

THE

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Happy Holidays

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About the Cover

A big thank you to Hesston Steam Museum General Manager Ted Rita for helping us with our Christmas edition cover. *The Beacher's* Bob Wellinski was able to snap a photo of Santa riding the museum's Porter No. 2. Santa was played by Pat Logan, who was assisted by his wife, Terri, as Mrs. Claus.

A Giving Heart

by Kim Nowatzke

this holiday season, Kevin Brown has the chance to give back in a new way to The Salvation Army of Michigan City.

The organization that changed his life.

Brown, president of Reprographic Arts Inc., is the honorary chairperson of The Salvation Army's 2022 Red Kettle Campaign.

"It's an honor and a privilege – a reconnection – to light the flame again," he said.

The title was bestowed upon him at the annual Red Kettle Kick-Off in November at McDonald's, 3507 Franklin St.

"Kevin is a beacon of light in the Michigan City community," said Jenilee Haynes Peterson, Salvation Army of Michigan City development director. "He has overcome a lot and is always willing to help others."

One of Brown's responsibilities for The Salvation Army is helping develop and implement its kettle campaign through donations from donors, corporations and foundations.

"They do so much for so many," he said of The Salvation Army. "This is my tagline – it's true."

Brown, 63, has supported the local organization over the past three decades through discounts on print items. But his dedication and commitment to The Salvation Army run deeper.

Born in Denver, Colo., Brown came to Michigan City as a young child. He joined the U.S. Navy in December 1976.

"I wanted to get out of Michigan City and see what was out there," he explained.

He went through boot camp in San Diego. Then,



Kevin and Elizabeth Brown are photographed at the Annual Red Kettle Kick-Off on Nov. 2 at McDonald's, 3507 Franklin St. Kevin is the honorary chairperson of the 2022 Red Kettle Christmas Campaign.

as a quarter master navigator, he was responsible for chartering the USS Okinawa, on which he was stationed. Throughout his four years of service, he

went on what was nicknamed the “WestPac (Western Pacific) Cruise,” as he traveled to Hawaii, South Korea, the Philippines and Japan.

Ironically, his brother, Michael, also served in the U.S. Navy from 1973-1977, but on the opposite end of the country.

“He was on the East Coast and I was on the West Coast,” Kevin said.

After his military discharge in July 1979, Brown stayed in San Fernando Valley, Calif. But it was there he became involved with alcohol and substance abuse.

He said eventually, “I got tired of living the same day over and over.”

Ready for a life of recovery, Brown contacted the Veterans Administration, which referred him to The Salvation Army. Although he was raised religiously, Brown said it was a time of “reconnection back with God.” He completed its rehabilitation program and became a Salvation Army employee.



This photo of Kevin Brown and his wife, Elizabeth, was taken at a celebration of his 30 years of recovery from alcohol and substance abuse.

Through it, Brown also met the love of his life, Elizabeth, or “Eli.” While working at the front desk of the local Salvation Army, Brown noticed her and her two sisters as they visited its thrift store.

“I took her out to a Peruvian exhibit at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) and that was it,” he shared. “What timing – God has a plan.”

They married in April 1994. Their son, Kevin D. Brown, was born in 1995. The family moved back to Michigan City in 1997.


“My dad (Fred Brown) was getting ready to re-

Continued on Page 4

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A Giving Heart

Continued from Page 3

tire,” he explained, “and I decided to help him with the business.”

That business was Reprographic Arts. After working as a salesman for a drafting supply company, Fred started his own business making ammonia blueprint copies of architectural designs in 1970. Regular customers The Skillman Corp., Fanning & Howey Architects, Tonn & Blank Construction and Larson-Danielson Construction, along with a few other subcontractors, kept the small business busy at its 201 W. Second St. location.



Kevin Brown and his father, Fred, in a photo taken around 1997.

The business expanded to the public with its 1995 move to a 3,300-square-foot building at 1017 Franklin St. After Kevin and Elizabeth joined the team in 1997, the business transitioned to digital dry toner prints, which significantly decreased production times. The next 10 or so years saw more expansions, including being one of the region's first to incorporate the Internet into its business plan and services. In 2017, it moved to a 5,500 square-foot location at 2824 E. Michigan Blvd. Last month, the business added 800 square feet of space.

Brown said it's rewarding to be a local business owner because, “I get to know a lot of people and can help people.”

Speaking about Brown as a person, Peterson said, “Those that have seen the darkness can help others see the light. Even though Kevin now runs a successful business, it hasn't always been this way for him, and he stays humble through his successes pulling others up with him.”

During a Nov. 3 interview with WIMS' Ric Federighi, Maj. Rebecca Simmons of The Salvation Army told Brown, “You're always looking for a way to give. You're so much a part of this community. You're not just giving back for this. You give back all the time.”

She cites the “Michigan City Strong” campaign



Kevin Brown is the owner of Reprographic Arts Inc., 2824 E. Michigan Blvd. Photo by Kim Nowatzke.

launched by Brown during the COVID-19 pandemic in which he printed T-shirts, mugs, yard signs and more with the inspiring message.

“During COVID, you were printing the ‘Michigan City Strong’ shirts...making sure that we stayed strong and that we weren't giving up and that we stayed strong and got through,” Simmons said.

Peterson also spoke of Brown's contributions to his community, in addition to the Michigan City Strong effort.

“He helps other entrepreneurs get a strong start, such as hosting Social Que in his parking lot,” she said. “He continues to expand his business in this community, adding to his team as he goes.”

During the radio interview, Brown shared some thoughts on how The Salvation Army made a difference in his life.

“It took me way back 30 years, and I was just choked up at the idea of me doing that,” he said. “They were there for me. They were there for me for the physical, but they were also there for the spiritual. I needed a spiritual resurrection, and I got it through them.”



Kevin D. Brown, 27, is the son of Kevin and Elizabeth Brown.

In addition to supporting The Salvation Army, Brown visits area prisons and treatment centers, sharing his story of recovery and hope.

"I've been doing that for the past 30 years," he said. "With life's ups and downs and how busy I am, sometimes it's not easy, but then I think of the life I've been afforded and how grateful I am. You feel good after you go and know that it was something that you just had to do. I tell my story, encourage them and listen to what they have to share."

When Brown returned to Michigan City, he organized recovery events, including two weekly groups still meeting after more than 20 years, and a special brunch that pays tribute to "old-timers" (those who have stayed "clean" for a set number of years).

"I donate my experience, strength and hope to people," he said.

Just as Brown has been a faithful supporter of The Salvation Army, Elizabeth has done the same



Kevin and Elizabeth Brown have fun at LaPorte's Sunflower Fest, where Reprographics Arts had a booth.

for a cause special to her heart: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

"She's been doing that for decades," Brown said.

Brown also is active in the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 75, Moose Lodge 980 and Elks Lodge 432. He and Elizabeth enjoy attending plays and movies, and added a miniature Alaskan Klee Kai, named "RA" (pronounced "Raah," as a nod to their business) to their family four years ago.

And, his faith still plays a big role in his life.

"I pray for my wife, my son, recovery friends, my employees and my customers, the less fortunate and those that have not made it to recovery yet," he said.

A sign hanging just inside his office also tells visitors just where he stands.

"I believe God has a plan for me," he said. "I pray for direction to follow it, patience to wait on it and knowledge to know when it comes."



