



Volume 37, Number 1 Thursday, January 14, 2021

# Serve & Protect

by Andrew Tallackson



Bob Sulkowski is photographed by *The Beacher's* Andrew Tallackson at his desk in Long Beach Police Department.

Bob Sulkowski can pinpoint the exact moment he became interested in police work.

He was 12. His father, Ed, was Michiana Shores' part-time marshal, balancing those duties with full-time work as a welder at Budd Corp., a metal-stamping plant in Gary. As marshal, there was no dispatch center or police radio. Calls came directly to Ed's home phone. And if Ed was at Budd Corp. when an emergency call arrived, the family quickly notified the LaPorte County Sheriff's Office.

On one particular evening, someone was breaking into a home on Birchwood Trail. Ed was at Budd Corp., so the family called the sheriff's office, which asked if Bob could show them where the house was. The eager 12-year-old jumped at the opportunity. Jim Arnold, then a sergeant with the department, picked up Bob about two blocks from his home. The youngster then showed Arnold where the burglary was reported.

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Published and Printed by  
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Delivered weekly, free of charge to Birch Tree Farms, Duneland Beach, Grand Beach, Hidden Shores, Long Beach, Michiana Shores, Michiana MI and Shoreland Hills. The Beacher is also delivered to public places in Michigan City, New Buffalo, LaPorte and Sheridan Beach.

## Serve & Protect

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The suspects may have left by the time police arrived, but for Bob, the incident triggered a fascination with law enforcement that never diminished. It only intensified over the years.

On Jan. 8, Bob retired after 38 years with Long Beach Police Department. Mark Swistek, who boasts a long and respected career with Michigan City Police Department, is his successor.

Bob's career reflected a devotion to making sure residents felt safe in their cozy, beachside communities. Now, small towns are not immune to the realities of the outside world. As chief in Long Beach, Bob has been part of every type of investigation: burglaries, theft, armed robbery, rape, drunk driving, juvenile drinking parties, even homicides. But his tenure with Long Beach also has seen a decrease in burglaries, increased beach safety involving personal watercrafts and concerted efforts to make the police department compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

And by developing a strong, respected police force that includes full-time, part-time and reserve officers, the department has cultivated a rapport with the community that emphasizes teamwork in solving crimes.

"I think small town policing is unique in the way you have to treat people, because they are your wealth of information," he said. "Without the con-



This undated photo shows the police vehicle driven by Bob's father, Ed. The vehicle was a 1971 Mercury Monterey.

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versation or relationship with the citizens of the town, things are only going to be as good as the police work you can do."

Bob, 62, sat down with *The Beacher* a few weeks before his final day on the job to talk about his life in law enforcement, and the people who influenced him along the way.

Born at St. Anthony Hospital to Ed and Mary Jane Sulkowski, Bob graduated from Elston High School in 1977. Before then, his father was one of his greatest influences. In addition to being Michiana Shores marshal, Ed also served with its volunteer fire department. Bob liked to hang around the fire house, also starting the first Junior Fire Department. He would ride with his dad while he was out patrolling the community. After learning from a friend about Michigan City Police Department's police cadet program, he became involved with Explorer Post 75 in May 1972.

(Bob remains friends with many of the officers who participated in the cadet program. He still has breakfast with them every Thursday morning.)

Bob also spent a good deal of time with Vern Magnuson, who was chief of the Michiana Police Department and a retired sergeant with Michigan State Police. Bob would ride with Magnuson while on patrol, listening to hours of stories about police work. Bob also rode with officers from MCPD.

In 1972, Long Beach Police Department officially took over the contract for police protection in Michi-



Bob still has the Mars Light used on his father's police vehicle.

ana Shores. In 1976, when Bob turned 18, he joined the Michiana Shores Volunteer Fire Department. Four years later, Lynn Papke, a Village of Michiana (Mich.) officer, asked Bob if he would serve with the Grand Beach Police Department. That began a two-year stint with the police force there, along with an enduring friendship with Long Beach officer Jim Kautz.

It was in 1982 that Bob became aware of an opening for deputy marshal in Long Beach. He was hired on July 28, 1982, attending the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy in January 1983. Back then, officers worked in 24-hour shifts: 12 hours on patrol, another 12 on house duty. The 12-hour shift still adhered to today began in May 1988.

Bob became Long Beach's chief marshal in January 1998. Today, Long Beach's police department has five full-time officers, nine part-time officers and six reserve officers. The latter are volunteers, but experience the same training in all aspects of police work as the paid staff.



Bob is photographed by *The Beacher's* Andrew Tallackson standing by photos of the Long Beach Police force.

"Countless hours, they volunteer for this department," Bob said, "from extra patrols on the weekends, to beach patrol, marine patrol, not to mention the Fourth of July week."

Ask Bob about key investigations or memorable incidents over the course of his 38-year career with Long Beach and the stories are priceless.

Take, for instance, the time he was on patrol in May 1987. He heard about an ambulance on its way to a home on Roslyn Trail. A woman was in labor.

"So, I headed over there and when I pulled up in front of the house, a lady came running out of the house and said, 'Get in here now.' The mother was lying on the couch and she was giving birth," Bob recalled. "She had already crowned, and the baby was on its way. Just after the baby landed in my arms, wrapped in a towel, EMS arrived."

"I am still friends with the parents, even though they have moved away."

Continued on Page 4

## 2020 INDIANA LAKEFRONT: A VERY GOOD YEAR; NOT GREAT

I just finished the report for the 12 miles along Lake Michigan in Michigan from the Indiana state line to Warren Dunes State Park west of I-94. The number of residential sales increased 49% for 2020 versus 2019, and the total \$Volume increased 56% in 2020 over 2019. It appears the higher-end price range did better than the lower end based on the higher \$Volume increase, and the fact that the average price increased more than the median price.

So, I had to see what happened on the Indiana lakefront defined as the area between U.S. 12 and the lake from Dune Acres to the Michigan state line. I included the "expireds" to get some idea of the significance of price on what did not sell. .

Yr. Status	Units	Med Price	Aver Price	\$Vol	Days Mkt
19 sold	161	\$425k	\$483k	\$77.8 M	177
19 exp	87	\$500k	\$674k	\$58.6 M	231
20 sold	203	\$443k	\$521k	\$105.7 M	98
20 exp	64	\$539k	\$681k	\$43.6 M	182

The number of sales increased by 27% for 2020 versus 2019. \$Volume increased by 36%. Two phenomenal increases for any market, but significantly less than the Michigan numbers. There is not much difference between the median and average price increases, so while the \$Volume number indicates the upper-price properties did better than lower-priced ones, the median/average comparisons do not support that thesis. Bottom line, the increase in value was more evenly spread over all price ranges in Indiana than in Michigan.

Days on Market dropped 45% between 2019 and 2020. That is significant. Number expireds dropped 26%. Sign of inventory tightening? The differences between the median/average sold and median/average expired prices support the thesis that "price" was the reason why those expired properties did not sell.

