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NEIGHBORS

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A regional newspaper widely 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: SEARCHING FOR
SANTA, Pages 6 & 7**

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REGIONAL NEWS

Beckwith to present Deathtrap

The Beckwith Theatre Company will present "Deathtrap," a play by Ira Levin on Friday and Saturday, December 3 and 4, 10 and 11 at 7:30 pm, and on Sunday, December 5 and 12, at 2 pm at the Beckwith Theatre, 100 New York Ave. in Dowagiac.

Tickets are. Call 269-782-7653 for reservations)

The performance is sponsored by Deck the Halls, Olympia Books, Wood Fire Trattoria.

Christmas event

The First United Methodist Church of Dowagiac will hold a Christmas decor and cookie walk (all cookies/candies are homemade) on Saturday, December 11 from 9 am to 4 pm at the church, 26 N. Lowe St. Dowagiac.

For more information call 782-8551.

Federal employees to meet

The Southwest Michigan Chapter 572 of the National Association of Retired Federal Employees will hold their Holiday lunch on Tuesday, Dec. 7 at 1 pm at 2894 Sandra Terrace in St. Joseph.

Current and retired federal employees, spouses and friends are welcome - you do not need to be a member to attend. Main dish will be provided-come & enjoy food and fellowship. Current Health Dept. guidelines for Covid-19 will be followed.

RSVP to 428 0667 or e mail rdpeter-son43@yahoo.com.

In case of poor weather conditions, call Mon. or Tues. to confirm event.

The next meeting will be March 22, 2022.

For info, call Jean Rowe at 782 2769 or email jeanrowe70@comcast.net

URSCC collection to WMU

The Underground Railroad Society of Cass County, MI is proud to announce that the URSCC Collection has been accepted by Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections Library in Kalamazoo.

This ensures that the story of the Underground Railroad in Cass County, and the research of historians that confirmed this story, is safeguarded for posterity, and available to future generations to study. URSCC began collecting documents from many sources as soon as they were formed in 2009. In 2012-2013, Mary Anne Bonine did primary research on the local families on the 1840, 50, and 60 census that participated in some way in the Underground Railroad. From 2014-2016, four additional local historians donated their UGRR and family research to URSCC--Barbara Wood Cook, Tom Kovalak, Estella Sanders Lawson, and Veta Smith Tucker. Sandra Mose Urser, another local historian, predates URSCC, and her research is housed at Grand Valley State.

From 2015-2018, the documents were organized, digitized and copied by URSCC members, and the Bonine House UGRR Research Library was formed, accessed upstairs in the Bonine House, and on the URSCC website www.urscc.org The library contains the work of these historians, as well as much more. The 1847 Kentucky Slave Raid, Ramptown, the 102nd USCT, the story of Calvin Township, UGRR in the region, Canada and Indiana and more are well

documented. URSCC is restoring the Bonine House, the Bonine Carriage House, and the Bogue House. They are open for tours June through October.

Send a singing telegram

Quartets from the Lighthouse Chorus, a local, non-profit a Cappella chorus, will deliver Singing Christmas Telegrams throughout Michiana on Tuesday, December 14.

For \$40, a Chorus quartet will deliver two holiday songs, a small box of chocolates and a personalized card. Orders may be placed by calling the Singing Christmas Telegram Hotline at 471-4559 or sending an email to lighthousechorus@lighthousechorus.org. A limited number of bookings are available, so anyone interested should book early to ensure delivery.

The Lighthouse Chorus gathers weekly to share their love of singing. They perform primarily in the four-part harmony of the barbershop style, and their repertoire includes everything from Broadway to gospel to doo wop. The group is always looking for new members and welcomes any male to visit practice on Thursday evenings at 7 pm at the Trinity Episcopal Church on S. 4th Street in Niles. More information on the Chorus is available at www.lighthousechorus.org.

Cass County Parks gets grant

After more than ten years, accumulated fallen trees and other natural debris had made the Dowagiac River waterway impassable from Arthur Dodd Memorial Park to Pucker Street. Thanks to a \$4,050.00 grant from the Gateway

Foundation, kayakers, canoers and fishermen are now able to enjoy this stretch of river from Dodd Park to Pucker Street. This stretch of river is a technical section of the river with many curves that require advanced maneuvering skills. Safety precautions such as wearing life jackets should be followed as you traverse this beautiful stretch of river.

The Michigan Gateway Community Foundation is a nonprofit Michigan corporation organized with a vision to create a strong, vibrant, caring community. Serving southern Berrien County and all of Cass County, the Foundation's mission statement is "Fostering a community of philanthropy, for good, forever."

County parks pass on sale

The Cass County Parks Department is offering an annual pass at a special rate of \$12 for in-county residents (\$22 out-of-county). The pass is good for entry to T.K. Lawless Park, Russ Forest, or the Arthur Dodd Memorial Park.

And with the pass you can visit Winter Nights fun January 22, 29, February 5 and 12, and the staff is now booking 2022 After-Hours Tubing Parties.

Daily entry to the parks is \$2 per resident vehicle (\$3 out-of-county), so for the price of 6 visits, you can visit for the entire year. The price of passes will return to the normal price of \$15 for in-county and \$25 out-of-county) after the holidays.

To take advantage of this offer, call 445-4456 or stop by the Cass County Parks and Recreation Department at 120 North Broadway, Suite 200, Cassopolis, Michigan 49031.

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EXCEPTIONAL FINANCING OFFERS AVAILABLE



REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

December 2-5 - **Barn Swallow Theatre presents Annie**, 7:30 pm (2 pm on Dec. 5)

December 3,4,5, 10,11, 12 - **Beckwith Theatre presents Deathtrap**, 7:30 pm on Fridays and Saturdays, 2 pm on Sundays, 782-7653

December 7 - **Southwest Chapter 572 National Assoc; of Retired Federal Employees holiday lunch**, 1 pm, 2894 Sandra Terrace, St. Joseph, 482-0667

December 11. **First United Methodist Church of Dowagiac Christmas decor and cookie walk**, 8 am - 4 pm, 9 am - 4 pm, 782-8551

Cass District Library This month's programs

All Month - Holiday Scavenger Hunt, Howard Branch - See what winter-themed items are hiding in the Howard Branch! Stop by all month to get a scavenger hunt sheet to begin your search.

