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Betsy Fleek can't help but get emotional when discussing the Indiana University-Bloomington RedSteppers.

Her voice waivers a bit, her eyes rimmed with tears. Good tears, mind you. As one of the dance team's original 24 members, she is part of IU history. When the group celebrated its 50th anniversary during homecoming weekend Oct. 7-8, it did so spectacularly: a halftime performance that featured an end zone-to-end zone kickline, complete with more than 200 past and present RedSteppers. A feat that left everyone packed into IU's Memorial Stadium — including Betsy's husband, Mark Schoonaert, and sister, Susie Pluto — in awed admiration.

So, yes, Betsy's poignant responses to questions about the RedSteppers are earned. In fact, asked how the dance team impacted her life, she pauses, collecting her thoughts.

"It was my very first experience with a strong role model, and strong women who all wanted to do well. To be the very best at what they were," she said. "There was a ded-

One Huge Adrenaline Rush

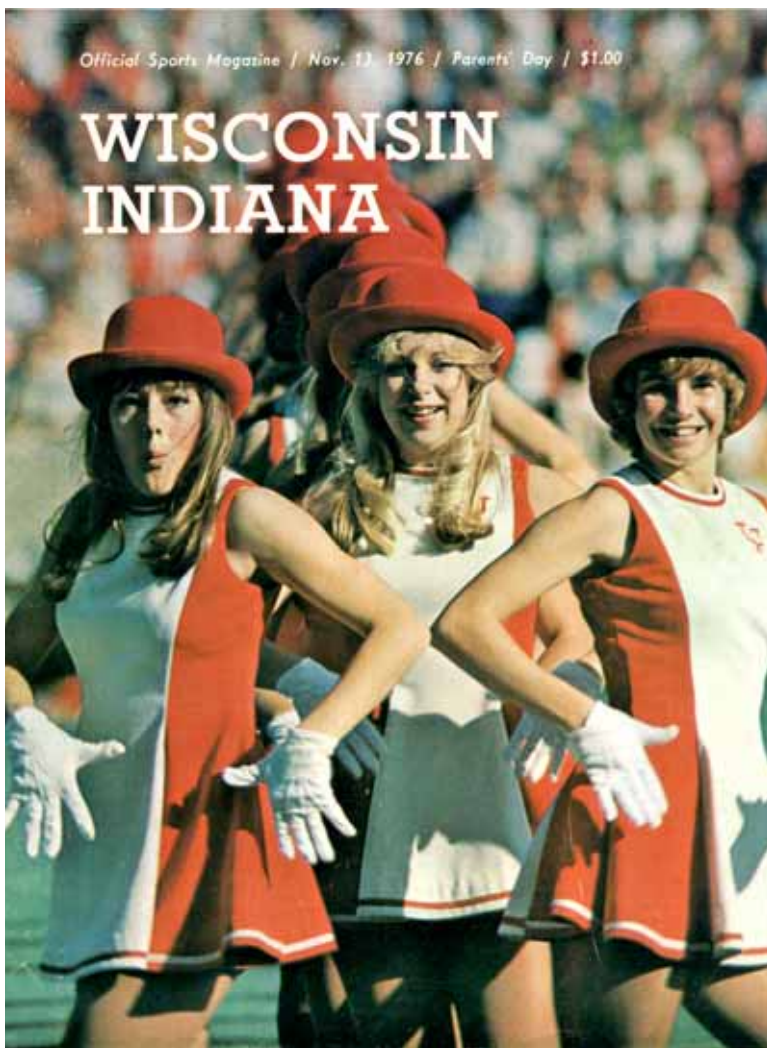
by Andrew Tallackson

ication and a drive. There was no drama. It was just everyone working together, and that has stayed with me my whole life."

□

The RedSteppers' debut in 1972 is all the more significant when you consider, at the time, women were not allowed to perform in the Marching Hundred, IU's esteemed marching band. So, in effect, the dance team was among the first female students to walk the university football field. This feat coincided with Title IX, the federal civil rights law included with education amendments in 1972. It aimed to halt sex-based discrimination at any school or educational program receiving federal funding.

Today, the RedSteppers, led by Coach Brookelyn Wood, are integral to the Marching Hundred, to IU football's game-day experience. Kicklines remain key to halftime performances, along with dance styles that include jazz, pom and hip-hop. The dance team performs at every home game, one away game, two to three volleyball games, two to three soccer games, one to three wrestling matches, two to six bas-



Betsy Fleek (left) appears on a 1976 program cover.

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One Huge Adrenaline Rush

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ketball games, clinics, community events, Riley Dance Marathon, Hoosier Hysteria and pep rallies.

For a bit of historical context, IU's Marching Hundred did not begin accepting female students until 1973. So in 1972, Karen Bailey, a professional dancer, teacher and choreographer, contacted the band's director of bands, Fred Ebbs, and colleague Ray Cramer, who would go on to a respected career as a guest conductor-clinician-adjudicator. Her mission: start a dance team to complement the Marching Hundred. Bailey became the group's founder, serving as its director and lead choreographer until retiring in 1992.

Bailey passed away in 2016, her obituary stating about the RedSteppers: *"Her crowning achievements were planning and choreographing half-time shows for all of IU's football games, as well as the bowl games during her tenure, including the Holiday Bowl, Peach Bowl, Liberty Bowl and the Copper Bowl. Without a doubt, her stewardship of the*

RedSteppers was Karen's lifelong passion, as well as the influential impact she made on hundreds of her RedStepper dancers."

