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Joyful Noise

When Matt Nelson is at the podium, bordered by vocalists and musicians eager to delight audiences, his enthusiasm is irresistible.

He stands at attention, a smile curled across his face. Then, with a wave of his hand, the magic begins and he is a flurry of motion. There is a pull, if you will, that drives the performers, a determination to deliver memorable music.

Nelson's philosophy, that notes are *only* notes when performed with zero emotion, is clearly embraced by those with whom he surrounds himself.

"Anyone can get up there who has a decent voice or plays an instrument," he says, "but that doesn't mean anything if they don't put some feeling, some emotion, into the music."

Nelson's latest endeavor is cause for celebration. Having guided LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra's Children's Chorus for years, he decided to branch out on his own 18 months ago, creating The Singing Co. of LaPorte County. The non-profit group extended his passion for working with children, and now, an adult chorus is about to make its debut.

Seventy voices in the children's chorus, 50 voices in the adult group and the 40-piece Singing Company Symphony Orchestra will present "It's Christmas," a free holiday concert at 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 14, at The Holdcraft Performing Arts Center, 1200 Spring St. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

"We felt this was the right way to introduce them to the community," Nelson says of the adult chorus, "to incorporate them into the Christmas concert.

The program features Christmas classics such as "Carol of the Bells" and "Feliz Navidad," and selections from Disney's "Frozen." The most ambitious undertaking is Indiana native Craig Courtney's 11-minute reimagining of "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The piece begins with a chant, then embarks on a parody-like journey through composers such as Mozart and Strauss, with the 12th day set to Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever."



Matt Nelson, musical director of The Singing Co. of LaPorte County, is photographed by The Beacher's Paul Kemiel during a rehearsal at Bethany Lutheran Church in LaPorte.



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Intimidating? Not for Nelson. He's game for challenges, with an accomplished background to prove it. In the beginning, supportive parents encouraged his desire to take lessons in voice and piano.

"They were the initial captains of this ship," Nelson says, laughing. "They supported me then, and they have supported me ever since."

Another encouraging presence was Russell Wagoner, his voice and piano instructor, and choir teacher, at LaPorte High School. Wagoner cultivated in him an approach to music that, now as an adult, he emphasizes to the next generation of talent.

"It's the emotion, the interpretation, that you put into music that's most important," he said. "The audience must be able to hear and feel the music you are performing."

After high school, Nelson studied music education and piano performance at Ball State Univer-

sity, Muncie, followed by additional studies in the church music and liturgy program at St. Joseph College, Rensselaer. Over the years, he's served as choir director for First Christian Church of LaPorte and Agape Christian Church, played for area worship services and served as a worship leader and church deacon at Agape. As education director at LaPorte's Bethany Lutheran Church, he redesigned the Sunday school program to take on the format of youth worship.

It was through his role as director of music ministries and education at LaPorte's St. John's Lutheran Church and School that he crossed paths with Susan Rosselli, who has been his accompanist since Day 1 of LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra's Children's Chorus.

That opportunity emerged through Phil Bauman who, then the LCSO maestro, wanted to feature a children's chorus in the annual Holiday at the Pops concert. That effort 12 years ago, Nelson says, drew 140 children, prompting symphony officials to invite



Matt Nelson conducts the children's chorus during rehearsal at Bethany Lutheran Church.

him to direct a youth program.

Open to children in second through eighth grade, the choir attracted youth from across the county, including LaPorte, Michigan City, Westville, Rolling Prairie, Hanna and Union Mills. Some had no formal training, others took private lessons. Nelson's main objective was to instill a love of music in each child through two concerts: one in the spring, the second at Christmas.

The experience, Nelson says, humbled him, specifically "the way the kids react to music, and how they take joy in it regardless of what kind of music it is. I love to watch the kids who come in shy, maybe even with a little self-confidence issues, but by the end of the season, their confidence is through the roof."

When the chorus began, musical accompaniment was by Rosselli at the piano. She's still a vital presence, but now, the children also are accompanied by an orchestra, a fair share of the performers hailing from LCSO.



Madison Gresham (back row, second from right) sings with the children's chorus during rehearsal. Accompanist Susan Rosselli is visible at the far right.

"A majority of kids who like to sing likely never get to sing with an orchestra," Nelson says, "which is why we wanted to provide it."

By offering such opportunities, Nelson cultivates a devoted talent pool.

Take, for instance, Michigan City's Madison Gresham, a Barker Middle School seventh-grader. Her favorite movie as a young girl was the 1999 adaptation of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," inspiring her to take voice lessons in second grade. Over the years, she has performed in shows through Young People's Theatre Co., Footlight Players and Mainstreet Theatre. This past October, she joined Nelson and other youth to appear as the children's choir in "Joseph" at LaPorte Little Theatre Club.

Gresham officially joined The Singing Co in 2017. When the subject of Nelson arises, she gushes with praise.

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Joyful Noise Continued from Page 3

"He is incredible," the 13-year-old says. "He knows the right way to say things so everyone understands them. And it's actual instruction so you feel like you learn from it.



Michigan City's Madison Gresham, a Barker Middle School seventh-grader, joined the choir last year. She has been taking voice lessons since second grade.

"There is music for everyone. If you're just looking to have fun, you don't have to do anything big. Or, you can try out for solos, and he is really good at working with people who have solos."

Rehearsals are playful, but firm, with Gresham stressing that Nelson knows the precise moment to lighten the mood.

"He is really funny whenever a kid is not smiling," she says,

laughing. "He makes this weird, creepy face, and it is so hard not to laugh."

That playful, yet collected approach easily adapted to working with older individuals. Nelson says he was approached about starting an adult choir for a number of years. Branching off on his own through The Singing Co. afforded the freedom to do so. The response, he says, was "phenomenal" — 50 adults signed up during open registration.

"When I had that first rehearsal with them," Nelson says, "they were sight-reading (music) I knew was not easy to sight-read. I was blown away by them."

Equally impressed was one of The Singing Co.'s biggest cheerleaders: board president Danielle Lavin-Loucks.

"I didn't realize there were so many amazing voices out there,

The children's chorus features children from throughout LaPorte County.

or the fact that there was so much interest," she says. "The first time I heard them in a warmup song, I had chills."

Lavin-Loucks' daughter, Zoey, joined the LCSO



Children's Chorus in second grade. Now 14 and a LaPorte High School freshman, she'd aged out of the younger group, but wanted to continue working with Nelson. The adult chorus affords her that opportunity.