All Month - Deck the Halls, Edwardsburg Branch - Help us decorate for the holidays by dropping in to make an ornament to deck out our Christmas tree. Ornaments can be picked up after the holidays.

December 1 - 6 pm, **Birch Holiday Centerpiece*** Main Branch - Join us for an evening of crafting to create a birch holiday centerpiece with faux greenery and embellishments. Cost is \$10 per person and all materials are included. Space is limited and registration is required. Call Stephanie at 749-1384 or stop by any branch to register.

December 2 - 1 and 3 pm, **"The Most Dangerous Man Alive: 1929"**, Local History Branch, Join author Chriss Lyon for a presentation of "The Most Dangerous Man Alive: 1929". Learn about the relatively unknown gang-

ster who killed St. Joseph Police Officer Charles Skelly in 1929, and who was found in possession of the two Thompson submachine guns connected to the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. The program also focuses on a few of Capone's henchmen who lived in Berrien and LaPorte Counties. Space is limited and registration is required for this program. Visit any branch or call 574-314-6454 to register.

December 8 - 12 - 4 pm, **STEAM Kit Wonderland**, Edwardsburg Branch - Need some ideas for gifts this year? Stop in the Edwardsburg Branch to explore our Steam Kit Wonderland! Kits will be out for everyone to play and explore.

December 8 - 1 pm, **Adult Craft Club***, Main Branch - Join us at the Main Branch for a monthly craft club! Space is limited and registration is required. Supplies will be provided. Contact Stephanie at 749-1384 for more information and to register.

December 8: Main Branch (House) - 6 pm, December 13: Mason/Union Branch (Village) - 6 pm, December 15: Edwardsburg Branch (Village) - 2:30 pm, December 22: Howard Branch (Train) - 1 pm, **Build Your Own Gingerbread Workshop*** - Join us at each location to make a gingerbread house, village or train! Cost is \$5 per gingerbread kit, registration is required. Call 574-314-6454 or visit any branch to register.

December 11 - 11 am, **Prep and Landing Interactive Movie**, Edwardsburg Branch - Do you have the skills to prep houses for Santa's yearly visit? Find out at the Edwardsburg Branch as we watch the movie and practice our elite spy moves.

December 14 - 5:30 pm, **The Mitchells vs. the Machines Movie Night**, Main Branch - Join us for fresh popcorn and a showing of Free Birds. All ages are welcome.

December 16 - 10 am and 6 pm, **More Than a Book**

Club, Edwardsburg Branch - Join us as we discuss Firefly Lane by Kristin Hannah. Best Friends, Kate and Tully's story spans three decades as they weather the storms of friendship, love, jealousy and betrayal.

December 16 - All Day, **Wood Slice Ornaments**, Howard Branch - Customize a wood slice ornament with paint and wood burning tool at the Howard Branch. All supplies will be provided.

December 20 - 1 - 3 pm, **Afternoon with Santa** - Meet Santa at the Main Branch for pictures and holiday crafts. This event is free and all ages are welcome.

December 27 - 1 pm, **Winter Break Boredom Busters: Wii Gaming**, Main Branch - Join us at the Main Branch for an afternoon of Wii gaming.

December 28 - 1 pm, **Winter Break Boredom Busters: Stuffed Animal Sleepover**, Main Branch - Bring your stuffed animal to the library for a sleepover! Pictures of the sleepover will be shared so participants can see what happens at the library after dark.

December 29 and 30 - All Day, **New Year's Eve Family Fun Pack**, Edwardsburg Branch - Families with children ages 2-10 are invited to pick up a New Year's Eve Family Fun Pack on December 29 and 30 while supplies last. Pack will include noise makers, crafts and fun recipes for New Year's Eve.

Take and Make Kits
Kits are available while supplies last.

- Starting December 1: Matchbox Mouse Ornament - Mason/Union Branch
- Week of December 13: Mouse Candy Cane Craft - Howard Branch
- Week of December 20: Snowflake Ornament - Howard Branch
- Week of December 27: Felt Finger Puppets - Howard Branch

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LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

My Grinch Christmas Tree, 2020

by **Jane Boudreau**

I have a little Christmas tale for this month's column. It's a departure from my usual babble about gardens, cleaning and decorating (Gee, why do you even read this every month?). I'm feeling really grateful in a lot of ways that this Christmas will be vastly different from last year. And I pray we never again have to depart from tradition and celebrating with family, friends, and strangers- the reason for the season. It's not going to be a long column because of course, my OCD self is busy shopping, wrapping, hanging garland, and making treats with the grands (number seven is going to be a Christmas baby, due December 18).

'Twas three weeks before Christmas and as a creature of habit, I was on my quest for the perfect fresh tree. For the past thirty-five years I've gone to the same garden nursery in early December for said tree. I go alone as my husband and I have rarely agreed on the same tree, and in the past would usually get into a heated argument while in comparison, innocent families walked around in a hot chocolate, candy cane induced coma, with their rosy cheeked children picking out gargantuan trees. But I digress. In spite of choosing the tree every year for thirty-five years to place in the living room of the house we have lived in for thirty-five years, it's never quite right. Too large, usually. Our typical city home has small boxy rooms and nine foot ceilings, and even though I'm aware of my own measly height of 5'2, I believe the tree is perfect if I can tilt my head almost completely backward to look up at my imaginary ceiling while outdoors at the nursery. Even after it's tied to the roof of my SUV, I'm certain that if I crawled up next to it, again I'd know how perfect it is. Until ... it's dragged into the house and fourteen inches need to be sawed off the top, leaving it fat from top to bottom.

