



Fresh community stories from Manistee, Mason, southern Benzie, western Lake and Wexford. Online at: freshwater-reporter.com.

Vol VIII, No. 1

JANUARY

ALWAYS FREE!

EVENTS CALENDAR & JANUARY BLOOD DRIVES ON PG 2.

MI BACKYARD

Nature is the best medicine for winter blues

By EMILY COOK

Weather-wise, January is notorious for being Michigan’s coldest and snowiest month. In recent years, it has also been highlighted as the cloudiest. Despite the gradual increase in technical sunlight hours after the winter solstice, the chances of us being lucky enough to spot that Glowing Eye in the sky are slim. In January 2024, for example, Traverse City had just a single cloudless day. (That’s still better than Muskegon, which reportedly didn’t see the sun until February. There wasn’t a single day with even partial sun.)

Living in northern Michigan, our experience of winter clouds is not surprising. However, the increasing lack of sunlight is an unfortunate trend related to climate change and warmer winters. As Lake Michigan freezes less, moisture accumulates and moves “downwind,” creating those heavy and gloomy January clouds. It’s another form of lake-effect weather. The more the Great Lakes freeze, the less that moisture can escape. Have you ever noticed the coldest winters often result in bluebird days (sunny and brilliant blue skies) inland? This straight-forward bit of science explains why winters are getting darker — and sometimes soggy, too.



Emily tries a fat-tire bike rental at Crystal Mountain. Photo: Joe Frederick.

The unfortunate reality for humans is that we need at least some sunlight to function our best. Michigan was ranked second in the country in 2024 for the number of people who were affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). We were behind only Alaska, where much of the state receives only a few hours of daylight in winter and a

portion of the state experiences polar night, or 24-hour darkness, for weeks. Sunlight provides Vitamin D, boosts serotonin and helps our circadian rhythm function properly. Endless clouds can undoubtedly lead to seasonal depression.

Though the odds seem stacked against us as Michiganders, we do have something

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NORTH SHORE DISPATCH

The debate about AI data centers in rural communities

By MARK BANASZAK and KATRINA STIERHOLZ

Our area is rural, and the people here prefer it that way. People like doing things themselves. You can see your neighbors out on the lakes getting fish for their freezers and hear them in the woods nearby, bucking up firewood. Neighbors hunt, fish, can and freeze, not only as a hobby but to fill their pantries and freezers. People take pride in their gardens and the neatly stacked order of their firewood. This feeling of accomplishment isn’t necessarily present during trips to the grocery store or when using electric heat.



St. Pierre hayfields. Photo: Mark Banaszak.

The famous forestry professor and naturalist, Aldo Leopold, once pointed out that if you’ve never worked in a garden or split firewood, you could easily have the mistaken impression that food comes from a store and heat from the furnace. To him, not knowing these things was a spiritual danger. His idea was that meaningful work keeps us aware of the hidden costs we take for granted.

Assessing the costs of work

Understanding the true cost of anything is challenging these days. So many things that were once difficult and time-consuming are now quick and easy. Once, cleaning your clothes took a whole day. Now, you can toss them in the machine and press start. Not long ago, a trip to the ocean was a life’s dream for a Midwesterner. Now, a flight to Florida can cost less than three trips to the

grocery store. Healthcare, financial management, communication, and even just getting the answer to any question, have all changed drastically and, in most ways, for the better.

We live longer, possess more, know more, collect more life experiences than ever in history, but it is not visibly apparent what costs are involved in these benefits. Since these costs are not easily seen, we may forget they even exist, but they do. The dirty water from our laundry goes somewhere. Flying from northern Michigan to Florida has an environmental cost that is cumulative for all of us, even if not visible when you look out the window of the airplane. These invisible costs extend to many technological advancements.

How the internet answers questions that require thought and research is a great example. Because of advances in computer analysis, you can easily get answers that

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Migrant sculpture. Courtesy photo.

Events to honor farm workers

By CYNTHIA ASIALA, volunteer member of the Arts and Culture Alliance of Manistee County and the Manistee Area Racial Justice and Diversity Initiative (MARJDI)

Two events — one in Wellston, the other in downtown Manistee — will honor and celebrate area farm workers this winter.

All are welcome to attend an annual Ice Breaker event hosted by the Arts and Culture Alliance of Manistee County at 5 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 31, at the Woods Events Center in Wellston. The center is located at 17345 6th St.

Included in the evening’s itinerary are a buffet of soups and a slideshow and poetry reading about the joys and angst of farming, presented by Z&N Farm’s Nicole Mezeske of Bear Lake. Attendees may bring an appetizer or dessert to share if they wish.

The following week, a free screening of a new film highlighting farmers and migrant workers, the backbone of our food chain, will be held at the downtown campus of West Shore Community College in Manistee. The film “Did You Guys Eat? ¿Ya comieron?” will be shown at 2 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 7, at 401 River St. (The film will also be screened in Frankfort on Jan. 24. See the calendar for details.)

