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March 2018

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Neighbors is published monthly from
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To contact Neighbors

(269) 228-1080

(269) 476-1680

<http://www.cassneighbors.com>

sailorphil@philvitale.com

jack@beanstalk.net

REGIONAL NEWS

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.

Kennedy's Kitchen at Beckwith

The popular Irish folk group Kennedy's Kitchen returns to the Beckwith Theatre for an evening of songs and stories on Saturday, March 10 at 7:30 pm. Tickets are \$20 (includes hors d'oeuvres and beverages). Call -782-7653 to reserve seats; tickets are purchased at the box office at the time of the performance. Season tickets are not applicable.

Underground Railroad Society Meets Capital Campaign Goal

The Underground Railroad Society of Cass County, Vandalia MI began the "It's Time" Capital Campaign to help restore the Victorian Bonine House and Carriage House in January of 2015, with a declared goal of raising \$350,000 by the end of December 2017. URSCC treasurer Cathy LaPointe has announced they have reached this goal, and credits the local community and URSCC members from all over the country for making it a reality.

"During the three years of the campaign we received over 900 donations, large and small. We had twenty-two

donors over \$1000, and eight over \$5000. Our largest donor at \$100,000 was the McLoughlin Family Foundation, a benefactor to so many in our community; but over half of the money raised was from our members in amounts from \$25 to \$500. We have seen an incredible outpouring of support for saving and restoring these iconic buildings. The story they tell is of a community that did what was right under dangerous circumstances. It's the best of America and we should all be proud of what we have accomplished."

A list of "It's Time" Capital Campaign donors can be found on the URSCC website, www.urscc.org as well as more information on the Underground Railroad Society and the UGRR in Cass County. The Bonine House and Carriage House are open for tours from May through October.

Artist Education Program

The Cass Area Artist Education Program has announced its 2018 schedule, which includes the following:

Painting with Acrylics for Teen and Adult with teacher Sharron Ott on Mondays 6:30 - 8:30 pm at the Cass District Library main branch in Cassopolis, \$12/class, drop in any time, bring your own supplies.

Drawing for Teen and Adult, with teacher Mike Slaski, Thursdays 10 am - Noon at the COA, Cassopolis, \$12/class, drop in any time.

Figure Drawing Intensive, for Teen and Adult, a one-day workshop with a clothed model, with teacher

Sharron Ott, Friday March 23, 1 - 3:30 pm at the COA, Cassopolis, \$15, supplies provided

St. Patrick's Day dinner

St. Ann Catholic Church in Cassopolis will host a St. Patrick's Day corned beef & cabbage dinner on Saturday, March 17, from 5 – 7 pm at the church, 421 N Broadway St, Cassopolis. Public welcome. Advance tickets \$10/ adult, \$5 children 5-12 years of age. Tickets at door are \$12/adult, \$5/child. Call 445-3000 or stanncass@gmail.com to reserve tickets.

Spring History Program Series

The Niles History Center and Niles District Library are co-hosting a special spring program series. All programs start at 6:30pm at the Niles District Library. Admission is free but donations are welcome! The series will include:

Thursday, March 8: Black Women and Activism, presented by students at Saint Mary's College in partnership with the Rebecca Dewey Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

Thursday, April 12: Connections with Michigan History and X: A Novel, by Dr. Michelle Johnson

Thursday, May 10: History of the Bonine House, by Cathy LaPointe

Berrien 4-H horse tack swap

The Berrien County 4-H Horse Leaders Association is sponsoring their annual Tack Swap on Saturday, March 17, 2018. It is scheduled from 1 - 4 pm at

the Shadow Trailer World Michigan in Berrien Springs. Admission is \$1 for adults and children 5 and under are free. The Tack Swap provides the opportunity to purchase new and used horse tack as well as English and Western riding apparel. Door prizes will be available. The Tack Swap is open to the public, you do not need to be a 4-H member to participate. For more information contact Pam McCaleb at 269-362-3252 or via email at we_luv_paints@yahoo.com.

Free wildlife and pollinator habitat workshops for landowners

Landowners who want to attract deer, songbirds, pheasants and pollinators like butterflies onto their property, while improving air, water and soil quality, are invited to attend a free workshop on Tuesday, April 24, at 5:30 pm at Camp Friedenswald, 15406 Watercress Way, Cassopolis.

The workshop is hosted in part by the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative Coalition. The Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative is a conservation initiative to restore and enhance Michigan pheasant habitat, populations and hunting opportunities on private and public lands via pheasant cooperatives. The initiative works by acquiring state and federal resources to assist landowners.

For more information and to register to attend a workshop, please visit www.mucc.org/pollinators or c contact Anna Mitterling at amitterling@mucc.org or 517-346-6454 with additional questions.

REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

March 8, 15, 22, and 29 - Storytime, 10 am on Thursdays, recommended age 3-5 yrs old, stories, songs, activity/craft, and more. Cass District Library- Main Library, 357-7822

March 8 - Niles History Center and Niles District Library spring program series Black Women and Activism, 6:30 pm, Niles District Library

March 9, 16, and 23 - Storytime, 10 am on Fridays, recommended age 3-5 yrs old, stories, songs, activity/craft, and more. Cass District Library- Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

March 2 - Dr. Seuss Birthday Celebration, 4 pm, Games, snacks, science activities, and special guest will read Oh, the Places You'll Go, Cass District Library- Main Library, 357-7822

March 10 - Kennedy's Kitchen performs at the Beckwith Theatre, Dowagiac, 7:30 pm, \$20, 782-7653

March 12, 19, and 26 - Painting with Acrylics, 6:30-8:30 pm, Painting classes are \$12 per night, bring your own painting kit, Contact sharronottart@gmail.com with questions, Cass District Library- Main Library, 357-7822

March 13, 20, and 27 - Storytime, 10 am on Tuesdays, recommended age 3-5 yrs old, stories, songs, activity/craft, and more. Cass District Library- Howard Branch, 487-9214

March 7, 14, 21, and 28 - Storytime, 10 am on Wednesdays, recommended age 3-5 yrs old, stories, songs, activity/craft, and more. Cass District Library- Mason/Union Branch, 357-7821

March 13 - Movie: Ferdinand, 6 pm, Free popcorn and water provided! Cass District Library- Howard Branch, 487-9214

March 13 - Spring Adventure for home schoolers, Bendix Woods County Park Glenn Bauer Shelter, So. Bend, 2-4 pm, \$5/child (under 5 free), 574-654-3155

March 14 - National Pi Day Party, 6 pm, Recommended for 3rd grade and up, have fun with math and pizza, Sign-up encouraged, Cass District Library- Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

March 17 - St. Ann Catholic Church St. Patrick's Day corned beef & cabbage dinner, 5-7 pm, 421 N. Broadway, Cassopolis, 445-3000

March 17 - Berrien County 4-H Horse Leaders Association annual Tack Swap, 1-4 pm, Shadow Trailer World Michigan, Berrien Springs, \$1, 362-3252, we_luv_paints@yahoo.com

March 20 - Book Club, 10:30 am, New members welcome! Call to find out what the group is currently reading, Cass District Library- Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

March 23 - Figure Drawing Intensive for teens and adults, 1 pm, COA, Cassopolis, \$15

March 27 - 5 pm the National Association of Retired Federal Employees, SW Michigan Chapter 572 first monthly meeting of the year at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe at 782 2769 or email jeanrowe70@comcast.net

March 30 and 31 - All Cass District Libraries will be CLOSED in observance of the Easter weekend. Cass District Library- 1-866-808-7323

April 12 - Niles History Center and Niles District Library spring program series Connections with Michigan History and X, A Novel, 6:30 pm, Niles