For Betsy, a Beverly Shores resident, Elston graduate and Elston cheerleader, joining the new dance team sounded like a blast. In 1972, during her freshman year at IU, she saw a bulletin board notice about tryouts. Auditions involved dividing those present into three groups. Each learned specific dance routines, performing as individual groups, then all together.

How did Betsy feel she did? She laughs when asked.

"In college, I was clueless," she says. "It was sort of like, you go out and you do your all, and you just hope you're going to make the team, but you have no sense of how you've done against others."

Within an hour after tryouts, though, the list of the inaugural RedSteppers was posted. Betsy was among the 24 women selected.

Bailey maintained a rigorous rehearsal schedule. Daily practices from 3-5 p.m., with the dancers first learning the choreography without music, using 8



Betsy Fleek (front row, far right) is photographed with 13 of the original 24 RedSteppers during Homecoming weekend.

counts as their guide, then receiving recordings of the music by Wednesday. Fridays involved dress rehearsals on the football field with the Marching Hundred.

Mondays, it should be noted, involved reviewing tapes of the performances, much like football coaches going over game-day footage.

"Karen Bailey was a perfectionist," Betsy said, "particularly if you were out of alignment, because you were expected to be just like the marching band in terms of where you stood. And, we had white gloves, so it was easy to see if your hands weren't in line with everyone else."

Betsy recalls that first rehearsal, on the football field, with the Marching Hundred.



Betsy Fleek in Memorial Stadium attending the Homecoming game.

"That gives me goosebumps," she says. Asked to elaborate on the experience, she pauses. You can see, in her eyes the memory of that day re-emerging.

"I think once we got to line up along the sidelines, where we always started, we knew. *I knew*, that everything was in place. We were as good as we were going to get, and to just have fun," she said.

"Karen Bailey would say, find some person in the 60th row of the stadium and dance for them. It was about projection. There is a tendency for people who dance to watch your steps, to watch each other. Her intent was to have us project out into the stadium. Forget about yourself, forget about your steps...she wanted you to project."

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And how did everyone packed into Memorial Stadium react on game day? A smile spreads across Betsy's face.

"It's going to sound hokey, but the crowd went wild," she says. "We're standing there in our ending position, and it's like, wow. This is really something. We knew something special was going on."

□

When plans were revealed to celebrate the RedSteppers' 50th anniversary, Betsy didn't think twice about it. She would be there. She even worked with a trainer to prepare. While physically fit, she nonetheless wanted to be able to kick as high as possible. That entailed core-strengthening exercises with her trainer.

Six weeks before IU's homecoming weekend, she started receiving YouTube videos to help prepare for the dance routines.

On Friday, Oct. 7, Betsy, Mark and Susie headed down to Bloomington. She was one of about 165 RedStepper alumni — and one of 14 of the original 1972 crew — who arrived on campus.

Recalling the reunion, Betsy's voice trembles. She pauses. "I'm surprised I'm still so emotional," she admits. "But it was like you picked up where you left off, like time had never happened."

Rehearsals, led by Coach Wood, lasted from 4-5:30 p.m. RedSteppers were divided into three groups, categorized by the years they performed. Then came the homecoming parade. Friday night

also included a special banquet, one in which Cramer, himself, shared a humorous story from the early days of RedStepper history.

"As the band was walking around the track to prepare for the halftime entrance, I happened to be walking behind the band and most of the RedSteppers," Cramer told the group. "I looked up at the Ohio State sidelines, where the team was standing, and not a single player was watching what was happening on the field. They were all watching the RedSteppers."

Cramer's observation, as seen on a video posted online, drew huge swells of laughter from the RedSteppers. As the laughs subsided, he continued. "This 6 foot 7 tackle, he looked down at me, thinking I was the Ohio State band director, and he said, 'When are you guys going to get some of those?' I said, 'Those are ours, and you will never see them at yours.'"

Saturday, Oct. 8, saw the more than 200 RedSteppers — past and present — arrive at 6 a.m. on the football field. Mark estimates it was 34 degrees, Betsy possibly a few degrees warmer.

Then, the moment of truth. The game against the Michigan Wolverines. How did the halftime performance go, which included performing to Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made For Walkin'."

"Oh my God, that was so much fun," Betsy says. "The FOX camera guy did a great job. He ran the entire length of the field for the final number, which was over 200 women doing an end zone to end zone kickline."

Betsy laughs, saying there is a video recording of



A group shot of all the RedSteppers on game day.

the performance where you can hear someone in the background say, "Man, those old women can kick!"

For Mark and Susie, the kickline — the whole experience — moved them in ways they did not foresee.

"I got to discover what my wife did before I met her," Mark said. "Sue and I were kind of in the background, circulating around with cameras, staying out of the way. But watching them practice and watching them improve, watching the teamwork, they were supporting each other, and to see it coalesce into that...that just got to me."

Susie agreed.

"I was so overwhelmed by the team spirit," she said, "the history and the connection to the school. All those strong, capable women."

Susie shared a conversation that unfolded that weekend.

"One of the younger RedSteppers asked Betsy a very good question: what are you feeling right now? How are you processing this now?" Susie then turned to face her sister, smiling. "You said, you're basking in every moment. That young person said, 'I'm trying to transport myself out 25 years, and how I would feel at a 25th reunion. And you said, 'Why stop there?'"