Emmy-winning filmmaker Stephany Slaughter, an Alma College professor of World Languages and Cultures, will introduce the hour-long documentary. A question-and-answer period with the perspective of local farmers will follow. Hospitality hors d’oeuvres will be provided by Rice and Shine, a Thai restaurant located in Manistee.

Donations of money and canned goods will be accepted to benefit members of our community.

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Area Events Calendar

TELL THEM YOU SAW IT IN THE FRESHWATER REPORTER!

To be included in our February edition, submit your announcements by January 15. Be sure to include the address where the event takes place, for visiting readers. Email your events/press releases to: editor@freshwater-reporter.com. Email any time for our online calendar. Always check with the venue before attending as some event dates may change or be canceled. Despite our best efforts, errors may occur.

ONGOING EVENTS

Thru Jan 3
Annual Winter Member Art Exhibition, Frankfort
Free. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd.

Autumn Art Exhibition, Arcadia
Free. Arcadia Community Center, 3586 Glovers Lake Rd.

Thru Jan 31
Small is Beautiful Miniature Art Exhibition, Ludington
Free. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St.

Jan 9-31
Local Artist Exhibit, Ludington
Free. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St.

Jan 9-Feb 6
Spectrum Art Exhibition, Frankfort
Free. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd. Opening reception Jan. 9, 5-7pm.

Jan 9-Mar 13
Winter Art Exhibition, Arcadia
Free. Arcadia Community Center, 3586 Glovers Lake Rd. Opening reception Jan. 9, 5:30-7pm.

DAILY EVENTS

January 1
New Year's Resolution 5k, Ludington
11am-1pm. \$20 students, \$30 adults. 100 Ludington Ave. Info/registration: <https://runludington.com>

January 3
Spirit of the Woods Winter Hike, Bitely
10am. The hike will start at the Nichols Lake North Trailhead, southwest of the town of Bitely (which is south of Baldwin on US-37) on Cleveland Ave. Hike will go north on an out-and-back route in the Manistee National Forest. Parking is limited & unpaved. RSVP to hike coordinator, Loren Bach, call or text (231) 510-1963 or email spw@northcountrytrail.org. For more info, visit www.facebook.com/groups/spiritofthewoods

January 8
Feuding Founders: Collaboration & Conflict Between John Adams & Thomas Jefferson, Benzonia
4-5pm. Donations appreciated. Presented by Mike Nagle. Part of a monthly lecture series hosted by the Benzonia Area Historical Society and Museum. At Mills Community House, 891 Michigan Ave. benziemuseum.org

January 10
Metropolitan Opera Live/Encore in HD presents I PURITANI (Bellini), Manistee
12pm, \$15-25. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Tickets: ramsdelltheatre.org

January 10
Winter Trails Day, Thompsonville
1-3pm. Free. Winter Trails Day offers kids & adults the chance to try cross-country skiing. Clinic includes a lesson, day pass and rental equipment. Demos held at the top of each hour: 1, 2, & 3pm, approx. 15 minutes long. Cross Country Center, Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain. Registration required as space is limited. Call: 231.378.3110.

Lantern-Lit Snowshoeing, Cross-Country Skiing, or Hiking, Ludington
6-8pm. Free. Walk begins at the Warming Shelter and has approximately 1 mile of lighted trails. There are bonfires at both the Warming Shelter & the Amphitheater, along with free hot cocoa & marshmallow roasting at the Amphitheater. Ludington State Park, 8800 M-116. MI Recreation Passport required for vehicle entry.

January 10, 11
Michigan's Free Snowmobiling Weekend, Statewide
Residents and out-of-state visitors can ride, legally, more than 6,000 miles of DNR-designated snowmobile trails, public roads and public lands (where authorized) without a snowmobile registration or trail permit.

January 11
Emergency Fund Concert and Contra Dance, Benzonia
3-6pm. Donations appreciated to support the Mills Community House's emergency fund program that helps pay bills for residents going through a hard time. At Mills Community House, 891 Michigan Ave.

January 13
Bees Knees Book Club, Beulah
5-7pm. Laid-back no-pressure gathering of book lovers. No assigned books or schedules. Just good company & lively conversation about whatever you are reading or want to recommend. St. Ambrose Cellars, 841 S Pioneer Rd.

January 15
Cocoa, Cookies, and Community Service, Benzonia
5pm. Hosted by Girl Scouts of Michigan Shore to Shore. Open to all interested in the Girl Scouts. At Mills Community House, 891 Michigan Ave.

