagel, Michigan State Rep.
517-373-1796, davepagel@house.mi.gov</p> |
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Readers can find out how their legislators voted on congress.org for Peters, Stabenow and Upton; and at michiganvotes.org for Miller and Pagel.

BUSINESS & FINANCE

Medicare Open Enrollment Period

By Dean Johnson
Kemner-Iott Benz Agency
of Cass County

The Medicare Open Enrollment Period "OEP" is rapidly approaching and I want to share a few frequently asked questions and answers with you.

Q. When is the OEP?

A. The OEP begins on October 15, 2017 and ends on December 7, 2017.

Q. What can Medicare Beneficiaries do during this OEP?

A. During the OEP, Medicare Beneficiaries can join, switch, or drop a Medicare Advantage Plan or Medicare Prescription Drug Plan. Any plan changes you request during this OEP will be effective January 1, 2018 as long as your request is received by December 7, 2017.

Q. Can I make changes to my plan after December 7?

A. Yes, but with limitations; between January 1 and February 14, 2018, if you are in a Medicare Advantage Plan, you can leave your plan and switch to Original Medicare. If you switch to Original Medicare during this period, you'll have until February 14, 2018 to also join a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan to add drug coverage. Your coverage will begin the first day of the month after the date of your enrollment. During this period, you CANNOT switch from Original Medicare to a Medicare Advantage Plan, or switch from one Medicare Advantage Plan to another, or switch from one Medicare Prescription Drug Plan to another, join, switch, or drop a Medicare Medical Savings Account Plan.

Q. Are there any other times I can change my Medicare Advantage Plan or Prescription Drug Plan?

A. Yes, in certain situations you may be able to join, switch, or drop a Medicare Advantage Plan or Medicare Prescription Drug Plan during Special Enrollment Periods known as "SEP." You can use the SEP if you move out of your plan's service area, if you have Medicaid, if you qualify for extra help, or if you live in an institution like a nursing home.

Q. How are the Medicare Advantages

rated and who does the rating?

A. Medicare uses information from member satisfaction surveys, plans and health care providers to give overall performance star ratings to the plans from 1-star to 5-stars. A 5-star rating is considered excellent. These ratings are updated each fall and change every year. You can switch to a Medicare Advantage Plan that has a 5-star plan rating from December 8, 2017 through November 30, 2018. Regrettably, there are no 5-star rated plans in our area and very few in the entire country.

Q. When can I initially enroll in a Medicare Supplement or Medicare Advantage Plan or Prescription Drug Plan?

A. You can join a Medicare Advantage Plan or Medicare Prescription Drug Plan or a Medicare Supplement Plan during a 7-month period that begins 3 months before the month you turn 65 and ends 3 months after you turn 65. If you are still working past the age of 65 and if you have Parts A and B of Medicare, you can also join these plans when you lose your Group Health Insurance Benefits when you retire.

Q. If I am receiving Medicare as a result of a disability, when can I initially enroll in a Medicare Advantage Plan or Prescription Drug Plan?

A. If you receive Medicare due to a disability you can join a Medicare Advantage Plan or a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan during a 7-month period that begins 3 months before your 25th month of disability and ends 3 months after your 25th month of disability.

Q. Is the "Coverage Gap" or "Donut Hole" changing in 2018?

A. Yes, there are some changes regarding the amounts the enrollee will pay for their Prescription Drugs once they enter the Coverage Gap or Donut Hole. In 2018, you will pay 44% of the cost of the Generic Drugs and you will pay 35% of the cost of the Brand Name Drugs. Please be aware, by the year 2020 the maximum you will pay for the Generic and Brand Name Drugs during the Coverage Gap or Donut Hole will be 25% of the cost.

Q. Are there changes in the Drug Formulary for 2018?

A. No, however, remember that the drugs covered by each plan will vary, so there is no single drug list that applies to all plans. The Formulary includes Generic and Brand Name Drugs, but does not include any Over the Counter Drugs. All Medicare Prescription Drug Plans must have at least two drugs in each category of drugs, but the Plans can choose which specific drugs are covered in each category.

