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# Bound by Family, Honor, Tradition

by Edmund Lawler

Jason Lambert went to American Legion Skwiat Post 451 nearly six years ago to inquire about a part-time job.

He got the job, but also found a family.

“I was asked to be kitchen manager for the post, and I interviewed for the position,” Lambert says. “I didn’t really know what the American Legion was, but when I saw how much they did for the community and for veterans, I thought, ‘What better way to honor my parents, both of whom are deceased veterans.’”

Lambert, 47, did not serve with the military; however, he was eligible to join the Sons of the American Legion. It’s a nonprofit consisting of male descendants — of all ages — whose parents or grandparents honorably served in the U.S. Armed Forces and were eligible for American Legion membership. Military service is not a membership re-

quirement. Founded in 1932, its primary mission is to sponsor American Legion programs that improve veteran communities and the community at-large. It is divided into detachments at the state level and squadrons at the local level. A squadron pairs with a local American Legion post; a squadron’s charter is contingent upon its parent post’s charter.

“I realized it was a great group of people,” Lambert says. “They’re like a family because they all care about you. If something happens, they will step up and help you out.”

In addition to running the kitchen Friday nights and some Sunday mornings at the Frank & Edward Skwiat American Legion Post, 121 Skwiat Legion Ave., Lambert now is commander of the post’s Sons of the American Legion Squadron 451.

The post is named in memory of two Michigan City brothers of Polish descent who were killed in

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American Legion Post 451 volunteers place flags for Memorial Day 2022 in St. Stanislaus Cemetery.

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action in World War II. Frank Skwiat was 22 when he was killed in Germany, his brother Edward only 18 when he died in combat in France. Their haunting side-by-side photos, which speak poignantly to the supreme sacrifice of the Greatest Generation, grace a wall in Post 451.

First established in 1947, the post has been at its current location just north of Ames Field since the building was built and dedicated in 1954.

Meanwhile, Lambert is busy serving up the finishing touches on Sons of the American Legion Squadron 451's 25-year charter anniversary.

When he's not at the post, Lambert, a 1994 Rogers High School graduate, is the office manager of a local mental-health counseling center. Previously, he was assistant catering manager for Northwestern University's Athletics Department, and he cooked in or managed kitchens in Maryland and Florida.

His father and mother enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1971 and met at Fort Bragg, N.C., in 1972. After their tours of duty, the couple married. Jerry Lambert, a native of Boone, N.C., and Flora Lambert moved to Michigan City, her hometown. Jerry was a sanitation worker for Michigan City and later a cor-

rectional officer at Westville Correctional Facility and Indiana State Prison. Flora was a waitress and later an over-the-road semi-tractor trailer driver.

Seated at the post's bar, shedding light on the Sons of The American Legion, Jason Lambert shifts to the group's community involvement.

"For example, we noticed that on Thursdays before Friday game nights, the Michigan City High School Wolves football team would be eating a meal outside Ames Field," he said. "So we reached out and now we host them here in our meeting hall on Thursday nights."

The meals, themselves, are donated by local restaurants, such as Social Que BBQ and Catering. On evenings when there is no sponsor restaurant, the post will prepare and serve a meal to hungry Wolves players and their coaches.

The post also prepares and donates meals to the MCHS Girls Soccer Team, which hosts a food tent at home games. The public can drop by the post for its Friday night fish fries, or on the fourth Sunday of the month for its breakfast. Friday dinners are from 4-7 p.m., the Sunday breakfast from 7:30-11 a.m.

Other community-focused programs led by the Sons of The American Legion include annual civic training events for high school juniors, which in In-



The dinner sending the Michigan City High School football team off to semi-state

diana is called Hoosier Boys State. Another is a flag-education program for fourth-graders.

The goal, Lambert says, is to preserve American traditions and values by teaching the fundamentals of good citizenship. All participating students are eligible for Legion-sponsored college or trade-school scholarships. The post also supports the community by showing its colors at local parades.

Then, there is the Sons of the American Legion junior program for people 21 and under.

“We involve them in flag education in the schools and Michigan City High School’s ROTC program,” he said. “We have a lot of fun programs for them.”



Jason Lambert is commander of The Sons of The American Legion Squadron 451. Photo by Edmund Lawler

Lambert says it’s important to stoke the Legion’s pipeline with younger members at a time when members of the Korean and Vietnam wars are reaching the end of their lives. Nationwide, there has been a sharp decline during the past 50 years of participation in fraternal organizations. But Lambert says the post’s membership remains strong. He says Post 451 has 260 full Legion members, 150 Sons of the American Legion members and 100 Auxiliary members. The American Legion Auxiliary is an organization of women most closely associated with men of the American Legion.

Lambert encourages people eligible for any branch of the Legion family to consider joining. Annual membership dues for Sons of the American Legion are \$25, \$23 for Auxiliary and \$40 for regular Legion membership. The dues are higher for regular members because of more extensive program offerings, he says.

Another prime goal of the Sons of the American Legion is supporting the veteran community.

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## Bound by Family...Continued from Page 3

“For example, at Christmas time, I did a squadron commander project where we donated to the Indiana Veterans’ Home in West Lafayette,” Lambert says. “In the past year, we donated over \$4,400 in products for the vets, including clothing, furniture, shaving supplies and other everyday needs.”



Tracy LeVay is post commander of Frank & Edward Skwiat American Legion Post 451.  
Photo by Edmund Lawler

Tracy LeVay is Post 451’s commander. She is a full Legion member who served six years (1984-1990) in the U.S. Navy as a cryptologist. A master of languages, she served at Fort Meade in Maryland, headquarters for the National Security Agency, as well as at duty stations in the Florida Keys and California.

“I joined the Navy to see the world, and all I got to see was the States,” she said with a laugh. Raised in Michigan City, LeVay says she wanted to join the Navy’s nuclear force. But women at the time were barred from Navy nuclear assignments because of a requirement that sailors in the program serve six months continuous duty beneath the sea on a nuclear-powered submarine.

“I was the wrong sex,” LeVay says. Thankfully, she notes, that rule has since changed. Men and women can serve on a nuclear sub for extended deployments.

Noting her affinity for languages, LeVay’s high school guidance counselor encouraged her to apply for the Navy’s cryptology program. Cryptologists are the Navy’s linguistic experts who decipher and analyze information of strategic importance in other languages.

Military service runs in her blood. Her grandfather, father and son, Christian, have served. Like his mother, Christian was a Navy cryptologist, specializing in computers.

“Four generations,” she says proudly.

LeVay echoed Jason Lambert’s point that a prime benefit of Legion membership is fellowship.

“We might disagree with each other sometimes,” LeVay says, “but like family, we make up and move on.”

One of the post’s most important missions is supporting the area’s veteran population, some of whom, sadly, need a lot of help.

## If You Go

The public is invited to the 25-year charter anniversary celebration of the Sons of the American Legion Squadron 451, Detachment of Indiana.

The event is Saturday, March 25, at the Frank & Edward Skwiat American Legion Post 451, 121 Skwiat Legion Ave.

Special guest speakers include past National Commander of the Sons of American Legion David Stephens, and Post 451 Commander Tracy LeVay. Dinner is from 4-5:30 p.m. The ceremony begins at 5:30 p.m., followed by entertainment at 6:30 p.m.

At least nine original members of the Sons of the American Legion Squadron 451, including the first commander, Kenny Ryba, are expected to attend. In addition, all Vietnam veterans will be recognized. Vietnam Veterans Day is March 29.

