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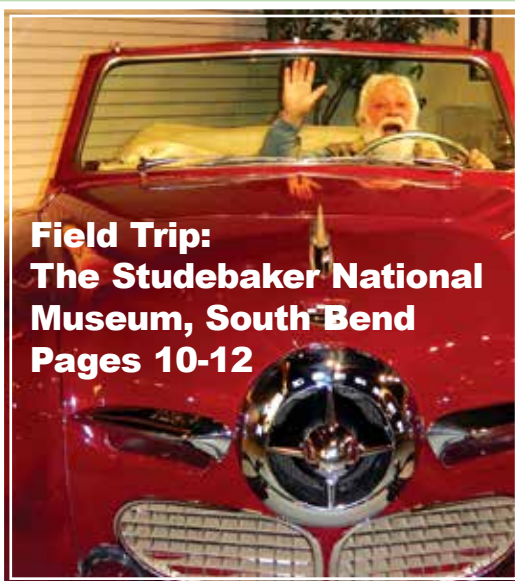
A regional newspaper freely distributed in Dowagiac, Cassopolis, Edwardsburg, Vandalia, Jones, Marcellus, Decatur, Union, Sister Lakes, Three Rivers, Elkhart and Mishawaka, with home delivery at Diamond, Eagle, Birch, Corey, Donnell, Indian, Magician, Shavehead, Baldwin, Long, Dewey, Cable, Juno, Christiana, Painter, Paradise, Stone, Buck, Lewis, Big & Little Twin and Bair lakes



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**Field Trip:
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Museum, South Bend
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Neighbors is published monthly from
March through December.

To contact Neighbors
(269) 228-1080
(269) 476-1680

<http://www.cassneighbors.com>
sailorphil@philvitale.com
jack@beanstalk.net

REGIONAL NEWS

Hazardous waste collection

Cass County's household hazardous waste collection will be May 19 from 9 am to noon at the fairgrounds in Cassopolis. The event is sponsored by the Cass County Board of Commissioners and Cass County Michigan State University Extension.

Disposal will be free for the first 300 pounds, as will electronic waste collection. Examples of acceptable household hazardous waste include: from your home, aerosols, bug spray and carpet cleaner; from your garage, antifreeze, brake fluid and degreasers; from your workshop, creosote, oil-based paints and varnishes; and miscellaneous, dry cleaning solvent, hot tub chemicals, mercury, swimming pool chlorine and photographic chemicals. Items that will not be accepted include latex paint; major appliances, used motor oil, bio-hazards, air conditioners, fire extinguishers, propane tanks, dehumidifiers, ammunition, car batteries and fireworks.

For more information on this program, call 445-4438.

Cass artists invites applications

The Cass Area Artists invites artists and crafters from Michiana to submit applications for participation in its 5th Annual Juried Summer Art Show, which will be on July 20 at the Lowe Center.

Applicants should submit images representing a sample of each of the categories (if only one category, then 2-4 images of that category) of items they will be selling and one booth shot to afarkas@yahoo.com and mail separate checks for booth and jury fees to Alli Farkas, PO Box 606, Dowagiac, MI 49047. Checks

should be made out to Cass Area Artists. Deadline for submissions is May. Entries will be juried by selected members of Cass Area Artists. If your entry is not accepted the check for your booth space will be returned to you. Artists/crafters accepted to the show will be notified by email by May 15.

For more informations visit <http://www.cassareaartists.org/home.html> or contact Tom Rose, director at boat-er458@yahoo.com or call 228-8047.

Chili & Baked Potato dinner

The First United Methodist Church of Dowagiac will host a Chili & Baked Potato dinner on Saturday, April 13 from 4 - 7 pm at the church 326 N. Lowe St. in Dowagiac. Donations will be used to repair the church organ. All are welcome.

Cass County Medical Care Facility 57th annual Spring Luncheon

The Cass County Medical Care Facility will host its 57th annual spring luncheon, Thursday May 9, at 11:30 am at the facility dining room. The cost is \$7. Please have your reservations in by May the 3. Membership dues of \$5 will also be collected at this time. Send payment for dues and luncheon tickets to Joyce Settle, 62460 Eagle Point Rd., Cassopolis, MI 49031 (269.445.3198).

Cass Historical Society programs

The Cass Historical Society has released the following list of upcoming events and programs for 2019. All events will be at the Cass District Library, 319 M62 N., Cassopolis, 6:30 pm, unless noted:

April 16 - One-room schools, Barbara Burton, Allen Butchbaker and volunteers

May 21 - Boys in Blue from Cass County, John Urschel

June 18 - Potawatomi history and culture, Marcus Winchester

July 16 - Down the Sauk Trail - across southern Michigan, Dr. John Geisler

August 20 - Annual Picnic, Russ Forest Pavilion East

September 17 - Bonine House and Carriage House, Cathy LaPointe, at Bonine House, Vandalia

October 6 - Fall Festival at Newton House

October 15 - Review of the year

REVIEW OF YEAR

Dowagiac Museum Program

The Dowagiac Area History Museum 2019 Spring Lecture Series, continues May 1 with a program featuring Don Lyons of the Heddon Museum presenting The Heddens and Their Bait. The museum is still finalizing the June 5 program.

The program is free to museum members, and \$5 for non-members. Children under 18 are admitted free. Membership will be available at the museum. The museum is at the corner of Division and West Railroad streets. For more information, call the museum at 783-2560 or visit www.dowagiacmuseum.info.

Tree Seedling & Fruiting Plant sale

The Cass County Conservation District will host a tree seedling and fruiting plant sale at the Cassopolis COA, 60525 Decatur Rd on Thursday, April 18 from 3 - 7 pm, Friday, April 19 from 9 am - 5 pm and Saturday, April 20 from 9 am

- noon. Pre-orders MUST be picked up at the COA on sales days unless other arrangements are made. Delivery available-additional charges may apply. For more information call 445-8641 x 5 or visit <http://casscdistrict.org>.

Art Barn workshop series set

The Art Barn School of Art, 695 N. 400 East, Valparaiso, IN has announced another season of painting workshops for artists. The 2019 series will be offered over several consecutive days. Workshops are 9 am to 4 pm, with a lunch break from noon to 1 pm. Lunch is included with the cost. Workshops are geared for ages 18 and over. All students must register 30 days in advance with payment to secure their participation. Register on-line at www.artbarnschool.org or call (219) 462-9009. Sessions include:

Capturing the Light with Lynn Ferris, Watercolor, July 12-14, 3-day session, \$350. Bring your work to the next level. Light and shadow shouldn't be afterthoughts in our paintings. In fact, good use of light and shadow is one of the best ways to take a painting from ordinary to extraordinary. Lunch will be provided each day of the workshop. Register by June 12

Basics of Watercolor with Lian Zhen, Sept 6-8, 3-day session, \$200

Zhen teaches basic techniques such as compositions and coloring, and his unique methods. He shows how to mix colors on watercolor papers, as well as letting the pigments painting themselves. The sessions include 4 to 6 demos each day with student practices between, so participants can absorb and assimilate the lessons. Supply list provided prior to



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REGIONAL NEWS

workshop. Register by Aug. 6

Creative Color - Loose and Vibrant with Ken Hosmer (Oil & Acrylic), Sept 10-13, 4-day session, \$330

Students of all levels will learn to creatively interpret subjects with color freedom; learn to lead the eye through your painting with light and dark pathways; learn to simplify subjects to create dynamic compositions. Daily painting demonstrations focus on landscape type subjects with animals, figures, buildings or water. Painting demonstrations will be in traditional oil, however students may work in either oil or acrylic. Ken is highly respected for his calm, supportive

demeanor as he skillfully verbalizes exactly what your painting needs for improvement. This makes the class ideal for both beginning and advanced students. Register by Aug. 9

For more information or to register, email adavis@artbarnschool.org or call (219) 462-9009.