Q. Is financial help available for people with limited income?

A. Yes, Medicare Beneficiaries may be eligible for "Extra Help" if they have limited income and resources. The amount of extra help they receive is based on their income and resources. If a member qualifies for "Extra Help" and joins a Medicare Drug plan, the member may get help paying the monthly premium, the annual deductible and prescription copays/co-insurance until the end of the year. Medicare will let enrollees know when they lose the "Extra Help" status. Beneficiaries will automatically qualify for "Extra Help" if they have Medicare and meet the following conditions:

1. have full Medicaid Coverage,
2. get help from their state Medicaid program paying the Part B premiums, or
3. get Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Benefits. You can apply for "Extra Help" by calling Social Security at 1-800-

772-1213 anytime.

Q. Is the Affordable Healthcare Act (ACA) part of Medicare?

A. No, the ACA is a program for health insurance for eligible persons under the age of 65 and not covered by Medicare. The open enroll period for the ACA begins on November 15, 2017 and ends December 15, 2017.

Please remember this open enroll period beginning on October 15 through December 7, 2017 is the only time during the year most of you can join or switch your Part D Medicare Prescription Drug Plans. This is a good time to analyze your prescription drug usage to make sure you are getting the most benefits from your Medicare Prescription Drug Plan.

This is also a good time to review your Dental Insurance Plan, we are finding many more companies offering Dental Insurance to Seniors and some of these plans also include coverage for bridges and dentures.

I also suggest that you contact your independent insurance agency for questions regarding this open enroll period and the plans available in your area for 2018. This is a time to do business with people you know and trust.

Dean R. Johnson
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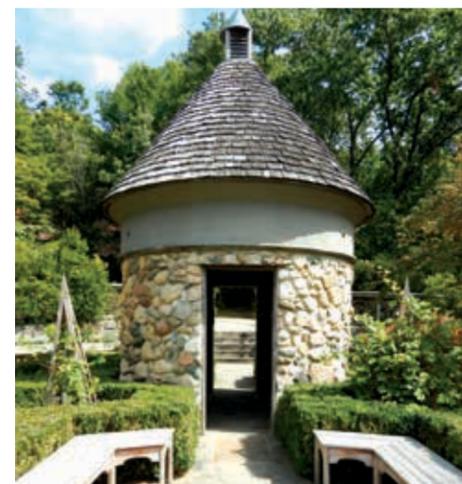
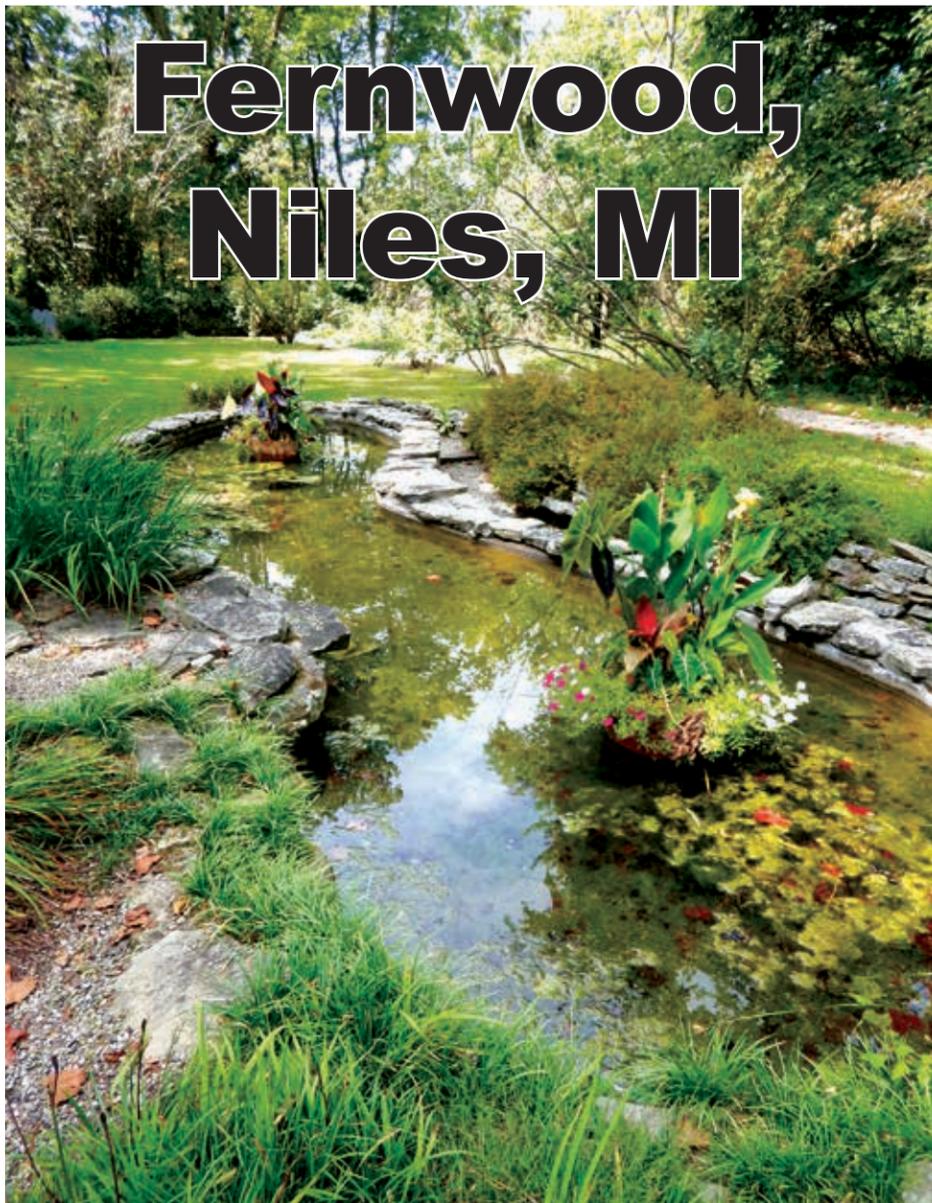