District Library

April 20, 21 - Michigan Lakes and Streams 57th Annual Conference, Crystal Mountain Resort, Thompsonville, MI, <https://www.mymlsa.org/mlsa-57th-annual-conference>

April 24 - free workshop on attracting wildlife onto your property, 5:30 pm, Camp Friedenswald, Cassopolis, www.mucc.org/pollinators, amitterling@mucc.org or 517-346-6454

April 24 - 5 pm - The National Association of Retired Federal Employees, SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe at 782 2769 or email jeanrowe70@comcast.net

Ma10 - Niles History Center and Niles District Library spring program series History of the Bonine House, 6:30 pm, Niles District Library

May 22 - 5 pm - The National Association of Retired Federal Employees, SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe at 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

June 9 - Diamond Lake Association Annual Meeting, 10-11:30am, Diamond Lake Yacht Club

June 22, 23 - Diamond Lake All-Lake Garage Sale, 9 am-2 pm Saturday, 9 am - Noon Sunday

June 26 - 5 pm- The National Association of Retired Federal Employees, SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current

federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe 782 2879 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

July 7 - Diamond Lake Fireworks, 10:30 pm, Fireworks Island, Rain/Wind delay date will be Sunday July 8

July 21 - Diamond Lake Triathlon, 7:30 - 10:30 am, Park Shore Marina

July 24 - 5 pm - The National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe at 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

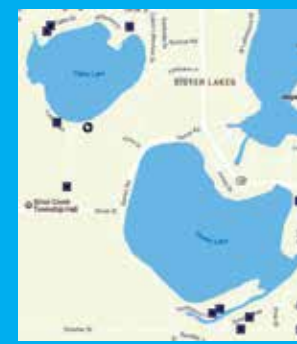
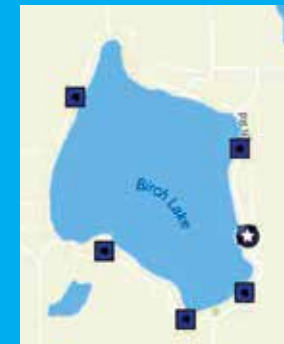
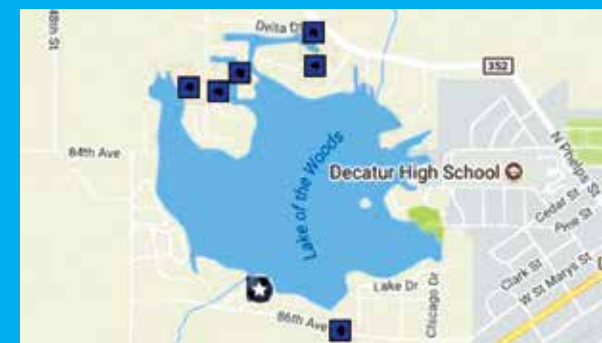
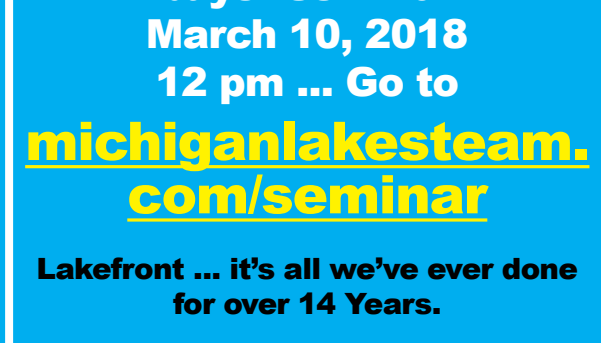
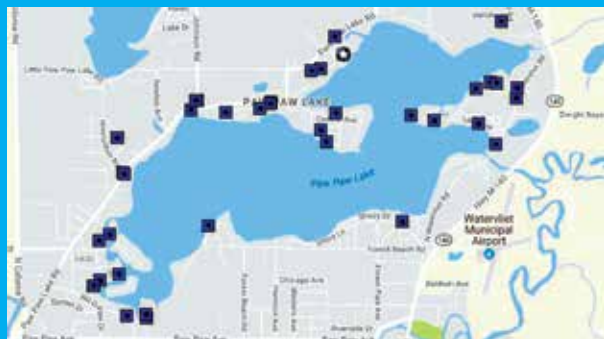
August 28 - 5 pm - The National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe, 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

September 25 - 5 pm - The National Association Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe, 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

October 23 - 5 pm the National Association Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 monthly meeting at the Super Buffet in Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families are welcome. For information, call Jean Rowe, 782 2769 or e mail jeanrowe70@comcast.net

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PASTA ITALIA CON CHEF DONATO

Aunt Agnes' Paprikash, Spaetzle and Ricotta Gnocchi

by Chef Dennis Bamber

Growing up, a very close friend of our family who was like a second mother to me, was Hungarian. I spent a lot of weekends and vacations with " Aunt Agnes" and always loved her chicken paprikash. I make this a few times every winter and along with the great taste, brings back fond memories of my boyhood.

Spaetzle is the typical dumpling that goes with this dish, but I also added an Italian twist with Ricotta Gnocchi as an alternative.

Ingredients

- 3 tbls of butter
- 2 onions diced
- 6-8 tbls of paprika
- 3-4 tbls of flour
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 4 cloves of garlic minced
- 1 tsp of salt
- 1/4 teaspoon of cayenne
- 1 whole chicken cut up(if you do 2 chickens double the recipe as you will probably need 2 deep skillets.

- 2 cups of sour cream
- Directions**
- Heat butter in deep heavy skillet. Add onions and cook until they turn golden, about 15 seconds. Sprinkle flour, cayenne and paprika and cook, stirring for a minute or so.
- Stir in broth, garlic, salt and black pepper
- Bring mixture to a boil and add chicken, turn down heat to a simmer and cover and cook for 1 hour turning once. Using tongs, pull skin off chicken and skim off the fat with a spoon.
- Add the sour cream, stirring until it dissolves and cook for another 15-20 minutes.

Spaetzle

Beat together 2 eggs and 1/4 cup of water. Add 1-1/2 cups of flour, 1/2 tsp of baking powder and 3/4 tsp of salt. Beat well with wooden spoon. Drop small bits of the dough into boiling salted water, when spaetzle float to the top, scoop them out with slotted spoon. Serve by covering with paprikash sauce with the chicken.

Ricotta Gnocchi

In food processor add 2 cups of ricot-



ta, 1 large egg, 1 cup of finely grated parmesan cheese, 1 tsp of salt and 1/2 cup of flour.

Blend the ingredients.

Put the gnocchi mixture in a pastry bag or resealable plastic bag. Cut a 1/2 inch opening in the bag, squeeze 1" pieces of the gnocchi, cutting off with a paring knife into boiling salted water, Cook for about 3 minutes, the gnocchi should float to the top. Remove with a slotted spoon and serve as you would the spaetzle.

Dennis Bamber

is an avid cook. He grew up in the restaurant business and has traveled extensively worldwide as well as being a partner in a business in Paris for 9 years. He is a second generation Italian-American. He is currently a Realtor with Cressy & Everett, licensed in Michigan and Indiana, and specializes in lake property.



TO YOUR HEALTH!

Advances in dentures can make you smile

Are you unhappy with the look of your teeth? Do your teeth constantly cause you pain? Perhaps you're struggling with multiple missing teeth, unable to chew or speak like you once could. Dentures could be a great option for you. Dentures are a time-proven way to help restore your mouth to health, regain function, and rebuild confidence in your smile.

There are many different kinds of dentures on the market to suit the varied needs of patients. The two most common types of dentures are complete dentures and partial dentures.

Complete dentures include all of the upper and lower teeth. Partial dentures replace some teeth, but use your natural teeth for support. Often your dental professional may recommend a complete denture and a partial denture, with one on the top and one on the bottom if some teeth can be saved.