Indeed, another RedSteppers reunion is planned in two years. Betsy will be there. She's also reconnected with fellow RedSteppers in Chesterton and



A photo from high above in Memorial Stadium as the RedSteppers perform to "These Boots Are Made For Walkin'."

Hammond.

And the rush of that October celebration is still fresh in her thoughts.

"My moment started at 4 o'clock Friday and all the way to 2 o'clock Saturday," she said. "It was one huge adrenaline rush. I was on pure adrenaline. There was nothing that was going to stop me. I told Mark, when we go to this, I'm going to the parade, I'm dancing every number. I'm doing everything."

And she did.

In true, glorious, RedStepper fashion.

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“Christmas at The Acorn” Returns for a Mix of Surprises and Old Favorites

by Andrew Tallackson



“Christmas at The Acorn” is something the performers eagerly anticipate each year.

For Robert Swan, last year’s “Christmas at The Acorn” took on a rather bittersweet tone. He and his close-knit band of performers had endured trying times. Their guitarist passed away. Heart issues prevented tenor Warren Moulton from performing. Swan, himself, experienced health setbacks.

Then, of course, there was the reality of emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.

All of that, ironically, cultivated a newfound appreciation of the annual Christmas concert.

“It was the most special show we’ve ever done,” Swan admits. “Everybody had been through this bleak time, with no live entertainment, and everybody felt super special about being together with other people.

“In a way, it was almost like a religious experience. It was really tangible. Everyone there, and all the singers, were kind of bowled over by the specialness of the moment.”

This year marks the 19th year for “Christmas at The Acorn.” The concert is at 8 p.m. EST Friday, Dec. 23, at The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich.

More About the Show

Tickets are \$40, or \$65 for reserved seats. Group discounts for four or more reduce the ticket cost to \$30. Reservations can be made at www.theacorn.org. The performance is funded in part by Berrien County Community Foundation and Pokagon Fund.

Joining Swan this year — he’ll, of course, offer his popular rendition of “Chestnuts Roasting on an Open fire” — are sopranos Emma Sorenson and Martha Cares, alto Kimberlyn Jones, tenor John Concepcion and baritone Michael Cavalieri.

Swan likes to balance the new with the beloved. This year offers a Shaker Christmas song “Star in the East,” the gospel piece “Sweet Little Jesus Boy” and the upbeat Spanish carol “Riu Riu Chiu.” Returning favorites include “Baby It’s Cold Outside,” “O Holy Night,” accompanied by harpist Ramona Kim, and “Santa Baby.” The musicians also include guitarist Marco Villareal. All the performers, Swan says, enjoy being together for this specific show.

“Here, you have a group of people, they all know each other and are finally together again,” he said. “Since they are working with other good people, it’s a refreshing communal experience for them. That happens every time we do this.”

“And now,” he continues, in light of the pandemic, “we’re moving on, continuing on and putting the past in the past. We’re just having a wonderful time. There is a freedom in that. That’s a cool feeling.”

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Canterbury Theatre, 807 Franklin St., will present "The Canterbury Christmas Show (With the Grumpy Green Elf!)" starring media personality Donna Kavanagh for four performances Friday-Sunday, Dec. 16-18.

The family friendly show is created by Kavanagh, who hosts "Kavanagh Live" on NPR's Radio Harbor Country, as well as "What Gives" on South Bend PBS station WNIT.

The Canterbury show will feature the Grumpy Green Elf, played by Kavanagh, who will answer questions about Santa and the North Pole. She also will pose questions to the audience.

The show will last approximately one hour. Performances are at 6 p.m. Friday, Dec. 16, 2 and 6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 17, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 18.

Visit www.canterburytheatre.org for tickets or more information.



Donna Kavanagh stars as the Grumpy Green Elf.

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Night at the Giese Church

"Night at the Giese Church," which celebrates the popular miniature church, is from 6-8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 17, at LaPorte County Historical Society Museum, 2405 Indiana Ave.

Admission is by donation. Hot cocoa and cookies will be served.

Also, the museum is closed Dec. 24 and 31 (Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve). Call (219) 324-6767 for details.

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Boys & Girls Clubs, Church Unite for New Programming

Boys & Girls Clubs of LaPorte County and LaPorte's State Street Community Church will unite next year to bring after-school youth programming to LaPorte's Brighton Street Green Space.

The church is a nonprofit operating programs and facilities that offer free community services, including the Pax Center, Pax Center Garden and Jackson Street Community Garden. Its newest addition, Brighton Street Green Space, features an education building and gardens in a park-like setting. The nonprofit BGCLPC runs after-school clubs at five locations throughout Michigan City, Westville and Kingsford Heights, in addition to its summer camp. The organization recently announced expansion plans to LaPorte, beginning with a new club at Lincoln Elementary School on Jan. 17. The new Brighton Street Boys & Girls Club is part of this initiative.



An exterior view of the Brighton Street Green Space Education Center, the intended home base for the Brighton Street Club.

The new club is expected to operate seasonally from March-May and August-October. Club members in kindergarten through fourth grades will have after-school snacks, academic support, physical activities and arts and crafts from 3:15-6 p.m. Monday-Friday. All programs are free. The organization's Phase II Expansion is supported by Healthcare Foundation of LaPorte.