And, The Singing Co. has become a family affair for Lavin-Loucks. Her brother-in-law, Nate, is the board vice president. Her husband, Ryan, sings with the adult choir, and her son, Teddy, performs with the children's group.

Lavin-Loucks hopes the Dec. 14 concert at The Holdcraft Performing Arts Center expands community interest in The Singing Co. She has nothing but admiration for what it achieves, and for the

> profound impact Nelson has had on her daughter.

"He's such a positive person, and has been such a positive influence in her life," she said. "He's also given her so many opportunities perform, and to become a better singer. It helped her confidence to be on stage, in front of hundreds of people, and not feel intimidated.

"That has been

just amazing."

(Visit www.singingco.com or email thesingingco@gmail.com for more info, or details on how to get involved, with The Singing Co. of LaPorte County.)



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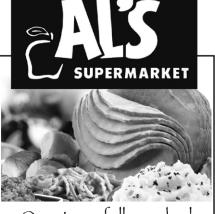
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Historical Epic "Outlaw King" is Full of Surprises

by Andrew Tallackson



Chris Pine (right) and Aaron Taylor-Johnson star in "Outlaw King."

Here is a grubby, muddy, visceral period piece that earns its title. The characters are bound by ideals that have them scrambling for cover as they retaliate guerilla-style against oppressive forces.

Movies are no stranger to this historical period, but "Outlaw King" is full of surprises. It plays fast and loose with the facts, but this is no drab costume drama. This is rebellion depicted as a feral, bloody free-for-all.

It would be easy to dismiss the film as "Braveheart 1.5," since the events it depicts unravel during and immediately after William Wallace was executed for retaliating against the English. In reality, much of the events "Outlaw King" portrays unfolded some time afterward. But movies are not paint-by-numbers storytelling. They must condense and adapt, and "Outlaw King" does so expertly.

The film, now streaming on Netflix, has plenty of ground to cover right off the bat, and Scottish director/co-writer David Mackenzie does so in a stunning opening sequence captured largely in one unbroken shot. No editing as we learn how Robert the Bruce (Chris Pine), a 14th century Scottish Lord, navigates the tricky political landscape dictated by Edward 1 of England (Stephan Dillane), who promises the nobility will have their lands back if they extend homage to him. The king also weds Bruce to his goddaughter Elizabeth, played by relative newcomer Florence Pugh in the film's most exciting performance. She's electrifying. This is no sheepish maiden, but a fiercely independent women, a sharp thinker who earns her husband's respect and, even-

tually, his undying love.

Edward 1, of course, along with his son, Edward, Prince of Wales (Billy Howle, excellent, 2-2 this year after the heartbreaking "On Chesil Beach"), have no intention of playing fair, prompting Robert and his followers to fight back.

Mackenzie, however, does not stage the payback as convenient, effortless vengeance. Robert and his followers are often fleeing on a moment's notice, unable to gain any footing against their pursuers. The fighting is savage, merciless, relentless.

Pine first worked with Mackenzie in 2016's superb "Hell or High Water," and the director knows how to cull the best out of his leading man. That film and now "Outlaw King" show Pine exploring characters who risk likability by committing heinous acts in the name of defiance.

Pine and Pugh, in fact, are dynamite as husband and wife, while the final confrontation between Robert and Prince Edward's armies, massive on every scale, earns points for not transforming the two men into creatures of supernatural strength. This is the first picture I can recall since "Rob Roy" that depicts both sides of the fence riddled with exhaustion as they face off against each other.

"Outlaw King" does not end as we assume it will, defying expectation yet again. Right when it appears you have it figured out, it keeps you on your toes, headed in altogether unforeseeable directions, satisfying to the very end.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com

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The Writes of Christmas



A train for Christmas.

For Christmas 2017, I treated myself to roundtrip train travel between St. Joseph, Mich., and Chicago.

No surprise, right?

What was surprising was the amount of writing I did on the train "Pere Marquette." For starters, I made a note to contact Drew Tallackson at *The Beacher* to see if they would have me back after my retirement in 2012.

(Oh happy days, they did.)

Then, I wrote a Christmas story loosely based on an experience Natalie and I just had with a defective computer we shipped back to California. I wrote the first draft with the very pen my friend Sylvan Jayaraman gave me in 2017 when he was producing custom, handmade pens as J. Raman Pens. So consider the following story as a harmonic convergence of a love of trains, a love of *The Beacher*, the

love of a good friend and a fine pen — all, of course, at Christmastime.

Now, here's the story I call:

"Santa's Pen"

We were at The UPS Store in St. Joe two days before Christmas to return a faulty computer — purchased sight unseen from some fly-by-night outfit in California — when I made one of my usual offhand remarks: "Santa make any pickups here yet?"

"Oh, yeah," the helpful clerk said, "he's been by every afternoon. In fact, you just missed him."

"Well, that's all right, because we really don't need to get this lemon back to those people in California before Christmas."

"Well, it'll get there by the 29th."

"Great."

"So, I just need you to sign this." She handed me a form, and I patted my pocket for my everyday carry.

"Whoops," I said, "I left home without a pen. That's not like me. May I use one of yours?"

"Sure." She picked a pen off the counter and was about to hand it to me when she stopped, blinked and said, "Wow! Where did this come from?!? This sure isn't one of our pens."

No, indeed, it definitely was not.

That's because it was THE pen that fell out of Santa's pocket when he picked up packages that afternoon.

"You're sure it's not one of your pens?"

"Oh, yeah. Way fancier than what we keep on the counter. I have no idea where it came from, but — hey — it's Christmas. Keep it. With our compliments."

"Really?"
"Really."

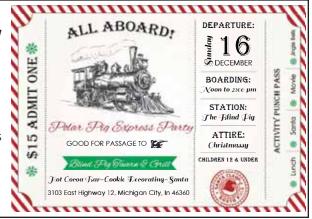




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And so, I kept the pen that fell out of Santa's pocket when he made his afternoon pickup at The UPS Store in St. Joe two days before Christmas, and I had every intention of keeping it.

Or so I thought.

You see, when you are presented with what you assume to be Santa's lost pen, you probably should give it right back.

Well, I didn't, and look what happened:

To celebrate having suc-

cessfully shipped our defective computer, we went to our favorite taco place down the road from The UPS Store. They greeted us, as they always do, by shouting: "Welcome to José's!"