Berrien 4-H Leaders' Association annual meeting

The Berrien County 4-H Leaders Association will host its 54th Annual Meeting on Monday, April 29. It is scheduled to start at 7 p.m. at the Berrien County Youth Fairgrounds in the Youth

Memorial Building in Berrien Springs, MI. This meeting is for all Berrien County 4-H project leaders, club coordinators & teen leaders.

The Berrien County 4-H Leaders Council encourages all leaders and teen leaders in the Berrien County 4-H youth development program to attend this once a year meeting in order to see the Berrien County 4-H Leaders Council in action and be updated on the 4-H Youth Program.

For information about Berrien County 4-H, contact Kelly Stelter, 4-H Program Coordinator at 927-5674 ext. 4015 or via email at grandtke@msu.edu.

Barn Swallow Theatre events

The monthly Board of Governors meeting for The Barn Swallow Theatre will be Saturday April 9 at 2 pm. New members are always welcome.

Auditions will be held for the youth play (ages 6-13), "King Midas and the Touch of Gold" on Thursday April 18 from 7-9 pm and Saturday April 20 from 10 am-1 pm. Please bring a list of any rehearsal schedule conflicts from April 22-June 16.

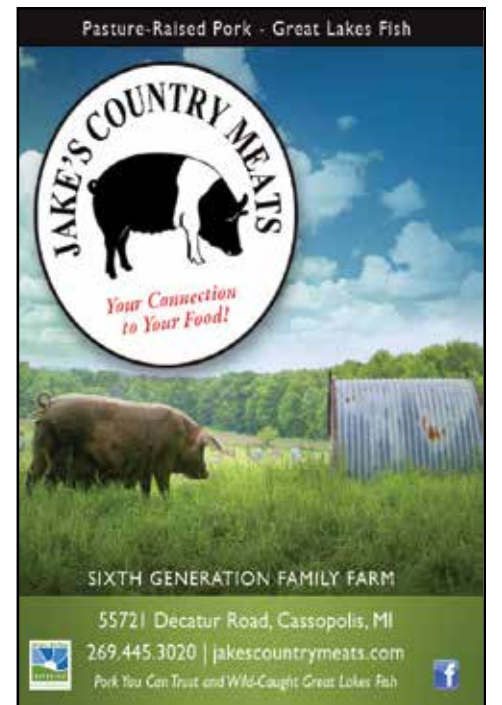
Performances of the play will be on June 13, 14 and 15 at 7:30 pm, and on June 16 at 2 pm.

The Barn Swallow Theatre is located at 22334 US-12, Edwardsburg,. For more information call 228-6672.

La Porte, IN museum announces new website and information



After months of collaboration, The La Porte County Historical Society Museum Website is up and running. Visit the website to find general information about the museum and exhibits, contact the staff or Board of Directors, find out which days the museum offers free admission to veterans, and more! Visit the site at laportecountyhistory.org.



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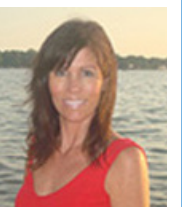
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REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

April 4 - DIY Bunny Craft, 1 pm, Call 357-7822 to register. Space is limited to 20 kids. Cass District Library - Main Library, 357-7822

April 5 - Lego Day, 12-4 pm, Build your own design or try a challenge card. Popcorn provided too. Cass District Library - Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

April 8 - Whitewashed DIY Birdhouse Class, 6 pm, Call 487-9214 to register. Space is limited to 10 adults. Bring your own hammer. Cass District Library - Howard Branch, 487-9214

April 9 - Family Story Time: Weather Wonders, 6 pm, Join us for stories, songs, and fun activities about the weather. Cass District Library - Howard Branch, 487-9214

April 9 - Barn Swallow Theatre Board of Governors monthly meeting, 3 pm, Edwardsburg, 228-6672

April 13 - VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance), 9:30 am-2 pm, By appointment only, Call United Way to set-up an appointment at 800-563-5432. Cass District Library - Main Library

April 13 - DIY Painted Flower Pots, 10 am, Call 487-9215 to register. Space is limited to 15 people. Cass District Library - Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

April 13 - Easter Eggstravaganza, 10:30 am - 12:30 am, Dowagiac, 782-8212

April 16 - Cass Historical Society program on one-room schools, Cass District Library - Main Branch, 6:30 pm

April 17 - Egg Decorating, 6 pm, Call 487-9215 to register. Space is limited to 16 people; ages 6 and older. Cass District Library - Edwardsburg Branch, 487-9215

April 18, 20 - Barn Swallow Theatre auditions for

youth play "King Midas and the Touch of Gold, 228-6672

April 18, 19 - Cass County Conservation District tree seedling and fruiting plant sale, Cass COA, 3-7 pm Friday, 9 am - noon Saturday, 445-8641, <http://www.cassccd.org>

April 19 - "Bow the Knee" Easter Musical/Dramatic presentation - Penn Friends Community Church - 19107 Quaker Street - Cassopolis, 7 pm

April 21 - Easter breakfast at 9 am, Penn Friends Community Church - 19107 Quaker Street - Cassopolis, followed by the "Bow the Knee" - Easter Musical/Dramatic presentation at 10:30 am

April 22 - Earth Day tree sales, Dr. T.K Lawless Park, 445-8641 x 5 or visit <http://cassccd.org>

April 23 - 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 jeanrowe70@comcast.net

April 29 - Berrien County 4-H Leaders Association 54th annual meeting, 7 pm, Berrien County Youth Fairgrounds, Berrien Springs, 927-5674, grandtke@msu.edu

May 1 - Dowagiac Area History Museum Spring Lecture program on the Heddon Museum, 783-2560

May 3, 4 - Michigan Lake stewardship Association (formerly Michigan Lakes and Streams Association) 58th Annual Meeting, Crystal Mountain Resort, Thompsonville, MI, mymlsa.org

May 4-17 - Dogwood Fine Arts Festival, 9 am - 5 pm, Dowagiac, (866) 490-2847, www.DogwoodFineArts.org

May 9 - Cass County Medical Facility Auxiliary's 57th Spring Luncheon, 11:30 am, \$7, in the dining room of the CCMCF, 23770 Hospital, Cassopolis. Reservations by May 3, Joyce Settle 445-3198

May 25 - Oshke-Kno-Kewewen Traditional Pow Wow, 9 am, 782.8998, <http://www.PokagonPowWow.com>

May 19 - Cass County Household Hazardous waste collection, Cass County fairgrounds, Cassopolis, 445-4438

My 21 - Cass Historical Society program Boys in Blue, Cass District Library - Main Branch, 6:30 pm

May 27 - Dowagiac Memorial Day Parade, 10:30 am - Noon, 782.6306

May 28 - 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 jeanrowe70@comcast.net

June 8 - 2019 Diamond Lake Association Annual Meeting (all lake residents welcome) 10-11:30 am, Diamond Lake Yacht Club; dillacassopolis@gmail.com, www.dillacassopolis.org

June 8 - Cass Area Artists' ART SHOW, 10 am - 4 pm at Sinclair Station, Cassopolis, 228-8047

June 13-16 - Youth Play 'King Midas and the Golden Touch, Barn Swallow Theatre, Edwardsburg, 7:30 pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 2 pm Sunday, 228-6672

June 18 - Cass Historical Society program Potawommi history and culture, Cass District Library - Main Branch, 6:30 pm

June 21 & 22 - Diamond Lake All-Lake Garage Sale,

9 am - 2 pm Friday, 9 am - Noon Saturday; dillacassopolis@gmail.com, www.dillacassopolis.org

June 25 - 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 jeanrowe70@comcast.net

July 6 - FIREWORKS at Diamond Lake, Birch Lake, dusk (rain date July 7).