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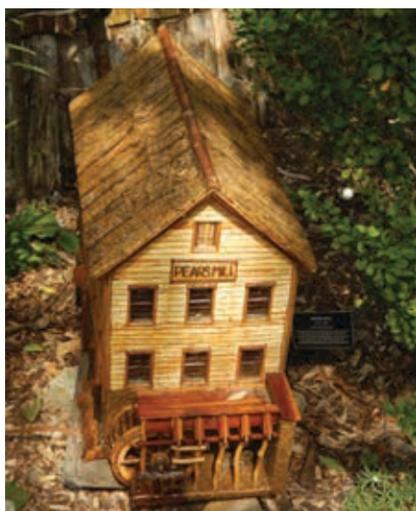
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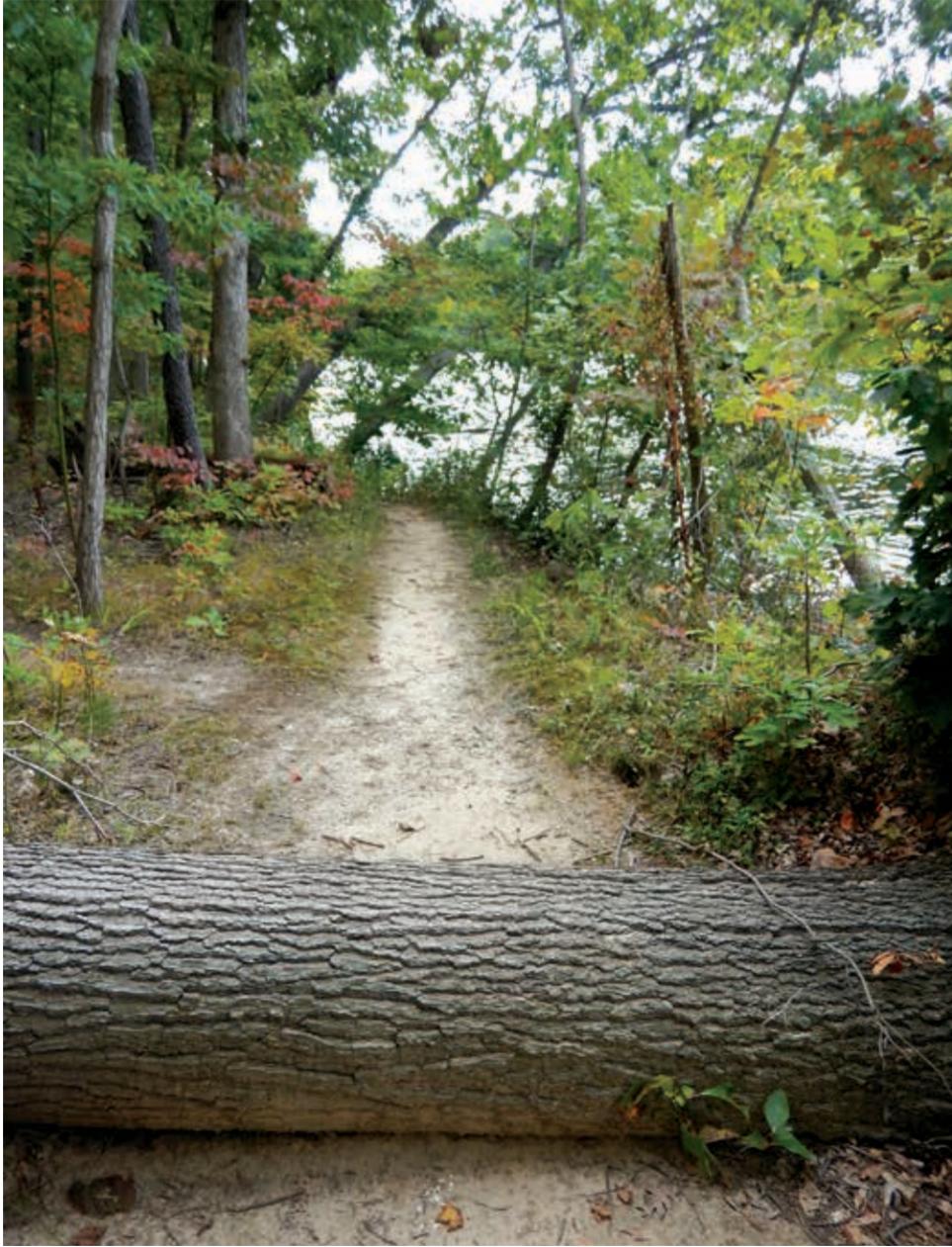
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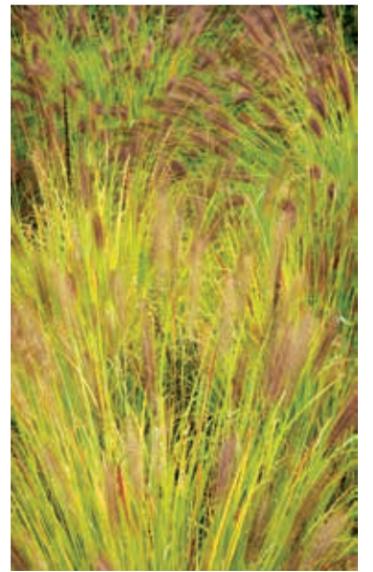
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For the Record

