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Journeys of a Lifetime

by Kim Nowatzke

Michigan City's Panini Panini is known for its handcrafted European food. Tripadvisor hails it as Indiana's No. 1 sandwich spot, 14th in the nation, even in the top 10 percent globally.

But this is not the story of a local business. It is about its fascinating owners for the past two years, Benoit (Ben) and Sabine Bauwens. To begin with, they are from Brussels, Belgium. Both speak fluent Dutch and French. Ben, now 53, earned his bachelor's degree as a French chef from *Ceria Ipiat* while Sabine, 50, holds a bachelor's degree in automotive engineering from Cardinal Mercier.

Ben's mother, along with her sister and brother, were born in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Africa. Her father was head accountant for a mining company, moving there with his family in the early 1930s. At the time, it was owned by Belgium and called Belgium Congo. The family returned to Belgium in the late 1940s-early 1950s.

"It was a big, big adventure," Ben explained.

Ben's paternal grandfather, August, and great-grandfather, Benoit, were well-known, award-winning Belgium bakers, owning Bakery Bauwens from before World War II until the mid-1960s.

"We still have trophies," Ben said. "People traveled from all of Belgium to go to it."

His great-grandfather was the first one to own special machines to make whipping cream and pis-

tolets (bread bowls).

"He wanted to discover everything – to try," Ben said. "He was experimental with breads and other pastries."

Ben's "more temperate" father, August, became an electrician, working for 29 years at CRC Chemical as production leader at the European production plant in Belgium.

Ben told the story about how his parents purchased a cow to be butchered each year.

"When I was 11, I decided I wanted to learn how to do that," he said. "I stopped in at a local butcher and asked if they needed help. They said yes and to come on Saturday. Of course, the first week I cut my finger."

Ben worked for the butcher every Saturday for a few years, beginning at 6 a.m. and leaving around 1 p.m.

"I had to ride my bicycle in the snow," he said. "It was very cold."

Ben's college program included three major courses of study to work as a butcher, cook or pastry chef. Although he studied all three the first year, he was required to focus on two for the rest of his education, so he chose classes specializing in meat cutting and cooking.

After college, Ben worked for a butcher for 18 months in a fine-dining butchering company in Wemmel, Belgium. However, he first had to serve his obligatory one-year requirement in the Army,

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The Bauwens family in Panini Panini (from left): Tanguy, Sabine, Ben and Marine.



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where his position was as bartender. Unfortunately, after he finished his term, his secular position was no longer available. So, the young entrepreneur opened his own restaurant, calling it *In Den Boom* ("In The Tree") because of the large tree in front of the building. It was a special concept where lava stones were heated in an oven. The customers then cooked their meat as they wanted, directly at their tables on stone grills.

Unfortunately, he had to close the business when his girlfriend at the time "ran away with the money," he said.

Ben's next job was with an international chemical company that created paint and industrial coatings. Starting out as a salesman, he was promoted to warehouse manager. One of his assignments was purchasing a company car, which led him to Sabine in December 1989.

"I went to the garage of her father – the bonus was his daughter," he said with a smile.

Then, after seven months, one of the suppliers, Kemira, asked him to work for them. He was employed there as a product manager from 1989 to 1992, traveling to Spain, Italy, France, Finland, Great Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Ben and Sabine had been dating only three months when the 22-year-old Ben was involved in a serious accident in Dijon, France. He and a colleague were in a rented van on their way to see a customer. Hoping to save time, they were driving in two-hour shifts, with one behind the wheel while the other slept for two hours. Unfortunately, when his colleague was



Ben and Sabine Bauwens on their wedding day, on Sept. 4, 1992, in Ganshoren, part of Brussels, Belgium.

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at the wheel only 20 minutes into his shift, he fell asleep. The van overturned several times. Ben suffered several lacerations and compressed neck vertebrae, placing him in a coma for several days. The doctors said if the accident damaged one higher vertebra, he wouldn't have walked again.

"I could only move my hands at first," Ben said. "I had to learn how to eat – how to walk."

It took him a year to recover as he endured three different operations on his back.

"I can't run," he said, "even today."

When Sabine came to France to visit him in the hospital with his mother, Ben told his girlfriend, "I think I'm at the end of the tunnel – I think I'm done here." He confessed he would understand if she wanted to move on with her life – without him.

But Sabine's reply was, "No, I'm with you – I stay with you."

Ben says, smiling, "I thought that she's probably the right one. I decided that she was the one for me for the rest of my life."

The two were married on Sept. 4, 1992, in Ganshoren, which is part of Brussels, Belgium. Today, they have two children: a son, Tanguy, 18, and a daughter, Marine, 20, as well as a Saint Bernard named Baloo.

One of Ben's last positions before coming to the United States was as head of the engineering department at Vinci Construction from 2009 to 2011. He next worked for *Entreprise de Construction de Bâtiments du Littoral* (Shoreline Construction Co.) for five years in the food division. The company was hired to construct chateauxes in France where wine was handmade. These included: Chateau Margaux; Lafite Rothschild; Mouton

Rothschild; Pi-chon Longueville; and Calon Ségur. As leader of the project/studies department, he completely reorganized it.

"I led all the complicated construction projects," he said. "I prefer when it's difficult. The more complicated and technically difficult, the better for me."

During this period in his life, he also lived in his sailboat — a Gib'Sea 34 foot

— because he worked 85 minutes from home. He would go to Rochefort every Monday morning, come back home every Wednesday night and back to work Thursday morning to be back Friday night.

Sabine's first job involved working for her father at his garage after she graduated from college in December 1989. Next, she spent a year as a sales representative for an automobile parts-and-tools

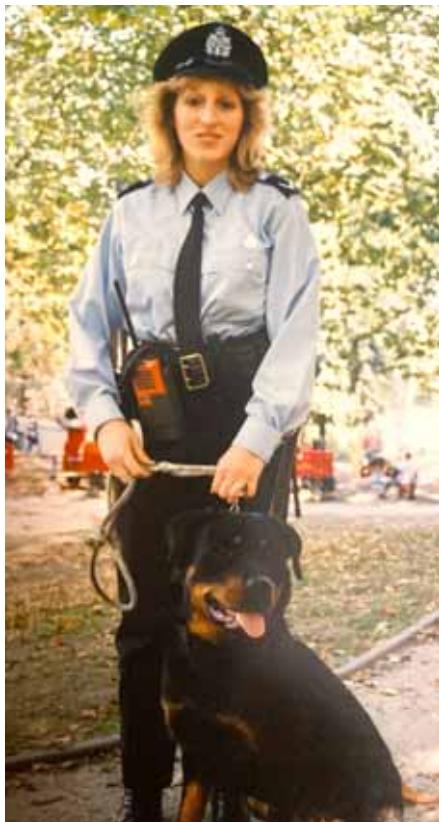
business. However, she found it difficult to work in a male-dominated industry in the early 1990s.

Sabine then worked in Brussels as a police officer in the K-9 unit, in the same area she'd worked as a sales rep. She described the seven years and seven months she spent there as the "best job of my life."