The complete and partial denture combination can also come as either "immediate" or "conventional." With an "immediate" denture, impressions are taken prior to extractions and dentures are delivered at the same appointment as the extractions. A "conventional" denture



Conventional upper and lower denture



Conventional lower partial denture



Conventional lower implant retained denture

is made over the course of multiple appointments after the gums have healed from extractions and molds and measurements are taken to customize a denture just for you.

For those of you who already have dentures, there may be other issues. Significant bone loss from years of wearing a denture can make even the most intimate-fitting denture hard to wear. There are many denture adhesive products to help secure your denture in place. But, if you are tired of using adhesives or they just aren't working, you may be

looking for a better solution.

One of the most exciting new advancements has come in the field of mini dental implants. Mini dental implants are small, non-invasive titanium screws that are placed into existing bone. The denture is then made to snap onto these mini dental implants. This can help eliminate the need for denture adhesives. Another added benefit is that the denture can be less bulky and more comfortable. Typically, between four to six mini dental implants are placed. This procedure can be painlessly performed in

under an hour. In most cases, you can have mini dental implants placed and leave with your denture securely fixed in place in one visit.

Stop struggling through meals, conversations, or pain and visit a dental professional to learn what would be the best solution for you. A healthy mouth is a happy mouth.

This article was provided by Roger Pecina of Afdent, 605 West Douglas Rd., Mishawaka, IN 46545, (574) 277-7770.

LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

Getting closer to Spring!

by JANE BOUDREAU

Hey Neighbors! It's good to be back after our little holiday/terrible weather/hibernation break. This must mean we are getting close to hanging up the good' ol shovel and grabbing a rake. If you like to get out into the yard and get your hands dirty, you're probably as ready as I am to start digging. The seed catalogs are getting a little worn from my constant thumbing through them, and I continue to toy with the idea of growing vegetables this year. I promised myself last summer that I was going to downsize my gardens and potted flowers. But now I've forgotten all of the hard and relentless work-similar to having a baby-and I just remember how pretty everything looked.



My daughter loves her flower pots as much as I do. They make for a portable garden. When we have days with scorching sun and little rain, I can move them to the shade. The same if I leave for a few days. They don't dry out so bad. If the watering routine gets you a little crazy, plant your flowers in the ground in semi shade, and you'll reduce the watering. Anyway, what my daughter does to save time and make a lasting impression, is buy ready-made flower pots from her nursery, or a Big Box store. She adds a bit of potting soil to a pot just slightly larger than the one she bought, and takes the whole thing out, flowers and soil, and puts it in her own pot. I thought this was a little too expensive to do, and then I took a look at my method. I'd buy flats of flowers and potting soil. It would take me a good afternoon to get my pots planted, watered, and put where I wanted them. And I always screwed up, some flowers were too tall, others too short. And, I always ended up with leftover plants. I felt sorry for them, made more pots, and ended up with a multitude of flowers to care for. I'm going to think about her method this spring. Maybe you should, too.

When I'm longing for color, I snip some fragrant branches from my forsythia bush. They last a good long time indoors with water. I have a lot of extra space along a fence at my city home, and I've decided I'm going to fill it in with flowers, bushes, and shrubs. Lilacs, hyacinths, and maybe a peony or two. And the bonus, cut flowers! I'll hopefully have more than these yellow branches, as pretty as they are.



I'm always big on spring cleaning, or at least on good intentions. Have you ever noticed that in January, every woman's

magazine you pick up in the store is shouting from the cover, "It's Time For Spring Cleaning!"? I guess they play on our senses, and perhaps guilt, that we must be so darn bored in January, that we'll even pull out a broom and dust pan to keep ourselves amused.

I don't worry too much about my house not being clean-it's just my husband and I, although he can sometimes be like 5 kids all together. I think it's more about clutter and dust from things not moving around so much. I'm really convinced that I'm going to someday be a little old lady with drawers filled with rubber bands and string.

Last year I went on a rampage and gave away more than half of my cookbooks. I had well over a hundred, and as much as I love to cook, I often judged a book by its pretty cover. What a way to start a huge collection. With smaller publishing houses now, there must be fifty new cookbooks published a month. And if you are a fan of Pinterest like me, you need go no further than your computer when you are standing in the kitchen holding a frozen chicken and a bag of okra.

The disgusting part was when I removed the books from the shelves. They had a nice high gloss of grease. And they weren't really near the stove. Dish soap is the perfect grease cutter, so I poured a hefty amount into a small bucket, and proceeded to clean up the covers of these books. This got me thinking about all of the small appliances and cute little things I have here and there on my counters, and how gross they must be. I'm happy to say that I'm slowly eliminating clutter, and things I simply won't use in my lifetime.

Here are a few of the things I have in abundance in just my kitchen alone, as that seems to be the catch-all for everything:

- Plastic grocery bags
- Pens
- Random scribbles on paper
- Coupons
- Tupperware
- Mail
- Prescription and vitamin bottles
- Old potholders
- Wine stoppers
- Worn out sponges
- Dog brushes
- Dog hair
- 16 bottles of balsamic vinegar

I have a crock of utensils, including 3 turkey basters (and I've never used one evvvvver).

And past their prime spices (anyone else have 6 containers of poultry seasoning?)

This year I'm going to make another clean sweep. It's hard. I think some of those old potholders were my mothers. She'd probably smile from above. She was very, very neat.



I was absolutely not on the ball when January rolled around this year. With all my good intentions, and easily achievable resolutions, I ended up in bed with a virus, much like mono. Once you have a virus, you always have a virus. As you are walking down the street in a busy city, there are many, many people around you with some sort of virus. They luckily have an immunity system. I'm not that person. I don't have a strong immunity system, so the minute I pick up a germ, I'm down for the count. The symptoms of my virus are fatigue. Just fatigue. All I can do is sleep. And I do. I sleep, eat, shower and repeat. For days. I clearly don't get much sympathy,

and that's sad. Everyone deserves a little chicken soup, maybe Chicken Kiev, when they are ill. I'm really fortunate that I work from home. I weigh sleep over writing, thus some late deadlines. Still, the dogs have taken up howling at my bedside when they're hungry or have to go out, and my husband is living on meal replacement bars.

I'm better now. I didn't get the holiday decorations down until the first week of February. My husband was glad to offer to do it, but I couldn't handle seeing his bear-like hands on my vintage ornaments. I was happy to see the last reindeer and angel go. Then the other day, I realized everything looked sort of cold and ... uncluttered. How unlike me. The virus may have stripped me of strength, but it wasn't going to take away my love of abundance. I had a little restraint with my mantel as you can see. I have spring, Easter, and whatever covered well.

This is one of my favorite bunnies. I collect bunnies, adding maybe one or two per year. This has added up to about sixty bunnies. When I put all of them out before Easter, it can be a little weird. I don't do that anymore, as it scares the grandchildren and my husband.

On to some recipes!



Mixed Grill Casserole

This is a sort of queer season for recipes. We are probably sick of soup, stews, and good 'ol comfort foods, but a warm oven keeps the home fires burning. I think casseroles are a nice bridge between winter and spring.

When we cook outside in the summer, I like to make what I call a 'mixed grill'. A few different types of meat and veggies. As long as the meat is cut in relatively the same size, everything will come out at the same time. I took this idea further by making a casserole that has all the flavors of the mixed grill and more. And a little comfort. I have a few notes at the end, as there is a method to my madness. Please read all the way through.