January 16
The Venue presents: Grunge Fest (Tributes to Alice in Chains & Stone Temple Pilots), Cadillac
7pm-11pm. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

Full Cord in Concert, Ludington
7:30pm. \$25 ADV, \$30 Door. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St. Tickets: ludingtonartscenter.org



CLASSES, EVENTS & EXHIBITS @ OLIVER ART CENTER:
“SPECTRUM” EXHIBITION
OPENING RECEPTION JANUARY 9TH @ 5PM
ON DISPLAY JANUARY 9 - FEBRUARY 6
FREE KIDS’ CRAFTS DROP-IN DAY
JOIN US FOR FUN CRAFT PROJECTS!
JANUARY 17, 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM
WINTER CLASSES AT OAC:
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HAND BUILT CERAMICS
DRAWING FUNDAMENTALS
EXPLORING PRINTMAKING
ACRYLICS & WATERCOLOR TECHNIQUES
MUSIC, ART, AND FUN ON THE SHORES OF BETSIE BAY
132 COAST GUARD RD, FRANKFORT - OLIVERART.ORG

January 17
Free Kids’ Crafts Drop-in Day, Frankfort
10:30am-12pm. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd.

Metropolitan Opera Live/Encore in HD presents ANDREA CHÉNIER (Giordano), Manistee
1pm, \$15-25. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Tickets: ramsdelltheatre.org

January 21
Conservation Easement Seminar, Ludington
Time TBD. Free. Learn options for protecting & preserving your land. Ludington Library, 217 E Ludington Ave. Contact Mason-Lake Conservation District for details.

January 22
Maureen Esther: HistoryTeller, Benzonia
Time TBD. Free. Maureen, a HistoryTeller for 30 years, enjoys bringing her love of art and history to the Benzonia Public Library, 891 Michigan Ave.

The Venue presents: Blackhawk, Cadillac
6pm-10pm. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

January 23
The Venue presents: That Arena Rock Show (70s & 80s rock), Cadillac
10am-9pm. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

January 24
Baldwin Dog Sled Derby, Baldwin
9am. Uptown Baldwin. A tradition since 1966. Family-friendly event with activities for kids, food & beverages, vendors.

2nd Annual Chili Bowl Showdown, Beulah
12-3pm. \$10. Vote for your favorite chili entries prepared by local cooks & businesses. Proceeds will support the Food Pantry in Honor. St. Ambrose Cellars, 841 S Pioneer Rd.

January 24
IPR presents a special screening of “Did You Guys Eat? ¿Ya comieron?”, Frankfort
4pm. Free. Stories of Michigan farms & the people who work them. Screening followed by Q&A with Director Stephany Slaughter. The Garden Theater, 301 Main St.

Lantern-Lit Snowshoeing, Cross-Country Skiing, or Hiking, Ludington
6-8pm. Free. Walk begins at the Warming Shelter and has approximately 1 mile of lighted trails. There are bonfires at both the Warming Shelter & the Amphitheater, along with free hot cocoa & marshmallow roasting at the Amphitheater. Ludington State Park, 8800 M-116. MI Recreation Passport required for vehicle entry.

January 29
Winter Grower Meeting, Scottville
9am-12pm. Free. Focus on regenerative agriculture. Valuable insights & opportunities to earn Restricted Use Pesticide credits for private & commercial applicators. Our Savior Lutheran Church, 765 US-10. Contact Mason-Lake Conservation District for registration.

January 31
BRRRewfest, Ludington
1-6pm. \$30 ADV, \$40 at the gate. 11th anniversary of the winter craft brew festival, Legacy Plaza, 102 W. Ludington Ave. 20 Michigan breweries. Beer, wine, mead, cider. Product sampling, live music, food & merch. Entry fee includes seven drink tokens & commemorative tasting glass. Tickets: <https://pureludington.com/events/pure-ludington-brrrewfest/>

Ice Breaker Soup Dinner, Wellston
5pm. Free. Supporters of area arts & culture are welcome. Slide show/poetry reading about the joys/angst of farming by Z & N Farm's Nicole Mezeske of Bear Lake. Buffet of soups made by board members. Attendees are encouraged to bring an appetizer or dessert to share. Hosted by the Arts & Culture Alliance at Woods Events Center, 17345 6th St.

JANUARY BLOOD DRIVES

January is National Blood Donor Month. Walk-ins are welcome, appointments preferred. To schedule an appointment go to this website & search by zip code or city: <https://tinyurl.com/mvatr9j5>.

5 Cadillac
11:30am-5:30pm. Lifehouse Assembly of God, 1120 W Division St.

6 Benzonia
9am-1:45pm . Benzie Central High School, 9222 Homestead Rd.

7 Brethren
9am-1:50pm. Brethren School, 4400 N High Bridge Rd.

8 Ludington
8am-12:45pm. Corewell Health Ludington Hospital Community Blood, 1 Atkinson Dr.

8 Manistee
12-5:30pm. Munson Healthcare, 1465 E Parkdale Ave.

12 Scottville
1:30-5:30pm. Mason County Reformed Church, 45 S Amber Rd.

13 Manistee
2-5:50pm. Trinity Lutheran Church, 420 Oak St.

13 Bear Lake
2-6:25pm. Bear Lake Community Church, 7861 Main St.

14 Ludington
1-5:20pm. St. Simon Parish, 702 E Bryant Rd.

15 Ludington
2-6:20pm. Ludington Bay Brewing Co., 515 S James St.

15 Beulah
9am-1:20pm. Benzie Transportation Authority, 14150 US-31

16 Manistee
10:30am-3:15pm. Manistee Intermediate School District, 772 E Parkdale Ave.



Farm workers

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The event is co-sponsored by the Manistee Area Racial Justice and Diversity Initiative (MARJDI) and West Shore Community College.