Unfortunately, the "many changes in the police department in Belgium" forced her to move on, and she began working in manage-



Marine Bauwens and the family dog, Baloo, in Beverly Shores.



Sabine Bauwens, photographed when she worked as a police officer in the K-9 unit for the Brussels, Belgium, police department.

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HIGH-PRICED PROPERTIES DOING WELL NEAR LAKE MICHIGAN

I did a report for high-end properties from the Indiana line to Warren Dunes in Michigan. High-end properties tripled in number of sales when I compared May through October from 2020 to 2019. Total \$Volume doubled.

So, I just had to look at the situation between U.S. 12 and Lake Michigan from Beverly Shores and the Michigan line. Here are the residential sales numbers for properties selling for \$500,000 or more in the May through October period. I added the 2011 data for reference to the lowest numbers in recent history.

Year	Units sold	Med Sold Price	Total \$Volume
2011	14	\$730k	\$11.6 M
2019	55	\$635k	\$43.7 M
2020	106	\$650k	\$85.0 M

Not unlike Michigan. But we only (only!!) doubled in number of sales and doubled in \$Volume. What's interesting about the median price is that it went up. Usually, it goes down with a strong increase in number of sales and \$Volume.

My belief is that we are about to see an increase in land values soon, even though the material costs for new homes has tripled because we are running out of inventory of existing homes. I looked at all sales for lots selling for at least \$40,000.

Year	Units sold	Med Sold Price	Total \$Volume
2011	14	\$730k	\$11.6 M
2019	55	\$635k	\$43.7 M
2020	106	\$650k	\$85.0 M

The figures are moving up from practically nothing in 2011 to a very healthy increase in past two years.

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ment for the Belgium government, in the waterways and law departments.

Ben said the couple decided to leave Belgium in 2006 "because of the quality of life," permanently moving to their vacation home in Bordeaux, France.

"Every time we were there, it was difficult to go back (to Belgium)," he said.

It was while he was recuperating from his back surgeries that the seed to come to the United States first took root. He was watching a TV program about investing in Detroit properties.

"When I'm back on my feet, I want to see that," he told himself at the time.

But, he discovered that flying from Paris to Detroit was much more expensive compared to a flight into O'Hare International Airport. Taking the latter in November 2013, he made his way to Detroit and decided to spend a day in Michigan City.

That decision changed the course of his life.

He ended up meeting with Realtor Michael Conner after he called him to look at a house.

"This guy was so funny and so interesting," Ben said, "that I stayed here the whole time and never went to Detroit."



Ben and Sabine Bauwens pose with their 2020 Michigan City High School graduate, Tanguy.

The Bauwenses purchased their first real-estate investment in March 2014.

As the "tax and political situation" became worse in France, Ben and Sabine knew it was time to move. At the time, the Bauwenses were paying 70.02 percent in federal taxes in addition to a 20

percent sales tax.

Their first option was New Brunswick, Canada.

"We visited there," Ben said, "but the kids weren't for it."



Sabine and Ben on Prince Edward Island in Canada. Behind them is the Confederation Bridge.

Plan B was America. Ben and Tanguy officially moved to the United States in March 2018, with Sabine and Marine following a few months later. They first found a restaurant to purchase in Schererville, but the sale didn't go through. In January 2018, they bought a take-out pizza place called Tortorice's Pizza in Buffalo Grove, Ill., living in Rockford, Ill., and operating their business for seven months.

But, Ben said, "we preferred to move over here in Michigan City."

When they discovered Panini Panini was for sale, owned by Joachim Schnappinger and his wife, Bonnie, for about a decade, they jumped at the chance.

Sabine said the Michigan City restaurant is "more our kind of food."

They already owned a home in Michigan City that they'd purchased in 2014. Not wanting to disturb the successful rental arrangement with their tenant, they decided to purchase another home as their primary residence. They look forward to ultimately purchasing land and building a house here.

"The environment was very friendly and helpful here," Ben said.

They are grateful for the community support during the pandemic.

"Owning this is a good thing," Ben said. "Michigan City is a pretty cool city – like a big family."



Sabine Bauwens, photographed in Lake Michigan near Beverly Shores.

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Salvation Army "Stuff A Sleigh" Food Drive This Saturday Dec. 5 at all Al's stores, Michigan City & La Porte.

This year has been challenging, to say the least.

But The Salvation Army has been there still for those who need it. Fulfilling basic needs isn't always glamorous or fun, but the Salvation Army knows lives depend on it, and they're always there to answer the call.

The Salvation Army will be at our Karwick and Franklin Street stores, and we're asking for your help. Buy a special \$5 voucher that will be used for meat credits by the Salvation Army or pick a few of your favorite things (non-perishable, please) for the upcoming holiday.

Thanksgiving was only a week ago, and we hope you had reason to be grateful for many blessings; we would now ask that you pass the blessings around this Saturday.

Please know that the Salvation Army and Al's are grateful for people like you!



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In Search of Grateful

My grandson scoots into my lap with a board book he chose from the basket at the foot of the guest bed. Story time with DJ precedes an afternoon nap at Lulu's Florida condo. Lulu is my grandma name. Following the lead of my peers, I chose this nickname in lieu of yesteryear's *old sounding* grandparent titles. But from a 2 1/2-year-old's mouth, Lulu often comes out sounding like "woo-woo," which I fear may stick.

DJ hands me a chunky, neon-orange book with rainbow lettering. "Good choice," I coo.

He squirms and wiggles and finally settles into the meat of my thighs, then he taps on the vibrant cover. He's ready! Invoking my brightest storyteller voice, I lean over my grandson's fair head and recite the title page, *The Thankful Book* by Todd Parr.

My exuberant words send puffs of breath careening into DJ's little-boy haircut. Wisps of fine golden hairs from the crown of his head float up and tickle my chin, lips and nose. I twinkle my nose like Samantha on "Bewitched" to banish the gossamer-like strands. DJ fidgets and presses his little torso into mine, a sign I'm taking too long to flip to the first pages.

I read:

There are lots of things to be thankful for.

Try to remember some of them every day!

With the pandemic in its deadliest surge yet, my Sarasota daughter and son-in-law are back to working from home. Day care and preschool are not safe options, so two days a week, DJ comes to Lulu's. And for those two special days, I adapt to a different pace and schedule. Mostly, the two of us venture down to the pool, hand-in-hand, where we make *vroom vroom* sounds with dump trucks, or car wash swishing noises with buckets and empty water bottles. Sometimes, we trek to the beach and jump in the waves, chase sea birds, craft sandcastles and etch our names in the sand.

Every day I think about the things I am grateful for, I read next.

DJ points to the drawing on the opening page of a little boy in blue pants staring up at a single star

That Girl, This Life

Julie Ryan McGue

in the sky. As my grandson chatters, I think about the board book's simple opening message. Now, more than ever, the author's basic advice rings true. Given all the challenges each of us face, it's important to examine and recognize what it is we can be grateful for.

I reread the opening line to DJ and quiz him about what he's thankful for. As we discuss his mama, daddy and new baby brother — for whom I'm grateful, too — I cuddle with DJ and express how thankful I am for him coming over and playing outside with me today. He glances up, presents me with a quick, shy smile, then his stubby little fingers force the next, thick page to flip open.