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“Avatar: The Way of Water” is Big, Dumb and Insanely Entertaining

by Andrew Tallackson

I could take my swipes at James Cameron and “Avatar: The Way of Water.” That the movie is too darn long. That Cameron writes dumb dialogue. That the midsection is repetitive. That the man can drag out a climax like it’s nobody’s business, sinking *yet another* ship, as if sending Titanic to its watery grave wasn’t bold enough.

Thing is, I loved the movie. For all his bombast and ego, Cameron still knows how to sweep you off your feet.

One reason “The Way of Water” feels long, at 3 hours 12 minutes, is that there ain’t much story. It’s a little more than a decade after the events of the first film. Earth has made a more vigorous effort to colonize Pandora. Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), now chief of the Omatikaya, leads guerilla raids to thwart progress. With new avatars bringing back the heavies from the original, including Stephen Lang’s Quaritch, it’s decided the only way to stop the attacks is to take out Jake and his family.

So, Jake and clan go into hiding, seeking refuge with reef people whose ties to the water are their greatest asset.

Cameron is exploring one of his favorite themes here: whether you retreat from an enemy or stand and fight. And by spending the film’s midsection largely in the water, he wants to firmly create this world in greater detail than before. The visuals are more lifelike than ever, particularly the expressions on faces. They have all the quirks and tics of living, breathing individuals.

We also get squabbling among Jake’s children, who resort to calling each other “buttholes” way more times than a screenplay by any Oscar winner should. And, Cameron spends a good 30 minutes following the kids as they adjust to this underwater world. The first few times, the glory of the imagery consumes you: It’s alive with creatures. Then, as the kids head below the surface again...and again... *and again*, I found myself checking the time on my cell phone, to see where we were amid the overall run time.

The last hour, as Jake and his fellow Pandorans face off against their enemy, is exhilarating proof that when it comes to large-scale action, there is no one better than Cameron. Yes, there are echoes of “The Abyss” “Aliens” and “Titanic,” but Cameron knows something that only Peter Jackson seems to

appreciate these days. You can throw all your money onto the screen, but what invigorates audiences are genuine heroics. As Pandora rallies against their pursuers, Cameron gives us underwater submersibles, spider-like vessels, victories and tragic losses. When the beauty of Pandora’s aquatic life



The film’s images, indeed, are a wonder to behold.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

“Avatar: The Way of Water”

Running time: 192 minutes. Rated PG-13 for sequences of strong violence & intense action, partial nudity, some strong language

aids Jake’s family, Cameron pulls back, allowing the haunting imagery to rattle you.

Just when it seems Cameron has added one ending too many, along comes the final scene that, well, it got to me. Tears and all.

That’s the thing about Cameron. Embracing his movies means forgiving the flaws because the spectacle overwhelms you...and in the best way possible.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

Editor’s Note

As you’ll see, I went overboard packing this week’s edition with reviews. I wanted to write as many as possible before we take a two-week break. Once we resume publication Jan. 12, I’ll start unveiling my picks for my favorite TV shows from 2022, as well as my Top 10 films of the year.



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Lilly Endowment Scholars

Unity Foundation announced Kayla Campbell and Paloma Valdes are the 2023 LaPorte County recipients of the Lilly Endowment Community Scholarship.

Campbell, a Michigan City High School senior,



has demonstrated leadership in her school and community through extracurricular and volunteer activities, including: American Legion Auxiliary Hoosier Girls State, Helping Hands Club, Student Council, Teen Arts Council and Trio. She wants to become a broadcast journalist. She has excelled academically,

including in advanced placement, dual credit and honors courses, and is ranked at the top of her class.

Valdes, a Marquette Catholic High School senior, has balanced academics with leadership roles in extra-curricular activities, including: Art Club, Drama Club, Indiana Academic Super Bowl,



Quiz Bowl, National Honor Society and Varsity Tennis. Involved in her community, she wants to make the technology industry more inclusive, and leverage technology to improve societal issues in education, health care and the environment. She is ranked at the top of her class and excelled in her coursework, which

includes advanced placement, dual credit and honors courses.

Each scholarship provides for full tuition, required fees and up to \$900 per year for books and equipment. It must be applied to four years of full-time undergraduate study at a baccalaureate degree at any eligible Indiana public or private non-profit college or university.

Lilly scholars also may participate in the Lilly Scholars Network. The scholarship program and LSN are supported by Lilly Endowment grants to Independent Colleges of Indiana.

Unity received approximately 70 applications for the scholarship from students in the county. They were scored on academic achievement, service to others, extracurricular activities and, to a lesser extent, financial need. A committee of local volunteers reviewed the applications, not knowing the names until after selecting finalists. The committee interviewed each of the eight finalists and submitted nominations to ICI, the program's statewide administrator, for the final selection.

The six remaining finalists will receive a \$2,000 scholarship through the Ludington Scholarship in the Unity Foundation, and are eligible to apply for dozens of other scholarships administered by Unity beginning Jan. 1, 2023.

Visit www.uflc.net for additional information on the scholarships and deadlines.

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- Northwest Health Heart and Vascular Building, 901 Lincolnway, LaPorte, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 29.
- St. John's United Church of Christ, 101 St. John Road, noon-6 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 3.
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Spielberg Gets Personal With “The Fabelmans”

by Andrew Tallackson

Gabriel LaBelle plays the Spielberg surrogate of “The Fabelmans.”

In “The Fabelmans,” you can feel Steven Spielberg trying to process the pain of his parents’ divorce. The impact of it not only on his childhood, but his desire to become a filmmaker.

For those who’ve grown up with Spielberg’s films, “The Fabelmans” is a treat. But for a new generation showing an alarming indifference to him, the movie is falling on deaf ears.

For a good 25 years, Spielberg was synonymous with movie escapism. Sure, his thoughts on the American family crept into pictures like “Jaws,” “E.T.” and “Poltergeist,” but the director typically dreamed big. Thrilling us. Making us weep. Flirting with adult material commenced with “The Color Purple,” “Empire of the Sun” and “Always,” but it was the Oscar-winners “Schindler’s List” and “Saving Private Ryan” that cemented his status with critics and older audiences.

Not so today. Last year, audiences gave his “West Side Story” remake the cold shoulder. Likely his biggest failure. A recent online poll cited the quintessential Spielberg movie as “Jurassic Park.” That was nearly 30 years ago.

“The Fabelmans,” now in theaters and through View on Demand, marches to a different beat from Spielberg’s past. Quiet. Reflective. No big emotional crescendos or three-hankie finish. That the movie runs more than 2 1/2 hours, yet is never dull, is a testament to his gifts as a storyteller. This is a man who, as we see in “The Fabelmans,” lives and

★ ★ ★ 1/2

“The Fabelmans”

Running time: 151 minutes. In theaters, VOD.

Rated PG-13 for some strong language, thematic elements, brief violence and drug use.

breathes film.

We meet the movie’s Spielberg surrogate, Sammy, as a child taken by his parents to his first movie. He’s terrified. The idea of being in the dark, surrounded by strangers. But the movie is Cecil B. DeMille’s “The Greatest Show on Earth,” an elaborate train crash unexpectedly thrilling him. From then on, a camera remains at his ready. A lens into his own world, and the potential to create new ones.