In 2016, the Arts and Culture Alliance of Manistee County placed a sculpture honoring migrant workers at Wee Bee Jammin’, north of Bear Lake. The sculpture, created by Dewey Blocksma, is meant to celebrate more than 80 years of migrant laborers harvesting the area’s crops — ranging from asparagus, strawberries, pickles and tomatoes to all manner of fruits.

“The MARJDI program thanks farm workers whose hands pick, lift, pack and carry the vegetables and fruits we enjoy,” reads a statement in the organization’s press announcement. “We honor their stories and seek with them the justice they so rightfully deserve.”

For more about the Manistee Arts and Culture Alliance, go to: <https://www.allartsmanistee.com>. For information about MARJDI, visit: <https://www.marjdi.org>.



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The ‘Good Things’ that count

Story and photos by JOSHUA ELIE



Taking my Big truck to work today. Photo: Patricia Elie

I had a blast this past year learning new things, meeting new people, seeing new places ... but what did I really accomplish?

More than 25 years ago I tested for my first builder’s license, and it was a breeze. Everything was still based on 1996 building practices and a lot of common sense. After doing some new construction projects, I found they didn’t interest me. What I really enjoyed was the challenge of home repairs. Around 2015, the state created a new code book and began requiring more (very expensive and time-consuming) certifications. Considering that I never had much use for the license, I decided to let it lapse.

A couple years ago, I started taking on some small handyman projects. They really took off, to the point that I realized I needed to get licensed again. Educating myself on all the newer building practices took up much of my year. There is nothing simple anymore about building law. Construction,

seemingly, has become less about building and more about trying to get paid for your work and avoiding taking on liability for fines and legal suits. None of these things are applicable to what I want to do as a simple handyman, though the license is required, nonetheless. I have found the whole experience quite fascinating and plan to take the actual exam eventually.

This year, I also found a new (to me) church that I enjoy. The people there gather to encourage one another and to do “good things” for others. That sort of environment seems difficult to find these days, and I am thankful to have found one so close to home.

Perhaps the most exciting part of my year was getting to visit five countries in Europe, to really mingle with the local people and learn their cultures. The experience was instructive in several ways.

We teach our kids to look both ways before crossing the street, but not where I was in Italy. I was standing in the city of Cannero Riviera, trying to figure out how to cross



Cannero Riviera, Italy. Photo: Joshua Elie

this busy street with alarmingly fast, two-way traffic. The street was so tightly packed that if the cars were to stop, they wouldn’t be able to open their doors. Amid this scene, a little kid walked up to the traffic, looked at me with a grin on his face, then looked directly ahead. He raised his arm in the air and then boldly walked into the traffic. All the cars came to an abrupt stop for him, and I quickly followed right behind. I guess this is just how you cross the street there.

Another big surprise: All European men pee sitting down if there is no urinal. I thought they were joking, but the way the bowls are shaped, if you don’t sit it all just splashes back out. No wonder the French think we are rude.

Looking ahead to a new year, I am forced to ponder that perhaps I should try to be more responsible, more task-focused, speed up my pace to get more accomplished and be more industrious ... Nah, I’m going to

Elie’s Quick Nacho Cheese Party Sauce

- 2Tbsp butter
- 2Tbsp flour
- 1 cup whole milk
- 6 oz. medium cheddar, shredded
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp chili powder
- diced jalapenos at your discretion

Heat the butter and flour in a pot, whisking until bubbly and foamy, and continue for about 60 seconds. Whisk in the milk and turn up the heat until the mixture simmers. Turn off the heat and slowly stir in your cheese. You may need to turn the heat back on, to a low setting, for all the cheese to melt. Careful not to burn your sauce. Stir in salt and chili powder (and jalapenos if you like) and whisk in more milk if too thick. This only makes a cup and a half, but the recipe can be doubled, tripled, quadrupled ...



have more fun this year than ever before! I’m going to go to more concerts, plays and parties. I’m going to travel more, experience new things that I never considered doing before, and most of all, take the time to interact with more people more often. I think what really matters most in this life is how your life impacts the lives of others. These are the “good things” that count.

Joshua Elie is a homesteader, a musician and the Irons’ area handyman. He is studying to obtain his second builder’s license.



Cheesy Nachos. Photo: Joshua Elie

The Old Mare

By SHANNON COURIER.
Photos courtesy of Shannon Courier.

The Old Mare stood in the warm sunshine, not knowing this would be her last day at the place she called home for so many years. Her sagging belly was a testament to the many beautiful foals she had brought into this world.

In the barn, a girl of 15 went about her daily chores. Her blond ponytail bounced with her every move. Her thoughts went to the Old Mare, whom she had cared for and loved for so long.