We read about being thankful for our senses, our special physical gifts, pets and friends, and hugs and kisses. As I prepare to recite the words on the final page, DJ's chin sags to the neckline of his favorite, yellow "digger" shirt. More for myself than for my napping grandson, I deliver the closing line in a whisper.

I am thankful for holidays because they bring my family together.

I set aside *The Thankful Book* and place DJ's stuffed puppy into the crook of his plump, little arm. He snuggles into the guest bed's pillow, and I cover him with his favorite blue-and-white blankie. For a few more minutes, I lie next to my grandson's sleeping form and listen to his steady, soft snores.

I reflect upon the final line of DJ's naptime story: *I am thankful for holidays because they bring my family together.*

I will not be gathering with as much family as I'm accustomed to during the approaching holidays, but I'm nonetheless appreciative. I'm grateful for my growing family, for their continued health and safety, and for the hope of better days to come. And, I'm thankful for my days with DJ — albeit courtesy of the pandemic — days when I'm forced to slow down and consider life's abundant and simple pleasures through the eyes of a young, inquisitive mind.

While I cannot predict whether the unintended gramma moniker, Woo-Woo, will replace the carefully chosen Lulu, more importantly, I'm hoping that this time next year, I'll be prepping epic family feasts (by then, the single basket of baby board books in the guest room will have multiplied into two or three!).

During the days ahead, may we all endeavor to name something to be grateful for, regardless of our circumstances.

Blessings, friends and neighbors, stay well!

(*Julie McGue is a Duneland Beach resident and the author of the upcoming memoir, *Twice a Daughter: A Search for Family, Identity and Belonging*.*)

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Bolt for the Heart Presents 33 AEDs to LaPorte County First Responders

The second Bolt for the Heart 5K Family Run/Walk and inaugural Half Marathon helped donate 33 Automatic External Defibrillators to LaPorte County first responders.

The Nov. 19 presentation was made at Franciscan Health Michigan City. Sponsorships and funds raised by the race paid for 29 AEDs for the LaPorte County Sheriff's Office and four to Long Beach Police Department.

Bolt for the Heart President Pierre Twer, who is a Long Beach native, praised the contributions of race participants, along with sponsors Franciscan Health, the Play for Jake Foundation and Performance Services. Other individuals and company donations were recognized with window clings that will be displayed in squad cars.

The race, held Sept. 27 at Washington Park, adjusted to COVID-19 challenges. The 285 participants, including 30 half-marathon runners, were kept safe through masking, hand sanitation, staggered start times and distancing protocols ap-

proved by the LaPorte County Health Department. A virtual race option was available as well.

This year's donation of AEDs amounts to \$49,500



Franciscan Health Michigan City President/CEO Dean Mazzoni speaks during the Nov. 19 presentation.

in value, continuing the work of 29 AEDs donated through the 2019 Bolt for the Heart event. With the goal of placing an AED in every patrol car in LaPorte County, Twer said the organization will continue work to outfit the LaPorte and Michigan City police departments next year.

Bolt for the Heart is a non-profit organization that raises money to buy AEDs for first responders. To date, it has donated more than 2,000 AEDs, including 465 AEDs for Indiana State Police.

Visit www.boltfortheheart.com for additional information.

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Dunebrook Online Holiday Auction Continues Through Dec. 10

Postponed from the spring because of COVID-19, Dunebrook is conducting an online holiday auction through 10 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 10.

The auction typically is held during the spring gala, which was canceled because of the pandemic.

"Like many organizations, we are trying to be creative in raising dollars, because the demand is great for our services, and parents need support now more than ever," Dunebrook Executive Director Jeanne Ann Cannon said in a press release.

Spearheaded by Director of Development Lisa Scheller, the auction includes dining opportunities, candy baskets, electronics and kitchen wares, with new items added weekly. Photos are included on the website <https://bit.ly/Holiday20Auction>

Auction proceeds support Dunebrook's Healthy Families program, which provides parenting education and support to expectant and new parents, Body Safety school-based prevention education and the Child Advocacy Center, which conducts forensic interviews after allegations of child abuse.

McDonald's Restaurants of LaPorte County again has donated to the auction, with Glenn Lubeznik being one of Dunebrook's earliest board members.

Auction items are still being accepted. Contact Scheller at lisa2@dunebrook.org or call (219) 508-4676 if wanting to contribute.



Lisa Scheller (left) and Hannah Scheller are photographed with a few of the auction items.



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Snowflake Parade

The Snowflake Parade kicks off at 4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5, starting at 10th Street and heading north on Franklin Street.

The event is presented by The Mayor's Office of Special Events and Michigan City Fire Department. Lineup starts at 3 p.m. on 10th Street and continues along Washington Street.

Michigan City will monitor the COVID-19 cases as the date of the parade nears. The event will be in compliance with state and county requirements.

The Festival of Lights will commence 30 minutes after the parade in Washington Park.

Email jsttimley@emichigancity.com or call (219) 873-4012 for more details or parade applications.

Fernwood Botanical Garden

- **Holiday Market Pop-Up Shop: Artist Liz Kuntz from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST Saturday, Dec. 5.**

Kuntz specializes in fine-art prints, greeting cards and stoneware creations. Additional pieces will be available for direct purchase in the gift shop during the holiday season from Amy Greely Studio, Lynne Tan, Treasureology, GrownUp KidStuff and Tiddleywink Toffee.

Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve is located at 13988 Range Line Road, Niles, Mich. Call (269) 695-6491 or visit www.fernwoodbotanical.org for more information and to confirm the status of classes.

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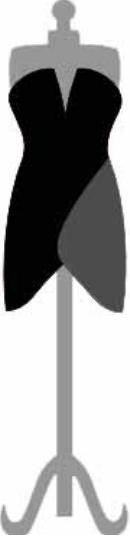
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Virtual Family Day

Lubeznik Center for the Arts will host a Virtual Family Day in conjunction with the new "Fake Real" exhibit from 1 to 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5.

Education Director Hannah Hammond-Hagman and online guests through Facebook Live will offer a brief gallery tour and step-by-step instructions for three related art projects, which include a sculpture, mixed-media collage and a drawing.

The tour will highlight three artists from the exhibit that explores ideas of memory, storytelling and culture. One of the artists is Ann Yafi, who uses thousands of pipe cleaners in her installation piece "Grid Love." Those watching then can take a crack at making a mini-installation.

Family Day Art Kits are free and available for pickup from LCA's front desk during regular business hours. Contact Hammond-Hagman at hhammond@lubeznikcenter.org or call (219) 874-4900 for more details.

The program is supported by American Licorice. The LCA is located at 101 W. Second St.

NB Library Zoom Presentation

The Friends of New Buffalo Library will host a Zoom presentation on plant and animal species that call Berrien County home at 7 p.m. EST Tuesday, Dec. 8.

