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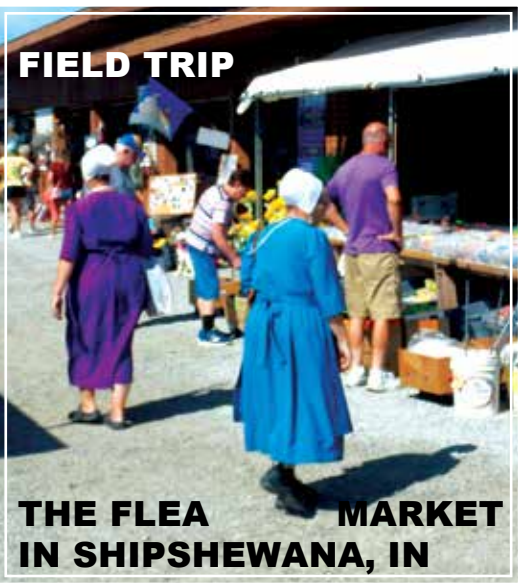
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# REGIONAL NEWS

## Preschool program at the park

St. Patrick's County Park in South Bend will host a "fall fling" program for families with preschoolers on Friday, October 11 from 10 am to 12 noon in the Brown Barn. The fling will feature a special morning of fall activities for children five and under. Enjoy an owl story time and owl activities, make a craft, sample a tasty snack and play in a giant leaf pile!

Program fee: \$5/family. Registration and payment are required by October 8. For more information, please call (574) 654-3155.

St. Patrick's County Park is located on Laurel Road, north of Auten Road and west of US 933 in South Bend.

## Edwardsburg Museum

The Edwardsburg Area Museum's 2019 season will end with the Christmas display, "All Dolled Up," which opens on Nov. 6 and will showcase dolls from the museum's collection and from area residents. The museum will close for the season on Dec. 14.

## Lubeznik Center receives grant

The Lubeznik Center for the Arts (LCA) in Michigan City, Indiana has received a grant of \$33,000 from the NiSource Charitable Foundation. The foundation's mission is "to help create strong and sustainable communities where NiSource employees and customers live and work." This funding will support a comprehensive technology upgrade that will dramatically enhance LCA's educational programs.

Phase I of this project included the

purchase of 30 iPads, a charging station and other related supplies. This new technology was already put to the test by a group of 8 to 13-year-olds in a one-week "Lights, Camera, Action" summer camp.

Over the next year, this new technology will be integrated into many different LCA programs, including the after school arts education offered at 11 different Michigan City area schools and a variety of classes and camps. Other plans include STEAM-specific professional development for LCA's education staff and a major upgrade to LCA's website.

## Harvest Fest Trunk or Treat

Once again, the Cass County Parks Department and the Cass County 4-H program have combined their Harvest Fest and Trunk or Treat Events into one great family activity!

2019 Harvest Fest will be Saturday, October 19, from 2 - 5 pm at T. K. Lawless Park on Monkey Run St. in Vandalia.

Activities will include inflatable activity hayride, face painting, Arden' Choo-Choo, bonfire, zip line, balloon animals, pumpkin decorating, costume contest, crafts and more. Free pumpkins will be given to the first 400 kids ages 10 and under.

Admission will be 1 canned food per person or \$1 per person. The event is from 2-5 with trunk time from 3-4.

Whether an organization, or family or individual trunks are welcome, but you must register. Information regarding specifics will be sent to you. Call Hailey at MSU Extension office at 445-4438

## Sandhill Crane races

The Friends Of Cass County Parks and Coach Ron Gunn will present the Sandhill Crane All-trail half-marathon, 10k, 5k and 1k kids run on Saturday, October 12 at TK Lawless Park in Vandalia.

This natural scenic odyssey of forest and field includes 6 charming bridge crossings, lots of streams and small lakes, and, of course, some hills (aka, "vertical visual breaks"). Sandhill Cranes do frequent this bucolic area, adding charm to the course – take it as a good omen if you see one during your race.

The event will begin at 7:45 am with packet pickup, with a corral start at 9 am for the half marathon. Registration fees are \$25 until Oct. 5; \$30 afterwards; online registration closes Oct 10 at 11:59 pm.

To guarantee a tee shirt on race day - Registration must be received by October 5.

For more information or to register visit [http://cainstoneadventuretours.com/Sandhill\\_Crane\\_Half.php](http://cainstoneadventuretours.com/Sandhill_Crane_Half.php).

## Fall Hike in the Park

On Friday, October 11 the Cass County COA will host a Fall hike and hay ride at Russ Forest County Park with naturalist Bill Westrate and Conservation District Administrator Korie Blyveis.

The event will feature a trail walk where they will be pointing out interesting plants, insects and birds along the way, sharing their knowledge and stories about the natural flora & fauna at this gem of a Cass County Park. Cass County

Parks will provide refreshments following the hike.

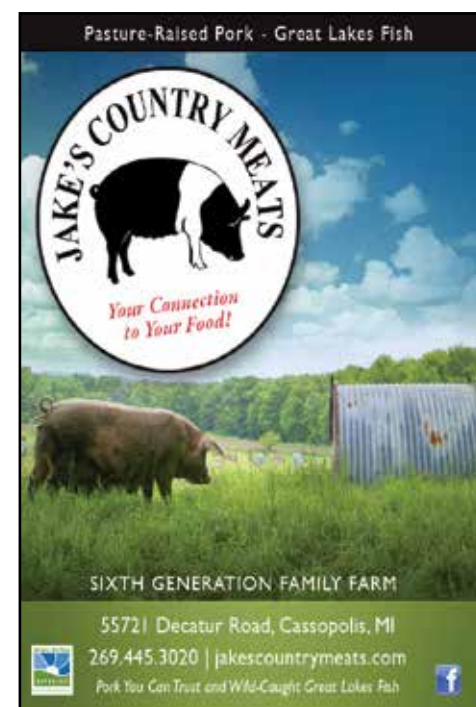
The event is co-sponsored by the COA, Conservation District and the Cass County Parks & Recreation.

Online Registrations will close October 11 at 2 pm.

To register call 445-8110 or visit the website <http://www.casscoa.org/>.

## Cookie walk, holiday decor sale

The First United Methodist Church at 326 N. Lowe St. in Dowagiac will host a cookie walk and holiday decor sale on Saturday, December 7 from 9 am to 3 pm. For more information call 782-8551.



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# REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

October 6 - April 16 - Cass Historical Society Fall Festival at Newton House, 1-4:30 pm

October 10 - Auditions for Barn Swallow Theatre Christmas Play Ho Ho Ho The Santa Claus Chronicles, 6:30 pm, 22334 US-12, Edwardsburg, 28-6672, <http://www.barnswallowtheatre.com>

October 10 - Colonel Orlando Moore: American Hero - Cass District Library Main Branch, 6 pm, a presentation about Colonel Orlando Moore, presented by Josh Urschel. Moore, from Schoolcraft, defeated John Hunt Morgan at Tebbs Bend with odds of 260-2500.

October 11 - Fall Fling for families with preschoolers, St. Patrick's County Park in South Bend, 10 am - Noon, \$5/family, register by Oct. 8 at 574-654-3155

October 12 - Dowagiac Dogwood Fine Arts Festival Autumn Arts event The Harp Twins, 7:30 pm, SMC Lyons Auditorium, [www.dogwoodfinearts.org](http://www.dogwoodfinearts.org)

October 12 - Under the Harvest Moon Festival, 10 am - 4 pm, Dowagiac, 782.8212

October 15 - Cass Historical Society review of year, Cass District Library - Main Branch, 7 pm

October 17-20 - To Burn a Witch at Barnswallow Theater, 7:30 pm (except Sunday at 2 pm), 228-6672

October 16 - DIY Ceramic Pumpkin Painting - Cass

District Library Main Branch, 1 pm; Call 574-314-6454 ext. 113.