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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.arcadia-publishing.com

In this edition of Neighbors we have selected postcards showing images of Jones and the nearby area and lakes.

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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OUR CHILDREN

The same old routine

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Routines get a bad rap sometimes, and they probably shouldn't. Your children's routines are actually very important, both to their day to day well-being and to their development. They are important for older kids, for teens, and for the very young. Let's take a look.

Do a quick search online or look through nearly any parenting advice book, and you will find that experts agree that children need routines in their lives for many reasons. First of all, routines help human bodies operate at peak efficiency. Regular habits for eating, sleeping, exercise, and so forth lend themselves to healthy living.

Secondly, children in particular, thrive on routine. It adds an element of predictability and even a sense of control to their lives. It helps them develop self-discipline that's needed for life success, and gives them a reserve of mental energy to tap during times of stress. Finally, routines minimize power struggles between parents and kids. Some activities are just a given fact, and when children understand this, they don't argue so much.

How do you develop routines? Mostly by setting an example and by having consistent expectations. Granted, it is much easier to set up those expectations when children are very young, but even older kids can learn that you mean business about following a routine for important parts of life. I recall that even when my children were very young, we had fairly rigid naptime and mealtime routines. If someone invited me out to lunch and shop, I always responded with "Sure, but I need to have the kids home by 1 so they can have their naps." My friends would look astounded and ask, "How do you know they will nap at exactly 1?" The answer of course was that this was the household routine that had been in place for nearly their entire lives. They knew that naptime happened then, and I consistently put them to bed then (and expected them to stay there!). And so they napped until their little bodies no longer needed an afternoon siesta a few years later, when naptime evolved to "quiet time" and finally disappeared all together.