Leading the program is Ryan Postema, Chikaming Open Lands executive vice president, who will discuss the wide range of ecosystems, from prairies and wetlands to forests and dunes, that provide the habitat for rare and protected plants and animals. He also will share what is being done to preserve these species and their habitats.

Visit the events section of the library's website (www.newbuffalotownshiplibrary.org) or Facebook page, or email new.buffalo.fol@gmail.com, for log-in information

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"Hillbilly Elegy" Honors Key Message of Vance's Memoir

by Andrew Tallackson

"As a teacher at my old high school told me recently, 'They want us to be shepherds to these kids. But no one wants to talk about the fact that many of them are raised by wolves.'

That was the passage that stuck with me from Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis. J.D. Vance's 2016 bestseller was the year's most divisive, celebrated by some for offering insight into "Trump's America," derided by many as armchair journalism, cutting a social class slack when it did not deserve it.

Vance didn't strike me as the latter. He asked only that you *understand*, not *embrace* the mentality of working-class white America, all in the context of his severely fractured family. As a parent, myself, I saw Hillbilly Elegy as Vance's plea for people to stop making excuses and blaming others for their ails and raise their kids right.

And that is what Oscar-winning director Ron Howard ("A Beautiful Mind") chose to emphasize, to distill from Vance's work, in his big-screen adaptation, which just debuted on Netflix. And, it has been savaged by critics. "*Worst movie of the year.*" "*Ron Howard's worst film ever.*" "*Laughably Bad.*" "*Poverty Porn.*" "*Shameless Oscar Bait.*"

Poisonous notices, to be sure. I get the "Oscar bait" quibble. Glenn Close and Amy Adams — forever the proverbial bridesmaids come Oscar time — get their fair share of "big moments" that either



"Hillbilly Elegy"

Running time: 116 minutes. Available on Netflix. Rated R for language throughout, drug content and some violence.

involve shouting, cursing or teary, red-eyed speeches. But laughably bad? The year's worst? Hardly. In fact, I would argue Hillbilly Elegy honors its source well, not just through Close and Adams, but also the entire cast giving the material all they've got. They sell it, and they sell it well.

In his memoir, Vance alternated between recollections of growing up in a poor Rust Belt Ohio town and a mix of personal observations, interviews and references to sociological studies, painting a portrait of disillusionment within the white working class. His mother, Bev, was salutatorian at her high school, but a damaged soul trapped in a vicious cycle of drug abuse; heroin, in particular. Vance's saving grace was his grandmother Bonnie, or "mamaw," as he called her. No saint herself, the chain-smoking, shambling, perpetually ill maternal figure was a fountain of foul-mouthed wisdom, preaching the importance of family, and family honor, over everything else. Vance was frequently in her care growing up, especially during Bev's violently destructive bouts with heroin and abusive boyfriends.

As a movie, Hillbilly Elegy can't follow the same structure as the memoir, putting Vance's life on

pause to illuminate the psyche of its social class. What Howard does is paint that picture in the world the Vances inhabit: businesses long shuttered, misplaced priorities — no money for food, but packs of cigarettes always at the ready — and a genuine collapse in the family unit (couples on the Vance's block are seen from afar, frequently locked in violent disputes).

The bleak look and feel Howard establishes lays the groundwork for his actors.

Close does her trademark disappearing act as Bonnie: zero makeup, dime-store glasses, hunched demeanor, hair fried into oblivion. Yes, she chews the scenery, but she does so meticulously, in carefully controlled bursts of desperation and feral parenting. And Adams, as Bev, reeks of failure. Feverishly trying to psyche herself up with the latest boyfriend, the new job, but the slightest hint of failure inducing a downward spiral.

Gabriel Basso and Owen Asztalos as the older and younger J.D., respectively, are very good in difficult scenes, particularly Asztalos in the most harrowing sequence lifted from the book in which J.D. flees Bev after she turns abusive while driving. What we get from Basso and Asztalos are resilience in the face of crushing disappointment, repeatedly staring failure in the face and somehow picking up the pieces.

We also admire Freida Pinto's lovely work as Usha, J.D.'s future wife. After "Slumdog Millionaire," Pinto seemed to get lost in forgettable roles. Always window dressing to bigger male stars. But here, she is enormously appealing: a beacon of love and support for J.D. as his family life crumbles before an important job interview. Equally compelling is Haley Bennett ("The Girl on the Train") as J.D.'s older sister and fierce protector, Lindsay. Why Bennett, who's like the second coming of Jennifer Law-



Amy Adams is effective as J.D. Vance's heroin-addicted mother.

rence, has not become a bigger star is a mystery. Performance after performance, she excels at playing the wisest person in the room.

I suspect the venom spewed at *Hillbilly Elegy* has less to do with what Howard created and more to do with leaving the volatile past few years in the dust. Vance's story, to me, ultimately is not about politics, but about surviving the impossible. And by that account, Howard's film achieves that...and achieves it well.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com



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“Raised By Wolves” Is Intriguing, Visually Stunning Science-Fiction

by Andrew Tallackson

Science-fiction over the ages has been fascinated by whether machines — robots — have the capacity to feel. To elicit genuine emotion. Because if these entities of wire and circuitry can grasp what it means to be human, could they be the next step in evolution...or a threat to civilization?

In films like “Ex-Machina” (2014) and “Terminator 2: Judgment Day” (1991), the argument is a resounding no. These creations are computer programs, behaving as they were designed to do.

But with HBO’s “Westworld” and now HBO Max’s “Raised By Wolves,” the answer to whether humanity exists within machines is an intriguing “maybe.”

I found “Westworld” to be increasingly maddening. Cold. Smug in its insistence on confounding viewers. “Raised By Wolves,” by comparison, is far more satisfying. Lavish, first-rate storytelling, with a more sympathetic cast than the unappealing androids of “Westworld.”

Every new streaming service, it seems, pulls out the big guns when it debuts, intent on one-upping each other with A-list talent and top-drawer production values. Apple TV+ certainly did with the blazing Jennifer Aniston-Reese Witherspoon drama “The Morning Show.” “Raised By Wolves” is the work of writer Aaron Guzikowski, who created the harrowing domestic drama “Prisoners” (2013) with Hugh Jackman and Jake Gyllenhaal, and executive producer Ridley Scott (“Alien,” “Blade Runner”), who also directs the first two episodes.

The premise is science-fiction lifted straight out of 1950s classics that capitalized on the fear and paranoia of Cold War nuclear devastation. In the future, Earth has destroyed itself by war and conflict. The only hope for humanity is raising children on the planet Kepler-22B, watched over by androids. In this case, it is the parental unit of Mother (Danish actress Amanda Collin) and Father (British actor Abubakar Salim), who try to create a small commune, where structure is essential, among a group of five to six children. All representing different races and gender.

The other group on Kepler-22B survived a deadly crash. Two of them, Marcus (Travis Fimmel) and Sue (Niamh Algar), not only changed their identities beforehand, but also their physical appearances to gain passage on the ship.

Religion enters the fray, with heated discussions between those known as “atheists” and those who pray to an entity known as “Sol.” These theological discussions get rather murky, muddying the waters of a story that essentially is about rebirth and survival on a cold, distant planet.