The dinner is free to veterans and \$8 for non-veterans. Reservations are required by March 17 by calling the post canteen at (219) 879-9827.

“We try to help as many veterans as we can,” LeVay says. “We have partnered with Keys to Hope Community Resource Center in Michigan City. They work with homeless people, including veterans. Any time they have a veteran come through, they let us know. We do everything we can to get them set up with resources, including mental-health resources.”

In April, LeVay becomes a student in the American Legion College, a week-long leadership training program at the Legion’s national headquarters in Indianapolis.

“I have learned a lot about leadership here and how to get people to work together,” says LeVay, who looks forward to enhancing her leadership and team-building skills at the Legion’s College.

The best part of being a member of the American Legion family, she says, is the sense of belonging.

“We can help you out if you are in need of something,” LeVay says. “And it always helps just being here, good days and bad.”

## GoldStars Tribute Wall

The traveling GoldStars Tribute Wall will return to Michigan City over Memorial Day weekend, May 26-29.

The wall honors members of the U.S. Armed Services killed in action during the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan wars. It arrived at Ames Field over the Memorial Day weekend in 2021. The American Legion Riders of Post 451 sponsored the wall and will do so again this year. At press time, the location was yet to be determined, Post Commander Tracy LeVay said.

Visit [www.TributeWall.org](http://www.TributeWall.org) for more details.

### Club Tack Sale

The LaPorte County EZ Riders Horse & Pony Club will host its second Tack Sale from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, March 18-19, at LaPorte County Fairgrounds, 2581 W. Indiana 2.

The club fundraiser helps cover costs of the fair, awards, trophies, judges and stall repairs. It's expected 109 vendors will participate with items for horses, dogs and the farm, as well as concessions.



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## “65” Borrows From Other Movies and Mildly Succeeds

by Andrew Tallackson

“65” is “Jurassic Park” meets “Deep Impact.” You’ve seen it before, and done better, but it’s just entertaining enough to likely secure a fan base when it hits streaming.

The movie is designed to be fun. Something that appeals to the 5-year-old child in adults who like to watch people run from hungry beasts. The writing-and-directing team, Scott Beck and Bryan Woods, penned “A Quiet Place” (2018), but I suspect it became a classic because of the rewrites by director-star John Krasinski, who invested human emotion into it. “65,” by comparison, is a B movie with an A-list star and reasonably effective effects.

The “high concept” behind “65” is that a sophisticated civilization existed 65 million years ago on another planet, a ship with some of its inhabitants struck by asteroids, or comets, or whatever. The ship crashes on Earth, with only its captain, Mills (Oscar-nominee Adam Driver, “Marriage Story”), and a young girl, Koa (Ariana Greenblatt, “Love and Monsters”), surviving. Driver, who is suitably intense, gets a backstory, that he agreed to the mission to pay for his ailing daughter’s medical care. Beyond that, once Mills realizes the only way off the planet is wreckage containing an escape pod, it’s time for a dangerous trek across dinosaur territory.

At a lean 93 minutes, the story never stops. But as directors, Beck and Woods don’t know how to create a sense of awe or terror in the presence of their dinosaurs. Think of the first time we see the brachiosaurus in “Jurassic Park,” or the brilliantly staged T-rex attack. “65,” by comparison, just relies on jump scares.

The asteroids/comets in the opening sequence, by the way, are no coincidence. Seems Mills had the misfortune of crashing on Earth right as these



Adam Driver stars in “65.”

★ ★ 1/2

“65”

Running time: 93 minutes. Rated PG-13 for intense sci-fi action and peril, and brief bloody images.

lumbering beasts are headed for extinction. So, the film’s second half, complete with fiery rocks dropping from the sky, brings the action to a lively finish. There’s also nifty gadgets thrown into the mix.

With a film like “65,” you get what you pay for. You want Adam Driver blasting away at dinosaurs? You get Adam Driver blasting away at dinosaurs. You want a classic? Rewatch “Jurassic Park.”

Contact Andrew Tallackson at [atallackson@gmail.com](mailto:atallackson@gmail.com)

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### Celebrating Women's History Month



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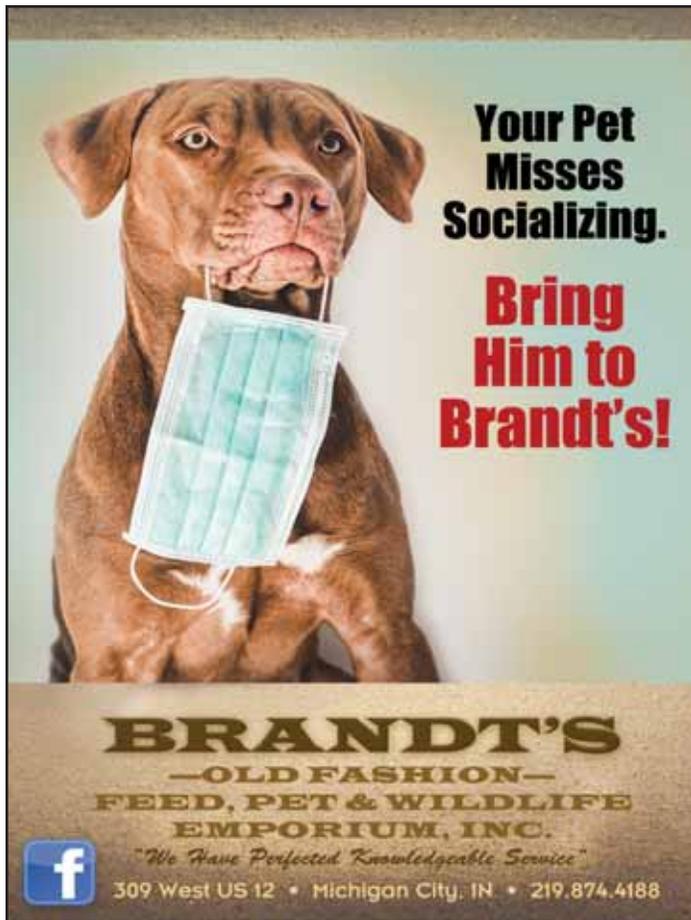
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### Krasl Art Fair Jury

Krasl Art Center has announced the jurors for the 61st Krasl Art Fair on the Bluff on July 8-9.

The five jurors virtually reviewed and juried 422 applicants Feb. 15 to determine the final 172 artists. Jurors are invited based on their careers, relationship to the arts and expertise in their fields.

The jurors are:

- Nicole Brown, a trained artist, graphic designer and sommelier. She was a member of the fair's 2022 Board Choice Award committee and now sits on KAC's board and marketing committee.
- Austin Collins, a sculptor whose area of practice includes public art, large outdoor sculpture, installation art and liturgical art, often with a focus on political and social issues. Most recently, he was commissioned for the Smart Streets Project in South Bend.
- Jeff Garrett, who is Michigan's grant program manager and ADA 504 accessibility coordinator. He previously served as director of the Art School at the Flint Institute of Arts. He has teaching experience in Michigan public schools and on a university level.
- Jessica Stoddart Ladd, a second-generation artist who grew up in a rustic middle Tennessee farmhouse. She attended Austin Peay University with an art scholarship focusing on sculpture and painting, and continued her studies at King's College in London, England, and Penland School of Craft in North Carolina.
- Harold Woodridge, the president and creative director of Cone Four Brand Alchemists. He studied ceramics at Washington University in St. Louis, where he earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts, and the Lill Street Art Center.