The Brighton Street Club launches March 6, with online pre-registration beginning about one month prior. Visit www.bgclpc.org or contact Sally Gabric, area director-Westville/LaPorte, at (219) 873-2298 for more information.

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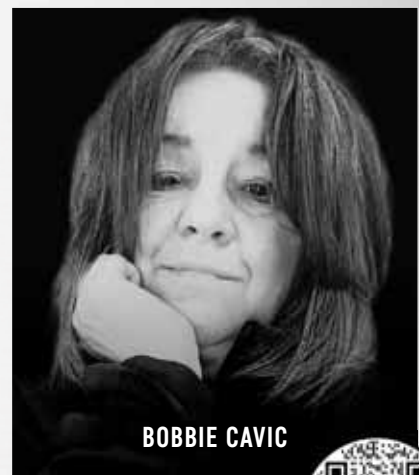
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Hallmark Christmas Movies Get a Hilarious Parody in “Campbells”

by Andrew Tallackson



Justin Long and Brittany Snow play it straight, while mouthing often outrageous dialogue, in “Christmas With the Campbells.”

In “Christmas With the Campbells,” Hallmark Christmas movies get the spoof they deserve, but in a rather sneaky way. It’s deadpan to the extreme. No big sight gags, like a Mel Brooks picture, just hilariously raunchy dialogue.

To be fair, Hallmark holiday flicks are easy prey. Most gave up on new ideas years ago, now running on autopilot. The faces change, but the stories are carbon copies of each other. For a parody, you could go big with the gags, but “Christmas With the Campbells” creeps up on you. It looks and feels like a Hallmark movie, but contains the kind of talk you most decidedly do *not* hear in one. The result, streaming on AMC+ and through View on Demand, is not for all tastes, particularly if you offend easily. But if you get what the movie is trying to do, it’s laugh-out-loud funny.

The driving force here are longtime pals Vince Vaughn (“Wedding Crashers”) and Peter Billingsley (“A Christmas Story” and its new HBO Max sequel). What they’ve done is hire a veteran Hallmark director, Clare Niederpruem (“The Christmas Bow”), and co-writer Barbara Kymlicka (“You Light Up My Christmas”), to cobble together the essential ingredients. Then, Vaughn and “American Vandal” writer Dan Lagana raunch up the conversations to defy expectations.

The setup is classic Hallmark. “Pitch Perfect” alumna Brittany Snow stars as Jesse, who loves Christmas, particularly spending the holiday with the parents of her boyfriend Shawn (“Saturday Night Live” veteran Alex Moffat). A classic Hallmark jerk,

★ ★ ★^{1/2}

“Christmas With the Campbells”

Running time: 87 minutes. AMC+, VOD. Not Rated, but containing dialogue inappropriate for young audiences.

he breaks up with her right before Christmas. And, he does so with dialogue that flips political correctness the bird on so many levels, it can’t be published in a family newspaper.

To Jesse’s surprise, Shawn’s parents — sitcom greats Julia Duffy (“Newhart”) and George Wendt (“Cheers”) — still want her to visit at Christmas, despite the breakup. Shawn won’t be there — he has a big job interview — so to them, the time won’t be awkward.

Shawn’s parents live in one of those secluded hamlets that looks as if it was art-directed by Martha Stewart. The streets flawlessly decorated, not an ounce of trash on the ground. The one kink in the Hallmark template: Shawn’s parents may be sensitive to Jesse’s loneliness, but they waste no time sharing details of their healthy sex life.

And into Jesse’s life enters Shawn’s cousin, David. He’s played by Justin Long (“Dodgeball”), who clearly studied Hallmark actors closely. He delivers his every line with the booming command of someone narrating a documentary. And, he drops one cliché after another, although, again, the screenplay slips the unexpected into his conversations that sends the dialogue way off course.

Another complication is David’s long-ago girl-



The movie's poster satirizes the type created for Hallmark Christmas movies...although the names at the top hint at the type of comedy it is.

friend (JoAnna Garcia Swisher), who owns the local bakery, still has the hots for him and speaks as if every baking term is a naughty innuendo. Toss in as well a cute dog, the holiday tradition of a Christmas tree where locals make wishes, and a bitter old lady who refers to every woman dating Shawn as trash.

Snow and Long play it straight, their performances never suggesting they realize they're in a comedy. That's what makes their dialogue so outrageously funny. Moffat, on the other hand, clearly relishes playing a self-absorbed pig, serving as the movie's anarchic symbol of off-color commentary.

At a mercilessly brief 87 minutes, "Christmas With the Campbells" knows not to wear out its welcome. A joke of a movie like this can only extend the joke so long before it fizzles. But the movie is over before you know it, and you've been laughing so hard for so long, the movie is a comedy gift. A naughty one, yes, but a gift nonetheless.

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“Sr.” Explores Robert Downey Jr.’s Complex Relationship With His Father

by Andrew Tallackson



“Sr.” was shot during the last two years of Robert Downey Sr.’s life, much of it during COVID-19.

In Netflix’s moving new documentary “Sr.,” Robert Downey Jr. embarks on a journey to reconcile feelings about his father, the counterculture director behind a rash of no-budget, underground movies. That road is filled with confusion, frustration and, ultimately, love, right as his father stands on the precipice of death from Parkinson’s disease.