We placed our orders for giant burritos with all the fixin's, and when I got to the counter to pay, I noticed a jar — one of those jars you often see on counters during the holidays — asking, seeking, begging folks to help a family that lost its home to a fire. Any amount will do, and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

I paid for our lunch with cash, then pointed to the jar so my wife could see the appeal for help. "What do you think?"

"Write them a check. For a modest amount."

So, using what I was already referring to as the Santa Pen, I wrote them a check for what I assumed was \$50 and entered the amount in the register. I tore off the check, tossed it in the jar and we went on with our happy lunch.

Then, we went to the office of my dear wife's physical therapist so she could settle her outstanding account before the new year. Again, I wrote a check for what I assumed to be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$50 and, of course, duly entered it in the register.

We ran more errands, as well as more opportunities to share a little Christmas joy with our checkbook and the Santa Pen, before heading home to proceed with the holidays.

And it was in the course of getting on with the holidays when my dear wife Elizabeth looked at the



A pen for Christmas.

check register and practically passed out from shock. "Five hundred dollars!" she shouted. "You wrote that family a check for \$500, and you paid my therapist \$450, and—"

"No," I said. "There's some mistake."

But there was no mistake, because the Santa Pen made me do it. The Santa Pen made me generous way beyond our means.

I sighed and said, "Well, we can't very well renege

on these generous donations, but there is something I'm going to do, and I'm going to do it Christmas Eve."

"What's that?"

"You'll see. But you'll have to wait up with me if you want to see."

"You know I always go to bed early on Christmas Eve."

"Suit yourself."

And suit herself she did on Christmas Eve, but I was awake in my recliner, enjoying the closing act of that beloved Christmas classic, "It's a Wonderful Life," when a jolly old elf tumbled out of our idle fireplace, dusted the soot from his red suit and said, "Bet you didn't for a second believe that was really my pen that I left there at The UPS Store."

"Nope, I can't say that I did."

"Well, it is, and I am here to formally present it to you — a major pen geek — as my Christmas present to you. A present, I might add, that keeps on giving and giving and giving and—"

"But I don't want your stinkin' Christmas pen that keeps on giving," I said, stamping my feet for emphasis. "Here, take it back."

But he refused.

Absolutely.

Then, in a twinkling, he shot back up our chimney and, dashing out of sight in his sleigh driven by eight tiny reindeer, I could hear him say: "Use the Santa Pen whenever you're feeling stingy, chintzy and otherwise cheap of heart. Now have yourself a merry little Christmas, and to all a good night."





"Midwestern Soliloquy"

"Midwestern Soliloquy," 22 oil paintings by Laurie Schirmer Carpenter of Midwest landscapes, runs through Jan. 17 at Valparaiso's The Village Gallery.

Carpenter grew up in northwestern Illinois and graduated from Loretto Heights College in Denver, Colo., with a degree in English literature in 1967. She graduated with distinction, with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Bachelor of Arts in art history, in 1988 at the University of Colorado, Denver. She has been painting full time since then.



Laurie Schirmer Carpenter's "Along Route 20."

When her husband was transferred in 1990 to Ann Arbor, Mich., she became reacquainted with her Midwestern roots and developed an interest in the landscape, especially skies. She moved to Northwest Indiana in 2006. She has been juried into the Area Artists Association and Oak Park (Ill.) Art League.

The Village Gallery is located in Pines Village Retirement Communities, 3303 Pines Village Circle. Gallery hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call (219) 465-1591 for details.



Teacher Innovation Grants

The Michigan City Area Schools Teacher Innovation Small Grants for Teachers program has funded 13 grants to support classroom projects.

Former Michigan City Mayor Chuck Oberlie and MCAS Superintendent Barbara Eason-Watkins established the fund in 2011 with Unity Foundation of LaPorte County. It provides grants of up to \$350 to teachers and professionals at Michigan City High School and LaPorte County Career and Technical Education-A.K. Smith Center.

In addition, Horizon Bank contributed to help grow the fund, and Michigan City Area Chamber of Commerce supports one grant each year in memory of longtime Horizon Bank employee and A.K. Smith graduate Joe Mellen. Additional funding this year came from the John A. and Dorothy Sieb Carstens Fund and the Tuholski & Oberlie Environment & Arts Fund for Youth.

This year's awards, totaling \$3,744, will aid 29 teachers, reaching 2,359 students with projects during the 2018-2019 school year.

They include:

- Susan Cleveland, Iconic Imprint II.
- Laura Daly, Audio for Inclusion.
- Kristen Freitag, Project Preservation and More.
- Adam Goebel, Open Your Eyes with Chemistry.
- Gwen Hudson, Science Fiction Prototyping.
- Ashley Kohler, iPads for Innovative Learning.
- Zoe Lauricella, Mini Whiteboards for Spanish Learning/Practice.
- Alan Layman, Using Graphing Calculators to Get Ahead on Assessments.
- Kelly Martin Fargo, Wolves Need the Green.
- Kelly O'Donnell-Kamryn Walker, Akela Room.
- Rebecca Shaman, Discovering the Secrety of Papyrus.
- Alexander Uryga, Benjamin Gillman, Michael Megyese and Brian Richards, Studying the Civil Rights Movement through the graphic novel "March: Book One."
- Ashley Zahrt, CRISP-cas9 Genetic Engingeering.*
 *Joe Mellen Award recipient

Tax-deductible contributions to the fund, or any Unity Fund supporting education, can be made at www.uflc.net, or mail checks to Unity Foundation, 422 Franklin St., Suite C, Michigan City, IN 46360, with the fund name in the memo line.





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Kurt Russell Gives "The Christmas Chronicles" its Silly Charms

by Andrew Tallackson



Kurt Russell is an example of boundless energy in "The Christmas Chronicles."

"The Christmas Chronicles." Not exactly holiday Oscar bait. Nor as witty as it should have been.

But there is something charming, comforting even, about a Christmas movie that celebrates innocence over weary pragmatism. We live in cynical times, when teens define downtime as bathing in the toxic glow of cell phones. Here is a modest family film with no big surprises, no ground-breaking visuals, but a sweet message that has two grieving teens rediscovering the power of family through Santa Claus himself.

And old Kris Kringle is played by none other than Kurt Russell in a performance of such good cheer, he sweeps you into the silly story. In many ways, he's the whole show.