July 16 - April 16 - Cass Historical Society program Down the Sauk Trail, Cass District Library - Main Branch, 6:30 pm

July 19, 20 - Summer in the City Festival, 10 am - 5 pm, Dowagiac, 782.8212, VPhillipson@Dowagiac.org

July 20 - Cass Area Artists' ART SHOW, 10 am - 4 pm at COA, Cassopolis, 228-8047

July 20 - 2019 Diamond Lake Triathlon, 7:30 - 10:30 am, Diamond Lake Marina; dillacassopolis@gmail.com, www.dillacassopolis.org, <https://runsignup.com/Race/MI/Cassopolis/DiamondLakeTriathlon>

July 23 - 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 jeanrowe70@comcast.net

July 25 - Ed's Open Header, "Cruise for the Cause" 5:30 - 8:30 pm, Dowagiac, proceeds will be given to the Cass County Cancer Service, 782-8212

July 27 - Steve's Run, 9 am - 1 pm, Southwestern Michigan College, 782.1000, <http://StevessRun.SWMich.edu/>



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REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

July 28-August 3 Cass County Fair
http://MyCassCountyFair.com, 445.8265

August 17 - Rod & Roll Classic Auto Show, 7 am - 4 pm, Dowagiac, 782.8212

August 20 - April 16 - Cass Historical Society annual picnic, Russ Forest pavilion

August 27 - 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 jeanrowe70@comcast.net

August 31 - Kee-Boon-Mein-Kaa Pow Wow, 9 am,

http://PokagonPowWow.com, 782.8998

September 17 - Cass Historical Society program Bonine House and Carriage House, Cass District Library - Main Branch, 6:30 pm

September 24 - 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 jeanrowe70@comcast.net

October 6 - April 16 - Cass Historical Society Fall Festival at Newton House

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, 6:30 pm

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 jeanrowe70@comcast.net

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

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 - 1:30pm 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

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

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PASTA ITALIA CON CHEF DONATO

Bucatini All' Amatriciana

by Chef Dennis Bamber

This is one of my favorite tomato sauces. The name comes from a small town not too far from Rome, called Amatrice, where it originated.

Most recipes call for Guinciale(pork jowl) but I prefer pancetta, an Italian unsmoked bacon instead.

You can substitute spaghetti, but it is so much better with bucatini, a rounder, fatter, type of spaghetti with a hole in the middle.

I'm going to give you 3 different recipes, two more like the original, and the other my version.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb of Bucatini
- 1/2 cup of chopped pancetta- you can use bacon, but boil it first to remove the smoke flavor, or prosciutto also can work
- 6 garlic cloves- finely chopped
- 1 red onion cut into small dice
- 2 cans of whole tomatoes - crushed by hand with their juices in a bowl
- 1/2 cup of parsley or basil chopped
- Pecorino Romano cheese for serving, if not, use Parmesan
- 1 1/2 teaspoons of red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon of black pepper
- 4 tablespoons of olive oil

DIRECTIONS

STEP 1

In a large fairly deep pot, cook the pancetta over moderate heat for a few minutes. Then add the pepper flakes and black pepper, stir right away and then add the onion. After the onion softens, add the garlic and cook 4-5' minutes more.

STEP 2

Add the crushed whole tomatoes and their juices, add a teaspoon of salt, and a splash of white wine.

Bring to a boil, stirring frequently, then turn down the heat and cook until the sauce thickens, about 45'.

STEP 3

Bring a large pot of water to a boil, salt the water, then add the Bucatini and cook until it is very "al dente". Save a small amount of the cooking water. Drain the pasta, put back into the pot, add the chopped parsley or basil, and add a few scoops of the sauce to finish cooking the pasta.

STEP 4

Serve the pasta in bowls, add more sauce and sprinkle with the pecorino Romano. Some like to mix Parmesan with the Romano as Romano is a bit sharper.

Buon Appetito.

THE CLASSIC VERSION

This version uses no onion or garlic.

DIRECTIONS

1. Sauté the Pancetta in olive oil until it begins to crisp.
2. Add a small amount of white wine and scrape the bottom of the pan
3. Add the hot pepper flakes
4. Then add the crushed whole tomatoes and let cook until it thickens.

Serve with pecorino Romano Cheese over the Bucatini

MARCELLA HAZAN

This is the great cookbook author's version.

NO garlic

DIRECTIONS

Sauté the onion in a little olive oil and butter until the onion becomes translucent.

Add the pancetta and cook a few minutes more.



Add the tomatoes, red pepper flakes and a teaspoon of salt.

Cook over medium heat for about 30'

Serve with Parmesan and pecorino over the Bucatini.

~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-Ameri-

can. He is currently a Realtor with Cressy & Everett, Licensed in Michigan and Indiana, and specializes in lake property.



LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

Happy April ... now, go outdoors!

by **Jane Boudreau**

Happy April, Neighbors! I hope everyone is getting outdoors more after months of hibernation. We don't have much furniture out on the patio yet, but I love to pull an old plastic Adirondack chair out into the sun (when we have it), good source -- and only source -- of vitamin D. And the dogs bask in it as well when they aren't rolling in the grass (or something worse.)

Sadly, as soon as the sun passes over the trees westward, it gets chilly. We have logs burning in the fireplace soon after coming in. I can't complain. Fall and spring get a bad rap with their unpredictable weather. Just put on a few extra layers and look for signs of flowers popping up or the beautiful colors of the leaves changing and you will feel a bit more lighthearted. Works for me.

I've been sorting through my veggies seeds, there are some that really don't mind cold weather, actually do better such as radishes, carrots and some lettuces. I plant these as I really use them a lot. Last year I planted carrots in mid May, actually a little late, and I didn't have any big enough to pull until September. Okay, stew it is! I have a lot of shade in my yard so I do much container planting. I can plant my seeds in about 3 minutes. Seeds in the ground survive cold temps much better with the warmth down deep in the earth. For containers I would suggest you keep them out of the wind, yet in a place where they get at least 6 hours of sun. Has anyone ever tried those self watering pots? With the money and time we invest in having a pretty garden, deck, or patio-maybe they are worth the money.



Lawn care is important now, too. I've always had crab grass and it's a tough one. When it sprouts you only make it worse by trying to pull it ... the seeds spread everywhere and you get even more. The key is to get it as soon as it emerges ... usually April or May in our area, then I use a crab grass preventer. If you don't care for chemical, you can dig it up at this very early stage as well. I also use a 'spring' weed-and-feed in May. If you want to get outdoors more and work on your lawn, regular raking eliminates the dead grass and leaves room for the new grass to grow. Good exercise, too.

It's time to 'springify' indoors, too. I love this old wicker basket I found at a yard sale, it moves around the house. I'm not crazy about silk flowers but sometimes you have to do it when nothing is blooming in your garden. Lighten things up with linen table runners and table-



cloths, lighter curtains, or maybe just some inexpensive sheers. A few pastel throw pillows, and a new houseplant or two, and you will feel lighter yourself.



These beauties are called Blue Globe Thistle. They dry very well and then I plant the seeds in the spring. But I really love having them in the house to brighten things up until May. You can bring in many varieties of flowers in the fall; lavender, peonies, hydrangeas, celosia, larkspur, and if you live on a lake, don't forget to cut a few stalks of cattail to display in a tall container.