Ingredients:

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 lb. chicken thighs, trimmed of fat, and cubed 1 inch
- 1 lb. sweet Italian sausage, sliced in 1/2 inch rounds
- 1 large onion, peeled and roughly chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped fine
- 1 green pepper, seeded and chopped
- 4 medium size red potatoes, cubed 1 inch
- 8 oz. frozen cut green beans
- S & P to taste
- 1 large jar of marinara sauce, your choice
- 1 cup bread crumbs, divided*
- 1 T butter, melted
- 1 cup grated cheddar cheese (Mozzarella works well also)

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in large dutch oven over high heat. Brown the chicken thigh cubes and sausage for approximately 3 minutes, tossing a bit. Remove to a platter and set aside.

Lower the heat and add the onion. Stir and cook until lightly translucent. Add the garlic and cook 1 additional minute. Add the meat back into the dutch oven, stirring to incorporate. Add the potatoes and green beans and a little salt and pepper. Mix well.

In an 8 X 10 casserole, sprinkle 1 cup of

the bread crumbs on the bottom. Spoon over the meat and veggie mixture evenly. Melt the tablespoon of butter in a small bowl in the microwave. Using a fork, mix in the last cup of bread crumbs, mixture should be somewhat dry. Sprinkle over the casserole evenly and follow with your cheese.

Bake in a 375 degree oven for 30 minutes covered with foil. Remove the foil and bake another 5-7 minutes until cheese is melted and bubbly. Let rest five minutes before serving.

*There is nothing worse to me than a runny casserole, especially when you are spooning it out of the dish, and looking at the liquid on the bottom. This is natural, as all of the ingredients give off water. Using a bit of bread crumbs on the bottom of your dish helps to absorb the liquid, and is also quite flavorful



I love cornbread, and I love it any way I can get it. I make it in a sheet pan, loaf pan, or a muffin pan. The best thing about cornbread is that you can add so many different ingredients to take it up a notch. When my kids were young, they would go crazy when I made a batch. They liked it best in an 8 x 10 pan, baked and then cut into squares. I then fried the squares in butter until lightly browned. They loved this even for breakfast, as well as a side dish at dinner. And believe me, it keeps well in the fridge, as long as no one is stealing it!

Again, you can add all sorts of things to your mix. I like a bit of spicy peppers sometimes. Any sort of veggie that is softened by cooking or blanching is great. I really love to add cheese. Here is my recipe for the quick and easy cornmeal muffins I like to make.

Easy, Cheesy and Spicy Cornmeal Muffins

Ingredients:

- 1 cornmeal mix (I like Krusteaves)*
- Vegetable oil spray
- 8 oz. cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 small Poblano pepper, seeded, rinsed, and chopped fine
- 2 T butter, melted

Directions:

Make the cornmeal mixture according to package instructions, and heat oven accordingly. Spray a muffin pan with veggie oil. Add 2 tablespoons of the cornmeal mixture to each cup. Add a teaspoon of cheese and a pinch of the peppers, then add enough of the cornmeal mixture to fill up to 3/4 from the top.

Bake according to box recipe. Remove from oven and gently brush the tops with butter. Serve after they cool a bit.

*You can definitely make the cornmeal from scratch. I opted for the easy way here. I bet you have a favorite recipe. If you want to share, send the recipe to me at my email address below. It may just get published.

This is a crazy sort of time. Who knows what is to come in March. The Farmer's Almanac predicted a cold and snowy winter, and that has certainly played out so far. It's still coming. We had a great time in

Continued on next page. See:

JANE

BUSINESS & FINANCE

Daylight Savings Time and Spring Cleaning

By Dean Johnson
Kemner-Iott Benz Agency
of Cass County

The phrase “spring ahead” reminds us to move our clocks ahead for daylight savings time. It also reminds us that it is time for “spring cleaning” of homes, garages, and yards. Sprucing up your home in the spring doesn’t take a lot of time and can save a lot of time and money in the end. Since many large home repairs start out as small, minor issues, inspecting the house after a long winter can make the difference between a small problem and a major home emergency.

- Siding and Trim: Clean siding with a pressure washer to keep mold from growing. Check wood and stucco surfaces for chipping or peeling. Probe the wood trim around windows and doors. Fill cracks, caulk edges, repaint or replace if necessary. Inspect weather-stripping around doors, windows, and garage doors. Cut back any trees or shrubs touching the exterior. Make repairs now before the spring rains do more damage to exposed wood.

- Roof and Gutters: Have your roof inspected. Shingles that are cracked buckled, or loose or missing granules could lead to leaks and need to be replaced. Flashing around plumbing vents, skylights and chimneys need to be checked and repaired if necessary. Check for loose or leaky gutters. Improper drainage can lead to water in the basement or crawl space. Make sure downspouts drain away from the foundation and are clear and free of debris.

Your home is one of your most important investments. By keeping it properly maintained you can reduce the risk of a loss and help ensure the safety and well being of friends and family. If you do suffer a loss, be sure to contact your insurance agent as soon as possible.

- Chimney: Examine the exterior of the chimney for signs of damage. Have the fireplace, and/or woodstove and chimney cleaned and serviced as needed.

- Foundation: Inspect the foundation around your house. Look for cracks or imperfections, and seal them or call a contractor if necessary. Look for low areas in the yard near the foundation that might pool water during a heavy rain. Remove leaves from around the house.

- Patios, Decks, Sidewalks, Driveways: Inspect wood decks, steps, and rails for any sharp edges, splintered or rotting wood. Also look for rusting nails or any nails that are coming out or weakening their connections. Check the railings and stairs to make sure they are secure and not wobbly. Inspect concrete slabs for cracks or movement. All exterior slabs should drain away from the home’s foundation. Spring is the best time to seal cracks in the driveway or any other concrete.

- Windows and Doors: Clean screening and check for holes. Holes bigger than a quarter allow plenty of room for bugs to climb in. Patch holes or replace

the screen. Tighten or repair any loose or damaged frames and repaint. Replace broken, worn or missing hardware. Wind can ruin screens and frames if they are allowed to flap and move so make sure they are securely fastened. Tighten and lubricate door hinges and closers.

- Sprinklers: Check lawn sprinkler systems for leaky valves, exposed lines, and improperly working sprinkler heads. If there is an area of your yard that collects too much water or doesn’t get enough, run the sprinklers to figure out the problem. If it is not something you can fix yourself, call a professional before your lawn needs the water.

- Outside Faucets: Check outside hose faucets for freeze damage. Turn the water on and place your thumb or finger over the opening. If you can stop the flow of water, it is likely the pipe inside the home is damaged and will need to be replaced.

- Air Conditioner: Have a qualified contractor clean and service the outside unit of the air conditioning system. Change filters and clean the air purifier. Shut down and clean the furnace humidifier and close the furnace humidifier

damper on units with central air conditioning.

- The Basement and Attic: If you have an attic, check for proper ventilation as well as leaks from the roof. Inspect the underside of the roof and the insulation closely for any discoloration, deterioration or dirt stains, any leaking water might have dried up. Check the basement walls, floors and trim for water stains or any signs of seepage through the foundation. Check the sump pump to insure it is working properly. Install a battery-operated pump as a backup.

- Check Alarms: Check smoke, carbon monoxide and security alarms and replace batteries. Check the pressure gauge on the fire extinguishers.

- Check Appliances: Check dishwashers, refrigerators, washers and dryers. Danger signs: crimping, cracking, or other damage on power wires, supply/discharge hoses, and vents. Check your water heater for leakage or rusting at the bottom.

- Pest Control: Look for signs of pests. Not only do pests cause damage to your home, clothing, carpeting, and wiring; they also contaminate food and carry infectious diseases. Perform seasonal pest control. Most pest control companies offer a monthly service.

Your home is one of your most important investments. By keeping it properly maintained you can reduce the risk of a loss and help ensure the safety and well being of friends and family. If you do suffer a loss, be sure to contact your insurance agent as soon as possible.