Brown



Collins



Garrett



Ladd



Woodridge

Art fair tickets go on sale May 1. Visit [www.krasl.org/art-fair/tickets](http://www.krasl.org/art-fair/tickets) for updates. Daily admission is:

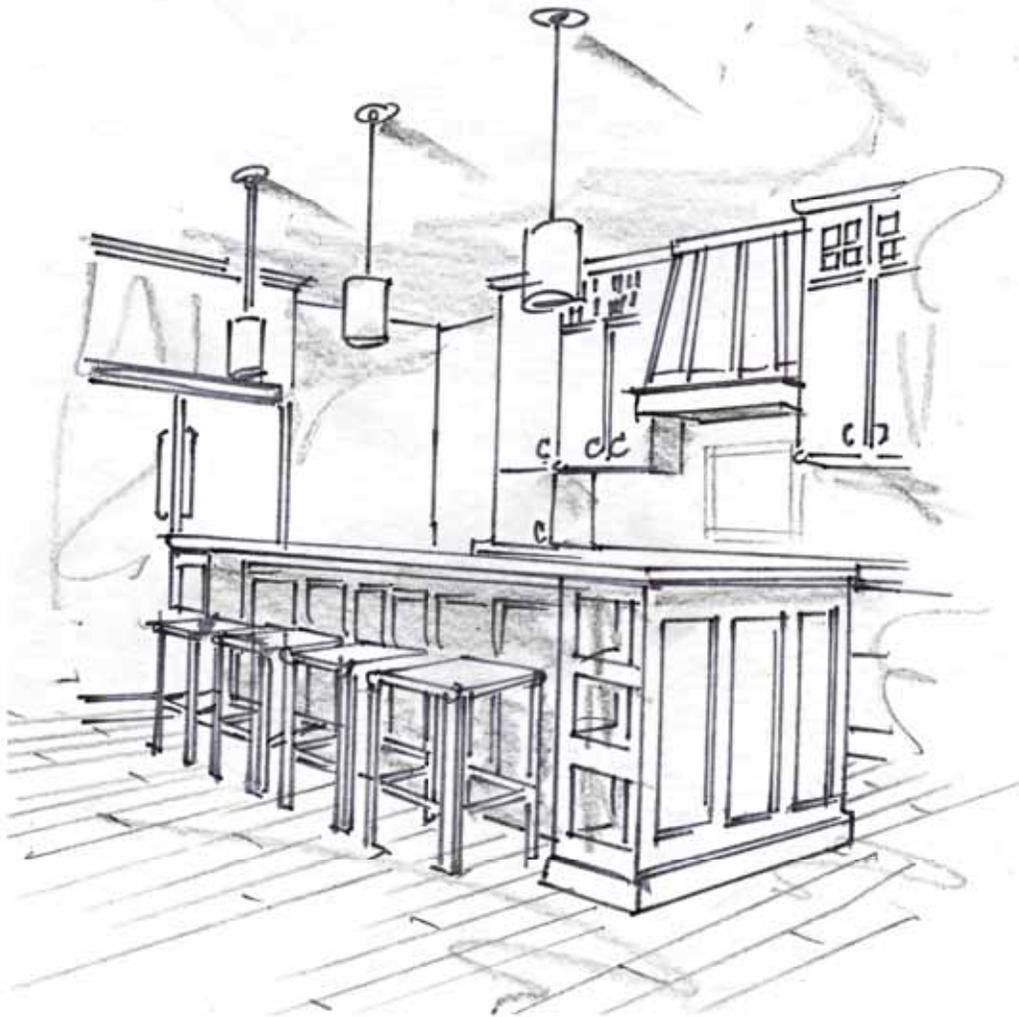
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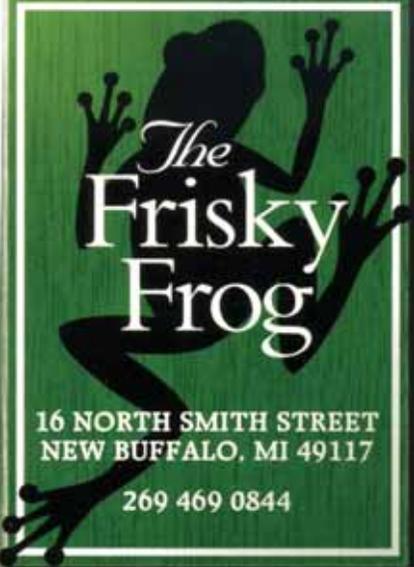
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Last year's Harbor Country Hikers trip to Sugarwood Forest Preserve.

Harbor Country Hikers will discuss bird migrations at its next outing at 1 p.m. EDT Saturday, March 18, at Sugarwood Forest Preserve, 6855 Elm Valley Road, Three Oaks, Mich.

HCH President Pat Fisher kicks off the program with a 10-minute presentation on migration, brumation, hibernation and dormancy, and ways wildlife deals with cold weather. Then, he'll lead the group on a 1.2-mile hike through Sugarwood's trails. A Chikaming Open Lands property, the preserve is an upland plateau bisected by deep ravines. The northern portion has an old-growth beech-maple forest, ravine with a Galien River tributary, groundwater seep and unique plant community. The rest of the uplands are considered mid-successional mesic southern forests. The southern ravine system contains floodplains and a number of paw paw trees.

Attendees should dress for the weather, wear a warm cap and sturdy boots or shoes, and take plenty of water. Depending on the weather, there may be muddy or icy areas.

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## Casting Aside Childhood Memories to Revisit “Chariots of Fire”

*Editor’s note — This week, we kick off a monthly series exploring how older movies hold up today.*



Ben Cross (center) stars as Harold Abrahams, a Jewish runner in the 1924 Olympics.

Had someone asked my thoughts on “Chariots of Fire” all but a month or so ago, the reply might have been something like, *borrrrrring*.

Then again, I was 11 when first seeing it. Who takes an 11-year-old, groomed on a steady diet of all things “Star Wars,” to see a British film about the 1924 Olympics? That would be Stephen and Judith Tallackson. My dear parents were the ones who expanded my movie vocabulary at a ripe young age. Heck, they’d arrive at my elementary school, unannounced, chauffeurs to an alleged doctor’s visit, only headed in secret to the nearest cinema.

“Chariots of Fire” marked one of those spur-of-the-moment “field trips” back in 1981. My memory of the experience is squirming in my seat amid what felt like hours and hours of British people standing around talking.

An unexpected interest in “Chariots of Fire” emerged last fall. An episode of Netflix’s “The Crown” delved into Dodi Fayed’s backstory — a precursor to him meeting Princess Diana — revealing he served as executive producer on “Chariots of Fire.” How the heck did that slip beneath my movie-geek radar? Then came the January wide release of Sam Mendes’ “Empire of Light” (now on HBO Max) in which a fictional seaside theater preps for the premiere of “Chariots of Fire.” Finally, on Feb. 10, Hugh Hudson, the movie’s Oscar-nominated director, passed away at age 86. While having directed a fair share of movies (“Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan”) and documentaries, an obituary hailed

past  
present

Andrew Tallackson



“Chariots of Fire” as the crown jewel of his career. Hmmm.

Time to revisit “Chariots of Fire.”

No shocker here — the child of 11 who squirmed his way through the picture found it a whole heck of a lot more interesting at 52. Some movies, you just have to live life a bit to appreciate them.

