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Musical Journey

by Andrew Tallackson



Chuck Steck performs last year during a LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra children's concert. Beacher file photo by Bob Wellinski

When Chuck Steck was a young boy, his father would regularly invite friends over for an impromptu jam session. Brent was what the family dubbed a “weekend warrior.” Talented at the piano and organ, he performed every weekend with a local dance band. It was something he enjoyed. It also helped put food on the table.

One of his father's bandmates was a trumpet player who owned a music store in Valparaiso.

Chuck fell in love with the brass instrument, right then and there.

“I thought it was the neatest sound in the world,” he said, smiling. “I bugged my parents until they got me a trumpet. It was an old, beat-up 1940s trumpet that looked like it had been through a couple of wars, but that’s what I started with.”

The trumpet, indeed, has served Chuck well, whether it be as a performer, educator or clinician. His love of music has influenced the lives of count-

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Musical Journey

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less students, spurred his involvement in regional orchestras and bands and inspired his two sons to pursue similar paths.

But it is his long-lasting devotion to LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra that conveys how music, in many ways, is a personal journey, a path fueled by growth and persistence, of assuring that orchestral works are not just notes on a page, but a glimpse into the souls of the composers.

The symphony is nearing the end of its two-year search for a new conductor. In that time, Chuck has served as interim director, and what's been gratifying for him is witnessing the orchestra prove it can tackle music once feared impossible.

"The past year, probably the best thing for me is to watch the rise of the orchestra itself," he said. "In talking to a lot of my colleagues who play in other orchestras, there comes a point when you go through this process where the orchestra members realize they *can* do this. They *can* meet the diversity, and they *have* to rise to whatever level is expected of them by whomever comes in to conduct them."

Chuck took time out from his bustling schedule to chat with *The Beacher*, not just about the orchestra, but also his own musical past, one that flourished thanks to his immensely talented family.



Chuck Steck appears with guest composer Rick DeJonge during the 2019 children's concerts. Beacher file photo by Bob Wellinski

You see, the LaPorte native, who would go on to graduate from LaPorte High School in 1974, was blessed not only with a musical father, but also his mother and four siblings. His mother, Jean, played piano, oboe in the high school band, and sang in the church choir. Two of his sisters played clarinet and his brother guitar. Many times, everyone gathered in the comforts of their home to play together as a family.

(To this day, Chuck adds, Jean tries to attend every one of his concerts.)

It was his father, though, who had the most profound influence. Brent was a lover of jazz and big band groups, specifically the legendary Glenn Miller and Harry James. Chuck would listen to these two through his father's record collection. Once in high school, he joined his father at gigs ranging from parties to wedding receptions.

"I decided fairly early on that music was going to be it for me," Chuck said. "I was very active in many musical groups as could be, and that was when I got hooked up with the symphony for the first time."

It was Chuck's junior year at LaPorte High School, around 1972-1973. LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra needed a trumpet player. So, Chuck can lay claim to performing in the orchestra's second concert.

"I remember feeling very good about being able to do it," he said, "this great experience, to be able to recreate these great works."

His fellow musicians with the symphony hailed mostly from LaPorte, Michigan City and LaPorte County. And it was about this time he met trumpet player Jim Garwood, of Garwood Orchard. Calling him “the most influential person in my life,” he was precisely the mentor who helps young talent excel beyond their own modest ambitions.

“He was a real decent man,” Chuck said. “He loved playing trumpet. It wasn’t his life, it wasn’t his vocation, but he played a lot, and he played well.”

Chuck eventually earned a Bachelor of Music Education and Master of Music from Valparaiso University. Later, he pursued advanced study at the Chicago Musical College of Roosevelt University and VanderCook College of Music. But it was during his time at VU that he began questioning the course his life would take.

“I went to Valpo U and was planning to be a band director and music educator, but I met a trumpet instructor who gave me new insight into my own playing and what I could do, and took me into some new directions, and I loved it,” Chuck said “By the time I was done, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to play, so I spent a fair amount of time after college doing that. I taught lessons, played in anything I could play in.”



Check Steck, seen here during a May 2019 LCSO concert, has played the trumpet since he was a boy. Beacher file photo by Bob Wellinski

Chuck has done a little bit of everything. He was LaPorte High School’s band and choir director for 22 years. Before then, he held the same position for six years at LaCrosse High School.

Since 1990, he has been a VU trumpet instructor, working with students of all majors. He also teaches trumpet at Lakeshore High School in Stevensville, Mich., as well as at Portage High School. Factor into the equations lessons he gives out of the studio at his LaPorte home.

He regularly performs with the St. Joseph (Mich.) Municipal Band. Since 2003, he has served as principal trumpet of Elkhart County Symphony Orchestra. He is longtime trumpeter and vocalist with Tom Milo Big Band. His brass quintet, the North

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Musical Journey Continued from Page 3

American Brass Company, performs throughout the region. In 2013, he became LaPorte City Band's conductor and music director, having served for years as its principal trumpet player.

And, of course, there is his affiliation with LCSO.

Amid all this, he somehow found time to start a family. He met his future wife, Mary, through performances of Handel's "Messiah" at Michigan City's First Presbyterian Church. That was around 1985. She played oboe, and it was that talent that saw Chuck invite her to play with LCSO.



Chuck and Mary Steck, photographed after the 2018 Holiday at the Pops concert.

Chuck and Mary have been married now for 30 years. They have two sons: Andrew, 26, and Matt, 23. Andrew is a band director in St. Louis and a freelance trumpet player. Matt plays French horn and writes music.

"All these things I got to do, they did, too," Chuck says. "They both played with us in the symphony, they played 'Messiah,' they both have played in my brass quintet at one time or another. They didn't fall far from the tree, these guys."

As a father, is it rewarding to see his children pursue the same interest?

"I don't think there is any greater feeling when you get to share your passion with your sons," he said. "When I was growing up, I didn't understand. I always thought my dad was happiest when he was off doing a gig. When my sons started to do it...then I got it. You're really passing along your soul, in a way."



The Steck family in 2014: Chuck and Mary with their sons, Matt and Andrew

With LCSO, Chuck has been along for the ride from the start, a witness to its evolution as a group with increasingly higher aspirations.

Philip Bauman's departure as conductor in spring 2018 gave rise to the two-year "Bravo, Maestro" series now drawing to a close. In that time, it has seen four guest composers — Russell Ger, Maria Mercedes Garcia Diaz, Alexander Platt and Carolyn Watson — with Wilbur Lin scheduled in March and Christopher Fashun ending the search in May. Factor in guest conductors such as Rick DeJonge, Alastair Willis and Chuck himself, that's seven conductors so far, with two more on the horizon.

"They had to rise to the occasion each time, because everyone is different," Chuck said of the orchestra.

As interim director, Chuck rehearses with the symphony twice before each candidate arrives. The musicians have the music beforehand to familiarize themselves with it. Chuck communicates with each guest conductor to get a feel for what he/she expects: matters such as tempo, dynamics, nuance.