His parents are played by Paul Dano (“There Will Be Blood”) and Michelle Williams (“Manchester by the Sea”). Early in the movie, there is something oddly artificial about them, as if they haven’t settled into the roles. Dano, in particular, feels uncomfortably stiff. Then, Williams finds her footing, and the performance is heartbreaking. A woman with so much talent, but no outlet to release it. Williams create a woman who loves life, even as reality fails to deliver the life she craves.

As a teen, Sammy (Gabriel LaBelle) mounts more elaborate productions — westerns, frequently — complete with effects and editing tricks. What he discovers is that his camera is a window into

truth. In the movie's dramatic centerpiece, footage he culls from a family camping trip slips a bitter secret into the light. His mother is having an affair with his dad's best friend (Seth Rogen). We see it not from the two caught in the act, but in small gestures. Hands held tight. Longing stares. And when Sammy forces his mother to watch the footage edited together, the collapse in Williams' face is her ticket to a Best Actress Oscar nomination.

(I maintain that Danielle Deadwyler's raw work in "Till" is *the* performance of the year; the Golden Globes, however, beg to differ.)

Spielberg's screenplay, which he penned with frequent collaborator Tony Kushner ("Lincoln," "Munich"), delves into the anti-Semitism he experienced in high school, and the subsequent desire to create images that spur instant approval. His relationship with a Christian girl at school, though, veers into cartoon caricature.

Spielberg has schooled us for so long in expecting emotional climaxes, we're surprised by how the end to "The Fabelmans" lacks any oomph. But with a



Michelle Williams delivers the most complex performance as a woman yearning for a creative outlet.

last-second camera tilt that honors the scene preceding it, Spielberg is winking at us. Smiling at the thought of what would come next.

And, as we know, what the young filmmaker frequently achieved was golden.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

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Guillermo del Toro Completely Reinvents “Pinocchio”

by Andrew Tallackson



Guillermo del Toro makes his vision of the title character resemble a being cobbled together from wooden branches.

In many ways, Guillermo del Toro can lay claim to introducing a “Pinocchio” we’ve never seen before. That by being more faithful to Carlo Collodi’s story, but with a few twists, it’s like experiencing this world for the first time.

It isn’t perfect. However, it is a return to form for “The Shape of Water” Oscar winner, more in keeping with his imaginative “Pan’s Labyrinth” (2006) than the beautiful bore of last year’s “Nightmare Alley.” Stop-motion animation that isn’t afraid of the darker, nastier elements.

As a fairy tale, this feels fuller, less episodic than the 1940 Disney classic. For example, we know lonely puppet maker Geppetto mourns the loss of a child, but del Toro spends the first 10 minutes of his film getting to know father and son during the Great War in Italy. Geppetto (voiced by David Bradley) is the loving, doting father and Carlo (voiced by Gregory Mann) the perfect son. Kind, energetic, respectful. So when an aerial bomb drops on the church where Geppetto toils on a statue of Jesus, Geppetto survives the explosion. Carlo does not. By this point, we’ve experienced the love between a father and son so we understand why, 20 years later, he still mourns his son’s death.

The story from there runs parallel to the Disney film: the introduction of Sebastian J. Cricket (voiced

★ ★ ★ 1/2

“Guillermo del Toro’s Pinocchio”

Running time: 117 minutes. Netflix. Rated PG for dark thematic material, violence, peril, some rude humor and brief smoking.

by Ewan McGregor), and a magical being (voiced by Tilda Swinton) who brings Geppetto’s hastily assembled wooden puppet to life. But whereas Disney introduced a lifelike being, del Toro does the opposite. His wooden “child” is, indeed, pieces of tree limbs cobbled together, resembling the Ents from “The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers.” And unlike Disney, this wooden boy is no saint. He’s a petulant, disobedient child driving his father nuts.

The score by Alexandre Desplat, del Toro’s “Shape of Water” Oscar winner, is pure magic...but for some reason, the director felt his movie needed songs, and that’s where his film runs into trouble. Desplat, working with lyricist Roeban Katz, inserts six musical numbers, and they are forgettable time-killers. By the third or fourth song, I heaved a sigh. The songs don’t advance the story. They stall it.

And maybe it’s me, but I’ve always found the passage where Pinocchio encounters a shady showman, well, boring. More like a prolonged road bump than any real progression of the story.

But what's interesting here is how del Toro reimagines the story in the context of 1930s fascism in Italy, complete with Benito Mussolini arriving for one of Pinocchio's shows. As in "Pan's Labyrinth," we are reminded that sometimes, it is the monsters in the real world that are more terrifying than the imaginary ones. Del Toro, deviating entirely from what Disney's vision, plunks the wooden boy into a training ground for young fascists, not too long before he encounters a sea creature that is more akin to the Kraken of Greek mythology than Monstro the Whale. The stop motion animation, the lush colors, are on full display here.

You cannot take your eyes off the film.

Disney was content to end his film with Pinocchio transformed into a human boy. Del Toro's spin is more effective. A melancholy rumination on life itself, how time marches on despite our protests. We live, love and endure.



Sebastian J. Cricket is more insect-like than in previous incarnations.

Another bold move. We know this story so well that to feel like we're rediscovering it, well, that's real magic.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

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In the Holiday Season



Krueger Middle School chorus teacher Shirley Allen leads the eighth-grade choir in a performance of holiday songs for the Service League of Michigan City during a recent luncheon at Patrick's Grille. Krueger choirs have been performing for groups around the community, including Imagination Station and Head Start, to perform a few numbers as they gear up for winter break.

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Happy Holidays



The Beacher staff wishes you and yours a holiday season filled with joy, peace and love, and a New Year that promises more.

A special thanks to our advertisers. We couldn't do what we do without you. And, of course, to you, our dear and faithful readers, thanks and see you next year!

The Beacher will take a two-week holiday and return Jan. 12.

A Visit From St. Nicholas

by Clement C. Moore

‘Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced through their heads;
And mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter’s nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below;
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick..

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:
“Now Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer! and Vixen!
On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleighful of toys, and St. Nicholas too.

And then in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot:
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.



His eyes, how they twinkled! his dimples, how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath.

He had a broad face, and a little round belly
that shook, when he laughed like a bowl full of jelly.

He was chubby and plump - a right jolly old elf -
And I laughed, when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye, and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.

He sprang to his sleigh, to the team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew, like the down of a thistle,
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
“Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!”

Dear Santa Claus

A beloved tradition returns to The Beacher with letters to Santa Claus from Notre Dame Elementary School second-graders, presented to you just as the children wrote them. Thanks to second-grade teacher Sara Conn for helping us out. Enjoy!



Dear Santa,

You're the best Santa ever! I do my homework every night and I also get a lot of brag Bracelets at school. I try to make sure the play room is clean. Can I please have a few Nerf guns, a Crazy Fort, Lego Sorter, and Lego army men? Thank you, Santa.

Love, your friend, Charlie

Dear Santa,

I have been good this year. I have obeyed my mom. I was nice to friends and family. I followed directions at school. These are the presents I want for Christmas: First, a pink blanket. I want it because so I can lay with it in my bed. Second, a very cool ninja line with 20 big soft mats, so I can play on it outside with my brother. Last, a 1736 PCS Friends House Building Blocks Set Pool Party Building Toy. That is all I want for Christmas. Merry Christmas, Santa.