October 17 - Edwardsburg Area Museum program on Lee Montgomery stories, 7 pm

October 16 - Family Owl Prowl, Bendix Woods County Park, South Bend, 6:30 - 8:30 pm, \$5/person, register by Oct. 14 at 574-654-3155

October 16, 17, 19 - Book Sale - Cass District Library Mason/Union Branch, during branch operating hours

October 17, 20 - Barn Swallow Theatre production of The Fall of the House of Usher and To Burn a Witch, 7:30 pm on Oct. 17; 2 pm on Oct. 20, [tickets@barnswallowtheatre.com](mailto:tickets@barnswallowtheatre.com), 228-6672

October 19 - Harvest Fest Trunk or Treat, Lawless Park, Vandalia, register at 445-4438

October 19 - DIY Denim Crafts - Cass District Library Edwardsburg Branch, 10 am; Bring a pair of old jeans and create two fun crafts with them. Crafting tools provided, 574-314-6454 ext. 113.

October 22 - DIY Ceramic Pumpkin Painting - Cass District Library Howard Branch, 6 pm, M574-314-6454 ext. 113.

October 22 - 5 pm, National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572

monthly meeting of the year at the Super Buffet, Benton Harbor (next to Big Lots). All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families welcome. Jean Rowe, 782 2769 or e mail [jeanrowe7@comcast.net](mailto:jeanrowe7@comcast.net)

October 24 - Stuffed Animal Sleepover at the Library Cass District Library Main Branch, 6 pm; Bring your stuffed animal to the library for a sleepover! Stuffed animals will enjoy pizza, read stories and have fun around the library. Registration is required. Contact McKinzie at 574-314-6454 ext. 113.

October 25 - Bunco Night, Cass District Library Mason/Union Branch, 6 pm, a fun evening of Bunco, drinks, food and prizes, \$10 entry fee at the door.

October 27 - Trunk 'n Treat, 6 - 7 pm, Dowagiac, 782-0000

October 29 - The Edmund Fitzgerald: The Stories - The Song, Cass District Library Edwardsburg Branch 6 pm, author and historian Mike Fomes presents a story-telling, musical program about the loss of a Great Lakes ship, its crew, and the song that told its haunting tale.

November 1 - Dowagiac Dogwood Fine Arts Festival Autumn Arts event Phantom of the Opera, 7:30 pm, SMC Lyons Auditorium, [www.dogwoodfinearts.org](http://www.dogwoodfinearts.org)

November 2 - Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church holiday craft bazaar, 9 am - 3 pm, 24832 US 12 E. in Edwardsburg, [www.ourladyedwardsburg.org](http://www.ourladyedwardsburg.org)

November 6 - Edwardsburg Area Museum Christmas program, 7 pm

November 9 - Barn Swallow Theatre Pie Auction and Variety Show, 7:30 pm, 22334 US-12, Edwardsburg, 28-6672, <http://www.barnswallowtheatre.com>

November 15, 16 - Christmas Open House Weekend, 10 am - 5 pm, Dowagiac, 782.8212.

November 30 - Small Business Saturday, 10 am - 11 pm, Dowagiac, 782-8212

December 3 - 1:30 pm The National Association of Retired Federal Employees SW Michigan Chapter 572 will hold their annual holiday dinner at Coach's Bar & Grill, Stevensville. All retired/current federal employees, spouses/families welcome, no RSVP needed. No business meeting, new officers will be sworn in. Next meeting is March 24, 2020. For information call Jean Rowe, 782 2769 or e mail [jeanrowe70@comcast.net](mailto:jeanrowe70@comcast.net)

December 6 - Candlelight Christmas Parade, 7 - 9 pm, Dowagiac, 782.8212

December 7 - Cookie walk & holiday decor sale, First United Methodist Church, Dowagiac, 9 am - 3 pm

December 12 - 15, Barn Swallow Theatre Christmas Play Ho Ho Ho The Santa Claus Chronicles, 7:30 pm (2 pm on Dec. 15), 22334 US-12, Edwardsburg, 28-6672, <http://www.barnswallowtheatre.com>

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PASTA ITALIA CON CHEF DONATO

Two simple tomato sauces

by Chef Dennis Bamber

Never found a jar pasta sauce I liked, and here are 2 simple, very tasty tomato sauces -- one uses fresh tomatoes, the other canned.

If you find some nice Roma tomatoes, try them. Roasting even makes a mediocre tomato taste better. It removes some of the water and intensifies the flavor.

**FRESH ROMA TOMATO SAUCE**

**INGREDIENTS:**  
3-5 pounds Roma tomatoes, halved (approximately)  
6-8 cloves garlic , peeled  
Olive oil for coating (about 1/4 cup)  
sea salt or Kosher salt, to taste  
1/2 teaspoon red pepper seeds

**DIRECTIONS:**  
Cut the tomatoes in half and remove the seeds and any white parts  
Place cut side up on a cookie sheet, and salt the tomatoes, add the peeled garlic cloves and drizzle the olive oil on top.

Put in a 375-degree, preheated oven and roast for 25 minutes, then turn and roast another 20 minutes  
Remove from the oven, allow to cool and remove the skins from the tomatoes. They will pop right off.

Put in a pot using the tool shown, or blender with the garlic, juices and olive oil, and puree the tomatoes with the roasted garlic cloves.

If sauce is too thick, add more olive oil.

Serve over spaghetti or penne with Parmesan cheese on the side.



**DIRECTIONS:**  
Put the tomatoes into a roasting pan with their juices. Crush by hand. Add the garlic cloves, the anchovies and salt and pepper.

Scatter the butter all over (you could use a 1/2 cup of olive oil instead for a healthier dish).

Roast in a preheated 400 degree oven for about 45 minutes. After 1 hour to 90 minutes, start mashing the garlic into the tomatoes with a fork or potato masher. The juices should evaporate and the sauce should be a jam like consistency.

Serve over bucatini or spaghetti with Parmesan or pecorino cheese.

~Buon appetito

**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.



**OVEN ROASTED BUTTER TOMATO SAUCE**

**INGREDIENTS:**  
2 (28-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes  
8-12 garlic cloves, peeled, crushed  
1 Tin of anchovy fillets packed in oil  
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces  
1/2-1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes plus more for serving  
Kosher salt, freshly ground pepper





# LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

## Cool days as Indian Summer slips in

by **Jane Boudreau**

**H**ello Neighbors! I hope that by the time you open this paper you are having cool days. The lack of humidity makes our September days so much sweeter. Dare I say I wish for an Indian Summer while under the spell of these gorgeous days? The dappled sun and slight nip in the air make me want to be outside longer. In the city I'm not too far from a university and high school. When I relax on my patio I can hear the football games; the announcer, marching band and crowd cheering. There is something very still in the air that makes this possible. Have you noticed this? Sort of magical.



Last week, before I even went into the house, I took a walk down the dock. I was elated to see cattails near the shore on the side of the dock where we once tied up our pontoon and more recently, my husband's fishing boat. I think they are as beautiful as any plant you can grow. I love them indoors as well in a tall urn. No water and a bit of hairspray to keep the seeds from shedding that cotton candy. I have some native plants growing here as well. I think so many of these can be invasive so I'm keeping an eye on them! I look at the water and I know, I won't be swimming again for months, or sitting on the dock catching some rays, but there are so many other beautiful ways to enjoy the country and I'm going to do it! If you know of any fall festivals in our area, please send me an email, I'd appreciate that so much.

Morning Glories grow profusely everywhere in my gardens ... give them something to climb vertically and they will take over horizontally. I love the

pretty heart shaped leaves to fill in spaces where I like a little privacy and in other spots to make some shade, like the railings around my porch where the dogs like to snooze. Come mid September the velvety flowers open for a few hours a day. Not so much for me in the morning but late in the afternoon when the sun going down in the west and lights up my yard. The blooms say, "Hello you!"