Today, “Chariots of Fire” is still a tad stuffy, but far more compelling than my 11-year-old assessment. That’s because the movie actually is about something. About believing in yourself, and fighting for what’s right.

Let’s start with that opening scene.

That iconic, justly famous opening scene.

The title credits of “Chariots of Fire” remain one of the greatest openings of any motion picture. Even then, if you hadn’t seen the movie, you knew the Oscar-winning anthem by composer Vangelis. It was *everywhere*: 1981’s answer to “My Heart Will Go On.” It even became the subsequent source of parody for any movie character achieving a Herculean task; hence, Clark Griswold and family racing

to Wally World’s front entrance in 1983’s “National Lampoon’s Vacation.”

The composer’s mix of electronica and traditional orchestral means — piano, strings — holds up remarkably well. Seeing these young men — all in white, barreling across the beach, feet bare, not a care in the world — it stirs you. The movie’s title hails from the “Bring me my Chariot of fire!” line from a William Blake poem, and that’s the sensation you get. Soaring. The freedom that comes from living in the moment, of being untethered to other worldly concerns.



The movie’s opening sequence, set to its Oscar-winning anthem by Vangelis, remains perfection.

From there, the movie grounds itself into reality at Cambridge University. Indeed, my memory of “Chariots of Fire” being talky was not *entirely* unfounded. Plenty of top U.K. acting talent, from John Gielgud, to Lindsay Anderson, to Nigel Davenport, hang around the story’s peripheries, expounding on the rights and wrongs of unfolding events.

But the two central real-life characters are fascinating. Eric Liddell (Ian Charleson), the son of Scottish missionaries to China, and Ben Cross as Harold Abrahams, a Jewish student. Harold faces rampant anti-Semitism. Eric, a devout Christian, refuses to run on the Sabbath. What we get in “Chariots of Fire” is a rumination on faith. One man beholden to his religion, the other the target of hatred because of it. Their stories are the soul of “Chariots of Fire,” and the eventual outcome of the 1924 Olympics is why people still have a soft spot for the movie today.

(The little-seen 2016 film “On Wings of Eagles” picks up Liddell’s story during Japan’s 1937 invasion of China, but fails on all fronts to move and/or inspire its audience.)

Looking back, did “Chariots of Fire” deserve four Oscars for Best Picture, Adapted Screenplay, Costumes and Score? I’m on the fence. Yes to Vangelis’ score. But when you consider the field of Best Picture nominees for 1981, you also had “Atlantic City,” “On Golden Pond,” “Raiders of the Lost Ark” and “Reds.” Movies with far more longevity and emotional impact. “Chariots of Fire,” by comparison, is classy and respectable. Today, it would be labeled “Oscar bait.”

But to dismiss it as a bore, based on my experience as a child, well, that ain’t right. Sports movies, to begin with, are spiritual experiences. Testaments to triumph over adversity. That “Chariots of Fire” directly addresses the personal beliefs of two men amid

a remarkable situation, well, it earns my respect.

And that opening sequence. *Man*, that opening sequence. There is nothing better.



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# Family is Transforming Business Space into Replica of LaPorte

by Kim Nowatzke

A LaPorte store owner is scoring big with her “small” idea.

Patricia “Patti” Pierson, owner of The Pink Sheep, 604 Lincolnway, is transforming empty retail space next to her children’s clothing boutique into “Lil Porte Plaaaytique,” a miniature replica of LaPorte. It’s only about 25 percent finished; however, children are enjoying driving pint-size vehicles down the main street that runs through the middle of town. Though it’s designed for children ages 18 months to 8 years, Pierson said all ages enjoy letting their imaginations take over.

“Everyone that comes in says it’s amazing,” she said. “So far, everybody has said this is what the city needs...word-of-mouth has spread like wildfire.”

To date, there’s an Al’s Supermarket, Archie’s Diner and a pizza restaurant yet to be named. Pierson always gets permission from local business owners to use names and logos. Plans are to add Hot Spot Café (located next door to The Pink Sheep), Deluxe Tastee Cream and a post office.

There also will be “half buildings that we think are cool, but don’t have a lot of activity to use,” including City Hall, Pierson said.

Aiming for 16 amenities in all, other true-to-life spots will include a drive-in, fire station, police station, playground, financial institution and hospital. Work has begun on The Grand Heritage Federal Credit Union, with Lil Porte Hospital next in line.

“The hospital is going to have pretend machines such as X-rays and MRIs that actually light up and move to familiarize kids with them in the event they ever need to have these types of tests,” Pierson said.

A replica of Kingsbury Elementary School (Pierson youngest, 6-year-old Remington “Remi,” is a student there) is nearly finished. Visitors can look forward to a campground (actually in the back of The Pink Sheep) and two restrooms (for now, customers use the one in The Pink Sheep).

One party room that holds 25-30 people is available to rent, and another larger one behind the boutique is in the works. And, Lil Porte Plaaaytique has just begun science/STEM classes geared for ages 3-8 and taught by Pierson’s husband, Keith.

“We try to pick buildings that are recognizable,” Patricia Pierson said. “Lifelike and realistic is the goal.”

One of her favorites is the house modeled after her own family’s within walking distance on Michigan Street. In fact, she used leftover paint from her home for the one at the Plaaaytique.

“We found our house and fell in love and moved here,” she shared. “That’s why I made a replica of



Remi Pierson, the 6-year-old son of owner Patti Pierson, takes a drive down the main street of Lil Porte Plaaaytique. Photo by Kim Nowatzke.

my house – because I love it so much.”

Construction began in May 2022, about a month after the Piersons signed the lease on the nearly 5,000 square-foot space that used to house Hilbish Drugs. Toy Parade was located where The Pink Sheep is, but the drugstore and toy store closed in 2015. At one time, those two spaces weren’t divided.

“It makes me happy that’s it’s all one space again,” she said. “We have the original signs for both and plan to put them up. We like to keep the original stuff as much as possible.”

This includes the original tin ceilings, now painted blue like the sky.

The Piersons had to completely rewire the whole building, run gas lines and install plumbing.

“There’s a lot of work that goes into making a 100-year-old building safe,” Pierson explained. “Nothing is straight, level or square...It cost so

much more than we imagined.”

While her husband takes care of the electrical work and framing, she works on the rest.

“I learned A LOT from research and Google,” she said.

Having grown up in Hammond, Pierson appreciates the small-town experience of LaPorte and her great neighbors. In 2013, she and Keith opened their original children’s clothing store, The Pink Sheep, in Cedar Lake. After moving to LaPorte in 2016, they opened a mini-version of their shop in a local antique mall, but soon outgrew the space. So, they moved into a location across the street from where they are now, but needed more room after only three months. In April 2022, they landed at 604 Lincolnway. The Piersons still take their business on the road, with about 30 booths a year at festivals between April and November.



Patti and Keith Pierson, owners of Lil Porte Plaaaytique.

First interested in sewing as an 8-year-old, Pierson honed her skills when her daughter, Bella, now 14, began having sensory issues with clothing. Pierson found it challenging to find clothing with no appliqueed designs, no zippers, mostly long sleeves and more, so she began sewing her own.

“I also learned to sew on Google. I learned everything I needed to know in life on Google,” she said with a laugh.

In addition to Remi and Bella, rounding out the Pierson family are Ashley, 32, Nathan, 31, Zachary, 27, and Coltt, 13. While Bella is the voice in radio ads for the family business, Remi and Sawyer Wind are the official models. Wind is the 5-year-old daughter of a friend, Falishia Wind, who sells items at The Pink Sheep.

