

# FRESHWATER REPORTER

A fresh approach to storytelling in Manistee and Mason counties...and a bit beyond.

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FREE

## Life's too short: Rise up and DANCE!

By GORDON BERG

Resilience. Joy. Hope. When it feels like our worlds are falling apart, it's hard to let go of what's dragging us down and trust the healing powers of love. But some people do. They've been through it all and can still find reasons to dance.

Valerie Harmon is one of these.

For more than 51 years, she's been spinning the music she loves so that others may find their own joy. Their own hope. Their own resilience.

Harmon's current home in Onekama is worlds away from where she grew up around Bridgeport, just south of Chicago. Bridgeport is an older, working-class neighborhood. Down to earth. Genuine. A diverse, tight-knit community. When someone needs help, neighbors rally around them. These are the qualities that were instilled in Harmon as a young girl.

When she was 10 years old, her parents divorced. She bounced back from that by doggedly signing up for every parks-and-rec or after-school class she could find. She joined a latch-key program, where she DJ'd her first dance for the kids. At age 10. She marveled at how the tunes she spun lifted people up. About three years later, her father bought a bar in Bridgeport from her grandmother. To pack the bar, he hosted DJ nights. On one of those evenings, the DJ didn't show. Rather than cancel, her dad asked his daughter to fill in. It was a huge success. The crowd loved Harmon. That night her passion for DJing became real.



DJ Val (a giant white "rat" beside her) at a Queen! House Party in a Chicago club, as husband Patrick (background) also takes a picture of Val. Photo: www.erikmkommer.com.

When disco came on the scene, that was the music she spun. In a few years, it morphed into a new genre: house (or dance) music. House music is felt, physically and emotionally. It's loud. It's energetic. It is joyful and life-affirming. The worldwide epicenter for house music was Chicago, and Harmon found herself in the middle of this movement. As DJ Val, she worked different shifts at three of Chicago's hottest clubs for 16-17 years, unheard of in the industry. She was recognized by Architects of House as one of the 100 most influential DJs in the Chicago house music scene between 1975 and 1995. Along the way, she occasionally managed clubs and worked as a graphic artist. She was in demand.

As a DJ, Harmon's song selections draw an emotional response.

"When I'm transitioning into a song, and I could feel the crowd, and I know ... they're gonna eat it up, and ... you can hear them screaming, and they don't have their cell phones out, they're dancing and sweaty, and you get that crowd response, and you get

goosebumps ... that is an amazing feeling."

That feeling extends to her fans, DJ colleagues and club staff. They all become her family. This family buoyed her up and helped her overcome deeper struggles. Graves disease. Bladder cancer. Thyroid cancer. Through all the radiation and chemo treatments, she kept going. She kept spinning her music, kept giving joy. She couldn't let her family down, and they weren't about to abandon her.

The Chicago DJ community regularly gathered in online chat rooms after their gigs to "talk shop," but they still hadn't met each other. That was about to change. One early morning, as Valerie made her way to a club to spin for a shift, DJs from all over Chicago were gathering there to greet her. They had been driven to the club by another DJ, Patrick Harmon.

Valerie fondly recalled, "... from the moment (Pat) came up to the DJ booth to grab my hand, it was over, like, that was it. Like it was absolutely love at first sight.

continued on Page 4

## NORTHWOODS SAUCE BOSS



## Draggin' tree

By JOSHUA ELIE

We all have our favorite winter and holiday season activities. Though watching football is at the top of many lists, this far north we are blessed with so much more ... Snowmobiling, snow skiing, ice fishing, or maybe just cozy nights at home in front of a fire and snuggled up in a quilt reading a good book, while the snow lfts effortlessly down from the sky.

This is my favorite time to bring in firewood. People may think I am crazy to wait so long, but there is a method to my madness.



Love to cut. Photo: Patricia Elie

I go out before the leaves start to fall in October and tag all the old dead trees I want to fell, plus my pathways, with reflective ribbon. Orange for cutting. Red to the right. Green to the left. This makes all the difference finding my way out of the woods in the dark because everything turns to shadows in the headlights, even tire tracks in the snow. Yes, I have gotten lost in my own backyard.

Quite a few years ago, I got tired of tripping over all the brush. So, I started cutting off the limbs that were too small to bother cutting to burn, and cutting trees into sections light enough to drag chained to the back of my truck. Now, I get them

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## Grip N Rip offers four-season fun

Story and photos by KEVIN HOWELL

Row after row of multi-colored discs are the first things to catch your eye as you step off the street into this little shop in downtown Scottville. The second and third are Luna and Lincoln peering over the glass counter as they give you their "WOOF!" greeting.

Welcome to Grip N Rip Disc Golf on Scottville's Main Street. Grip N Rip is co-owned by Kayleen Moffitt and Tyler Martinsen. Moffitt minds the store, while Martinsen, who works a full-time job elsewhere, does behind-the-scenes work, including building the cabinets and tables in the store. Both have been playing disc golf for years.

"Tyler actually introduced me to disc golf, and the more I got into it (the more I liked it)," Moffitt said.

### Grip N Rip history

Moffitt has been playing since 2016, Martinsen since 2008. As their enthusiasm grew for the sport, they found there weren't



Kayleen Moffitt, co-owner of Grip N Rip Disc Golf Shop, shows off a few of the shop's many discs.

many courses to play on, and nowhere to buy gear nearby.

"The only place to really go to get anything was Muskegon, and it's an hour drive," Moffitt said, adding, "I've always wanted to be a business owner, and (Tyler) had the knowledge of disc golf, so we combined and decided to open the shop."