Fall makes me want to bring it's bounty indoors-it doesn't get any cheaper than that. I love decorating my mantel seasonally and I keep it very simple; colorful apples and pears in a basket, whimsical pumpkin candles and dried flowers in a simple glass bottle. It doesn't take much to get that cozy feeling indoors.

I find the most colorful pumpkins at the Indiana and Michigan farm stands and without the huge price tag I see in urban areas. I love to make little vignettes everywhere. One is on my dining table along with some votive candles on a simple square of linen. I've always felt simple is better ... especially when using elements from outdoors. And for the pumpkins you display outside on your porch, deck, patio ... wherever ~~~ you might remember my tip from last year. Spray some Pledge furniture polish on them. I don't know exactly why this repels critters like squirrels and bunnies. The scent? The slippery feeling? All I know is it works for me on my pumpkins in my walnut tree forest yard. And they look great, too! Just remember to add more after it rains.

On a personal, some of you may remember that I had to put my fifteen year old dog down back in April. It absolutely broke my heart and I still miss him everyday. As much as I love dogs, I just couldn't begin to think about having



another one after my loss. Towards the end of summer I started following some area animal shelters just south of my other home in Chicago on Facebook. It filled my heart to see dogs being adopted at one particular shelter, and they provided photos and videos of the dogs and cats and my eyes would fill with tears thinking they really didn't have a home other than these wire crates.

One evening I was looking at the videos and I spotted a little black and white puppy sitting sullenly in a crate while the other two pups roughhoused. I felt my heart beat a little faster and I just had this "feeling." The next morning I drove to the shelter and the rest is history! Meet Poppy. She was born on a farm in Kentucky where all sorts of hounds are used much like cattle dogs. When litters are born they are shipped off to a local "kill" shelter and if not given away after a week, they are euthanized. The shelter in Illinois knew of the situation in Kentucky and started transporting cats and dogs to its facility. They are such good and loving people.

After I lost Milo I was drowning in my sorrows and it was all about me. When I met this little girl I realized it was an incredible gift to me, but even more so, her. She has a forever home. To watch her roll in the green grass, chase a ball, curl up on soft blankets, and get tons of love and attention from everybody who walks in the door, I can only think that I'm beyond blessed. And I'm sure Milo is looking down with a big thumbs up!

Now, on to recipes ...



### Savory Chicken Breast Sandwiches

This is a nice juicy sandwich that I like to serve on a toasted English muffin, or between 2 slices of good crusty bread. The marinade will make it tasty enough that you won't need any sort of condiment but for maybe a nice piece of iceberg lettuce. Serve it with potato chips or fresh fruit. Lunch or dinner, it's fantastic!

\*\*\*\*\*

#### For the marinade:

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 2 T balsamic vinegar
- 3 cloves chopped garlic
- 1 T peach or apricot preserves

- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- 1 T vegetable oil
- 2 boneless chicken breasts cut in half horizontally ... like book pages
- Chopped chives (optional)
- 4 English muffins or good French or Italian bread

\*\*  
Mix the marinade together in medium size bowl. Reserve 2 tablespoons and set aside. Add sliced chicken breast and let marinate 30 minutes or overnight. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Remove chicken from marinade (discard marinade). Add the chicken to the oil being careful not to splatter. Ouch! Cook chicken approximately 5-6 minutes per side or until they reach a temp of 160 degrees. Remove from skillet to a platter. While still warm brush the reserved marinade on to each breast and top with chopped chives if you'd like. Serve on the muffins or bread with a piece of lettuce, onions, mozzarella cheese ... whatever suits your fancy. Serves 2



### Warm Bacon and Blue Cheese Dip

This is a hot dip your guest will remember, and if you bring it to a gathering, everyone will want to know the recipe. Be like me. Don't hand it out. It's yours. Guard it with your life. Unlike I have just done here.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Ingredients:

- 2 8 oz packages of cream cheese
- 2 T half & half
- 7 pieces of cooked bacon, coarsely chopped (reserve 1 T)
- 1 T chives
- 2 cloves of garlic, chopped finely
- 4 oz blue cheese
- 2 T chopped walnuts

#### Directions:

Beat cream cheese and half and half in a mixer until somewhat smooth. Stir in bacon, garlic and blue cheese. Spread in a medium size casserole or pie dish. Top with chives, garlic and blue cheese. Sprinkle walnuts and remaining bacon pieces over and bake at 350 for 20 minutes. Serve with crackers, pita chips, or small toast squares. Be prepared for compliments.

### Autumn Almond Bark

So for those of you who like easier recipes, 2 down, 1 to go. Are you with me? And believe me, this is time consuming for me to write but actually not difficult-it just has a lot of ingredients. I love you all. Please don't line your bird

Continued on next page. See:  
**JANE**





# LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

## JANE

Continued from previous page

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\*\*\*\*\*



**Ingredients:**  
12 oz. semi sweet chocolate chips  
16 oz white chocolate or vanilla almond bark  
1 1/2 t dry pumpkin pie spice  
1/4 c dried cranberries roughly chopped (Usually found in your produce dept.)  
1/4 c pumpkin seeds  
1/4 c raw almonds  
1/4 c candy corn chopped roughly  
\*\*\*Substitute anything you like

**Directions:**  
Microwave the dark chocolate in 15 second intervals in your microwave, stirring each time until smooth. Do not overheat or you will have to start over. Sometimes you can add a little shorten-



ing to smooth it out but it's tricky.  
Line a baking sheet that has sides with parchment paper. Pour the dark chocolate mixture over the baking sheet and spread with a spoon to cover as much of the sheet as you can. Place in the freezer to chill about 15 minutes.  
Melt the white chocolate with the pumpkin pie spice mixed in. Do it much like the dark chocolate in 15 second intervals. When at room temperature spread over the chocolate. While still soft gently add the cranberries, pumpkin seeds, almonds and candy corn, just sprinkling over randomly. Place in freezer for another ten minutes. Remove and break the whole mess into random pieces, I like to do small and large pieces, Store in plastic bags in the refrigerator until ready to share. This is fine at room temp for quite awhile but refrigerate if it starts to look sticky. Enjoy!!  
So there we have it for October. Are all of you guys ready with your scissors to cut out recipes? I'm at our little place pretty much all the time enjoying the mild days outside and tidying up my garden. It's peaceful watching the elusive blue herons, the turtles sunning them-

selves on our shore station that become very indignant as I go about my yard work (plop, plop, plop into the water they go when this strange intruder comes near).

I'm cleaning up my garden tools but for a few needed to plant bulbs for next spring. Clay pots are empties of faded flowers, hosed off, and then stacked (put bubble wrap or a few stones between them so they separate easily in the spring), and always store them in a garage or shed as they can crack in the cold.  
Oh, and if you thought your mind was playing tricks on you in last month's paper, yes, blame me. I kept referring to September as August and I even confused myself when I read it! Maybe it was wishful thinking in wanting an endless summer!  
Until November,  
~Jane

Jane Boudreau is a blogger and newspaper columnist. She is a longtime resident on Diamond Lake and a home in Chicago and cozy place in the mountains of North Carolina. All photos are original and are property of Jane Boudreau. Please do not use without permission. You can email her at [blndy9@yahoo.com](mailto:blndy9@yahoo.com)

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# BUSINESS & FINANCE

## Medicare Annual Election Period nears

By **Dean R. Johnson**  
Kemner, Iott, Benz Agency

**T**he Medicare Annual Election Period "AEP" is rapidly approaching, and I want to share a few frequently asked questions and answers with you.

**Q. When is the AEP?** A. The AEP begins on October 15, 2019 and ends on December 7, 2019.

**Q. What can Medicare Beneficiaries do during this AEP?** A. During the AEP, Medicare Beneficiaries can join, switch, or drop a Medicare Advantage Plan or Medicare Prescription Drug Plan. Any plan changes you request during this AEP will be effective January 1, 2020 as long as your request is received by December 7, 2019.