Once the candidate arrives, the week leading up to the performance is loaded. In addition to school visits and social functions, he/she rehearses with the orchestra Tuesday, Friday and the Saturday morning dress rehearsal. Then, of course, the concert itself.

"We've had four very different people so far; needless to say, everyone reacts differently, but the orchestra has been great about rising up and finding where those conductors are, what their personalities are and work with them in that frame," Chuck said.

"A couple of the conductors have remarked to me that they felt so at home, that they felt so welcome by the musicians, almost like they were helping them become part of the family."

Chuck's role as interim director, ultimately, is to serve as an intermediary, a link between the candidates and musicians.

"The first step of the road has been, the conductors have had to work with and through me to decide what music will be played," he said. "You can

want to do all kinds of music, but if your orchestra can't play it, it won't work, so part of my job is to be the guide for what's doable, what's going to work on the program.

"It's kind of a growing process for everyone," he continued, "not just the musicians, but for the board of directors, too, as they look at people, and try to make decisions about how everyone will fit together, how they will fit into our community."

As part of the conductor search, LCSO staff, including a search committee, have been gathering data on each individual, including comments from concertgoers and patrons at each performance. Their decision also will consider who will work well with the musicians and the board, who will present the best front for the group within the community.

The new conductor should be named around June 1, Chuck says. Planning for certain LCSO programs,



Chuck Steck performs Taps during a Veterans Day ceremony.

namely Hoosier Star and the fall children's concerts, has begun now to get the ball rolling. Otherwise, the symphony's new leader will make his/her debut at the November concert.

Once that person is firmly situated, where does the symphony go from there?

"Part of the beauty in my musical world was where music has taken me over the years," Chuck said. "The worlds are unlimited. So what is this new person going to do for us? What are they going to do, what are they going to show our community about the beauty of music? Where are they going to take us all?"

"I think we are looking forward to having a new vision at the top, from the conductor. I think we are excited to do some of the music, some of

the challenging music, these people are thinking of. I think it's going to be a cool new direction that everyone is looking for."



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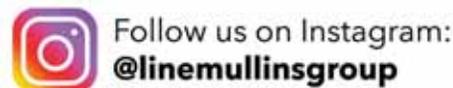
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Remembering Maggie

by Andrew Tallackson



Maggie Beyer wrote for *The Beacher* for 15 years, beloved for columns such as “Meanderin’ With Maggie” and “Diggin in the Earth.”

It was spring 1998. Creek Ridge County Park. The sky was blue, the air rife with the smell of freshly cut grass.

Assembled around picnic tables were a batch of families and their eager pets. Dogs, mostly. Some sat at attention. Others sniffed the ground, uncomfortably sporting costumes for a pet contest that placed them before judges.

A reporter’s notebook in hand, I weaved through the crowd, getting quotes from individual pet owners for a News-Dispatch article. The mood was light. Amiable.

As I stood leafing through my notebook, my wife nearby, trying to corral our pup, Oliver, into behaving, a woman with curly salt-and-pepper hair and the gentlest of smiles approached.

“I know who you are,” she said. “You are a good writer. I think we will become friends.”

And that is how I met Maggie Beyer. A *Beacher* correspondent of immeasurable talent, with a heart for the community and expertly telling stories of good people and great places. I eagerly anticipated seeing her wherever I went. And, as always, there she was, with a smile. A tender bit of encouragement. A heartfelt inquiry as to how I was doing.

She was a wonderful writer, with an eye for detail, whether it be through her column “Meanderin’ With Maggie,” or by talking with people about what they like, love and cherish.

I was fortunate to see Maggie before she left five years ago to live with family in Denver, Colo. Her eyesight had begun to fail, but that frailty did not dim her spirit. She offered up that smile, gave me a hug and wished me my best with *The Beacher*.

It was with heavy heart that we learned of her passing. *The Beacher* was blessed to have her share her talent with us. Keeping that in mind, we invited those who knew her well to share a few recollections. We’ve also included her obituary.

Sally Carpenter
Former Beacher Editor

Maggie was an advertising copywriter for Marshall Field in downtown Chicago many years ago before joining the *Beacher* team. She had a zest for life, a love of fashion and the arts, and a brilliant command of words that made her *Beacher* articles both informative and stimulating.

She started working for *The Beacher* in the late 1980s, which is when I first met her.

I was privileged to work alongside her and Sally Montgomery for many years. I listened and learned from her; she was both helpful and patient.

We shared many interesting conversations and social occasions which I will never forget — especially the last play we saw in Chicago and the last time she visited me before moving to Colorado.

Time may pass, people move on, but we never forget the big picture — how one person can make

a difference in your life, and leave a place in your heart.

Maggie was a lovely person, and I am proud to have called her friend.

**Charley McKelvy
Columnist, "Travels
With Charley"**

Maggie Beyer was not only a pleasure to work with at *The Beacher*, she was a true friend in all seasons. We had mutual friends and interests outside *The Beacher*, and it was a pleasure to share them with such a joyful person.

Also, Maggie was intrepid. She lived close to the lake and loved life, and she always had a warm and wonderful smile, even on the darkest of days. I am glad to have known Maggie.

**Ange Benz
Longtime Friend**

Maggie Beyer: a good friend, a talented and charming presence in our groups, whether meditating or partying. Maggie was a generous and thoughtful person, loved and loving. We miss her. We still sing a revised edition of her "12 Days of Christmas" at our annual Christmas gathering.

□

In Memoriam

Marjorie "Maggie" Beyer passed away Jan. 2, 2020.

Born Dec. 20, 1926, the only child of Joseph and Lillian Holleck, Berwyn, Ill., Maggie received her Bachelor of Arts in psychology from Purdue University. She earned her master's degree in public affairs from Indiana University.

Maggie is survived by three children, Tammis Anderson, Janis Morse and Hal Anderson; six grandchildren; and 13 great-grandchildren.

Maggie moved to Long Beach in 1972 and Michiana in the '80s. She was always active in the community, representing women's groups, senior citizen advocacy and community outreach programs. During her 15 years writing for *The Beacher*, she was known for her feature stories on local events and noted area residents.

The column "Meandering with Maggie" showcased her love of travel, and "Diggin in the Earth" exhibited her interests in gardening and ecology. She is remembered for her seasonal poetry, often appearing as covers for *The Beacher*.

After moving to Denver in 2015 to live with her daughter, Tammy, Maggie continued writing with the Windsor Garden Writers group and was a member of the Windsor drumming circle.



Maggie (left) with Sally Montgomery (center) and Barb Stodola in 2008.



Maggie was blessed with many wonderful friends throughout the years, especially her caregiver, Mary Jane McCormick, who cared for her for the past 3½ years.

A memorial service at Lake Michigan is planned for family members in June.

Hoosier Star Auditions Set for March

LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra will host auditions for its 15th annual Hoosier Star competition, open to amateur singers of all musical styles and ages, on Saturday and Sunday, March 21-22.

Times are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 21 and noon to 5 p.m. March 22 at LaPorte Little Theatre, 218 A St.