JANE

Continued from previous page

January one weekend with the whole family sledding, and a lunch once at Swiss Valley. My kids took lessons there ages ago when they were little sprouts. Now young adults, they are going back. My oldest son was explaining to his wife how the snow is artificially made when the real stuff isn’t around. On this particular Saturday, we were having a wonderful snowfall. We watched out the windows at it, as well as the skiers flying down the hill. At some point my daughter in law asked, “So, is this the fake snow or real?” We nearly passed out laughing.

In ending, I hope you enjoy the last bits of winter for what it’s worth. I say- don’t bother much with the spring cleaning, maybe 5 minutes a day. Read, crochet, cook, putter, and in my case, sleep.

See you next month, my friends!

Jane Boudreau is a writer and blogger, who has lived on Diamond Lake for over 26 years. She also flits between there, Chicago, and a mountain home in North Carolina. You can reach her at blndy9@yahoo.com All photos are taken by Janet. Please ask for permission before using.



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OUR CHILDREN

Fun for National Reading Month

by **SANDY FLEMING**

March is National Reading Month, so it's a great time to help children (and adults!) become readers. Reading opens doors to all parts of life at all ages. It's crucial that kids gain as much reading skill as they can. It's also crucial that they gain skills on pace with their peers. When kids fall behind, even a little bit, school and sometimes even life leaves them behind and they never do truly catch up. The best way to prevent this is to pay close attention to reading skill development and keep them on track throughout their younger years and grade levels. Educators know that kids who are "behind" with their reading by grade 3 often never get caught up. It's up to parents, grandparents, caregivers, and anyone who works with children to partner with the schools to make sure kids are learning these critical skills at an early age.

But third grade is not a set-in-stone cutoff age, either. Kids who have trouble with reading in the early years can and do improve dramatically if they get the specialized help they need to progress. The key is to be watchful. Monitor your child's progress carefully, and if you have concerns, reach out to the school, to a private tutor, to someone who is knowledgeable in literacy development and get the help your child needs to succeed.

So what can you do at home? Lots and lots of things! Here are some ideas to get you started. They are sorted roughly by age level, but feel free to mix and match. Some kids are ready to advance in some areas, and other areas might be challenging even if the student is older. Don't set those age guidelines in stone; just whichever activities will help your student improve reading skills. Meet kids where they are at and move forward from there!

For Infants and Toddlers

Yes, this is exactly the time to begin if you can. Infants and toddlers need a whole lot of basic groundwork to eventually become successful readers. There are even some experts who say that you should read to your child even before he or she is born. What can it hurt? But definitely from the day you come home from the hospital it's time to make reading a part of your daily routine.

Even the smallest infants are absorbing the world around them. When you read to your baby, a whole host of good things are happening. You likely are holding the child, so they will be feeling that physical comfort and closeness. Baby hears your voice and language, too.

It's really difficult to say how much meaning is absorbed by which age, but it's enough to realize that kids understand your words long, long before they can respond in meaningful ways. You don't want to miss that magical moment when your infant catches glimmers of understanding because you think it's "too early" to share books!

Now, what can you read? Well, almost anything will do. You can even read magazines and other adult material; just avoid things that might be upsetting or scary when partially understood. This is a great way to get your reading in now that your life has gotten so much busier. But be sure to choose some material each day that is perfect for children, too. Read poetry, children's books, and picture books. Show baby the pictures, too. Babies see best in that 12-15" inch range, so be sure to give them a good look at the pictures.

Make reading aloud part of your child's daily routine. Many families find it works best to read right before nap time and/or bedtime. You can also read aloud as your youngster is waking. Try reading while you're nursing, too. You'll quickly find what works best for you and your family.

As baby grows, make the reading an interactive time. Point out items in pictures and name them. Ask your child to point to or touch things mentioned in the text. Share lots of kinds of books—stories, poems, songs, picture books, and identification books, where everything in the picture is labeled. See if you can get your youngster to attempt to repeat sounds, words, phrases, or even whole sentences. See if he or she can do gestures that go with the text as well.

Touch the words as you read. Have your child show you words in the book. Let him or her choose the reading material sometimes, too! Talk with the kids about what's going on in the story and "think out loud" about what might happen next or what has already happened in the tale. This will help lay the groundwork for later predictions, summaries, and more.

Play lots of word games with babies, too. They don't have to talk to be able to do these. One of our family favorites was chanting "Let's go change the baby, the baby, the baby! Let's go change the baby; change her into a PICKLE!" We replaced "pickle" with any number of other silly words, and long before the kids could talk, they recognized the nonsense involved and collapsed into fits of giggles.

Don't forget finger plays, nursery

rhymes and songs. These help with the beginnings of language development and awareness of sounds that letters make (phonemic awareness). They have rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and more that make them attractive to say and to hear.

And all of this reading and singing and talking also will help the little ones build their vocabularies. According to an article in Psychology Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201402/tackling-the-vocabulary-gap-between-rich-and-poor-children>), studies have shown that differences in vocabulary and numbers of words kids are exposed to can show up as early as 18 months or even before. The kids who hear fewer words and fewer new "hard" words fall farther and farther behind until the gaps are very noticeable by school age. You can help your child get off on the right foot simply by exposing him or her to more and better language! Talk to the kids, listen to what they are saying to you, and be sure you engage frequently (lots of times each day!) in real conversation, where the participants take turns speaking and listening and maintaining a coherent topic of discussion.

Preschoolers

My goodness, what progress children make in the area of reading readiness and language development during the preschool years! It's like they are little sponges and their brains are just wired to absorb all of this new information to build a firm foundation for the formal reading instruction that is just around the corner.

Keep reading to them! Be sure they get doses of reading aloud several times each day, and make sure they have access to books to look at and use on their own. As you read, make sure to engage the kids. Don't just read out loud and be done with it. Talk about the story, the characters, the pictures, the events. Point things out in the pictures and have your children find the things you ask them to look for. Read stories that are longer and more complicated. Most preschoolers can chapter books! Try family favorites, such as Mary Poppins or the Wizard of Oz. Get out the controlled vocabulary books now, too, like favorites from Dr. Seuss and other simple reading. Point to the words as you say them. Have the kids show you the beginning and end of the book, the title, and the author's name. Show them a word and ask them to show you the next word or the one before it. Point out the periods and demonstrate how our voices change when we get to the end of a sentence or a question. And never, ever change or skip words or "shorten" a book as you are

reading—this can disrupt many of the types of learning that we want to encourage, like understanding that text does not change, that each word you say has a matching word on the page, and more.

Keep the learning alive by doing projects and activities that are related to some of the stories that you read. Make the connection between the book about the zoo and the trip to the zoo that your family took last week. Make puppets and use them to retell the story. Ask questions and have your child ask questions.

One of the most common problems with reading aloud at this age comes when kids won't sit still for stories. Countless parents say "I don't read to him/her because the kid just won't sit still. I guess he/she just doesn't like books." **DON'T STOP READING TO THE KIDS BECAUSE THEY WON'T SIT STILL!** Read while they are across the room playing with blocks. Read when they are forced to sit still, such as in their car seats or when lying down for bed or at meal time. Read in weird places, like the bathtub or under the table. Make a special reading tent from blankets and furniture to attract their attention.

And be sure that you continue playing lots of word games even when you are not reading books. Make lists of words that start with the same sound, or that rhyme, or that end with the same sound. See who can make up the best sentences. Try thinking of words that all mean about the same thing, or opposites, or words in categories. These are great pastimes when you are in the car or when you need to wait like at the doctor's office.

Help the kids learn to hear the different sounds within words as well as the syllables. Say words one sound at a time and have kids try to guess what you're saying. When they are good at that, try having them break up words and see if you can guess what they say.

