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Connecting Amid COVID

by Kim Nowatzke

Editor's note — This is the next in a series of articles over the next few months exploring life in LaPorte County since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Badges. Camping. Friendships. Crafts. Adventures. Cookies. And, plenty of laughs, smiles and fun. That is what Girl Scouts is all about.

Even during a pandemic.

Tonya DeMartinis is a leader for Michigan City Junior Girl Scout 00214 with seven fourth- and fifth-grade girls from Cool-spring and Springfield elementary schools.

She recalls Friday, March 13, 2020 — like so many Americans — as a turning point for her troop.

The girls were looking forward to a two-night stay at Camp Soni Springs in Niles, Mich. They earned the free outing as a reward after volunteering at the camp in the fall of 2019. DeMartinis had booked only one overnight stay because it was a better fit for the troop. But that Friday, as Michigan City Area Schools students went home, they soon learned virtual learning would begin the following Monday.

"I reached out to parents on March 13 as soon as I got word about virtual learning starting on the 16th. I was undecided if we needed to cancel or go ahead with our plans,"

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Even behind masks, the big smiles of Michigan City Girl Scout Junior Troop 00214 were evident as they safely met last fall at Creek Ridge County Park. The top row is Hannah Kilbourne and Layla Koyama. The middle row is Shelby Fulford, Olivia DeMartinis and Charlotte Wildfang. The front row is Lilly Baker and Thalia Smiertelny.



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DeMartinis said. "COVID was still new, but scary. That day is when all the toilet paper was gone from the shelves and you couldn't find groceries anywhere. Luckily, I shopped earlier in the week for our event."

"All the parents felt comfortable with their girls staying as long as no one had a temperature. And we made sure we were washing our hands constantly. One parent even said, 'Yes, let's still do this. Who knows when these girls will see each other again?' How right she was. Even one of the crafts we made that night was homemade hand sanitizer."

Yvonne Bancroft, community manager for the Girl Scouts of Northern Indiana Michiana Council, acknowledged COVID's challenges for leaders and Scouts.

"Things have been very different," she said, "and our numbers have been down."

Yet, she added, leaders have risen to the challenge to connect with each other and their girls.

"They are awesome, trying their best to stay in



New Buffalo Girl Scout Troop 00344 fondly remembers pre-pandemic activities, such as this one. The girls are participating in a special ceremony at Camp Soni Springs to respectfully burn tattered U.S. flags.

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has tried to keep up that schedule virtually.

"Before our Zoom meetings, I drive to all the girls' homes and drop off bags of supplies we will need for that meeting," DeMartinis said. "Most always, we do crafts. They love that."

"For Thanksgiving, we did a thankful tree with finger paints. They were supposed to put a finger-paint of yellow on the tree for every person in their family or extended family they were thankful for, and then fill in



Fifth-grader Thalia Smiertelny displays a hot cocoa bar, a surprise Christmas gift from Tonya DeMartinis, her Michigan City Troop 00214 Girl Scout Junior Troop leader.

the tree with others color of paint that I provided. They really enjoyed that craft, and I got such positive feedback from the parents on how they loved that and would keep it forever."

Brianna Keith, who leads Cadette Girl Scout Troop 00486, said the troop, which includes girls in grades six through eight, looks forward to camping each summer. So, leaders created a virtual camp-in



Lily Baker, a fifth-grader in Michigan City Girl Scout Junior Troop 00214, holds up a special Thanksgiving craft she made in Girl Scouts.

experience for the 10 girls. One activity they enjoyed was a "wacky campfire" in which items found around their houses represented the key elements of a proper campfire. Other fun items included oven s'mores, camp songs, knot-tying, camp-themed Mad Libs and time for the girls to hang out "together."

"They were on their call for hours. As much as we want to teach them and to learn badges, this is what the girls need right now," Keith said. "We have way more interaction with the girls online when they aren't sitting in front of a computer learning. They miss their friends, and they want to see them."



Hannah Kilbourne, a fifth-grader in Michigan City Girl Scout Junior Troop 00214, holds a special Thanksgiving craft she made in Girl Scouts.

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Keith has used her creative skills to direct scavenger hunts for the girls in their homes, and a “chop challenge” where the Scouts pick up meal fixings, including a secret ingredient, needed for a meal. Wanting to continue the annual holiday gift exchange, troop leaders picked up and dropped off presents to the Scouts’ homes.

Girl Scout Troop 00028 Leader Amanda Fowler leads 10 Brownie and Junior Girl Scouts in second through fifth grade from various MCAS schools. She has faced challenges with Zoom calls. Some of her Scouts experience connectivity issues, and some aren’t as interested because of so many hours already spent online for their virtual school days.

“We use it more for fun – like a family game night,” she explained.

Giving the girls a “break from technology,” Fowler has focused on hands-on activities the girls can do from home. Recently, she sent out a questionnaire the Scouts could answer by watching President Biden’s inauguration. Those who participated earned a special patch.

“It’s been a challenge to keep their attention, but it’s working,” Stocks said. “We have earned several more badges this year in Scouting because of Zoom, a lot more than we would have at this point. They are going to finish strong on badges.”

Janet Drews, a leader of Daisy, Brownie and Junior Troop 51027 in New Buffalo, said girls and their families have not been interested in meeting virtually.

“While we could meet in person socially distanced, outdoors and following strict state, county and Girl Scout guidelines, we had all except two girls participate,” Drews said. “Once we could no longer meet outdoors in person, we have not had the same level of interest from girls or families.”



Junior Girl Scout Abbey Ordiway, part of Girl Scout Troop 51027 in New Buffalo, decorates a pumpkin during one of the troop’s outdoor meetings last fall.

Meeting on Zoom isn’t just a struggle for the girls.

“Most challenging as a leader has been coming up with things for the girls to do,” DeMartinis said. “If they need supplies for a project, I have to bag them all up, safely deliver them to all the girls and set up the Zoom meetings.

“Sometimes, I have girls that can’t get on, and sometimes the leader even has problems getting on,” she continued with a laugh. “Most of the girls are attending the meetings alone in Zoom, which means I have to pick things that I can explain and they can do without an adult to help. This is a great learning tool for me and my troop. The girls for the most part, are very independent, but some things call for ‘hands on learning.’”

Many badges and patches planned for this year have in-person requirements now placed on hold. For example, it’s been necessary for DeMartinis to reschedule a cooking class four times.

“I miss them terribly!” DeMartinis said. “I miss having them hug me and laugh with me in person. I miss watching them grow in front of my eyes. Seeing them in a Zoom meeting every two weeks or so is not what I was made for. There have been times I have cried after a meeting because I miss them so much.”

“I had decided last year that this would be my last year (as a Girl Scout leader), before COVID was even thought about. With this disconnect, it is



Just before COVID shutdowns took place, Girl Scout Troop 51027 with Daisy, Brownie and Juniors enjoyed participating in the first New Buffalo St. Patrick’s Day Parade.

a struggle for me to enjoy my last year. When I see my girls, though, it brings me back to why I do this."

In September, when COVID cases were down and the county ranked orange, DeMartinis' troop held a few meetings at Creek Ridge County Park.

"At the first meeting, the girls got to basically 'see' each other for the first time! It was heartwarming to see the smiles on their faces," she said. "My co-leader, Lisa Baker, and I had the girls make tie-dye tennis shoes. They loved it! I brought popsicles and bottles of water. I always have a gigantic container of hand sanitizer at all our meetings. We mainly just wanted the girls to hang out and, well...be kids! We also met again and painted landscaping stones. It was time-consuming because it was hot and the paint wouldn't dry fast. The girls did not care."