"The Christmas Chronicles" debuted Nov. 22 on Netflix, its first week generating a near-record 20 million streams. Audiences haven't dwindled, and I suspect the draw not only is Russell, but also the exceedingly likable family at the core of the story. It's set in Lowell, Mass., the focus being the fractured Pierce family. A year earlier, the father (Oliver Hudson), a firefighter, perished in the line of duty. Mom (Kimberly Williams-Paisley), a nurse, is consumed with work on Christmas Eve, leaving her children—older brother Teddy (Judah Lewis) and younger sister Kate (Darby Camp)—to fend for themselves. Teddy takes to stealing cars. Kate clings to the belief Christmas can save the family.

Sounds like a run-of-the-mill Hallmark Christmas movie. In many respects, it is...until Russell steps into the picture as Kris Kringle. He's initially depicted through lively CGI, a marvelous dance of red lights zipping in and out of chimneys. But due to Kate and Teddy, Santa's sleigh crashes in downtown Chicago, leaving him scrambling to deliver his remaining presents.

I half-hoped Santa's bag of gifts landed in Wrigley Field, or some other Windy City landmark. So much sight-gag potential. No such luck. Santa, however, does barrel into an Irish pub, and it is vintage Chicago humor, the film's comic high point. One inebriated fellow is passed out at the bar, the rest of the crowd too absorbed in its meal to consider the man in the red suit, who seem to know everything about them, might actually *be* Santa.

And it is during this scene, and the gleefully loopy chaos that ensues, that you have to wonder why Russell, over the course of a long, storied career, never courted greater success. Sure, he's had a share of hits — "Unlawful Entry," "Backdraft," a few "Fast and the Furious" pictures — but none made him a household name. In "The Christmas Chronicles," the actor is boundless energy, rampant good cheer undeterred by the callous sensibilities of modern society. He makes you grin, as does the film, which trots out a most welcome cameo at the end once Santa is back in his North Pole comfort zone. You also are touched by how the message of family remains at the heart of the picture, to the very end.

Again, don't expect "The Christmas Chronicles" to take home any trophies come awards season. Does it put a smile on your face? Absolutely.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com



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• Christmas Angels Among Us at 2 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 13.

Ange Benz leads the program. Call her at (219) 874-3754 for more details.

• Needle Arts League at 5:30 p.m. Thursdays, Dec. 13, 20 and 27.

Membership to the group, formerly known as the Knit Club, is open to anyone interested in needle arts such as crochet, needlepoint, cross-stitch, crewel, tatting and other hand stitching. All skill levels and ages are welcome.

• Polish Advent & Christmas Customs at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 16.

Father Wally Wladyslaw Rakoczy leads the program that includes his collection of *szopki* (Nativity scenes), ornaments, *Koledy* (Polish Christmas) albums and paintings on glass. He also will share stories and information on how Advent and Christmas are celebrated in Poland. The program is free, but seating is limited. Call Theresa Child at (219) 464-1369 or Robin Kohn at (219) 873-3049 for reservations.



"The Polar Express"

• Film Showing: "The Polar Express" at 3:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 17.

The film is Rated G. Children 18 and younger who arrive within the first 30 minutes have a chance to win a copy of the movie.

• Holiday Craft for Kids at 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 18.

All materials are provided. Children 3 and older, accompanied by an adult, must be present to receive the craft supplies.

• Learning Center Volunteers Needed

The Learning Center needs volunteer tutors for children and adults. Students need assistance in: reading, math, high school equivalency and English as a Second Language. All supplies and training are provided. All that's required are two hours a week. Contact Jessica Hoffmaster at (219) 873-3043 or stop by the center for more information.

Contact Robin Kohn at (219) 873-3049 for more information on library programming.

Lake Michigan Youth Orchestra

Lake Michigan Youth Orchestra will present a winter concert at 4 p.m. EST Sunday, Dec. 16, at Lakeshore High School Auditorium, 5771 Cleveland Ave., Stevensville, Mich.

The concert includes performances by: the Concert Strings, LMYO's introductory string group; the Encore Strings, LMYO's mid-level string group; and the Youth Symphony, LMYO's most advanced group. Highlights include "Here Comes Santa Claus," "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" and "Dance of the Knights" from "Romeo and Juliet."

Burke Lokey conducts the Youth Symphony, Rachel Cabanilla-Sinnett the Encore Strings and Beth Oeseburg the Concert Strings.

The LMYO is an educational outreach program through Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra.

Tickets, available at the door, cost \$5 for adults and \$3 for students and seniors. Contact the SMSO office at (269) 982-4030 or visit www.smso.org for details.

Harbor Country Hikers

Harbor Country Hikers will share tips on helping birds survive winter during a hike at 10 a.m. EST Saturday, Dec. 15, through Harbert Road Preserve.

Hikers should dress in layers and wear a coldweather hat and gloves. Harbert Road Preserve is just east of the Interstate 94 overpass on the south side of Harbert Road.

Visit harborcountryhikers.com for more details.

Christmas Cantata

The Queen of All Saints Contemporary Choir will perform Joseph Martin's "A Christmas Cantata: Invitation to a Miracle" at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 16, at St. Mary the Immaculate Conception Church, 400 W. 10th St.

The choir is directed by Stephanie Sobecki. Admission is free.









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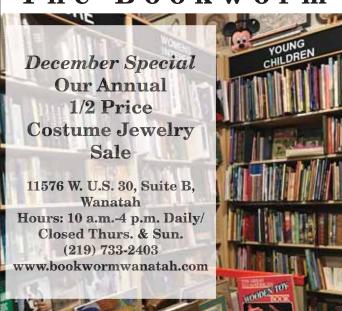
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Westchester Public Library

The following programs are available:

• NorthShore Health Center free blood-pressure screenings from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 13, at Hageman Library, 100 Francis St., Porter, and 10 a.m. to noon Wednesday, Dec. 19, in the Thomas Library Bertha Wood Meeting Room, 200 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton.

Interested patrons also can receive help calculating Body Mass Index.

• Jingle Bell Jamboree: Merry Grinchmas from 5 to 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 14, at Hageman Library.

Children can listen to holiday stories, sing holiday songs and participate in holiday activities, including games and making Grinch dust.



"Holiday Affair"

• Holiday film, "Holiday Affair," at 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 16, at The Baugher Center, 100 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton.

Free popcorn is available.

• Maker Mondays from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 17, in the Thomas Library upstairs IT classroom.