The Piersons aim to complete Plaaaytique by January 2024. It is interesting to note that the idea for the town originated with Pierson’s desire for her booth at the antique mall to resemble a doll house. That structure now houses the checkout area at their current location.

“I told my husband that if we got an actual store, that I wanted it to look like a giant doll house that kids could play in. Now, we’ve ended up with a village.”

(Visit “Lil Porte: The Pink Sheep Plaaaytique” on Facebook for more details.)

## (Mis)Adventures in Spring Cleaning

*Author's note — I would like, dear readers, to continue the domestic adventures of the fictional couple I introduced last Christmas: Dolly Dearest and Good Husband Hank. They are, of course, based on Natalie McKelvy and her gray-bearded husband, Yours Truly. So far, these stories are loosely based on their own misadventures in and around their cottage in the Michigan dunes.*

So, let us continue the saga of Dear Wife Dolly and Good Husband Hank as they attempt to clean THAT gutter on the kitchen side of their “little dump in the dunes.”

Hank had been meaning to clean it out himself — by means of his trusty stepladder and garden hose — but he just hadn't gotten around to it.

Why?

Because he knew in his heart of hearts and brain of brains that it was no longer a tried-and-true method. And certainly not a safe approach.

In a word, Hank knew he needed that one, magical word: HELP!!!

Can you imagine an American male of a certain age admitting he needs, gulp, HELP!!!!?

So, Hank had a hard time getting his mind around it, but one fine day, in the present season, he went to Dolly and peeped, “Help.”

Dolly was baking potatoes, so she didn't hear him.



She just heard him peeping, so she pulled her head out of the oven and said, “I know you said something, but I can't hear you when you're in the other room, and I have my head in the oven. Would you please come in here and repeat what you said?”

Hank exhaled, rather impatiently one might say. Then, he stepped into the kitchen — not a particularly great distance considering he was in the next room — and made a great show of repeating, “Help.”

“Help?!? You're asking me for help?!?”

“I am, Dolly Dearest.”

“All right. But if it's something you can't figure out on the computer, why don't you just take a deep breath and figure it out on the computer? All by your lonesome. You can do it. You're a big boy now.”

“Yeah, but I'm also a broken-down old boy. It's not the computer. It's THAT gutter.”

Hank pointed out the kitchen window at THAT gutter.

“It's been so long since I cleaned it out that a tree's growing out of one end. Right over the kitchen window. So...”

“You want me to help you?”

“Yes.”

“You want help, and you want me to help you?”

“Yes on both counts.”

“Well then, do you want me to help you right now?”

“Well, when you have some spare time, Dolly Dearest.”

“Let me get these potatoes going, and then I'm all yours.”

“Music to my ears, Dolly Dearest.”

And so, when Dolly was well and truly done in the kitchen, they went to the neighbor's shed and “borrowed” their extension ladder. Actually, the neighbors gave Dolly and Hank open permission to use the extension ladder whenever they needed it. And now, they needed it. Right now before the next round of rough weather rolled in across the lake, the big lake they called Michigan. (A truly great lake if ever there was one.)

Working as the well-oiled combine they were, Dolly and Hank safely schlepped the neighbor's extension ladder from the shed to their infamous side gutter, THAT gutter!!!

“Here goes nothing,” Hank said as they extended the extension ladder. “EUREKA!!!”

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Hank, being the man of the house, took it upon himself to take the first step, up the ladder. Not so steady. The subsequent steps were even unsteadier.

Dolly was not impressed, saying, "Are you all right up there?"

"Piece of cake," Hank said. But it wasn't, and he knew it.

It was obvious to him and Dolly when he descended. One agonizing step, or rung, at a time.

"Hank!!"

"What?!?"

"You look shaky."

"No, I don't. I'm just fine. It's this old, rickety ladder. Not me, Dolly. Dearest."

Dolly Dearest was having none of that, and so, when they shifted the ladder, with great effort by both of them, to the next strategic position, Dolly insisted on going aloft. Absolutely insisted.

Oh boy!

How did that work for the fun couple?

Well, fine at first, for Dolly was nimbler than Hank and ascended that bent-up old aluminum ladder with the ease and agility of a seasoned sherpa. Up, up and away she went — all the way to THAT gutter. She cleaned out all the glop she could reach with her gloved hands, then had Hank hand her up the garden hose and hosed out most of the rest. Dolly then dropped the hose and began her descent.

"I've got you," Hank said, standing guard at the base of the ladder.

"I'm fine," Dolly said.

Dolly WAS fine.

Until she wasn't.

For Dolly took a bent rung too fast and slipped.

Right off the ladder and into Hank's waiting arms.

Dolly and Hank fell as one into one writhing and wriggling heap.

Dolly re-injured an old back injury, and Hank shredded his left shoulder which, he thought, was a bad thing considering he was left-handed.

The two old fools lay there in the leaves and ground cover, moaning and groaning, and inquired about each other's condition.

The reports from the spring cleaning crew were not good. In no time flat, they found themselves among the barely walking-wounded walking, limping and literally crawling into the Regional Walk-In Clinic.

"We're having a record day," the beleaguered re-



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ceptionist said. "It's going to be a 2 1/2 hour wait. Is that all right?"

Hank shrugged as much as his shredded shoulder would allow. Dolly said, "We both brought big, thick books."

Indeed, they had, with Hank in possession of one of his lurid potboilers by a notorious author of lurid potboilers, and Dolly schlepping a definitive history of Kazakhstan, with maps and time lines.

They were ready for the long haul, because they had weathered many a long haul at the always-slammed Regional Walk-In Clinic in a town near where they lived.

And, of course, they weren't disappointed, for they waited a full three hours (and change) before they were finally seen on that "record day." But the wait was worth it: They got to watch a beautiful sunset and gather all kinds of fascinating "facts" from the other patients. Did you know, for example, that pure cherry juice, mixed with water, has an an

Continued on Page 22

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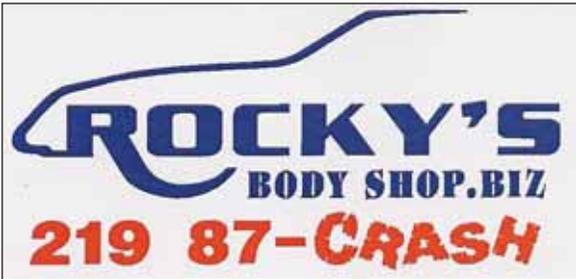
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Continued from Page 21

algescic effect on joint and muscle pain? Who knew? Well, Dolly and Hank knew as a result of what they quietly referred to as “the long wait.”

And, during the long, day-into-night wait, Dolly helped an overwhelmed young mother find a private nook in which she could change her infant son’s wet diapers. Hank finished his potboiler and was breathing so heavily by the thrilling conclusion, the receptionist asked if he needed to be seen immediately.

“Sorry,” Hank said. “I shouldn’t read such lurid stuff in a waiting room. I’m fine. Really.”

“You sure?”

“Oh yeah. One hundred percent.”

And so, after finally being seen and examined by the caring, competent and compassionate health-care professionals at the Regional Walk-In Clinic, they were both found to have sustained “somewhat” serious injuries from their “misadventure” with the neighbor’s ladder.