Drews is thankful her Scouts participated in the first New Buffalo St. Patrick's Day parade in March, just before restrictions went into place.

"The girls really enjoyed that," she said. "They had so much fun singing, cheering and waving as we made our way through the parade route."

Drews also is grateful for the two meetings held at an outdoor pavilion in late summer/early fall.

"Each girl was given her own supplies to use (and not share) and worked at her own picnic table," she said. "All tables were positioned six to 10 feet apart, and the girls brought their own masks to wear. They were able to complete a paint and canvas art project

for our first meeting, and for our second meeting we decorated fall pumpkins with paint and craft supplies."

The troop also has participated in the New Buffalo Memorial Day parade and remembrance service. The girls and troop leaders look forward to participating in them again, once it is safe to do so.

Stocks' troop, which has high-school-age Scouts, has been planning a trip to Hawaii for the past three years. It was originally set for this June. They have it all worked out, including a day of snorkel

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Co-leader Lisa Baker (left) and Leader Tonya DeMartinis (right) are photographed with girls from Troop 00214.



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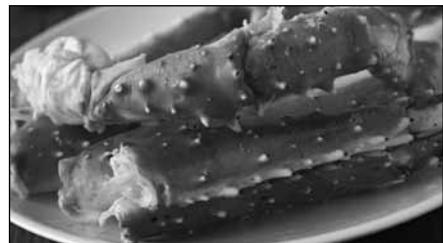
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ing, quality beach time, sailing on a catamaran and even a service project “to give back while we’re there.” They haven’t officially booked anything yet, but hope COVID doesn’t interfere with a dream trip as the culmination of their last year in Girl Scouts.

A big part of Girl Scouting is community service, and many troops have carried out this mission despite COVID. While the county was at an orange level, Troop 00028 delivered door-to-door toy donations to Toys for Tots, cookies to area veterans through Disabled American Veterans, firefighters and EMS personnel.



Olivia DeMartinis, a fifth-grader in Michigan City Girl Scout Junior Troop 00214, is all smiles showing off the tie-dye tennis shoes she made at a fall 2020 Girl Scout meeting.

Other bags were handed directly to some of our citizens as they walked around in town and were recognized from the local soup kitchen. A large assortment went to Sand Castle Shelter for the Homeless so families could receive a new supply.

“In Christmases past, we have put together gifts of Chapstick, socks, scarves and hand sanitizer for Rittenhouse Village at Michigan City,” she continued. “We would take cookies there, and let the residents decorate them and pass out the gifts. With COVID, we knew that wouldn’t be possible.”

On a council level, the troops look forward to celebrating World Thinking Day — in addition to the birthday of Girl Scouts (March 12) — together on March 20. If needed, the event will be held virtually.

Hopeful plans also are being made for the Girl Scouts’ annual summer camp at Soni Springs on



Fifth-Grader Hannah Kilbourne is photographed with tie-dye tennis shoes she made at one of Troop's 00214's outdoor meetings last fall.

This year, DeMartinis’ troop donated hygiene products, including hand sanitizers, toothbrushes and toothpaste, to a variety of area residents.

“Some of the goody bags were given to a few local families who were in need of a fresh supply of hygiene products,” said Lisa Smiertelny, who helped distribute the items and has a fifth-grade daughter, Thalia, in DeMartinis’ troop. “Two families were recovering from COVID and did not want to go to the store, but

wanted a new toothbrush.

July 26-30 with a theme of “Shipwrecked at Soni.”

“When we can meet again, we are planning a celebration for all the Girl Scouts in the area,” Bancroft assured.

For Bethany Fulford, even though her fourth-grade daughter, Shelby, is now meeting only virtually with Troop Junior Girl Scout 00214, she is thankful for Girls Scouts.

“It gives her something to look forward to and keeps her connected to her peers,” she said. “Scouts can still be fun, even if it’s through Zoom meetings.”

Ericka Kilbourne, whose fifth-grade daughter, Hannah, is in the same troop, agreed.

“Girl Scouts has been such a helpful way to keep a social connection with her friends,” she said. “There was a moment in early COVID when Hannah was really missing her friends, and after the Girl Scout meeting on Zoom, the girls created a group chat on Messenger, and it really improved her spirit.”



Shelby Fulford, a fourth-grader with Michigan City Girl Scout Junior Troop 00214, is all set to sell Girl Scout cookies.

Stocks’ high-school junior daughter, Keegan Stocks-McElligott, agreed.

“My 10 years in Girl Scouts has been an amazing experience for me and has taught me responsibility and compassion,” she said. “Most of all, I’ve met some of my best friends through Scouts. I don’t know who I’d be without Girl Scouts.”

Keith’s seventh-grade daughter, Cora, said she has learned that whatever the circumstance, Girl Scouts can meet anywhere. Her eighth-grade sister, Aria, said she has “learned a lot about using Zoom, and that no matter what is going on in the world, you can still do what you love.”

Lisa Baker, who co-leads Junior Girl Scout 00214, praises DeMartinis.

“We are so blessed to have our troop leader,” she said. “She has been going above and beyond keeping them busy, engaged and happy. She’s fantastic. So many in our group have grown up together. It’s so



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much fun to see them do all these fun things and learn so much. It's more than a friendship. It's a kinship. It's completely different."

COVID or not, DeMartinis said what has been rewarding is seeing her Scouts emerge as impressive young women.

"I'm tearing up right now thinking about them all when they first started, to where they have come," she said. "These ladies are our future. They are good-hearted. They are not cruel, and they love each of their Girl Scout sisters as much as the next. They don't show favoritism; they are what I want the world to be. They are giving



Olivia DeMartinis, a fifth-grader with Girl Scout Junior Troop 00214 in Michigan City, enjoys making a craft during a virtual meeting on Zoom.

and kind, and see the good in everyone. They make me so proud.

"It has been hard juggling Girl Scouts and other extracurricular activities, especially as the leader. But, looking over the past year, and the years previous, it has been worth it. As much as I worry about my daughter during this pandemic and my troop of girls, I know they are going to be just fine. They are going to continue to shine and exceed my expectations. They have their Girl Scout sisters to lean on, and their amazing supportive families."



Michigan City Girl Scout Junior Troop 00214 donated hygiene necessities to area residents as a community service project in winter 2020.

And About Those Cookies...

by Kim Nowatzke

Even a pandemic can't stop Girl Scout cookies.

Despite the challenges COVID dictates, area Girls Scouts are selling their iconic sweet treats.

"It's making it extremely hard, but we are Girl Scouts and we will sell cookies," said Yvonne Bancroft, community manager for the Girl Scouts of Northern Indiana Michiana Council.

The Council kicked off 2021 sales with its traditional Cookie Rally, only in a virtual format. Over the past several years, the event was held at Lake Hills Elementary School, serving as a way to challenge, educate and excite the girls about cookie sales. Various stations in the gym taught how to count back change, act out door-to-door sales and test knowledge of the types of cookies sold. The mission stayed the same for 2021, but the event was held over a Zoom call.

Brianna Keith, leader of Cadette Troop 00486 and the Service Unit Product program coordinator, passed out Virtu-

al Cookie Rally Kits, which contained supplies for a craft, goal-getter materials and two different cookie samples to try.