Grip N Rip first opened its doors in Ludington in 2021. The building where the shop was originally located was listed for sale, and the two were notified they had to move. The shop relocated to Scottville in May of this year.

"We wanted to be in Scottville originally," Moffitt, who was raised here, said. "But it never worked out that way, so it was a blessing in a way that we got to be in the place we wanted to be originally."

Though still considered a "niche" sport by some, disc golf's popularity has grown substantially since 2017, according to blogger "Corey" of discgolfdash.com. (Check out the site's web page of statistics to learn more.)

As the only disc golf shop in Mason County, Grip N Rip's reputation as the go-to place for all things related to the sport continues to increase, both within and

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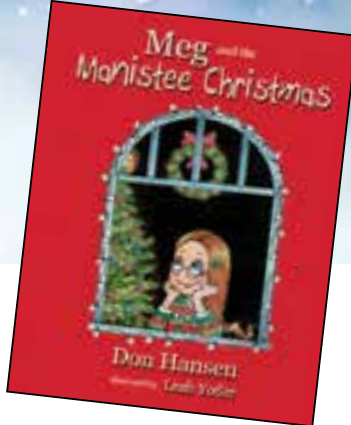
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**MI BACKYARD**

# Squirrels and spring peepers and other tales of surviving Michigan's winters

By **EMILY COOK**

As I write this in late October, the maple trees in my yard are nearly bare. This week's wind has removed most of the changed leaves. The ground is now littered with a thick layer of color. I can see a few black squirrels sifting through the leaves to find food options to add to their winter caches. Overhead, a cacophony of calls alerts me to the V-shaped flock of geese starting their migration south, ahead of winter. Living near Arcadia Marsh, I find it isn't difficult to spot the region's local waterfowl as they prepare for the colder months.



A gray tree frog has camouflaged itself as green. Photo: Emily Cook

It is easy to overlook this wildlife around us getting ready for winter as we (humans) prepare in our own way — installing storm windows and plow stakes along driveways, and hearing the ever-present buzzing of a leaf blower in the background. (More later on this particular preparation.) However, if one stops to pay attention, the survival of the animals in northern Michigan's coldest season is truly astounding.

Squirrels are expert hoarders. They spend weeks collecting thousands of nuts, seeds and other food to store in holes, trees and burrows. Chipmunks also hoard, but unlike squirrels they enter a state of torpor (semi-hibernation), slowing their heartbeat and body temperature enough to sleep for long periods of time. They wake every few days to a week to consume food they have stored.

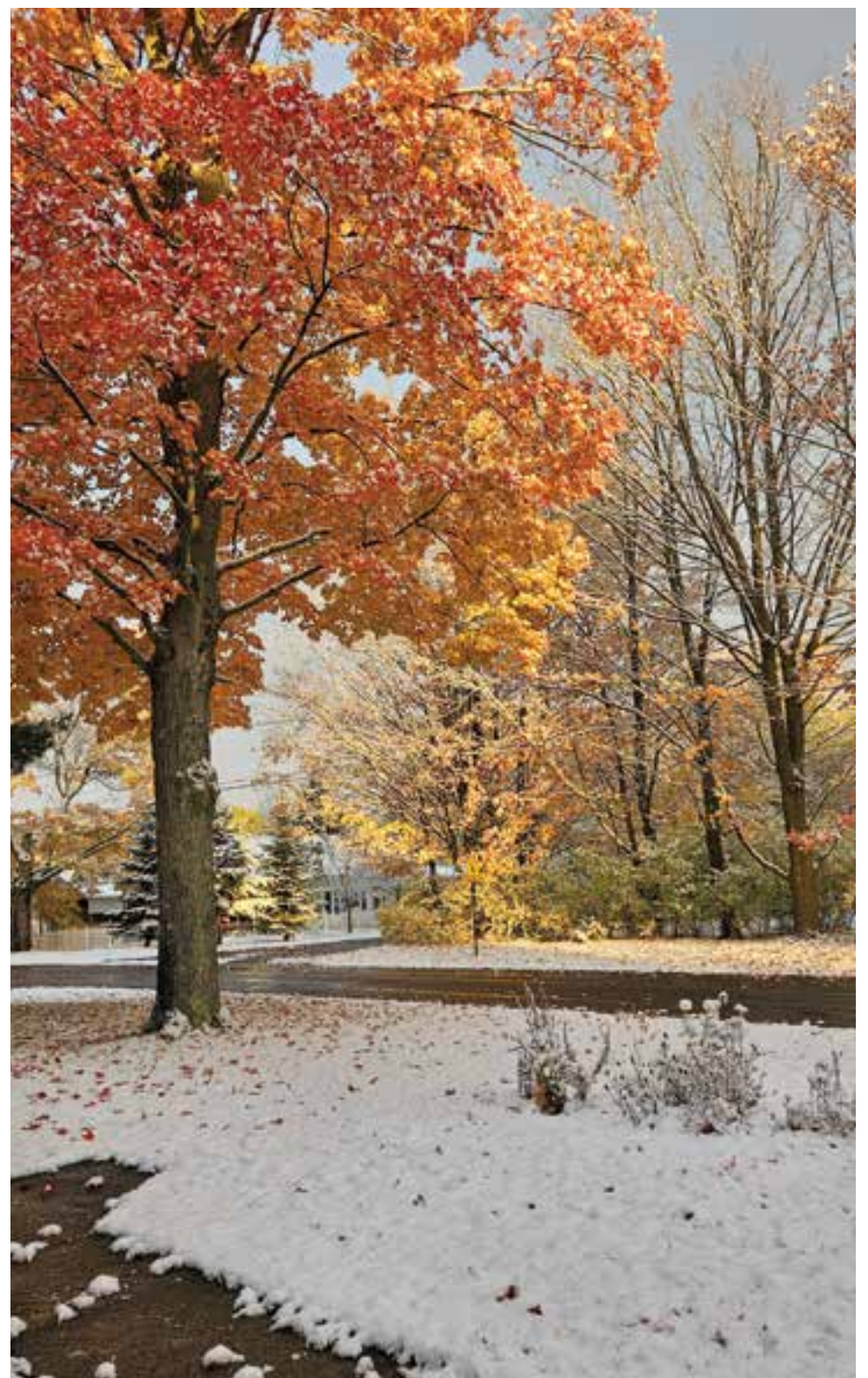
In the world of rodents, moles are especially unique because they don't hibernate, and their underground lifestyle