2020 was very a good year for Indiana lakefront, but not as great as the Michigan market right next door. That puzzles me. Email your theories of "why."

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## Serve & Protect

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Bob recalls other incidents from the 1980s, specifically a crew of individuals committing armed robberies. At one point, they robbed a liquor store in the town center, a gun firing off in the process. A countywide task force subsequently was formed.

Then one night, Long Beach police were following two suspects in the string of robberies. Detectives were involved, a road block erected. When the suspects saw police, Bob said, they headed into a field.

"We all started chasing them, and their car got stuck," he said. "As soon as my foot hit the ground getting out of the car, all you could hear was gunshots. Luckily, no officers were hit. But one of the suspects was shot. The other ran away and was caught the next morning."

"We found out later this same crew broke into a house in Michiana Shores, severely beating the homeowner and stealing a bale of marijuana."

On average, Bob says, it was common to have 60 burglaries a year between the three communities Long Beach covers. But through strong, effective police work, the department began gathering evidence, making arrests and scoring convictions.

Take, for instance, the night officer Todd Bullis investigated a burglary in progress. A neighbor had called police to report suspicious activity there. Bullis saw a car leaving the home and stopped it. As he approached the vehicle, he noticed a cord dangling out of the rear door. One person in the vehicle was holding a large TV. Asked where he got the television, the suspect replied that he "found" it.

Those arrests, Bob says, were possible because of people in the community working with police.

"Getting the community to call us when they see something has been difficult," he said. "They may call us two days later and say, 'hey, the other night I saw this.' We constantly urge people to call us when they see something suspicious."

Having an effective police department, Bob says, is the result of hiring aggressive officers.

"Not in the physical sense, but a proactive sense," he clarified. "I believe if the officers are out there making traffic stops when the criminal element comes into town, they may think twice about coming out here because they may get stopped."

In the summer of 1996, Long Beach police received complaints of personal watercrafts nearly hitting swimmers. Bob came up with the idea to place

buoys along the beach, specifically to remind those using personal watercrafts to slow down around swimmers. Bob presented a proposal to Long Beach Civic Association, which purchased the buoys. He also contacted B&E Marine about borrowing a personal watercraft to patrol the lakeshore. The business agreed, leading to the creation of the department's Marine Patrol.

The civic association's support, Bob says, has been crucial over the years.

"They have made many large purchases for the department that the town did not have to pay for," he said, "everything from equipment to the memorial in front of the police station."

The station, it must be noted, was not ADA compliant. In fact, it was still located on the second floor of the town hall. Bob applied for, and received, a \$50,000 grant to begin remodeling the town hall.

"Thanks to then council members led by Tom Ringo in 2001, this came to fruition," he said "We now have a state-of-the-art facility to be proud of."

Over the years, accolades presented themselves. Bob is a recipient of an Exemplary Law Enforcement Program Award from the U.S. Department of Justice.

However, not all of Bob's recollections are pleasant. The worst arrived on Oct. 31 1997. Bob was on patrol, pursuing a motorcyclist. The motorcycle crashed, and Bob had a scuffle with the rider to get him handcuffs, hyper-extending his knee in the process. Now being off work, the chief had to cover his shifts.

Jim Kautz was filling in for Bob on Nov. 4, 1997, when he assisted Michigan City officers at an accident on U.S. 12. He was struck by a car speeding through the accident scene. Swistek was the one who called Bob to the scene.

"When I arrived, I will never forget seeing Jim in a Long Beach uniform, lying on the highway severely injured," Bob said.

Kautz was taken to Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, Ill. After numerous surgeries, he died a month after the accident. The irony is, back in August of that year, Bob and Jim attended the funeral of a South Bend officer who was killed. Bob spoke with a lieutenant from the South Bend Police Department about a team from Indianapolis that assists departments where an officer has died while in the line of duty.

"Little did I know I would need this team just months later," Bob said. "I cannot begin to express how much compassion and professionalism the members of the Critical Incident Team assist you



Bob, photographed with now President-elect Joe Biden in July 2012 while he was visiting family in the area.

with. I just wish I had never had to meet them."

A fund was established in Jim Kautz's name at a local bank to support the family. Thousands of dollars were raised, Bob said. Before his untimely death, Jim had begun gathering information on two Long Beach officers killed while on duty. Eventually, Jim's name would be added to a Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D.C., along with Chief Marshal Ephraim Reid, who was killed on Sept. 25, 1933, and Earle Platt, who was killed on Oct. 25, 1956.

With 2020 having marked his final year with Long Beach police, Bob could not have foreseen the strange circumstances, on a global scale, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Ironically, Long Beach police did not see a marked increase in criminal activity, due in large part to families self-isolating to protect themselves.

"Our population has grown since COVID started, while the Chicago people came out here because they are so restricted in Illinois," he said. "But as far as calls for service, we have been very fortunate with it being very quiet."

And as he contemplated retiring, Bob took comfort in witnessing the next generation in his family showing an interest in law enforcement. His son, Nicholas, 28, serves with the Michiana Shores Volunteer Fire Department, with its street department, and as a reserve officer with Long Beach police.



Bob is photographed with his children, Kristen and Nicholas.

His daughter, Kristen Marie D'Agostino, graduated from Michigan City High school and Purdue University, as well as from esthetics school. Married to Dan D'Agostino, they live in New Buffalo, Mich., where she works for her husband's family's business and does esthetics on the side.

As for Bob, he will remain with the department part time. He has nothing but respect for Swistek as his successor. And, he's ready for the next stage in his life.

"They say that you'll know when it's your time to go," Bob said. "It's just my time to go."

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## Health Council Awards \$40,000 to Agencies, Honors the Late Norm Steider



Samaritan Counseling Center was one of the agencies benefitting from a \$10,000 gift through Duneland Health Council.

Dec. 29 was a significant day for the Duneland Health Council.

First, it announced \$10,000 in gifts to four non-profit agencies serving children. DHC awards grants to approximately 20 agencies based on demonstrated need. The four benefitting groups this year were Boys & Girls Club of Michigan City, Dunebrook, Open Door Adolescent Health Center and Samaritan Counseling Center.

Secondly, the DHC board recalled former Chief Executive Officer Norman "Norm" Steider, specifically his leadership and contributions to the community's health and well-being.

Steider was the organization's first CEO, leading it from 1996 to 2016. He passed away after a long illness on Dec. 15, 2020. Steider's wife, Mary, their children, Melanie and Gretchen, and grandchildren



Steider

were present for the award announcements.

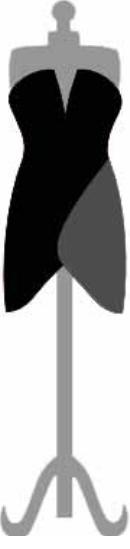
"Norm's commitment to children in Michigan City was unceasing," DHC President Gil Pontius said during his opening remarks. "He recognized all children must have the support of our community — educators, adults and other children — because they and their families face pressures in the current environment. Norm walked the walk!"