Love, Jacob

Dear Santa,

I have been really good this year, and I have been caring about my friends, family, and others. I have been doing good in school, helping everyone I can, and I have gotten four brag bracelets.

May I please have an Ultimate Bluey house, because it's so much cooler than the normal one.

May I also have the Rainbow Magic full series, but with no Fiona since I already have one, and two Nora ones. I'd like these because I like reading and I love Rainbow Magic. The reason I want two Nora books is so I can give my friend Nora one.

For my last one, may I have a toy bakery so I can bake by myself and bake every day and night if I want to? Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Love, Fiona

Dear Santa,

I am good at school every day. I have been helping my mom with the dishes.

I want a drone so I can play with it, and Star Wars and Avatar video games. I will be very careful with them. Always careful. I want a puppy, a real puppy for fun and to play with. I want to help it.

From, Zane

Dear Santa,

I have been a good brother to Oliver and everybody else. I do homework every night. I have been good this year! I have got a lot of brag bracelets for being good at school. If you bring presents, I'll give you extra cookies and be extra nice to my family.

May I please have a lot of Chicago White Sox jerseys? May I please

have a Mega Nerf gun because it shoots farther than regular Nerf guns? May I please have a football shooter, because my brother does not play football usually? May I please have a lot of football jerseys for the Bears, because I can go to a football games? May I please have a lot of Bears' helmets for a Bears' games?

Love William

Dear Santa,

I have been good this year and I do my homework every day. I am super good in school and this is what I want: I would like an iPhone 14 Pro Max and a drone to share with my brother. I would also like AirPods to listen to music in the morning, and I would also like a Lamborghini. I would like a football, a football shirt, a camera, and a soccer ball to play in the back yard. That is what I want for Christmas.

From Everett

Dear Santa,

I've gotten many Brag bracelets because I did good deeds at school. I've been helping my parents around the house and I have been helping my brothers with the room. I want a stuffed animal of you, Santa, that is red like your coat! I want an Elf on the Shelf, because I don't have one. I want a Dallas Cowboys jersey, helmet, football, and cleats and pants.

I want a new pair of pump shoes, a stuffed animal donkey, lion, and a stuffed animal of Mrs. Clause. Please get me a Pop It, a crucifix, and a Fitbit.

Love, your friend, Henry

Dear Santa

I have been good to John, Bernadette, and Walter. I do my homework every day. I am good in school. I will give you a present and give you extra cookies. May I please have an American girl doll so my cousins and I can play with it together? May I have a camera to take pictures with? May I have Squishmallows to play with my siblings, Bernadette and Walter? Thank you, Santa.

Love, Noreen

Dear Santa,

I have been very good this year. I have been getting very good grades this year. I always get A+, A or A-. I love school and I am very good at doing homework. I love to do assignments and homework, and I love my teacher a lot. She is the best teacher ever! She always gives my class and I very fun assignments. For presents can I have a cross so I can pray every day and night?

Also can I have a book about saints and Jesus? May I also have a Roblox gift card? I really need Robux, and is it ok if it can be a lot of Robux, like 4000? I am not trying to be greedy.

May I please also have magnet balls? They stick together, and I have been watching videos and it looks very cool. May I please have a new bike? Mine is too small. Is it okay if the color is blue? It can be any shade of blue and green. I would like blue and green mixed for my bike. Can I also get lots of books? I really want some Bailey School Kids books because I like them.

Can I also get cars that move when you move it back? May I please also get a new camera with the camera thing that you put inside it and you get to take pictures? Mine is broken so I cannot use it. May I please also get something for my brother? I think he would like Hot Wheels because he sometimes plays with them, so I would like to give him that.

Love, Charlotte

Dear Santa,

I have been good this year. I am

amazing at school and home. I get a lot of BRAG bracelets from school. I want a Crucifix, so I can look at it when I pray and because I love Jesus. I want Hot Wheels because they are really cool and a Bears Jersey because I love them. Merry Christmas, Santa.

Love, Joey

Dear Santa,

I have been good this year. I follow directions at school. I help a lot at home. This year, I want a drone to play outside with my brothers. Second, a basketball hoop because I have a basketball. Third, I want an Elf on the Shelf because they're funny and mischievous. Fourth, I want a football because they're so fun to play with. Next, I want a crucifix because I love Jesus.

May I please also have a Detroit Red Wings puck, because I love them?

Love, Harry

Dear Santa,

I have been good this year. I do my homework every night. I'm super good in school.

I would like a football jersey so I can go to the Bears' game. I would also like to have some Pokémon cards because I like to trade. I would like to have Madden 22 and 23, because I have a Xbox and I can be good with it. You are the best Santa.

Love, James

Dear Santa,

I have been good this year. I have been making the beds, and I have been really good to my little sister, too. What I really want for Christmas is an aqua Nintendo Switch because I can play Mario Kart and Super Mario golf. I will share it with my little sister. Can I have a baseball bat, so I can play baseball? You're the best!

Love, Eila

Dear Santa,

I would like an iPhone 14 Pro, a stuffed animal, a Bailey School kids book, a baby Jesus statue, a small dog, and a drone? I would also like something for my teacher, like a mug. I will do my job at school, my homework, and I will be a help to my mom, dad, and sister. I will be good for mom, too. Thank you.

Love, Cambria

Dear Santa,

I promise you I have been good. For Christmas, can I have a dress designing kit and also a Friends Lego set? I want hope and joy to the world, happiness, a magic wand, and 5 tickets to Crystal Mountain. Merry Christmas!

Love, Nora

Dear Santa,

How is it going down in the North Pole? I have been good this year. I clean the playroom when my mom tells me. I'm good in school. I do my homework. Could I have Harry Potter book 3, a gold monorail train, and maybe something else for my brother like a Barbie? Thank you, Santa. I hope you have a good trip around the world. Have a good Christmas. I hope you have an awesome day. Thank you so much for reading this note. I can't wait for Christmas. Thank you so much for delivering our presents every year. Merry Christmas, Santa!

Love Nathan

Dear Santa,

I have been good this year. I have been helping my mom with the dishes. I have been doing the laundry and have been filling up the water bottles for my sisters every day for school. Can I please have a skateboard so I can learn how to do tricks? I would like a Bears football jersey because I love the Bears. Can I please have super Mario Golf, because I love the Mario games? You're the best!

Love, Quinn

Dear Santa,

I was so helpful to my mom after she had surgery last week. In school I'm working very hard to get my missing work done. I've been very tidy at home and school. I would like to have a new toy car for my brother and I want to get Eva an L.O.L.O.M.G doll. I would like to get my mom a new phone and a pair of leggings, because I love her. I would also like to get my dad a new Jacks Jigs t-shirt. For Fiona, I would like to get her a stuffed dog and a new pair of her favorite colored hair ties. I would like to get Noreen a little bit of gummy bears and get my class a new book set. Merry Christmas, Santa.

Love, Moira

Holiday at the Pops





LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra nearly packed LaPorte Civic Auditorium in its entirety for the annual Holiday at the Pops concert on Dec. 10. The evening was a celebration not only of the Christmas season, but also of the abundance in local talent on display.