provides some built-in protection from winter temperatures. However, because their main food source is the earthworm, moles have a spooky method for storage. As they bite the earthworms, a toxin in their saliva paralyzes them. They are then stored, alive, in a portion of the mole's tunnel system. More than 450 live worms have been found in one mole chamber. I liken it to the chest freezer we keep in our basement. It's full of our favorite foods we can pull from all winter, like last summer's veggies and homemade applesauce. And while a room full of earthworms personally makes my skin crawl, in the world of mammals we aren't all that different from the smallest critters living outside.

However, our survival skills do massively differ from our region's ectothermic animals, such as amphibians, reptiles, fish and insects. These creatures — like snakes, turtles and frogs — rely on the outside environment to manage their body temperature. They have adapted to Michigan's winters in other ways, too. Many go through a process called brumation, where they enter a state of dormancy, stop eating, and burrow to "wait out the winter," essentially.

Other methods of ectothermic survival almost sound like science fiction. Take spring peepers, for example. You have undoubtedly heard them sing in early spring. Despite being the smallest frog in Michigan, at only two centimeters long, their chorus can be almost deafening. These "peeps" occur after awakening from a sleep that literally changes their cells. As fall shifts into winter, the peepers push out water from their bodies and replace it with additional glucose. As their bodies get colder and colder, the glucose in the cells serves as an "anti-freeze", preventing the cells from freezing entirely. If water remained, the subsequent ice would kill them. For months, the peepers remain in a state of suspended animation, with their hearts eventually stopping entirely. During spring's primary thaw, their hearts slowly start beating again and their song begins — a process that can occur in as little as a single day.

Peepers aren't the only frogs that accomplish this incredible feat. Wood frogs and Eastern gray tree frogs do the same. This method of survival isn't guaranteed, however. If their body temperature dips below approximately 20 degrees Fahrenheit,



Leave the leaves to provide wildlife habitat in the winter months. Photo: Emily Cook

the frogs will freeze too much and not survive. To combat this, they insulate themselves by burrowing under leaves or in logs, loose tree bark, and mud along water bodies.

This is where I conclude with a brief plea to leave your leaves as you clean your yards this fall. I realize it is not realistic for many people to do nothing. I'll admit, members of my household even remove some to keep a little swath of grass alive for our dogs. That said, piling leaves in out-of-the-way corners of your yard, using them as mulch in your

garden beds, and simply letting them break down in the coming season will do wonders for our wildlife friends preparing to spend some time in the cold. You never know who could be using these little pockets of habitat to take a months-long nap.

*Emily Cook is a resident of Arcadia where she lives with her husband and two collies. She is a conservationist by training and a writer and artist when time allows. She explores nearby nature trails and a Lake Michigan beach as much as possible.*

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## Trees

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all out in the open, so there is nothing to trip over. This is the really fun part because once you get some momentum, you can't stop ... or you will likely have to cut your load in half just to get moving again. It really is quite the adrenaline rush making all the tight corners at such a brisk pace in the snow, while keeping the log you're towing from hanging up on other trees or stumps.

I'm sure some of you enjoyed our wet, icy, muddy non-winter last year, but I ended up wedged sideways against a tree, on a slope, with the tree leaning over the bed of the truck. It took a come-a-long and some creative levering with some construction planks, but I managed to get loose about the time the sun began to rise. Though I love such challenges, nothing feels better than coming home to a warm fire and the smell of fresh-baked cookies after my idea of a fun night out.

You are familiar with what we call "windmill" cookies here in the U.S., right? They are tasty with all their spices, though they have the texture of a dog biscuit. In parts of northern Europe (where this cookie originally hails), they are called *Spekulatius* (German), *Speculaas* (Dutch) or *Speculoos* (Flemish). They are much more of a soft and



Sleigh ride. Photo: Patricia Elie

chewy "biscuit" (cookie) with more vibrant spicing. Traditionally, they were a Christmas cookie, though these countries observe St. Nicholas Day (Dec. 5). After WWII, the spices became much more affordable in those parts, so the *Spekulatius* biscuit became a favorite for any occasion. Other than gathering the spices, you will find they are very easy to make, and it's traditional to stamp them with whatever design you like.

I'm looking forward to a full, robust winter with many nights when the snow turns to fields of blue diamonds in the moonlight, and crystallized trees glow in the morning sun. If that isn't your thing, you can at least make some great cookies.

*Joshua Elie is a musician and retired building contractor. He now enjoys life as a homesteader.*

## Spekulatius (Windmill cookies)

- ½ cup shortening
- ½ cup salted butter
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 ¼ cup flour
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 ¼ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cloves
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg
- ¼ tsp allspice
- ½ cup sliced almonds



Cookies! Photo: Joshua Elie

In a large mixing bowl, beat together shortening, butter, granulated sugar and brown sugar until light and fluffy, then beat in one egg.