Dunebrook Executive Director Jean Ann Cannon said Steider was instrumental in developing its first Child Advocacy Program

"Norm's fierce persistence is the foundation upon which we built Dunebrook," she said. "His roles in grant writing and financial development to ensure we continue to provide child advocacy, child abuse prevention and teaching healthy parenting were foremost."

Deborah Briggs, director of the Open Door Adolescent Health Center, recalled Steider's mentorship when the school-based program began in the late 1990s. Briggs said his direct help landed a competitive four-year grant for training and staff development from Robert Woods Johnson Foundation.

Steider also was one of the founding board members of Samaritan Counseling Center, which incorporated in 1981.



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An Art Barn School of Art collaboration with the New Studio for the Visual Arts in Jupiter, Fla., Dews will present her finished works, and describe her process of abstracting from nature to create compositions. Painting and drawing techniques such as cropping, collaging, painting with washes, creating textures and composing strata pieces will be demonstrated.

The cost is \$250 per person. Registration is available at [www.artbarschool.org](http://www.artbarschool.org). Art Barn is located at 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso. Call (219) 462-9009 for more details.

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## Lubeznik Center for the Arts

Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St., has received a \$12,000 grant through Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Youth Program Resilience Fund.

One of only 297 grants offered by Lilly, LCA will use the money to support after-school arts education and outreach, including partnerships with the Boys & Girls Club, Safe Harbor and LCA's Teen Arts Council.

Also, the center is closed through Jan. 30 to deep clean, paint, install a new exhibit, conduct shop inventory and prepare for the upcoming year. However, staff will be at the office, checking emails and voicemails.

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## MLK Jr. Day Virtual Program

Purdue University Northwest will celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and legacy with its first virtual ceremony from 8:30 to 9:45 a.m. Monday, Jan. 18.



Morris

Karen Bishop Morris, PNW associate professor of English, will deliver the keynote presentation. The event is free and open to the community at [YouTube.com/PurdueNorthwest](https://www.youtube.com/PurdueNorthwest).

Morris has served in many roles, including: interim dean of the Honors College; chair of the department of English; director of First-Year Writing; and director of the University Writing Center. She earned her doctorate in English/Rhetoric and Composition from Purdue. She has served as a board member or fundraising strategist for national and local nonprofit organizations. She focuses her academic energy on building innovative programs, implementing high-impact practices for first-generation students and strengthening connections between higher education and various stakeholders.

Wendel McCollum, Michigan City Area Schools associate superintendent, is the emcee. PNW Chancellor Thomas Keon will give opening remarks. Vanessa Allen-McCloud, Urban League of Northwest Indiana president and CEO, is the vocalist.

Instead of donating needed items in person, as in the past, the planning committee suggests making a donation to a charity or organization of choice.

Visit [www.pnw.edu/mlk-celebration](http://www.pnw.edu/mlk-celebration) for details.

## NB Library Community Forum

The Friends of New Buffalo Library Community Forum continues with a Zoom presentation, "Myths Busted: What You Thought You Knew Just Ain't So," from 7 to 8 p.m. EDT Tuesday, Feb. 16.

Leading the program is Bob Myers, Historical Society of Michigan director of education. The Zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89396176122>

Call the library at (269) 469-2933, follow the Facebook link at [newbuffalotownshiplibrary.org](http://newbuffalotownshiplibrary.org) or email [new.buffalo.FOL@gmail.com](mailto:new.buffalo.FOL@gmail.com) for details.

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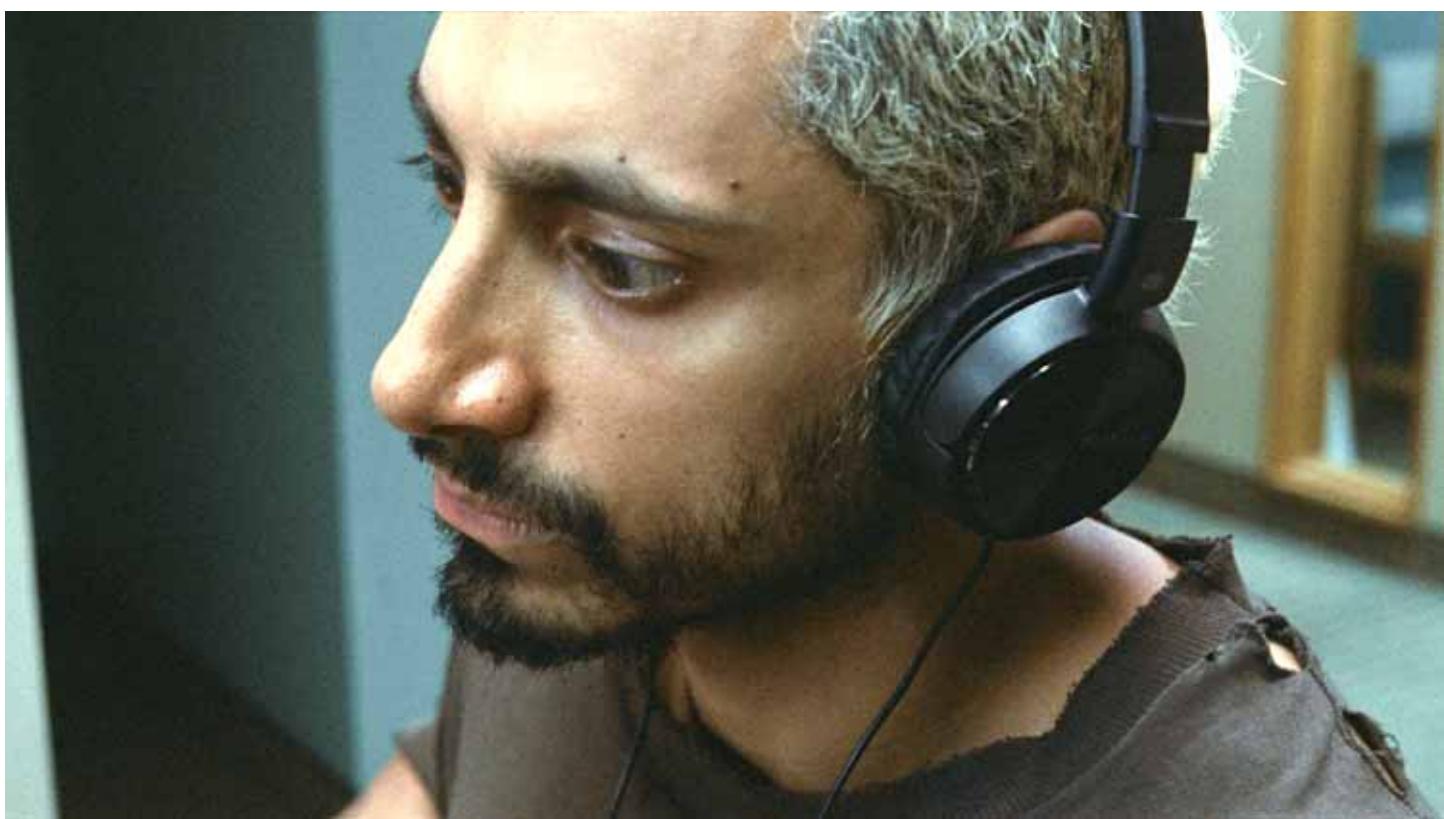


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## "Sound of Metal" Packs a Wallop as One of the Year's Best

by Andrew Tallackson



Riz Ahmed stars as a man experiencing devastating hearing loss in "Sound of Metal," now streaming on Amazon Prime.