It sounds gloomy, but it is not. There is a lot of joy to be found in this film that can be viewed as an exploration of fathers and sons, of filmmaking and facing one’s own mortality. And while Robert Downey Sr., who passed away in July 2021, remains a bit of an enigma, you come to admire his son all the more for emerging later in life as the survivor he truly is.

I must confess to not having seen any of Robert Downey Sr.’s films. Exceedingly low-budget, guerrilla-style satires like “Putney Swope,” “Chafed Elbows” and “Pound.” Absurdest movies that, today, likely wouldn’t survive because of the Puritanical spirit of cancel culture.

But in interviews during “Sr.,” as he’s often referred to, we see a man who lives and breathes film. Its aesthetics, its many approaches to spinning a story. Even when being asked questions, he’s always thinking of life behind the camera. How his discussions might be conveyed on screen through various stylistic choices.

We suspect, too, that filmmaking has been his first true love, and everyone else in his life a close second. That he realizes it now, facing his own mortality, is one of those puzzles in life where pivotal epiphanies arrive decades beyond when they should



“Sr.”

*Running time: 90 minutes. Netflix. Rated R
for language and some drug use.*

have emerged.

But in Robert Downey Jr., we discover a man of great humor, who can look back on his own struggles, and his relationship with his father, with a sense of clarity. The movie, in fact, does not shy away from his own drug addictions, nor the fact that his father was the one who introduced him to drugs at a young page. An act that Sr. regrets to his dying day.

Whatever animosity Robert Downey Jr. may have felt toward his father, at any point in his life, seems long gone. More, he seems intent on documenting his father’s life: his films, his marriages, his impact on his children. And between father and son, we encounter two people who own up to their pasts, but refuse to let it define them. Instead, they adore each other.

After “Avengers: Endgame” (2019) killed off Tony Stark, I wondered what happened to Downey Jr. Was he taking a much-needed break? Turns out, he was heavily involved in commencing with “Sr.,” then faced with the challenge of continuing with it amid COVID-19. Zoom allows many of the conversations between the two men to proceed, and the physical distance between them does not dampen the honesty that emerges. In fact, the frankness takes on an urgency, with the effects from Parkinson’s disease



"Sr." shows father and son being brutally honest about their past.

exacting a greater toll that confine Sr. to a bed.

"Sr." is not about erasing the past, but about accepting life for what it doles out. We live, we rise, we fall, we celebrate the special moments, our time on this planet comes to an end. And for Robert Downey Jr., there is peace.

This is one of the year's best movies.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

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FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Michigan City's Festival of Lights celebration kicked off with the popular parade Dec. 3. Families lined Franklin Street to watch the many entries before heading to Michigan City Public Library for the lighting of the official Michigan City Christmas tree. All photos by James Conlin



Candy Cane Express



A beloved holiday tradition, the Candy Cane Express returned to Hesston Steam Museum the first two weekends in December. The family event included train rides, refreshments and visits with Santa.
All photos by Bob Wellinski





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Harbor Country Hikers



Harbor Country Hikers is photographed during a 2020 trip to
Warren Dunes State Park.

Harbor Country Hikers will visit Warren Dunes State Park, 12032 Red Arrow Highway, Sawyer, Mich., at 2 p.m. EST Saturday, Dec. 17.

Hike leader and HCH President Pat Fisher will take the group through about 1.8 miles of the park's six miles of trails, and discuss the sounds of winter.

Group membership is preferred; however, the public is welcome. Those who attend should dress in layers, wear sturdy shoes or boots and a warm cap, and take plenty of water. An all-terrain rollator — a wheeled walker with oversized tires for use on unpaved surface — is available on a first-come, first-served basis by emailing harborcountryhikers@gmail.com

Visit www.harborcountryhikers.com or Harbor Country Hikers on Facebook for directions or more details.

**American
Red Cross**

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

- Northwest Health Heart and Vascular Building, 901 Lincolnway, LaPorte, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 15, and Saturday, Dec. 17.
- A.K. Smith Career Center, 817 Lafayette St., 7:45 a.m.-1:45 p.m. Thursday-Friday, Dec. 15-16.
- City Hall, 100 E. Michigan Blvd., 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Friday, Dec. 16.
- Trinity Lutheran Church, 907 Michigan Ave., LaPorte, 1-6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 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 www.redcrossblood.org for more details.



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Michigan City Public Library

Michigan City Public Library's circulation/front lobby area is open to the public. Public seating is available, and the computer lab is open. Hours are: 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday-Saturday and closed Sundays.

The library is changing overhead lighting to LED fixtures. They will feature automatic ambient lighting, centralized controls for turning on and off and conservation in unoccupied public areas. The library will remain open during all phases of the project, but reserves the right to close if necessary. Areas under the work zone will be closed. The goal is to minimize closure time to its collections and services. The meeting rooms will close while work is done.

The following programs are scheduled:

- **Needle Arts Club to Warm Up America Joining Night from 5:30-7 p.m. Thursdays in December.** Membership is open to anyone interested in needle arts such as crochet, needlepoint, cross-stitch, crewel, tatting and other hand stitching. All skill levels and ages are welcome. Also, the group has organized a local chapter of the Warm Up America Foundation. Volunteers are knitting and crocheting handmade squares (7x9 inch) that will be joined together to make full-size afghans.
- **Film Showing: "Mission Joy" from 2-3:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 16, in the meeting room.** The doc-

umentary spotlights the friendship between the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

- **Monday Musicale Holiday Concert at 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 17.** The concert is free.
- **Harpist Debra Sawyer performs at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 21.** Attendees can sing along to Christmas favorites.
- **Story Time at 10 a.m. Wednesdays.** Children birth to age 5 and adults will enjoy stories, songs and crafts. Check out previous story time videos through the library's YouTube channel, Facebook page and website.