Kepler-22B, indeed, is a triumph of production



Mother (Danish actress Amanda Collin), an android, cares for human children on a distant planet in “Raised By Wolves,” which is streaming on HBO Max.

design: a vast, seemingly barren planet filmed in saturated colors to contrast the emptiness of the new world with the colorful hope of its new human and android inhabitants.

The most fascinating character in “Raised by Wolves” is Mother, known by the human adults as a “Necromancer” for her terrifying ability to take to the skies in a Christ-like pose, scanning for human prey. Mother, however, was reprogrammed shortly before leaving Earth by a scientist entreating her as humanity’s last hope. Collin, as Mother, is astonishing. We never feel like we are watching a performance, but a creature of intricate design. She rarely moves like a human. In some cases, inhumanly still, her head moving in short tics as if constantly absorbing her environment. Her voice can be sternly maternal one moment, laced with a childlike lilt in another, suggesting a capacity to respect human emotion. Salim, by contrast, is a cheerful sort as Father. Prone to telling riddles. Nurturing in ways Mother is not. An outpouring of encouragement that

The gentle nature of Father (British actor Abubakar Salim) is an intriguing contrast to the more violent behavior of Mother.



The two most-impressive performances among the young cast are by Felix Jamieson (left) as Paul and Winta McGrath as Campion.

them, stirring up the same trouble that has plagued past civilizations on the brink of destroying themselves.

Plenty of food for thought, indeed. HBO Max has renewed “Raised By Wolves,” and the Episode 10 cliffhanger definitely leaves plenty of unresolved affairs. That we are intrigued enough to hang around for more is a sign that all the tremendous talent involved did their job. We’re hooked. Eager for more.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com



"Run" Ratchets Up the Thrills With Two Great Performances

by Andrew Tallackson



Sarah Paulson (right) stars as a woman obsessed with controlling her daughter (Kiera Allen) in "Run," which is streaming on Hulu.

"Run" is B-movie comfort food done right.

We need thrillers like this every now and then, where we gloss over lapses in logic and just roll with it because the actors deliver the goods scene after scene after scene. In this case, it's Sarah Paulson and newcomer Kiera Allen, who are so good, director/co-writer Aneesh Chaganty is able to ratchet up the tension *because* of them.

The movie's initial plans for a Mother's Day release – how devious *that* would have been – were scrapped by COVID-19, which is why it just debuted on Hulu. The story is a cross between Stephen King's "Misery" and Gillian Flynn's "Sharp Objects," the latter which explored Munchausen syndrome by proxy in which a disturbed caregiver intentionally makes someone sick.

In "Run," that person is Diane Sherman (Paulson), who homeschools her daughter Chloe (Allen) because of a laundry list of illnesses. Confined to a wheelchair, she's riddled with asthma. Diabetes. Heart issues. You name it, she has it. During a homeschoolers parent meeting, Diane is a portrait of compassion, although there is an edge to her voice — one Paulson fires like the verbal equivalent of a poisonous dart — that suggests otherwise.

Diane and Chloe live in self-sustained isolation. Diane farms her own produce, cooks, cleans, tucks

★ ★ ★^{1/2}

"Run"

Running time: 90 minutes. Streaming on Hulu. Rated PG-13 for disturbing thematic content, some violence/terror and language

Chloe in for bed, complete with a nightly regimen of little green-and-white pills.

Chloe is 17. Pretty. Exceptionally bright. Thrilled by the possibility of attending college. So intelligent, in fact, she preoccupies herself with intricately designed robotic projects. Which drops "Run" into Plot Hole No. 1. A girl as savvy as Chloe would have dialed in *way* before turning 17 that all is not right with mommy. But, OK, we gloss over that for the sake of the plot, which shows Chloe, little by little, locking all the puzzle pieces into place about her mother. Problems with the phones. The Internet. Those little green pills are another mystery. The prescription bottle has her mother's name on the label, covered up by a newer label with Chloe's name attached.

Hitchcock would have loved a story like this because he was a big tease. He loved to toy with his audience, placing his characters in dire situations that seem to stretch beyond their control. "Run" has one doozy of a sequence in which Chloe sneaks out



The suspenseful highlight of "Run": a desperate attempt by Chloe (Kiera Allen) to seek answers about her medication at the local pharmacy.

of a movie theater, her mother still in her seat, while she heads outside to the local pharmacy, specifically to confirm her suspicions about her medication. The way Chaganty, as director, piles on the hurdles for Chloe has a twofold effect. You smile at the twisted nature of it, while the tension, as Diane realizes her daughter hasn't come back, is enough to make you squirm in your seat.

We realize here that Allen, as Chloe, is a major talent. Someone to watch out for. She is sensational here. Smart, savagely determined and, in moments like the pharmacy scene, a powder keg of feral desperation ready to erupt.

Chaganty provides enough backstory for Diane – revealed in carefully divulged snippets – so we grasp the psychology behind her. Munchausen syndrome by proxy is centered more on the unstable caregiver than the recipient of that care. A twisted desire to feel needed, useful, to erase the emptiness that exists deep within. And the treat of Paulson here is watching Diane gradually unravel, feverishly covering lie after lie with a host of new mistruths, while always redirecting each crisis back to her. Paulson, scene by scene, slips into a quivering mass of madness, yet never catapulting over the edge into camp.

Chloe does find out the whole truth about her mother – another plot hole: Chloe's way-too-easy access to the information – but instead of ending in a gore-drenched bloodbath, "Run" steers us in a direction we don't see coming. The last scene is so diabolical, you laugh at the ingenuity of it. It is immensely satisfying. Hitchcock would have been proud.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com

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Waving Goodbye to Summer at Warren Dunes State Park



Gone — the boys and girls of summer.

In this time of COVID-19, super Sunday summer bike rides are huge.

No, they were huge.

And that's the point of this exercise, to wave goodbye to a strange, but strangely wonderful summer at Warren Dunes State Park in Sawyer, Mich.

That's where I mainly went every Sunday afternoon in summer, after, of course, doing all my usual Sunday rounds. I'd come home from the last stop, usually to my favorite box store to stock up on necessities, letting my impulse buying streak run wild, then settle in for a late lunch/early dinner with Natalie, then head out for a 17-miler in the cool of a summer evening.

Warren Dunes, which is about four miles from us as the gull flaps, was always the centerpiece of my meandering rides.

Why?

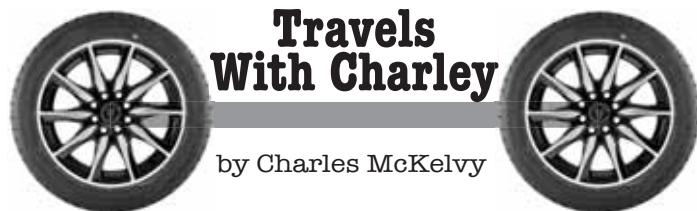
Well, you obviously haven't been there if you have to ask.

Warren Dunes State Park, as I have previously stated in these pages, has long been the only country club we would ever join. Warren Dunes, quite simply, provides some 1,952 acres of fun in the sand, surf and sassafras. We have birded it, biked it, hiked it, kayaked along its golden shore, cross-country skied its trails and just grooved on its very proximity.