It needs no further explanation when I say 2020 was a curious year. On so many levels. Where to begin is an exercise in futility.

Typically, our first edition of the year includes my picks for the year's best films. But because of COVID-19, studios were granted extra breathing room to release their films in January for Oscar consideration. That is why you won't find my top 10 picks published for a few more weeks, to allow time for these pictures to become available.

Having said that, expect "Sound of Metal," now streaming on Amazon Prime, to land near the top of my list. Intensely emotional, deeply empathetic, with performances by Riz Ahmed and Paul Raci that, if they're not nominated for Oscars, well, then something has gone absurdly wrong.

Ahmed is not a household name — he's had key roles in "Jason Bourne" and "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story") — but what he achieves here will chart the course of his future career.

He stars as Ruben, the drummer for a metal band that, like many metal bands, cranks up the decibels to skull-shattering levels. While on tour, he's with his girlfriend Lou (Olivia Cooke, wonderful), the band's lead singer, when his hearing turns muffled. He can make out sounds, a trace of nearby conversations, but nothing distinct. He visits a doctor who delivers shattering news: whether it be from playing in the band or past drug use, he now can only hear



### "Sound of Metal"

*Running time: 120 minutes. Streaming on Amazon Prime.*

*Rated R for language throughout and brief nude images*

20 to 30 percent of the words uttered around him. The condition will not improve, but worsen. Cochlear implants may help, but the cost through surgery, not covered by insurance, ranges from \$40,000 to \$80,000. When Lou finds out, she not only is devastated, but terrified for Ruben, that he might relapse into alcohol and heroin use. She calls his sponsor. He suggests Ruben visit a rural community for deaf, recovering addicts, one run by a Vietnam veteran, Joe (Raci), who lost his hearing in the war, and who is a recovering alcoholic.

Consider the bare bones of the story, and "Sound of Metal" could be a Lifetime Channel movie, where hearing loss equals phony inspirational uplift. But director Darius Marder, who wrote the script with his brother, Abraham, go for ultra-realism. This may be the first movie to successfully reproduce what it is like for people who are deaf or suffering from hearing loss. The Marders take us into Ruben's head where we hear what he is *not* able to hear, and it is devastating. An entire world of conversations from which Ruben is rapidly being excluded.

Ahmed plays Ruben as a man who's life has been



Paul Raci is extremely moving as a man who runs a rural community for deaf, recovering addicts.

defined by music. His body language conveys someone always in motion, grooving to a hidden beat. And when the hearing loss hits, Ruben does not take it like a martyr. Ahmed unleashes anger at the world, the actor pouring everything he's got into these scenes.

The beauty of the film comes from Ruben's gradual transformation. The Marders cast real actors from the deaf community to play not just members of the rural facility, but also within a school affiliated with it, including "Walking Dead" actress Lauren Ridloff as an exceedingly patient teacher. And when Ruben finds the money to have the cochlear implant surgery, the ensuing conversation between him and Joe is the emotional centerpiece of the film. Beautifully conceived, and performed by Raci with heartbreakingly honest and regret. Raci's career has mostly been in television, but his work here is a revelation: A man whose voice is carefully calibrated as a calming salve to the distressed.

Ultimately, "Sound of Metal" is about embracing the hand life deals you. You can crumble, or roll with the punches. What fate awaits Ruben? I won't say, but the final scene, in its own quiet way, is unbelievably powerful.

This is a remarkable film.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at [drew@thebeacher.com](mailto:drew@thebeacher.com)



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# Season 3 of “Cobra Kai” is the Best Yet

by Andrew Tallackson

Season Three of “Cobra Kai” is thrilling, moving, soapy, campy, laugh-out-loud hilarious. By all accounts, the best episodes to date.

When it launched in 2018 on YouTube Red, my fear was that “Cobra Kai” was cash-grab nostalgia: a shameless attempt to capitalize on our fondness for the “Karate Kid” movies. How delightful it was to be proven wrong.

The “Karate Kid” franchise was the equivalent of “Star Wars” to creators Josh Heald, Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg. They knew it backwards and forwards. The characters. The locations. The fights. Every minute detail.

What they’ve created with “Cobra Kai” honors the films, but takes them a step further. It deepens the characters. Fleshes out their backstories. Reveals how the past often is doomed to repeat itself. And through the show’s secret weapon, William Zabka as Cobra Kai sensei Johnny Lawrence, the series is hysterically subversive in contrasting his stuck-in-the ’80s mentality with the walking-on-eggshells squeamishness of the 21st century.

How Heald, Hurwitz and Schlossberg keep topping themselves is a mystery, but we remain grateful they haven’t lost sight of the soul of the show, which now is available on Netflix.

The Season 2 cliffhanger was a doozy, with summer-long tensions among students of warring dojos (karate studios) — Johnny’s Cobra Kai and the rebirth of Miyagi-Do by Daniel LaRusso (Ralph Macchio) — erupting in a showdown of apocalyptic proportions at school. Amid the ruckus, Johnny’s prized student, Miguel (Xolo Maridueña), suffered a near-fatal back injury that placed him in a coma.

Hospital scenes structured around coma patients are a soap-opera staple, complete with shots of the comatose patient and grieving family. But “Cobra Kai” isn’t interested in milking these scenes for syrupy sentiment. It uses the first few episodes to wrap up Season 2 loose ends:

- Johnny’s son Robby (Tanner Buchanan), on the run after causing Miguel’s injuries.
- Daniel’s struggling auto dealership, which takes a hit after the students’ brawl, his daughter Sam (Mary Mouser), being one of the key players. Tensions between the students themselves, from Hawk (Jacob Bertrand) to Demetri (Gianni Deценz), are at an all-time high.
- The fractured allegiances within Cobra Kai, with Johnny kicked out by his former mentor, John Kreese, played with snarling pit bull efficiency by Martin Kove.