**Q. Can I make changes to my plan after December 7?** A. Yes, but with limitations; NEW for 2020 there is an Open Enrollment Period "OEP" between January 1 and March 31, 2019, if you are in a Medicare Advantage Plan, you may switch to another 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 March 31, 2020 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 OEP you CANNOT switch from Original Medicare to a Medicare Advantage Plan 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 cer-

tain 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, 2019 through November 30, 2020. 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 stop working.

**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 2020?** 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 2020 the maximum you will pay for the Generic and Brand Name Drugs during the Coverage Gap or Donut Hole will be 25 percent of the cost.

**Q. Are there changes in the Drug Formulary for 2020?** A. No, however, remember that the drugs covered by each plan may 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 automati-

cally 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 1, 2019 and ends December 15, 2019. Please remember this AEP beginning on October 15 through December 7, 2019 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 that there are many more companies that are offering Dental Insurance to Seniors and some of these plans also including coverage for bridges and dentures. Please be watchful for the Medicare Scams to Medicare Beneficiaries. For safety sake I would suggest that you contact your independent insurance agent or me at the Kemner Iott Benz Insurance Agency for questions regarding this AEP and the 2020 plans available in your area. As always, this is a time to do business with people you know and trust.



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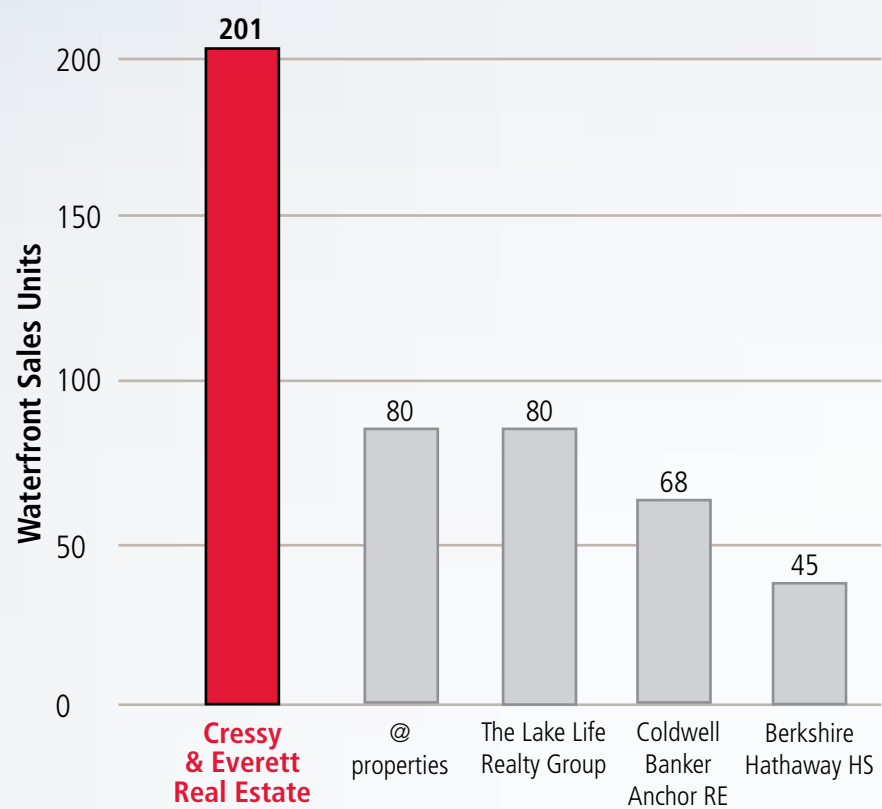


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# OUR CHILDREN

## When 'I won't' really means 'I can't'

by **SANDY FLEMING**

Every parent has heard it in one form or another from every child. You ask them to do something that is a perfectly reasonable request, and their response is some version of “no.” It’s a very normal part of growing up. From the time they become even a little bit self-aware, children are pushing for their independence. This frequently takes the form of refusing to do what others ask them to do, just because they’ve figured out that they can refuse. Just think of your favorite baby or toddler, and you’ll see this in action.

Of course, as they grow, they also quickly realize that it’s in their best interests to do as their parents and teachers ask them. At first, they comply because they don’t like the artificial consequences that adults tend to impose. Little ones might hate time out and may be motivated to behave in ways that will not trigger that outcome. Teens do not want to get grounded or be deprived of their phones or video game time, so they usually respect their parents’ wishes to avoid those kinds of consequences.

The hope is that as they mature, they will come to realize that the rules and expectations adults set down have a very good basis in reason and are for their own protection or their own well-being. They discover that self-regulation and the other skills you’ve been trying to teach them will help them lead successful and happier lives, so they adopt all sorts of productive behaviors. They grow into competent adults who can hold jobs, manage relationships, and navigate all the other challenges of adult life. At least that’s the way it’s supposed to work.

But what if your child’s “I WON’T” really means “I CAN’T”? Sometimes bad behavior and noncompliance is a sign that you are expecting something that your child simply cannot do. This might be as simple as the adult not understanding the capabilities of children in that age group.

Most of us would not expect a toddler to respect physical boundaries like staying off of the stairs because they might fall down or staying out of the street because they might get hit by a car. We understand that they are not yet ready to obey those sorts of commands, so we put baby gates across the steps and we keep them away from roads or hold their hands when they are near moving cars. We work to teach them how to manage these hazards, but we protect them along the way while they are learning. We don’t remove the supporting protection until we are positive that they have the skills and knowledge needed to keep themselves safe around roads or stairs.

As kids get older, they become less likely (or maybe less able) to tell us when they are struggling with something. They may not even understand it themselves, or may not have the language to explain the problem. Instead, it looks like they are refusing to comply with our requests and requirements.

How can you tell the difference between a refusal that is part of growing up and asserting independence and one that is caused by an underlying problem of capability? One easy way is how the child or teen responds to the consequences you set up. If you have chosen effective, meaningful consequences, your son or daughter will want to avoid them. He or she may slip up occasionally, but for the most part, the young person will try to do what is expected.

It’s a good idea to examine poor behaviors more closely if you have applied the consequence a few times and the child is not coming into compliance. For example, you may become concerned about low grades in school and set a consequence of decreased television time since you know your child adores TV time. He or she earns low marks on the report card, so you take away television. However, the low grades do not improve. They stay below your expectations or maybe even drop farther. It’s time to examine your underlying assumption that your child is CAPABLE of earning the grades you are expecting. The problem may not be willful misbehavior, but an underlying “I can’t” that needs help, not punishment.

There is a group of skills that many parents are not even aware of that control many behaviors that either help or hurt children’s ability to behave in responsible ways on the path to maturity. These are called the Executive Functions. The nutshell explanation is that these are the skills we all rely on to help us make good decisions, to delay gratification, to keep our worlds organized, and to set goals and make changes in ourselves or our environments. There are six subskills in this set of Executive Function: Working Memory, Organization, Task Initiation, Self-Monitoring, Planning and Prioritizing, and Emotional Regulation and Flexibility. Together, they give us the ability to plan and coordinate our lives. They affect everything from keeping track of your belongings to setting career goals to maintaining solid relationships.

There are also predictable types of apparent misbehavior that are associated with weaknesses in executive functioning skills. It’s these common problems that may mean your child’s “I WON’T” is really an “I CAN’T.” It’s worth a look to make sure your child has the basic skills to comply with your behavioral requests before everyone gets frustrated and angry. Let’s take a look.

### Working Memory

Working memory is our short term memory. It’s how we keep track of what we need to do right now and how we think about things going on at the moment. If working memory is not working right, you’ll see children who appear to not follow directions, especially the kind with several steps. Your child might seem to struggle to apply information you KNOW they know. The child may seem unfocused, have trouble with reading or listening comprehension, or seem too irresponsible to take messages when needed.