All photos by Bob Wellinski

Yes, “Emancipation” Comes With Baggage...But It’s Also Powerful

by Andrew Tallackson



Will Smith's character in “Emancipation” is based on a real runaway slave whose photo helped fuel the abolitionist movement.

You could take the cancel culture stance against “Emancipation,” saying it doesn’t deserve our attention because of Will Smith’s behavior at the Oscars.

Or, you can argue the Apple TV+ film is director Antoine Fuqua’s best, that major moviemaking exists here. Propulsive, brutal, moving, with a performance by Smith that reminds you how intensely he commits to a role.

The movie’s inspiration is a real photo of a runaway slave and his scourged back that propelled the abolitionist fight against slavery. Naysayers maintain Fuqua was the wrong person for this story. That he’s spent so many years with popcorn flicks — “Training Day,” “Olympus Has Fallen,” “The Equalizer,” his superior 2016 “Magnificent Seven” remake — that he paces his story like an action picture. I say, his skills are on full display here.

For one thing, there is an authenticity here that was lacking in the similarly themed “Harriet” (2019). For all its power, that movie *felt* like a movie: freshly built sets, actors in costume.

The physical production of “Emancipation” — its budget is rumored at \$120 million — creates an uncompromising depiction of slavery as Hell on Earth. Some of it has to do with the striking cinematography by three-time Oscar winner Robert Richardson (“JFK,” “The Aviator,” “Hugo”). It isn’t 100 percent black and white; much of the color is saturated from the images. Hints of color — the greens within blades of grass, the reds of blood shed by slaves — lean toward sepia tones. The effect is a world without hope. The physical labor involved to build train

★ ★ ★ 1/2

“Emancipation”

Running time: 132 minutes. Apple TV+. Rated R for strong racial violence, disturbing images and language

tracks is one of smoke, grime and brutal violence, with Fuqua’s camera gliding through it. It pulls you into this world more so than any static, more “respectable” approach.

When Peter (Smith) and three other slaves stage a revolt, covered by Civil War combat in the background, they take to the swamps, headed for Baton Rouge where Lincoln’s troops are reported. If the tone of “Emancipation” takes on the drive of one of Fuqua’s action films, that’s fine. It gives Peter’s journey an immediacy that “Harriet” lacked. The dangers — alligators, snakes, Peter’s pursuers — are vividly depicted.

As mentioned, when Smith commits to a role, he gives his all. Here, he’s gaunt, practically emaciated, his face a mix of despair and drive propelled by his faith. Surprisingly, the movie, through William Collage’s screenplay, contemplates God’s presence amid the unthinkable. We see the conflict on Smith’s face, and the truth is, we get caught up in Peter’s story and less on Smith’s Oscar controversy.

Ben Foster, the quirky actor from “3:10 to Yuma” and “The Messenger,” is in full method-actor mode as Peter’s lead pursuer. He plays a man almost serene in his violence, but who has a key scene midway through the film that powerfully conveys how



The movie, with subtle power, recreates how the photo was taken.


racism is not instinctive, but taught. Cultivated.

The last act of "Emancipation" sees Peter joining Union forces, and it's a rather abrupt shift in tone that Fuqua might have handled better. But the ensuing action on the battlefield is so epic, so expertly staged, it invigorates you, all the way to the exceptionally moving final scene.

I don't disagree with the criticisms of "Emancipation." That it's a B movie masquerading as Oscar bait. That we can't be objective about Smith, who's still on the cancel culture naughty list. But the movie held me in its grip. There is genuine moviemaking craft here. That cannot be denied.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

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“Banshees” Tries, and Fails, to Spin Macabre Comedy

by Andrew Tallackson



Brendan Gleeson (left) and Colin Farrell star as former friends at odds with each other in “The Banshees of Inisherin.”

“The Banshees of Inisherin” is one of those Gaelic head-scratchers where you expect brilliance because of all the rapturous critical notices...then the screen fades to black and your only thought is, “What the heck was that?”

I wanted to like this. The last film by writer-director Martin McDonagh, 2017’s “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri,” was a divisive picture with no middle ground: either you loved it or despised it. For me, it pushed buttons that needed pushing because of society’s renewed indifference to common decency.

But with “The Banshees of Inisherin,” now streaming on HBO Max, McDonagh has created a film that is maddening because it is about nothing *and* everything. He’s trying something different: a moody, lyrical, *way* dark comedy that veers into tragedy and never deviates from it. For everything that works, like its quartet of awards-worthy performances, the oppressive tone undermines their ability to make you care about the characters.

McDonagh crafts his story like a fable where, near the close of the Irish Civil War in 1923, Pádraic Súilleabháin (Colin Farrell) can’t figure out why his best friend-drinking pal-musician Colm Doherty (Brendan Gleeson) won’t speak to him. They were friends yesterday. Why the cold shoulder today?

Turns out, Colm is either mad, or experiencing an



“The Banshees of Inisherin”

Running time: 114 minutes. HBO Max, in theaters. Rated R for language throughout, some violent content, brief graphic nudity.

existential crisis...or both. He’s blunt with Pádraic. He finds him dull. Their conversations excruciatingly so. Colm wants to make the most of his days by finding livelier talk elsewhere. He also warns Pádraic that if he speaks to him again, he’ll start cutting off his own fingers. One by bloody one.

Does Pádraic listen to him? Of course not. Pádraic considers himself a nice guy. Everyone on the cloistered island of Inisherin, where everyone knows everyone’s business, thinks so...or at least, lacks the gumption to say what they really think about him.

Farrell and Gleeson first appeared together in McDonagh’s 2008 “In Bruges,” and this is a complete reversal of their hit men roles in that picture. Farrell creates a genuinely good guy who is also painfully lonely and insecure, even through he cannot admit it to himself. And Gleeson plays a crusty curmudgeon with the detached air of a man who *really* does not give a flying you know what.

As tensions between Pádraic and Colm mount daily, McDonagh treats their descent into all-out war with a macabre hand that grows wearier by the

minute. We turn to the movie's supporting players for reprieves: Marvel veterans Kerry Condon (the voice of F.R.I.D.A.Y.) and Barry Keoghan ("The Eternals"). Keoghan is relegated to the role of the "village idiot," but he treats Dominic, the son of the local constable, with intriguing results. In today's terms, you might say he has Asperger syndrome. He has no filters, saying whatever comes to mind, those sentiments often presented in certain tics. Condon, as Pádraic's sister Siobhán, is equally compelling. She's the only one on Inisherin to accept that the island is toxic. That to stay is to allow the soul to perish. The actress gets her share of "big" scenes, moments where Siobhán gives people a piece of her mind. That means the character shouts a lot, and it wears on you, although to Condon's credit, she infuses each tirade with blasts of truth.

But by the last act of "The Banshees of Inisherin," the story spirals through one tragedy after another — some of it ludicrous — and never recovers. We suspect McDonagh wants us to appreciate the dark irony. The title comes from Colm's new song. When Pádraic says he doesn't believe in banshees, that their screams no longer suggest death is near, Colm agrees. His theory: They now sit back, watching the chaos unfold.

McDonagh literalizes that thought with the final



Barry Keoghan (right) infuses the movie with a loopy sense of mischief.

image, but by that point, we've long lost any emotional investment in the picture. More, just relieved it's finally over.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

Ted Perzanowski, M.Div., B.A.