Dolly, for her part, re-injured one of six small hip muscles in the lateral rotator group — the infamous piriformis muscle. She originally gave it a good jarring when she fell backwards while attempting to play tennis with Hank and a friend. Dolly also broke and dislocated her right thumb in that fall, but the ER doc put that right by popping it right back in, then splinting it. No such luck with her piriformis muscle. That bruised puppy required two years of intensive physical therapy, or PT, to return to anything close to normal. And now, at the Regional Walk-In Clinic, Dolly was watching the walk-in doc enter an order for a comprehensive round of PT.

“Do you have a favorite therapist?” the doc asked.

“Oh, yes,” Dolly said, smiling. She gave the good doctor the name and contact information for her beloved physical therapist, “Susie the Super Stretcher.”

“Susie the Super Stretcher?!?”

“Well, Super Susie for short. She is truly super.” Dolly then proceeded to give the doctor Super Susie’s actual name and organization.

So, when the doctor deemed that Hank had torn, well, partially torn, the rotator cuff in his dominant left shoulder, she ordered a round of comprehensive PT for Hank. “And I bet you’d like to see Super Susie as well. Yes?”

“Yes!!!”

So, they were sent off to see Susie the Super Stretcher for comprehensive rounds of physical therapy.

But before they set off to be lectured by Super Susie for their foolishness, they cut to the chase.

“Next time THAT gutter starts sprouting trees,” Dolly said, “let’s call ‘Fabulous Freddie’ and have him clean out THAT gutter. And all the other gutters. He does such a good job on the windows, and he also does gutters, so...”

“...let’s have ‘Fabulous Freddie’ scramble up his own ladder and clean out the gutters. Deal?”

“DEAL!!!”

Learn more about the staff of The Beacher Weekly Newspaper

# Meet Linda Weigel

**Area of Residence:** I live in the beautiful countryside between Michigan City and LaPorte.

**Title:** “The Inquisitive Artist.” I began writing for *The Beacher* in March 2018, a few years after retiring from teaching art at La Lumiere School.

**What I love about my work:** Sharing my love of art, design and artists with a larger audience makes my job ideal and rewarding.

**Favorite stories:** One-on-one interviews with the artists themselves. Last year, I have a tie between “The Art of the Inevitable,” an interview with Chicago artist/sculptor Bernard Williams, and “A Social Practice Artist” with Corey Hagelberg, an artist/printmaker from Miller Beach. Both gentlemen were wonderful to interview, very forthcoming and honest.



**Favorite movies:** My favorite movies speak to some universal revealing truth, such as “The Imitation Game” or “Ordinary People,” as well as light suspense/comedy such as “My Spy” or even “Knives Out.”

**Favorite books/authors:** Generally mystery writers and history writers, starting with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and moving forward Louise Penny, Anne Cleaves, Deborah Crombie and David Baldacci. Also, the complete works of Jane Austen, David McCullough’s “John Adams” and Lucy Worsley’s “Agatha Christie an Elusive Woman,” plus numerous other biographies, especially those about our founding fathers.

**Favorite music:** Aretha Franklin and James Taylor always lift me up. Paul Simon, Adele, Ed Sheeran, Shania Twain, John Legend.

**Favorite TV shows:** The original “NCIS,” the “Endeavor” series, “All Creatures Great and



Photo by  
James Conlin

Small” and the Sherlock series on PBS. Right now, I am watching “Vexed,” “Three Pines,” “Home Town,” “Good Bones,” “Vera” mysteries, “Midsomer Murders,” the “Brokenwood” mysteries and rewatching Prime’s “Reacher.”

**Favorite food:** Just about anything pasta or a good pot roast.

**Reason I love living in this area:** I love the natural beauty with all the lakes (large and small), forests, county parks, open expanse of farm fields, cultural opportunities and, of course, the people. It’s been a wonderful place to raise a family.

THE  
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Paper

### Community Student Art Exhibit

Krasl Art Center, along with Berrien Regional Education Services Agency and Box Factory for the Arts, will present the 2023 Community Student Art Exhibitions.

The event highlights elementary-, middle- and high-school students from Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties. The young artists have their work exhibited in a professional setting and receive juried awards. The elementary exhibit features awards in: 2-D, 3-D and Video (first and second place), plus a \$50 collaborative award, and the Jan Stevens Family Memory Award (\$50 in 2-D, 3-D, Video and Digital). The middle and high school exhibit awards first

and second place in 2-D, 3-D and Video. Sponsor awards include the Stevens Family Award (\$200), the Box Factory for the Arts Emerging Artist Award (\$500) and the Berrien RESA Scholarship Awards (\$50 art scholarships for one student per school).

Held at Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph, Mich., two ceremonies are planned. The elementary reception is from 6-8 p.m. EDT Thursday, March 16. The exhibit, itself, runs through April 30. The middle- and high-school reception is from 6-8 p.m. EDT Thursday, April 20. The exhibit, itself, runs April 7-30. Call (269) 983-0271 or visit [www.krasl.org](http://www.krasl.org) for more details.

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### JROTC Earns Award at Event



The Armed Exhibition demonstrates the "Gauntlet" as part of its routine.

Michigan City High School's Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps earned an award at the March 4 Fort Wayne Concordia High School military drill meet.

The Wolves finished fourth out of 14 schools in the Armed Regulation category. Most schools were Army JROTC units, some of which consistently compete in the All Service Drill National Championship in Daytona Beach, Fla. The judges were Army recruiters from the Fort Wayne area.

"This drill meet gave the opportunity for...cadets to command units for the first time," Maj. Tom McGrath, the senior Marine instructor, said in a press release. "Sophomore Cadet Staff Sgt. Alexandra Reed did a great job commanding the Unarmed Regulation platoon. We expect great things from her in the next two years."



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### Monday Musicale Competition

April 8 is the deadline to submit applications for Monday Musicale’s Student Awards Competition, the date for which is Sunday, April 16, at First United Methodist Church, 121 E. Seventh St.

Students in grades 4-12 (or the home-schooled equivalent) can audition in the areas of keyboard (piano or organ), instrumental (string or wind), vocal and/or musical theater (choreographed vocal presentation). Applicants must live or attend school in LaPorte County, or take private lessons from a county resident or Monday Musicale member.

First-place winners in the Junior Division (grades 4-8) receive engraved plaques. A \$100 cash award goes to the highest-scoring division participant. Senior Division candidates (grades 9-12) compete for monetary awards of \$300-\$500.

The James J. Guerrucci Award (\$300) is open to a keyboard player (fourth grade-adult) who must perform a self-selected solo and demonstrate improvisational skills on a hymn chosen by the scholarship committee. Additionally, pianists wishing to try organ lessons may apply for one of two \$300 Organ Lesson Grants.

Visit the club’s Facebook page, Monday Musicale Michigan City, or contact Sue Cassler at [susan.cassler@comcast.net](mailto:susan.cassler@comcast.net) for an application and complete list of rules.

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

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 402 E. Coolspring Ave., 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, March 18.
- American Legion Post 37, 756 E. U.S. 20, 12:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 21.

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](http://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:*

- **Spring Angels Among Us at 2 p.m. Thursday, March 16.** Ange Benz, who leads the discussion, can be contacted at (219) 874-3754.
- **Rock Star Photographer Bobby Talamine at 6 p.m. Thursday, March 16.** To honor Women's History Month, the library will feature the "Women of Rock" display in March in conjunction with his program. Talamine has photographed everyone from Chrissie Hynde and Patti Smith to Joan Jett and Sade.
- **Film showing: "The Fabelmans" at 2 p.m. Friday, March 17.** The film, which runs 2 hours,

31 minutes, is Rated PG-13.