Again, all of this sounds like daytime-soap mate-



Daniel LaRusso (Ralph Macchio, left) and Johnny Lawrence (William Zabka) are still at odds in Season 3 of “Cobra Kai,” now streaming on Netflix.

rial. In fact, a criticism of “Cobra Kai” is that scenes involving the students play out like teen soap opera. However, as any parent of a teen-ager will tell you, their lives are soap operas. Lacking the context and perspective of adulthood, every crisis, setback or social-media dis is cause for meltdown. So in that respect, the behavior of “Cobra Kai’s” teens is on the money.

What I love about the show, though, is its intelligence. The scripts are uncommonly sharp, smart in the ways adults let what happens in high school chart the course for their existence as adults, and how spouses can cut through the BS to offer the right perspective — Courtney Henggeler as Daniel’s wife Amanda remains a comic firecracker. The show reveals how villains like Kreese weren’t always bad, but troubled souls steered in the wrong direction.

The show also gives Zabka, as Johnny, the best dialogue. The actor has impeccable comic timing. He’s deadpan perfection. Johnny, it seems, never left the ’80s. He assumes what worked then still applies



Tamlyn Tomita returns as Kumiko, a character that first appeared in “The Karate Kid Part II.”

the confrontations between the two do not resolve themselves as we anticipate. In fact, they show a maturity uncommon for streaming television. Heck, for any television these days.

For Johnny, “Cobra Kai” has emphasized how he never recovered from his breakup with Ali Mills (Elisabeth Shue), how his heart still belongs to her all these years later. By the time this review goes to print, it is fair to say the spoilers will already have appeared online. Shue is back in Season 3, and it is everything you could want from Ali’s return. Shue — my first major crush, after Princess Leia, of course — looks amazing at 57, and she radiates beauty, charm and intelligence. She’s still got it, and the dinner scene that features Ali, Daniel, Johnny and Amanda is priceless: full circle for characters linked by what happened in high school.

The Season Three finale builds to another showdown — here’s to hoping the LaRussos have good homeowners insurance — but the final scene, which opens the door to Season Four, is downright epic.

Then again, that’s the drawback of binge television. When it’s done right and done well, and we devour a series in a matter of days, the wait time for what comes next is excruciating.

Season 4 of “Cobra Kai” can’t get here soon enough.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at [drew@thebeacher.com](mailto:drew@thebeacher.com)

## Coming Soon

Editor Drew Tallackson’s picks for the best TV shows of 2020 on Jan. 28, and the best movies of 2020 on Feb. 4

## Gadot Remains Super Hero Worth Cheering in “Wonder Woman 1984”

by Andrew Tallackson

Could it be we embrace “Wonder Woman 1984” so wholeheartedly because we crave an escapist antidote to 2020? Or maybe it’s that director Patty Jenkins, star Gal Gadot and everyone involved in the picture went the extra mile.

Whatever the reason, “Wonder Woman 1984,” now in theaters and on HBO Max, is grand entertainment: a sequel with humor, action and emotion. This is proof Gadot’s Diana Prince and her super-hero alter-ego have plenty of life in them.

Take, for instance, the exhilarating opening sequence, a flashback to Diana’s youth on Themyscira, where we see her engaged in an Olympic-like competition against older Amazons. With Diana constantly on the run, the images have a fluid, intoxicating pull, elevated by visually ingenious challenges and a magnificent, choral-like anthem by composer Hans Zimmer. But the race has less to do with Diana triumphing and more so with her learning a key lesson from her mother, Queen Hippolyta (Connie Nielsen): “No hero is born from lies.”

Skip ahead to 1984, and Diana is working as an anthropologist at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., where two key players enter the story. One is frumpy, mousy Barbara Minerva (Kristen Wiig), a colleague who yearns to be like Diana: bolder, more assertive. The other is businessman Maxwell Lord, played by The Mandalorian himself, Pedro Pascal, who sets his sights on a chunk of rock known as the “Dreamstone,” obtained through an FBI raid of a local jewelry store.

We see elements of the raid earlier in the film as Wonder Woman swings into action at a shopping mall. The sequence is standard comic-book action, designed to remind us how much arse our hero can kick, but it’s also evidence of how Gadot and Jenkins, as director and co-writer, know how to tweak these tropes. The payoff is a sly, girl-power wink between Wonder Woman and a young girl in awe of a woman silencing male threats.

We admire, too, how the film handles Pascal’s cheeky Maxwell Lord. Again, a standard comic-book groaner: the megalomaniac out to rule the world. But Pascal, who is having one heck of a year with this film and Season 2 of “The Mandalorian,” creates an intriguing bad guy. The “Dreamstone” has

the power to grant wishes. Whatever the person asks, that is what he/she receives. It is a Pandora’s box of complications: the old “be careful what you wish for” scenario. Maxwell, whose requests grow bolder, and far more dangerous, starts to crack at the seams. Watching Pascal’s villain unravel is fascinating, especially as Maxwell balances his own wants over responsibilities to his young son. That conflict humanizes the character so he’s not just a disposable villain.

Wiig’s Barbara? Not as compelling. Evolving into “Cheetah,” Barbara symbolizes a power grab gone wrong, confusing cruelty with power. The script, however, doesn’t give Wiig the dialogue, or presence, to effectively chew the scenery.

How the film handles the return of Steve Trevor (Chris Pine), who perished at the end



Gal Gadot is still a winning presence in “Wonder Woman 1984.”

★ ★ ★ 1/2

### “Wonder Woman 1984”

*Running time: 151 minutes. In theaters and on HBO Max.*

*Rated PG-13 for sequences of action and violence.*

of the first film, is handled well – some call it a lazy contrivance, I say it works in the context of the story – and we also see Jenkins, as director, concocting marvelous imagery. There is major moviemaking here, from the gorgeous sights of Diana and Steve flying through a July 4th celebration, to a dynamite chase sequence in Egypt: cleverly choreographed, with stunt work honoring “Raiders of the Lost Ark.”

The success of “Wonder Woman 1984,” though, rests with whether we still embrace Gadot. We do. Boy, do we ever. She invests so much energy, heart and good cheer into the role, it’s fair to say, as long as future adventures do her justice, we’ll follow this character anywhere.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at [drew@thebeacher.com](mailto:drew@thebeacher.com)

## "Soul" Finds Pixar Achieving Brilliance...And Sliding Into Its Comfort Zone

by Andrew Tallackson

"Soul" is Pixar at its most ambitious. Not only are its main characters African American – a first for the computer-animation giant – but it explores one man's quest for self-fulfillment.

The result: unanimous acclaim from audiences and critics.

I liked half the movie. Cue the booing.

Streaming on Disney+, "Soul" opens in a middle-school band room, with teacher Joe Gardner (voiced by Jamie Foxx) stuck in a rut. And, the lack of enthusiasm from his students will put a smile on the faces of anyone who has taught music to teens.

Let's talk about the animation here, too. Pixar has made computer animation an art form for so long, we take it for granted. But here, we are reminded of Pixar's genius. The band room is rich in detail, the color palette a blend of reds, browns and yellows. There also is a stark clarity: Every student feels like a living, breathing creation.