Like many other skills, working memory can be improved with intentional exercise. Try playing memory games (both visual and auditory). Many childhood favorites will be helpful, like Concentration, I’m going to the store and I’m going to take \_\_\_\_, and learning songs or rhymes.

### Organization

Organization is putting things into a workable order for a purpose. Organization allows us to keep track of our belongings, but there are many more outcomes. It’s organization that lets us write in a coherent fashion, that gives us guidance about how to study for tests, that helps us remember information and retrieve it when needed.

If your child struggles with keeping

backpacks, closets, rooms, or other areas neat and tidy, suspect organization issues. If your child forgets steps in routines, forgets to bring home supplies needed for homework regularly, continually loses items that are important to him or her, or can’t seem to keep track of school papers between finishing them and turning them in, then organization may be the issue. Usually checklists are the go-to answer. Help your youngster learn to be more intentional about the steps in the process or where items are placed after completion.

### Task Initiation

Task initiation is the get-up-and-go that we all need to get started on less than pleasant tasks. It’s what makes us adults get the dishes done, pay the bills, go to work each day, and similar behaviors. Task initiation helps us put aside our natural procrastination, helps us figure out how to get started, and pushes us to get things done even when no one is looking over our shoulder.

If your child struggles with task initiation, it’s likely to show up in their response to homework. They may seem to need tons of nagging to get going and to stay focused. They may use all kinds of avoiding behaviors from needing to get more supplies to needing to get one more drink of water before starting their work. It’s possible you may feel your child has to be watched like a hawk while he or she is doing the homework or you will find him or her goofing off. Sometimes kids can’t seem to figure out what to do first or can’t seem to understand that the assignment that is due tomorrow needs first attention or that a long term assignment should not be put off until the last minute. Help by setting a strict homework routine, by insisting on “work time” even if homework does not come home each night, and by setting a priority calendar that lists short term steps for longer projects. Try using a timer to coax your very very slow worker to finish a number of problems within a reasonable amount of time.

### Self-Monitoring

We use self-monitoring all the time as adults. These are the skills that allow us to notice when something isn’t going as planned. We continually monitor our actions to see if they are having the desired outcomes. We monitor our physical, mental and emotional well-being, too.

If children are struggling to use self-monitoring, you might see what seems like carelessness on assignments. You might see small or silly errors regularly. Kids may not know when to ask for help, but plow right along with an assignment they do not understand. When reading, sometimes children misread a few words that change the meaning of the text, but do not notice when the sentences don’t make sense anymore. Kids don’t double check their work, seem to not notice or care if they are getting poor grades, or have a lot of missing or late assignments. Help them with mindfulness training. Teach them to do frequent check-ins with themselves mentally. Have them keep track of how often they ask themselves important questions like “What am I supposed to be doing right now?” “Did that make sense?” or “Have I checked my work?”

### Planning and Prioritization

These skills are how we adults set goals and make longer term changes in

our lives when we want to. We realize that change takes effort, and that a journey with no clear destination will end up going nowhere. We use these skills to lay out short term milestones to help us meet larger goals and to figure out what is important to us or to our end goals.

Children and teens who struggle with planning and prioritization have particular challenges with big projects at school. If the teacher says to write a report, a child who has trouble with planning and prioritization just sees the large end project. He or she does not understand how to break it down into steps like choosing a topic, researching the topic, taking notes, organizing the information, drafting the paper, editing, and then proofreading and publishing. Some do not study very effectively because they can’t pick out the important information from the trivia, and so get overwhelmed. Help your child with planning and prioritizing by modeling and demonstrating the skills. Use tools like calendars and highlighters to help them see smaller steps in order or chunks of information that all fit together.

### Emotional Regulation and Flexibility

As adults, we rely on these skills to keep us in line with behavioral and societal expectations. We know that we need to control our emotions and use appropriate ways to express any negative thoughts or feelings. We know that sometimes we need to bite our tongues and curb the impulses that will land us in trouble. We also use these skills to help us with problem solving and with looking for alternatives when we can’t do what we want to do.

Trouble in this area might seem like a child who flies off the handle at the slightest provocation. A child might become overwhelmed with problems that seem rather simple or small. If the first answer doesn’t work, these children are inclined to give up without thinking of another way to tackle a problem. You’ll hear them say that they can’t do a task or that things are impossible. Sometimes it can help to be intentional about teaching problem solving skills. Quick reminder sayings like “what’s another strategy?” or even posters can help. Be sure you are modeling the skills and talking about them out loud with the kids. Otherwise they may not notice how you handle frustrations and set backs.

### In Summary

You can see that a lot of troublesome behaviors might be traced back to one or more of these executive functions. If your child continually seems to be misbehaving in some of these ways, even after you’ve tried effective consequences to change the behavior, examine the underlying skills. Use some of the suggestions to try to teach the missing or weak skills. And if you still cannot make a dent in the undesirable behavior, consider talking to an educational expert, teacher, counselor, or other outside person to get more ideas. Listen to those “I WON’Ts” carefully and make sure they are not covering up a secret “I CAN’T.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Sandy Fleming is an educational consultant and tutor in Edwardsburg. Visit her website at <http://sandy-flemingonline.com> for more information about helping kids who struggle with learning or school skills.