When we worked for Classic Catering in Bridgeman, the highlight of every job was coming home

Travels With Charley

by Charles McKelvy



Ready for an end-of-summer ride in Warren Dunes State Park.

late at night, utterly exhausted, and rolling down the windows as we passed Warren Dunes and savoring the woodsy aroma of campfire smoke wafting over Red Arrow Highway. It was the closest thing to watching the fog roll in over San Francisco Bay.

So, yes, we love Warren Dunes State Park, and on Sundays this summer past, I would ride there on Natalie's day off from bicycling and utterly enjoy being in the people's park with people from all over.

I would ride through the campgrounds and wave at all the friendly campers, marveling at the advances in camping equipment since my Scouting days in the 1960s.

Then I'd head on down to the beach and enjoy watching the masses enjoy a day at what I consider THE most beautiful beach on all of Lake Michigan.

Yes, the beaches at Indiana Dunes State Park and Indiana Dunes National Park are just as lovely as what you'll find at Warren Dunes, but those beaches have something Warren Dunes doesn't have: in-your-face, up-close-and-personal views of the mills and factories along the southern rim of the lake.



The turkeys were preparing for winter.

You look out at the lake from Warren Dunes in any direction, and all you see is the lake. Well, you can see the NIPSCO plant in Michigan City if you look long enough, but the lake looks to a lot of visitors from the big city like an inland sea. Such a view is priceless, which is precisely why I made the beach at Warren Dunes the centerpiece of my Sunday afternoon bike rides this summer.

Excuse me, this past summer.

Yes, it's always bittersweet to see summer come to a close, and I really did see that on the last Sunday of September, the day the annual Apple Cider Century bike ride in Three Oaks would have been staged. But nothing has been normal in the year of COVID-19, so there were no cider centurions this year. No SAG stops and zippy packs of serious cyclists enjoying the end of summer on the backroads of Berrien County, Mich., and LaPorte County, Ind.

The Apple Cider Century was canceled for good reason, but there was no good reason to keep me off the roads leading to Warren Dunes State Park on Sept. 27.

Let me tell you all about it, perhaps in prose, but probably not in verse, because I am not a poet. But



Parking was no longer a problem.

I certainly felt like one when I took my salute-to-summer ride to Warren Dunes on Sept. 27. Accustomed to sharing the park with the merry masses of day-trippers and campers, I was sorry to see the three campgrounds I rode through were, at most, a third occupied, and that they had closed one of the three beach parking lots. The two open lots were nowhere near full, and while there were folks climbing up Pikes Peak and running down, there just weren't all that many.

Speaking of Pikes Peak, I did take a moment to remember the annual summer walks from our Prairie Club beach in Harbert to the top of Pikes Peak and back. If memory serves, I featured at least one of those walks in *The Beacher*.

Summers, past, right?

Right.

But on Sept. 27, five days after the official start of fall, there was a chill in the air. A grim, gray scrim had been pulled over the summer sun, and it was just falling into fall with a wisp of winter in the wind.

Still, the gift shop was open at the beach, the clerk saying they hoped to be open through the end of October, minus all the flotation devices. She said they would continue to sell apparel, and my eager, consumer eye caught a tie-dyed, long-sleeved Warren Dunes State Park T-shirt that would do the trick for an October ride to the park. I promised I would bring my wallet next week, then rode off into the sunset, feeling more than a little morose.

Summer was well and truly and officially over, and the other visitors were feeling the bluesy vibe, too.

Something like Samuel Barber's mournful "Adagio for Strings" should have been playing on the public-address system, but it wasn't, so I played it in my head as I charted a course for home and smiled, knowing Natalie would think to turn the heat on before I got there.



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The library is open, but with restrictions in place.

Until further notice, hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Saturday. There is no public seating. The library also follows LaPorte County Health Department's Public Health Order Face Covering Mandate by requiring masks inside the building. Every individual must wear a face covering over his/her nose and mouth at indoor areas open to the public. The circulation and reference desks will have masks available for \$1.

The following services have been temporarily suspended: public programs and meetings; literacy tutoring; MakerSpace/3-D printing; study rooms; homebound service; interlibrary loan; puppets; puzzles; blocks and children's AWE computers in Youth Services; Ellison die cut machine; public faxing; microfilm use; magazine/book sale; and acceptance of donations.

Access is limited to the computer lab: One session (up to one hour) per person per day is allowed. Due to social-distancing guidelines, only one person at a station at a time. Children are not allowed in the computer lab with parents/guardians.

One computer is reserved for genealogy research, with time limited to one hour per person per day.

Four charging tables allow a limit of 30 minutes per use (no seating is available at these stations).

WiFi is available throughout the building and exterior/parking lot.

The following virtual programming is scheduled:

- Storytime and Crafts to Go at 10 a.m. Wednesdays.** A new storytime video, aimed at children through age 5, will be posted on the website at 10 a.m. Wednesdays. Each video is available for two weeks at the following link: www.mclib.org/parents/story-time/. New take-home crafts are available Wednesdays to accompany the virtual storytimes. Visit the Youth Services desk to get them. Contact the Youth Services department at (219) 873-3045 for more details.

Michigan City Public Library is located at 100 E. Fourth St. Visit www.mclib.org for more details.

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Historian Retiring After 30 Years

After 30 years, LaPorte County Historian Fern Eddy Schultz will retire at the year's end, becoming LaPorte County historian emeritus.



Schultz was appointed to the position in 1991, working to preserve, share and promote LaPorte County history. Her accomplishments include leading the restoration of Pine Lake Cemetery's Eason Chapel in 1993, writing many books, articles and columns on local historical topics, compiling and preserving historical records, producing exhibits and serving as a speaker for many history programs.

In 2002, Schultz received the Hubert Hawkins History Award from the Indiana Historical Society. In 2017, the LaPorte County Historical Society dedicated The Fern Eddy Schultz Research Library to honor her research, education and preservation of LaPorte County history.

She also has served on the boards of the Pine Lake Cemetery Association, LaPorte County Historical Society and many other history organizations.

"I will still be available at netster@csinet.net and would enjoy hearing from each and every one who I have had contact with over these wonderful 30 years," Schultz said in a press release.

KAC Adjusts Exhibit Schedule

Having temporarily closed in light of increased COVID-19 cases nationwide, Krasl Art Center also has shifted its exhibit timeline and programs.

"Artists as Influencers: Pathways in Glass" and "Shelter-in-Place" will remain on view through Jan. 24, 2021. More information is available on KAC's Facebook and Instagram pages.

The KAC Member's Show has been rescheduled to Jan. 30-March 28, 2021. "Inspired by..." showcases member artists, and the people, places and objects that influenced them. Member artists are invited to display one artwork created within the past two years that addresses the theme. All media is accepted, and artists of every skill set are encouraged to enter. Artwork drop-off is Jan. 22-25, 2021.

Local artist Jennifer Zona, a KAC member, teacher and ceramic studio manager, will be featured in the artlab gallery on Jan. 30-March 28, 2021.