Two new services are available:

- ComicsPlus offers unlimited access to thousands of digital comics, graphic novels and manga. Popular titles include Avatar: The Last Airbender & The Legend of Korra, Big Nate, Bone, Disney Princesses, Geronimo Stilton, Stranger Things, Locke & Key and American Gods. Patrons need a current library card and PIN.
- The app Library NewsStand includes 7,000 titles of digital magazines and newspapers in more than 60 language, including: *Newsweek*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes*, *The New Yorker*, *Reader's Digest*, *Elle* and *Esquire*. A library card is required. (Michigan City Public Library is located at 100 E. Fourth St. Visit www.mclib.org for more details.)

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Studebaker Buildings Exhibit

"Built to Last: Studebaker Buildings Past & Present" runs through May 29, 2023, at The Studebaker National Museum, 201 Chapin St., South Bend.

As an international company, Studebaker operated production facilities, sales outlets, showrooms and dealerships across the globe. Many have been torn down, those that remain repurposed. The exhibit uses historical and contemporary photos.

Museum hours are (all times Eastern) 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$11 for adults, \$9.50 for seniors 60+ and \$7 for youth ages 6-18. Call the museum at (574) 235-9714 or toll free at (888) 391-5600, or visit www.studebakermuseum.org for more details.



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Indiana Dunes National Park

- **Bird Feeder Talks from 10-11 a.m. Thursdays, Dec. 15 and 22, at The Park Connection Office, located off the Chellberg Farm parking lot.** Learn from volunteers and local bird experts about birds that remain in the dunes area during winter. The parking lot is on Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 20 and 12, Porter.
- **The Save the Tunes Council performs from 7:30-9 p.m. Friday, Dec. 16, at Indiana Dunes Visitor Center.** The group preserves folk songs in the traditional way, using guitar, autoharp, dulcimer, banjo, harmonica, bagpipe, penny whistle, hurdy gurdy and other obscure instruments.
- **Drop-In Volunteer Program from 9 a.m.-noon Saturday, Dec. 17, at Indiana Dunes Visitor Center.** The no-hassle volunteer option helps keep trails and beaches clean. Wear comfortable clothes. Work gloves and equipment will be provided. Temporary passes are available.
- **Christmas at Chellberg Farm Open House from noon-3 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 17.** Celebrate a traditional Swedish Christmas and learn about the region's cultural history. The program is sponsored by the Friends of Indiana Dunes. The parking lot is off Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 12. and 20 in Porter.
- **Winter Solstice Hike from 3-5 p.m. Wednesday,**

day, Dec. 21, at Kemil Beach. Join rangers for a sunset hike starting at the Kemil Beach parking lot. Afterward, participants gather around a campfire. The parking lot is one mile north of U.S. 12 on East State Park Road (County Road 300 East).

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.

Indiana Dunes State Park

- **High Dunes Hike from 10-11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 17.** Meet a naturalist at the nature center for a hike to the summit of the state's highest sand dune. Wear hiking shoes.
- **Whooooose Hoot? at 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 17.** Meet at the Nature Center Auditorium for a hands-on program about Dunes owls and migratory owl species.
- **Bird Window Bingo at 10 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 18.** Prizes will be awarded during a bird-theme version of the game.
- **Snakes Alive! at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 18.** Meet at the Nature Center to view snakes and learn more about them.
- **Creature Feature at 10:30 a.m. Monday-Friday, Dec. 19-23.** Naturalists will introduce a different animal that calls the Indiana Dunes home.

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.

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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Nearly a Century Old

Editor's note — Simeon Square Manager Deb Topolski provided the following information.

Mattie Dinwiddie, who has lived at Simeon Square Retirement Community for more than 30 years, turned 99 on Monday, Nov. 28.

The residents held a birthday party for her attended not only by residents, but also a few long-time Immanuel Lutheran Church members.

The award-winning gardener and workaholic can be seen walking the halls very early in the morning at Simeon, 1207 S. Woodland Ave., to make sure things are "up to par." She credits being raised on a farm to her work ethic.



Mattie Dinwiddie celebrates her 99th birthday at Simeon Square Retirement Community.



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In the Area

Dec. 15 — Coolspring Storytime, 1:30-2 p.m., Coolspring library branch, 6925 W. County Road 400 North. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

Dec. 16 — Film Showing: "Mission Joy," 2-3:30 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

Dec. 16-18 — "The Canterbury Christmas Show (With the Grumpy Green Elf!)," Canterbury Theatre, 807 Franklin St. Times: 6 p.m. Dec. 16, 2 & 6 p.m. Dec. 17, 2 p.m. Dec. 18. Info: www.canterburytheatre.org

Dec. 17 — Warm Up with a Cup: Polar Express Edition, noon-4 p.m., Coolspring library, 6925 W. County Road 400 North. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

Dec. 17 — Saturday Movie at the Library, "Paddington 2," 1-3 p.m., Coolspring library branch, 6925 W. County Road 400 North. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

Dec. 17 — Monday Musicales Holiday Concert, 2 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

Dec. 17 — "Night at the Giese Church," 6-8 p.m., LaPorte County Historical Society Museum, 2405 Indiana Ave. Info: (219) 324-6767.