Maybe it's taken a lot of years (decades) for me to realize I need to find a tree no taller than myself, and forget all the hemming and hawing about it being perfectly shaped and round. So last year I was wandering around the nursery on a cold night, the Christmas music was playing through the speakers, and it had just started to snow. Well, it all sounds a little too magical because I was actually freezing my a** off and I just wanted to go home, sit under a huge throw with a glass of red wine, and watch a Hallmark movie. It was clear we weren't having anyone over to even see my Christmas decor (the pandemic really had no mercy in 2020 and it was never more evident than during the holidays). And then I turned a corner and there I saw **The Tree**. Yes!! **The Tree**! It was thin, scraggly, just downright ugly, and I knew it was mine. I was going to liberate myself from my quest for perfection, and take this Frasier fir home like it was a lost puppy. I mean- it was in the cards. For me, this poor tree represented all of us who were apart from family, near and far. The people who had gone to battle with the virus, and those who succumbed to it, my father in law included. And I was going to decorate it with the brightest of lights and tons of shiny ornaments, each twinkle for all of the medical workers who saw more devastation in a day than some do in their careers, the essential workers that risked their health everyday to make sure we had everything we needed to get from day to day while quarantined, and the



many who lost their paychecks or businesses ... all over the world. And the star on top? That was for dear Papa in heaven. So, this was my tree in the above photo. Perfect in every way.

I have a more than usual amount of recipes this month because we celebrate so much during the holidays. Ironically, but with good intentions, they are all basically appetizers with the exception of one cocktail. But they go hand in hand, right? And quite literally! I did this because we all have our tried and true holiday recipes from the main dish to the sides. I think it's fun to search out new apps to try, as well as desserts, but many guests bring desserts, so I tend to avoid baking which I really can't do-I'm a failure in that department, and make a lot of not so subtle suggestion (or demand) to bring a dessert. And appetizers? As my sister in law, Karen says, it's her favorite food group.



Roasted cinnamon sugar glazed nuts

I make candies nuts every Christmas. They are perfect in small bowls scattered here and there during cocktail time at

holiday parties, and I also make gift boxes for family and friends with all sorts of sweets, and little bags of candied nuts are always a big hit. You can find all sorts of nuts at a good price at Sam's Club and Costco.

Ingredients:

1 egg white
1 t vanilla extract
3 c nuts such as cashews, pecans, walnuts, almonds...
1/2 c brown sugar
2 t ground cinnamon

Directions:

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Spray a baking pan with cooking spray. In a medium size bowl, whisk the egg white and vanilla until frothy. Add the nuts and toss until coated.

In a small bowl mix together the brown sugar and cinnamon. Add to the nut mixture and toss well. Spread evenly on the baking sheet.

Bake for 50-60 minutes, stirring and tossing every 15 minutes. Cool and store in an airtight container.

Obviously I double and triple the ingredients as I gift them. Make some people happy and do the same!



Creamy cheese spread with warm candies, bacon & dates
This is a winner of an appetizer.

Doesn't it look delicious? I can't take credit for the photo and it doesn't have to look this purdy, but the flavors are insane. And dates are in season! With no further ado:

Ingredients:

6-8 slices bacon, chopped
2 T chopped fresh rosemary*
1 t brown sugar
1/3 c plus 1 t honey
1/2 t cayenne pepper--more or less as your preference
12 plump dates, pitted and torn
1 10 oz. log creamy goat cheese
4 oz. cream cheese, room temperature
2 T olive oil
sea salt

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

On the baking sheet toss together the bacon, 1 T rosemary, the brown sugar, 1 t honey, and the cayenne. Arrange in an even layer. Scatter the torn dates around. Bake until the bacon is crisping, about 8-10 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine the goat cheese, cream cheese, olive oil, and a pinch of salt in a food processor and pulse until smooth and creamy. This mixture can be kept in the fridge for up to 3 days. Bring to room temp before serving.

Spoon the cheese mixture into a serving bowl and top with the warm bacon and date. Drizzle over a little of the honey and rosemary. Serve with thin toasted bread rounds or crackers. This serves 8 so you may want to double the recipe.

*You can find fresh rosemary in the produce section of most grocery stores.



Cranberry Cheese Log

This is again a simple but outstanding recipe for a festive party at this time of year. Not much time to make but with all the great flavors. I was inspired by a fellow blogger.

Ingredients:

8 oz. goat cheese (chevre)
1 t ground cinnamon
1 c chopped walnuts, finely crushed
1 t honey
1 t kosher salt
1 c Dried cranberries

Directions:

Cream together the goat cheese and cinnamon. Chill for 15 minutes in the fridge. Stir together the honey with the walnut pieces and salt. Spread out on a

Continued on next page. See:

JANE

BUSINESS & FINANCE

Strange insurance claims during the holidays

By **Charlie Retherford**
Kemner, Iott, Benz Agency

Greetings from the strange and sometimes humorous world of Insurance. This is the lighter side.

Here are some of the stranger claims that have been turned in around the holidays:

- Carpet that needed to be cleaned because Santa left dirt from his boots near the fireplace. As it turns out, the dirt was actually from squirrels who came down the chimney to get the nuts that were part of some of the gifts.
- Santa's sleigh was stolen from a holiday display. It was covered by the policy but how do you put a price on "Santa's Sleigh"?
- Broken TV screens from handsets thrown by accident while playing certain video games. That gives new meaning to "virtual reality".
- A Christmas tree blew off the roof of a car and flew back and broke the windshield of the next vehicle. Keep a safe distance from moving Christmas trees!
- Imagine the mess that would be made by dropping the turkey and spilling the contents of the pan on the floor; not to mention the restlessness of all the hungry relatives.
- Several claims have been filed by homeowners who fell through the attic



ceiling while retrieving Christmas decorations. Most were not badly injured but repairing the ceiling can be a huge pain in the pocket.