- **Irish Music Concert: For St. Paddy's Sake at 6 p.m. Monday, March 20.** The program features a performance by the Irish band.
- **Needle Arts Club to Warm Up America Joining Night at 5:30 p.m. Thursdays in March.** 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.
- **Sesame Street Scavenger Hunt in March.** Search for Bert, Ernie, Super Grover, Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch in Youth Services.
- **Weekly Crafts for Kids & Teens weekly in March.** Each week offers a different project. Take-home craft kits are available, or create some in the Makerspace. Supplies are limited.
- **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 seeks volunteers to help at least one day a week during tax season (through April) through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program. The IRS provides some training, and volunteers must pass the VITA test through the intermediate level. Testing and training are online. Call (219) 873-3049 for details.

□

Volunteer genealogists can answer questions from 1-4 p.m. Tuesdays (Pat Harris) and 11 a.m.-2 p.m. the last Saturday of the month (Colleen Miltenberger).

□

*Michigan City Public Library is located at 100 E. Fourth St. Visit [www.mclib.org](http://www.mclib.org) for more details.*

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TEAM STANDING	WON	LOST
1. Striking Beauties	25	7
2. Gutter Gals	19	13
3. Diagonal Divas	17	15

HIGH INDIVIDUAL GAMES	SCORE
1. Mary Lou McFadden	168
2. Dottie Brinckman	166
3. Nancy Klausner	163
3. Linda Sperling	163

SPLITS	
Tina Sonderby	2-7
Diana Holt	2-7
Nancy Kubath	5-6
Dottie Brinckman	5-6-10, 5-10

### STRIKES

Nancy Klausner — 4 in a row.

Linda Sperling — 3 in a row.

## River Valley Garden Club

River Valley Garden Club's first "spring" meeting of 2023 is at 1 p.m. EDT Tuesday, March 21, at Harbert Community Church, 6444 Harbert Road, Sawyer, Mich.

Phil DeRuitter, owner of DeRuitter Greenhouse, Three Oaks, will provide information on new varieties of annuals and perennials. Club member/avid birder Sue Nuti will give an update on bird migration and local sightings.

Members will be urged to start new plants for the annual garden club plant sale, which is May 20.

Meetings are open to the public. Contact Elizabeth Palulis at (269) 426-3513, email [evpalulis@yahoo.com](mailto:evpalulis@yahoo.com) or visit [www.rivervalleygardenclub.org](http://www.rivervalleygardenclub.org) for more details.

## New Buffalo Township Library

### Weekly programs:

- Craft Time all day Wednesday while supplies last.
- Read to a Dog Sessions for all ages from 10:30-11:30 a.m. Tuesday and 4-4:45 p.m. Wednesday.
- Story Time at 4 p.m. Thursday.
- Lego Club all day Saturday.

*All times are Eastern. New Buffalo Township Library is located at 33 N. Thompson St. Call (269) 469-2933 for more details.*

## Public Art Committee

The Michigan City Public Art Committee meets at 10 a.m. Thursday, March 16, in the City Hall Mayor's Conference Room, 100 E. Michigan Blvd.

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### In the Area

**March 16** — Getting Started with Libby (adults 19+), 11 a.m.-noon, Coolspring Branch Library Meeting Room, 6925 W. County Road 400 North. Info: [www.laportelibrary.org](http://www.laportelibrary.org)

**March 16** — Spring Angels Among Us, 2 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 874-3754.

**March 16** — Rock Star Photographer Bobby Talamine, 6 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 874-3754.

### **March 17 — ST. PATRICK'S DAY.**

**March 17** — Film showing: "The Fabelmans," 2 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 874-3754.

**March 17-19** — "Oliver!," Footlight Theatre, 1705 Franklin St. Times: 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat./2 p.m. Sun. Tickets: \$17, \$12/12 or younger. Reservations: [www.footlightplayers.org/reservations](http://www.footlightplayers.org/reservations), (219) 874-4035.

**March 17-19** — "1776," Marquette Catholic High School Rudy Hart Theatre, 306 W. 10th St. Times: 6:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 1:30 p.m. Sun. Tickets: \$10/adults, \$8/students & seniors. Info: [www.marquette-hs.org](http://www.marquette-hs.org), (219) 873-1325.

**March 18-19** — The LaPorte County EZ Riders Horse & Pony Club Tack Sale, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., LaPorte County Fairgrounds, 2581 W. Indiana 2.

**March 20** — Teen D&D, 5-7 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: [www.laportelibrary.org](http://www.laportelibrary.org)

**March 20** — Irish Music Concert: For St. Paddy's Sake, 6 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 874-3754.

**March 20** — Family Pajama Storytime, 6-6:30 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: [www.laportelibrary.org](http://www.laportelibrary.org)

**March 21** — Virtual Author Talk with Jernard Wells (adults 19+), 3-4 p.m., through LaPorte County Public Library. Registration: <https://libraryc.org/laportelibrary/24659>

**March 21** — Bingo, 5-6 p.m., Long Beach Community, 2501 Oriole Trail.

**March 22** — Rock Painting Craft Make and Take, 1-4 p.m., Luhr County Park Nature Center, 3178 S. County Road 150 West, LaPorte. Free. Info: (219) 325-8315, [www.laportecountyparks.org](http://www.laportecountyparks.org)

**Through March 31** — Artwork by Madeleine

Schooley/the late Barbara Fedder, The Legacy Center Gallery at Queen of All Saints Catholic Church, 1719 E. Barker Ave. Gallery 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.

**Tuesdays** — Bingo, St. Stanislaus Kostka Catholic Church, 109 Ann St. Doors open: 3:30 p.m. Bingo: 6 p.m. Starting Feb. 7: \$45 entrance fee (includes all cards). Info: (219) 336-3099.

**Thursdays** — Needle Arts Club to Warm Up America Joining Night, 5:30 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3045.

### In the Region

**March 17** — The Save the Tunes Council, 7:30-9 p.m., Indiana Dunes Visitor Center, 1215 N. Indiana 49, Porter. Info: (219) 395-1882, [www.nps.gov/indu](http://www.nps.gov/indu)

**March 17** — The Acorn St. Patrick's Day Celebration with The Ike Reilly Assassination, 8 p.m. EDT, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$30 + \$5 convenience fee, \$55 + \$5 convenience fee (reserved). Reservations: [www.acornlive.org](http://www.acornlive.org)

**March 18** — Beach Glass Wire-Wrapping Workshops, Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Times: 10:30 a.m.-noon, 1:30-3 p.m. Cost: \$7. Pre-registration: (219) 926-1390.

**March 18** — Harbor Country Hikers, 1 p.m. EDT, Sugarwood Forest Preserve, 6855 Elm Valley Road, Three Oaks, Mich. Info: [www.harborcountryhikers.com](http://www.harborcountryhikers.com), Harbor Country Hikers on Facebook.

**March 18** — Letters From Home: The 50 States Tour, 7 p.m. EDT, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$20 + \$4 convenience fee, \$45 + \$4 convenience fee (reserved). Reservations: [www.acornlive.org](http://www.acornlive.org)

**March 19** — Smammals of the Dunes, 10 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

**March 19** — First Day of Spring Hike, 1-3 p.m., Heron Rookery, 1336 County Road 600 East, Michigan City. Info: (219) 395-1882, [www.nps.gov/ind](http://www.nps.gov/ind)

**March 21** — River Valley Garden Club, 1 p.m. EDT, Harbert Community Church, 6444 Harbert Road, Sawyer, Mich. Info: (269) 426-3513, [evpalulis@yahoo.com](mailto:evpalulis@yahoo.com), [www.rivervalleygardenclub.org](http://www.rivervalleygardenclub.org)

**Through March 24** — Group exhibit, "Sense and Sensibility: Poetry in Painting," South Shore Arts, 1040 Ridge Road, Munster.