Open to contestants from throughout the state and Southwest Michigan, the performance categories are divided into two age groups: youth – 17 and younger; and adult – 18 and older (at the time of auditions). Ten finalists — five in each age group — advance to the final event and the chance to perform with the LCSO, as well as win monetary prizes for being crowned a 2020 Hoosier Star winner.

Duets are welcome and considered as one finalist. No group performances may enter, and both competitors in a duet must be from the same age division. For auditions, applicants may provide an accompanist, use a CD with no lead vocals, supply a digital mp3-capable device or sing a capella.

The actual event is Saturday, Sept. 12, at LaPorte Civic Auditorium, 1001 Ridge St. Audience members, as well as a panel of judges, choose the final two winners in each age division based on that night's performances. First and second place in the Youth Division receive \$1,000 and \$500, respectively. First- and second-place winners in the Adult Division win \$1,000 and \$500, respectively.

Registration forms can be found at www.hoosierstar.com. Contestants are encouraged to pre-register for a guaranteed time slot. The registration fee for the audition is \$20 per person or duet. If a competitor would like to audition as a soloist and a duet, he/she must submit two separate audition forms, including separate fees. Applications must be in by March 16 to receive a guaranteed time slot. Walk-ins are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis during the audition dates.

Call (219) 362-9020 for more details. Applicants will be notified of their assigned audition date and time within a week prior to the auditions.



Joe Stewart, the 2019 Adult Division winner.
Beacher file photo by Bob Wellinski



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The event, held in memory of rider Kelsey Marie Meekhof, hosts more than 250 guests annually. Cocktails are at 5:30 p.m. EST, followed by dinner and the program at 7:15 p.m. EST. The theme is magical worlds, complete with castles, princes and princesses, a caricature artist, photo booth, live music performances and a silent and live auction.

Individual tickets cost \$75, two seats cost \$125 and tables of 10 cost \$675. Visit reinsoflife.org or call (574) 232-0853 for tickets or more details.

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The Guilty Pleasures of Netflix's "The Witcher"

by Andrew Tallackson

Henry Cavill as Geralt of Rivia.

I couldn't get into "Game of Thrones."

(Crickets)

Found all the characters and conflicts confusing.

(Crickets)

Gave up early into Season 2.

(Cricket cardiac arrest)

There. It's out there. Nor does it offend me in the slightest if you decide this column no longer warrants your attention. I get it. You love the show.

Logic would dictate, then, that Netflix's "The Witcher" falls into the same trap. It's sort of the cheap, tacky cousin of "Game of Thrones," and by the second episode, I was completely lost. My boss, Tom Montgomery, prompted me to stick with it, revealing it weaves through multiple timelines. Armed with that knowledge, "The Witcher" not only became tolerable, but a watchable guilty pleasure. It's trash, but fun trash.

The Netflix series is based on books by Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski, as well as a popular series of video games. The audience base clearly is substantial. By Dec. 31, the show's first season surpassed Disney+'s "The Mandalorian," which has my undying devotion, as the world's most in-demand series.

Most. Watched. Show. On. The. Planet.

Hard to appreciate *why* during the first episode, the opening scene in fact, where Henry Cavill's monster hunter Geralt of Rivia dukes it out with a swamp beast: a creature so bargain basement, I feared the effects department cribbed it from the estate of Ed Wood. Fifteen minutes later, we enter a magical castle populated by nymphs, the nudity

so gratuitous, I half expected Elizabeth Berkley to turn up, staging a medieval showgirls routine.

This is the most watched show on the planet?

By the second episode's close, however, the varying timelines come into play. We have the kingdom of Cintra, which is defeated by its southern neighbor, Nilfgaard. That sends Cintra's princess, Ciri (Freya Allan), fleeing, told to find Geralt as her protector. We also have Yennefer of Vengerberg (Anya Chalotra), a hunchback in sorceress training, her path frequently crossing with Geralt. Where does his story, his timeline, mesh with everyone else's? Ironically, that becomes part of the fun: trying to decipher if their stories are at the same time, or does one precede the other?

Once the timelines converge, and "The Witcher" makes more sense, there are pleasures to be had.

Let's start with Cavill. I never much cared for him as Superman. The late Christopher Reeve, for my money, remains the perfect embodiment in mind, body and spirit. Cavill, by comparison, was a stiff. A chiseled Ken doll whose sole purpose, in "Justice League" it seemed, was to stand shirtless for all to admire his ripped physique.

The actor, however, is an ardent fan of "The Witcher," and it shows. There is an intensity to his take on Geralt that is sorely lacking when he dons Superman's cape. The gruff performance is a wink to the audience. He knows the material is ridiculous, but he plays it straight with Geralt's bored demeanor and gravelly voice. It is deadpan counterpoint to the show's blatant silliness, like Joey Batey's Jaskier, a travelling bard who breaks out into songs that com-

ment on Geralt's quest.

For me, the show belongs to Chalotra, whose Yennefer is introduced as a traumatized hunchback, but thanks to a bit of magical surgery, is transformed into a seductive sorceress, one who wields sex for power. There is something playful, dangerous and tantalizing about Chalotra, whose Yennefer takes on greater significance as the story advances. There are plenty of sets and effects in "The Witcher" — some fantastical, others laughable — but Chalotra barrels through them with confidence. She's the real deal.

By the final episode, all the story threads come together for one wild, invigorating battle between all the major players, and with Yennefer at the core. Apparently, the show's low-grade visuals were a means to furlough the budget, saving the big bucks for the big finish. And it shows. The last episode of "The Witcher" is a blast.

All of this, of course, is pure and utter nonsense. Hardly great TV. But the treat of "The Witcher" is that no one involved takes it *too* seriously. They know they are not making "art," but when it comes time to step up their A Game, they give it all they've got.

Netflix gave the creators of "The Witcher" the OK for Season 2 before Season 1 even aired. Thrilled by the show's success, they've now greenlit Season 3 as well. As long as everyone keeps a level head about it, affectionately treating the material as sword-and-sorcery trash, then I'm along for the ride.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com

Top photo: Anya Chalotra becomes the most fascinating element of "The Witcher," playing Yennefer of Vengerberg.

Bottom Photo: Joey Batey's Jaskier offers comic relief as a travelling bard.



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Montessori PreK-8th Grade

Lubeznik Arts Festival Applications



Beacher file photo by Bob Wellinski

Artist applications are open for the Lubeznik Arts Festival on Aug. 15-16 at Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St.

The annual event connects festivalgoers to the organization's programming and exhibits. LCA's summer display, "Well-Behaved Women: Celebrating 100 Years of Women's Suffrage," can be viewed then. The festival line-up also includes food vendors, family art activities and live entertainment.

Fine artists and crafters can apply. The event will feature approximately 85 exhibitors working across a variety of mediums, including two-dimensional art, fine craft, jewelry, photography, sculptural objects and wearable art. An estimated \$3,000 in cash prizes will be awarded.

This year's juror is Laura Cutler, co-owner of LaPorte's Thaddeus C. Gallery. She has a Bachelor of Fine Art from Otis College of Art & Design and a Master of Fine Art from The New York Academy of Art. She has taught painting, drawing and ceramics at numerous colleges and is an associate faculty member at Indiana University-South Bend.