Local software engineer Adam Johnson will lead a hands-on program, appropriate for patrons 12 and older, about Arduino circuit devices. Registration is necessary in person, by phone at (219) 926-7696 or email at dan@wpl.lib.in.us

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JROTC Wins Sectional Meet

Michigan City High School's Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps won the Midwest Sectional Drill Meet on Saturday, Nov. 17.

This qualifies the cadets to compete in the MCJROTC Region 1 meet in Reading, Pa., on March 2, 2019, with the chance to qualify for the National Meet in Washington, D.C., on April 13. These trips are fully funded by the Marine Corps.

Other qualifiers from the sectional were Chicago Pritzker College Prep, Indianapolis Ben Davis and Portage. There are 21 MCJROTC schools in the Midwest section.



The Unarmed Basic Platoon executes "Eyes Right."

MCHS earned first place in the Armed and Unarmed Basic Regulation events. Those units were commanded by Cadet Capt. Tyler Stockley and Cadet Gunnery Sgt. Danny Walker. The Wolves also placed third in Armed Exhibition, third in Color Guard A, second in Color Guard B and third in Marksmanship. Those drill units were commanded by Stockley, Cadet 1st Sgt. Zach Benedict and Cadet Cpl. Josh Wilhelm.

The cadets' next meet is Dec. 8 at Purdue University West Lafayette. They then will travel to East Aurora High School in Illinois on Jan. 19 before heading to Reading for the regional meet in March.







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It Takes a Village...Gingerbread, That Is



Shawn Ward, the country club's executive chef, challenged his team to produce gingerbread buildings that best represent Long Beach and Michigan City. And the staff, without question, rose to the challenge.

Historic Barker Mansion, for instance, is bordered by green-and white mints. Shoppers at Lighthouse Place, it appears, prefer the Nike outlet. The NIPSCO cooling tower is sculpted out of Rice Krispie treats.

All told, there are some 13 creations that country club staff aim to display through the new year, as long as it stays in good shape, of course. Whether all those yummy sights prove too tempting for those itching for a quick nibble remains to be seen...









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LaPorte County Parks



All registrations/questions go through the Red Mill County Park Administrative Office, 0185 S. Holmesville Road, La Porte. Call (219) 325-8315 or visit www.laportecountyparks.org for more details.

Nature's Tiny Tots

Designed for parents and grandparents, explore nature with toddlers and preschoolers. Enjoy music, dancing, storytelling and, weather permitting, hiking.

The free program is from 10 to 11 a.m. Dec. 17, Jan. 14 and 28, Feb. 4 and 11, March 4 and 18, and April 1 and 15 at Luhr County Park, 3178 S. County Road 150 West. Call (219) 325-8315 at least one week in advance to register.

Parent & Child Discovery Days

The program includes arts and crafts, games and snacks. All activities are related to the topic. Programs are appropriate for children 3 to 8, with an adult required to participate. Times are from 6 to 7:15 p.m. at Luhr County Park. The cost is \$5 per child/per program. Pre-registration and payment are required at least one week in advance or until full, whichever comes first.

The schedule is:

- Dec. 19 Let it Snow!
- Jan. 16 Terrific Trees.
- Jan. 30 Owls and More.
- Feb. 6 A Raccoon's World.
- Feb. 27 Catch the Sun.
- March 6 Bug Fun.

Breakfast with the Birds

The free, all-ages program is from 9:30 to 11 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 26, at Luhr County Park Nature Center.

Guests explore birds and enjoy breakfast treats while watching the birds feed at the nearby station. No pre-registration is required. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

Teachers-Groups-Scout Leaders

Free environmental education programs are offered to groups throughout the year. Programs last one hour or longer depending on the group size and age. Programs can be scheduled at Creek Ridge, Luhr, Bluhm or Red Mill parks. Call (219) 325-8315 for more information or to make a reservation.

Shelter and Hall Reservations

Call (219) 325-8315 to make reservations for one of many picnic shelters at any of the four county parks, or Pat Smith Hall at Red Mill County Park for a family function.



American Red Cross

The American Red Cross LaPorte County Chapter will sponsor the following bloodmobiles:

- LaPorte Family YMCA, 901 Michigan Ave., 1-6 p.m. Monday, Dec. 17.
- Trinity Lutheran Church, 907 Michigan Ave., La-Porte, 1-6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 18.
- St. Luke United Lutheran Church, 2000 E. Coolspring Ave., Michigan City, 2-8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 19.

Donate blood or platelets through Dec. 19 and receive a \$5 Amazon.com gift card by email. Donors must be in good general health and feeling well, at least 17 (16 with parental consent) and weigh at least 110 pounds. Call (800) 733-2767 or visit redcrossblood.org for more details.

Brauer Museum of Art

Valparaiso University's Brauer Museum of Art is closed through Jan. 7 for the academic break and exhibit installation.



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Friday Hours

The Beacher Weekly Newspaper, 911 Franklin St., closes at 2 p.m. Fridays

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Aiding a Good Cause



The Four A's Car Club has presented a \$2,000 check to Orak Shrine Temple to benefit Shriners Hospitals for Children, which offers free care in times of need. Thanks to exposure through the Great Lakes Grand Prix, the club has attracted new members, raising money for donations to the hospital. Pictured are (from left) Four A's Treasurer Dave Mann, Orak Shrine Treasurer Bob Keuper and Four A's Vice President Dave Rybicki.

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Art Barn School of Art

The following programs are through Art Barn School of Art, 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso:

• "A Christmas Carol" with Grant Fitch at 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 15.

Fitch's one-man adaptation includes costumes and props. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children 12 and younger.

• Ornament Parties from 2 to 5 p.m. Saturdays, Dec. 15 and 22.

Children 5 and older can make handcrafted ornaments using paint, garlands, yarn, buttons, beads and glitter. Refreshments will be served. The cost is \$35 per child and free for an accompanying adult.

Call (219) 462-9009 for more details.

Toys of Yesterday

Children can make toys during "Toys of Yesterday" at 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 15, at Barker Mansion, 631 Washington St.

Youngsters first will look at Catherine Barker's historic toys and others from the early 1900s, then make a toy to take home. The cost is \$2 per child and free for each accompanying adult. Registration is required through Eventbrite or by calling the mansion at (219) 873-1520, Ext. 5.

Visit www.barkermansion.com for details.

Michigan City Art League

Michigan City Art League is exhibiting works in the lobby at Swingbelly's Restaurant, 3101 E. U.S. 12. Works will be available for purchase. Contact Kadie O'Connor at (219) 214-2349 for details.