**Through April 12** — Anneke Dekker solo show, Pines Village Retirement Communities, 3303 Pines Village Circle, Valparaiso.

**Through April 16** — Exhibit, artist-poet-artist-

ficial intelligence researcher Sasha Stiles, Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, Mich. Info: [www.krasl.org](http://www.krasl.org)

**Through April 30** — 2023 Community Student Art Exhibitions, Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph, Mich. Receptions: elementary/6-8 p.m. EDT March 16; middle-, high-school/ 6-8 p.m. EDT April 20. Info: (269) 983-0271, [www.krasl.org](http://www.krasl.org)

**Through May 29** — “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](http://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](mailto:friendsofnewtroy@yahoo.com)

**Saturdays in March** — Bailly/Chellberg History Hike, 2-4 p.m., Bailly/Chellberg parking lot off Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 12/20, Porter. Info: (219) 395-1882, [www.nps.gov/indu](http://www.nps.gov/indu)

**Saturdays-Sundays in March** — Chellberg Farm Open House, 2-4 p.m. Meet at parking lot off Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 12/20, Porter. Info: (219) 395-1882, [www.nps.gov/indu](http://www.nps.gov/indu)

**Sundays in March** — Miller Woods Hike, 1:30-3:30 p.m., Paul H. Douglas Center, 100 N. Lake St., Gary’s Miller Beach neighborhood. Info: (219) 395-1882, visit [www.nps.gov/indu](http://www.nps.gov/indu)

**Vickers Theatre** — *Now Showing*: “Women Talking.” Rated PG-13. Times: 7 p.m. March 16, 4 p.m. March 17-18, 7 p.m. March 19. *Also*: “Puss in Boots: The Last Wish.” Rated PG. Times: 4 p.m. March 16, 7 p.m. March 18-19, 4 p.m. March 19. All times Eastern. Theater address: 6 N. Elm St., Three Oaks, Mich. Info: [www.vickerstheatre.com](http://www.vickerstheatre.com), (269) 756-3522.

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**The Illusionists** by Rosie Thomas (available in hardcover or paperback online; also available as an eBook. 480 pages. )

Atmosphere. It sets the stage for what is to come, and this book is drowning in it. And that's a good thing. Character development is essential to a story, but so is the setting. You must feel the wind on your face, walk the dark, scary alleys, and imagine the smell of flowers in the park. If an author can put these elements in your imagination through words, then you're off to a great start!

That's what this week's recommendation does for you: It takes you back to late 19th century London to a time of misery and happiness, as well as a time of hunger and wealth, spread out in a patchwork quilt of a city growing faster by the day.

*"The swelling vastness of the city was difficult to comprehend, but its annexing of distant fields made...an unstoppable machine that gobbled up grass and spewed out streets as it churned onwards."*

Now, let me introduce you to the fascinating people of the time. Let me introduce you to...The Illusionists.

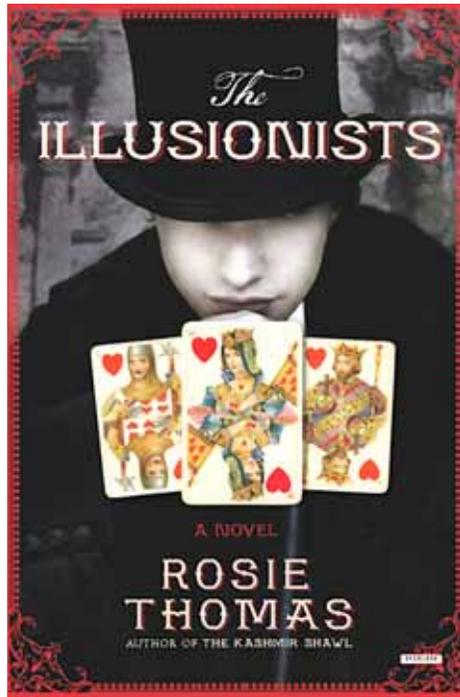
In 1885, London is on the cusp of great changes. While there is still great misery and poverty, a slowly growing middle class is fighting its way up the social ladder. Soon, the great city will see electricity, hear their favorite singers on the phonograph, maybe even ride in the newfangled automobile. But, for the moment, life on the Strand, once an area of great houses, is now home to cheap ale houses and even cheaper women.

Enter our hero — or could that be antihero? — Devil Wix. He doesn't like the terms magician or conjuror; no, he prefers to be called "*an illusionist.*" Tall, dark and handsome, Devil is quick on his feet, quick in his sleight of hand and certainly not lacking in self-confidence.

One day, stopping at one of his favorite watering holes, he sees what seems to be a small boy picking pockets while the rest of the saloon watches two men fight. Upon closer inspection, Devil discovers his mistake.

*"The child wasn't a boy at all but a man, his own age. There were furrows at the sides of his mouth and a jaw dark blue with stubble. A pocket-picking dwarf. That was a fine thing."*

He calls himself Carlo Boldoni (formerly of Morris's Amazing Performing Midgets). So starts the beginning of a strange friendship. Carlo leads Devil to an old theater, currently under renovation by one



## Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter



Jacko Grady. He will call the place the Palmyra. Devil, always on the lookout for a venue, persuades Grady that he is Carlo's assistant and the pair are hired — the theater opens in two weeks. Now, they must come up with an actual act.

Carlo's size, along with his ability as a contortionist, put Devil's active mind to work on a simple short play that contains amazing illusions current audiences find most appealing. He calls it "The Execution of the Philosopher."

Enter Heinrich Bayer, a Swiss-German engineer, with his automaton, Miss Luci. Devil enlists Bayer's help in building the necessary parts for his and Carlo's act.

Add Jasper, Devil's boyhood friend and expert in waxworks, who introduces him to Miss Eliza Dunlop. Ah! Sweet Eliza. A free-thinking girl and art student who immediately captures Devil's attention and vice versa. Eliza is fascinated by the world of the theater and soon finds herself a part of the ensemble. No children or boring family life for her — just the kind of woman who attracts Devil, yet manages to keep him at bay. But for how long?

As this little band of friends and co-performers becomes a more cohesive group, a series of events finds ownership of the Palmyra in Devil's hands.

Acts are expanded, new ones put on contract and the theater's reputation slowly begins to grow. Also growing is Carlo's jealousy of Devil Wix. Why does he have to be tall and handsome? Why does Carlo have to be the freak? Also, Carlo's silent longing for Eliza and his growing knowledge that Devil and Eliza are very attracted to each other add to Carlo's frustration and need for revenge.

And then there's Heinrich, whose love of his automaton Luci begins to change his perception of reality. Will anyone notice before it's too late?

As Eliza sagely tells her sister about her life on the stage, "*It is a way of life that requires a good deal of effort, which I hadn't realised when I entered it with too many romantic notions about glamour.*" Indeed.

*The Illusionists* was named a Best Book of the Year (2014) by NPR and a Notable Book of the Year by *The Washington Post*.

Till next time, happy reading!



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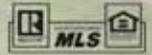
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