Contact Marketing Coordinator Kyle Murphey at (219) 874-4900 or kmurphey@lubeznikcenter.org, or visit www.zapplication.org/event-info.php?ID=8354 for more details.



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New Barker Mansion Director

Sarah Berndt is the new director at Barker Mansion, the board for which now has five new appointees.

Mayor Duane Parry and the Barker Civic Center Commission made the announcement.

With a background in museum leadership and decorative arts, Berndt has experience managing historic collections and expanding outreach, as well as interpretive programming. She has a Bachelor of Arts in anthropology and art history from Augustana College, Rock Island, Ill., and a Master of Fine Arts in American Material Culture from the University of Delaware's Winterturth Program.



Sarah Berndt

The five new board members are: Ed Beutner; John Leinweber; Ed Merrion; Sarane Ross; and Maggi Spartz. They join current members Thomas McCormick and Alexander Ross.

Barker Mansion is located at 631 Washington St.

Save the Dunes Seeks Vendors

Save the Dunes is seeking regional vendors for its 10th Annual Jammin with Save the Dunes, which is from 4 to 10 p.m. June 6 at Washington Park.

More than 1,000 people are expected to attend. Potential vendors include local restaurants that can operate within a 10x10 space, or local food trucks. Potential boutique vendors must sell dunes or beach-related items that fit the event's theme. No electricity is available on site, so all vendors must be self-sustaining. Batteries and generators are welcome. Lighting is limited to park lighting only.

Participation requests will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis. Space is limited. Completed agreements must include a one-time payment of \$100 for food vendors and \$50 for boutique vendors. Vendors selling food must comply with county health regulations. Selected participants must provide valid proof of insurance and, if applicable, current ServSafe certifications for employees.

The application deadline is March 1. All inquiries are welcome. Contact Amber Seiler at (219) 879-3564, Ext. 121, or email amber@savedunes.org for details. Visit savedunes.org for more information.

The event supports the non-profit Save the Dunes, which preserves, protects and restores the Indiana Dunes and all natural resources of Northwest Indiana's Lake Michigan watershed.

AAUW Meeting

The Michigan City Affiliate of the American Association of University Women meets at 11 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 4, at LaPorte County Library's Coolspring Branch, 6925 W. County Road 400 North.

The speaker is Dorothy Stoler, who will share her experiences of "Castle on the Rhine." After the program and business meeting, members will have lunch at The Sugar Bowl, 402 W. U.S. 20.

AAUW, founded in 1881, furthers gender equity for women and girls through research, education and advocacy. Membership is open to anyone with an associate or equivalent baccalaureate degree, or a higher degree from a regionally accredited college or university.

Contact Julie Kreighbaum at 872-3730 for more details.

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Tuesday, February 4, 2020

at 6:00 pm

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Was Adam Sandler “Robbed” of a Nomination?

by Andrew Tallackson



Adam Sandler stars in the Safdie brothers' "Uncut Gems."

Adam Sandler makes a lot of crap.

Yes, he cranked out dumb-fun comedies in the '90s (“Happy Gilmore,” “The Wedding Singer,” “The Waterboy”), proved his chemistry with Drew Barrymore was no fluke (“50 First Dates”), then grew lazy, the films like watching him hang out with pals (“Grown Ups,” “Just Go With It,” “Jack & Jill”).

The list of Adam Sandler crap is substantial, so when the actor turns serious, critics take notice. Paul Thomas Anderson’s “Punch-Drunk Love” (2002) is the best example — salty, but sweet.

“Uncut Gems,” Sandler’s latest, has caused an outcry among those who believe he was robbed of an Oscar nomination. Strip me of my critic’s hat — am I missing something? “Uncut Gems” is excruciating. It’s like sitting in a chair and someone places sheet metal next to you, pounding on it with a sledgehammer. The result: a savage migraine.

I gave “Uncut Gems” my best shot, lasting an hour before giving up, unable to continue.

The problem is Sandler’s character. He plays Howard Ratner, who runs a jewelry store in New York’s Diamond District. He’s sleaze, always on the con, whether it be with clients or his crumbling family. His latest screwup involves NBA star Kevin Garnett, playing himself and delivering the film’s only authentic performance. Garnett is transfixed by jewels Howard obtained from Ethiopia. He wants to “borrow” them for the night.

You can figure out what happens next. Every reckless, insipid move Howard makes — we see it coming *way* before he does. Sandler shouts, screams and mouths every obscenity in the book. He does so

★ 1/2

“Uncut Gems”

Running time: 135 minutes. Rated R for pervasive strong language, violence, some sexual content and brief drug use

with commendable intensity, but he can’t uncover a single worthwhile trait to make the experience of being around Howard tolerable.

The Safdie brothers (Josh and Benny), who directed and wrote the film, have an annoying habit of allowing the characters to talk over each other, so what you get is a cacophony of ear-shattering dialogue, most of it variations on the F word.

The Safdie brothers, whose previous film was 2017’s “Good Time” with Robert Pattinson, also have much to learn. Their film looks cruddy, amateurish. Daniel Lopatin’s score is laughably dated, undermining the emotional content of each scene.

By the midpoint, “Uncut Gems” amounts to little more than Howard making one dumb move after another, treating his family with cruel disregard (poor Idina Menzel) and verbally abusing his mistress (Julia Fox) in public. And the film’s ethnic politics? That’s a whole other column.

Does Howard redeem himself by the end? I didn’t care to find out. We are introduced to the character, by the way, while he’s having a colonoscopy, the camera weaving through his insides. It is a fitting image. You feel hollowed out by “Uncut Gems,” and by Sandler’s character.

Robbed of an Oscar nomination? Hardly.
Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com

And the Nominees Are...

PICTURE

- "Ford v Ferrari"
- "The Irishman"
- "Jojo Rabbit"
- "Joker"
- "Little Women"
- "Marriage Story"
- "Once Upon a Time in

Hollywood"

- "Parasite"

DIRECTOR

- "The Irishman,"

Martin Scorsese

- "Joker," Todd Phillips
- "1917," Sam Mendes
- "Once Upon a Time...,"

Quentin Tarantino

- "Parasite," Bong Joon Ho

**ORIGINAL
SCREENPLAY**

- "Knives Out"
- "Marriage Story"
- "1917"
- "Once Upon a Time..."
- "Parasite"

ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

- "The Irishman"
- "Jojo Rabbit"
- "Joker"
- "Little Women"
- "The Two Popes"

ACTOR

- Antonio Banderas, "Pain and Glory"
- Leonardo DiCaprio, "Once Upon a Time..."
- Adam Driver, "Marriage Story"
- Joaquin Phoenix, "Joker"
- Jonathan Pryce, "The Two Popes"

ACTRESS

- Cynthia Erivo, "Harriet"
- Scarlett Johansson, "Marriage Story"
- Saoirse Ronan, "Little Women"
- Charlize Theron, "Bombshell"
- Renee Zellweger, "Judy"

SUPPORTING ACTOR

- Tom Hanks, "A Beautiful Day
- in the Neighborhood"
- Anthony Hopkins,
- "The Two Popes"
- Al Pacino, "The Irishman"
 - Joe Pesci, "The Irishman"
 - Brad Pitt, "Once Upon a Time..."