- A family visited a safari park during the holidays and one of the "friendly" monkeys grabbed a cell phone from a family member and ran off with it. They were not inclined to follow the monkey to recover the phone. Hopefully, he took some interesting photos!

Some of the above claims would not be covered without specific endorsements. One type of coverage you will want to keep in mind at this time of year is for particular items you give or receive. Jewelry should be scheduled on your policy to get adequate coverage for lost or even stolen items. Without the endorsement, there is a limit to how much coverage you will have and lost jewelry would not be covered by most home policies at all. Guns, furs, art, antiques and collectibles are all examples of what you will need to schedule for proper coverage. That is not a comprehensive list so you will want to check with your agent to see what else you may need to schedule.

As I was researching information for this article, I came across a list of really strange policies that have been issued for SPECIAL coverages under STRANGE circumstances. I thought you might enjoy them too.

- The Alien Abduction. For \$1 a year, one insurance agency offered a mil-

lion dollar payout if you could prove that you experienced a "close encounter of the third kind".

- In 2001, Taco Bell used the return of the Mir Space Station due to fall into the ocean as a publicity stunt. They offered to give everyone in America a taco if the space station hit a 40' by 40' target located in the middle of the ocean painted with the words Free Taco Here. Obviously, had that actually happened, it would have cost the insurance company millions of dollars.
- The scotch whiskey maker, Cutty Sark, offered a large prize to anyone who could provide proof of the Loch Ness Monster. Proof would need to be a monster at least 20 feet long. This was underwritten by Lloyd's of London and as a condition of paying out the million dollars, Lloyd's would claim ownership of the monster.

So, you see? There really is a wacky side to the insurance industry. I learn new things every day and this occupation is never boring. I hope I was able to surprise you or put a smile on your face, even if just for a minute. Please feel free to call us with any questions or concerns you may have about insurance. Our agents will be happy to help.

All of us at Kemner Iott Benz wish you and your family the best of health now and in the New Year. Happy Holidays to All!

LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

JANE

Continued from previous page

sheet of parchment paper. On another sheet of parchment paper, spread out the dried cranberries.

Remove the cheese from the fridge and shape it into a log and roll in the walnut pieces and then the cranberries. Press the cranberries into spaces that didn't pick up. The parchment paper will help make this easier to roll as it mimics sushi and egg roll methods.

After chilling for a minimum of fifteen minutes, serve on a pretty platter with a variety of crackers. Don't you just love the way it looks sliced? This can also be refrigerated in plastic wrap for a day before serving. Enjoy!

Some hosts have the class and good taste to have a signature drink at their parties or gatherings. I don't credit myself with a whole lot of class or good taste, and as a matter of fact I'm pretty good at serving beer in the bottle, and cheap wine in plastic cups. But one year long ago, I did have a signature drink for



our Easter celebration (I must have had a lot of time on my hands). I can't remember said drink but I served it in one of those plastic dispensers with a spigot that you can get at the Dollar Tree. To my credit, it was gone in a flash. In fact I had to keep mixing up more of said signature drink and I ended up overcooking the ham.

Christmas is a little different. I am

really planning on putting my heart and soul into everything to make up for last year's dismal holiday. I found this drink online and I take no credit for the photo or recipe. If you've pretty much had it with cranberries, at least try this. It was delish at a recent party we had. I served it in wine carafes that you can find at Michael's or the like. This was a "help yourself" set up with the garnishes on the side.

Cranberry Thyme Spritz:

- 1/2 c honey
- 2 c fresh cranberries
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme*
- 1 inch fresh ginger, sliced
- 8 oz. vodka
- 4 oz. elderflower liqueur **
- 1/3 c grapefruit juice
- 1 fresh grapefruit, sliced for garnish
- 1/4 c fresh lime juice (about 2-3 lines)
- 4 ginger beers
- Star anise for serving (optional)

Prepare the simple syrup. This can be done up to two days before serving and kept refrigerated. In a heavy medium pot, bring 1/2 c water, the honey, cranberries, thyme and ginger to a boil over high heat. Boil 5 minutes or until

the cranberries begin to burst. Remove from heat and let cool. Remove the thyme and ginger. If desired strain out the cranberries.

In a large pitcher, combine the cranberry syrup, vodka, grapefruit juice, and lime juice. Chill until ready to serve. Add the ginger beer and stir. Garnish each drink with the grapefruit slices and star anise. Serves 8.

*You can find plastic containers of fresh herbs in the produce department of your grocery store. **Elderflower liqueur can be available pretty much anywhere but I actually found mine at Target. If you've ever had an original champagne cocktail, you might be familiar with it.

Sending good wishes for a Merry Christmas to you and yours. I'll see you in March. Many thanks to Sailor Phil for putting up with my late deadlines, Fred for sending me lovely restaurant gift cards, and my sweet friend at Diamond Lake Marina who says I need more recipes.

Jane Boudreau is a longtime blogger and writer who has a home in Chicago and on Diamond Lake, as well as a little place in the mountains of North Carolina. You can contact her at blndy9@yahoo.com



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FIELD TRIP



Field Trip: In search of SANTA

Bigfoot. The Loch Ness Monster. Jimmy Hoffa. Unicorns. Santa Claus. All are illusive; but every year there are unconfirmed sightings, although some people say none of them exist at all ... but every child knows that as the holidays approach, it's not wise to scoff at Santa. So we went in search of Santa this year to see if we could actually find him. Not having the budget to travel to the north pole, we decided we'd look a little closer to home ... we'd heard he had been sighted in the vicinity of Linton's in Elkhart, and since that's a place my beloved spouse delights in visiting as the holidays approach, I took my camera, just in case I got a glimpse of the guy I'm frequently told is my doppelganger. We waded through a lot of decorations (all of which are for sale, of course), spotted about a thousand "fake" Santas that ranged from animals to elves and dwarves,, and the wife oohed and aahed at the holiday clothes, jewelry, purses and such, but not a living, breathing Santa to be found. I guess that just like every other year, we'll just have to wait until Christmas and see if he made it to Cass County. Merry Christmas everyone!