Sometime later, the teenaged girl went to the Old Mare in the paddock and slowly led her back to the barn. Painstakingly brushing her red gold coat, the girl made sure the mare’s mane and tail were smooth as silk. A few much-deserved treats later, the Old Mare was standing in her stall ... waiting.

The girl saw the truck and trailer first. She walked to the Old Mare’s stall with her mother and the new owners. Happiness was



in their eyes as her heart started breaking. She was strong; she could do this. She gave the Old Mare a hug goodbye, and that’s all it took. The Old Mare’s breath on her cheek was warm, her soft brown eyes saying everything would be all right.

The girl ran from the stall to her mother’s arms, tears running down her red face. She watched as the Old Mare was loaded onto the trailer, which slowly rolled down the road and out of sight. The Old Mare’s nickers could be heard as they disappeared. But there was good news. The new owners told her she could visit the Old Mare whenever she wanted. Her eyes brightened as she happily envisioned those future meetings.

This is the true story of my daughter many years ago and is dedicated to all the horse lovers (young and old) who have been through this experience.

Shannon Courier lives in Manistee County and works seasonally on a farm in Bear Lake. She enjoys Jeepin’ and paddling.

Beat the winter blues: 7 tips to stay sane

By ROSALIND JAFFE

There are two types of northern Michiganders: those who love Michigan winter and those who don't. The first group gleefully ski, ice-fish, snowshoe and hike their way through our lengthy winter. Those in the second camp don't necessarily hate winter; their attitude switches between ambivalence, dread and acceptance. For those who focus on gray skies, strenuous shoveling and penguin walks, here are some tips on staying sane for the next few months.

“There’s no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing.”
So true. Seriously committing to long underwear increases happiness. Amass a large choice of hats and gloves in various colors to cheer you up. Even indoors, think fuzzy, soft, furry, enveloping. Don't be embarrassed to overdress. You'll be unfashionable, but you will be warm.

Absorb as much light as possible.
Get outside daily and take a moment to observe the weather and scenery; don't doggedly march between vehicle and door with head down. Open curtains wide during the day. At night, close the house for maximum snugness, light candles and indoor party lights, use the fireplace and plug in that lava lamp. Reserve a few candles for the March power outages.

Indulge in seasonal activities.
Avoid selected hobbies and games the rest of the year, and in winter's depths go whole hog over jigsaw puzzles, board games, crafts and indoor projects. Deep dive into daily activities. Attack that huge novel you've owned for years. Cook the intimidating yet intriguing recipe. Practice

that tech trick everyone but you knows how to do. Accomplish something during your hibernation, even if it's only memorizing the Scrabble list of two-letter words.

At its best, winter glistens with ice and crystals, and you should too.
Display shiny things throughout your house — glass, silver and metal — so your home shimmers on a sunny day. Wear velvet, sequins and colorful clothes, big belt buckles, jewelry and baubles. Accessorize and experiment with bling. Keep that swinging holiday style until spring returns.

Let comfort be your byword.
Every chair, sofa and bed is a potential nest for pillows and throws. Condition your hair, apply a face mask, soak your feet in Epsom salts, get a massage, trim your beard. Create a home spa day. Make spiced tea, hot chocolate or warm adult beverages. Moisturize as if you live in the desert.

On rare occasions, relish the cold.
Go outdoors severely underdressed for 10 seconds. You will feel terrifically tough without committing yourself to any real time outdoors. Hang out in igloos at local restaurants. Sit by your coldest window with a soft blanket fresh from the dryer. Agree to sit at a fire pit but have an excuse to leave early, as they are never truly warm enough.

Reach out to loved ones, be kind to your neighbors and help each other survive, perhaps even thrive, in northern Michigan's winter.

Rosalind Jaffe is a retired bookseller and banker. A northern Michigander, she leaves her winter camp to the reader's imagination.

NEW BOOK RELEASES



Rescue the Good Stuff
(2nd edition)
The story of child Maddie's search for truth, told in prose poems.
“A tour de force that grabs you and will not let go.”
Shirley M.C. Johnson, Ph.D.,
Fulbright Professor of English



Be Yourself, Everyone Else is Taken
(2nd edition)
Expands on the original poetry collection with fresh, insightful verse.
“Her poems sing us back up the sheer cliff of hope.”
Claudia Schmidt,
Singer/songwriter, recording artist

from Freshwater Reporter's
Poet in Residence
Louisa Loveridge Gallas





**The Wizard's Dream:
A Universal Winter's Tale**
Eric Hoffer Award Finalist
A wizard's confusion causes despair until he finds his light.
“A magical holiday tale.”
Elfrieda Abbe, former The Writer publisher/editor

Available in Frankfort at Bella's Cafe, The Bookstore and the Oliver Arts Center gift shop. Also sold at MT Plate Diner in Arcadia.

Nature

continued from Page 1

working in our favor — incredible access to nature. Studies have shown getting outside for as little as 30 minutes a day, even with less direct sunlight exposure, can have a huge impact on our physical and mental well-being during the winter months. Additionally, exercise increases the body's “happy hormones,” aka endorphins, and is often a social outlet, too. You don't have to do an endurance event to make a difference. A walk in the woods or around your neighborhood will be just fine. If accessibility is a consideration, simply bundling up and being outdoors for a few moments while breathing deeply can reset your brain.