A new Art & Wellness Pop-Up will be piloted in KAC's recently updated community lounge when the center reopens. It moves to Benton Harbor Public Library in January. The project is the result of a partnership between KAC and Spectrum Health Lakeland's Population Health Department.

KAC is located at 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, MI. Email curatorial@krasl.org or visit www.krasl.org for more details.

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LET'S TALK TODAY.



Chesterton Art Center

Chesterton Art Center, 115 S. Fourth St., is offering monthly children's art classes during the school year taught on Zoom by Jennifer Aitchison.

All materials are included in the tuition and can be picked up from the center. Students actively participate in learning while studying a major movement of modern art history each month. All classes include drawing in some form and exposure to mediums such as painting, printmaking, sculpture, collage, drawing, weaving and paper arts. On-site classes may be added later when it is safe to do so.

The December focus is cubism, as well as local nature in winter. Animals from the Arctic and Antarctic will be created in a cubism-inspired mixed-media piece.

The schedule is:

- Monday, 1:30-3 p.m., homeschool, 8- to 15-year-olds.
- Monday, 3:30-5 p.m., elementary, 8- to 12-year-olds.
- Tuesday, 1-2 p.m., preschool/K, 3- to 5-year-olds.
- Tuesday, 4-5:30 p.m., 5- to 8-year-olds.
- Wednesday, 3:30-5 p.m., 5- to 8-year-olds.
- Thursday, 1:30-3 p.m., 8- to 15-year-olds.
- Thursday, 3:30-5 p.m., fifth through eighth grades.
- Thursday, 5:30-7 p.m., 13- to 18-year-olds.

December tuition is prorated. The normal program is four weeks, but December is three weeks to accommodate winter breaks. A make-up day will be offered for those signing up for a Monday class. So, the tuition is \$67.50 for high school, middle school, elementary and homeschool students (the member rate is \$52.50), and \$56.25 for preschool and kindergarten students (the member rate is \$41.25). Preschoolers will need assistance from someone at home. Visit www.chestertonart.com or Eventbrite.com for more details.

Chesterton Art Center is located at 115 S. Fourth St. Visit www.chestertonart.com for more details.



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

- A.K. Smith Career Center, 817 Lafayette St., Michigan City, 7:45 a.m.-1:45 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4.
- Trinity Lutheran Church, 907 Michigan Ave., LaPorte, 1-6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 8.
- LaPorte County Fairgrounds, 2581 W. Indiana 2, noon-5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 9.

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. Visit rcblood.org/ together for more details.

Realtor Ring Day

LaPorte County Realtors will participate in the national Realtor Ring Day to support The Salvation Army in Michigan City and LaPorte from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4.

Members of the LaPorte County Association of Realtors will ring bells in Michigan City at both Al's Supermarkets locations (Franklin Street and Karwick Plaza), and in LaPorte at Kroger and Al's.

Funds raised will remain in their respective communities to fund Salvation Army programs. It will aid services such as food pantries, utility assistance and Pathway of Hope case management.

More information about The Salvation Army is available at www.samichigancity.org or calling (219) 874-6885 in Michigan City; or by visiting www.salaporte.org or calling (219) 326-5342 in LaPorte. Those interested in volunteering to ring a bell at a red kettle can sign up at www.RegisterToRing.com

Tire Piles Removed from Preserves

Save the Dunes finally bid good riddance to several tire piles this fall that were dumped at three Lake County nature preserves.

With funding support from bp, Save the Dunes had the financing to hire Northern Indiana Mechanical to remove and properly dispose of the tires. The preserves included Shirley Heinze Land Trust's Ivanhoe South Nature Preserve, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources' Pine Station Nature Preserve in Gary and Save the Dunes' Martin Oil property in Hammond. A total of 250 tires were removed from the sites.

These preserves have been the focus of extensive efforts from all three organizations to revitalize and restore the area's rare dune and swale habitat.

It was during an October 2019 site visit to develop land-management plans for Martin Oil, with support from the Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program, that Save the Dunes' Senior Program Specialist Victoria Wittig first observed the tires.

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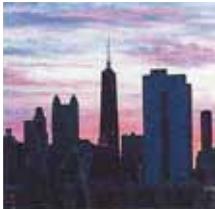
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new office hoursMon.-Thurs.: 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Friday: 9 a.m.-2 p.m.Thank you for your patience
during the COVID-19 pandemic**Wreaths Across America**

The Three Oaks Rebecca Dewey Chapter of the National Daughters of the American Revolution is working to ensure all veterans laid to rest at Fort Custer National Cemetery are honored on National Wreaths Across America Day.

This year, the ceremony will be held simultaneously at more than 2,100 locations across the country Saturday, Dec. 19. The goal is to place a live, balsam fir veteran's wreath at the headstone of every veteran buried there.

Each wreath sponsorship costs \$15. The Rebecca Dewey Chapter not only is raising money to put wreaths on veteran's graves, but also a portion of the proceeds will be donated to the local Blue Star Mothers group and a local veteran's group. Funds will be collected through Dec. 15.

Fort Custer National Cemetery is located in Augusta, Mich. Anyone interested in donating to the Wreaths Across America effort, or needs additional information, should contact Sandy Wilhoit, Rebecca Dewey NS-DAR, at sswilhoit@aol.com

Indiana Dunes State Park*The following program will be offered:***• Beginner Bird Drawing & Painting Workshop from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 13.**

Local artist Kristina Knowski will provide hands-on guidance, working from the park's mounted bird specimens, so participants can draw, learn and paint diverse Dunes bird life. Register by visiting Knowski's Arts Facebook event and clicking on her Eventbrite page.

Indiana Dunes State Park is at 1600 N. County Road 25 East (the north end of Indiana 49), Chesterton. Call (219) 926-1390 to register for programs or for more information.

Holiday Gift Gallery

Art Barn School of Art's Holiday Gift Gallery will sell fine art and fine crafts to support local artists and art-educational programs.

Shopping hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, additional Wednesday hours from noon to 4 p.m. through Dec. 23 or by appointment by calling (219) 462-9009.

Art Barn is located at 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso. Visit www.artbarnschool.org for more details.

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

Activities to Explore

In the Area:

Dec. 5 — Lubeznik Center for the Arts free Virtual Family Day, 1-2 p.m. Info: (219) 874-4900, hhammond@lubeznikcenter.org

Dec. 5 — Snowflake Parade, 4 p.m., 10th Street & north on Franklin Street. Festival of Lights, 30 min. after parade, Washington Park.

Dec. 8 — Friends of New Buffalo Library Zoom presentation (Berrien County plant & animal species), 7 p.m. EST. Free. Log-in information: www.newbuffalotownshiplibrary.org, new.buffalo.fol@gmail.com

Dec. 10 — Acorn Watch Party: The Bergamot's Holiday Concert, 8 p.m. EST. Free. Info: www.acornlive.org

Dec. 12 — Acorn Live Stream: Bryan Lubeck Hosts Christmas at the Acorn, 8 p.m. EST. Free. Info: www.acornlive.org

Through Dec. 31 — New exhibit, "New Views," Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St. Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays/11 a.m.-4 p.m. weekends. Closed Tuesdays. Info: www.lubeznikcenter.org, (219) 874-4900.