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OUR CHILDREN

Gift ideas for all ages

by **SANDY FLEMING**

Is your house overrun with toys, gizmos, and gadgets? Many families are searching for meaningful gift ideas that won't take up space in the toy box, so that's exactly what we have this month! Ideal gifts are that just right combination of exciting for the recipient, affordable, and maybe even beneficial in some way. Check out these lists for some creative ideas to consider.

For Kids of All Ages

- **Magazine Subscriptions:** Nearly everyone loves getting things in the mail, and kids are no exception (even the big ones)! Magazine subscriptions are one gift that keeps on giving month after month, since the gift can be opened anew each time an issue arrives. To pick a great magazine subscription, think about your child's age and stage, his or her interests, and what will have entertainment or learning value.
- For younger kids (and I do mean younger as in birth through preschool), consider some of the special interest magazines designed for each age group. Highlights has some great offerings for kids up through 12 years or so. You remember Highlights from the dentist's or doctor's waiting rooms when you were a kid- they all had them! But the company also does some outstanding magazines for toddlers, preschoolers, and younger elementary kids with all the great features you remember, just scaled down so younger folks can enjoy them.
- There are a host of nature magazines, too, for kids who are into animals and the out-of-doors. Check out offerings from Ranger Rick and National Geographic if your child has leanings this direction. Got a sports minded youngster? Sports Illustrated has a Junior version designed for elementary readers. Time, Boys Life, Girls Life, and many more are still around, as well.
- **Support for Lessons/Teams/Clubs** or uniform pieces, handbooks, and so forth: Sometimes these extracurricular activities are easier to afford if they come from the holiday budget. If you need to dress up the funding for placement under the Christmas tree, consider designing a gift certificate or a gift card for the items or payments. I've even seen some creative families create a gift from transportation by creating a punch card good for transportation to and from a number of practices/games/meetings/events. Extra activities such as teams, clubs, lessons, and so forth play an important role in your child's development. Not only do they gain new skills and have loads of fun, they also build a host of important life skills. Most activities happen in groups, so kids learn critical social skills. They also get a hefty dose of time management and goal setting as they learn to juggle school assignments and chores with more limited free time. Learning a sense of duty to the group, responsibility to bring needed equipment or supplies, and so much more are also important pieces of learning. Kids learn job skills this way, too, like punctuality, following directions, and accepting criticism when needed.

So even if the finances make it tough to help them do absolutely everything they take an interest in, you can make this investment around the holidays. If it's off season, put that money aside so it's available next spring or whenever the opportunity will come round again. This also teaches kids some important lessons about saving and delayed gratification.

- **Season or Annual Passes:** It seems like nearly every family destination costs money these days, but you can purchase a season or pass to many attractions that will keep on giving long after the holiday is over. Consider your favorite parks, museums, or zoos. Many of these places belong to national organizations that have reciprocal benefits for members. For example, your local zoo pass may get you ½ price admission at the zoo in the state capital or one that you'll be passing on your next trip to see grandma and grandpa. Aquariums, planetariums, and botanical gardens are fair game, as well, depending on everyone's interests. So are season sports tickets, play tickets, concert series tickets, and so forth.
- **Common Game Equipment:** Another fun, thoughtful, and often inexpensive gift idea that is suitable for nearly everyone (from toddlers on up) is things to play games with. Now, I'm not talking about actual games, though those are wonderful ideas in their own right. I'm talking about the things you can use to play lots of different kinds of games. Check out these ideas:
 - **Dominoes:** There's an inexpensive and very versatile game! There are thousands of different domino games that are just right for nearly any age group. They range from simple matching games to games with challenging strategy and complex scoring systems. Plus, dominoes make great building blocks! Long before they can play domino games, kids love to build towers with them. Or there's the game of setting them up on end close together to make a rippling line when you push over the first one in the series. Dominoes hold all kinds of fun possibilities, and are very inexpensive.
 - **Decks of Cards:** You can find card decks with thematic graphics pretty easily. Check gift shops and online if you are looking for something special. But decks of cards are one of the most versatile yet inexpensive gifts you can imagine. If you are on a tight budget, they might be just the ticket. Little kids can play many classic games, such as Old Maid and War. Older kids and teens will like the more complicated games, from Crazy Eights (which is where UNO came from), Rummy, Hearts, Pinochle, Euchre, Poker, and more. Kids can play on their own if you teach them various solitaire games, or in groups of two or three or four or more.
- And don't tell me you don't know any card games. Think back to your childhood, and I bet you'll surprise yourself! Don't forget about Memory, Go Fish, and others I'm sure you'll dredge up. Or if you are desperate, a simple search online will yield a refresher on the rules to these and many more.
- Plus cards can be used for things other than games. How about encour-

aging your child to learn a few simple card tricks? This can be a great pastime! Or build card houses. Or....