I encourage those who can to take advantage of the region's many trails, some of which are groomed, to combat any heaviness experienced from winter blues. No gear? No problem. Multiple local organizations provide either free or low-cost rentals. These are a handful of options, but do your own research, too. More and more, these opportunities are becoming available to the public.

Big M, Manistee County
Almost 20 miles of groomed trails for classic nordic skiing. There is a \$5 parking fee as it is part of the Manistee National Forest.

Non-motorized Trail, Manistee County
3.8 miles of groomed trails for classic and skate-skiing. Free.

Manistee National Golf & Resort, Manistee County
Over 2 miles of wooded trails and free snowshoe rentals.

MORE >



Taking advantage of the sun when it shines, Arcadia Marsh. Photo: Emily Cook



Embracing the beauty of a winter sunset, Manistee County. Photo: Emily Cook.



Ski tracks are set at Arcadia Dunes Nature Preserve. Photo: Emily Cook.

Ludington State Park, Mason County
About 4 miles of groomed trails for skiing. They offer periodic guided snowshoe hikes, as well, with “first come, first served” free rentals. A state park pass is required.

Mackenzie Cross Country Trail, Wexford County
Just into the next county and as part of Caberfae Peaks, these trails are free and consist of 10 groomed miles.

C.S. Mott Nature Preserve: Arcadia Dunes, Manistee and Benzie Counties
Many miles of backcountry skiing available, entirely free to use.

Crystal Mountain Resort, Benzie County
More fee-based, the resort offers groomed trails for nordic skiing and fat-tire biking. (Also ice skating!) All outdoor gear is available for rent. I tried the bikes out a few years ago and it was great fun.

Manistee Conservation District offers free snowshoe rentals for up to four days at a time. Visit their Bear Lake office during business hours, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., to borrow a pair.

Snowshoeing is available at almost all the above locations, too, but it's important to stay off any groomed ski trails. Hike alongside them to avoid disrupting the hard work of groomers, mostly local volunteers. May we all find a little sun this winter, and if not, at least some opportunities to explore the wonderful natural areas around us. It never hurts to take a Vitamin D supplement, too.

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 the Lake Michigan beach as much as possible.

Sharing Shack offers free items, creates a community network

By **PAT STINSON**. Photos courtesy of Gasoline ReFind.

Lynn Brown was excited when a shed appeared on her property more than a year ago, a birthday gift from her husband Scott. She didn’t plan to use it as a she-shed. Instead, Lynn turned it into what she calls a Sharing Shack, a way for others to “give” things to their neighbors.

The cute wooden building sits across the lot from the Gasoline Refind storefront she operates with Scott’s help. The little “shack” and their store are located west of Bear Lake, and the shack is stocked with free items community members bring to them.

“It is all community donations,” Lynn said. “I just provided the spot. It’s an ever-changing mix of stuff. And it gets a lot of visitors!”

Sharing Shack donation information is listed on the Gasoline Refind website (gasolinerefind.com) and simply states that items must be in “good, usable, clean condition.” The site lists the kinds of items that are acceptable, with some exceptions for larger items noted.

A short history of the Sharing Shack appears on the website. The idea of offering free items began in one corner of their retail store, with clothing available for anyone needing some. That grew to a free summer weekend event with clothes, then expanded to a tent filled with donated items, again offered for free to those wanting to keep or borrow one or more items.

“I had been using a large tent for the summer months, but (Scott) felt sorry for me always having to run and re-secure it when strong winds came through, usually at midnight,” Lynn explained. “My neighbors wouldn’t like me very much if it all ended up in their yard. He knows how much the giving means to me, so he made it possible for it to be available all year. I absolutely love it.”

The Sharing Shack has a lot of fun stories, according to Lynn, and the best one is the silverware story.

“It was July,” Lynn began. “Someone had literally just donated a set of silverware. A lady came and said, ‘Please tell me you have silverware! My daughter just increased the guest count on her engagement party (short notice), and I don’t want to use plastic or buy it.’ I told her, ‘Crazy enough, someone just brought a set.’ She asked, ‘Can I just borrow it and bring it back to you?’” Of course! The gal used it and brought it back, and immediately another woman showed up, saying, ‘So-and-so told me you have a set of silverware I could borrow?’ Of course! And she borrowed it and brought it back. It was now the beginning of August. A somewhat shy young man came in with his mother and Mom said, ‘He’s getting his first apartment at college with two other boys and he’s in charge of getting kitchen stuff.’ I asked, ‘How about a set of silverware?’

Lynn had another fun story she wanted to share, the one about the “big, old, red gym mat.” Lynn said when it appeared, she thought to herself, “Who the heck is gonna take that big thing?” She photographed it and posted it to the Gasoline Refind Facebook page. “We were really busy that day,” she recalled, “and it was when we were first starting the Sharing Shack, so most people still felt awkward about taking things for free.” She said a handful



of people were standing by the shack to look at the mat, but no one was taking it.