School-Aged Kids

Because kids are learning to read on their own is no reason to stop reading to them. By now, story time is likely a favorite family pastime. Keep reading to them! Don't let life's busy-ness get in the way. Choose stories that are just beyond their level of independent reading comfort. Or choose an unfamiliar book and read a "teaser" then leave the book lay where they can pick it up. There are loads of strategies to make reading aloud part of your family routine well into the school years, and of course, once they can read comfortably, let them take a turn doing the reading as you listen!

And keep on playing the word games. The elementary years are a great time to introduce favorites like Hangman, crossword puzzles, word search puzzles, and commercial games that encourage spelling and word work.

Put on plays, write book reviews, and try other strategies to have kids respond to books, too. Books aren't meant to be read in a vacuum. They should be adding meaning and knowledge to life, and most people don't read books and have no reaction to them. Teach your kids to share their feelings about books. It will be a skill that they can use throughout the rest of their lives.

Sandy Fleming is an educational consultant and tutor living in Edwardsburg. Visit her website (<http://sandyflemingonline.com>) for more great ideas about how to help kids move forward with their learning.



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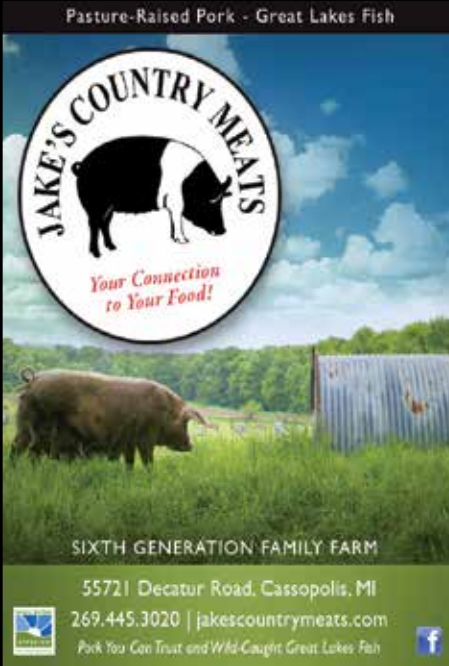
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HISTORIC POSTCARDS

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.arcadiapublishing.com

In this edition of Neighbors we have selected postcards showing images of Dowagiac 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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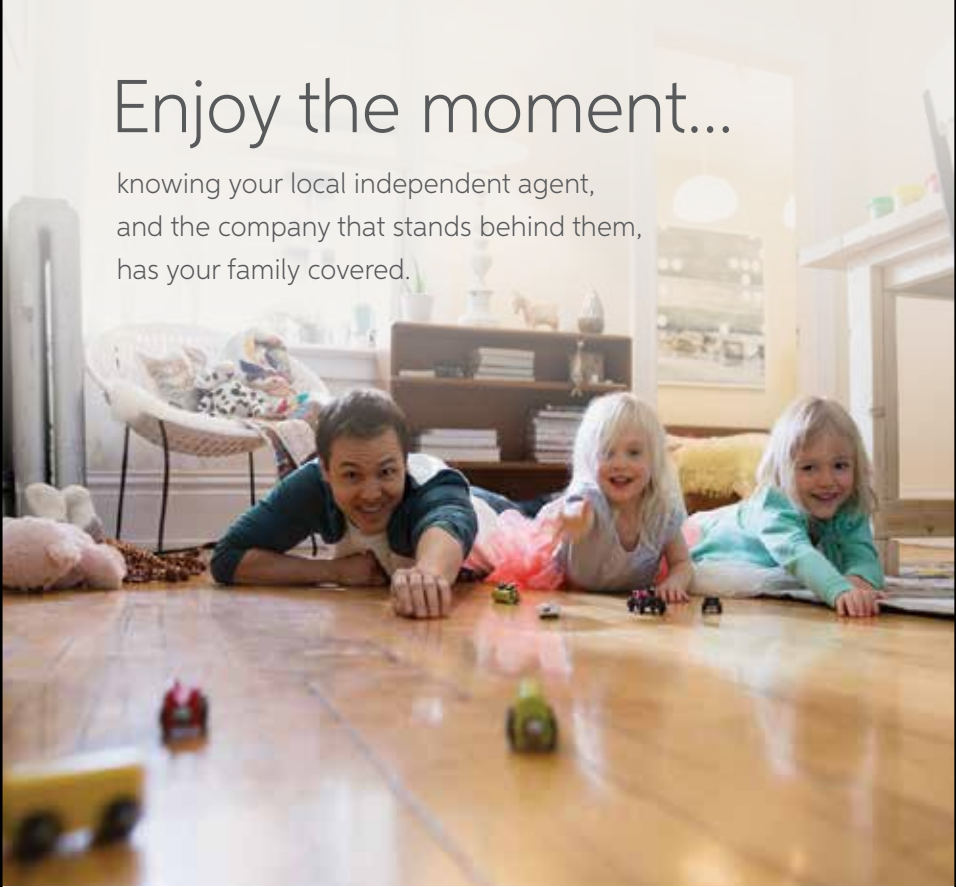
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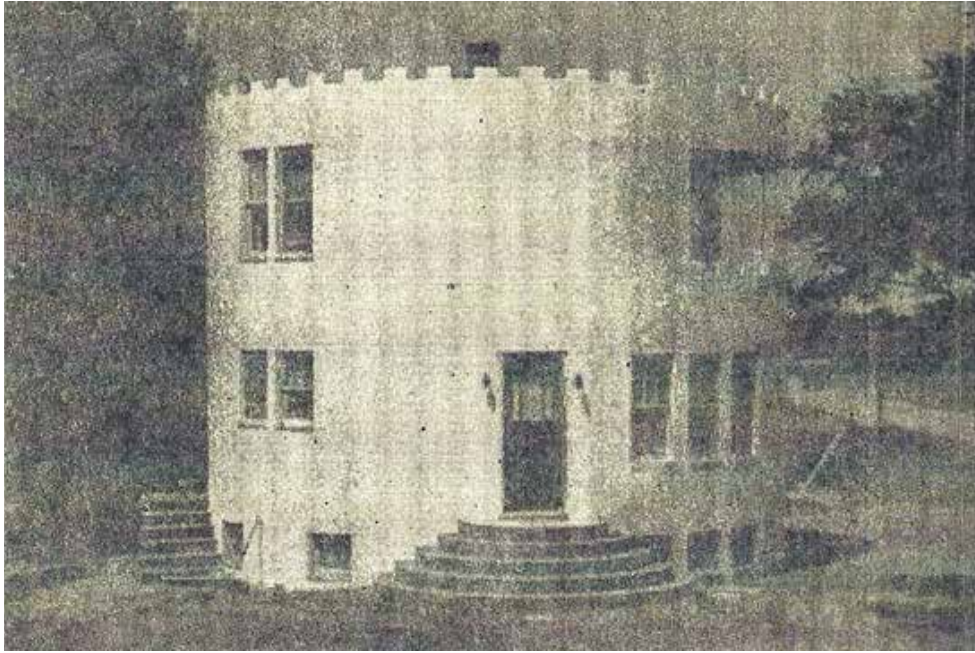
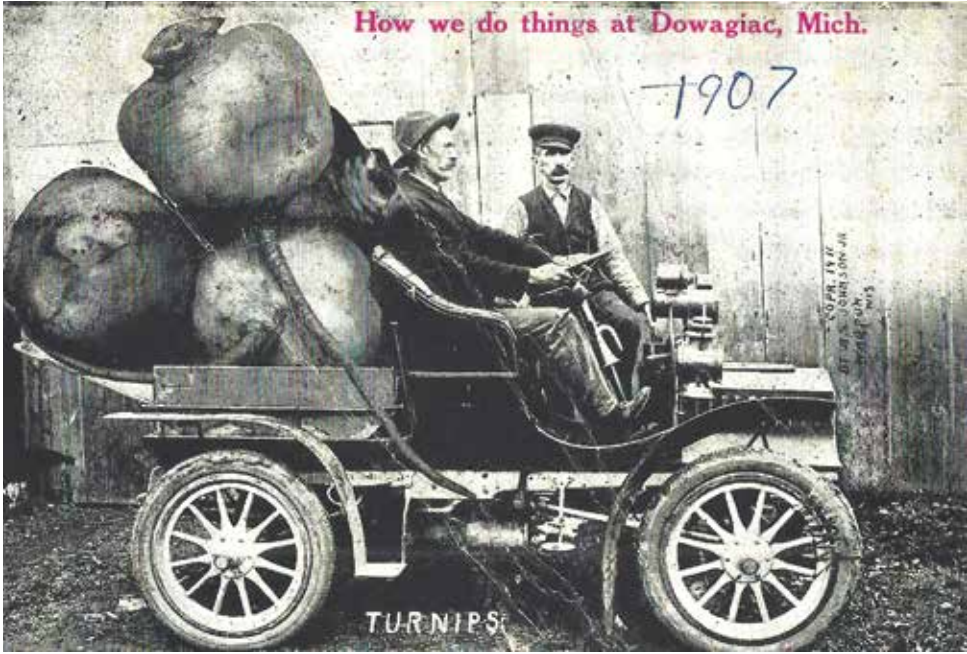
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NATURE NOTES