Eighth-grader Aria Keith of Michigan City Girl Scout Troop 00486 is excited to pick up Girl Scout cookies to sell.

During the virtual rally, Keith's eighth-grade daughter, Aria, presented a virtual cookie booth the Scouts could "fix" in real time. Several faux pauxs, such as money left out, and girls eating cookies or improperly dressed for the weather, were present.

Cookie sales have a theme of "Be Amazing" and a bee mascot, so Keith also taught the Scouts about "honey bees, and how they are important and useful as pollinators.

"The girls learned ways to sell cookies even though we can't have cookie booths."

The Scouts can't hold cookie booths if the county advisory level is red. Only outdoor Girl Scouts meetings, including cookie booths, can be held at the orange county level. Even then, specific rules in a 27-page document with guidelines on cookie booths must be followed.

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About Those Cookies

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The official cookie-selling season began Jan. 15 and ends March 15. This year, customers can choose from: Toast-Yay!, Lemonades, Shortbread (Trefoils), Thin Mints, Peanut Butter Patties (Tag-alongs), Caramel deLites (Samoas), Peanut Butter Sandwich (Do-si-dos) and Girl Scout S'mores. Some troops also will sell limited availabilities of the gluten-free Caramel Chocolate Chip cookie that debuted in 2017.

The Toast-yay! cookie debuted this year, with Keith saying it tastes like Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal. The Thanks-A-Lot cookie is no longer available, and this is the last year for Girl Scout S'mores.

Customers can "meet" all the cookies, find cookie booths in their area and even purchase cookies directly at www.girlscouts.org. Girl Scouts cookies in this area cost \$4 per box, with the exception of the gluten-free Caramel Chocolate Chip cookie, which sells for \$5 per box.

Tonya DeMartinis, a leader for Junior Girl Scout 00214, said with the number of girls participating this year significantly down, "there is a demand for cookies I did not see coming. I really thought that with COVID, sales would be down. They are not, and with fewer girls selling, it makes it hard to find a cookie dealer. New this year, girls have their own cookie link to sell online, you can choose 'girl delivered' and pay by credit card, and girls can drop off to you. No contact at all. Also, if you would like them



The New Toast-Yay! cookies are described as tasting like Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal.

shipped, the shipping fee has dropped from \$12 for six or more boxes to \$6 for six or more boxes."

Many Girl Scouts will have cookies on hand to sell, while other troops take orders, then fill those quickly. Last year, the Girl Scouts of Northern Indiana Michiana Council sold more than 30,000 boxes of cookies.

The girls receive special patches for attending the cookie rally, and for the increments of cookies they sell.

Many Girl Scout troops use the money earned from sales to give back to their community. Others, such as DeMartinis, use the cookies themselves.

"During cookie season, my troop will collect boxes of cookies to donate to the VA Hospital (Jesse Brown VA Medical Center) in Crown Point, Ind. We will pass them out to the veterans," she said. "I started three years ago when I accompanied my dad to an appointment. The vets love it! They talk to the girls and tell them stories. They hug us, and some cry, telling us how thankful they are we

do this, because they often feel forgotten. I love the fact my troop gets to see and interact with these people we are thanking by giving cookies to. Unfortunately, we were not able to do that last year. I still dropped off over 100 boxes to an administrator there, and they were happy to pass them out on our behalf."

This year the troop still plans to donate cookies to the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, and DeMartinis hopes the girls can once again deliver them in person, possibly in the summer.



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Teachers in Their “Element” Making

by Kim Nowatzke

Using their creative “elements,” two Michigan City schools are celebrating Black History Month with educational and engaging wall displays.

Barker Middle School and Pine Elementary School have transformed chemistry’s periodic table of elements to a “Periodic Table of Black History,” featuring at least 90 famous and lesser-known African Americans.

Barker social worker Nicole Norris and Pine sixth-grade teacher Kayla Sullivan first saw the idea on the popular TikTok video-sharing social networking app. Both are new to MCAS and their schools this year.

At Pine, the Black History display can be found in the “red pod” area of fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms. Sullivan, who is in her first year of teaching, created it. She included 90 black Americans, with each square containing the person’s initials (in most cases), name and birth and death date (if applicable). Most importantly, a short summary details his/her accomplishment or contribution behind the inclusion in the “wall of fame,” so to speak.

The “Period Table of Black History” at Pine is color-coded to divide individuals into 10 categories: Yellow – Scientists; Red – Activists; Lime Green — Famous Firsts; White – Authors; Bright Blue – Athletes; Purple – Musicians/Singers; Light Green – Artists; Light Blue – Actors/Actresses; Orange – Government/Politicians; and Pink – Entrepreneurs.

Sullivan has turned the display into a class assignment designed to meet language arts, writing and social studies curriculum goals. Her 20 sixth-graders have formed eight groups, and the plans are to spend at least two weeks on the project after choosing a black American unfamiliar to them.

“I had the kids choose people that they haven’t really heard about that are historical figures,” she explained. “I really want the kids to learn about different cultures, and not only about people today, but those that set the platform before them, too.”

Using a PowerPoint presentation, the kids will share important information, such as the person’s background, as well as photos.

Sullivan said the “kids will be a part of making a model of the presentation, including the minimum number of slides, and a rubric of it to decide what they want to see and how they want to be graded.”

Then, the students will create an “Audio Museum” with a voice-over. When someone scans a special QR code on the wall display, they can hear the

Each individual “element” in the “Periodic Table of Black History” at Pine Elementary School includes the black American’s initials (in most cases), name, birth and death date (if applicable) and a short summary.

student’s audio description of the selected person.

“We hope that this display serves as a visual celebration and promotion of race. As a building, we try to continuously work on cultural competency and equity for the benefit of our students, and this is a representation to promote that,” Pine Elementary School Principal Zach Huber said. “It helps bring awareness and serves to lift up culture, intentionally lifting up black Americans.”

“Ms. Sullivan also has a display in her classroom promoting individuals and groups that have historically been marginalized. Our goal is to make sure that our students see themselves in the successes of our country throughout history.”

At Barker, Norris was further inspired by a Florida public library’s display, adapting it to better fit a middle-school concept. The display, prominently

Black History Come Alive for Students

found in Barker's main lobby, features 98 individuals, arranged by using the following color code: Light Orange — Activists; White — Actors/Actresses; Yellow — Artists/Performers; Dark Blue — Athletes; Lavender — Entrepreneurs; Pink — Famous Firsts; Green — Musicians; Red — Politicians; Red, Dark Orange — Scientists; and Light Blue — Authors.



Above: Kayla Sullivan, photographed with her students at Pine. **Below:** Nicole Norris, photographed with Barker Middle School's "Periodic Table of Black History."



Just as in the Pine display, each square includes the black American's initials, names, birth and death date (if applicable), and a summary of the individual's achievements/contribution.

Norris opted to feature "more current people — the people that they see now, rather than historical figures." These include Vice President Kamala Harris, singer Beyoncé, gymnast Simone Biles and professional basketball players LeBron James and

the late Kobe Bryant.

Her purpose for the project?

"Representation matters," Norris said. "We have a lot of kids that belong to the black community here at Barker, and I think that it's important that they see successful figures that look like them and realize they can do anything."

With MCAS students on distance learning since last November, Norris used her virtual time to complete the project. She said it took her about three days, off and on, to create it. A good chunk of that time was spent researching each person featured.