Benefits of Routines

Besides the benefits already noted,



routines have a whole lot more to offer.

Children with well-established routines will be more cooperative with others, within the family and beyond. The whole idea of a routine is that life is predictable and secure. From this foundation, kids can freely grow and learn, since they know the basics of life are going to be cared for.

Routines help kids build independence. And that, after all, is one big goal of parenting, isn't it? Once children know the routines, they can begin to manage them on their own. This is what happens with self-soothing babies who sleep when they are put to bed, toddlers who learn to go potty by themselves, and preschoolers who manage nearly all of their self-care. It continues as kids learn to complete chores, cook, clean, and even manage money. Routines can help kids at all levels master the skills they will need to live independently once they are adults.

Most of us enjoy the feeling of anticipation-knowing what we plan is going to happen. Routines build this sense of anticipation early in childhood. The idea that we can look forward to future events is a pretty basic piece of mental health, and you can

foster this by sticking to routines when kids are young.

Thankfully, routines can easily become habits. For this reason, be conscious about the routines you set up and build special feelings of love and connection into them. Most of us do this automatically, especially with the bedtime routine-there are snuggles, stories, and maybe a time to share about the day or talk about plans, hopes and dreams. Examine your daily routines with the kids right now. Where could you build in some esteem-boosters, some demonstrations of your love, some powerful memory-makers? If you add these ingredients to routines, you will deepen your relationship with the kids.

Routines promote healthy mental and physical habits that will stick with children well into adulthood. Chances are very good that even if your child "has no routine," he or she does brush teeth, get dressed, and several other things without fail every day. That should tell you that your child is capable of following routine expectations that you have set, and so is capable of adding new things to their routines. You just need to make it a priority to get them done each and every day.

And finally, expectations and routines diminish parental and household stress. When an expectation becomes a routine part of the household schedule, there is far less likelihood that kids will argue about it. They will automatically fall into their routine instead of constantly checking where the boundaries are today. For example, I hope that each of you is using seatbelts or an approved child safety seat appropriate for your child's age and size. You've probably done this since the trip home from the hospital, and the few times that your kid argued with you about sitting in them, you stood your ground for your child's well-being and because it is a law. Treat your other desired routines in the same way, and they will quickly become facts rather than points of contention.

The End Result

Well-thought-out routines that begin early in life or that are added for older children lead to a smoother running household. Everyone knows that their basic needs will be cared for and that healthy habits will be the norm. It saves everyone from arguing about every little thing.

Routines add a sense of stability and well-being to kids' lives that allows them to become more independent and more resilient in times of stress. Even when life is storming away outside, they can fall into familiar routines and draw a sense of safety from them.

And children who have grown up with routines tend to develop into independent adults who make sound decisions for their own lives and those of their family members. It becomes a routine to have routines, and everyone benefits.

Sandy Fleming is a tutor and writer living in Edwardsburg. Visit the website at <http://sandyflemingonline.com/>



NATURE NOTES

Woodchuck, Topknot, Red Bellied Sapsucker

Joanie Gentry found one of our native squirrels, the groundhog, in a mulberry tree partaking of the berries produced by the tree.

Groundhogs are also called woodchucks, whistle pigs, and a half dozen other English names. The Latin name of the species is *Marmota monax*, classified as a squirrel by mammalogists.

Gardeners and farmers often curse the species as it eats just about everything that grows.

Woodchucks are mainly ground dwellers, excavating dens in fields, yards, forest edges and other locations.

Many people do not realize that woodchucks can climb trees! Over the years I have seen several woodchucks in trees, usually between 4 and 8 feet off the ground, and on most occasions in mulberry trees eating the fruit.

Woodchucks will also climb trees if they feel imminent danger, such as dogs or humans approaching. When cornered and frightened, a woodchuck may vocalize by whistling, barking, hissing or growling.

The woodchuck is one of four mammals that inhabit Southwest Michigan which truly hibernate. The species is dormant beneath the ground from late November to late February or early March.

Gentry also photographed a noteworthy shorebird on August 31 at Tiscornia Park, called a red knot. During late August and early September red knots migrate through our region, from the breeding grounds located north of the Arctic Circle to wintering grounds of Atlantic coastal areas, from New England, south to South America.