Dec. 18 — Free annual Christmas Cantata, "Invitation to a Miracle," 3 p.m., Queen of All Saints Catholic Church, 1725 E. Barker Ave.

Dec. 19 — Family Pajama Storytime, 6-6:30 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

Dec. 21 — Harpist Debra Sawyer, 2 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

Through Dec. 30 — Holidays at Barker Mansion, 631 Washington St. Hours: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Tues.-Sun., 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Fri., closed Monday. Admission: \$16.50/adults, \$10/children & seniors, free/children 2 & younger, active military, veterans. Info: www.barkermansion.org

Through Dec. 31 — Ginny Scott abstract/expressionist paintings, Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St.

Through Dec. 31 — Works by Andrea Bojrab, Queen of All Saints Catholic Church's Legacy Center, 1719 E. Barker Ave. Center hours: 6 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon.-Thur., 6 a.m.-6 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 6 a.m.-3 p.m.

Sun. Info: (219) 872-9196.

First and Third Mondays — Singing Sands Toastmasters Club, 6:30-8 p.m., Senior Health/Wellness Center (old hospital ER, Barker/Buffalo).

Mondays in Michigan City — Bingo, Moose Family Lodge 980, 2107 Welnetz Road. Doors open/8:30 a.m., early birds/9:30 a.m., regular Bingo/10 a.m.

Thursdays in December — Needle Arts Club to Warm Up America Joining Night, 5:30-7 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

In the Region

Dec. 15 — Acorn Holiday Open Mic Night featuring Abbie Thomas, 7 p.m. EST, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Performer Inquiries: openmic@acornlive.org

Dec. 15, 22 — Bird Feeder Talks, 10-11 a.m., Park Connection Office off Chellberg Farm parking lot, Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 20/12, Porter. Info: (219) 395-1882, www.nps.gov/indu

Dec. 16 — The Save the Tunes Council, 7:30-9 p.m., Indiana Dunes Visitor Center, 1215 N. Indiana 49, Porter. Info: www.nps.gov/indu (219) 395-1882.

Dec. 17 — High Dunes Hike, 10-11 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 17 — Christmas at Chellberg Farm Open House, noon-3 p.m., parking lot at Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 12/20, Porter. Info: www.nps.gov/indu (219) 395-1882.

Dec. 17 — Whooooose Hoot?, 2 p.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 17 — Harbor Country Hikers, 2 p.m. EST, Warren Dunes State Park, 12032 Red Arrow Highway, Sawyer, Mich. Info: harborcountryhikers@gmail.com, www.harborcountryhikers.com

Dec. 17 — Davy Knowles, 8 p.m. EST, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$30 + \$5 convenience fee, \$55 + \$5 convenience fee (reserved). Reservations: www.acornlive.org

Dec. 18 — Bird Window Bingo, 10 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 18 — Snakes Alive!, 2 p.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 19-23 — Creature Feature, 10:30 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 21 — Winter Solstice Hike, 3-5 p.m., Kemil Beach, one mile north of U.S. 12 on East State Park Road (County Road 300 East). Info: www.nps.gov/indu (219) 395-1882.

Through Dec. 23 — 44th Elkhart Juried Regional, Midwest Museum of American Art, 429 S. Main St., Elkhart. Hours (all Eastern): 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tues.-Fri., 1-4 p.m. Sat.-Sun. Admission: \$10/adults, \$6/8-12, \$8/13-18 & college students with

ID. Info: www.midwestmuseum.us, (574) 293-66

Through Jan. 8, 2023 — Annual members' exhibit, Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, Mich. Info: (269) 983-0271, www.krasl.org

Through Jan. 8, 2023 — "Charged: The Rise, Fall & Resurgence of Electric Vehicles," The Studebaker National Museum, 201 Chapin St., South Bend. Hours (Eastern): 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Sat., noon-5 p.m. Sun. Admission: \$11 - adults, \$9.50 - seniors 60+, \$7 - youth ages 6-18. Info: www.studebakermuseum.org, (574) 235-9714.

Through Jan. 12, 2023 — Annual Members' Exhibit, Chesterton Art Center, 115 S. Fourth St. Free artists' reception: noon-2 p.m. Dec. 10. Hours: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. Info: (219) 926-4711, www.chestertonart.org

Through Jan. 19 — Bridget Marcus pastels, "Fight Pattern: South African Birds," The Village Gallery at Pines Village Retirement Communities, 3303 Pines Village Circle, Valparaiso. Gallery hours: 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri. Info: (219) 465-1591, www.pinesvillage.org

Through May 29, 2023 — "Built to Last: Studebaker Buildings Past & Present," The Studebaker National Museum, 201 Chapin St., South Bend. Hours (Eastern): 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Sat., noon-5 p.m. Sun. Admission: \$11 - adults, \$9.50 - seniors 60+, \$7 - youth ages 6-18. Info: (574) 235-9714, www.studebakermuseum.org

Mondays — Pickleball, 5:30 p.m. EST, New Troy (Mich.) Community Center, 13372 California Road. Free, donations welcome. Info: (269) 426-3909, friendsofnewtroy@yahoo.com

Vickers Theatre — *Now Showing:* "The Menu." Rated R. Times: 3 p.m. Dec. 16-19. *Holiday Film Series:* "Elf," 7 p.m. Dec. 15, free; "Home Alone," 6 p.m. Dec. 16, \$5; "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation," 6 p.m. Dec. 17, \$5; "Die Hard," 6 p.m. Dec. 18, \$5; "The Shop Around the Corner," 6 p.m. Dec. 19, \$5; "A Christmas Story," 3 p.m. Dec. 23, \$5; "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," 3 p.m., Dec. 24, \$5. All times Eastern. Theater address: 6 N. Elm St., Three Oaks, Mich. Info: www.vickerstheatre.com, (269) 756-3522.