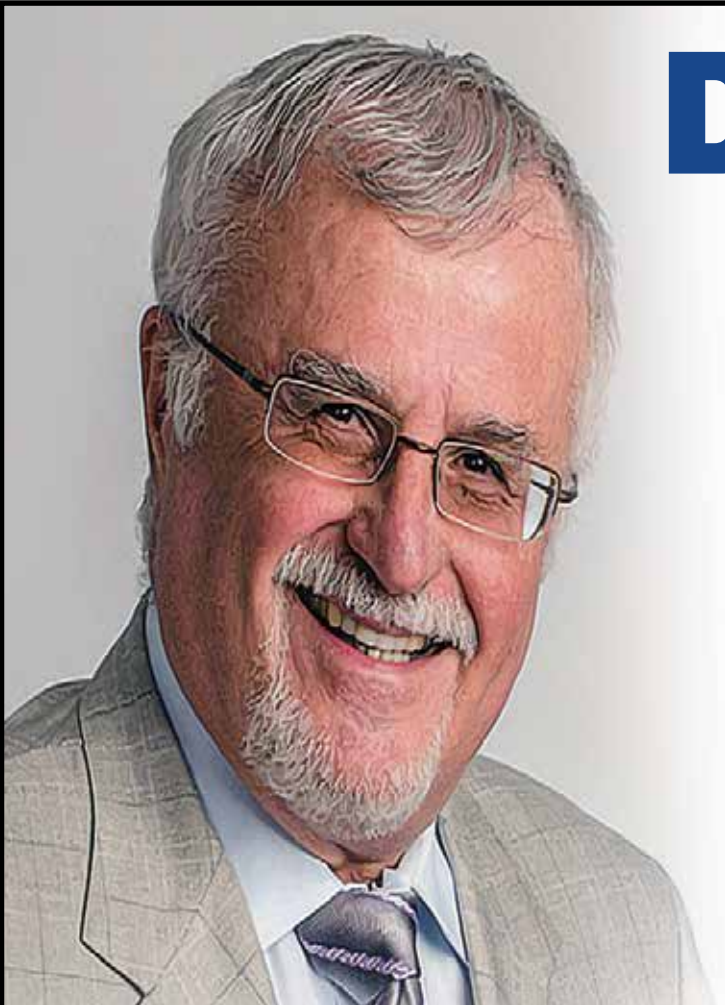


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# HISTORIC POSTCARDS

## 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.

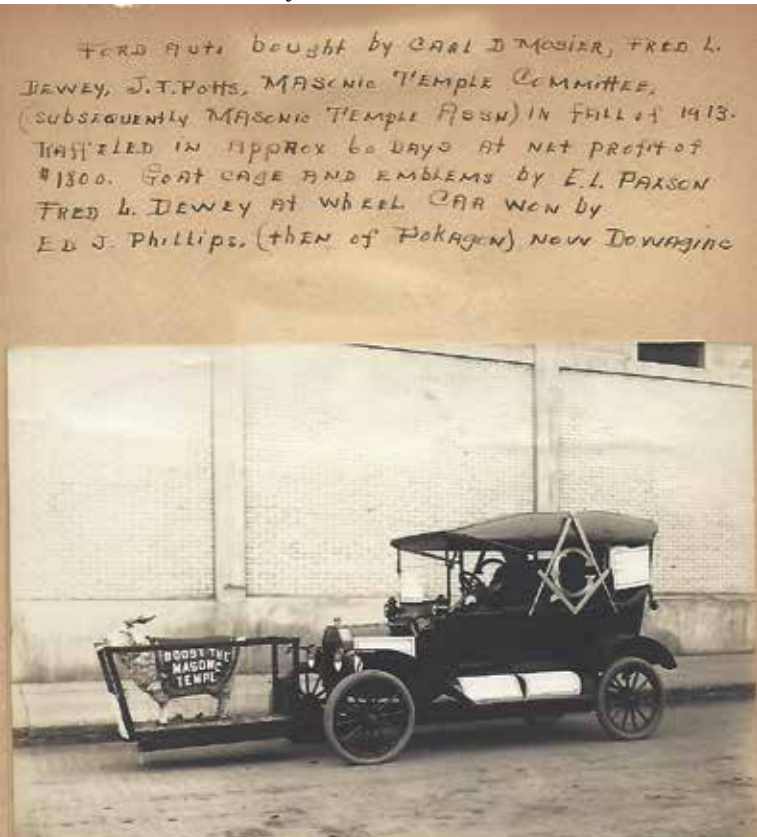
Floyd and his wife Donna started collecting post cards more than 20 years ago, and since Jerdon Real Estate specializes in marketing lake property, it was a natural fit that Floyd’s interest be directed to the lake cards. The collection now numbers many thousands.

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 web-site: [www.arcadiapublishing.com](http://www.arcadiapublishing.com)


In this edition of Neighbors we have selected postcards showing images of Dowagiac and the surrounding area. In future issues, we will couple additional cards from one or more of the area’s lakes with views of nearby communities, lakes and countryside.



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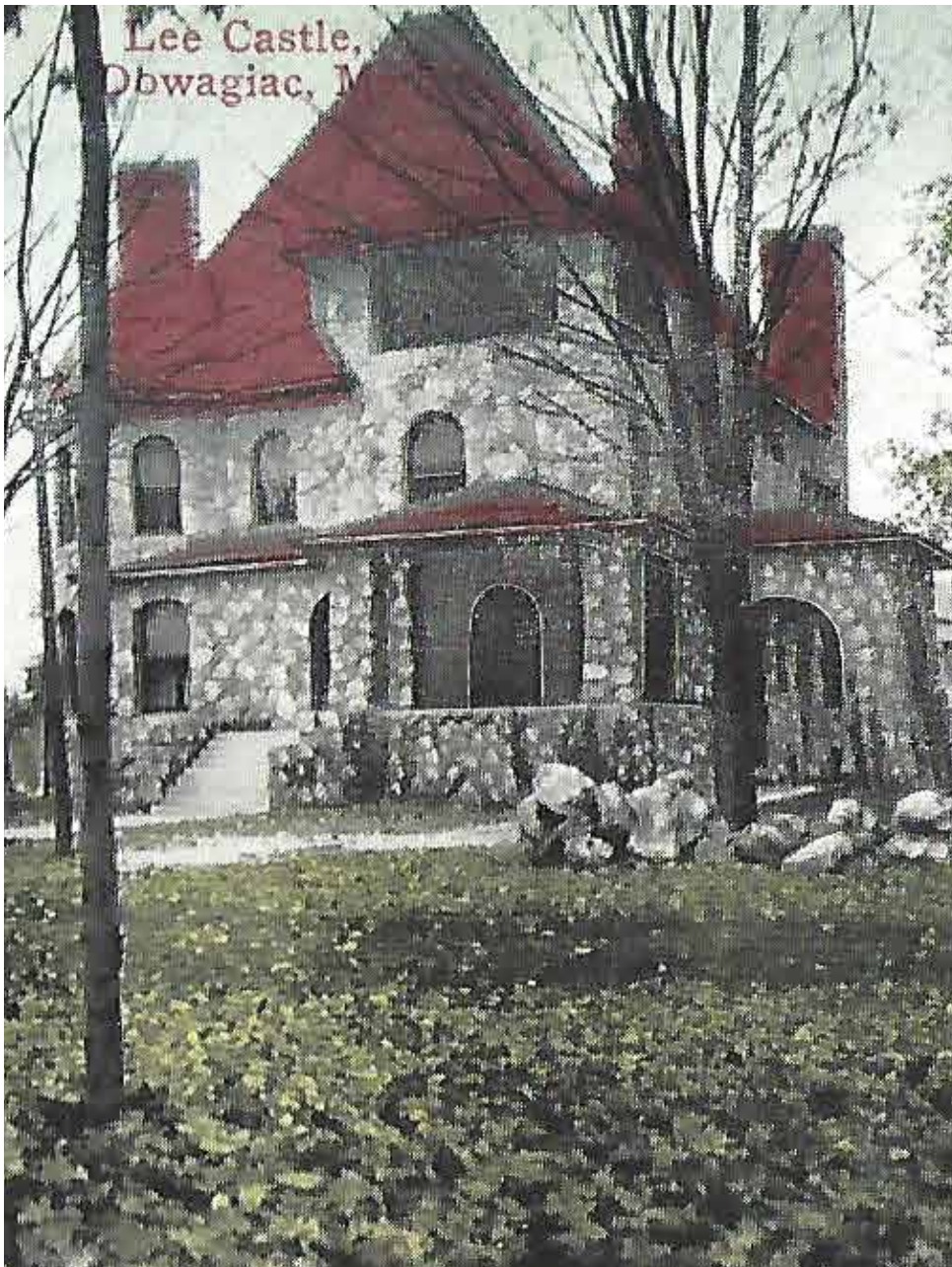
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# LOCAL HISTORY



Looking west from Broadway and State Streets, Cassopolis, Michigan, Circa 1900. Former Cass County Courthouse visible on left, serving as Opera House.

Provided by Cass District Library  
Local History Branch

This month we take a "Now and Then" look at a view, looking west, at the corner of Broadway Street and State Street, Cassopolis, Michigan.

The older of the two photos (above) was taken after 1898, for that is the year that the courthouse was moved off of its original site (northeast corner of Broadway and State) where the 1899 structure currently stands, and relocated to the corner of State and Disbrow Streets.

Look on the left side of the old photo for the courthouse with its distinctive four Greek-revival pillars. The building was built in 1842 at its original location. IT was moved to the site seen in the photo in 1898 where it served as Opera

House and later as "Colonial Theater" until it was torn down in the spring of 1968.

Currently, the driveway and parking lot for Fifth Third Bank are located on the former site of the Colonial Theater.

In the old photo, buggies can be seen parked on both sides of West State Street. On the south side of the street (right), buggies are seen with no horses. It is possible that the nearby Goodwin Hotel (not pictured) stored extra buggies at that location.

Perhaps most intriguing is a Greek-revival building barely visible near the center of the old photograph, to the left of State on a hill rise. This is perhaps the home built by Asa Kingsbury one of the founders of Cassopolis. The building no longer stands. Presently Stone Lake Woods Apartments occupies the site.



Same view on 19 September 2019.



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# NATURE NOTES

## Spectacular late summer sightings

Provided by Cass District Library  
Local History Branch

Ken Bishop of Kalamazoo found and photographed a northern mockingbird on August 11 in Hartford Township, Van Buren County.