The red knot in Gentry's photo can be identified by its size of about 10 and one-half inches in length, in addition to its dull olive colored legs and feathers on its back which look "scaly". During the spring and summer months the bird has an orange, or salmon colored head and chest.

The yellow-bellied sapsucker is a common species of woodpecker in Michigan, nesting mainly from the northern half of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, and all of Michigan Upper Peninsula.

Eliza Wein captured an excellent photograph of a yellow-bellied sapsucker, while the bird was sucking sap of a mountain ash tree in the northern part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula in July.

Sapsuckers drill evenly spaced small holes in trees known for good sap, such as mountain ash, tulip, sugar maple, basswood and many others.

Sapsuckers eat not only tree sap, but also cambium, bast, and various insects attracted to the sap.

Often sapsuckers feed on previously damaged trees, drilling around older tree wounds where nutrients accumulate in swellings that circle the branch or stem.

Sap holes created by sapsuckers draw not only insects to the sweet sap, but over 35 bird species have been documented visiting. Of the additional bird species often attracted to sapsucker holes are ruby-throated hummingbirds.

Yellow-bellied sapsuckers do not nest in Southwest Michigan. However, they are common to abundant spring and fall migrants and common to uncommon winter residents, local numbers varying from winter to winter.

In Southwest Michigan, yellow-bellied sapsuckers start to arrive during the first few days of September. The main bulk of the population passes through from



Woodchuck, or groundhog, in a mulberry tree near Sawyer. September 2017 by Joanie Gentry.



Yellow-bellied sapsucker sucking sap while drilling a mountain ash tree near Green Lake, Michigan, where the species breeds. Photo by Eliza Wein, while on vacation in northern Michigan from South Salem, New York.

September 20 through about November 10, although a few stay the winter, especially along river and stream corridors where water remains open all winter.

During the spring the population increases around March 20, indicating a northward passage of southern individuals. By May 1, most sapsuckers have departed Berrien County for northern Michigan and Canada, although records of lingering birds through the month of May. Since the late 1800s, yellow-bellied sapsuckers have been absent as a breeding species during the months of June and July.

Prior to the deforestation of the southern half of the Lower Peninsula, circa 1830s, reports of yellow-bellied sapsuckers reportedly nested in our region, although there are no specific records from Cass or Berrien Counties.



Red knot at Tiscornia Park in St. Joseph, August 31, 2017. Joanie Gentry.

LOCAL HISTORY

The diary of Dr. Phineas Gregg

Provided by Cass District Library Local History Branch

Conclusion of the diary of George Franklin Gregg (1848-1932). In February 1870, Frank Gregg lived in Newberg Township, but had family in nearby Brownsville, Calvin Township. In the spring of 1870, Gregg moved to Brownsville when he became a school-teacher. Insights on daily life in rural Cass County during 1870 are documented in this diary.

Note that there was no long Christmas Break in the school calendar. Had there been a Christmas break, the kids would end up doing chores, chopping wood, etc. Better to be in school. The word "Christmas" does not appear in Gregg's diary. Modern Christmas and holiday customs had not yet evolved in the northern United States in 1870.

I notice lack of mention of his young child, Sarah Gregg, born apparently healthy April 11, 1870.

Thursday, December 1, 1870 - Thompkins Sudds folks are here.

Friday, December 2, 1870 - School as ever. Some little disturbance through carelessness. Went home.

Saturday, December 3, 1870 - Lydia is at V'a [Vandalia]. Went up yesterday with Houghteling [Hoteling?]. I went to Cass [Cassopolis] afoot, had to walk from there to Vandalia. Bought a clock at Cass, it cost 475 [likely \$4.75]. P Shaws team ran away with him and he died the following Tuesday.

Sunday, December 4, 1870 - At Vandalia, went to meeting. J. Hurd preached. Rode part of the way to Newburg with Bro[brother] Webster.

Monday, December 5, 1870 - School rather noisy but still some progress.

Tuesday, December 6, 1870 - More cheerful all around. 40 scholars very little whispering. Went to Sam Sickels in the eve.

Wednesday, December 7, 1870 - Damp and stormy. All is well.