SUPPORTING ACTRESS

- Kathy Bates, "Richard Jewell"
- Laura Dern, "Marriage Story"
- Scarlett Johansson, "Jojo Rabbit"
- Florence Pugh, "Little Women"
- Margot Robbie, "Bombshell"

1st & 2nd Place Prizes

Rules for The Beacher's Beat the Editor Contest:

Check one box in each category. Only one entry per person. Entries from *Beacher* employees will not be accepted. Forms can be dropped off at *The Beacher* or submitted by mail to: The Beacher, Attn: Oscar Contest, 911 Franklin St., Michigan City, IN 46360. Only scanned copies will be allowed by email to drew@thebeacher.com. The deadline is noon Monday, Feb. 3. Editor Andrew Tallackson's picks will appear in the Feb. 6 edition, before the Feb. 9 telecast. Those who beat his picks will be placed into a drawing. First place receives a \$25 Fiddlehead gift certificate and an AMC movie pass. Second place receives an AMC movie pass. If no one beats him, readers with the most correct picks will be placed into the drawing. The winner will be revealed in the Feb. 20 edition.

Name:

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What's New in



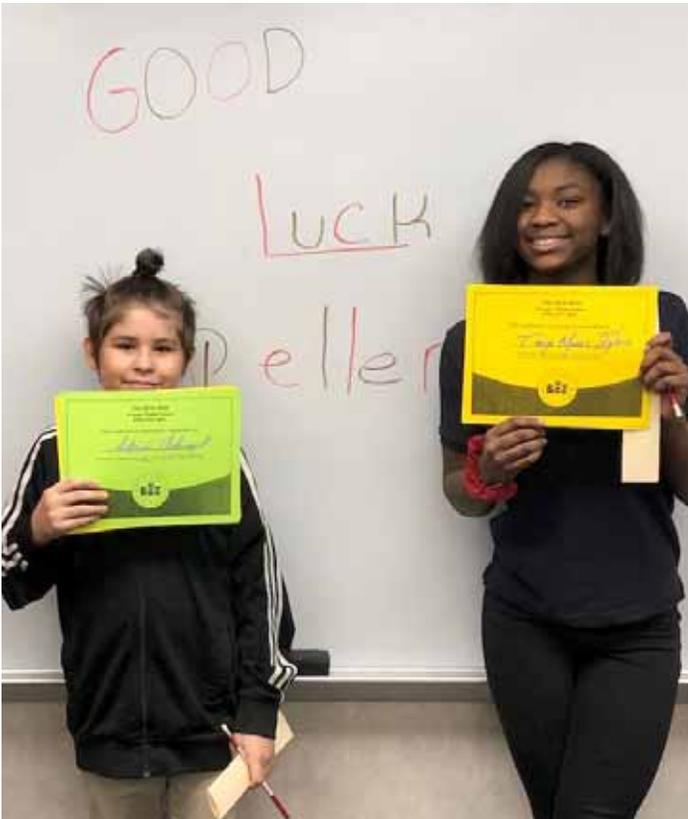
Coolspring Elementary School student Trevor Trusty was chosen to introduce U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky on Jan. 18 during his Town Hall forum at Purdue University Northwest. Trusty, a sixth-grader, is involved in basketball and robotics. He received a certificate of recognition from Visclosky.



Krueger Middle School received a donation of feminine products, deodorant and lotion from MonoSol, a Merrillville-based company that manufactures biodegradable films and other products. MonoSol's recently formed women's group, 4>WARD, donated the items through its community outreach mission. Pictured are Krueger nurse Jenna Applegate (left) and MonoSol Marketing and Communications Specialist Shannon Denny. The items will be distributed through Krueger's "Care Closet," a resource students in need can use to request clothing and personal items.

Care Closet donations are always needed.

Visit <https://educateMC.net/KMScarecloset> for more details.



Krueger Middle School held its annual Spelling Bee on Wednesday, Jan. 22. Pictured are Adrian Tlahuextl (left), who finished in first place, and T'mya Moore, who finished in second place. Tlahuextl will represent Krueger in the LaPorte County Spelling Bee on Wednesday, Feb. 13, at South Central.



Michigan City High School's Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps conducted presentations at Krueger and Barker middle schools in advance of eighth-graders scheduling courses for next year. The JROTC is required to have 100 cadets to keep the program at MCHS.

The cadets demonstrated regulation military drill, exhibition drill and numerous physical-fitness events, and ended with a question-and-answer session. Cadets also shared their experiences in JROTC.

Michigan City Area Schools



Savannah Holley.

Seven MCAS choral students performed with honor choirs during the Indiana Music Educators Association convention on Jan. 17-18 in Fort Wayne.

All of the students were selected based on a rigorous application process that included auditions. Pine Elementary School students Grace Dillard, Ralph Smith and Alyssa Tracy performed with the Elementary Honor Choir; Barker Middle School students Brooklynn Accardi, Madison Gresham and Reece Carlson performed with the Middle School Honor Choir; and Michigan City High School's Savannah Holley performed with the All-State Honor Choir.

Michelle Howisen is MCHS choral director, Stephanie Sobecki is Barker's choral director and Jeanne Bolen the Pine Elementary music teacher.



Pine Elementary School students selected for the Elementary Honor Choir include (from left) Grace Dillard, Ralph Smith and Alyssa Tracy.



Michigan City High School Choral Director Michelle Howisen (from left), Barker Middle School Honor Choir students Reece Carlson, Madison Gresham and Brooklynn Accardi, and Barker Choral Director Stephanie Sobecki.

Friday Hours
The Beacher Weekly Newspaper
closes at 2 p.m. Fridays.
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Indiana Dunes National Park

• **Cabin Fever Festival/Groundhog Day from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1, at Indiana Dunes Visitor Center and Paul H. Douglas Center for Environmental Education.**

Activities for all ages, including free movies and music, are planned. A ranger will lead an outdoor adventure hike, or borrow snowshoes or skis and explore Miller Woods. A detailed schedule is available by calling (219) 395-1882.

• **Playdate in the Nature Play Zone from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1, at The Paul H. Douglas Center for Environmental Education.**

Explore Miller Woods, build a fort, climb a tree, create nature art and feed the resident fish, turtles, snakes, toads and frogs. Dress for the weather.

• **Snowshoe hike from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturdays at Indiana Dunes Visitor Center.**

Meet for a quick lesson, then hike through fields and woods surrounding the center. A regular hike will be offered if there is fewer than two inches of snow. A limited amount of equipment is available.

• **Movie Screenings at the Douglas Center from 1 to 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.**

Join a ranger for a screening of a national park or outdoor-related documentary. This weekend, the film is "Nature: A Squirrel's Guide to Success."

• **Miller Woods Hike from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Sundays at Paul H. Douglas Center.**

The ranger-led stroll explores a 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

• **Snowshoe Shuffle at 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 1.**

The free naturalist-led snowshoe hike, which meets at the Nature Center, includes the history and techniques of snowshoeing. Free snowshoes will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. A winter hike is planned if there isn't enough snow.