Through Jan. 4, 2021 — Works by Jamie McNeil, Queen of All Saints Catholic Church Legacy Center, 1719 E. Barker Ave. Gallery hours: 6 a.m.-8 p.m. Info: jessicar@qas.org.

In the Region

Dec. 3 — Harbor Country Hikers Zoom presentation, 7 p.m. EST. Topic: how animals and plants survive winter in Michigan. Info: www.harborcountryhikers.com/events

Dec. 5 — Holiday Market Pop-Up Shop: Artist Liz Kuntz, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. EST, Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, 13988 Range Line Road, Niles, Mich. Info: (269) 695-6491, www.fernwoodbotanical.org

Through Dec. 20 — Elkhart Juried Regional Art Exhibition, Midwest Museum of American Art, 429 S. Main St., Elkhart. Hours (all times Eastern): 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tues.-Fri., 1-4 p.m. Sat.-Sun. Info: info@midwestmuseum.us, (574) 293-6660.

Through Dec. 23 — Holiday Gift Gallery, Art Barn School of Art, 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso. Shopping hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tue., Thur., Fri.; 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat.; additional Wednesday hours: noon-4 p.m. through Dec. 23; by appointment — (219) 462-9009. Info: www.artbarschool.org for more details.

Through Jan. 3, 2021 — "A Christmas Story Comes Home Exhibit," Hammond's Indiana Welcome Center, 7770 Corinne Drive. Center hours: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. daily. Info: www.achristmasstorycomeshomes.com

Through Jan. 13, 2021 — Members Art Show, Chesterton Art Center, 115 S. Fourth St. Regular business hours: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. Info: www.chestertonart.com, (219) 926-4711.

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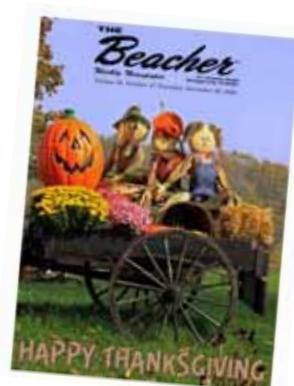
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For more than 35 years, The Beacher has existed as a **free** newspaper, and it will **continue** to do so. Amid the pandemic, however, small newspapers across the country are finding additional ways to financially support themselves. So, we've created a page where you can support us by becoming a Beacher patron. This week, we thank **Margaret Coffey**!



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Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter

A Dog's Perfect Christmas by W. Bruce Cameron (hardcover, \$15.99 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook. 273 pages.)

"Turns out...no matter how great your plan is, nothing ever goes the way you think it will. It's how you react to the unexpected challenges of life that really matters."

This universal truth doesn't make its appearance until near the end of this story, but it also provides a great introduction to a book I almost put aside because it started out too slow and sad. But, my philosophy about reading is, give the story a chance.

Cameron became an overnight sensation with his bestselling *A Dog's Purpose* in 2010 and its arrival on the big screen not long after. A whole series of books followed. I thought this novella was heading for a too, too depressing storyline. But something kept me reading, and I'm glad I did. The holiday season is in full swing, and this shorter story, in a more compact size, may just be what we need right now — people facing strife and personal pain who persevere and reinforce the human capacity for sharing the burden of whatever life throws at us. It all comes down to one 4-letter word. Love.

Meet the Goss family of Traverse City, Mich.: father Hunter, a corporate-facilities director; mother Juliana, former litigator and now mother to three: 13-year-old Ello and 3-year-old twins, Ewan and Garrett. There's also Sander, Hunter's 67-year-old father living with them since his wife died two years ago. Almost forgot, there's also Sander's wolfhound, Winstead, about as old as Hunter, only in dog years, of course!

From Page 1, this is a family in trouble. Ello, short for Eloise, grudgingly makes Sander his breakfast every morning, sets it down and walks out of his room. No conversation, other than "do you need anything else?"

The twins can tax the patience of a saint, and the parents, well...

Juliana is feeling the loss of her identity as a woman and former darn-good litigator, while Hunter is feeling the pressure of redesigning the workstations of the corporation he works for. His new boss is highly critical of everything, and with Thanksgiving and Christmas coming up, he could be out of a job by January if this project falls through. On the other hand, if Hunter succeeds, he may get a promo-

tion. Unfortunately, it would mean spending a lot of time traveling around the country to all the satellite offices. Seems he can't win.

Ello is lost in the normal hormone rage of a 13 year old, thinks no one could understand what she is going through, and is at the beck and call of Brittne, her BFF, the prettiest and snottiest girl in class who Ello tries so hard to please. Yeah, typical teenager.

And because everyone is deep in their own problems, no one actually talks to each other to resolve the simplest of things. Have I described The Average American Family?!

Things are coming to a head when Juliana admits to Hunter she is not happy with her life. Divorce? She won't say.

One day, Juliana isn't feeling well. Flu? Head cold? Only it doesn't go away. She's finally admitted to the hospital...and whatever is going on, it isn't good. Can this family come together and work as a loving, helpful team? Only time will tell...

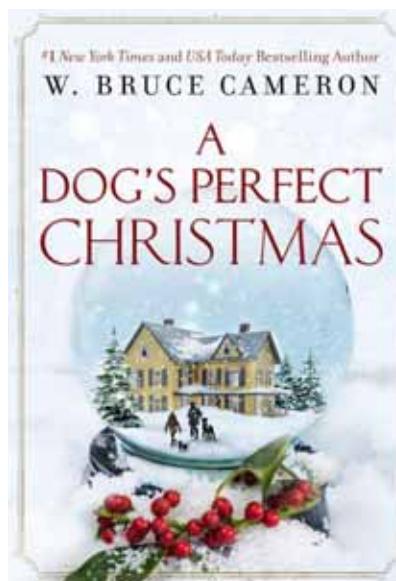
There are small victories to come in this family — new duties are spread around, even though everyone still holds back what they are thinking. A new boy in class has Ello's head spinning, her BFF Brittne dumps her and she finds out her grandfather is not the old crab she used to think he was. The world is upside down!

In the middle of all this, Hunter still doesn't know if he will have a job after Christmas, or if Juliana will make it through her crisis. He's so wrapped up in these two things, he overlooks, at first, all that is happening with the rest of his family. For example, Sander has acquired a "harem" of widows since he started taking the twins to the playground! And Ello has found a stray puppy on her way home from school one day...although maybe the puppy found her. Problem — parents said no more pets in the house. Winstead was enough. Hmm, Ello will have to work on that one.

Funny and heartfelt moments exist here, also. I loved the way Hunter can't accept that his daughter is growing up, wishing there is a pill or something to keep her the little girl who crawled up in his lap. The twins provide many moments of laughter, too. Remember having a 3-year-old? Now imagine doubling that mischief!

All in all, this is a lovely little book that has much to say about family, love and commitment. For a small book, it carries one heck of a punch!

Till next time, happy reading!





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