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Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

The following programs are available:

• Drop-In Volunteer Program from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Dec. 15.

Projects focus on preserving the park's natural and cultural resources. Dress for the weather, and be prepared to walk off trail. All equipment and protective gear, including gloves and eye protection, will be provided. Meet at The Park Connection volunteer office, which is adjacent to the main Chellberg Farm parking lot.

• A ranger will lead a two-hour tour of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore in one of the park's 16-passenger buses at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 16

The tours meet at Indiana Dunes Visitor Center. After a brief introduction, participants board for the tour. Tours are free, but reservations are required by calling (219) 395-1882.

• Miller Woods Hike from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 16, at the Paul H. Douglas Center.

The ranger-led stroll explores a rare black oak savanna, and offers views of Lake Michigan and Chicago.

The Visitor Center is at 1215 N. Indiana 49, Porter. The Paul H. Douglas Center is at 100 N. Lake St. in Gary's Miller Beach neighborhood. Call (219) 395-1882 for more information.

Indiana Dunes State Park

The following programs are offered:

• Indiana Dunes Christmas Bird Count all day Saturday, Dec. 15.

The Indiana Audubon Society leads the annual all-day event. Birders scour the Dunes tallying every species they see and hear as part of the wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations and guide conservation actions. Stop by the Nature Center or call the center to learn more.

• Animal Search Party from 10 to 11 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 16.

Meet a naturalist at the Nature Center for an easy walk to look for animal signs and activity in the forest and marsh.

• FUR-tastic Show N' Tell from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 16.

Stop by the Nature Center to look at mammals of the dunes, and learn about their special fur adaptations.

Indiana Dunes State Park is at 1600 N. County Road 25 East (the north end of Indiana 49), Chester-

ton. Call (219) 926-1390 for more information.



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"Ralph" Reward



Lake Hils STEM Elementary School rewarded close to 150 students with a field trip to see "Ralph Wrecks the Internet" on Nov. 27 and 28. The trip was part of a new schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program that recognizes good grades, discipline and attendance each trimester. Second- and third-trimester incentives will include a bowling party and school dance. A final incentive for year-long excellence is a trip to Deep River Waterpark.



Open Mic Night

"Genius Night: Open Mic/Show & Tell" is at 6:30 p.m. EST Friday, Dec. 14, at Elsie Earl Studios, 200 W. Buffalo St., New Buffalo, Mich.

The venue is open to singers, poets, storytellers, musicians and visual artists. The cost is \$5. Visit ElsieEarlStudios.com for details.



New Troy Indoor Flea Market

The New Troy (Mich.) Community Center, 13372 California Road, will host an indoor flea market from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. EST Saturday, Dec. 15.

The market includes antiques, tools, crafts, books, jewelry, memorabilia, housewares, farm fresh eggs and locally made or grown food. Hot lunch is prepared by The Salty Nag, which specializes in Irish stew and street tacos.

Proceeds from space rentals benefit the center, an all-volunteer facility run by the non-profit Friends of New Troy. Admission is free.

The market continues the second and third Saturdays of each month through April. Contact Donald at (773) 803-9773 for details.

Afternoon Tea

Registration is Monday, Dec. 17, through Saturday, Jan. 26, for New Buffalo Township Library's fifth annual Afternoon Tea, which is set for 2 p.m. EST Sunday, Jan. 27, in the Pokagon Room.

Tickets, which cost \$8, include admission, a variety of teas to choose from and a selection of tea sandwiches, scones and sweets. Vegan and glutenfree options will be available.

Contact Courtney at nbtlcreate@gmail.com, visit www.newbuffalotownshiplibrary.org or call (269) 469-2933 for details. The library is located at 33 N. Thompson St.

PNW Baseball Camp

Registration is under way for Purdue University Northwest's four-week baseball camp that starts Jan. 13 at the Westville campus.

PNW Assistant Coach Shane Prance will direct the program in conjunction with U.S. Baseball Academy. Classes, available for players in grades 1-12, are limited to seven per coach. Sessions are offered in advanced hitting, pitching, catching, fielding and baserunning.

Space is limited. Visit www.USBaseballAcademy. com or call (866) 622-4487 to register or for more details.

Read The Beacher On Line http://www.thebeacher.com/







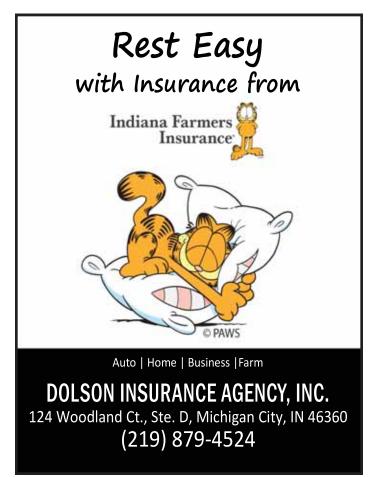




Making Waves



The Beacher's Paul Kemiel captured this stunning shot: 15- to 18-foot waves crashing over Michigan City's lighthouse pier on Monday, Nov. 26.







Girls Basketball Clinics

The Michigan City High School Wolves Girls Basketball team will hold free mini basketball clinics for girls in grades K-8.

The clinics, held at the Wolves Den Gymnasium, are from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 15, and 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Dec. 22.

Girls can attend one or both. No advance registration is required; parents will be asked to complete permission slips at the door.

FUMC Women's Cookie Walk

The 18th Annual Christmas Cookie Walk is from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Dec. 15, at First United Methodist Church, 121 W. Seventh St.

Presented by the United Methodist Women, guests can pick their favorite cookies, the cost being \$8 a pound.

Old Lighthouse Museum

Old Lighthouse Museum in Washington Park will be open from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 15-16 and 22-23.

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Activities to Explore

In the Area:

Dec. 13 — Christmas Angels Among Us, 2 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

Dec. 13 — Harbor Country Singers caroling, 6-8 p.m. EST, New Buffalo Township Library, 33 N. Thompson St.

Dec. 14 — Jingle Bell Jamboree: Merry Grinchmas, 5-7 p.m., Hageman Library, 100 Francis St., Porter.