Soon after school, Joe gets his big break. A former student invites him to play piano for jazz great Dorothea Williams (voiced by a hilariously droll Angela Bassett). The moment Joe plays with the group is a celebration of the liberating freedom of jazz. The animation is astonishing, right down to the image of Joe's hands at the piano, a precise approximation of the real thing. It is marvelous work.

His head in the clouds, Joe glides through the streets, happy...until he falls into a manhole. He finds himself headed to the "Great Beyond," a "stairway to heaven" of sorts envisioned in black and white and rivaling the majesty of Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey."

Then, my heart sank.

Joe lands in the "Great Before," where counselors prep unborn souls for life on Earth. Here, the great and mighty Pixar finds itself on autopilot. "The Great Before" looks, sounds and feels exactly

like "Inside Out," Pixar's 2015 triumph about the emotions within a girl breaking free from the innocence of childhood. Maybe it is no coincidence Pete Docter directed and co-wrote both films, but "Soul" stops being daring and slips into its comfort zone. Save for counselors who curiously resemble Picasso paintings, we've seen this world before.

Joe's journey within the "Great Before" has him meet 22, an unborn soul whose cynicism has trapped her in limbo. The character is voiced by Tina Fey. I happen to be a huge fan. Fey could read a tax audit and invest sly snark into it. But her whiny dialogue gets old, and you have to wonder why a film, which celebrates jazz as the musical embodiment of the African-American experience, devotes so much of itself to Joe making 22 happy before himself.

The movie does return to the present, with 22 accidentally landing in Joe's body and Joe into an oversized cat. Scenes in a barber shop, and in the clothing store owned by Joe's mother (voiced by the great Phylicia Rashad), restore the heart of "Soul," although each time it flips back to the "Great Before," the momentum stalls.

Finally, we arrive at a moment of greatness. Joe, with 22's soul inside him, sitting on a porch step. Appreciating life's simple gifts. It is one of the most delicately moving sequences Pixar has achieved. *Ever*. A Zen moment carried out with the lush inspiration of Pixar's brilliant animators. From there, the film maintains the right note to the finish.

As an adult, especially one who unexpectedly contracted COVID-19 late last year, the message of "Soul" hits home. Every moment in life is a gift. No arguing with that. I adored that aspect of the film.

But the "Great Before?" Eh...

Contact Andrew Tallackson at [drew@thebeacher.com](mailto:drew@thebeacher.com)



Joe (voiced by Jamie Foxx) has a moment of clarity in "Soul," now streaming on Disney+.



### "Soul"

*Running time: 100 minutes. Streaming on Disney+.  
Rated PG for thematic elements and some language*

**Making a Difference**

Michigan City Lions Club presents a donation of books and a check for needed equipment to the Edgewood Elementary School Speech and Hearing Department. Pictured are: front row, Lori Jones, Speech and Hearing Department, a student, Jerry, and Lion DeNita Ton. The back row is: Susan Baldwin, Speech and Hearing Department, Lion Nancy Hawkins and Club President Irene Rosevear.

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**Harbor Country Hikers**

Leaders in nature preservation and related areas is the focus of a Harbor Country Hikers Zoom presentation at 7 p.m. EDT Thursday, Jan. 14.

Staff with Fernwood Botanical Garden & Nature Preserve's Sims Education Center created "The Greats: Leaders in Conservation, Botany and Exploration." It memorializes 55 environmentalists, preservationists, botanists and nature illustrators.

Fernwood Executive Director Carol Line leads the Zoom discussion on a selection of their lives and work. Some of the "Greats" are well known, like Rachel Carson, whose "Silent Spring" is credited with starting the modern environmental movement. Others are lesser known, like John and William Bartram, father-and-son botanists who explored the American colonies in pre-Revolutionary times.

The program also includes Peter Rabbit author Beatrix Potter, who contributed to the study of mushrooms and was an important figure in land conservation in Britain.

Visit [www.harborcountryhikers.com/events](http://www.harborcountryhikers.com/events) or email questions to [harborcountryhikers@gmail.com](mailto:harborcountryhikers@gmail.com) for a link to join the presentation.

**Bridgman Public Library**

Bridgman (Mich.) Public Library will host a Zoom presentation with Marney Rich Keenan about her book, The Snow Killings, at 6 p.m. EDT Tuesday, Jan. 19.

Keenan will discuss her investigation and the comprehensive examination of one of the oldest unsolved serial murder cases in the country. The Zoom link will be available on [www.bridgmanlibrary.com](http://www.bridgmanlibrary.com).

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## Michigan City Public Library

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

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

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

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

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

The following virtual programming is scheduled:

- The Online Graphic Novel Club returns Jan. 14 with a Goodreads review of Alex Sanchez's You Brought Me the Ocean. The Podcast release is Jan. 21 and the Zoom meetup is Jan. 28. Contact Jonathan at (219) 873-3045 or email YSonline@mclib.org to register.
- Make an MLK crown and Freedom Bel on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Jan. 18. The activities are free and available at Youth Services.
- Tinkercad begins Jan. 18. The online workshop allows children to design 3-D creations and print for free. Registration is required at <https://forms.gle/P3eggy4urdEg9CQ8> or call (219) 873-3045 and ask for Mr. Dave.
- Craft kits are available weekly. Children can make a photo album, with all supplies available. Children also can pick up a "Crow Kit." Available now is "Cool Critters and Waddling Penguins."

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## Lilly Scholarship Recipients

Reese Attar of Michigan City High School and Jillian Maudlin from LaPorte High School are the 2021 LaPorte County Lilly Endowment Community Scholars.

Attar will graduate from MCHS with an academic honors diploma, having taken advanced placement, dual credit and honors courses. She has shown strong work ethic through her extracurriculars, work and volunteer activities. She has been on student council, varsity girls' soccer and tennis programs for four years, serving in emerging leadership roles. She's also been involved with Children's International Summer Villages as a board member for three years, traveling across the world and coordinating national service projects.

Maudlin will graduate from LPHS with an academic honors diploma, having taken dual credit, honors and advanced-placement level courses. She has shown strong leadership and mentorship as co-founder and president of the Slicer Mentor Club, and her work with LaPorte Homework Helpers, Leo Club and YMCA Advocacy Board. She's been highly involved with Academic Decathlon, Principal's Advisory Council, Science Olympiad and Spell Bowl.

As part of the scholarship program, Attar and Maudlin will receive four-year, full-tuition scholarships to an accredited public or private Indiana college or university of their choice, and an annual \$900 stipend for required books and equipment.

Unity Foundation received more than 50 applications from students. They were judged on academic achievement, service to others, extracurricular activities and, to a lesser extent, financial need. A committee of LaPorte County residents reviewed the applications, not knowing the names until after the finalists were selected.

The 12 finalists were interviewed and nominees submitted to Independent Colleges of Indiana Inc. for the final selection. The 10 remaining finalists each receive \$2,000 in scholarships from Unity and are eligible to apply to Unity's county-wide scholarship program.