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Long Beach Resident

Surface Value

Author's Note: I wrote the following short story based on events in our "home office." But I have changed names and certain sequences to fit my fictional narrative. The point is that drama exists even in mundane doings of everyday life. Observe and write, as I always say. Enjoy, and do have a Merry Christmas!

"Will that be OK for you?"

He thought about it for a moment.

And then he said, "Oh, yeah. And I even get an elbow rest out of the deal."

By deal, he referred to the "converter" adjustable platform they had just bought for their desktop computer — the heart of their little operation as self-publishing writers.

Why buy such a beast?

Because Dear Wife Dolly had just learned from her physical therapist that the only way to relieve her neck and back pains was to stand periodically while sucking the life out of the couple's amazing computer. Yes, Dear Wife Dolly would and could get herself attached to the computer for hours and hours at a time.

And, as she told her physical therapist, Susie the Super Stretcher, she often stepped away from the ever-glowing computer screen in real pain.

So Dolly told Good Husband Hank she was going to phone their friend and IT guy, Teddy the Terrific, to see if he had a handle on adjustable platforms for computers. For their big, honking desktop computer.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes," Teddy the Terrific told Dear Wife Dolly. "We just 'retired' an older model at work, and I was just going to sell it online. How about I bring it over and see if it will work for you?"

"Oh, Teddy," Dolly said, "you are a saint."

Saint Teddy the Terrific, indeed.

So Saint Teddy the Terrific rolled up to the home office of Dear Wife Dolly and Good Husband Hank and schlepped his "converter" to the custom-built desk where sat their monster of a desktop. Complete, of course, with mouse, mouse pad and keyboard.

"I cleared the deck for you, Teddy," Good Husband Hank said.

"So I see," Teddy the Terrific said, getting right to work setting up the new order of things at the couple's home office.

Life With Charley

Charles McKelvy



Dear Wife Dolly watched in wonder and said, "You wouldn't believe it, Teddy. Hank just went nuts clearing all those books and stuff off his desk. Well, our desk, but he kind of nested in here. As you know."

Teddy the Terrific, Saint Teddy the Terrific, knew better than to get in the middle of that discussion, so he simply smiled and said, "Well, this is really going to work for you."

And it did, with the aforementioned comment from Good Husband Hank that he would "even get an elbow rest out of the deal." He referred to the placement of his old Remington Quiet-Riter Eleven manual typewriter next to the big, honking desktop.

"Elbow room's a good thing. Well, an elbow rest, really. But what about you, Dolly Dearest? Are you happy with this new world order?"

"I think this is going to work," she said.

Teddy the Terrific, of course, had expertly demonstrated the operation of the converter, or the adjustable computer platform.

"See," Teddy said, as he raised and lowered the clever apparatus. "Easy peasy."

Dear Wife Dolly took to it immediately, and didn't hurt herself raising and lowering the converter. She particularly liked the top two positions. "When my neck and back get sore, I can just raise it up and stand and use the computer. It is, as they say, ergonomically correct."

Teddy the Terrific was pleased to hear that and, after a pleasant conversation with the fun couple, took his leave with a check in his pocket.

Old school, right?

Right, and, yes, because the fun couple were both 72 and not given to adapting to every modern way that came their way. They were, after all, low-in

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come rejecters of advanced-technology, so they simply took what they needed from the ever-growing pile of fancy newfangled baubles and left the rest for the brain-dead masses to fight over.

But then there was trouble in River City. Well, not the River City of some merrily mindless musical, but at the very home offices of the sublime self-publishers.

Dear Wife Dolly found that when she lowered the converter to its lowest position, she had to raise her chin to see the screen.

Chin up, as it were.

Or, as she wryly noted, "I look like a turtle sticking its head out of its shell."

Dear Wife Dolly did not want to look like a turtle when she looked at the computer because that meant pain and suffering. Possibly war, famine and the total collapse of empires.

Good Husband Hank didn't want any of the above, so he suggested a pillow or towel or two, placed strategically on the desk chair.

Dolly tried all of that and more, and found that when she could level her chin, she could not put her feet on the floor.

Another loss for the good guys.

Not quite.

Calls and emails were made to physical therapist Susie the Super Stretcher and IT-wonderworker Teddy the Terrific.

Susie said a footrest might resolve the issue, and Teddy said he would noodle it and come up with one of his elegant solutions.

Two days later, when Dolly was off on one of her afternoon walks around their sylvan section of Southwest Michigan, and Hank was having one of his afternoon siestas on his Big-Boyo Recliner Deluxe 4000, Teddy the Terrific rapped lightly on the front door.

Teddy held up the longer printer cable he had promised when he set up the converter. "Now you can stay connected to the printer, no matter what position the converter is in. Plus, I think I have a solution to Dolly's problem with having to crane her neck when the converter is in the lowest position."

Indeed, he did.

Unfortunately for Hank, of course, Dolly was not there to see and hear Teddy explain it all.

Now, to be fair, Good Husband Hank never got much beyond geometry in high school math. He opted for chemistry over physics his junior year, so he had a poor grasp, at best, of the physical workings of things. And, he had never hung with the greasers in high school, the slicked-back dudes who whiled



their weekends away wrenching on old cars.

So, the sleepy 70-something did his best to make sense of Teddy's elegant solution to Dolly's dilemma. He knew with some certainty that it involved a custom cut of wood and the drilling of a new hole in "his" desk to, well, Hank figured it had something to do with finding a new path for the various cables that sustained the desktop computer. And that it all had something to do with clearing the way so the converter could be pushed further back on the desk. And that, Hank recalled Teddy saying, would enable him to move the pedestal-mounted screen on down to a custom-cut piece of wood on the desktop level. Plus a few inches to allow for the clearance of, well, that part was fuzzy in Hank's old noggin.

All he knew for sure was that he sure wished Dolly was there to see and hear Teddy explain it all.

Good Husband Hank was not such a good husband when Dear Wife Dolly finally returned from her evening walk, more than 10 minutes after Ted-

Continued on Page 36



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Continued from Page 35

dy's departure.

Hank tried not to blow a gasket, but he did.

Dear Wife Dolly took notice, and said, "Hank, it's not the end of the world. I'll call Teddy after dinner."

Dinner?

Yes, that was also a source of Hank's anxiety. It was Dolly's turn to cook dinner that night, and he had a church meeting at 7, and it was getting to be quarter-to-six, so he just boiled over, like the old fool he was fast becoming.

Now, you would think this story has a good ending.

It does, and we shall get to it.

But first to Dolly's call to Teddy after dinner.

Teddy explained, clearly and concisely as always, just how he would adapt the converter to meet Dolly's physical needs, to allow her to lower her chin and save her neck.

All good.

Dolly reported all that to Hank when he returned from his church meeting, which, ironically, was all about staying calm in the face of the vicissitudes of life. Good Husband Hank talked a good show with his men's fellowship, but when Dear Wife Dolly dealt the occasional serving of hot, steaming change, why, Hank often had himself a good, old-fashioned hissy fit.

But give extra credit to Hank that night, after his church meeting, for not having a hissy fit when Dolly patiently and precisely described Teddy's brilliant plan.

"Sounds good," Hank said, calmly and patiently. "But I'm still worried about my desk."