Add flour, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, allspice and baking soda. Mix to combine.

Start preheating oven to 350 degrees.

Roll into balls about 1 ½ inches in diameter and place on baking tin about 2 inches apart.

Flatten with fork to about ¼ inch thick and bake for 7 minutes. Wait at least 5 minutes to cool before transferring.

This dough can also be rolled out and "stamped" (cut with molds any shape/print you want). Larger cookies will require more baking time.

## DJ Val

continued from Page 1

Wow, like a pound of bricks. And I had been single for about 15 years. I was not looking. Yeah, it just happened ..."

They were together for 15 years. About four years ago, Pat was diagnosed with ALS. When he learned this, he immediately asked Valerie to marry him. Two weeks later, they tied the knot. Those two weeks were a whirlwind. It was the height of the pandemic. Everything was closed. Finding a wedding dress was impossible. She was frantic. Then her club family came to her rescue. One of Chicago's celebrity drag queens created a beautifully "blinged-out" dress at the last minute. According to Valerie, "... it was the best wedding you could ever have."

As Pat's ALS progressed, they yearned



A sunset in Onekama, by Valerie Harmon. Harmon posts many breathtaking sunset photos on her [djvalchicago](https://www.instagram.com/djvalchicago) Instagram page.

for a more manageable, peaceful existence. They sold everything they had to move to a small fixer-upper in Onekama, across the street from Portage Lake. With help from neighbors and local service organizations, their home was modified to accommodate his limited physical abilities. During this time, their devotion to each other deepened. They stopped listening to music. It was just too hard on Pat; it reminded him of when he was healthy. They found joy in simply being together on their front porch and marveling at the beautiful sunsets on the lake.

They were delighted when a mutual colleague would call Pat to boost his spirits. That friend was Georgie Porgie, voted by *Billboard Magazine* in 2010 as Top 10 Dance Artist of the Decade, and more recently as Greatest of All Time Top Dance Club Artist. Valerie gratefully recalled, "(Georgie) is like a friend-soulmate, because this guy's spirit is 10,000 years old, and he lifts you up, no matter. He would call and talk to Pat when Pat could hardly breathe, and he would talk to him for an hour or two, just speaking positive, and Pat would feel so good after talking to him ... He's an amazing person."

Pat died at Christmastime last year. It was only after his passing that Valerie started listening to music again. She returned to her home studio knowing that it was, "... something I had to trudge through to stay who I was. Still at times, it's hard, but I know (Pat) would not want me to stop."

After her own health challenges, she was inspired to write again. Ten years ago, she



Queens of House picnic (2019). Photo: Brightledge Photography.

collaborated with Porgie, also the founder and owner of Music Plant Group, to record "Rise Again". It shot to #1 on the Kings of Spins charts.

This fall, still grieving for her husband yet buoyed by her own lyrics, Valerie rose again. On October 17, with Porgie as headliner, she made her dramatic and triumphant return to the club scene at an international dance-music event in Amsterdam that attracted devoted followers of this music

from all over the world.


Porgie showered her with accolades. "Valerie Harmon is known to the world as Superstar DJ Val ... One of the kindest, most beautiful spirits on earth. She is an incredible DJ, producer, songwriter and remixer. One of the hardest-working DJs who has broken barriers for female DJs around the world. Her accomplishments and triumphs are beyond words! I am proud to call DJ Val my friend, my sister, my inspiration. Val is a bright star to the world!"

Harmon — who, for the last several years, has been an internet radio DJ and is "working toward producing dance music" — reflected on her future. "I'll die a DJ. I will never stop. Life's too short ... Yes, people need some splashes of rainbow on them, so they ... see that life can be happy, even in the face of tragedy."

For more about Harmon's career, visit her website: [www.djval.com](http://www.djval.com) and [www.amsterdam-dance-event.nl/en/artists-speakers/dj-val/20137](http://www.amsterdam-dance-event.nl/en/artists-speakers/dj-val/20137). Listen to her radio show on Thursdays at 10 p.m.: <https://mix93fm.com> and follow her DJValChicago Instagram page for more sunset photos. Listen to "Rise Again" at: [https://youtu.be/f5VIp13MIMc?si=uIyPXBJScV9LmG\\_y/](https://youtu.be/f5VIp13MIMc?si=uIyPXBJScV9LmG_y/)

*Gordon Berg is a descendant of Manistee's Bergs, Swansons and Martinsons. His debut book, "Harry and the Hurricane," is about his father's life as a young boy and how he survived the Miami Hurricane of 1926. [www.harryandthehurricane.com](http://www.harryandthehurricane.com)*


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## NORTH SHORE DISPATCH

# Support Biodiversity

By **MARK BANASZAK**

According to Josh Shields, forester and wildlife biologist for the Manistee Conservation District, biodiversity is an intricate network of relationships between species that have evolved together in a place. The term biodiversity does not just refer to the number of species in an area; it can also refer to different stages of a species' lifecycle simultaneously present in an ecosystem. For instance, Shields said forests are healthier with a mix of canopy trees, saplings, standing dead trees, logs on the ground, and shrubs and plants on the forest floor.



*Sundial Lupine, an indicator species. Photo courtesy of Cameron So, McGill University.*

In our area, we can do a lot to support biodiversity.