Eastern bluebirds and snowy owls

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Wildlife has suffered due to the prolonged cold spell engulfing much of the eastern US this past week. I have received several reports of eastern bluebirds attending heated birdbaths, including a photo of four bluebirds at the birdbath of Jerry Biggart of Coloma.

Biggart also snapped a photo of a Carolina wren at the birdbath. Over the last 40 to 50 years, bluebirds and Carolina wrens have increased in population in Southwestern Michigan. Both species are found year-round in the area but Carolina wrens are more susceptible to perishing in cold weather than bluebirds.

Southern Michigan is the northern limit of the Carolina wrens' range, and noticeable decreases in singing males occur each spring following a particularly harsh winter in the area. The most recent decline came in spring and summer 2014 after the particularly long and cold winter. This is true when we look back at bird records in the 1970s and 1980s.

Carolina wrens mainly feed on insects and non-vertebrates in summer but in colder months are able to sustain their lives by supplementing diet with suet and seeds.

Eastern bluebirds have rebounded tremendously after the banning of the pesticide DDT, beginning in the 1970s. Bluebirds seem to withstand brutally cold temperatures and snow in part because they form winter flocks, sometimes upwards to 30 bluebirds. At night they huddle together and conserve heat, quite often in bluebird nesting boxes, which is a great help.

Carolina wrens don't flock together and are much more susceptible to extreme cold, even if they have a regular food source.

Last week I mentioned a male Baltimore oriole, present south of Grand Rapids since November at a feeding station with meal worms. The homeowner thinks the bird perished on the night of December 28, during which temps fell below zero.

Quite often is the case that stray non-tropical migrants such as Baltimore oriole, rose-breasted grosbeak, and even scarlet or summer tanagers will linger into December but don't have the adapta-



Eastern bluebirds at birdbath of Jerry Biggart of Coloma, December 2017.

tions to withstand prolonged exposure to the extreme cold in January or February.

Those who feed birds and other wild animals regularly do help a great deal and I am often asked about what to do if the homeowners leave for vacation and cut the food source off suddenly. In most cases birdfeeders are a supplemental food source to birds and mammals and they adjust if necessary to survive.

In Southwest Michigan there are thousands of people who feed birds, often within close proximity to other feeding stations in subdivisions and towns, and thus most animals adjust to another food source, such as another set of feeders or a natural food source such as weed seeds in fields or tree nuts.

If readers could keep an eye out for ring-necked pheasants and report any in the area to me, especially in south Royalton Township and northern Oronoko Township. There has been a healthy and sulfa-sustained population of pheasants in this area for decades but during the last several months reports have declined.

Snowy Owls

The winter of 2017-2018 seems to be one of a major snowy owl irruption from the arctic, south into the Great Lakes region. At press time it has been estimated at approximately 75 of these arctic owls have been observed in Michigan, and around 10 in Southwest Michigan alone.

Snowy owls nest in the far north of Canada, Alaska and Eurasia. Specifically they nest north of the area that is capable of growing trees, or north of the tree-line on arctic tundra.



At left, Snowy owl on Lincoln Township North Lake Park sign, November 28, 2017. Kevin Gebhard of Stevensville. At right, Snowy Owl # 1 of 2 on post, New Buffalo harbor, November 24, 2017. Joanie Gentry of Sawyer.

Every year there is a southward migration of the species during autumn through spring. However the annual southbound, winter population is usually represented in Southwest Michigan and surrounding areas, by about a half-dozen sightings.

Once every few winters we see higher than average snowy owls in the region, sometimes the owls appear as far south as Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina. It looks as though the winter of 2017-2018 will be an irruptive year of snowy owls into the Great Lakes and New England.

Scientists know that lack of food, mainly small rodents, in the snowy owls usual wintering grounds of Canada are an important component of the irruptive flights south, but other factors may play a role, perhaps changes in arctic climate and a reduction of sea ice are part of the equation.

The frequency of winters in which massive southward snowy owl flights are apparently increasing. Major snowy owl irruptions occurred during the winters of 2011-2012 and 2013-2014, and 2017-2018 being the third in ten years. Historically such invasions into the northern US occurred less frequently. We know large flights occurred in winters 1877-1878, 1892-1893, and an incredible flight took place during the winter of 1901-1902 in which it is estimated 1000 individuals were seen in Toronto, Ontario. Since the 1960s up until the 2010s snowy owl inva-



sion years occurred about once every ten to twelve years.

Snowy owls are white with varying, dark horizontal barring depending on age. They are about two feet in length and wingspan of about two feet. Each snowy owl migrates alone, not in flocks. On average an adult snowy weighs about 4-5 pounds.

Three snowy owls were photographed on November 22 at the South Haven pier by Kenneth Bishop. Up to two have been seen since November 22 at the New Buffalo harbor, photographed by Lisa Schaller of Sawyer.

Mary Connors of Benton Harbor reported November 20: "A snowy owl swooped by us on our walk this morning through Harbor Shores golf course, clutching a large rodent. It landed well past us on a rise in the golf course just south of Higman Park Road and M-63. It was big! Next time I'll pack a camera."

I received a photo of a snowy owl atop a barn in rural Cass County on Monday, sent by Barbie Starr of Niles.

Kevin Gebhard of Lincoln Township photographed a snowy owl Tuesday morning as it sat on the North Lake Park - Lincoln Township sign. He told me that another snowy owl was present at the Lincoln Township soccer fields along Rocky Weed Road over Thanksgiving weekend.

Some owls may linger in our region into March so keep an eye out for one!

LOCAL HISTORY

Hardships of pioneer life in Howard Township

Provided by Cass District Library
Local History Branch

Hardships and Incidents of a Pioneer Life in Howard Township, as told by John F. Coulter. Provided by Cass District Library's Local History Branch.

The Coulter home and farm were located on both sides of the intersections of Coulter Street and M-60.

"In 1834, James F. Coulter, accompanied by his father, John Coulter, came into this county from Clinton County, Ohio bringing about one-hundred and fifty head of milk cows, which were disposed of to the settlers on advantageous terms, and then they purchased 640 acres of land from the Government in Howard Township.