"I know, Dear," Dolly said, holding Hank close. "All will be well in the garden of your desk. Or desk, but it's technically in your office, so it's really YOUR desk."

Hank appreciated that Dolly underlined and bold-faced YOUR. "I don't deserve such a wonder wife as you, Dolly Dearest. And you don't deserve such an old grouch like me."

Hank thought of his absolute favorite movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," the 1946 Frank Capra Christmas classic. He particularly thought of the scene, early

in the movie, when George Bailey, as played to perfection by James "Jimmy" Stewart, drags himself home from yet another red-letter day at the Bailey Building and Loan. Another awful day of battling Bedford Falls tycoon Henry F. Potter. Played with devilish relish by Lionel Barrymore, Old Man Potter wants it all, and he simply won't be a happy, yet embittered old man until he seizes control of the Bailey Building and Loan.

So George Bailey is bushed and defeated, once again, and he asks his wife, Mary Hatch Bailey, done to perfection by Donna Reed, why she ever married a loser like him.

Mary bucks up George, telling him that he lassoed a stork and soon will be a father.

That snaps George Bailey out of his funk, and he realizes he has something Old Man Potter will never have: the love of a good woman,

And so the story goes on to the four-hanky climax under the tree in the Bailey living room on Christmas Eve. If you haven't seen it nor cried a river over it, then you are definitely not of this earth.

"Earth to Hank," Dear Wife Dolly said, waving a hand in front of her husband's blank face. "What planet were you on this time?"

Good Husband Hank blinked and said, "the planet 'It's a Wonderful Life.'"

"Let me guess — you were George Bailey coming home from yet another red-letter day at the old Bailey Building and Loan. And you were asking dear Mary why she ever married an old wreck like you, right?"

"Something like that."

"Well snap out of it. You insult my intelligence by suggesting I would marry an old wreck. You are the farthest thing from it."

"You think so?"

"I know so. Now stop worrying about your desk and the stuff on your desk. Teddy has a brilliant plan, and you will be amazed before he's halfway through. And he'll be here Thursday to make it all right."

All righty then.

As promised, Teddy the Terrific appeared on Thursday, and this is what he did:

HE MADE IT ALL RIGHT.

And Dear Wife Dolly and Good Husband Hank lived happily ever after, until, that is, it was time for a team effort to clean out the long-neglected side gutter.

But that's a story for another holiday.

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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.
- **Versiti Blood Drive from 11:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 27.** Versiti is the blood provider

to Northwest Indiana hospitals. Call (800) 7TO-GIVE or visit tinyurl.com/2jds9yv4 to register.

- **Bad Art Night for Kids and Teens from 3-5 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 27.** Awards go to the worst art. No registration is required.
- **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.

□

The library will be closed on the following dates:

- Friday, Dec. 23, at noon.
- Saturday, Dec. 24-Monday, Dec. 26.
- Saturday, Dec. 31-Monday, Jan. 2.

□

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.)

Genealogist of the Year



Arlene Hudgens (left) is photographed with Gloria Arndt, Dorothy Palmer and Cindy Blicher.

Arlene Wroblewski Hudgens is the 2022 Genealogist of the Year, honored during LaPorte County Genealogical Society's Christmas dinner at Portofino Grill.

Gloria Arndt nominated Hudgens for her research into the early pioneers and businesses of Otis. Hudgens posts her findings on the Facebook page she administers, "Otis, Indiana," making the information available to those researching ancestors who lived there.

Indiana Dunes National Park

- **Bird Feeder Talks from 10-11 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 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.
- **Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, Dec. 31.** Families, amateur birders and scientists can use binoculars, bird guides and checklists to help count the world's bird populations. Participants must register in advance with ranger Christine Gerlach at (219) 395-1885 or christine_gerlach@nps.gov. The count circle is Indiana Dunes National Park West.

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

- **Creature Feature at 10:30 a.m. Thursday-Friday, Dec. 22-23.** Naturalists will introduce a different animal that calls the Indiana Dunes home.
- **Christmas Eve Morning Stroll at 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 24.** Join a naturalist at the nature center for an easy walk where binoculars are provided to search for birds and other winter wildlife.
- **"Feed the Birds B-I-N-G-O" at 10 a.m. Tuesday-Saturday, Dec. 27-30.** Join a naturalist at the Nature Center to help fill bird feeders and play the game.
- **Cold Blooded Buffet at 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 31.** Meet at the Nature Center Auditorium to see reptiles and amphibians eat live meals.
- **First Day Hike at 10 a.m. Sunday, Jan. 1.** Visitors can complete a two-mile, 90-minute moderate loop along Trail 7 to Lake Michigan. The hike continues along the beach to Dunes Creek and through the park's campground.
- **Full Moon Hike at 5:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 5.** Meet at the Nature Center for a short presentation about the moon, followed by a hike to Lake Michigan and back. The Friends of the Indiana Dunes will serve treats.

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.



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LaPorte County Parks



All registrations/questions go through the Red Mill County Park Administrative Office, 0185 S. Holmesville Road, LaPorte. Call (219) 325-8315 or visit www.laportecountyparks.org for more details.

Parent & Child Discovery Days

The program includes arts and crafts, games and snacks. All activities are related to the topic. Programs are appropriate for children 3-8, with an adult required to participate. Times are 6-7:15 p.m. at Luhr County Park, 3178 S. County Road 150 West, LaPorte. The cost is \$5 per child/per program. Pre-registration and payment are required at least one week in advance or until full, whichever comes first. The schedule is:

- Jan. 4 — "Game Night."
- Jan. 18 — "Where Did They Go?"
- Feb. 1 — "Oh Deer!"
- Feb. 8 — "See You Later."

Nature's Tiny Tots

Designed for parents and grandparents, explore nature with toddlers and preschoolers at Luhr County Park. That includes music, dancing, storytelling and, weather permitting, hiking. Call at least one week in advance to register.

The schedule is: Jan. 17 and 31, Feb. 14 and 28, and March 14.

Hootin Good Time with Owls

Participants receive one email a week for nine weeks, learning about different owls that frequent parks and around North America.

Email rangerlaura@csinet.net and include a full name and email. In the subject line, type "Owl Program." Reserve a spot by Jan. 9, 2023.

WinterFest

Visit Luhr Park Nature Center to make snow art (weather dependent), do a craft and have a snack from 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 29.

All ages are welcome, and no pre-registration is required. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Visit <https://laporteparkandrec.com/> for additional details.

Field Trips

Educators, Scout leaders and groups can schedule a free organized program for students or group at any county park. The programs on various topics meet state standards and patch requirements.

Call (219) 324-5855, visit www.laportecountyparks.org or email natureniki@csinet.net for details.

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A Helpful Hand



The Ancient Orders of Hibernians-McGinnis by the Lake Chapter presented a \$1,000 check to Tammy Rosebaum, Citizens Concerned for the Homeless operation director. Proceeds came from the ninth annual AOH Charity Christmas Party on Dec. 3 at Ritz Klub Tavern. In addition, AOH collected supplies for Sand Castle Shelter-Children. Santa also presented toys to children at the shelter. This is the third year in a row AOH has partnered with Citizens Concerned for the Homeless. Pictured are (from left) AOH member Tom Burke, Rosebaum, AOH President Jack Lydon, AOH members Duane Kelley, Pat Rubey and Paul Carey.