Easter is arriving a little late this year but I thought I'd pass on some recipes for goodies. I posted this recipe a few years ago but it is so darn easy and you'd have a lot of fun doing it with your kids or grandkids. Desserts are one thing that change quite a bit from year to year on holidays around here. Do not mess with the traditional turkey, ham or roast beef, but new desserts are fun to try. Many of my guests bring cheesecake, cupcakes and pies. I like to make cookies. Grab and go. Great for those kiddos.



This is the best sugar cookie recipe I've ever used. I don't know what it is but they are crisp on the outside and soft on the inside. I use a store bought frosting, vanilla or butter cream, and tint portions so I have a rainbow of cookies. Top them with malted milk eggs or M&M's. A winner!

Best Sugar Cookies Ever

Ingredients:

1 c butter
1 1/2 c sugar
1 egg, beaten
2 1/4 c flour
1/2 t baking powder
1/2 t salt
1 t vanilla
1/4 c sugar for rolling

Directions:

Cream together butter and sugar until fluffy. Add egg and mix until combined. Add flour, baking powder, salt and vanilla. Beat well.

Scoop dough by tablespoons and form into balls. Roll in sugar and place on a parchment paper lined baking sheet about 1 1/2 inches apart. Bake at 350 for 8-10 minutes. When cool, frost and add decorations.

These beauties are simple and you can make them year round by decorating them differently for other occasions. How easy can it get? You may want to double the recipe, although 1 or 2 of these cookies are quite enough for little ones.

Chocolate Dipped Oreo Cookies

Ingredients:

1 package of white almond bark (or white chocolate bars)
1 package Oreo Cookies



Icing, sprinkles, or any sort of decorations of your choice

Directions:

In a large bowl melt almond bark in your microwave in 15 second intervals, stirring in between. Do not overcook...if you do add a teaspoon or so of vegetable oil to smooth out. Using tongs, dip each cookie in the almond bark and place on parchment paper. Smooth out any of the tong marks with a spoon. When almost cool, decorate with icing (I used the store bought. Another great idea is to pick up a few of those plastic squeeze bottles with the pointed tip. You can find them at craft stores. Thin out store bought frosting with water and go for it!). Sprinkles are a nice touch, too, especially in pastel colors for spring.



I wanted to add a couple of recipes that just make you feel light and healthy and ready for spring. These are not complicated although they may not be anything you've made in the past. Let's try something new. They may become a regular on your table or a Go To when you have company. And look at this color!

Continued on next page. See:

JANE

BUSINESS & FINANCE

Insure to value with homeowners insurance

By **Charlie Retherford**

What does the phrase, “Insure to Value” mean in relation to your Homeowners Insurance?

Simply put, it is the maximum amount the insurance company will pay for your house if deemed a total loss.

The next question one will likely have is: How does the insurance company determine the maximum amount? This is known as Replacement Cost. Replacement cost is the estimated figure determined by calculating how much it will cost to rebuild your home with similar (Like, Kind & Quality) materials and workmanship. Replacement cost takes into consideration current construction prices, which may fluctuate by area, as well as, availability of products and man-power. Along with details of your specific structure, this will determine the cost to insure your home to value.

The information your insurance agent will collect about your specific home includes, but not limited to the fol-

lowing:

- 1) square footage, number of stories, and construction quality
- 2) age of the home and details regarding the age of the mechanical systems
- 3) materials used for interior and exterior finishes
- 4) number of bathrooms, fireplaces, attached garages, decks, porches, etc....

Once these facts are collected your agent will be able to provide you with the proper amount of insurance coverage for your home.

If you are like most people, you may question the difference between Market Value, Taxable Value, and Replacement Cost. These three things are very much different from each other.

Market Value is based on the probable sale price of a property which includes many determining factors like school systems, proximity to scenic views and recreational amenities, and local economic conditions in addition to the particulars of the home itself.

Your city, township, or county tax assessor determines the taxable value of your property by considering square footage of the home, lot size, additional buildings or other improvements on the entire parcel of land and so on. This figure is usually below Market Value or Replacement Cost.

Keep in mind, Replacement Cost policies require you to repair, rebuild or replace the damaged property after a loss. Failure to do so will result in the insurance company only paying the Actual Cash Value of the damaged property at the time of the loss.

Actual Cash Value is determined on a depreciation basis. Property is depreciated based on the determination of the useful life of an item and what percentage of life was left in the item at the time of loss. For example, if the useful life of a roof is around 25 years, and it is damaged beyond repair when it is 5 years old, it's depreciated value would be 80% of its original value at the time of loss.

Some people opt for a Repair Cost or

Market Value home policy. This is generally used for older homes where the replacement cost of “Like, Kind & Quality” may involve very expensive or hard to get products or workmanship: for instance, plaster walls, hand-cut woodwork, antique hardware, etc ... Just like a replacement cost policy, you are required to repair or rebuild damaged property to a similar condition, but with contemporary materials. So, drywall would be used to replace damaged plaster and so on. In the case of a total loss, the repair cost policy will only pay the market value of the home and that is often not enough to replace the entire structure.

We all hope we never suffer a catastrophic loss, but you can see it is very important to understand what it may cost to replace your home following a disaster. For further questions on Replacement Cost, feel free to give us a call.

JANE

Continued from previous page

Cream of Spinach Soup

Ingredients:

1 pound fresh spinach, stems trimmed
1 bunch of green onions, tops and bottoms trimmed and roughly chopped
3 c chicken broth
1 t nutmeg
Pinch of salt & pepper
1 c heavy cream plus 1/4 c for swirling

Directions:

In a large saucepan bring spinach, onions and broth to a boil. Lower heat to a bubble and let simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally until spinach is tender.

Turn off heat, add nutmeg, cream and S&P. Let cool for a few minutes. Puree in batches in a blender or food processor until smooth. Return to saucepan and gently reheat. Pour into serving bowls and swirl a teaspoon or so of the remaining cream on the surface of the soup. Serve immediately.

Tomato, Avocado & Black Bean Salad

A final recipe that is as colorful as it is healthy. And don't forget delicious. No salad should be boring. Have this for lunch or dinner with some good bread topped with herbed butter. * This recipe

serves 2 as a side salad so you may want to double for more.

Ingredients:

1 English cucumber (seedless), diced
1 c black beans, rinsed
1 1/4 c corn
1 red pepper, seeded and diced
1 c cherry tomatoes, halved
1/2 c tightly packed cilantro, chopped
1 lime, juiced

1 avocado, seeded and diced
S&P

Directions:

Place the cucumber, beans, corn, red pepper, tomatoes and cilantro in a bowl. Squeeze the lime juice over and toss well. Gently fold in the avocado and S&P. Enjoy!

*I mentioned the addition of bread and herbed butter to accompany the salad. Herbed butter is simple. Simply bring a stick of salted butter to room temperature. Add 1 to 1 1/2 t of your favorite dried herb such as basil, oregano, dill or tarragon. Your choice. Cream the herbs well into the butter in a medium size bowl. Chill for 10 minutes. Shape the butter in a log and refrigerate until ready to serve. Slice pieces of the butter log into 1/4 inch pieces and arrange on a small plate to pass at the table. You will feel like the ultimate hostess. You can also keep it on hand smushed into a

small bowl to have a zillion ways.

I hope I've given you some ideas for getting outdoors, bringing the outside in, and sprucing up your Easter dessert table. Healthy eating is perfect this time of year with all of the fresh produce coming into our markets. My soup and stew is very refreshing now, but will take you all through summer. If you have any questions about these recipes, please email me.

Happy April and have a Blessed Easter.

This post is dedicated with much love to my neighbor, cooking and gardening mentor, and steady friend for the past 28 years. RIP, Barb Keck. There is and never will be anyone like you.