Here, we live amidst diverse ecosystems, including aquatic, forest, upland, wetland and dune. This adds to the health and beauty of our area. Wetlands support a different array of plant species than shoreline dunes, as well as helping to control flooding and maintain water quality. Shoreline dunes help maintain stable coasts.

But there are clear threats. Biodiversity is threatened by habitat loss, overexploitation (overuse of natural resources), biological invasions (such as invasive plants), climate change and pollution. Which threat is greatest depends on the local context. Shields said that even something as normal for our area as white-tailed deer can become a significant threat when large numbers of them prevent too many new seedlings from growing.

Wildlife biologists and conservationists monitor diversity and animal populations to detect and assess problems. Networks of foresters and biologists have tools to measure and register the relative health of areas. They often use geographic information systems (GIS) to connect important data, like populations or species distributions, to places on the map. This is one of the areas in which you and I can help.

When asked how everyday citizens can assist with issues like biodiversity, Angie Bouma, senior conservation ecologist at the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC), responded that simple things like providing wildlife



*Participants make biodiversity observations. Photo courtesy of Rick Kane, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.*

habitat on your land, or volunteering to help remove invasive species or plant native ones, support biodiversity.

She also said that citizens can help by simply observing. One way to do that is to download and use the iNaturalist app, which you can find linked on many GTRLC websites and signage. This app helps non-experts identify and location-tag wild species. As you gain expertise in identifying plants and wildlife, your observations can become research grade. Research-grade observations have led to collaboration between conservation agencies and research institutions.

GTRLC, for example, collaborates with researchers at McGill University in Canada studying the sundial lupine, a native perennial wildflower. A researcher using

an online database noticed observations of this plant on GTRLC land. Sundial lupine, considered at risk, is an important food source for certain species of butterflies, especially endangered ones. Butterflies are useful as an indicator species for biodiversity because they are well understood, and changes in their population often come before changes in the population of other species.

So, get out there and observe wildlife in all its forms. Your participation can help efforts to protect our critical biodiversity.

*Mark Banaszak has spent more than 30 years as a public school educator, an urban community gardener and an outdoor enthusiast. Recently, he has transplanted his city life to rural Manistee County.*

# Can You Feel it? The Estate of Grace

By Louisa Loveridge Gallas

Freshwater Reporter Poet in Residence

A poem testifies to how music helps us survive.

The evening is breathing hard as a love poem longing to happen deep inside the night club light. O, yes, the Estate brings you this gift, *live jazz, world-class* right here in Cream City his name's Spike Robinson. Right now Spike's tenor is heavy fog *smokin'* through curved brass. Mercy! Mercy has brought some heat to this harsh blighted world where the sun has covered its face. Dusky glass over cool Miles Davis photo on the back wall catches Spike's profile. Spike reaches for that long creamy high note before he takes the solo home, drummer clicks along behind him a train heading for the station. Then Spike hangs his tenor on his shoulder while the man at the piano takes over the solo track. *Can you feel it?* Horn sways with Spike's body a languorous snake charmed by the piano man working his way around the changes.

The night starts to cook.

Just now you forget that outside this room half the world is crawling on its knees. You leave behind your troubles, your losses, you check the blood streaming down the face of the earth at the door.

A guy at the next table lets one of Spike's riffs bring an "O, *Yeah*" deep from within, you whisper, "That's right, brother." Your soul sways closer to the someone beside you who's your beloved dearly, and earlier weren't you lost together within the homey mundane? Tonight you snatched dinner so fast it was illegal, like stealing lipstick from dimestores and whom the 10,000th dinner hour you shared was over and tell the truth now didn't the night measure ahead of you with a bleak arithmetic toward the 10 o'clock news? Except some great pal across town calls suddenly, "Do you folks know Spike Robinson's playing *The Estate* tonight?" The door to Heaven swings open. You look up at each other with the look that binds, the recognition that God just walked in on eighth notes. Off you hustled, the winter night indeed still young. You arrived for the nice old song *You won't see me cryin' anymore* right on time. Such sweet moments, you don't watch your back. Nothing is happening anywhere else in the world.

You are in the Estate of grace. When all the tunes come home, the wee small hours are over, you will go back through that door back into the city of confusion your pulse high, a praise song, you walk out straight into the paralyzed eyes of the wounded world, you raise up your hands and testify

Get up, get up, RISE!  
*Life is a wind instrument*  
SO STAND UP AND BLOW.

Winner, *OnMilwaukee.com*  
2010 poetry contest.

Saxophone image: Steve Replogle,  
Fremont, Mich. artist

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## KALEVA NEWS

# November raffles for veterans, December marketplace

By CINDY ASIALA

During November, members of the public may pay tribute to a veteran by visiting the Kaleva Art Gallery at 14449 Wuoksi Ave. and entering the service member's name in a drawing to win one of two wall hangings created especially for veterans.

One of the wall hangings honors the Marines; the other recognizes all branches of the military. They were created by Sandra "Sandi" VanDonkelaar, who has taught quilting classes at Maple Grove Township Community Center.

The drawing for the wall hangings will take place Dec. 1 at the gallery, and organizers said they hope to award other prizes as well.

Gallery hours are Friday and Sunday, 12 p.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For information, contact the gallery at (231) 362-2749 or visit the website at: <https://www.kalevamichigan.com/kaleva-art-gallery>.

### Christmas Marketplace

On Saturday, Dec. 8, from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m., a Kaleva Christmas Marketplace will be held in three village locations to help shoppers plan and complete their holiday purchases. The Kaleva Art Gallery on Wuoksi Avenue will offer handmade gifts, including household items, jewelry, weavings, pottery and more. The Bottle House Museum, also on Wuoksi, will be decorated and filled with Finnish history and culture, as well as gift ideas. The decorated Maple Grove Township Community Center, on Kauko Street, will host Kaleva businesses with gift ideas displayed on tables and ready for purchase.