The display isn't her first, though. She also completed one called "Twenty One Cool Careers That Require Math" in another area of the middle school. Some occupations included animator, cryptanalyst, science journalist, astronomer, fashion designer, environmental consultant and car designer, to name a few. Since Barker is an Indiana STEM-certified middle school, the topic was a natural choice.

"Our Black History and STEM Career bulletin boards provide a great visual opportunity for students to pick up information and promote a positive climate in our school," Barker Middle School Principal Lucas Snyder said.

In the high school where she worked at previously, Norris created a "Famous Failures" display that included public figures students are familiar with on their Instagram and Snapchat apps. She featured some of their personal struggles and back-stories before they grew to be public figures. For example, the singer/rapper Lizzo spent a year living in her car before her career took off.

Another high school display, courtesy of Norris, was dedicated to safe dating. The project, which included lighting, educated students about signs of manipulation and abuse in a dating environment, examples of a healthy relationship versus an unhealthy one, resources and more.

"I love doing bulletin boards and displays like this," Norris said. "It's one of my favorite things to do."

Chesterton Art Center

Chesterton Art Center has collaborated with Indiana University Northwest's School of the Arts to present "Mobile Art + Action Pop-Up" through Saturday, Feb. 27.

The creative installation features faculty and alumnus artworks and hand-painted protest paper signs by national and international artists. Also on display is the School of the Arts Mobile Art + Action Community Lab, an exhibit display system launched last fall in Gary, Hobart and Hammond. In observation of Black History Month, exhibit elements include a spotlight on living contemporary black artists, a comprehensive set of The Black ABC's on loan by a private collector and "Echo Location" by The Floating Museum, a Chicago-based collective presenting six small 3-D printed busts from the collection of the DuSable Museum of African American History.

The Legacy Foundation awarded a COVID-19 Innovative Response Grant to support the Mobile Art and Action Lab throughout Northwest Indiana. The CAC stop helps kick off the year-long schedule.

The displays are presented throughout the CAC galleries. In the Luella DeWulf Gallery are "Paper Signs of the Times" and "Words of Encouragement."



Hand-painted protest paper signs are part of the exhibit.

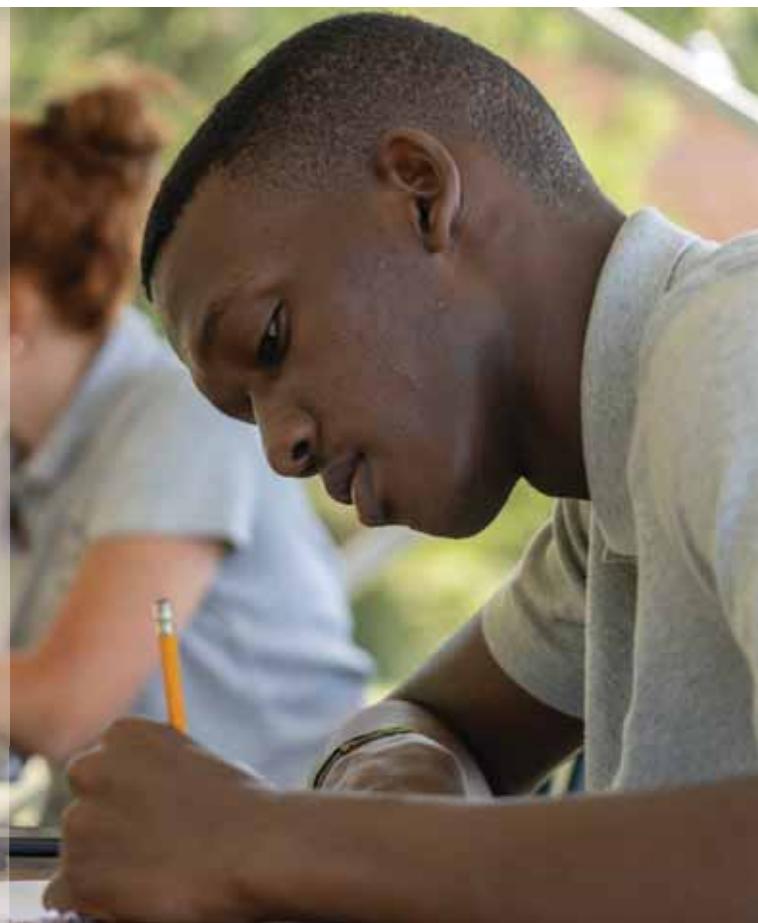
In the Ruth Bicknell Gallery are The Black ABC's, Kelly Knaga, "Echo Location" and Ryan Bennett.

The exhibit is free, and masks are required. Viewing hours are 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday. Visit www.iun.edu/arts and www.chestertonart.org for details.

Chesterton Art Center is located at 115 S. Fourth St. Visit www.chestertonart.com or call (219) 926-4711 for more information.

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Fernwood Botanical Garden

- Meet the Greats: Fernwood Virtual Lecture Series continues with “Keith Stolte: Chicago Artist Colonies” from 2-3 p.m. EDT Saturday, Feb. 20.



Stolte For more than a century, Chicago's leading painters, sculptors, writers, actors, dancers and architects congregated in close-knit enclaves. They included: Theodore Dreiser, Margaret Anderson, Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan. In the 1920s, Carl Sandburg, Emma Goldman, Ernest Hemingway, Ben Hecht, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Clarence Darrow transformed areas of Towertown into Chicago's Greenwich Village.

Stolte, a Fernwood member and life partner of more than 20 years to Dr. Brian Ortiz, live at Carl Street Studios, one of the colonies featured in Stolte's book, Chicago's Artist Colonies. He has practiced law in Chicago for more than 20 years and began his academic career at the University of Chicago, where he received a degree in history.

Tickets are \$25, or \$20 from members.

- **Live Stream Yoga from 10-11:15 a.m. EDT Fridays and Wednesdays through February.**

Deirdre leads weekly sessions to bolster immunity through stretching and meditative movement set in Fernwood's Winter Gardens. If unable to attend the live-stream session, email Deirdre (dguthrie@fernwoodbotanical.org) for a Zoom link.

Visit <https://spore-studios.com/yoga/> for more information and to register.

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.



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

- Northwest Health LaPorte, 1007 W. Lincolnway, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 18.
- Northwest Health LaPorte, 1007 W. Lincolnway, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Feb. 22.

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.

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“Lupin” Takes Viewers on One Wild Ride

by Andrew Tallackson

Assane Diop (Omar Sy) gets his hands on the necklace that altered the course of his life in “Lupin,” now streaming on Netflix.



“Lupin,” the wildly entertaining French series on Netflix, continues a trend begun by “The Queen’s Gambit” where the latest word-of-mouth smash is simply good, old-fashioned storytelling.

Indeed, there’s a reason this show – the first French production to rank among Netflix’s Top 10 – is so bingeable. We become so caught up in the story, the gorgeous scenery, the breathless chases, the high-voltage star power of Omar Sy, we can’t get enough. When a TV series actually is about something, something that matters, we have a greater investment in it.

Only the first half of the 10-episode series is available, the remaining five debuting sometime this summer. The pace of each episode is like a bullet fired from a gun. Once it’s out of the barrel, it never looks back.