- **Gifts for the Very Young**
 - Be sure to check recommended ages and to clear your ideas with the parents if they are going to a child that is not your own!
 - **Purses/Bags/Luggage:** Toddlers and preschoolers adore things that can hold other things, and the more pockets and compartments, the better. Consider getting your young child a child-sized duffel bag, backpack, or suitcase. It can be just for fun, or it can serve important purpose when your kid goes on those first sleepovers or adventures to Grandma's house.
 - **The Gift of Color:** Nearly all youngsters love simple craft supplies. It doesn't need to be fancy- a ream of white or colored paper, crayons or washable markers, colored glue, construction paper, children's scissors, stickers, googly eyes, pipe cleaners, and all the other denizens of the craft closet are fair game. And don't forget the play dough!
 - **Music, Music, Music:** Find out what format the family likes to use for their listening pleasure and then grab some appropriate music for each child on your list. Get the fun stuff, and the familiar movie tunes, but don't forget to introduce them to other genres like classical and ethnic music, too.
 - **Dress Up Items:** Most very young children love to play pretend, and any dress up items will be well-worth the investment. You can hit the local thrift store and find some great things for bargain prices. Look for things with long ribbons and streamers, furry things, brightly colored things, and grown up clothing that will help kids fantasize about adult life.
 - **Simple Blocks and Builders:** Before they can even walk, little ones love to stack and build things. Simple blocks, especially with fun shapes, are always a welcome gift. There are soft blocks for the wee little ones, and simple wooden blocks or larger sized Lego-type toys.
- Gifts for the Elementary Aged Crowd**
 - **Sleeping Bags:** This is prime sleepover age! It's also the age of Girl Scouting and Boy Scouting expeditions and other overnight outings. Kids love having their very own sleeping bags! Be sure to invest in the right bag for your child's needs, though. Slumber bags are designed for indoor use. They usually have bright colored outer shells and often have popular designs and characters. Outdoor bags will be a bit more pricey, but are necessary if your child will be using it for sleep-away camp or camping outdoors. They are usually colored in earth tones and solid colors. Look for a bag that has a temperature rating if your child will be camping – you don't want anyone to get cold!
 - **Simple Magic Tricks:** Ask most adult magicians when they got started on their hobby (or even their career) and you'll find they discovered magic in their elementary years. By this age, kids can usually read and follow directions fairly well, and have the manual coordination to do the tricks. Magic can be a social lubricant, a baby-sitter's friend, or even a hobby or career.

- **Board Games:** Elementary age is a wonderful age for classic board games, like Monopoly, Life, Cootie, and even Rack-O, Risk, and Apples to Apples. There are literally thousands of choices. When you choose a game for your youngster, think about the circumstances when they will play: will there be hours and hours or just a few minutes? Will there be lots of kids around, or will they be playing with a parent? Is there room to set up a larger game, or do you need a small, table-top or even travel size?
- **Science and Craft Kits:** The elementary years are a great time to learn, and to pursue things that might eventually become hobbies. If the child on your list has an interest (or might develop an interest) in something like this, a kit can be just the right introduction.
- Gift Ideas for Tweens and Teens**
 - **Duffie Bags:** Middle and high schoolers are on the go constantly, and they'll need something to haul their sports gear or other important items. Most would love a new bag! Consider grabbing one decorated with their favorite team's logo.
 - **Go Digital:** Consider grabbing your teen's favorite paid or subscription app to brighten their holiday. Games, music, audio books- they're all fair game!
 - **Personal Care Items:** Whether it's make up, nail polish, or hair gel, it all gets pricey on a teen's budget. Put together a whole basket of goodies for your teen to help him or her feel the best for important days.
 - **Gift Cards for Outings:** Movie gift cards, restaurant gift cards, entertainment center gift cards, even gas station gift cards if your teen is driving. All will be welcome ways to stretch their entertainment dollars.
 - **Party Games:** Is your child an entertainer at heart? Help him or her along by adding to the collection of party games. There are countless options for young adults available, mostly hilarious or challenging. These are great for parties and sleepovers.
 - **Pocket and Travel Games:** Many popular games have travel or pocket versions. Snap up a few of these and help your teen occupy himself or herself during long waits or on breaks.
 - **Batteries, extra charge cords, ear buds:** It sounds mundane but these things get used up, wear out, or just plain get lost. Having spares around is always a great and much appreciated idea.
- And remember, the very best gift you can give your kids at absolutely any age is your time and attention. Make sure you spread that liberally throughout the year- cook together, go on outings, do projects, take short trips, go shopping, whatever suits everyone's mood and budget. You'll not only be helping your kid have a good time, but you'll also be building skills and making memories to last a lifetime.

Sandy Fleming is a private tutor and writer living in Edwardsburg. Stop by her website at <http://sandyflemingonline.com> for more information.

HISTORIC POSTCARDS

Historic postcards depict rich scenes of area's past

In this issue of Neighbors, Jerdon Real Estate of Dowagiac, owned by Floyd Jerdon and his son Tom, has provided antique postcards of a few of the many lakes in our area.

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

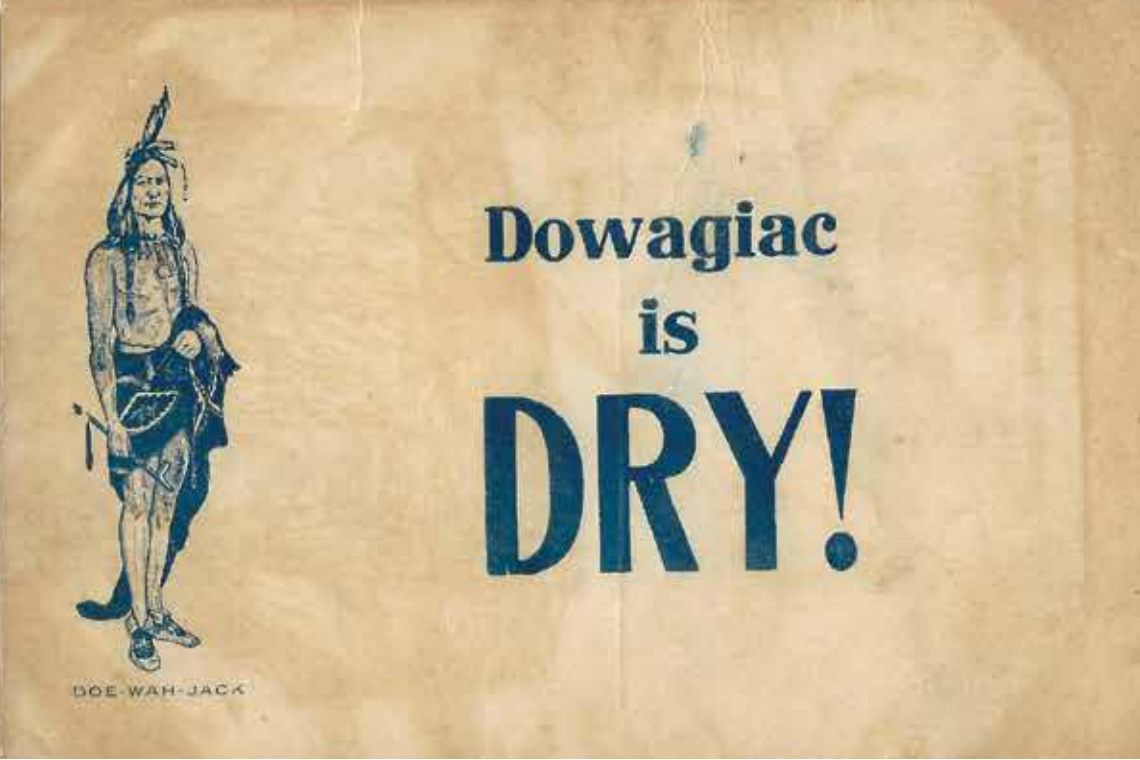
Jerdon has recently used many of his postcards featuring the Sister Lakes area in a book written by RL Rasmussen. The book, which retails for \$19.99, is in its second printing by the