Dec. 14 — "Genius Night: Open Mic/Show & Tell," 6:30 p.m. EST, Elsie Earl Studios, 200 W. Buffalo St., New Buffalo, Mich. Info: ElsieEarlStudios. com

Dec. 14-17 — Vickers Theatre, 6 N. Elm St., Three Oaks, Mich. *Now showing*: "Can You Ever Forgive Me?" Rated R. Times: 6 p.m. Fri.-Mon. *Also*: "Wildlife." Rated PG-13. Times: 9 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 3 p.m. Sat.-Sun. All times Eastern. Info: vickerstheatre.com

Dec. 15 — Indiana Dunes Christmas Bird Count, all day, Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 15 — 18th Annual Christmas Cookie Walk, 9 a.m.-noon, First United Methodist Church, 121 W. Seventh St.

Dec. 15 — "Toys of Yesterday," 10 a.m., Barker Mansion, 631 Washington St. Cost: \$2/child, free/accompanying adult. Registration: Eventbrite, (219) 873-1520, Ext. 5.

Dec. 15 — Holiday Bash, 6 p.m., P.A.R.C., 1713 Franklin St. 21 & older.

Dec. 16 — Animal Search Party, 10-11 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 16 — Holiday film presentation, "Holiday Affair," 1:30 p.m., The Baugher Center, 100 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton.

Dec. 16 — Polish Advent & Christmas Customs, 2 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

Dec. 17 — Film Showing: "The Polar Express," 3:30 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

Dec. 18 — Holiday Craft for Kids, 3:30 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

Saturdays in December — Glowing Lights Night, 4 p.m., Barker Mansion, 631 Washington St. Cost: \$8/adult, \$5/youth or senior. Reservation: Eventhrite

Through Jan. 4 — Holiday Artisan Market, Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St. Info: www.lubeznikcenter.org

Through January — Duneland Plein Air Painters exhibit, Chesterton Art Center, 115 S. Fourth St. Info: www.chestertonart.com

In the Region

Dec. 15 — Harbor Country Hikers, 10 a.m. EST, Harbert Road Preserve. Info: harborcountryhikers. com

Dec. 15 — Indoor flea market, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. EST, New Troy (Mich.) Community Center, 13372 California Road. Free admission. Info: (773) 803-9773.

Dec. 15 — "A Christmas Carol" with Grant Fitch, 7 p.m., Art Barn School of Art, 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso. Tickets: \$10/adults, \$5/children 12 & younger. Info: (219) 462-9009.

Dec. 15-16 — "Weekends With Santa," Gabis Arboretum at Purdue Northwest, 71 N. County Road 500 West near Valparaiso. Photos with Santa/noon-4 p.m. Carload admission: \$5. Info: (219) 462-0025.

Dec. 16 — Lake Michigan Youth Orchestra winter concert, 4 p.m. EST, Lakeshore High School Auditorium, 5771 Cleveland Ave., Stevensville, Mich. Tickets: \$5/adults, \$3/students & seniors. Info: (269) 982-4030, www.smso.org

Through Jan. 17 — Laurie Schirmer Carpenter's "Midwestern Soliloquy," Valparaiso's The Village Gallery, 303 Pines Village Circle. Info: (219) 465-1591.

Want your event listed here?

Email drew@thebeacher.com



Holiday Hours

Christmas Week

Closed Monday & Tuesday, Dec. 24-25 Open Wednesday-Friday, Dec. 26-28

New Year's Week

Closed Monday & Tuesday, Dec. 31-Jan. 1 Open Wednesday-Friday, Jan. 2-4





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On December 13, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson arrived in France, becoming the first chief executive to visit Europe while in office.

On December 13, 1927, Yehudi Menuhin, a 10-year-old child violinist, made his successful New York debut in Carnegie Hall. After the triumphant recital he was asked what he would like next. "Some ice cream," was his reply.

On December 13, 1928, George Gershwin's An American in Paris premiered in New York's Carnegie Hall.

On December 13, 1978, the ill-fated "Susan B. Anthony" dollar was issued by the United States Mint.

On December 14, 1799, at his home in Mount Vernon, Va., George Washington, the nation's first president, died at 67.

On December 14, 1902, the cable ship Silverton set out from San Francisco to lay the first cable from the mainland to Honolulu. On Jan. 1, 1903, the cable was ready to transmit messages.

On December 14, 1911, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundson made the first recorded visit to the South Pole, beating out an expedition by Robert F. Scott.

On December 14, 1999, to the dismay of millions of fans, cartoonist Charles Schulz announced that he was retiring his "Peanuts" comic strip.

On December 15, 1791, the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, which went under the title of "The Bill of Rights," went into effect after being ratified by Virginia.

On December 15, 1939, "Gone With the Wind" premiered at Loew's Grand Theater in Atlanta.

On December 15, 1944, during World War II, an army plane, with bandleader Major Glenn Miller aboard, disappeared on a flight over the English Channel.

On December 15, 1984, Russia launched an unmanned spacecraft that was designed to rendezvous with Halley's Comet in March of 1986.

On December 15, 2001, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Italy, reopened to the public after a \$27 million realignment that had dragged on for more than a decade.

On December 16, 1835, there was a \$20 million loss as more than 700 buildings burned in New York City.

On December 16, 1905, Variety, a weekly maga-

zine devoted to all phases of show business, came out with its first edition. It contained 16 pages, and sold for a nickel.

On December 16, 1916, Grigori Rasputin, the "mad monk" who wielded a mystical influence over the Czar and Czarina of Russia, was lured to a Petrograd palace and poisoned. When this failed to kill him, he was stabbed to death and his body sunk beneath the ice of a local canal.

On December 16, 1959, The Second City improvisational comedy troupe staged its first performance in Chicago.

On December 16, 2000, President-elect George W. Bush selected Colin Powell to become the nation's first black secretary of state.

On December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright made the world's first successful airplane flight as they soared over the sand dunes near Kitty Hawk, NC. Only five persons, besides themselves, were present. Although a general invitation had been issued to everyone within a five or six mile radius, not many were willing to face a cold December wind to see, as they no doubt thought, another flying machine that would not fly.

On December 17, 1933, in the first world championship of professional football, the Chicago Bears defeated the New York Giants by a score of 23-21. (Each player on the winning team received \$210.00).

On December 18, 1865, slavery was abolished in the United States by the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which read: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been legally convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

On December 18, 1892, Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker" premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia.

On December 18, 1915, President Woodrow Wilson, widowed the year before, married Edith Bolling Galt.

On December 18, 1978, NASA abandoned plans to try to save the Skylab space station, deciding to let the descending craft burn in the atmosphere.