As the series begins, professional thief Assane Diop (Sy) pulls off an astonishing feat by stealing a priceless diamond necklace auctioned off at the Louvre Museum. Believe me, the Louvre has never been more gloriously filmed at night as it is here: a yellow beacon of light amid darkness. How Assane impregnates this impregnable fortress is worthy of “Ocean’s Eleven.” It requires of Assane that he not only think quickly, but also bank on the casual racism of a society that does not expect a black man to carry his weight in gold.

There is a purpose to Assane’s actions. Through flashbacks, we learn how his father, Babakar (Far-gass Assandé), arrived in France from Senegal, hoping to create a better life for him and his son. Babakar found work for the wealthy businessman

Hubert Pellegrini (weasely Hervé Pierre), who framed him for stealing the necklace we see at the start of the series. Sent to prison, Babakar would rather die than be robbed of his honor. He hangs himself. Now, 25 years later, Assane appears closer to revealing the truth.

As a child, Babakar introduced his son to Maurice Leblanc’s series on gentleman thief Arsène Lupin, with Assane inspired by the character in terms of how he outsmarts Pellegrini and his henchman through charades, disguises and quick thinking.

So, we have the type of story that always gets us pumped up. A son out to avenge his father’s death amid a sea of greed and corruption. And in Sy, whose 2011 “The Intouchables” was far superior to the Kevin Hart remake (“The Upside”), “Lupin” has found an actor who becomes a star right before our eyes. Sy brings so much energy, good cheer and mischievousness to the role. His Assane Diop is, indeed, the gentleman thief. Elegant. Sophisticated. Gliding through a room like he owns it. And when he deceives those he attempts to burgle, you can tell, Assane enjoys it. There is a playfulness to Sy that suggests, for Assane, this is a game to be won and savored. How rare is it in a TV series that the *mind* is celebrated over *muscle*.

The supporting players enrich the adventure. The most complicated are his ex-wife, Claire (Ludvine Sagnier), and teen son, Raoul (Etan Simon). So many adventure tales with divided spouses envision them as squabbling morons. Not here. Assane and Claire have a past that reaches back to their childhood. Claire still loves Assane. They are friend-

ly, civil to each other. It is Assane's shady doings, which he repeatedly conceals, that drive the wedge between them. There is considerable chemistry between Sy and Sagnier, a spark that gives you hope their relationship can be salvaged.

Even Pellegrini's daughter, Juliette (Clotilde Hesme, "The Returned") is fascinating. Her link to Assane also stems from their childhood. She cares for him while still owing allegiance to her father.

What keeps "Lupin" fresh is that it never settles into a pat format. Having Assane repeatedly foil his pursuers would get old. Fast. But by the fourth episode, the series ups the stakes, introducing a journalist, Helene (Maria Barraud), disgraced at the hands of Pellegrini, who reluctantly comes to Assane's aid. The elements of danger escalate tenfold, and by the fifth episode, when Assane, Claire and Raoul head to the coast for a Lupin festival, all bets are off, complete with a cliffhanger ending.

As I've stated before, the one drawback of bingeable TV is that when it works, when it delivers the goods, having to wait for more can be agonizing. In "Lupin," Netflix has achieved the equivalent of a roller-coaster ride that never stops, and when it does, you're ticked that someone hit the brakes.

Summer can't get here quickly enough. With "Lupin," we gotta find out what happens next.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com



Assane's son, Raoul (Etan Simon), factors heavily into the series, especially the climax of Episode Five.

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Ice Skating Rink Reflects Community Pride in Long Beach

by William Halliar



Above: Families enjoy the ice-skating rink outside of Long Beach Community Center. **Bottom left:** Building the rink are (from left) Tom Znavor, Bill Vlasek and Rick Dziak. **Bottom right:** Members of the "Gray Brigade" include (from left) Renita Vlasek, Tom Znavor, Bill Vlasek, John Kearney, Mike Szczepaniak and Bart De La Barre. All photos provided by De La Barre.



Skaters Delaney and Nolan Keenan enjoy the rink.

We Midwesterners enjoy our seasons.

Why else, then, would we stay in this neck of the woods? Is it because of the warm summer breezes off Lake Michigan or the beautiful fall colors? Perhaps we relish the zephyrs of spring, with the kiss of a warm breeze and the promise of summer fun.

For many, the first cold snap in fall, followed by the first sighting of lacy snowflakes, send our hearts aflutter with the anticipation of winter fun in the great outdoors.

For the past 18 years, Long Beach residents have enjoyed cold winter weather on their very own ice-skating rink. Set up at Long Beach Community Center, it is "truly a community project," says Bart De La Barre, a Long Beach resident and volunteer firefighter with the town. The entire community takes pride in the rink's setup and maintenance during the winter season.

De La Barre proudly states the rink has vastly improved since the "MacGyvered" one first assembled in 2003. In referencing the popular TV secret agent, he means the first attempts to build an ice-skating rink. He recalls it was constructed of landscape timbers. It was, he says, nothing more than "Tyvek house wrap and lots of duct tape."

The memory of it makes him laugh as he surveys the current rink, which is,

says, a "custom package like those used in many other communities for outdoor recreational skating and even hockey tournaments."

The new rink is 50' x 100'. It takes 30,000 gallons of water, provided by Long Beach Volunteer Fire Department, to fill it. The foam barriers are set up by firefighters and street department volunteers, who also help maintain it.

It is, indeed, a "community rink."

De La Barre credits its upkeep to a group of retired residents who proudly call themselves the "Gray Brigade." They make sure the rink is kept in tip-top shape. It cannot be used until the ice is sufficiently frozen so there are no rough spots dangerous to skaters.

Individuals young and old enjoy the rink. Some even bring out hockey goals, encouraging "pickup games" on frozen, snowy evenings. The rink is large enough to accommodate the occasional hockey game at one end while families skate safely at the other.

De La Barre looks forward to a winter of fun, gliding over the smooth, glass-like surface that reflects the bare branches of bordering trees, whose limbs are blanketed in shawls of white fleece awaiting the first hint of spring.

"With Mother Nature's cooperation," he says, "Long Beach will have a rink for years to come."

“Palmer” is a Strange, but Ultimately Daring Family Tale

by Andrew Tallackson



Justin Timberlake stars as an ex-con who becomes a father figure to a young boy (Ryder Allen) in “Palmer,” now streaming on Apple TV+.

The setup of “Palmer” is so blah, you wonder what drew the fine cast to it in the first place. Then, it blindsides you, emerging as something else entirely: timely in a way few films dare to tread.

The result is odd. A strange hybrid of weary clichés and bold pleas for tolerance. It shouldn’t work, but it clicks somewhere down the line, thanks in large part to its strong cast.

Streaming on Apple TV+, the movie first appeared on the 2016 Hollywood Black List, meaning no studio dared touch it because of the risky subject matter...and I’ll get to that in a minute.

The title ex-con, played by Justin Timberlake, is a former college football star who landed in prison for 12 years after a brutal incident. Released to the care of his grandmother, Vivian (June Squibb), he struggles to find work — no one wants an ex-con under their employ — until the local school affords him a break, hiring him as a custodian.

The movie’s trailer suggests a lonely, eccentric boy will warm this ex-con’s heart, giving his life direction and purpose.

Sorta.

The boy, Sam (Ryder Allen), comes from a train-wreck of a home. Mom (Juno Temple) is an addict,

**“Palmer”**

Running time: 110 minutes. Apple TV+. Rated R for language, some sexual content/nudity and brief violence

the man in her life physically and verbally abusive. The two frequently disappear for weeks on end, leaving Sam in Vivian’s care.