publisher, Arcadia Publishing.

Among other places, the book may be purchased at the Jerdon Real Estate office on M-62 West, and at Whistlestop Gifts, which is operated by the Dowagiac Chamber of Commerce.

For more information or to get a copy of Jerdon's book, visit the website: www.arcadia-publishing.com

In this edition of Neighbors we have selected postcards showing images of various places around Cass County. 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

Geese, hawks and bluebirds

*Provided by Cass District Library
Local History branch*

The most abundant waterfowl species in Michigan is the Canada goose, which in recent decades has become so numerous, it has become a nuisance in many communities.

Greg Myrkle of Bangor photographed a flock of Canada geese while at Portman Nature Preserve near Mattawan on November 6. These individuals had likely found refuge here while migrating south for the winter.

Although tens of thousands of south-bound Canada geese pass through Southwest Michigan to the Southeastern US for the winter, thousands stop and stay the entire winter locally. There is enough waste grain among fields and grass on which the geese feed upon to support geese through the cold months. Geese also have access to water sources that usually remain unfrozen through most of the winter such as the St. Joseph River.

The peak of the Canada goose migration in Southwest Michigan occurs in mid to late November, when several different subspecies appear. Of the subspecies of Canada goose, the only one present in the Great Lakes Region during the breeding season is the giant race, which has a five-foot wingspan. During fall and spring migrations and the winter months additional subspecies of Canada goose are present locally including the lesser Canada goose, and the Richardson's subspecies. Both of those subspecies nest in north-central Canada and generally over-winter southwest of our region.

The largest winter flocks of Canada goose in Michigan typically gather at the Todd Farm Unit of the Allegan State Game Area, the Muskegon Wastewater System, the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge in Saginaw County, and the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary in Kalamazoo County.

The largest winter concentrations of Canada geese in Berrien County are typically on Paw Paw Lake in Coloma and Watervliet Townships, and Lake Chapin in Oronoko and Berrien Townships.

A sharp-shinned hawk was seen by Pat and Bob Conrad at their backyard bird feeding station on October 5. The sharp-shinned hawk is closely related to the Cooper's hawk, both belong to the genus accipiter and are adapted to flying through wooded areas.

The sharp-shinned hawk, like the Cooper's hawk, may be seen perched near



Top photo: Canada geese, November 2021 at Portman Preserve near Mattawan, Van Buren County, by Greg Myrkle of Bangor.

Above right: Sharp-shinned hawk on October 5 at the feeding station of Pat and Bob Conrad, Lincoln Township. Photo by Pat Conrad.

Above left: Male eastern bluebird on October 15 at Warren Dunes State Park by Brad Anderson. This bird has a few white feathers around its face, etc that upon first glance appear to be a dusting of snow.

backyard bird feeders in hopes of picking off an unsuspecting songbird for its next meal.

Brad Anderson found a male eastern bluebird with some white albino feathers on October 15 at Warren Dunes State Park.

At first glance the bluebird looks as though snowflakes have fallen upon it, but upon closer inspection they appear to be white feathers.

Eastern bluebirds depart the Upper Peninsula and northern half of the Lower Peninsula for the winter months, but are

present throughout the year over the southern half of the Lower Peninsula. Bluebirds that stay the winter will feed on insects, berries and will come to yards if offered mealworms.

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LOCAL HISTORY

Newton Woods schoolhouse in the late 1800s

Provided by **Jonathan Wuepper**,
Branch Manager of the Cass District Library
jwuepper@cass.lib.mi.us

For the December issue, we again feature a one-room schoolhouse, this time from Volinia Township. Once again, I turn to the late Kenneth Hartman's work: "Cass County One Room Schools" for much of the information.

According to Hartman, the Newton Woods School, or simply the Newton School, served District Number 4 in Volinia Township, located in section 30 on the Marcellus Highway, 200 feet west of Decatur Road.

It is so named "Newton School" because the land surrounding this school was owned by pioneer George Newton and he very likely donated the land to the township for such purpose.

Our earliest plat map of Cass County is from 1860 and it indeed shows a schoolhouse on section 30, although it is unknown if it is the same building that appears in the accompanying photos. Subsequent atlases of 1873, 1896, and 1914 show a schoolhouse on section 30.

Hartman was apparently well aware of the two photographs of the Newton School from the Cass District Library's collections, which accompany this article. Hartman states: "A [circa] 1880 picture of the Newton [school]house shows 9 girls and 22 boys and a small pine tree at the N.W. corner, a shingled roof, chimney at the north end and an excellent bell tower on the south end, board and batten siding with 2 entrance doors."

"Another picture [circa 1890s] at the Newton [school]house shows as tall as the metal roof. The chimney is the same but the bell is exposed. 8 girls and 14 boys."