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Maudlin

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## Indiana Dunes State Park

The following programs will be offered:

- **Dunes Geocache Adventure — Open House Meet & Greet Local Geocachers from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 16.**

Any level of geocacher can participate, with games and prizes offered. Details are at [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com), then search zip code 46304 for the event page. Pre-registration is required. Participants should take a GPS unit or cell phone geocaching app.

- **Snowshoe Rentals are available at the Nature Center.**

Snowshoeing is offered as long as 6 inches of snow is on the ground. A driver's license is needed, and the cost is \$5 for the day. (10 a.m.-4 p.m.) Call the Nature Center to ask about snow conditions.

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

## Indiana Dunes National Park

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](http://www.nps.gov/indu) for additional information.*

## Fernwood Botanical Garden

- **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](mailto: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](http://www.fernwoodbotanical.org) for more information and to confirm the status of classes.*

## Local Woman Wins Memorial Award

Save the Dunes has awarded Michigan City's Shannon Eason with its Paul H. Douglas Memorial Award.

The annual honor goes to individuals who aim to preserve and protect the Indiana Dunes. It pays tribute to Illinois Sen. Paul H. Douglas, who helped establish Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore despite bitter opposition from the steel industry, Indiana businesses and elected officials.

Eason, who has a long history of environmental leadership, has collaborated on many projects with Save the Dunes, Indiana Dunes National Park and other regional conservation organizations.

The assistant park superintendent for Michigan City Parks & Recreation, her work involves maintaining the ecological integrity of the dune landscape and restoration projects. That is accomplished by removing invasive species from natural areas and incorporating native plants, permeable pavement and other sustainable practices in city landscaping.

Eason played a crucial role in developing and installing "Save Our Dunes and Stay on Designated Paths" signage, as well as the addition of beach mats on access paths to reduce environmental impacts of recreational use.

She manages Michigan City's Singing Sands Trail Project, one of the latest additions to the Marquette Trail that has been in development across the region for years.

Visit [www.savedunes.org](http://www.savedunes.org) or [www.facebook.com/savedunes/](http://www.facebook.com/savedunes/) for more details.



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

- Bethany Lutheran Church, 102 G St., LaPorte, 1-6 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 19.
- St. John Kantz, 7012 N. County Road 600 East, Rolling Prairie, 1-6 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 19.
- Eaton Chiropractic, 8690 Pahs Road, Michigan City, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 20.

*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](http://redcrossblood.org) for more details. Visit [rcbblood.org/together](http://rcbblood.org/together) for more details.*

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*Opening April 15: 2nd Location at 16201 Red Arrow Highway, Union Pier, MI*

## PEO Supports Local Shelter



Members of Philanthropic Educational Organization Chapter BR have supported Interfaith Community Shelter by collecting needed items from a wish list. The shelter, located in the old Sacred Heart Church on West Eighth Street, provides overnight shelter, and dinner and breakfast, to homeless men and women.



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## Foundation Grants Total \$4.6M

Healthcare Foundation of LaPorte has awarded \$4,628,036 in grants to projects and programs that improve health and wellness.

HFL is a nonprofit, independent, private foundation that emphasizes living healthy and well in and around LaPorte, specifically to become one of Indiana's Top 10 healthiest communities by 2030. Initially funded in March 2016 from sale proceeds of LaPorte Hospital, the organization has contributed more than \$17 million to projects and initiatives since 2017.

The latest funding supports: COVID-19 emergency grants; personal protective equipment; AEDs; capacity building efforts; Partners in Prevention (school-based prevention), including technical assistance to schools and program evaluation; and strategic and responsive grants made through HFL's two grant cycles. HFL's strategic grants make an impact in one of its three board-approved strategic focus areas of "Healthy Children," "Healthy Minds" or "Healthy Living."

In 2020, HFL awarded grants to 42 LaPorte County organizations delivering 67 projects and programs.

## Salvation Army Exceeds Goal

The Salvation Army of Michigan City exceeded its 2020 holiday season campaign goal, raising 112 percent of the \$200,000 goal.

With its "Rescue Christmas" theme, the campaign collected \$224,608.99 since the kick-off. The Salvation Army sets a goal every Christmas season that raises money through red kettles, online/mail-in donations and sponsorships. The funds help local families during the holidays, but also The Salvation Army to operate throughout the year.

This year, nearly 700 families received holiday assistance with food and toys, including more than 1,200 children. In addition, approximately 400 meals were distributed Thanksgiving Day. Also supported by donations through the Christmas campaign are a year-round food pantry, diaper bank, utility assistance, weekend backpack feeding program, youth summer camp and Pathway of Hope case management.

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## Leeds Project Heart

Leeds Public House, 401 Franklin St., will host a longer Leeds Project Heart that continues through February.

Fifty percent of proceeds from a special cocktail will support Giant Paw Prints Rescue, a Westville-based nonprofit that spotlights larger breeds by helping them find new homes.

Visit [www.leedspublichouse.com](http://www.leedspublichouse.com) for more details.

## Activities to Explore

### In the Area:

**Jan. 14** — Michigan City Public Library Online Graphic Novel Club, Goodreads review of Alex Sanchez's You Brought Me the Ocean. Podcast release: Jan. 21, Zoom meetup: Jan. 28. Info: Jonathan @ (219) 873-3045, registration: YSonline@mclib.org

**Jan. 16** — Dunes Geocache Adventure — Open House Meet & Greet Local Geocachers, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

**Jan. 18 — MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S BIRTHDAY.**

**Jan. 18** — Purdue University Northwest Martin Luther King Jr. virtual ceremony, 8:30-9:45 a.m. Link: YouTube.com/PurdueNorthwest. Info: www.pnw.edu/mlk-celebration

**Jan. 18** — Michigan City Public Library Craft: MLK Crown & Freedom Bell for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Free, supplies @ Youth Services. Info: (219) 873-3049.

**Jan. 18** — Michigan City Public Library online Tinkercad begins. Registration: (219) 873-3045, <https://forms.gle/P3eggy4urdEg9CQ8>

### In the Region

**Jan. 14** — Harbor Country Hikers Zoom presentation, "The Greats: Leaders in Conservation, Botany and Exploration," 7 p.m. EDT. Info: [www.harborcountryhikers.com/events](http://www.harborcountryhikers.com/events), [harborcountryhikers@gmail.com](mailto:harborcountryhikers@gmail.com)

**Jan. 14-16** — Art Barn School of Art three-day virtual workshop, "Abstracting Nature," 1-4 p.m. Cost: \$250/person. Registration: [www.artbarnschool.org](http://www.artbarnschool.org).