All three locations will offer a Kaleva Passport. Shoppers are encouraged to get their passport stamped at each of the three to qualify for a raffle. (No purchase is necessary.) The drawing takes place Sunday at 4 p.m. Prizes include a \$25 gift certificate from the Bottle House Museum, a \$25 gift certificate from the Kaleva Art Gallery, an adult haircut valued at \$40 from Krista Fink, and one large pizza from 3 Sisters Tavern on Walta Street.

To get everyone in the holiday spirit, hot chocolate and cookies will be served, a children's activity is planned and visits with Santa are encouraged.

As always, arrive on time for the best selection of goodies.

## ARCADIA NEWS

# Community center: a hub of activity

By KRISTINA STIERHOLZ

How did a village with a year-round population of 149 attract more than 10,000 visitors to its community center last year? It all began by finding opportunity in the challenges created by changing demographics.

The Pleasant Valley Community Center is an example of vision and a source of community pride. Through a familiar sequence of events, Arcadia's elementary school closed as part of consolidation. Two Arcadia residents purchased the school property in 2006 and donated the building to create a community center. Renovations brought the building up to code, and the Pleasant Valley Community Center opened in January 2010. The PVCC is a non-profit organization governed by a board of directors, assisted by over 45 volunteers, and funded by grants and donations.

Action at the PVCC first coalesced around fitness activities and events for parents and the community. Soon after opening, the Arcadia branch of the Manistee County Library moved from the township hall to a room in the PVCC, and a slow but steady increase in activities and outreach began.

As building use increased, the next challenge was staffing. Board members wore many hats, and they risked burnout. The board decided to hire an executive director, and Cyndy Wangbichler was chosen to manage PVCC operations. Her goal for the PVCC is "to be a destination for educational, social, fitness, and recreation offerings."

Wangbichler cited the pandemic's impact and outreach efforts as key to

accelerating usage. When the PVCC reopened after COVID's mandated closure, visitors came with a new appreciation for the in-person community it offered. The PVCC also expanded its outreach to service agencies, inviting and welcoming the people they serve in Manistee and surrounding counties.

In the past year, the PVCC has hosted pickleball, yoga, ballroom dancing, euchre, a book club, art shows and classes, twice-weekly lunches for seniors, wellness and nutrition classes, flu shot clinics, a United Way food bank, the Farmworkers Appreciation Dinner, special library events, tutoring, and much more. The center offers a game room with ping-pong, pool and air hockey; a state-of-the-art workout room; a commercial-grade kitchen; and wheelchair-accessible classrooms and a gymnasium, all of which are available to rent.

The PVCC measures its usage by counting signatures on a sign-in sheet. Some users forget to sign in, and visitors who use the outside facilities (playground and pickleball courts) aren't captured. Even so, more than 10,000 visits were counted in 2023, and 2024 is on track for 12,000 visits. These numbers reflect the PVCC's broad and expanding reach.

Wangbichler still hears from people who are just finding out about the PVCC and all the activities it offers. If you're new to the PVCC, you can find the center's weekly schedule on its Facebook page. Or visit online at: [PleasantValleyCC.org](http://PleasantValleyCC.org), and sign up to join our community's activities and events.

## LATE ADDITIONS TO THE CALENDAR

**November 30**  
**Native American Heritage Day, Manistee**  
12-6pm. Public invited. Drumming, dancing with explanations of each dance, intertribal dancing with an invitation to community members to join in, vendors. Little River Casino Resort, 2700 Orchard Hwy. (M-22)

**Dec. 8-14**  
**Holiday Family Fun, Frankfort**  
Variety of family activities with holiday crafts, food & performances. Workshops in pasta making, creating holiday cards & ornaments take place all week. Also holiday choral & piano concerts. Visit [www.oliverart.org](http://www.oliverart.org) for info.

**Dec. 13**  
**Festive Piano Concert with Kit Holmes, Frankfort**  
6pm. \$10 adults, \$5 children ages 12 and under. Tickets at [www.oliverart.org](http://www.oliverart.org). Contemporary/traditional holiday tunes by award-winning, Manistee-based songwriter Kit Holmes. Sing along.

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# Every day's like Christmas at Kaleva's recycling-resale center

Story and photos by **VALERIE CHANDLER**

I love finding great deals and shopping, so what could possibly make this experience better? Supporting a local business that gives to charities, and it all helps our earth.

In 2008, one man with a truck, and an idea to increase recycling efforts in northern Michigan, formed Bay Area Recycling for Charities, commonly known as BARC. Based in Traverse City, BARC serves Grand Traverse, Antrim, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Benzie and Manistee counties. The organization has grown from one truck to eight trucks, dozens of trailers, four semi-trucks, and 15 semi-trailers. These vehicles help them manage their recycling efforts, positioning them as the largest recycler in the state.

### Shopping to save

In addition to BARC's Traverse City recycling location, the nonprofit has a 10,000-square-foot recycling center in Kaleva that includes a 2,400-square-foot resale store employing 16-18 individuals. I was curious why Kaleva was chosen as its resale site. I learned the area was identified as having the greatest need. The site is also centrally located for its customers, who travel from as far south as Muskegon and make the trek from Leelanau County's northern reaches.