Thursday, December 8, 1870 - All is still well except a little quarrel which took place [at] prayer meeting.

Friday, December 9, 1870 - School as common. A little noisy otherwise very well. Went home.

Saturday, December 10, 1870 - At home. Went to the center with Mother to attend the funeral of a little boy that was killed by a tree.

Sunday, December 11, 1870 - Very stormy. Went to Findley's in the morning. Had to walk to Newberg in the snow.

Monday, December 12, 1870 - Very damp and foggy all day. Snow wet and slushy underfoot.

Tuesday, December 13, 1870 - Cool, damp and stormy. Very good school. Went to H. Crego's.

Wednesday, December 14, 1870 - Cold and windy. Things go cross ways today.

Thursday, December 15, 1870 - Roads rough. Weather disagreeable.

Friday, December 16, 1870 - Cloudy and damp. Some snow. went home, very hard walking. Mary F is at our house.

Saturday, December 17, 1870 - At home. Went to Sal Griffins to see about getting some wood.

Sunday, December 18, 1870 - Cold but not stormy. Came to Vandalia, heard Webster preach. Came on to Jabe's heard Skinner preach in eve.

Monday, December 19, 1870 - School very full. 49 enrolled, 41 present although weather is disagreeable.

Tuesday, December 20, 1870 - At school. Good attendance, good order.

Wednesday, December 21, 1870 - Very cold and stormy. School. Small house, cold.

Thursday, December 22, 1870 - Very cold and rough, stormy indoors as well as out.

Friday, December 23, 1870 - School as common. Middling attendance and attention. Did not ask anyone to sweep or carry in wood. Went to Va [Vandalia].

Saturday, December 24, 1870 - At Vandalia. Lydia is here. Very stormy, it is said the thermometer was 18 degrees

below 0 yesterday. Went to Brownsville in the evening.

Sunday, December 25, 1870 - Came to Vandalia again today. Still very cold. Stayed to dinner. Lydia went forward at the church. We had a prayer meeting at Newberg (SH) [likely School House].

Monday, December 26, 1870 - School. Still cold. Don't feel well. Had the tooth ache last night, nearly all night.

Tuesday, December 27, 1870 - School attentive. A visitor in the afternoon, some what noisy toward evening. Singing at the schoolhouse in eve.

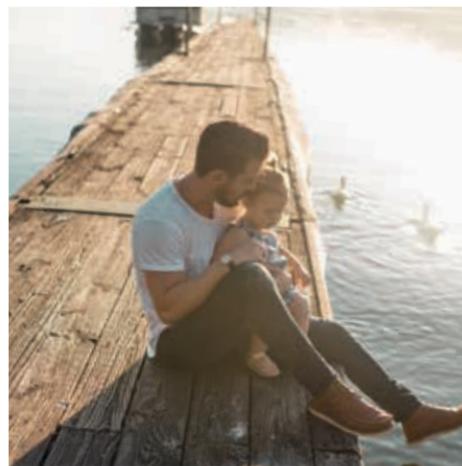
Wednesday, December 28, 1870 -- School as common. Attendance as usual. Good cheer. Spelling school, oyster supper. Sick -

Thursday, December 29, 1870 - Good attendance. Good spirits. Tolerable, good order meeting.

Friday, December 30, 1870 - School small, but good lessons. Mostly well learned prayer meeting.

Saturday, December 31, 1870 - Quarterly meeting. Commenced meeting tonight. The year is gone. I am nearer my eternal Home. I leave this diary & close the year with but one regret, I have not done enough for Jesus my savior.

Diary concluded.



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THE LAST WORD

Learning to properly embrace the snow ...

The thin, Mona Lisa smile on her lips didn't give me a hint of whether she was being serious, but the content of her last sentence was so completely out of character that I was pretty sure my wife was just yanking my chain.

"What did you say?" I asked, incredulous. I couldn't believe it had come from her tanned face.

We held eye contact for several seconds, staring at each other in a sort of bewilderment, neither of us wanting to break the silence.

"I said that this winter we need to embrace the snow."

I shifted my eyes and looked over the beautifully blue lake behind her, a body of water so steeped in its summerness it belied and almost denied even the possibility of the impending and inevitable seasonal denouement.

At least she'd smiled when she said it, I thought. She smiled again and declined to respond to my question.