• **Nature Myths at 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1.**

Meet at the Nature Center to help shatter myths about animals that call the dunes home.

• **Groundhog's Day Photo Scavenger Hunt from 10 a.m. to noon Sunday, Feb. 2.**

Stop by the Nature Center for the list, with prizes awarded.

• **Cocoa & Crafts from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 2.**

Meet at the Nature Center Auditorium to make a Groundhog's Day-themed craft.

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



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Leadership Award Nominations

The community can submit nominations through Feb. 28 for the ninth annual Ned E. Kalb Community Leadership Award.

Purdue Extension Office of LaPorte County and Leadership LaPorte County — two organizations Kalb impacted — sponsor the award established in 2011. Kalb was a key founder of Leadership LaPorte County in the early 1980s. He also spent 15 years as the Purdue Extension director in LaPorte County, where he also served on many public and private boards. After leaving Purdue Extension, he went overseas to teach self-sufficiency to underdeveloped countries through modern farming and business methods.



Kalb

Nominees can be individuals or organizations. A panel of local leaders selects the winner, who is honored at the Extension annual meeting March 24 at LaPorte's Silver Palace.

Past recipients include John Coulter, James Dworkin, George and Dory Morley, Diana Werner, Cynthia Hedge, Herb Higgin, Elaine Shurte and June Lenig.

Nomination forms are available from the Leadership or Extension offices. Call Leadership at (219) 325-8223, or Purdue Extension at (219) 324-9407 or (219) 874-5611. A form can be requested by email to kulman@purdue.edu, mfoell@purdue.edu or info@leadershiplaportecounty.com. An online nomination is at www.extension.purdue.edu/laporte

Insights in History

Key moments in Indiana University's history are the focus of "Insights in History" at 1:30 p.m. EST Wednesday, Feb. 5, at The History Museum, 808 W. Washington St., South Bend.

The speaker is James VanderVeen, IU-South Bend professor of sociology and anthropology. Also planned is a tour of the new exhibit "Indiana University: 200 Years in the Making," which VanderVeen curated.

Call the museum at (574) 235-9664 or visit www.historymuseumSB.org for more details.

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LaPorte County Public Library

• **South Bend Symphony Orchestra Brass Trio and Instrument Petting Zoo from noon to 1 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31, at the main branch.**

Children can hear, see and try the instruments.

• **Carnegie Centennial Celebration from 3 to 6 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31, at the main branch.**

Through community donations and funds appropriated by the Carnegie Corp., LaPorte Public Library opened in November 1920.

Guests at the celebration can do make-n-takes in the MakerLab, delve into history through the Indiana Room and dance during the Kid's Zumba Dance Party, presented by Zumba Instructor Gail Beal, at 5:30 p.m. in Youth Services. Light refreshments will be served.

• **"Don't Let Fake News Fake You Out" from 3 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1, at the main branch.**

The interactive workshop offers tips and tricks to separate fact from online fiction.

• **Leatherworking: Quarter Keeper Keychain Beginner Class from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1, at the main branch.**

Learn basic leatherworking skills, including saddle stitch, adding a snap and cutting leather, while creating a leather keychain that holds a quarter. Register at laportelibrary.org to ensure enough supplies are available.

• **STEAM Sandbox from 3 to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday.**

Students in grades 3 and older can move through levels, earning a certificate for each completed level. They work independently and chart their progress while completing hands-on, interactive projects.

• **MAKE a Difference from 3 to 5 p.m. Mondays in February.**

The focus is fidget sleeves for Golden Living residents.

LaPorte County Public Library is located at 904 Indiana Ave. The Coolspring Branch is located at 6925 W. County Road 400 North. Visit www.laportelibrary.org for more details.

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Fernwood Botanical Garden

• **Northern Indiana Artists exhibit opens Friday, Jan. 31.**

The exhibit, which runs through March 29, features various mediums and styles. An artist reception is from 2 to 4 p.m. EST Sunday, Feb. 9.

• **Winter Exploration for Kids from 2 to 4 p.m. EST Saturday, Feb. 1.**

Children ages 6-10 explore trails to find animal tracks and other winter features. Dress for walking the trails. The cost is \$10, or \$8 for members.

• **Children's Kindness Retreat from 1 to 4 p.m. EST Saturday, Feb. 8.**

The program, open to children ages 7-10, draws from social emotional learning and mindfulness meditation practices, games and creative movement. The emphasis is nature-based projects.

The class is limited to 12 participants. The cost is \$40 (\$32 for members), plus \$5 for materials. Register by the Wednesday prior to the retreat.

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.

Michigan City Public Library

• **Makerspace: open lab, 3:30 p.m. Thursdays.**

Youth ages 6-18 can create with LEGO WeDo, Micro Bits, paper circuits and Ozobots. Children 12 and younger must have a parent or guardian attend with them.

• **Free Gentle Flow Yoga at noon Saturday, Feb. 1.**

Certified yoga instructor Lauralee Sikorski emphasizes deep breathing and releasing stress. Take a mat and wear comfortable clothing.

• **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.

Michigan City Public Library is located at 100 E. Fourth St. Contact Robin Kohn at (219) 873-3049 for more information on library programming.

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Chesterton Art Center

• **The next Life Drawing Open Studio is from 6 to 9 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 5.**

Artists can use any media, including pencil, charcoal, pastel or paints. They must take supplies and clean up after. Organizer Ivan Chermel can provide some guidance; however, the class is not structured. Fully clothed models are used.

The cost is \$15, and students must pre-register.

• **Local painter Mark VanderVinne will host Critique Night at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 5.**

Artists can take a piece at any stage, from conception to the final version, with all ability levels and styles invited.

Guests may simply listen; however, participation is encouraged. While being a safe environment, it is a critique involving advice and insight into the effectiveness of the work or artistic concept.

• **Jennifer Martin will host February children's art classes.**

The goal is to introduce children to various artists, their styles and techniques, with projects reflecting what they are learning. February's focus is Cubism.

The schedule is:

- Monday, 1:30-3 p.m., homeschool, 8-to 15-year-olds.
- Monday, 3:30-5p.m., elementary, 7- to 12-year-olds.
- Tuesday, 1-2 p.m., preschool 3- to 5-year-olds.
- Tuesday, 4-5:30 p.m., elementary, 5- to 8-year-olds.
- Wednesday, 1-2 p.m., preschool, 3- to 5-year-olds
- Wednesday, 3:30-5 p.m., elementary 5- to 8-year-olds.
- Thursday, 3:30-5 p.m., elementary, 7- to 12-year-olds.
- Thursday, 5:30-7 p.m., middle school, fifth to eighth grade.
- Friday, 3:30-5 p.m., high school, ninth to 12th grade.

Tuition is \$90 per month for after-school and home-school students (the member rate is \$70), and \$75 for preschool students (the member rate is \$55). Families must be current members to receive the discount. Supplies and a snack are included. Students must be registered and paid for before the start of each month. All payments made after the 15th of the month are subject to a \$20 late fee.