And, Sam does not identify as a boy. He wears dresses and makeup. Goes to school with barrettes in his hair. Has tea parties with a gal-pal. Worships a TV cartoon about princesses. Is excessively bullied at school.

When Vivian unexpectedly dies in her sleep, and with Sam in her care, it’s up to Palmer, who has no clue what to make of the boy, to watch him.

In essence, “Palmer” feels like two separate movies, with zilch in common, randomly edited together. A redemptive ex-con flick and a youthful LGBT+ tale...and a deadly serious one to boot. You can see why the movie landed on the Hollywood Black List. It suffers from a massive identity crisis.

Midway through, though, “Palmer” makes it clear Sam is *not* the story’s comedic element. Rather than



Justin Timberlake proves himself a capable actor in a challenging role.

sidestep the reality of the situation, director Fisher Stevens and writer Cheryl Guerriero go for it, exploring how society reacts to a boy who does not see himself as a boy. Allen, as Sam, shows skill and daring, creating a boy who accepts who he is and makes no apologies for it. The cruelty he experiences is not soft-pedaled. We witness Sam subjected to taunts, even physical violence.

Timberlake, as Palmer, does not ask us to pity him. He's made mistakes, and he owns up to them. And it is the world of hurt Sam experiences that makes Palmer forget his troubles to help the kid survive. Timberlake handles the transition from hardened ex-con to understanding father figure with skill. It isn't a case of immediate sympathy, but a gradual slide into understanding and support.

I wondered, at first, why a British actress with killer comedic chops like Temple — the secret weapon of Apple TV+'s "Ted Lasso" — would disappear into a character so one note and despicable. We understand why in her final scene with Ryder: a blazingly emotional confrontation that reveals a fearless bravery on the actress' part. Turns out, Temple can do no wrong whatever material comes her way. She's the real deal.

The closing scenes of "Palmer" aim for a reach-for-the-Kleenex finish. I wasn't terribly moved by it. Despite the subject matter, the movie treads along a familiar path. Instead, I was more impressed by its daring. This movie, it's got guts.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com



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“Malcolm & Marie” Quickly Wears Out its Welcome

by Andrew Tallackson

Zendaya and John David Washington star in “Malcolm & Marie,” now streaming on Netflix.

“Malcolm & Marie” is the 1 hour-46 minute equivalent of fingernails on a chalkboard.

The Netflix film, a three-week shoot last summer amid COVID self-isolation, is a showcase for its stars, Zendaya and John David Washington, whose all-or-nothing performances surpass everything they’ve done up until now. And the movie has something to say about the toll exacted on individuals when a movie lifts from their personal life.

Beyond that, this is 106 minutes of two people bickering. Actually, bickering is putting it mildly. These are bitter people. They reach for the jugular and squeeze to the brink of suffocation. And that is how we feel watching them.

Shot by writer-director Sam Levinson (Zendaya’s compatriot on the HBO series “Euphoria”) in gorgeous black and white, the movie unfolds over one long night that bleeds into the wee hours of morning. Malcolm (Washington) and his girlfriend, Marie (Zendaya), return home from the premiere of a film he wrote and directed about a junkie trying to get her life in order. Marie, in part, was his inspiration. At 20, she overdosed, with Malcolm caring for her, supporting her at every turn. But during the premiere, Malcolm, elated by the positive response to his movie, forgets to thank Marie. No mention at all.

She. Is. Pissed.

How mad? When Marie finally gets around to spilling the truth, initially dodging his inquiries as to why she seems distant, the two go for blood. Every quirk, flaw, nagging trait, they bludgeon it



“Malcolm & Marie”

Running time: 106 minutes. Netflix. Rated R for pervasive language and sexual content

to death. Washington, who in films like “Tenet” and even “BlackKklansman” came across as somewhat muted, finally taps into the blazing intensity of his Oscar-winning father, Denzel. Washington’s Malcolm exists as if on a caffeine high: ego, narcissism and insecurity swirling within him, as if he enjoys belittling Marie. And Marie can hold her own, although the scene where he verbally attacks her while she’s in the bathtub, her lips trembling out of defiance and betrayal, suggests a fearless quality to Zendaya, that she has the moxie to succeed in roles meatier than Peter Parker’s girlfriend.

But by existing as a two-character study, “Malcolm & Marie” feels less like a movie and more like community theater. Each actor gets their “moments,” where the dialogue feels less propelled by the breath of life and more like monologues. Overly written. Overly brainy. In the real world, people don’t talk like this. In fact, there is a moment, during one of the film’s endless squabbles, where Washington seems to almost trip over the wording. That it’s too much for any living, breathing human.

By the midpoint, after an especially nasty verbal scuffle, the movie lost its hold over me. I began checking the time on my phone. Pausing the film to



A confrontation while Marie relaxes in a bathtub reveals Zendaya to be a formidable talent.

see how much time remained. One minute, Malcolm and Marie are at peace, all that bile out of their system. Then, they're at it again, regurgitating the same complaints about each other. Back and forth. Back and forth. Even the "meta" moments where Malcolm laments about white critics who overpoliticize his work are run into the ground with a monologue that collapses into hysterics.

"Malcolm & Marie" does herald Zendaya and Washington as forces to be reckoned with, performers who are acting heavyweights. But once the movie fades to black, I was more elated it was over than being thankful to have seen it.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com

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The library is open, but with restrictions in place. 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 are 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 accepting 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).

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Two new databases are available. Newspapers.com World Collection contains historical newspapers from the 1700s-2000s, including thousands of well-known regional, state and small local newspapers in the United States and other countries. Visit tinyurl.com/4f8kfo3v and log in with a library card number.

In addition, Fold3, a military records database powered by Ancestry.com, is available. It provides access to military records, including stories, photos and personal documents. Visitors to the site can combine records found there with personal effects to create an online memorial for someone who served. Visit tinyurl.com/58cnu2vn and log in with a library card number.

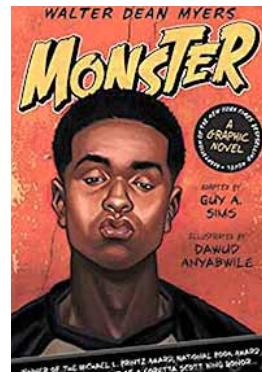
The following virtual programming is scheduled:

- Great Decisions returns through Zoom. Limited discussion booklets are available at the circulation desk. Call (219) 873-3049 for more details.
- Virtual Story Time. A new video will be posted to the website, Facebook page and YouTube channel at 10 a.m. Wednesdays. Each video will be available on the website for two weeks at www.mclib.org/parents/story-time/. Stop by Youth Services to receive the craft project for the week beginning on Wednesdays.
- Checkers. Color a checker board, follow the instructions and play with checkers made in 3-D printers. Sets are limited to one per family.
- Dungeons and Dragons. Youth Services will host monthly one-shot campaigns for ages 13-18. The next session is from 3-5 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 24. Youth Services provides free characters and dice for those who register and while supplies last. Registration is required. Call Jonathan at (219) 873-3045 or email jlovett@mclib.org or ysonline@mclib.org.