Jane Boudreau is a writer, blogger and newspaper columnist for your local Neighbors as well as The Reporter in Chicago. She divides her time between Diamond Lake, Chicago, and the mountains of North Carolina. She does her best with cooking, gardening, decorating and giving pushy advice. Contact her at blndy9@yahoo.com, and read her blog at Blondiesjournals.blogspot.com.



OUR CHILDREN

Planning now for summer learning

by **SANDY FLEMING**

Know it's only April, but summer vacation will be here before we know it. This year, why not make sure your child avoids the summer slide that plagues so many? And if your child is already behind the eight ball so to speak with school learning, give him or her the help needed to catch up a bit while the rest of the students are standing still or slipping backwards.

What is "Summer Slide"?

Educators across the country notice each year that most children tend to go backwards instead of forwards with learning over the summer vacation. Maybe it's the long months of little academic discipline, or maybe it's the time away from moving forward, but for whatever reason, summer is a time when kids typically go backwards instead of forwards with their learning.

In fact, it's so pervasive that most teachers build in several weeks of review in an effort to get the kids caught back up to where they were at the end of the previous school year. It's also the reason that most standardized testing is held off until October and November. Kids seem to need that much time to get back into the swing of learning and to remember what they were working on the previous school year.

Now imagine a world where the students stay with the program all summer long. They hit the classroom doors in September with all of the knowledge that they left with in June. Teachers have an additional few weeks to move them even farther ahead. It truly is one of the reasons that many districts (even in our area) are moving toward a year-round school calendar. Can we afford to continue "wasting" so many weeks each year when education does nothing but become more important?

Preventing "Summer Slide"

It's not so hard to do. Your child will benefit greatly (even your teen) if you set up some kind of regularly scheduled mental workout throughout the summer months. The easiest way to manage is to grab a grade level workbook or sign them up for classes in the summer months. That takes very little effort on the part of the parents, which can be a good thing in light of our busy adult schedules. Most bookstores have a wealth of materials to choose from, and with just a little simple math, you can figure out how much progress needs to happen in order to finish up before the school bell rings.

The kids will do even better, though, if you can manage a bit more excitement in the learning. Set up a variety of situations that coax your youngster to use the old noodle, and there is a good chance that he or she will be a more willing participant. Puzzles, games, books, scavenger hunts, writing activities, and more will round out an educational summer. Make it something different each and every day, and give them a reason to complete the exercises. You can make screen time, video games, or other favorite activity the reward for getting the job done in a timely manner.

A regular summer routine might look like this: 30 minutes of reading, 20 minutes of writing to make a paragraph or two about the reading, some kind of science experiment, some hands-on application math problems, and maybe another 60 minutes of reading and writing to round things off. The whole thing would be over and done with by mid-morning,



and your child would be well on the road to avoiding "Summer Slide."

Probably the main thing to ensure is that your youngster does not overdo the screen time. Phones, tablets, television, video games all count as screen time, and it's very, very easy to allow it to take over to the exclusion of other, healthier habits. Start the summer off with very strict limits on screen time, and you can always lighten up later, after the kids have earned it. Start off too lax, and you will have lost control right at the start. There is usually very little chance of changing habits and a lot of chance of cranky and unhappy kids that try to make your life miserable.

When School Is Not Going Well

Let's face it, some children just do not do well in school. There could be lots of reasons for this. School may be a struggle because of lack of attention or effort, because of some learning challenge, because of a mismatch between the teacher and the student, because of trauma or problems at home or health problems, or any number of other reasons.

Whatever the cause, if your child is behind in school skills, summer offers an ideal time to play catch up. Schools have known this for decades—they offer summer school classes for high school students to recover credits while they can focus just on one class at a time. Some elementary schools also offer summer programming to help kids catch up during the summer months, especially if their scores on standardized testing are low.

Tutors also love to see kids during the summer months. Peers are standing still educationally speaking, and summer is a time when we can focus on remedial skills that actually will improve the problem and close the gap. During the school year, many of us focus on providing

homework and study support to help the kids get through the year with something other than a failing grade. So summer is actually a godsend because we are no longer trying to hit a moving target. Kids who are learning at a slightly slower pace or who are missing foundational skills have a chance to close the gap so they don't perform quite so badly the following school year.

And of course there are a whole lot of things you can do to help your child be more successful even without summer school or the help of a tutor. Zero in on troublesome skills and help your child relearn them or practice them. There is a wealth of resources available just by searching online or by finding resource books at your favorite store. Focus on areas where your child struggles, and you're sure to move the needle for next fall.

If your child has trouble with reading, make sure you spend a lot of time reading together. Head off to the local library and grab new books each week. Sign the family up for summer reading programs that offer rewards for pages or for books read. These are available for all ages, including adults. Read aloud with the kids, even the ones that know how to read. Just choose books that are a bit beyond their comfort zone in reading to share with them. The idea is to get them excited about books and interested in learning more.

If sight word recognition is a concern for your young struggling reader, play some sight word recognition games. Try writing the words on two sets of cards and playing Memory or Old Maid with them. Spread them around the room and have a word hunt, similar to an Easter egg hunt. Set a goal of mastering the grade level Dolch list or a certain number of Fry words, and you will move your child's reading ahead by miles.

Help your child learn the basic math

facts appropriate for his or her age group (addition/subtraction facts in grades 1-2, multiplication in grades 3-4, and division in grades 4-5). This is one simple thing you can do for your children that will reverberate through their math classes for the rest of their school career.

Share activities around the house, no matter what age your child is. Cooking together, working on household projects together, and so forth, help children to see academic skills in action. For example, if you need to paint the room, let your child help you do the calculations to determine how much paint is needed. If you need to double or halve a recipe, have your child help.

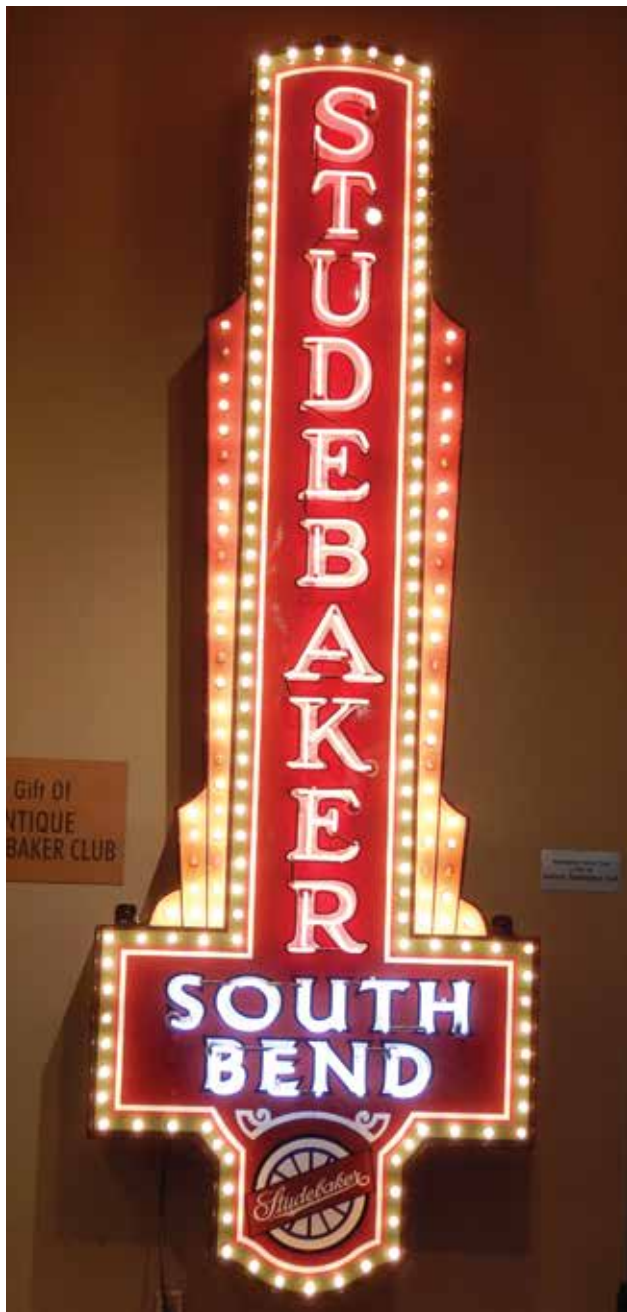
Play lots of games together. Nearly any commercial board game builds countless critical skills, so you can't go too far wrong. Games help with math skills, with reading comprehension, with social interaction, and much, much more.