“This guy pulls in with a pickup, hops out, parts the sea of people, like Moses, grabs the mat, lifts it over his head (no small task), and says really loudly as he walks back to his truck, ‘FREE.99!’ and drops it in the back and drives away ... leaving everyone with their mouths hanging open.”

Other stories are simply heartwarming. A mom with a daughter who was going through some medical issues and reacting to shampoo and soap needed to find products she could use. “She was spending a fortune trying to find bathing products (for her daughter) that wouldn’t trigger a reaction,” Lynn said, adding, “That stuff is expensive!” She reached out to her network of community members, and they came through with “three big boxes of good

products for Mom to try.”

Lynn said as word about the shack has spread, some of the local clothing resale shops have sent people to them when they know someone needs help.

“I have one lady who clothes homeless people in the fall. That’s her superpower because she has access to (them). I have another lady who buys only kids’ coats, and I pass them out personally rather than leave them out.”

She remarked that 3-4 students from a nearby summer camp would visit the shack at a time.

“I think we clothed half the Little Eden Camp college girls working there this summer,” she said.

The Sharing Shack is always open. People who wish to donate are invited to visit the gasolinerefind.com website for a list of acceptable items and an explanation of how to donate. The shack is located at 5020 Potter Road, at the intersection of Potter and Erdman roads.

Words we love to avoid

Each January, Lake Superior State University publishes a list of banished words or phrases its wordsmiths have identified as misused, overused or annoying. Their annual list was first created in 1976. We asked our contributing writers to share their personal selections for words that annoy them. **Feel free to share your choice of irritating words when we post this story online.**

67
We need to talk about the 6-7 nonsense. What does it even mean? –*Valerie Chandler*

absolutely
A word used to stall before answering a question, whether the person has been asked to agree or not. –*Mark Videan*

actually
When used to begin a sentence, it reveals that the user thinks they know better. How aggravating is that? –*Pat Stinson*

adulthood
Adding an “ing” to the end of a noun does not make it a verb. –*Mark Videan*

blessed Also **blessed be**.
Ridiculously overused. The latter phrase makes me think of a cult or the chanting mutants in the movie, “The Omega Man,” starring Charleton Heston. –*Pat Stinson*

Baby Mamma
References the mother of a man’s biological child she is not married to. And **Baby Daddy** references the biological father of a child the woman is not married to. To me, it is far better to simply say the person’s name. –*Grace Grogan*

BOGO
Buy One, Get One. –*Mark Videan*

bruh
Term for a male friend. –*Valerie Chandler*

convo
A horrid abbreviation for conversation, a human exchange. –*Mark Videan*

creative
This is an adjective, not a noun, no matter how many creatives tell you otherwise. –*Mark Videan*

cringe
It’s embarrassing that the younger generations tend to use it so often. Do they even, like, try to, like, (use) any other terminology? (See “like.”) –*Valerie Chandler*

delish
A word popularized by food writers in glossy magazines trying to sound hip but is especially grating when they use “Delish dish.” –*Mark Videan*

FOMO
Fear Of Missing Out. –*Mark Videan*

gifted
Gifted is an adjective, not a verb. Precludes the use of the words “give,” “given” and “giving,” which we need more of. –*Pat Stinson*

holding space
One of our Newer Age terms for a safe environment where you can express yourself without judgment, except if you use the expression in these pages. –*Pat Stinson*

Hon or honey
As in, “What can I getcha, Hon?” drives me up a wall. Navigator Jean is the only one who can call me that, and even she doesn’t. –*Kevin Howell*

ICE
The average person doesn’t need to be “woke” to know how many times it’s been in the news. If I hear any more about ice, I want it to be in my drink. –*Valerie Chandler*

impactful
I don’t know when the dictionaries decided that this corruption of the noun “impact” and adjective/verb “impacted” had become a legitimate word. Its use is as painful to me as a wisdom tooth trying to shove aside its neighbors. –*Pat Stinson*

inspo
This abbreviated word does not inspire me. –*Mark Videan*

interesting
It simply doesn’t go far enough. Damned with faint praise. It’s like saying something has been noticed, but hardly noticeable. Unremarkable. Forgettable. Is it curious? Is it intriguing? Is it staggering? Is it evocative or provocative? Inspiring? If an event or restaurant menu or experience was merely “interesting,” it’s discountable. Unless, of course, whatever it was really was only just interesting and nothing more. But then, why would anyone choose to spend time even writing about it, let alone reading it? –*Gordon Berg*

like
Pay attention to how many times a Gen Z or Gen Alpha says “like” while communicating a thought; it’s literally a thousand times. No, not quite a thousand. (See “literally.”) –*Valerie Chandler*

like no other
As irritating as “truly unique.” –*Pat Stinson*

literally
... irritates me when used incorrectly because it’s almost always not literal. –*Valerie Chandler*

moving forward
When you mean “in the future,” say or write it. How many of us are moving backward? –*Pat Stinson*