The Kaleva Resale Shop offers rotating monthly sales on a variety of goods — from apparel, jewelry, electronics and kitchenware to reclaimed sinks, windows and doors, to home goods, toys and brand-new items. Of note are box after box of new and used doodads and thinga-ma-jigs (hardware) that will delight contractors and do-it-yourselfers. Then there's the growing book corner, where long-forgotten copies of old titles sometimes lurk among the

newer releases. You never know what kind of treasures could be waiting for you to uncover.

The shop also offers affordable, eco-friendly alternatives for households and businesses that are planning events. Their compostable table and service wares are on display and available for order from the Kaleva location. Using biodegradable products is one way to reduce our ecological footprint.



### Reducing landfill waste

BARC accepts almost any household item, and if it can't be recycled in whole or part, the item is sent to other recyclers for further breakdown. BARC accepts number 1-7 plastics, ink cartridges, car and household batteries, appliances, televisions, mattresses, metal, wire, tires and more.

Annually, millions of pounds of e-waste (electrical or electronic items) are dumped into landfills. E-waste has toxins that take hundreds of years to break down, and they pollute our air, water and soil. BARC recycles electronics as well as items containing freon, such as refrigerators, air conditioners and freezers. When customers of certain utilities properly recycle these items, they receive rebates from Traverse City Light & Power and Cherryland Electric Cooperative. There is a minimal fee to recycle appliances with freon, but most people get double the cost back when claiming the rebates.

Each year, BARC deconstructs approximately six homes set for demolition and repurposes the materials to build affordable tiny homes. Approximately 80% of the tiny home square footage is created from one deconstructed home. Other materials are repurposed into flower boxes,



outdoor furniture and more; they are for sale at BARC's Kaleva location.

Recycling a mattress will save a 40-cubic-foot, gas-emitting pocket from landfills. In addition to accepting household mattresses, BARC provides bulk-mattress removal for hotels, hospitals, colleges/universities, nursing homes and assisted living communities across Michigan and much of the Midwest. Some mattresses are disassembled and repurposed for insulation in the tiny homes. Mattress springs have been sold in the resale shop as table notions for weddings and other events.

According to PIRG.org, Americans discard more than 1,000 pounds of food per person in one year, making it a significantly growing problem. One way to combat food waste is through the process of composting. BARC composts over 600,000 pounds of food waste each year. Though they have reached capacity, they are diligently working to increase their ability to collect and compost more organic material.

### Giving to charities

I had the opportunity to speak with Karla Smith-Kasten, recycling coordinator for BARC. She said she became involved with BARC after the Kaleva location had a fire about five years ago. Karla took food to the firefighters and met the owner while the cleaning crew was on site. Now, part of her work includes collaborating with Manistee, Wexford and Oceana counties for household hazardous waste collection and disposal. I asked her what she liked best about her job, and she quickly responded, "Just being able to meet the people in the community and being able to help."

She added, "People see things as garbage, and we see something different."

To help cover the cost of processing, BARC charges a small recycling fee for most items. For larger and less common items, an additional fee may be incurred. There is a nominal cost for scheduled pick-ups, more for those 30 miles beyond their Traverse City facility.



All donations and purchases help BARC expand its recycling services and positively impact our environment through the concept of "reduce, reuse, recycle." Through responsible waste management and the creation of environmentally conscious compostables, BARC can reinvest 100% of its profits in donations to local nonprofits and charities. On average, more than \$20,000 worth of in-kind goods and services — including compostables, waste services and fundraising events — are donated each year. No other local organization focuses exclusively on recycling, supplying compostables to local businesses, and hosting low-to-no-cost, zero-waste special events.

BARC Kaleva alone supports and donates to approximately 15-20 local charities. Karla spoke about the multitude of ways they donate. They provide children's books to the Maple Grove Township Community Center and the Lions Club, to hospitals and children's events. They donate clothes

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Grip N Rip Disc Golf “greeters” Lincoln (left) and Luna enjoy some rubs from Moffitt during a break.

## Grip N Rip

continued from Page 1

outside the area. Centrally located among 12 courses found in the county, and within miles of 38 courses, the shop is growing its customer base ... and garnering attention. Grip N Rip will be featured in a Wisconsin PBS television news segment about recreational features in Ludington and Mason County. The segment will air locally in April 2025.

### Evolution of disc throwing

Discus throwing dates to ancient Greece. Fast forward to the 1930s, when inventor Walter Morrison and his wife threw a popcorn lid back and forth for the fun of it. (Thanks, Wikipedia, for the fun trivia bits.) That turned into a round cake pan and eventually into a plastic disc called the Pluto Platter in the late 1950s.

The Wham-o company tagged the name “Frisbee” for flying discs in the mid-1960s, and from there all kinds of disc sports popped up, including disc golf.

Considered a sport since the 1980s, its popularity is said to have boomed during the pandemic, when people were looking for outdoor activities.

### A sport for all

Among all the styles and types of discs (from 37 brands) on the walls of Grip N Rip, there is one for all ages and abilities. For those starting out, Moffitt offered this advice.

“If a female is just beginning, a go-to disc is a Leviathan, and it’s from a brand called Divergent. (For) a lot of younger male beginners (with generally more power), I usually recommend Innova brand; it’s great for that.”

Discs typically run from about \$12 to \$20, depending on the grade of plastic.

“I really think ... it’s a sport that, no

matter your age or your skill level, you can play. You don’t have to be good to enjoy (it) and exercise, and have fun.

“Most of the courses have benches, so even if you can’t walk very far, you can still play, and then sit on a bench and take a breather before you go to the next hole. It’s great for kids ... and your parents; it’s more of a family sport.”