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Christmas Bells by Jennifer Chiaverini (paperback \$17 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook and an audiobook. 314 pages)

Jennifer Chiaverini has an instinctive way of bringing history to life. With apparent ease, she breathes life into real people from the past while adding fictional characters who blend in so well, they seem just as real. Her extensive research is evident, and what makes historical fiction such a popular genre. Some of her other bestselling titles include: Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker, The Spy Mistress, Mrs. Lincoln's Rival, Switchboard Soldiers and Fates and Traitors.

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day / Their old familiar carols play / And wild and sweet / The words repeat / Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

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The priest at the church is Father Ryan, who is assisted by Sister Winifred, who's been there since before Father Ryan was born. The church has a children's choir led by Sophia, with piano accompaniment by Lucas. They're in love, but can't seem to admit it to each other, let alone themselves!

Charlotte and Alex, two siblings in the choir, have a father who's MIA in Afghanistan. Camille, recent widow of a state senator, quietly sits in the back of the church listening to the choir sing.

Each of these people has a story told in the manner of *The Canterbury Tales*. The meshing of their stories will have a profound effect on each of them in this season of hope, so proudly and loudly proclaimed by the ringing of the Christmas bells.

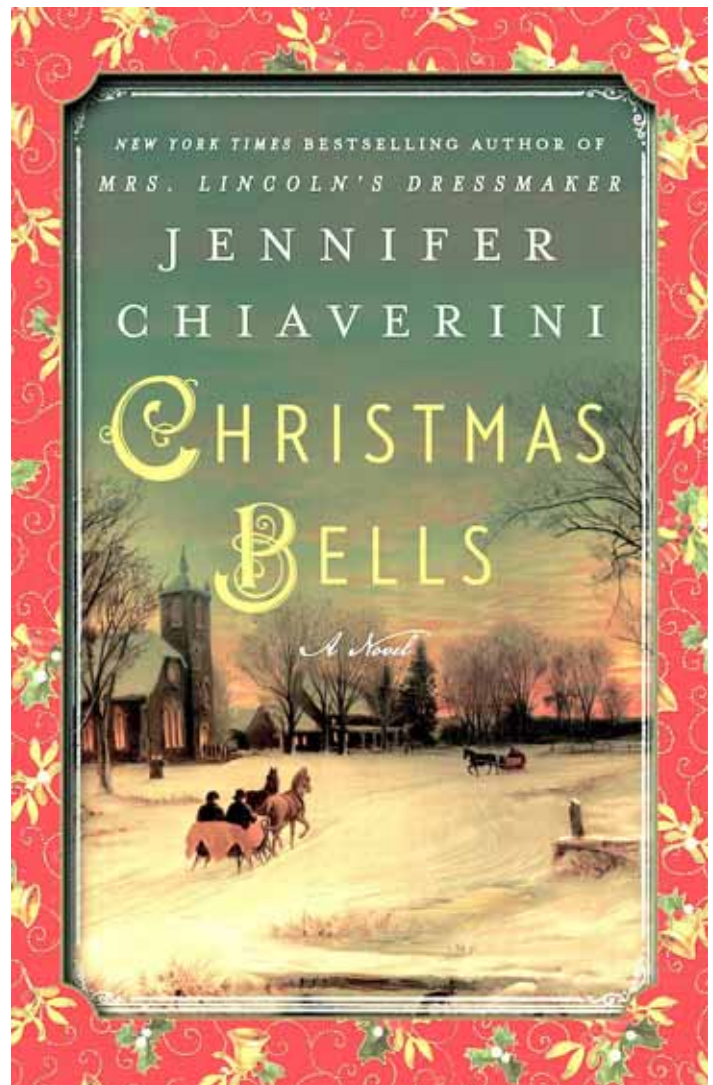
In between these stories, we learn something of Longfellow. These chapters lead up to his writing the "Christmas Bells" poem. The music was added later. What you might not know is that Longfellow wrote that poem during Christmas 1863, while the nation was in the throes of a hateful civil war that threatened to divide us forever.

Going back to the summer of 1861, tragedy strikes the family when his beloved wife dies in a bizarre accident. Then, after war is declared, Henry's oldest son begs his father to sign papers so he can join the Union Army. Here he is, suffering from the loss of his wife and now, the possible loss of his son. He can't change his son's mind. Charley runs away and joins the army anyway, and Longfellow soon loses his desire to write...

Then, in 1863, Longfellow listens to the ringing

Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter



of the church bells on Christmas Day and contemplates the state of his world. He remembers his wife's words: *"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep."* It reminds him of his faith in God's plan, that good would prevail and soon, there will truly be peace on earth.

Yes, hope and inspiration can come when we least expect it.

Till next time, happy reading!

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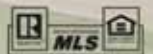
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