The comment had come as a kind of show stopper during a conversation with a bunch of "snow-bird" neighbors, one of whom was energetically extolling the relative virtues of Florida over all other points south of the Michigan/Indiana Interstate Date Line ... the latitude line which divides states with "real" winter from those sissy seasons that the down-northerners mistake for winter.

"You need to buy a place down there and spend your winters where it's nice all year round," he said. "It's the most perfect spot on earth."

I considered it briefly but declined.

Of course he couldn't understand why *anyone* in their right mind would spend a winter in a place like Cass County, even taking into consideration Irma and Harvey, the most recent and most demonstrable arguments to buying property in wherever their sub- and tropical paradises might be.

"Fact is," the neighbors told me matter-of-factly, "I'd rather spend a year in prison than spend a winter here. I'd rather be baked in an oven than frozen out on the Michigan tundra. I'd rather have teeth pulled than shovel snow."

Tired of both his comparisons and his attitude, I mentioned my dentist's name and suggested he look into a particularly painful procedure.

That's when my wife had bristled at the acidity of my comment and dropped her argument-chilling statement.

"This winter, we're going to embrace the snow," she had said quietly to diffuse the sputtering neighbor (definitely a dental problem developing there, I was sure).

The group went quiet. For several seconds you could have heard a snowflake drop.

"You mean like snow-related activities ... like skiing and snowmobiling and sledding and stuff," another friend asked.

"No, we're too old for that kind of activities. We'd break a hip," she replied.

"Maybe we could buy snowshoes and trek around the park or something," she offered. "If we've got enough snow."

The group was agape, mouths open, eyes wide.

"Or we could just buy those shoe-sole treads that strap onto our boots and take the dog for long walks in the snow," she

interjected pleasantly.

I scanned the faces of the aghast snowbirds, wondering what they might be thinking of her plan.

"I play golf at least four days a week in Fort Myers," my buddy with the future dental problem said. "In shorts and short sleeves. The weather's always perfect there. It's a perfect place to spend the winter. I'll never winter here again."

My wife turned and looked at him, her demeanor indicating that she might hasten the onset of some of the more difficult dental procedures he was certain to receive if he kept it up.

"The news this morning said there was a hurricane headed that way," my wife said pleasantly. "They said high winds and storm surges and all kinds of horrible things."

"Nah," tooth boy sneered. "It'll turn. It'll never hit there."

Another neighbor jumped into the conversation.

"You'll never catch me down there in hurricane season," he interjected. "If you're looking for an off-season place you should consider Phoenix. Golf courses everywhere, warm all year, plenty of sunshine. And we're not far from Vegas or California if you want to take a short side trip."

"I don't care what you say about dry heat," tooth boy shot back argumentatively, "when the thermometer says 115, it's too hot to breath. You have to play golf there in the dark it's so hot during the day ... I'm telling you the west coast of Florida is the place to be."

"I hear there are alligators in Florida ... and both of you have snakes ..." said

yet another neighbor, one with the fear of reptiles and amphibians (I think it's clinically referred to as snakeatoadaphobia).

Both snow birds turned and blinked at her ... kind of like a heron looks just before it shoots its long beak out and swallows the small fish whole.

"Yeah, but we don't have snow," tooth boy shot back triumphantly.

My wife sipped her iced tea.

"Embrace the snow," she murmured. "We're going to embrace the snow."

She turned to me for reinforcement. I hesitated, causing her to scowl.

"Well, it's a lot easier for you to embrace the snow," I blurted, realizing at once I was about to commit a critical, 15-yard-type husband penalty. "You're the one sitting inside with a warm cup of cocoa, watching me shovel it after the road commission plow has piled a 3-foot drift at the end of the drive for the third time on one day. How bout you embrace the end of a snow shovel and come out and help me?"

The room went deathly silent.

From somewhere in the distance I saw a referee throw a yellow flag down onto the ground at my feet.

My whole life passed before my eyes.

It's a slow learning process, the doc said when he told me this morning that I'm making good progress. Another week or two in traction, the casts will come off in a month or so, then physical therapy for a few weeks ... with any luck I'll be able to regain full movement of most of my muscles sometime around Christmas.

With a little luck, he said, I could be back in shape in time to properly embrace the snow when it falls.



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