### Fun in all seasons

Disc golf is considered a year-round sport, and Grip N Rip hosts weekly leagues and charity tournaments throughout the year, as well as physical education periods at Ludington Middle School. There are also “putting” leagues planned in the Scottville Elementary School gymnasium this winter. Grip N Rip has branched out with a Cannabis Tournament near Mancelona.

“We do that every September,” Moffitt said. “This year was technically our first, and they had nine dispensaries that collaborated with me, and we had three that were on site with giveaways and swag bags and things ... That’s a lot of fun and I’m excited to keep growing (the event); it was a huge success (and) everybody had a blast.”

Whether you’re a beginner or an experienced disc thrower, Grip N Rip has a disc for you and advice about where to play. Be sure to say “hi” to Lincoln and Luna when you visit.

Contact the shop at (231) 425-3488, or email [gripnripdiscgolf@gmail.com](mailto:gripnripdiscgolf@gmail.com). Find the store online at: [gripnripdiscgolfludington.com](http://gripnripdiscgolfludington.com).

*Kevin Howell lives in Mason County. He loves the Michigan woods, lakes, people and, especially, Michigan craft beers – not necessarily in that order!*

## Getting through the lean months

By PAT STINSON, F.R. co-editor

Our final issue of the year is always a cause for worry and celebration. Worry, because we’re heading into the slower winter advertising months. In fact, there are just 14 ads in this issue, not nearly enough to cover our costs. Celebration, because our spirits are buoyed as we add holiday events to the calendar and edit stories with themes of giving. And, of course, we’re looking forward to a new year of bringing fresh stories to you.

As we plan our combined January/February and March/April issues, we want to hear from you. What interesting or important news in your community could be shared with our readers? Which types of stories would you like to read more of? Environmental? The arts? Area history? Astronomical events/space news? Book reviews? Local personalities? Essays? Poems? Please send us an email with your preferences: [editor@freshwater-reporter.com](mailto:editor@freshwater-reporter.com).

Our postage costs have increased and are expected to rise next year, too. A one-year

subscription to the Freshwater Reporter will cost \$36 in 2025. The good news is the number of issues next year will also rise, from 8 to 10. We’ve kept the rate as close to break-even as we can.

If you’re a business owner and you like the stories we share, please consider advertising with us. We print 3,500-4,000 copies, and at even two readers per issue, that’s 7,000-8,000 views in print, and more online with your free digital ad. Those signing up by Dec. 31 receive a discount.

Some of our readers send us \$5-\$250 donations each year. We are extremely grateful for each donation. If you haven’t donated previously, please consider a small monetary gift to help us through the leaner months. (Your donation is not tax deductible.)

Thank you for reading and supporting our efforts the last five years. We have met some wonderful people through the Freshwater Reporter and look forward to meeting many more. Happy holidays!

## Local band debuts first album

Compiled by staff

The Handstanders, a Manistee-County-based band, released their debut album “Move in That Direction” on November 8. The album is available digitally for \$8, which includes a high-quality download in various formats and unlimited streaming using the free Bandcamp app. Fans of vinyl can purchase a limited-edition, 12-inch record for \$25 through the group’s Bandcamp store.

The Handstanders are Trevor Hobbs on keyboard and drums, Yali Rivlin on saxophone, Casey Chinnock on vocals, Jamey Barnard on keyboard, drums and vocals and John Storms Rohm on keyboard and bass.

According to a statement on the band’s website, the album was recorded live last year in a mid-19th-century, Lake Michigan cottage. They used the best of three “takes” for each of the 11 tracks, some of which

include “stunning” improvisation and “minimal” overdubbing. Ryan Hobbs of Flip the Tape engineered, mixed and mastered the album.

The Handstanders, who describe their music as “soulful and melodic” and “jazz-infused,” have played around the area at Onekama’s Monday evening concert series, Pines of Arcadia in Arcadia, The Alluvion in Traverse City, Northern Natural Cider House and Winery (for Chief Day in Chief), Spirit of the Woods Folk Festival in Brethren and other venues.

To purchase the album, go to: <https://thehandstanders.bandcamp.com/>. To learn more about the band, go to: <https://www.thehandstanders.com/>. Follow them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/TheHandstanders/> and on Instagram @thehandstanders.

## BARC

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and household items to local families that experience loss due to fires. They prepare necessity boxes for the homeless, donate to the Angel Project that makes beds for children, and they work with the Big Bear Sportsman’s Club and Staircase Youth Services to provide bikes to children and to teens who need transportation for work.

### Sharing the message

BARC has a mission to inspire an environmental culture by educating people on the long-term value of recycling and making green choices simple and accessible to individuals and organizations throughout the region. Karla mentioned she provides presentations to teach others about recycling, and this fall she will be working with the local library to teach and encourage kids about recycling efforts.

If you’re interested in volunteering at



Bay Area Recycling for Charities, they are always looking for recycling enthusiasts to help with programs. When you volunteer, you support BARC’s goal to prevent potentially valuable and reclaimable materials from going to landfills and polluting the environment.

Visit the recycling center and resale shop at 14407 Industrial Dr. Resale store hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Recycling drop-off hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Call them at 231-492-6138. To learn more and shop online, visit BARC’s website at [mybarc.org](http://mybarc.org).

*Valerie Chandler lives in Wellston with her husband Matthew and their border collie/Australia shepherd. A citizen and employee of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, she is also a cancer survivor who loves to spend time with her family and has many interests.*



## FRESHWATER REPORTER

A fresh approach to storytelling in Manistee and Mason counties...and a bit beyond.

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