Chamber Annual Awards

Michigan City Chamber of Commerce is accepting nominations for its annual awards through Dec. 23.

In addition to honoring milestone members and legacy businesses, winners will be announced in categories such as Community Impact, Small Business, Large Business, Young Professional and Ambassador. The chamber awards committee will qualify nominations. Finalists will be notified and invited to the annual membership dinner Friday, Feb. 17, 2023.

Nominees must be chamber members, have a location or actively do business in the Michigan City area. An official nomination form should be used for submissions.

Visit www.MichiganCityChamber.com or call (219) 874-6221 for a form or more details.



Prayer to the Blessed Virgin

(Never known to fail.)

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

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

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In the Area

Dec. 22, 29 — Coolspring Storytime, 1:30-2 p.m., Coolspring library branch, 6925 W. County Road 400 North. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

Dec. 24 — Christmas Eve.

Dec. 25 — Christmas Day.

Dec. 27 — Bad Art Night for Kids and Teens, 3-5 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3049.

Dec. 27 — Readers Corner-Book Club, 6-7 p.m., Coolspring library branch, 6925 W. County Road 400 North. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

Dec. 31 — New Year's Eve.

Jan. 1 — Happy New Year.

Jan. 4 — Crafty Kids, 4-5 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

Jan. 9 — Family Pajama Storytime, 6-6:30 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

Jan. 10 — Page Turners Book Club, noon-1 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

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. 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. 22-23 — Creature Feature, 10:30 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 23 — Christmas at The Acorn!, 8 p.m. EST, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$40 + \$6 convenience fee, \$65 + \$6 convenience fee (reserved). Reservations: www.acornlive.org

Dec. 24 — Christmas Eve Morning Stroll, 10 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 27-30 — "Feed the Birds B-I-N-G-O," 10 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 30 — The Erly with Lost Pyramids, 8 p.m. EDT, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$15 + \$3.50 convenience fee, \$40 + \$3.50 convenience fee (reserved). Reservations: www.acornlive.org

Dec. 31 — Christmas Bird Count. Details/registration: (219) 395-1885, christine_gerlach@nps.gov

Dec. 31 — Cold Blooded Buffet, 10 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 31 — New Year's Eve with The Edgar Willbury Experience with opener Skirt, 9 p.m. EST, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$20 + \$4.50 convenience fee, \$45 + \$4.50 convenience fee (reserved). Reservations: www.acornlive.org

Jan. 1 — First Day Hike, 10 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Jan. 5 — Full Moon Hike, 5:30 p.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

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:* "Devotion." Rated PG-13. Times: 6 p.m. Dec. 23-24, 3 & 6 p.m. Dec. 26, 3 p.m. Dec. 30-Jan. 2. *Holiday Film Series:* "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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Mr. Dickens and His Carol by Samantha Silva (paperback, \$15.99 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook and an audiobook. 288 pages.)

"Marley was dead: to begin with."

Who among us doesn't recognize those opening words from Dickens' immortal classic, A Christmas Carol? But did you know the reason he wrote it? Me neither. In her notes, Samantha Silva explains that while the story is a work of fiction, *"It is spun out of threads from the lives of Charles Dickens, his family and friends, and even a nemesis or two...it is a playful reimagining of how the second most beloved Christmas story in the world (after the original) came to be."*

Here's what we do know about the circumstances that required Dickens to write a book just before Christmas 1843. **Fact:** There was the need to satisfy his publishers, who threatened to deduct his pay if he couldn't come up with a new moneymaker — apparently, Martin Chuzzlewit was not well-received at the time. **Fact:** He was overextended and constantly hounded for money by creditors and relatives, especially his father, as well as many charities to which he generously gave in the past. And, his wife had just given birth to baby No. 6!

What's a man to do?! There's also the big house filled with children, a wife and housekeeping staff to satisfy. Wow. That's enough to make any man lose his Christmas spirit. What author could possibly write a warm, fuzzy holiday tale under those circumstances? Impossible!

The need to write reaches critical mass when his wife has enough of his moping and constant chastising of the children, packs up and goes to relatives in Scotland. Dickens finds the house to be a vast empty tomb with the removal of children's laughter. He takes his leave in search of a muse...

Silva excellently captures the landscape and spirit of the time, offering a mirror into mid-19th century London. We are able to look into the whole spectrum of humanity, from gangs of ragged, homeless children to lords and ladies in fur and finery, from smoke-filled pubs to hawkers selling their wares in foggy streets. It's a mind-boggling walk into history. Still...

Christmas is in the air, but not in Dickens' heart. He's walking across the city, trying to find something to start him writing. He finally ends up at Furnival's Inn, where it all started for him. He is surprised to see a sign above the clerk's office that says *"Dickens slept here."* The clerk doesn't recognize him, offering the room for a reduced price if tourists can tour the

Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter



Coming Jan. 12

Sally Carpenter offers her picks for her favorite books of 2022.

room from time to time! As a young man, Dickens lived here and once dreamt of becoming an actor, instead, finding out he had a knack for writing. His fame grew along with the family he and Catherine made. He became the rock star of his time — *"The men who smelled of drink...knew him no less than those who smelled of rank."*

Time is running out for Dickens. Less than a month to Christmas, and his publishers set a date for printing and a public reading before the holiday. No pressure!

Dickens keeps wandering the area around Furnival's, trying to remember when life was happier. This would be a good time for a muse to make an appearance and inspire Dickens to write what his publishers want. Enter Eleanor Lovejoy...

Like the Scrooge character he doesn't know he will write yet, Eleanor encourages Dickens to take a look at life, love and money, reaching back into his past to find that period of time when life was full of promise, not disappointment, creditors and relatives needing money. Her son reminds him of his own children, whom he now misses ter-

ribly.

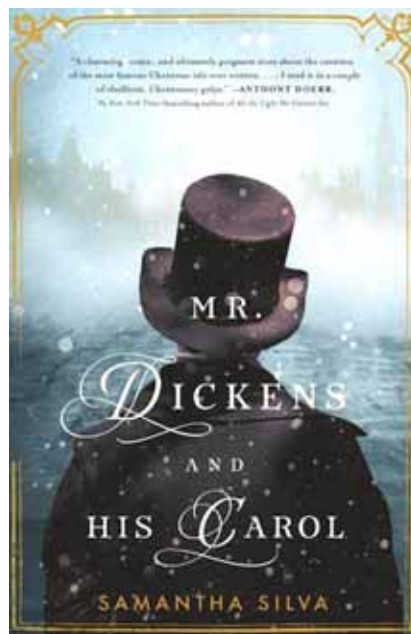
Mission accomplished, after a few fits and starts. Dickens writes furiously...A Christmas Carol is finally born, with little time to spare. A public reading is held two days before Christmas, and the book immediately sells 6,000 copies: an unheard of number for the time. But what has happened to Eleanor? The ending will surprise you.

Silva writes in the language of the 19th century, and even has a little fun with authors who are Dickens' competition, men like Thackeray and Collins.

Carol bells will ring, garlands will be hung by the fireplace, wide-eyed children will make Christmas wishes and one man will discover what he lost and now had found: the real meaning of the season.

What a perfect way to end the year! God bless us. Every one!

Till next time, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and happy reading!





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