Don't Sell the Kids Short!

Sure, it might be easier to let the school work slide over summer. Yes, the kids will try as hard as they can to convince you they "need a break." Don't give in! No one ever said that parenting was easy, and no one ever said that brains need a "break" for months on end. Don't fall into that trap—it only perpetuates the problem. Instead, break out of the cycle for the summer, and you may find that you can help them break out of the cycle of "hard" work at school for the rest of their lives. Isn't that worth a little bit of effort?

Sandy Fleming is a writer and private tutor living in Edwardsburg. Contact her at sfleming1235@gmail.com if you'd like to talk about your child's learning needs. Private tutoring is available both in person and online, and consultation is available if desired.

FIELD TRIP



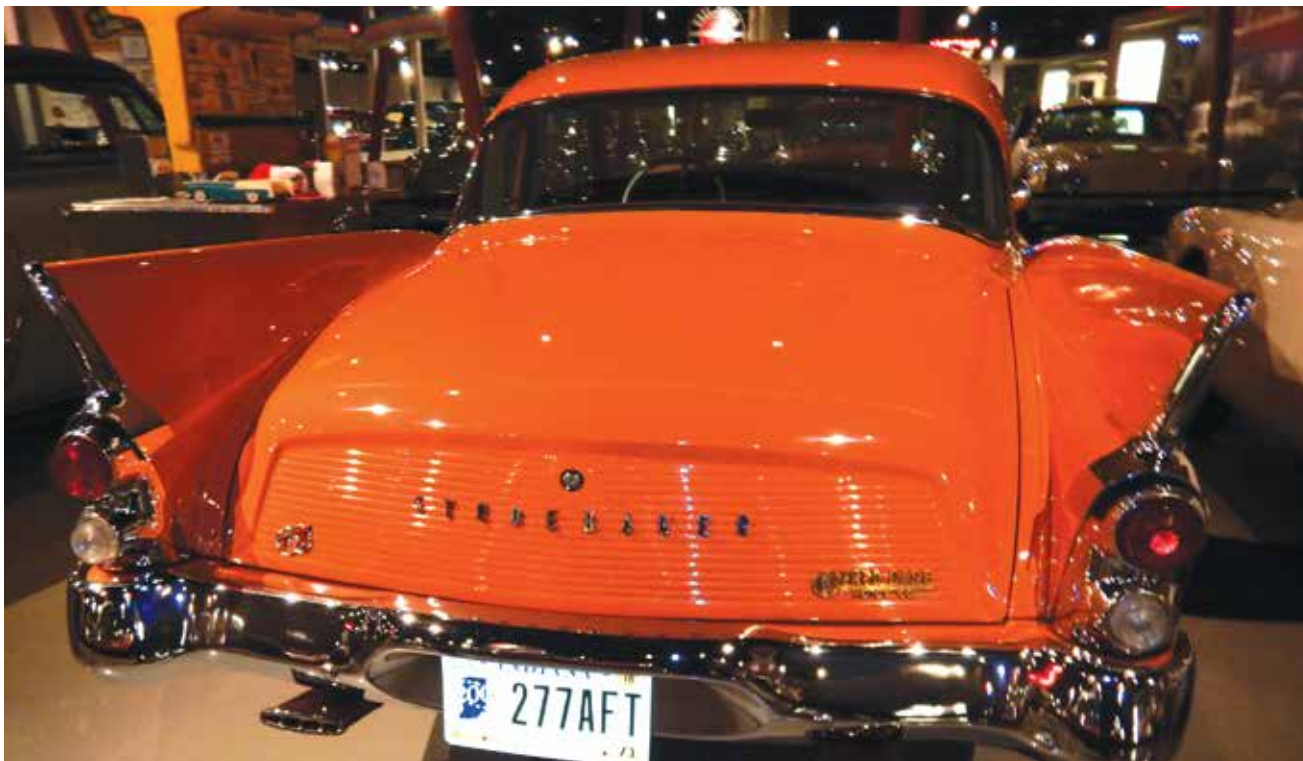
The Studebaker National Museum

As seen through the eyes (and camera) of my 12-year-old grandson Dominic Vitale-Richards (right).

Recently we had a chance to visit the Studebaker National Museum in South bend with our grandson Dom, who grabbed my camera and shot a bunch of pics that were cool enough to include as this month's Field Trip.

Nice job, Dom!

For complete info on the one-of-a-kind display right in the heart of Michiana, visit the website history-museumSB.org.



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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.

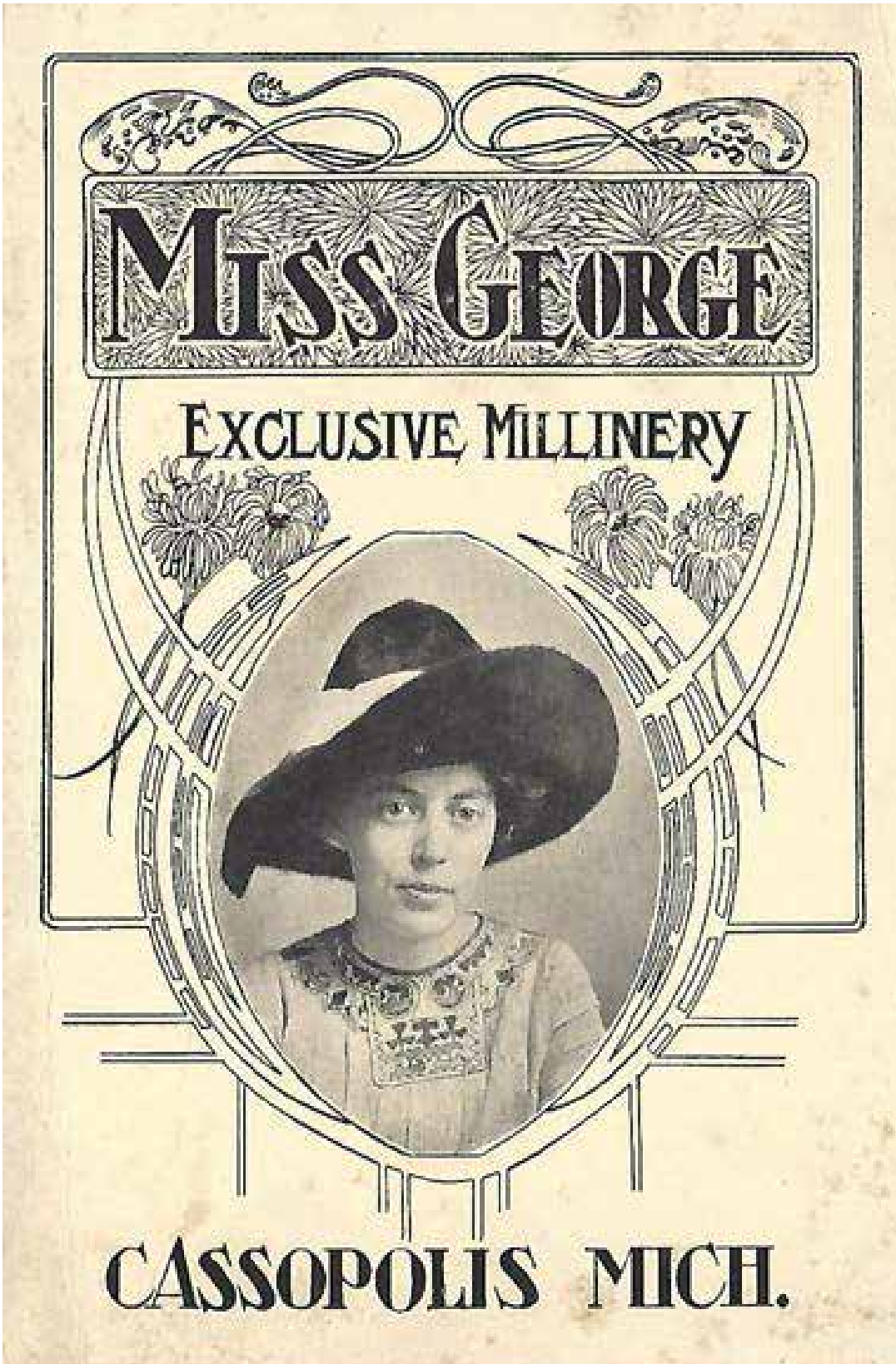
Jerdon has recently used many of his postcards featuring the Sister Lakes area in a book written by RL Rasmussen. The book, which retails for \$19.99, is in its second printing by the publisher, Arcadia Publishing.