The northern mockingbird may be found in Southwest Michigan at all times of the year, but is by no means common. Our region is at the northern part of the species range, it is more numerous to our south.

Those who observe mockingbirds often hear them before seeing the bird, as it is an excellent songster, mimicking not only other birds songs and call, but also replicates noises such as railroad crossing bells and dogs barking.

Most of the mockingbirds that reside in Michigan during the warm months, migrating south of the state line for the winter. Some may only travel a hundred miles south. A few hardy individuals will remain and may be seen at winter feeding stations.

Closely related to the northern mockingbird is the gray catbird. Brad Anderson sent in a nice photo of a catbird taken August 25 at Warren Dunes State Park in which you can see the birds reddish under tail covert feathers.

The gray catbird is common among forest edges, woodlots, and overgrown fields during April to October. Gray catbirds winter in the southern US, south to Panama.

In Berrien County, gray catbirds begin departing during September. Most are gone by October 1, but a few linger until the middle of the month.

Brad Anderson also photographed a yellow-throated vireo at Warren Dunes, the same day as the catbird. Vireos eat only insects and thus they must depart Michigan before cold weather starts.

The yellow-throated vireo is common during summer in our region, as are the red-eyed vireo and warbling vireo. All three species eat insects and thus, must depart northern latitudes before the first hard frost.

Yellow-throated vireos are migrating south, most will have vacated Southwest Michigan by September 25, the average date the last one is reported in Berrien County. A few yellow-throated vireos may linger until early October.

A magnolia warbler, almost unrecognizable as it appears soaking wet after bathing in the bird bath of Dick Schinkel of Oronoko Township, August 23.

Magnolia warblers nest in Canada and northern areas of US, including northern Michigan. The species vacates Michigan by the end of September.

September is the month when most ruby-throated hummingbirds start migration toward their wintering grounds of Mexico, and Central America. Most adult male ruby-throated hummingbirds have departed Michigan, leaving adult females and young of the year. Only the adult males sport the red throat feathers.

Last Sunday afternoon, John Gatto of Stevensville was walking along Water Street in Benton Harbor when he came upon a distressed ruby-throated hummingbird being fed sugar water by Maddie Merle, who works at the nearby Phoenix Coffee Shop and wrote:

"I stopped to ask what was going on, only to find Maddie offering a spoon of sugar water to the distressed bird, perched on the sidewalk under the table. The shivering little hummer seemed quite out of it, but with a little coaxing the bird started lapping up the sugar water for dinner. After a few minutes of this, Maddie needed to head back to the shop and decided to move the tiny flyer to a safer place. She gently scooped up the



*Left to right from top, Northern Mockingbird on August 11, 2019, Hartford Township, by Ken Bishop of Kalamazoo; Bobcat (Lynx rufus) courtesy United States Fish & Wildlife Service; a wet magnolia warbler next to the bird bath of Dick and Pat Schinkel, Oronoko Township. Photo by Dick Schinkel on August 23, 2019; gray catbird on August 25, 2019 at Warren Dunes State Park by Brad Anderson. This shot shows the birds reddish under tail covert feathers; male Baltimore Oriole sits at a feeder containing nectar, at the home of Randy Schrubba of St. Joseph Township on September 10. Most Baltimore Orioles will have left Southwest Michigan by September 25; Yellow-throated vireo on August 25, 2019 at Warren Dunes State Park. Brad Anderson; Ruby-throated hummingbird drinks nectar from a cardinal flower, Warren Dunes State Park on August 30. Photo by Brad Anderson; A stunned ruby-throated hummingbird is given sugar water by Maddie Merle along Water Street in Benton Harbor; Sanderlings on the Lake Michigan beach, Warren Dunes State Park, August 30, 2019. Brad Anderson; Dead male black-throated blue warbler at Edgewater Center, St. Joseph, September 2019 by Nancy Burch.*



bird, who sat in her hands just long enough for a portrait before flying off to an adjacent tree."

The cardinal flower is one of our most beautiful native flowers, attractive not only to humans but also to hummingbirds. Brad Anderson recently captured an image of a ruby-throated hummingbird drinking nectar from one of the cardinal flowers at Warren Dunes State Park.

Anderson also sent some nice photo of a small flock of sanderlings, seen at the waters edge at Warren Dunes State Park on August 30.

Sanderlings are shorebirds that nest along the shores of the Arctic Ocean and migrate to and from the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, in part, through the Great Lakes.

Sanderlings begin their southward migration in July, most pass through our area in September, but some linger throughout the fall and into early December.

### Bobcat Reported in Watervliet Township

On Labor Day, at approximately 9 pm, Bill and Laura Reilly were arriving back at their family cottage in Watervliet Township, when they noticed an animal lying in the next door neighbors grass. As there car turned into the driveway, the animal was spooked and ran within inches of the vehicle, and Bill slammed on the brakes to avoid hitting it.

Laura said when she first saw the animal, she expected it to be a coyote, but as it ran past the car, she noticed "it had no tail." Although no tail was seen by Laura Reilly, bobcats actually do have a short, bobbed tail, which often goes unnoticed. She also noted "Its head was broader and the ears were more feline looking," and both Laura and Bill Reilly concluded the animal was indeed a bobcat.

I learned of the sighting last week and reported it to Dr. Alan Kurta, Professor of Biology at Eastern Michigan

University, and author of Mammals of the Great Lakes Region, said the bobcat could be living along the riparian corridor of the Paw Paw River.

Bobcats prefer wooded areas and generally shy away from humans, so it makes sense that the bobcat seen by the Reillys would be attracted to the large, wooded area just to the north of Windermere Lane into which it was seen running.

Bobcats are not easily identified to being male or female in the field, but the fact that this animal was not in the presence of any bobcat kittens would indicate it is probably a lone male. In summer, male bobcats have a home range of between one-third square mile up to 2 square miles, so its quite possible the animal remains in the area.

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Although they may be up and about at any hour, the bobcat is typically most active about two hours before sunset until about midnight.

Bobcats eat small mammals such as eastern cottontail rabbit, mice, voles, and squirrels. Few young bobcats reach adulthood when prey populations are low. The average life span of the bobcat in Indiana and Michigan is around five or six years. Few in the wild live past ten years.

Changes in bobcat range since settlement, recent Berrien County records.

When the pilgrims came to America in 1620 the bobcat ranged from the present day boarder regions of southern provinces of Canada, all of the 48 contiguous states and DC, south through most of Mexico. Habitat destruction and unregulated hunting and trapping resulted in the bobcat being wiped out of much of its range, especially east of the Mississippi River during the 1800s.

By 1900 the bobcat was gone from most of Illinois, southern, Wisconsin, southern Michigan, Ohio and much of the northeast.

In Berrien County, the species was last reported around the time of World War I, when a single bobcat was reported shot in Chikaming Township.

During the second half of the 20th Century, forests in the eastern United States regenerated and well regulated hunting and trapping resulted in an increase of bobcats in the eastern US.

The species has returned as a breeding mammal in southern Indiana, and was confirmed in northern Indiana in 1993 when a 20 pound bobcat was snared near Waterloo in DeKalb County.

In 2002, I reported in the Herald-palladium on what I thought was a credible sight record of a bobcat seen north of Grand Mere State Park.

Then in 2010 Dale Gardell of St. Joseph captured an infrared image of a bobcat that was walking along Morrison Channel, and was featured in the HP.

Bobcats under normal conditions pose no threat to humans. If one was cornered it would likely fight back, as do nearly all animals.

**Additional sightings**

Baltimore orioles are putting on calories for the long trek to South America where they winter. Randy Schrubba photographed a nice male oriole at his St. Joseph Twp feeder on September 10.

Most Baltimore orioles will have vacated Berrien County by September 20-25, but a few stragglers may remain until October. Winter records of this Neotropical species are increasing across the US and Canada, but are not common.

Baltimore orioles seen during winter in the north switch from their summer diet of insects and nectar to suet and seeds, but often succumb to the bitter cold as winter progresses.