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

Coffee With the Curator

The latest installment of "Coffee With the Curator" is at noon EST Wednesday, Feb. 5, at Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, Mich.

The program involves walking through the galleries with KAC Deputy Director/Curator Tami Miller. Visit www.krasl.org for more details.

LONG BEACH WOMEN'S BOWLING



Jan. 21, 2020

TEAM STANDING	WON	LOST
1. Gutter Gals	9	3
1. Gutter Busters	9	3
1. Wrecking Balls	9	3
2. Wine-ettes	8	4
2. Alley Oops	8	4

HIGH INDIVIDUAL GAMES	SCORE
1. Holly Dres (highest ever)	198
2. Sue Labovitz	173
3. Margie Midkiff	172
4. Nancy Kubath	163
5. Barb Macudzinski	161
6. Ellie Parkerson	157
7. Diana Holt	156
8. Linda Neulieb	155
9. Lisa Albers	153
10. Sue Luegers	151
11. Ann Bogart	150
12. Carolyn Wiggins (series)	412
13. Debbie Novak (series)	408

SPLITS	
Jill Jankowski	5-7
Barb Macudzinski	7-8
Diana Holt	3-10
Ann Bogart	3-10, 5-6

STRIKES	
Holly Dres	4
Sue Labovitz	3

More bowlers are invited when teams meet at 12:30 p.m. Tuesdays at City Lanes.

Credit Union College Scholarships

Members Advantage Credit Union is accepting applications for its Gail Walker and Leona Bruno scholarships.

In 2010, MACU established the \$1,000 Gail Walker Memorial Scholarship in memory of the former board member. It is awarded annually to a graduating high school senior, college freshman or sophomore with academic achievement.

The \$1,000 Leona Bruno Scholarship was established in 1994 in memory of the first MACU manager. Annually, it goes to a graduating high school senior with scholastic achievement.

The deadline is Feb. 26. Call (219) 874-6943 for details.

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New Footlight Scholarship

Footlight Players has unveiled The Robert W. Komerda Theatrical Scholarship Program in honor of its longtime member and president.

The \$1,000 scholarship is supported by donations from patrons who participated in 50/50 raffles at Footlight Theatre, 1705 Franklin St.

Qualified applicants must have a LaPorte County address, a personal interest in theater and have graduated from high school or will do so by the end of this school term. He/she plans to continue his/her performing arts education. A committee of judges will select the recipient based on the registration forms and three provided references. Applications must be complete and legible.

The deadline is midnight March 9. The recipient will be notified no later than April 30, and receive four free passes to the Sunday, May 3, matinee of "Steel Magnolias."

Three ways exist to obtain a form:

- The theater hotline at (219) 874-4035, by which a form can be sent by mail. If leaving a message, speak clearly and provide a telephone number.
- In person. Registration forms are available at the box office when the theater is open.
- Visit footlightplayers.org. Print the form, fill in the information and send it back. A Footlight representative will confirm it has been received.

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Prayer to the Blessed Virgin

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Oh, most beautiful flower of Mt. Carmel, fruitful vine, splendor of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in my necessity. Oh, Star of the 'Sea, help me and show me, herein you are my mother. Oh Holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Earth! I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart to succor me in

this necessity. There are none that can withstand your power. Oh, show me herein you are my mother. Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee (3x). Holy Mother, I place this cause in your hands (3x). Holy Spirit, you who solve all problems, light all roads so that I can attain my goal. You who gave me the divine gift to forgive and forget all evil against me and that in all instances in my life you are with me. I want in this short prayer to thank you for all things as you confirm once again that I never want to be separated from you in Eternal Glory. Thank you for your mercy toward me and mine. The person must say this prayer 3 consecutive days. After 3 days, the request will be granted. This prayer must be published after the favor is granted.



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

- LaPorte High School, 602 F St., 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31.
- St. John's United Church of Christ, 101 St. John Road, Michigan City, noon-6 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 4.
- Sacred Heart Church, 201 Bach St., LaPorte, noon-5 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 5.

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.

Noon Time Talk Series

The Noon Time Talk Series continues with "Jana Hanka" at 12:20 p.m. EDT Thursday, Jan. 30, at Midwest Museum of American Art, 429 S. Main St., Elkhart.

Director/Curator Brian Byrn will discuss the new "Spotlight" exhibit of ceramic works by the Kalamazoo, Mich.-based artist. Admission is \$5. Members are free. Call (574) 293-6660 for details.

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Activities to Explore

In the Area:

Jan. 31 — South Bend Symphony Orchestra Brass Trio and Instrument Petting Zoo, noon-1 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: laportelibrary.org

Jan. 31 — Carnegie Centennial Celebration, 3-6 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: laportelibrary.org

Jan. 31 — New Graphic Novel Book Group for Kids, 4:30-5:30 p.m., Westchester Public Library, 200 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton. Focus: Raina Telgemeier's "Ghosts." Info: (219) 926-7696.

Feb. 1 — Cabin Fever Festival/Groundhog Day, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Indiana Dunes Visitor Center, 1215 N. Indiana 49, Porter/Paul H. Douglas Center for Environmental Education, 100 N. Lake St., Gary's Miller Beach neighborhood. Info: (219) 395-1882.

Feb. 1 — Leatherworking: Quarter Keeper Keychain Beginner Class, 1-3 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Registration: laportelibrary.org

Feb. 1 — Pink Floyd Tribute, "Echoes of Pompeii," 8 p.m. EST, The Acorn, 107 Generation Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$40. Reservations: acornlive.org

Feb. 2 — GROUNDHOG'S DAY.

Feb. 2 — Groundhog's Day Photo Scavenger Hunt, 10 a.m.-noon, Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Feb. 4 — Free seminar, Bio-Identical Hormone Replacement Therapy, 6 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. RSVP: (219) 221-6958. Info: www.customdosing.com

Feb. 5 — Hat and Scarf Time With Your Stuffed Friend, 10-10:45 a.m., Luhr County Park, 3178 S. County Road 150 West, LaPorte. Free. Reservations: (219) 325-8315.

Feb. 5 — "Seed Starting: How to Grow Garden Plants from Seed," 6-7:30 p.m., Westchester Public Library, 200 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-7696.

In the Region

Jan. 31 — Opening night party, "Lines with Power and Purpose: Editorial Cartoons," 5:30-8 p.m. EST, Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, Mich. Free. Info: www.krasl.org

Feb. 1 — Winter Exploration for Kids, 2-4 p.m. EST, Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, 13988 Range Line Road, Niles, Mich. Cost: \$10, \$8/members. Info/registration: (269) 695-6491, www.fernwoodbotanical.org

Feb. 1-2 — Movie Screening, "Nature: A Squirrel's Guide to Success," 1 p.m., The Paul H. Douglas Center, 100 N. Lake St., Gary's Miller Beach neighborhood. Info: (219) 395-1882.