• Online Graphic Novel Club for teens will focus on Walter Dean Myers' graphic novel *Monster*. Stop

by Youth Services to pick up a copy while supplies last. The podcast episode releases Feb. 18. Registration is required for the Zoom meetup on Thursday, Feb. 25. Call Jonathan at (219) 873-3045 or email YSonline@mclib.org.

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Songs of the Pioneers”

The Region of Three Oaks Museum and The School of American Music will present “Songs of the Pioneers” at 7 p.m. EDT Thursday, Feb. 25, on Zoom.

The songs, played by a quartet of local folk musicians, depict the subjects that occupied the minds of Southwest Michigan’s 19th century settlers, including logging, farming, domestic work, the railroads, Great Lakes sailing and celebrations.

Program host Nick Bogert, a TROTOM board member, provides historical context for the music. He creates a brief pictorial background using old photos and paintings of lumberjacks, railroad crews and other illustrations. Bogert also has produced other TROTOM videos, including “Lifestyles of the Mich(iana) & Famous,” “Lights! Camera! Three Oaks! The Making of Prancer” and “The Pokagon Band: More Than Just a Casino.”

Local musicians include: Garth Taylor providing guitar, dulcimer, vocals and arranging; Dan Moser on vocals, banjo, guitar and percussion; Tara Dodge on vocals, flute and percussion, and Daniel Rodriguez on upright bass.

Email TROTOM at trotommuseum@gmail.com for log-in information.



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Winter Photo Contest

Gabis Arboretum at Purdue Northwest invites photographers and nature enthusiasts to submit original photos to possibly be featured in future education, marketing and social media materials.

The deadline is March 20. Photos taken at the arboretum will compete in two categories: “landscape and nature” and “fun with family and friends.”

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Photos can be submitted at tinyurl.com/1336he58



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LCSO in the Spotlight



Editor's note — This weekly spotlight, provided by Tim King, LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra executive director, highlights its talented musicians.

Jackson Roush is a member of LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra's double bass section.

He received his Bachelor of Music in composition from Valparaiso University in 2018, where he also attained a second major in computer science. He is pursuing a Master's of Music in composition at Ball State University, where he also teaches music theory as a graduate assistant.

In addition to the LCSO, he is active as a composer, and as an instrumentalist and producer for regional music acts, having recorded and performed in various genres. He also enjoys cinema.

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Indiana Dunes National Park

The National Park Service has implemented a mask requirement for employees, visitors, partners and contractors.

The move supports President Biden's Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing, aiming to protect those who live, work and visit national parks.

At Indiana Dunes National Park, face masks are required in all park buildings and facilities, including the Dorothy Buell Memorial Visitor Center, Paul H. Douglas Center for Environmental Education and Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk pavilion. Masks also are required on NPS-managed lands when physical distancing cannot be maintained, including on narrow or busy trails, overlooks and in historic homes.

As conditions are subject to change, visitors should check the park's website and social media channels for updates before a visit. Visit tinyurl.com/2r86ch6e for details. Park rangers are on duty to provide information, protect visitors and park resources and uphold the requirement.



The park is offering virtual ranger chats for teachers and students through a variety of media.

The programs can cover a wide range of topics and grade levels. IDNP educators can customize programs to meet teacher preferences. For example, the park can bring Max, the milk snake, into a virtual classroom to teach about animal adaptations.

No Maple Sugar tours at Chellberg Farm are planned, but a virtual presentation about maple sugaring, complete with activities and connections to the area's history, is offered.

Visit www.nps.gov/indu or www.facebook.com/IndianaDunesNPS for a list of programs, then call the scheduling office at (219) 395-1885 for details.



Snowshoes are available for free checkout from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. daily, with at least a 2-inch snow base required, at The Paul H. Douglas Center for Environmental Education.

Snowshoe sizes are available for kids and adults. They can be used to explore the three-mile-long Miller Woods trail system that leads visitors on an easy to moderate hike through oak savanna and dune habitats. Inside the Douglas Center are exhibits, a live animal display and "Nature Backpacks" stocked with supplies and nature guides. Wear a face covering when inside the center and maintain social distancing on the trails.



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 or visit www.nps.gov/indu for details.

Links on Sale for Mystery Program

South Bend's The History Museum will present "Mystery at the Mansion: Dillinger's Last Caper" as a virtual program for the first time since it began in 2007.

Links, which go live at 7 p.m. EDT Friday, Feb. 26, can be purchased for \$10 (general) or \$8 (members) at www.historymuseumSB.org

The event is inspired by John Dillinger's 1934 robbery of Merchants National Bank in South Bend. Participants track down the secret accomplice. Those who solve the case have a chance to win the grand prize: a curator-led, behind-the-scenes virtual tour of the 38-room Oliver Mansion.

Participants also will hear accounts from those involved, then cast a vote for the person who helped "Public Enemy No. 1."

Local author Roger Chrastil, who scripted past "Mystery at the Mansion" plays, as well as the museum's "Christmas at Copshaholm" specialty tours, wrote the story. He has written several other works, including the plays "An Immigrant's Story" and "Or Does It Explode?," both of which were performed at the museum.

Visit www.historymuseumSB.org or call (574) 235-9664 for reservations. The museum is located at 808 W. Washington St.

Bridgman Public Library

Bridgman (Mich.) Public Library will host the Zoom program "Outsmarting the Scammers" by Douglas Wall at 2 p.m. EDT Tuesday, Feb. 23.

The program offers advice on how to identify and avoid fraudulent activity and scams.

Call (269) 465-3663 for more details. The library is located at 4460 Lake St.

Harbor Country Hikers

Harbor Country Hikers heads to Grand Mere State Park for its next destination at 2 p.m. EDT Saturday, Feb. 20.

HCH President Pat Fisher will discuss the history of the state park, which is designated a National Natural Landmark. Long considered an outdoor laboratory for natural resources study, Fisher will explain how a combination of natural forces formed the unique Grand Marais Embayment. Protected from Lake Michigan by the dunes to the west, the park has many natural features not found throughout the rest of the state.

The 2.5-mile hike is rated moderate difficulty and should take about two hours. Hikers should dress in layers, wear a warm hat and take water. Depending on the weather, there may be muddy or icy areas. Hikers must observe social distancing and wear face masks.

From Red Arrow Highway, drivers should head west on John Beers Road, past the Interstate 94 westbound exit to make a southbound turn onto Thornton Road. The parking lot entrance is about a half mile on the right. Visit www.harborcountryhikers.com for more details.

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Activities to Explore

In the Area:

Feb. 18 — Online Graphic Novel Club for teens, Walter Dean Myers' Monster. Through Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Podcast episode release: Feb. 18. Info: (219) 873-3045, YSonline@mclib.org.

Feb. 20 — Morning Bird Walk, 10:30 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Feb. 24 — Dungeons and Dragons, 3-5 p.m., through Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Registration: (219) 873-3045, jllovett@mclib.org, ysonline@mclib.org

Through Feb. 27 — Indiana University Northwest's School of the Arts, "Mobile Art + Action Pop-Up," Chesterton Art Center, 115 S. Fourth St. Free, masks required. Hours: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. Info: www.chestertonart.org, www.iun.edu/arts

Wednesdays — Virtual Story Time, 10 a.m., through Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: www.mclib.org/parents/story-time/

Through March 31 — Dale Cooper installation (3-D paper flowers), The Legacy Center Gallery @ Queen of All Saints Catholic Church, 1719 E. Barker Ave. Gallery hours: 6 a.m.-8 p.m. Info: jessicar@qas.org

Through June 5 — New exhibits, "Lost and Looking" & "Pipelines and Borderlines: The Art of Survival," Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St. Info: www.lubeznikcenter.org

In the Region

Feb. 20 — Harbor Country Hikers, 2 p.m. EDT, Grand Mere State Park. Info: www.harborcountryhikers.com

Feb. 20 — Meet the Greats: Fernwood Virtual Lecture Series, "Keith Stolte: Chicago Artist Colonies," 2-3 p.m. EDT. Tickets: \$25, \$20/members. Info/registration: www.fernwoodbotanical.org, (269) 695-6491.