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 Cassopolis and the nearby 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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NATURE NOTES

Waterfowl abound in Cass County's spring

Provided by Cass District Library
Local History Branch

The common merganser can be found on open water, primarily the Great Lakes and larger inland lakes, throughout Michigan during the winter months. Beginning in late February common mergansers begin the flight north to wooded streams and lakes of Canada, and the northern states. It breeds across Michigan's Upper Peninsula and northern half of the Lower Peninsula.

The common merganser is the most common of the three merganser species that occur in Michigan. The other two species include red-breasted merganser and hooded merganser. The nickname "saw-bill duck" is used to describe either of the three merganser species as all three have serrated bills, allowing the bird to hang onto the fish it catches while underwater.

The common merganser will pass through Southwest Michigan during March and early April. Most will be north on nesting grounds by late April. Their nest is built by the female, in a tree cavity but sometimes inside earthen banks or rock crevices, and constructed with plant fibers such as grass, weeds, moss and feathers.

The drake common merganser can be seen in the accompanying photo taken by Brad Anderson on March 2, 2019 at Lake Chapin. Its green head and white chest and sides are distinctive. The female is the same size as the male but has a very different plumage consisting of reddish feathers on the head and a crest. The back is grayish on the female.

The drake mallard sports a green head, yellowish bill, brownish chest and gray sides and back. Brad Anderson took a nice photo of a mallard this past week at St. Joseph and I thought it would be a good opportunity to show readers the difference between a drake mallard and common merganser. Although males of both species have green heads, they otherwise look different.

The mallard is the most abundant duck in Michigan, and in the world, and is the most commonly harvested duck in North America. It is found every month of the year throughout Michigan, though many thousands of mallards vacate the Upper Peninsula from October through March.

Prior to World War II, the mallard was considered to be common during nesting season throughout Michigan, but nearly absent during winter. Walter Barrows wrote in his classic "Michigan Bird Life" (1912) that he did not know of any winter records of mallards within the state, but that they could be found overwintering in northern Indiana and Ohio.

Over the last 50-75 years, mallards have been overwintering at more northern latitudes in North America. From December 2018 through February 2019, mallards were recorded in 10 of the 15 Upper Peninsula counties and 64 of 68 lower peninsula counties.

Mary Jo Canaday of Berrien Springs photographed 2-3 of a total of 11 trumpeter swans last week in a cornfield along Avery Road in Bertrand Township.

Unlike the mute swan, the trum-



Above: Drake common merganser on Lake Chapin, March 2, 2019, Brad Anderson.

Top right: Drake mallard, most common duck species in the world, as it swims along St. Joseph River, St. Joseph. Brad Anderson.

Right: Trumpeter swans along Buffalo Road, Bertrand Twp., by Mary Jo Canaday of Berrien Springs.



Above: Two Green-winged teal drakes at North Lake, Grand Mere State Park, February 24, 2019. Lisa Schaller of Bridgman.

Below: Female common goldeneye in flight over New Buffalo Harbor on February 22, 2019.



peter swan is native to North America and has rebounded after a brush with extinction. Prior to Europeans arriving in North America, trumpeter swans were found in the northeast and Great Lakes Regions. In July 1701 French explorer Cadillac noted large numbers of swans around Lake St. Clair.

Thousands of trumpeter swans were harvested by hunters and trappers of the Hudson Bay Company primarily during the 1700s and early 1800s. They were wiped out of Michigan even before the first settlers arrived in the 1820s-1830s.

Locally, trumpeter swan bones have been identified among faunal remains unearthed at the Fort St. Joseph archeological site near Niles. The fort was active from 1691-1781.

By 1936 less than 100 trumpeter swans were left. Legal protection, conservation, including many state and provincial restoration initiatives have brought the species back from the brink of extinction.

Michigan's trumpeter swan restoration efforts began in the early 1980s through a cooperative effort between the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Nongame program and the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary near Battle Creek. The first successful breeding resulting from reintroduction efforts in Michigan occurred in 1992 in Cass



County.

Currently the species can be found nesting in both the Upper Peninsula and Lower Peninsula, but it is more uncommon in the southern half. At least 175 pairs of trumpeter swans reside in Michigan, found in summer in both the Upper Peninsula and Lower Peninsula. They are least common in the Detroit metro area.

Like other species of waterfowl, the trumpeter swan can be found locally on unfrozen wetlands. I have seen upwards of 100-150 swans congregating in winter on Christiana and Juno Lakes in Cass County.

The species is expected to continue to recover in eastern North America.

The first green-winged teal seen this year in Berrien County were photographed on February 24 at Grand Mere State Park's North Lake by Lisa Schaller.

Green-winged teal are one of the most harvested ducks in North America, ranking second behind the mallard. The population is healthy across the continent. Michigan lies at the southern edge of the green-winged teal's nesting range, and north of the main wintering grounds. Canada hosts the bulk of the nesting population while the southern US is home for most green-winged teal in winter. A small number of green-winged teal will

stay the winter based on food supply, in turn determined by availability of open water.

The green-winged teal is a dabbler, feeding during summer on aquatic invertebrates, aquatic vegetation, including seeds. Come winter it feeds on grass, grains, seeds and other vegetation.

The relatively shallow Grand Mere Lakes are excellent locations for viewing teal and other water birds. Aquatic vegetation and other food abound in these lakes, on which the green-winged teal thrives.

The species migrates northbound from February until early May in Southwest Michigan. There are a few scattered nesting records in Southwest Michigan, but it is by no means common here in the summer months. Southbound fall migrants appear as early as August and peak in October in our region.

Common goldeneye are abundant on our waters from October through April. These ducks dive for food, being mainly small fish, crayfish and other aquatic invertebrates.

Brad Anderson photographed a

Continued on next page. See:

NATURE

NATURE NOTES

NATURE

Continued from previous page

group of four male goldeneye at New Buffalo harbor on February 25. Three days earlier he captured an image of female goldeneye in flight over the harbor.