Feb. 5 — "Coffee With the Curator," noon EST,

Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, Mich.
Info: www.krasl.org

Feb. 5 — “Insights in History,” 1:30 p.m. EST, The History Museum, 808 W. Washington St., South Bend. Info: www.historymuseumSB.org, (574) 235-9664.

Support Groups

Mondays — Codependents Anonymous (CoDA), 6 p.m., Franciscan Alliance-St. Anthony Health. Info: (219) 879-3817.

Mondays, Fridays — Overeaters Anonymous, 7 p.m. Mon./Franciscan Hospital Clair of Assisi Room, 3500 Franciscan Way; 9 a.m. Fri./First United Methodist Church, 121 E. Seventh St. Info: https://oa.org, (219) 879-0300.

Wednesdays — Alzheimer’s/Dementia Support Group for Caregivers, 2 p.m., third Wednesday of each month, Rittenhouse Senior Living, 4300 Cleveland Ave. Info: (888) 303-0180.

Wednesdays — Al-Anon meetings, 6-7 p.m., Franciscan Alliance-St. Anthony Health. Info: (708) 927-5287.

Thursdays — Adult Children of Alcoholics and Dysfunctional Families, 6:15 p.m., Franciscan Health Michigan City, Maria Theresia Conference Room C, 3500 Franciscan Way. Info: (219) 801-1296.

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Westchester Public Library

• **Graphic Novel Book Group for Kids at 4:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31, at the Thomas Branch.**

The focus is Raina Telgemeier's "Ghosts." Snacks are provided. Registration is required.

• **Popular Books at 2 p.m. Monday, Feb. 3, at the Thomas Branch.**

Colson Whitehead's "Underground Railroad."

Thomas Library (219-926-7696) is located at 200 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton. Westchester Township History Museum (219-983-9715) is located at 700 W. Porter Ave., Chesterton.

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La Porte County Parks



All registrations/questions go through the Red Mill County Park Administrative Office, 0185 S. Holmesville Road, LaPorte. 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. Feb. 3 and 10, March 2 and 16, and April 6 and 27 at Luhr County Park, 3178 S. County Road 150 West, La-Porte. Call 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:

- Feb. 5: Clouds Overhead.
- Feb. 12: Could You Be a Squirrel?
- March 4: 1 Bird, 2 Bird.
- March 18: Water Everywhere.
- April 1: Flower Power.

Hat and Scarf Time With Your Stuffed Friend

The free program for children 2-11 is from 10 to 10:45 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 5, at Luhr County Park.

Wear a favorite hat and scarf, and take a favorite stuffed animal, for the program that includes story time and snacks.

All children must be accompanied by an adult. Space is limited, so call at least one week in advance to reserve a spot. The minimum required enrollment is eight and the maximum 24.

Nature Center Open House

A variety of crafts are planned during the free, all-ages open house from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 12, at Luhr County Park.

No pre-registration is required, and 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.



Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter

Cilka's Journey by Heather Morris (*hardcover, \$27.99 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook. 340 pages.*)

"Everyone affected by war, captivity, or oppression reacts differently — and away from it, people might try to guess how they would act, or react, in the circumstances. But they do not really know."

That quote speaks to the heart of this story. No matter what you think, none of us really can say what we would do to survive. Choosing to give up and die, or do what you must to survive, is only the beginning. Afterwards are the consequences of those decisions — and how you will be judged.

We all know about the World War II death camps and Hitler's "Final Solution," but it always brings that history to life when we can tell the story through individuals, people who had to make the life-or-death decision — if they were given that chance at all. This is one of those stories...

There are many, many books written about World War II, each more horrific than the last. This one is written as historical fiction — the story of real-life Cilka Klein is derived from many years of research and face-to-face interviews with death camp survivors and their families. Heather Morris also traveled to Europe and visited the towns and places where Cilka's life journey took her.

Should a person be despised for choosing to live? That is the question that plagues Cilka throughout her story...

She was born a Czech Jew. In 1942, her family is taken by the Nazis to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Because she is young — only 16 — and pretty, she catches the attention of several Nazis. She has two choices: give in to their demands or die. She chooses to live and somehow survive despite the constant guilt that eats at her conscience.

When the camps are liberated by the Soviets in 1945, Cilka appears before a Soviet tribunal, judged to be a Nazi collaborator.

"You are convicted of working with the enemy, as a prostitute and additionally as a spy. You are sentenced to fifteen years' hard labor." Really?!

Instead of the freedom she thought was coming, she finds herself on a train headed for the Vorkuta Gulag, Siberia, north of the Arctic Circle. There is no barbed wire atop the fences — who would be stu-

pid enough to try to escape into the wilds of Siberia?

Cilka is put in a drafty bunk house with a group of women. They are immediately put to work in the coal mines.

Oddly, Cilka is the only one with numbers tattooed on her arm, which she tries to hide because she is the only Jew in the group. Most of the women are political prisoners or even common criminals. None of the women know what she endured at the hand of the Nazis...all except for one...

By chance, Cilka is placed in the camp hospital under the direction of a female doctor who takes Cilka under her wing and teaches her about taking notes for the doctors and filing paperwork. She also works as a translator, as she can speak four or five languages, including Russian. Eventually, she learns nursing skills.

The story reveals how, after weeks and months, the women form fragile friendships — not an easy thing with trust being in short supply and pain being the norm.

Guards come into the bunkhouse at night and rape the women, and, of course, some become pregnant. Cilka is sent from the hospital to help in the maternity ward. The new mothers and their babies, if they live, are sent to a nursery where they stay together until the

child is 2, then sent away, presumably for adoption somewhere in the USSR. The mother goes back to work in the mines.

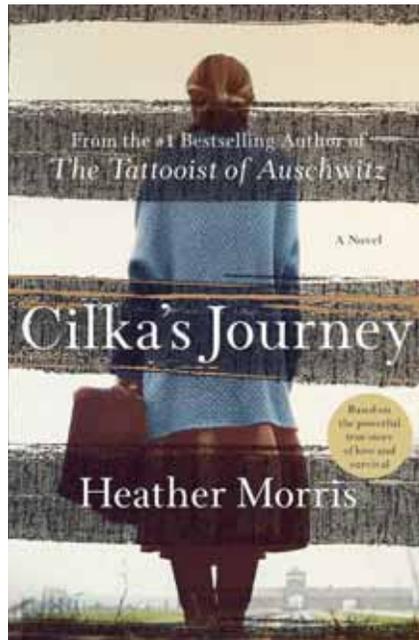
So this brings us back to my original quote. Do you really think you know how you would react? This story proves how none of us know how we would react to what Cilka is subjected to for 10 years — three with the Nazis, the next seven in Siberia.

Morris provides extensive notes at the end explaining how she was introduced to a man with "a story worth telling." That man was Lale Sokolov, the subject of Morris' first book, The Tattooist of Auschwitz. He told her about Cilka, who died in 2004. That started Morris on a journey to discover more about her story.

Only historical fiction could give us a more personal understanding of Nazi concentration camps and the gulag camps of Siberia.

I cried at the turning of the last page. It's impossible not to. Yet Cilka's story is truly one of hope, perseverance and, yes, even love.

Till next time, happy reading!





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