The last class was taught at the Newton Woods School during the 1953-1954 school year, and then it was closed as District Number 4 was consolidated into the Dowagiac school system.

When Ken Hartman compiled his schoolhouse book in 2001, he wrote: "Nothing remains of the building except the fieldstone foundation and 6 steps on the south side. The cement blocks under the steps indicate that they were added well after the original building was put up. The north side of the remains has 3 concrete steps and a pipe railing."



Above: Newton Woods School, District Number 4, Volinia Twp. Reportedly taken circa 1880s, winter scene.

Right: Newton Woods School, District Number 4, Volinia Twp. taken circa 1890s. Tree is larger in this photo than in the winter scene. Note metal roof. The building no longer standing. Photos courtesy Cass District Library/Local History Branch.



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THE LAST WORD

by Phil Vitale
aka sailorphil

Giving a gift we hope we never see the kids use



ver the years our two daughters, Erica and Sanya, have been a constant source of joy in my life. I could not now, and do not want to ever imagine life without them. I am as proud as any parent has ever been. There has not been a second of their lives when I did not love them with all of my being.

Having said that, in addition to the love and pride they have given to me, I must admit that my daughters have also been a relatively constant source of surprise, amusement, and often bemusement as well.

Take for example the time my older daughter, Erica, came running up to me with a woman's compact case, the kind of case that older women used to carry rouge in. Clutching it tightly in her little hand she held it out to me as I got out of the car one day, her smile beaming like a bright star in the night sky.

"Look what I found, dad," she beamed.

Then she carefully opened the case, her tiny fingers holding it like it was an egg ... and about a hundred tiny, black pill bugs erupted from the case, swarming all over her hand as she scrambled to put them all back without smashing them.

When I asked her what she intended to do with the bugs, she smiled and blurted, "show and tell."

Her teacher was not amused.

Or the time when she was at her grandma's house (my mom), and while grandma was working in the kitchen, Erica decided to Vaseline my parent's dog, covering it with a thick coat of the gooey, oily gel that took hours of soaping and scrubbing to get out of it's fur.

Needless to say, the dog was not amused, either.

And then there's daughter Sanya, who is even less conservative and less inhibited than her older sibling.

Always an independent sort, Sanya as a youngster demanded to choose her own clothes for school (I could write a novel on the screaming hissy-fit fight she and her mother had in the aisle of a K-Mart one year during our annual back-to-school clothes-shopping trip one year). And on top of that, Sanya also demanded and

delighted in dressing herself for school every morning.

Now most parents would be ok with that, thinking that it was helping her to develop her sense of style and individuality, but Sanya's choices then (and to some degree to this day) sometimes weren't what a parent might hope for, and she frequently went to school proudly sporting intentionally mismatched socks and color combinations that made most people's teeth itch.

Although Sanya genuinely enjoyed the attention her attire attracted, more than once her mother and I were asked to meet with her teachers to discuss her attire (not to mention her attitude and non-conformity).

And then there was the year in high school when Sanya and one of her BFFs at the time decided they'd cut their own hair ... and shaved half of each of their heads ... completely baby-butt bald.

Well, it eventually grew back, but I will admit that as non-judgmental as I tried to be, I was not terribly amused with that one either.

And I remember a time when Sanya was about five years old. She became enamored with evangelical television programming, I'm not sure what attracted her to that channel, it might have been the theatrics and shouting, but whatever it was we decided it was ok to let her watch ... it was, after all, better than the mainstream TV programming of the mid 1970s.

Anyway, one morning we were waiting for her grandma to pick the kids up (grandma usually babysat while I attended college classes and worked). I'd been out late the night before and was suffering from a bout of overindulgence, so I was reclined on the sofa while we waited. Sanya, in all childlike innocence, asked if I wasn't feeling well. Not wanting to admit my self-induced malaise, I simply told her that I was sick.

The next thing I knew my dear, sweet daughter shouted at the top of her lungs "YOWZAH," and planted a sharp right cross to the middle of my forehead.

To this day I swear that if I could have gotten up I was tempted to consider some righteous child abuse.

I was neither cured nor amused to say the least ...

As the holidays approach every year, I can't help but remember some of the holiday gift requests we were

maneuvered into indulging for our kids. Some were mostly harmless (except for the wasted money during the years when they eschewed the gifts and amused themselves with the bows, ribbons and boxes instead).

Barbies. Cabbage Patch Kids. Legos. Nerf balls. Skateboards. Pet rocks. Etch-a-Sketch. Play Doh. Easy Bake ovens. Anything Star Wars. All used for a day (or a week) and quickly forgotten and stored or littering the floors of their rooms. I shudder to think what the value of any of those things might be in today's world if we'd had the foresight to save them instead of pitching them at the annual clean-your-room marathon the next fall.

Well, my daughters are adults now, and they are pretty good at running interference between their children and us, guiding us in gift selection that are designed to be most appreciated (certificates to attend summer camp have been very popular for the youngsters, clothes for the oldest). But for the past few years both daughters have been somewhat close-mouthed with their own wish lists.

This year however they both piped up last May with the same request, one that we still feel a bit odd about having indulged as a holiday gift.

You see, back in May, as I was facing a pretty serious surgery, I decided that even though I'm in pretty good health, I'm approaching 70 years of age and have lived through two strokes. I'm not going to live forever ... so as I obsessed on my mortality, I decided it was time to get my ducks in a row. I reviewed my will and then contacted my neighbor (who owns several funeral homes) who helped me make make arrangements for my cremation when I die (when and if it happens).

When it was done, I told my daughters, since they will probably be the ones tasked with executing my wishes. And both girls immediately asked if we'd buy them a cremations for Christmas this year.

Did I mention surprise, amusement, and bemusement That was an understatement. I have to admit, this is the first Christmas gift I've ever given anyone that I truly hope they never get a chance to use, at least not in my lifetime. Oh well, at least I didn't have to go to a mall this year. Merry Christmas everyone!



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