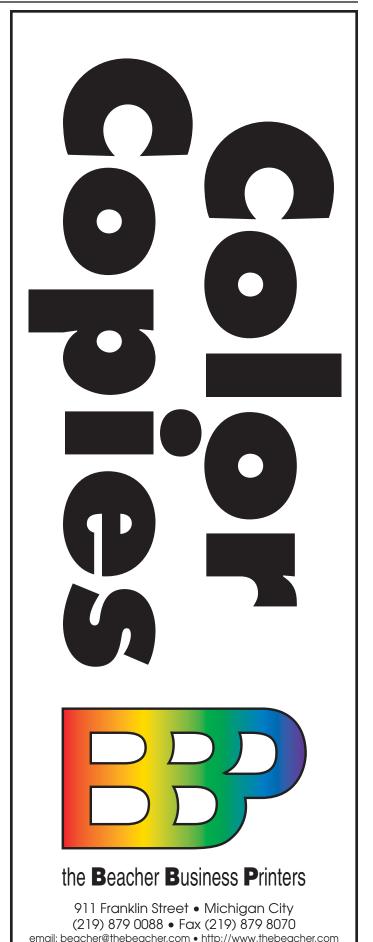
On December 19, 1732, Benjamin Franklin began publication of Poor Richard's Almanack, a series of booklets full of aphorisms and homely sayings.

On December 19, 1776, Thomas Paine published his first American Crisis essay, in which he wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls."

On December 19, 1843, Charles Dickens' famous Yuletide tale, <u>A Christmas Carol</u>, was published in England.

On December 19, 1957, Meredith Wilson's musical play "The Music Man" opened on Broadway.

On December 19, 1997, "Titanic" opened in movie theaters across the nation.



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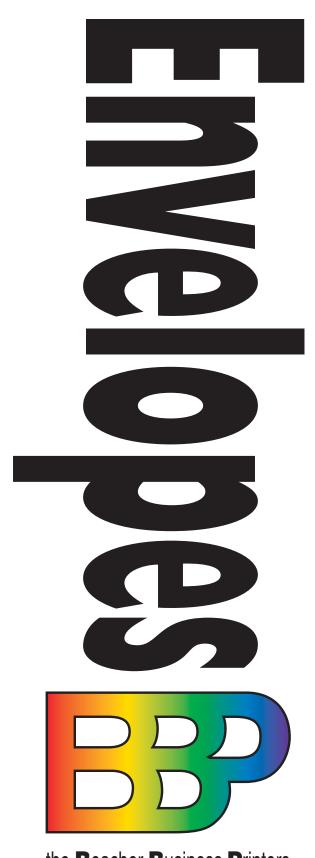
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Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter

The Fallen Architect by Charles Balfoure (hardcover, \$25.99 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook. 322 pages)

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Therefore, when a horrendous accident happens, killing 14 people, someone must be to blame. But when a court rushes to convict someone, the truth may not always come out.

It's 1900, and Douglas Layton is a well-known

and respected architect in London. He had designed many prestigious buildings and recently won a competition to design the Royal Post Office. A very big win, indeed.

Layton is married to a lord's daughter, and they have a 4-year-old boy, Ronald, the joy of Layton's life. A pretty picture. But what the posh upper-class of England doesn't know is that Layton is an imposter. Class structure in England at the time is strict. One doesn't move from commoner to gentry: "The instant a child in England was brought into the world, he was placed on a rung of a tall, invisible social ladder. And there he stayed for the rest of his life."

What the lords and ladies don't know is that Layton is from Puddletown in Dorset — the son of a stonemason. That's a long way from the

landed gentry. But Layton has been fascinated by architecture since a child, and as a young man attended school to become a proper architect. That also gave him the chance to move to London and win his wife and the accolades of the upper class on his own merits. No one knew his humble beginnings: "He had done what so few in England could: reinvent himself."

As his fame as an architect grows, Layton receives many commissions. But the most unusual and fascinating is the one for a new theater. At this time, what was called "music halls" had begun a transformation from rowdy entertainment venues for the lower classes to fancy theaters featuring a better class of acts to entice the middle and upper classes. To draw in these richer customers, the theaters were much improved in both appearance and the quality of the acts, even including the new moving pictures. They were now called "variety theatres."

Layton's commission is for the Britannia Empire Theatre. On opening night, the unthinkable happens: A section of the front balcony gives way and 14 people, including several children, lose their lives, while others are maimed or otherwise injured. Layton is found guilty and sent to prison for five years of hard labor. Newspapers across the country label him the Butcher of the West End.

Coming out of prison, his wife having divorced him, Layton swallows his pride and goes back to his family home in Dorset. His brother introduces him to a worker at the Grand Imperial Theatre in Nottingham, who helps him get a job as a scene painter. He moves to Nottingham and completes his

> transformation by taking the name Frank Owen, hoping no one recognizes his face from the newspapers.

> Layton enjoys his job at the theater, makes friends with the entertainers, and life moves on. However, he doesn't want to spend his life as an outcast, unable to return to his life work as an architect, but what can he do about it? He could find out what really happened that night five years ago for a start...

Little does Layton know that starting his own investigation into who really wanted the accident to happen leads to finding skeletons in the most unusual places, even threats and attempts on his own life. Many people thought five years in prison was not enough punishment, that he only received a light sentence because he was a

gentleman. Plus, the families of those killed in the theater want him dead, too. Persistence and a little help from friends lead Layton to a confrontation he doesn't see coming. Who can you trust?

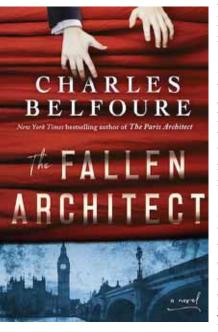
I loved the way Balfoure weaves the social structure and mores of the early 20th century into his story. It provides a better understanding of why what happened to Layton makes him a pariah among the upper class that once praised him and accepted him as one of their own.

A most addictive read, filled with the color and amusing actions of the variety theater of the time — both behind and in front of the curtain —and a bit of a lesson in architecture.

Balfoure also provides a mystery that takes a lot of investigating to reach a satisfying — did I just say "satisfying"? — conclusion. Hmmm.

Balfoure is an architect as well as a writer. His area of specialty is historic preservation. He has written two other books: The Paris Architect (a New York Times bestseller) and The House of Thieves. One chapter of each book can be found at the end of The Fallen Architect.

Till next time, happy reading!





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