**Through Jan. 16, 2021** — "Series 6," annual holiday Berrien Artist Guild exhibit, Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph, Mich. Viewing hours: noon-4 p.m. EST Fri.-Sun. Info: (269) 449-2167, [www.boxfactoryforthearts.org](http://www.boxfactoryforthearts.org)

**Jan. 19** — Bridgman (Mich.) Public Library Zoom presentation, Marney Rich Keenan's The Snow Killings, 6 p.m. EDT. Zoom link: [www.bridgmanlibrary.com](http://www.bridgmanlibrary.com)

**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/>



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**MACU Donates to LP Foundation**

Members Advantage Credit Union recently donated \$500 to the NewDay Foundation of LaPorte. The organization helps cancer patients as they struggle with treatment. NewDay delivers "Bags of Hope" to first-time chemotherapy and radiation patients, as well as new teddy bears, coloring books and crayons, and reading/activity books to children at local hospitals. Pictured are (from left) MACU President Frank Beachnau, NewDay Foundation CFO Dennis Fischer and NewDay Foundation CEO Katrina Langford.

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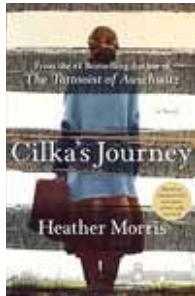


## Off the Book Shelf

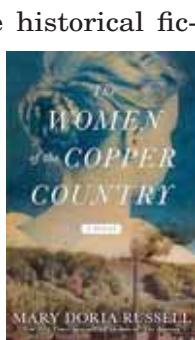
by Sally Carpenter

The books just kept coming at hyper speed last year! Fifty book reviews just couldn't cover all the great reading available. My choices covered a lot of subjects: love and sacrifice, murder and revenge, black comedy and social issues. As I do every January, here is a recap of my 10 favorite books from the past year.

**Cilka's Journey** by Heather Morris — This historical fiction is based on the life story of Cilka, a Czech Jew. She survived the Nazi camp at Auschwitz in World War II, only to be sent to Siberia after a wrongful conviction of being a Nazi collaborator. Her strength of character shines through her life of starvation, rape and hard labor. Like me, you will cry for Cilka, it's impossible not to.

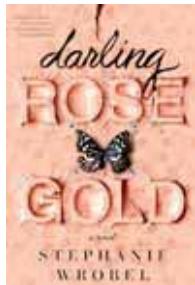


**The Women of Copper Country** by Mary Doria Russell — More fiction, this time in the early days of the 20th century in the upper peninsula of Michigan. The men spend their days down in the copper mines while the women raise the children and dread the horn that signals an accident usually leading to someone's death. Annie Clements is another woman with strength of character, and a driving force for the union the men so desperately need.



**The Operator** by Gretchen Berg — This book shows you how small-town living can really crowd in on you! There's humor, love and a lot of confusion in this nostalgic look at life in the 1950s when operators handled all telephone calls and, yes, listened in on them, too! Operator Vivian Dalton makes fun of snooty Betty Miller, but the call she hears Betty receive will change Vivian's life...until another piece of information may put the ball in her court.

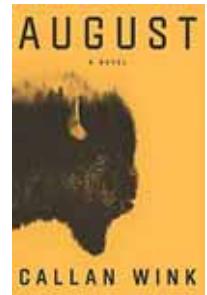
**Darling Rose Gold** by Stephanie Wrobel — "...some of us cannot forget and will never forgive. We keep our axes sharp, ready to grind." This dark comedy will make you wonder whether the feud between Rose Gold Watts and her mother, Patty Watts, will end in a stand-off or a murder. Who is the better person — maybe neither? But the answer doesn't come until the very end.



**Winter Counts** by David Heska Wanbli Weiden — This modern-day story of Native Americans provides a gritty, non-nonsense look at growing up

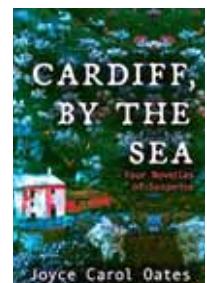
native in America today. It follows Virgil Wounded Horse, the reservation "fixer." When the feds won't help and the tribal police can't help, he's the go-to man — but at what price to Virgil? Especially when his nephew is charged with drug dealing.

**August** by Callan Wink — August is the name of a boy growing up on a dairy farm in middle Michigan with his parents, Bonnie and Dar, and follows August from boyhood to manhood. There's a gritty reality and honesty here, a genuineness that transcends other coming-of-age stories. It's thoroughly engaging, with characters that jump off the pages. Look for more from this author.



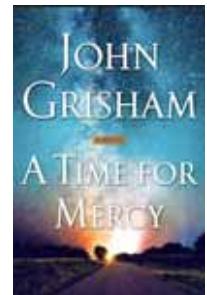
**The Book of Lost Friends** by Lisa Wingate — This is historical fiction at its finest. After the Civil War, a Missouri newspaper printed letters from former slaves trying to connect family members that slave traders tore apart for so many years. In the 21st century, these stories will resonate with a school teacher trying to help the students in her small Louisiana town to reach their potential.

**Cardiff, By the Sea** by Joyce Carol Oates — The indomitable Ms Oates is back with four short stories about women facing situations they could never have imagined — are they dreams or do they signal madness? How do they cope? There's your husband's dead ex-wife talking to you in the wind, a feral cat as some phantom guardian angel, and more — lots to absorb.



**Survivor Song** by Paul Tremblay — This is my sci-fi pick for the year. So scary, and so realistic. You will be physically exhausted and mentally thrilled after reading this story of two women's drive to survive and bring a child into a world gone slightly mad.

**A Time for Mercy** by John Grisham — This story is as good as Grisham gets. Back to Mississippi where lawyer Jake Brigance must defend a teen who killed the man abusive to his mother — a hard case, especially when the man is a respected policeman and the county is screaming for a death sentence.



A lot of exciting books are arriving in the coming weeks, and I can't wait to share them with you. Till next time, happy reading!

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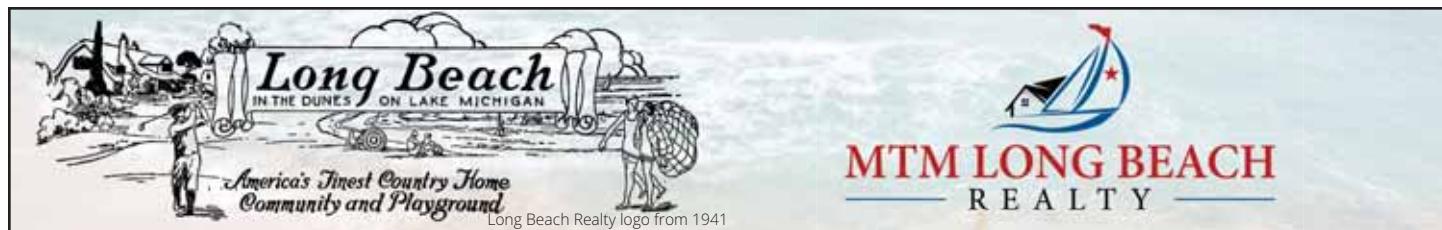
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