Every February geese start to move northward toward their nesting grounds in Canada. Sarett Nature Center staff member Mike Mahler reported a group of 15 greater white fronted geese, seen February 25 at the Brown Sanctuary. Greater white fronted geese will nest far in the Arctic regions of northern Canada.

Also present at Brown Sanctuary that day was a lone tundra swan, one mute swan and large numbers of Canada geese. Most of the water at the sanctuary is frozen.

Marge Yetzke of Bainbridge Township sent in photos of some cedar waxwings seen feeding on ornamental



Above: Four drake common goldeneye in center of Anderson's photo of February 25, 2019 at New Buffalo Harbor. A female common goldeneye is seen on the right.

bushes in her yard. One photo prominently displays one waxwings ash-gray and yellow feathers, seen on the back, wings and tail.

Cedar waxwings are present all year long in Southwest Michigan, although local populations move around in winter in search of food.

Report your wildlife sightings to Jonathan Wuepper at wuepperj@gmail.com.

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Aaron Miller, U.S. Representative
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LOCAL HISTORY

Cass Courthouse history research project



Cass County Courthouse, Cassopolis, Michigan. Undated, but believed to have been taken during the 1940s.

**Provided by Cass District Library
Local History Branch**

The present Cass County courthouse is the third structure to be built specifically for that purpose. According "Cass County, Michigan A Twentieth Century History" by Lowell Glover (1906), the original building sat on the west side of Broadway, north of York. It was con-

structed of wood and was 24 by 34 feet in dimensions. The building was ready for occupancy on May 1, 1835.

The next building to serve as courthouse was constructed between 1839-1841 and was located on the northeast quarter of the intersection of State and Broadway. This Greek Revival-styled structure served as county courthouse until 1898 when it was moved to the

south side of State Street, west of Broadway, where it was used as an opera house and movie theater. It was torn down in 1968.

Construction on the current courthouse began in October 1898 and was completed in early 1900 and the county offices were moved into the building in January.

The accompanying photo of the court-

house is undated, but believed to have been taken during the 1940s. In hopes of pinpointing a more accurate date to the picture, I am interested in knowing the make and models of the cars present. You can reach me at jwuepper@cass.lib.mi.us, or come to the Local History Branch Library Monday through Thursday 9 am-4 pm.

THE LAST WORD

When the real Mad Max nearly deep-sixed my vacation



Well, the notes on the paperwork that the pharmacist gave me when I filled the newest of the medications my doctor had prescribed eerily

warned that the drugs sometimes caused vivid and unusual dreams. And after what happened I'm having a bit of trouble putting that caveat into perspective. Hell, I'm having trouble deciding if it really happened or if it was all just a bizarre, beta-blocker-pizza-induced nightmare (with double cheese).

It began rather sedately about a month ago. My wife and I and two of our best friends and frequent sailing buddies drove to Chicago and boarded a big jet airplane for the first leg of a trip that would eventually see us travel by plane, sailboat, cars, cabs, trucks and just about everything except a rickshaw, on what became an odd olio of dreamy adventure spiced with otherworldly nightmares.

At first we had all chuckled about the fact that the news was teeming with gloom and doom stories about the Boeing 737 Super Max 8 airplanes (just like the one we were riding) that were being grounded all over the world. Seemed ok to us, we joked. What could go wrong?

Note to self: never ever, ever, ever again even make a joke using that expression at the start of a vacation!

As it turned out, the first few legs of our vacation were everything we could have hoped for. The planes were on time. They flew (and landed, thank God) without incident or accident.

When we arrived we were welcomed; the pre-sailing hotel we spent our first night

in was a spectacular converted mid-1700s era boatyard and British naval fort that oozed charm and grace. The food in the restaurant was a delightful mixture of European and West Indian served while a steel drum band serenaded us with light Reggae and Island jazz.

After a pleasant night's (dreamless) sleep kissed by gentle, warm Caribbean breezes, we arose to a hearty breakfast, finished our preparations and set off on the first sailing leg of this multi-legged odyssey that we had been planning for months. The weather forecast called for light breeze and calm seas, so we set off with the bravado of the naive, pointing our bow at the island of Montserrat, a journey of about 35 miles. When the wind hit 25 miles an hour and 7-10 foot waves started battering us, we shortened sail, wrapped a bit heavier clothing around us and pressed on.

No worries, we laughed. We've certainly seen worse. What could go wrong?

On that leg, nothing went wrong, and we arrived about an hour before customs closed, plenty of time to deal with the onerous but required bureaucratic nightmare that inevitably occurs when you cross into a foreign land.

But then a party barge barged into the harbor, bringing with it hundreds of locals intent on turning this serene, quiet piece of paradise into a three-day St. Patrick's Day party (an annual event we were later told that involves mass quantities of umbrella-laden rum drinks and a lot of very, very loud music).

After a quick cocktail and a look around, we retired to the boat, intent on making our way to the next island at first light (when did we get so old we

asked ourselves as we pulled the pillows over our ears to drown out the intense beating of the super-amped waterproof woofers and tweeters ashore).

Fortunately the remaining legs of our sailing trip were delightful. Great wind, a stout, fast boat, moderate seas and an efficient crew.

No runs, no drips, no errors.

But a couple of nights before the end of our journey, one of my phone-enhanced sailing mates got a message from the airlines ... it seems that the remaining Super Max 8 aircrafts had been grounded, and since that was the only plane that flew into the island where we were, our return trip had just flown the coop.

After several tense hours of texts and tweets and twerps and whatever else phone people do (oh yeah, there were at least a couple of real phone calls, and despite the fact that we were miles from the nearest cell tower, we could actually hear people talking), we were informed that we had been rebooked on a different airplane and everything was fine.

What could go wrong, right?

Until the next morning when it wasn't fine any more ... and the airlines texted us that we'd been bumped again.

Our communications officer spent several more frantic hours telephonically negotiating, cajoling, threatening and begging, until finally we were told we had a choice ... we either had to spend an additional week in the islands (something that unfortunately wouldn't work logistically for half of us) or, if we hurried, there was a chance we could fly to Puerto Rico on what might (or might not) be a sea plane, spend the night, then fly on to Chicago the next day.

Sea plane? Puerto Rico?

That night in my sleep, I had what I now assume was a medication-induced nightmare. In my fitful slumber, a giant, 8-legged, crablike creature (that I instinctively knew was named Super Max) was attacking our sailboat. My friends and I armed ourselves with axes (I've never seen an axe on a sailboat ... how is it that dream axes just show up when you need one?) and we began hacking off the evil crustacean's legs, one after another ... but the devious appendages kept growing back, each more fiercesome than the last. Again and again we hewed off crab leg after crab leg, but it was to no avail. The devilish Max just kept attacking -- until, in a stroke of culinary genius, Patti, our galley goddess on the trip, broke out a pot of melted butter that we poured onto Max, par-boiling him to a blistering-red doneness and stopping him and his fiendishly regenerating legs in their tracks!

And then I woke up. I think.

We made it home, albeit a day late, several dollars short, and despite an unexpected detour to San Juan, we truly enjoyed our last night of vacation at an ocean-front restaurant marveling at the stunningly full super moon floating above the waves pounding onto the beach.

All nightmares aside, it was an epic vacation, full of heart-pounding adventure in the delightful tropics. But I do have a couple of regrets. I would have liked to do the sea plane thing (what could have gone wrong, right?).

But even more importantly, I wish I'd ordered the crab legs at that restaurant in San Juan. After all, what would have served Max better than a steaming plate of hot, buttered irony.



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