The Coulter land then extended to the Jefferson Township line. The price

paid was \$1.25 per acre. John Coulter, SR was a single man at the time, and remained here a portion of the time the following tow years working at the carpenters trade. He made a good many of the sash that were in the first houses of Edwardsburg.

That village was a very small place at the time [1830s] and the same can be said for South Bend, Elkhart and Niles. Dowagiac was not yet even a dream.

When John Coulter Sr. took a notion to return to his home near Cincinnati, he started out on foot and walked 40 miles the first day, and blistered his feet terribly. The next morning he got some whiskey and poured some into his shoes before he put them on. He said he traveled but a short time when the blisters on his feet began to burst. He only got about 20

miles a day.

He got back to Cincinnati in due time, and a prospective bride awaited him at the end of the road, and that might have had something to do with his hurrying so.

On the 2nd day of June, 1836, united in marriage to Miss Ann Wilson, the daughter of Rev. Amos Wilson, a Baptist minister, and the young couple in a few days after their marriage bid farewell to Ohio and with a yoke of oxen hitched to a cart started for the wilds of Michigan to occupy their new home.

The cart was nicely covered so they could travel in all kinds of weather and camp out nights. They were 17 days making the trip from their home in Ohio to their new home in Howard Township, Michigan. Taking a trail from Troy, Ohio

to Fort Wayne, Indiana the land was largely, heavily timbered and roads naturally very muddy. The state had cut out a roadway, so it was not difficult to keep a proper course, but that the road soon became impassable, as the water couldn't dry out once the road was thoroughly wet. One day they made only four miles.

They were near Ft. Wayne on the 4th of July, where the citizens were having a celebration. But I don't think this young couple felt much like celebrating. They got to their new home sometime in the forepart of July, and when they got there they had a good log house to move into --- the same one in which eight children were born to them in after years; and gave place to a brick one in 1855 -- build by pioneers Ben and Jerry Silver."

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202-224-6221, www.peters.senate.gov

Debbie Stabenow, U.S. Senator

202-224-4822, www.stabenow.senate.gov

Fred Upton, U.S. Representative

202-225-3761, www.upton.house.gov

John Proos, Michigan Senator

517-373-6960, senjproos@senate.michigan.gov

Aaron Miller, U.S. Representative

517-373-0832, aaronmiller@house.mi.gov

Dave Pagel, Michigan State Rep.

517-373-1796, davepagel@house.mi.gov

Readers can find out how their legislators voted on congress.org for Peters, Stabenow and Upton; and at michiganvotes.org for Miller and Pagel.

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THE LAST WORD

Suffering the cruel tease as we march through March

March is such a cruel tease of a month as Mother Nature inflicts her cruelties upon we poor winter-ravaged residents of her Kingdom here in Cass County. March weather is a seasonal monster sticking it's head out from under the bed, invoking suppressed memories of the many sub-zero days she piled end to end and the record snowfalls she piled higher and higher along the sides of the driveways and in front of the mailboxes ... and then contrasts those nightmares with the gentle scents of thawing earth that waft in on the warm breezes and weave themselves through the still feeble rays of the sun on these not-yet spring days; days that mercilessly send us coatless into the sunny yard, only to be chased back by the still-icy winds into our winter-stuffy, over-dry homes with our cheeks red and the tips of our ears blue.

The winter cover has barely left the yards and ponds and lakes, but only after weeks of unseasonably above-average warmth followed by days of abnormally above-average rains that washed dirt roads into the next county, flooded yards and basements, diminished and destroyed the dirty drifts of leftover snow and thinned the dull-gray ice that rotted and cracked on the laketops until sudden spring wind gusts piled the cubes and shards into a million broken pieces on the lee shores in one gusty overnight.

My poor dog doesn't quite know what to make of the change of seasons. On our daily walks, she still scoops mouthfuls of snow from whatever floe is

left hidden from the sun in the culverts and ditches, and she gingerly tiptoes around the floods and bogs the snowmelt has left on the edges of the field, all the while her ears up and tail a-wag as the sounds and scents of stirring field creatures piques her curiosity and send her into a frenzy of doggie scratch and sniff in the wet, rotting leaves left from last fall's weeks of falling leaves.

She doesn't seem to mind the new route necessitated by the seasonal thaw, our old path along a once-frozen and snow-covered dirt road is now virtually impassable because of the appearance of muddy ruts and mini lakes left after this season's glaciers melted. The new route, after all, is filled with new discoveries as muddy, well-trodden, once-frozen winter game trails reveal themselves as gloriously muddled mazes to try to explore, nose bouncing or furiously furrowing along the wet paths of cloven-hoof and sharp-clawed small-animal prints.

As we continue our March march down the pot-holed, cracked and crumbling road, past the brown, over-soaked fields and the drab, yet-leafless forests, the smallest hints of hope thumb their noses at the passing winter. From out of nowhere a clump of sumac stems and sticker bushes blush a blaze of red against the dull background; below them a dazzle of bright, emerald-green ivy leaves peak out of the soggy ground.

A car passes, the driver waves at us through the window, which is already down a couple of inches from the top. Enjoying the day; probably doesn't even have the heater on, I muse. He's not wearing a coat either.

I can feel a trickle of sweat forming on my face as we walk, and for the first time in months I'm not worried about the moisture freezing in my mustache and beard. The dog is panting as she dips her head and grabs another mouthful of dirty snow lingering in the shade of a roadside culvert.

The sun feels good on my face and shoulders, and I take off my stocking cap and stick it into my pocket along with my gloves. I unzip my down parka and pull the front open to let the heat from my torso dissipate. "Overkill," I think to myself as I mentally ridicule the precaution of wearing a coat, hat and gloves on such a gloriously Springlike day.

We walk on, my dog frisking and scampering ahead to sniff at yet another spot that only a long, wet, hair-covered nose would ever find interesting. She looks back at me as if imploring that I share a sniff.

I decline amicably and walk on.

Off in the woods the breeze flutters a group of ghostly white, dead leaves that still cling to a small tree, the only leaves visible this early in the year. The dog turns and looks into the woods, probably daring a deer to appear or a groundhog to stick his nose above ground to smell the earthy Spring scents.

A dull rumble assaults my ears, growing slowly in intensity as a motorcycle emerges over the hill ahead in the distance, it's rider wrapped in layers of leather and warm coverings against the nip of the rushing air.

"Too chilly for that yet," I tell the dog. She ignores me and lowers her nose to the ground, sniffs again and snorts an

echo of the motorcycle's roar.

We walk on in the sunshine, and I check the time. Nearly 4 pm. Might be March but the sun still sets early, I think. Couple hours or more left but it will start to cool off quickly.

We reach the corner and the dog lunges against the leash, throwing her considerable weight into the argument in favor of more thoroughly examining the fetid carcass of a dead animal that the carrion eaters haven't finished with yet.

"Not a chance," I tell her.

She is not amused.

We turn around and begin heading back the way we'd come, heading for home, walking on the other side of the road, but still in the sunshine. Am I imagining it or is it cooler on this side? Are the sun's rays a little less warming? Is the wind just a touch more bitter?

As we round the corner of the woods and pass an open field the wind whips over the open ground, and the tips of my ears begin to tingle. My fingers are cold as I retrieve my gloves and zip my coat.

The cold is sharp against my face, reminding me that even though it's been balmy for the past hour as we made our first march of March of the year, the Spring solstice has yet to arrive; I live in Michigan, and around here winter has long arms; around here Spring takes her own sweet time arriving. Around here it's still March, and that means the odds are good that no matter how ready we are to be done with it, we'll see more cold, maybe even more snow before Spring finally gets here. Around here the cruel tease of March lasts as long as it wants.

And my dog and I don't get a vote.

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