Feb. 23 — Bridgman (Mich.) Public Library Zoom program, "Outsmarting the Scammers" by Douglas Wall, 2 p.m. EDT. Info: (269) 465-3663.

Feb. 25 — The Region of Three Oaks Museum/The School of American Music, "Songs of the Pioneers," 7 p.m. EDT, Zoom. Log-in information: trotommuseum@gmail.com

Through March 7 — Exhibits, Elkhart's Midwest Museum of American Art, 429 S. Main St. Exhibits: "The Blue Ribbon Collection: The Amish Acres Arts & Crafts Festival"; "Adam Grant: A Holocaust Remembrance"; "Gabor Peterdi: The Early Works." Info: www.midwestmuseum.us, (574) 293-6660.

Through March 12 — Student exhibit, Art Barn School of Art, 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso. Gallery hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tue., Thur., Fri./10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. Info: (219) 462-9009, www.artschoolvalpo.org

artbarnschool.org

Through March 28 — New exhibits, KAC Members' Show & local ceramist Jennifer Zona, Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, Mich. Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. EDT Fri.-Mon. Info: www.krasl.org, (269) 983-0271

Fridays and Wednesdays through February — Live Stream Yoga, 10-11:15 a.m. EDT. Through Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, 13988 Range Line Road, Niles, Mich. Info: <https://spore-studios.com/yoga/>

Westchester Public Library

Westchester Public Library has curbside pickup at its Thomas and Hageman branches.

Use a library card or go online to place holds on up to 10 items, including DVDs and CDs. Once notified the items are available, park in specially-numbered spaces at each branch during pickup hours.

While parked, call the library phone number posted on the numbered space sign, tell staff your library card number and he/she will check out the items and take them to a table at the parking space and walk away. Patrons then can step out of their vehicle to retrieve them. Curbside hours are Monday-Friday (1 to 6 p.m. at Thomas and Hageman) and Saturday (11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Thomas and 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Hageman).

Hageman Library (219-926-9080) is located at 100 Francis St., Porter. 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. The Baugher Center is located at 100 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton.



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Prayer to the Blessed Virgin

(Never known to fail.)

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.

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Dunes Audition Deadline Extended

Dunes Summer Theatre is gearing up for its 2021 summer season, with audition submissions now due by Monday, March 15.

Those interested should send an email with "Audition" in the subject line, with a head shot and resume in PDF format attached. Dunes staff will respond with further instructions on how to submit an audition. Be prepared to send materials that demonstrate singing range and/or one short Shakespeare comedic monologue.

Rehearsals begin May 18-June 8, depending on the performance. Visit www.dunesarts.org/theatre for details, including the email address.

Season tickets will be available soon, with updates available on the website.

Also, Dunes staff are accepting applications for a 2021 technical director, with the summer season presented on the lawn in June and July. Applicants should submit a resume containing all relevant training and experience, as well as the name and contact information for three professional references, to Managing Director Elise Kermani no later than April 1 at contact@dunesarts.org

The theater is located at 288 Shady Oak Drive in Michiana Shores.

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**Prayer to the
Blessed Virgin**

(Never known to fail.)

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.



Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter

The Children's Blizzard by Melanie Benjamin (hardcover, \$28 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook. 343 pages.)

Melanie Benjamin is one of the foremost authors of historical fiction today. In six previous books, she brought to print some of the most famous people in the world with compassion and meticulous research.

This time, Benjamin focuses on a particular happening in history rather than a specific person, using fictional characters that are a compilation of real people who lived at the time. I'm happy to say, it works out wonderfully. The story I'm about to share is Mother Nature at her worst, and the question we always ask ourselves after a disaster — how would I react given the same circumstances?

It was 132 years ago the upper Midwest suffered the worst blizzard it ever saw. It was Jan. 12, 1888, when the event, called The Children's Blizzard, or The Schoolchildren's Blizzard, or sometimes the Schoolhouse Blizzard, took everyone by surprise from the Dakota Territory to Nebraska — specifically northeastern Nebraska to southeastern Dakota.

Unfortunately, the name given to the day tells us who suffered the most.

"Earlier, and there would have been no question of sheltering in place. But it hit right when most schools were about to disgorge their pupils for the day, or just had."

The day began amazingly quiet and inordinately warm...and that should have been a warning sign right there. Children went to school dressed for spring because that's how warm it was. No coats or mittens, no wool scarves necessary...so they thought. Weather during the 1880s was very unpredictable and by midday, the sky had turned an ugly color, the wind picked up, the temperature rapidly dropped and the snow began its relentless attack.

"The sun had vanished, swallowed by the cloud that wasn't a cloud, but a black wall of fury—sparks of lightning preceded it, bluish flashes of electricity tumbling over the snow like wagon wheels."

It was a "perfect storm" brought together by opposing streams of northwest cold and southwest warm currents. No one could have predicted this storm because there was no U.S. Weather Service, only the Army Signal Corps that gave weather "indicators." People on the prairie got more informa-

tion from looking out the window.

What Benjamin gives us is a broad, yet personal look at life on these prairies in 1888. Life was hard, people expected that, but the newspaper ads at the time made the area sound like homesteaders were entering the Garden of Eden. And so they came...

Including the Olsen family from Norway. Their two daughters, Raina and Gerda, now 16 and 17, are school teachers: Raina is boarding with the Petersen family in a small community in Nebraska, and Gerda with a family of homesteaders in the Dakota Territory.

Each sisters' schoolhouse is situated on the prairie to make it accessible for the surrounding farms. That means a mile or more walk for the children from home.

On Jan. 12, both girls decide to let school out early so the children can take advantage of the balmy weather. Something makes Raina stop the children from leaving. She sees the sky and knows it won't bring anything good...

Gerda, on the other hand, makes plans to meet a boyfriend and pays no attention to the sky until it is too late...the children are on their way home when the snow begins to fall.

The storm is not the end of this story, although the telling of it is painful to read. What about the aftermath?

Hopefully, the healing will begin, but for some the healing never comes as some families have to wait for the spring thaw to find loved ones' bodies. How do you live with the horror of wondering — where is my child?

How each of these young teachers handled the blizzard will make a hero of one and the other ostracized by the community for her seeming indifference to their children. A reporter from the Omaha Bee newspaper takes down all the families' stories of grief and loss and puts them in print for all to see.

Seldom have I read a story that so realistically portrayed a place, a time and an event. There is something disturbing about this story — it is like being in that blizzard — the feeling you must be somewhere between heaven and hell, but which are you closer to? Only the lucky few who survived could answer that.

I was transfixed with Benjamin's empathetic telling of what life and nature were like on the prairie, how people were sold a bill of fine living for a land that was actually unforgiving and unpredictable.

This is a story to stay with you and make you hug your children a little harder tonight.

Till next time, happy reading!



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