Nancy Burch of St. Joseph photographed a window strike male black throated-blue warbler last week, found outside of Edgewater Center. The bird was en route from its nesting grounds of Canada and northern Michigan to its wintering grounds of Central and South America when it flew into a window and perished.

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# THE LAST WORD

## How did Rocky get in such great shape without a FitBit?

I've heard that in the city of Philadelphia there's a statue of Rocky Balboa (aka Sylvester Stallone) at the Philadelphia Museum, right in front of the stairs that Rocky ran up and down in the movie before he posed with his hands in the air to signify victory.

I've never seen the statue myself; only been to Philly once and that wasn't on the agenda (it might have even been before the movie was made, I don't remember when I went through that city), so I've never joined the throngs of tourists posing at the top of the stairs with arms akimbo, pretending to be "da champ."

Not that I wouldn't do it ... I've been known to do some pretty goofy things in my life, like the time I joined a group of nerds at the base of Devil's Tower in Wyoming intoning the famous five-note dirge from Close Encounters of the Third Kind or when I scare my grandkids by shrieking, pointing into the water and making that horrid Hitchcockian "bump, bump, bump, bump" noise when a relatively small and harmless blue gill swims by them when they're fishing off on the end of the pier ... so I'm pretty sure that if and when I do ever get back to Pennsylvania, I'll probably run up the stairs and take a Rocky stance, just for giggles.

Or maybe not.  
Even though I am of Italian origin, I've been told I look more like Babbo Natale, Italy's version of Santa Claus, than I look like Rocky Balboa.  
Sure, I've got an Italian nose (and yes it's been broken a couple times), and

I used to have blue-black hair, and I've usually got a good tan, and I could easily make my voice go low and raspy when I pound on the wall and yell "Adriannnnn," but that's where the similarities pretty much stop.

I'll be the first to admit that the muscles in Rocky's arms, shoulders and legs are a bit more chiseled than mine, and on more than one occasion a "friend" has pointed out that my stomach reminds them more of a 12 pack than it reminds them of Rocky's six-pack abs ... so it's likely that even a myopic casual observer wouldn't be likely to mistake me for Sly's doppelganger, even in poor light.

But, at the ripe old age of older-than-dirt, last New Year's Eve I made a resolution to get into better shape (I should have just given up lima beans again or something that wouldn't have been such a pain in the knees, but it was New Year's Eve and alcohol was a factor), and I've turned over a new leaf (ok, I'll admit I was so out of shape I had to get help to turn it over), and I starting the process of trying to figure out how to buff up.

Now, I'm not going down to the meat shop on the corner and punching the hanging sides of cow (I've never even gone cow tipping, a pastime I'm told is pretty popular with the snipe-hunters of Cass County).

And I haven't started pumping iron, practicing mixed martial arts (I've discovered that I really hate getting the stuffing beat out of me), mountain biking, rock climbing, pilates, or any of the thousand other ridiculously physical activities popular with sweaty health-nut millenials these days.

Nope, I started slow (at my age,

everything moves slow) by choosing to do some road work ... no, I'm not jogging or running behind a jeep in the snow like Rocky did (the sounds my knees make after I run 10 steps is enough to scare a bowl of Rice Krispies back into the box) ... instead, I'm just walking.

At my wife's urging I began joining her last winter, and taking our dog on what I not-so-jokingly referred to as her relaxing 1-mile version of the recreation of the Bataan Death March.

To thank me for that spot of humor, day by day she upped our ordeal by just one tree ("We stopped here yesterday," she'd say with that "wifely" smile, "so we need to go one more tree past that today.")

As if the trail that leads down the trial of trees wasn't already long enough, when she got a FitBit last year for Christmas, the agony stretched beyond my wildest imagination.

It started innocently enough.  
At the end of the first day's walk with her new bit of fitness, she checked her phone app and announced, "We just walked 3,000 steps."

I ran down the five steps leading to my front door, raised my fists into the air and began humming the Rocky theme ... "da da dum ... getting stronger ... da da dum ..."

She was not amused.  
"We can do better than that," she sneered as I stretched for an off-key crescendo. "I'm going to set it for 3,500 steps tomorrow ... just as a goal."

I closed my eyes and envisioned hitting the sofa with my backside, surfing up a football game and then telling her that maybe she could get in some extra

steps by bringing me a brewski and making me some nachos for the game ... after which I shivered through a vision of her closing my eyes by hitting me with a right-fisted roundhouse-Rocky haymaker that would knock my backside right off the couch onto the floor ...

"You know, 3,500 sounds about right to me," I lied.

Over the summer she has increased our "goal" to 10,000 steps a day, a little over four miles a day, the maximum number we've determined that our aging canine is willing (or able) to travel on a hot day ... and by sheer wifely will she's kept us on track ... every day.

I'll admit, I feel better (but I still miss the football, nachos and brewskis), and I have lost 55 pounds since the New Year's Eve resolution (ok, alcohol was a factor in my resolution to shape up), but as winter approaches I'm beginning to see the dirt that I'm older than began to crumble ...

My legs hurt.  
My back aches.  
My knees are wobbly.  
I hear a creaking noise whenever I get up from a chair.

Even my dog aches.  
But, hey, we're getting into much better shape, and who knows, any day now I just might convince her to up our daily walk to 20,000 or 30,000 steps, just to see if we can. Imagine the shape I'll be in if we start walking 10 or 12 miles a day ... If I can still walk tomorrow ...

But you better just watch out Rocky Balboa, one day soon, I'm coming for you! You might be able to tenderize beef for all the goombas in Pennsylvania, but I've got a FitBit, and I know how to use it!



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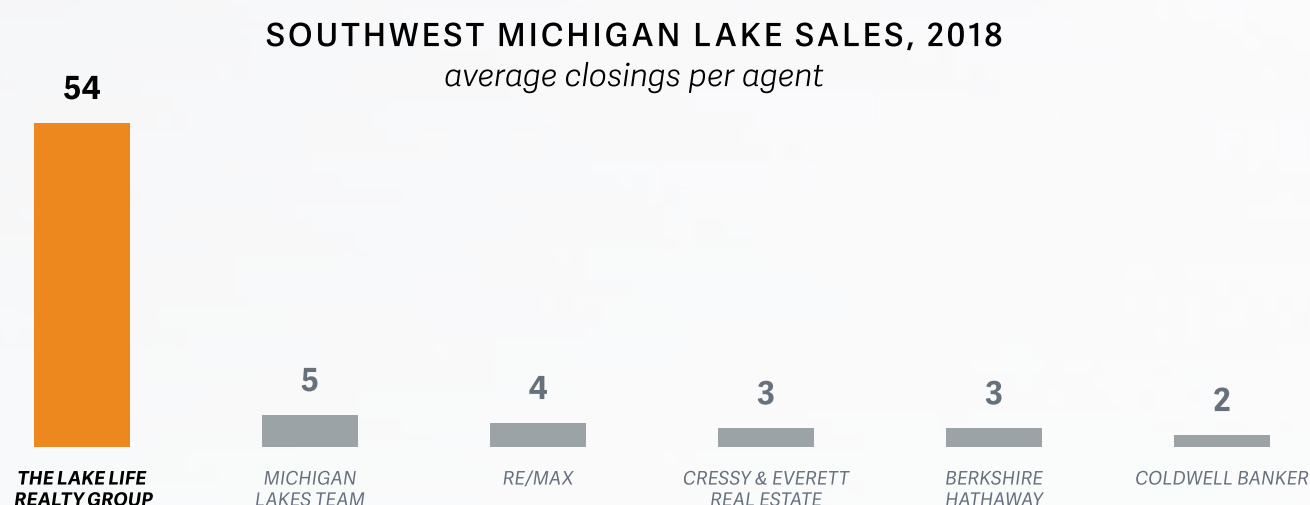
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