Labubu As in blah-blah-blah. This is also a toy and fashion accessory. Let’s face it, these Chinese monster dolls are not cute but are a multi-million-dollar fad. Well played, China. –*Valerie Chandler*

passion
Also **passionate**. Their overuse has left me drained of emotion. –*Pat Stinson*

so
Used too frequently to begin a sentence that continues a thought. Also meant to convey emphasis, as in “Thank you so much,” because a simple “thank you” isn’t enough. –*Pat Stinson*

tariffs
At the top of my list. –*Valerie Chandler*

tasked
This is not a verb. –*Mark Videan*

That’s a non-starter
So dismissive, and it makes me think of bread dough not rising. –*Rosalind Jaffe*

unique
Please, people. Unique is one of a kind. There can be no others like it. Use it sparingly. –*Rosalind Jaffe*

y’all
This expression is charming when uttered by Southerners but has been widely adopted by others trying to sound folksy. –*Pat Stinson*

you know?
No, I don’t know. That’s why I asked. –*Kevin Howell*

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A conversation with a local author and poet

Illuminating the wondrous, lyrical path of Louisa Loveridge Gallas

Louisa Loveridge Gallas has been the poet in residence for the Freshwater Reporter since 2022, participated in residencies with Wisconsin Arts World, published and won awards in literary journals, created workshops, performed live in Michigan and Wisconsin, and joined in concerts on keyboard and back-up vocals with singer-songwriter Claudia Schmidt.

A retired therapist, Loveridge Gallas has been coming to Michigan for 30 years and in 2012 bought property to live in Arcadia with her husband, Richard, and beloved dog, Ella Rose. She admires Mary Oliver's vision for poets, indeed, for all of us. To watch, listen, be astonished and illuminate the sacred ordinary details of our lives. "To pay attention is a kind of prayer."

Loveridge Gallas' baseball poem, "A Hard Run," ends with her heartfelt intent that poems uplift: "These days we've got a pretty tough world, right? Just know, if I'm around...when I see you heading for Home I'll make sure the umpire flings his arms wide and cries SAFE."

You haven't always identified as a writer and poet, have you? You were a therapist. You've also been a jazz vocalist, and you enjoy painting. What inspired you to turn to poetry? Was it a secret obsession?

I began writing therapist-ish "books" around age 7, on napkins, as a solitary only child. I was trying to capture, in words, my mysterious family. I never stopped writing but soon added music, singing and piano gigs. I worked as a musician for my high school concerts and shows; then during early jobs I realized poems were an obsession as I wrote secretly under my desk. A published writer and frequent performer, I later trained to become the therapist who began with my napkin "books." But my passion/obsession continues to craft words, images, rhythms, for our lives. If a day goes by without some actual writing, I don't feel so well.



Mixed media paintings, "Peace of Mind" and "The Beet Goes On," by Loveridge Gallas, are currently displayed in the Oliver Art Center gallery, Frankfort. Photo: P. Stinson

You often touch on big themes – race, gender, environmental upheaval – in your poetry, but the message is sometimes conveyed in small ways, using a voice that's personal. How do you decide when to go big and use a scorched earth approach, as in your poem "Lament," and when to let the poem be, in your words, a witness or companion?

I must address the big issues we humans face and create; as E.B. White urged poets:

"To sound the alarm." No fear, no despair; silence is betrayal, hope is a verb, do the work. I stay true to a "scorched earth" approach, at times, following a mentor who wisely said: "Sometimes you just have to see one side and see it hard." Such poems, of course, take care of less people as they are steeped in "good trouble" that serves fewer people in polarized times. I'd say the poet is an observer and influencer, to call out the facts. Yet we now live where "alternative" facts have abolished common ground for our collective. I do seek a quick rapport in live readings, starting with universal, companionable poems, before I introduce some more hard-hitting ones. Never write to be loved. Only to be truthful to yourself, your values, to represent the hardship and grace of our world.

Your poetry sometimes shifts the reader's frame of reference from themselves, as humans, to animals or vegetables or fruit. I'm thinking of your "Belly Rubs" poem published in August, which suggests people could be more like a dog and just let life be, or "The Eggplant Protests," where your eggplant bristles at being called an "it." How does using humor or playfulness help you in your writing?

My dad — funny, charming, a storyteller — inspired me to bring wit to my work. I often start gigs with a wee joke: "Poet has 50 peak experiences before lunch! And survives." Gets a gentle laugh. Then I roll to: "When Ghandi was asked by a journalist, 'What do you think of Western civilization?' Ghandi responded, 'I'd be in favor of it.'" Hefty laugh from the audience. My final early lead is a poem, "Go," about environmental decline that starts, "Do you sometimes feel lonely or the world seems too rotten even for the compost heap?" Not funny, but universal enough to ease the audience into threats to our disintegrating environment too many people deny. The hour is late. I'm also mystified at the furor over pronoun choices, like they/them, that disturbs even those usually generous around people's identities. So, I approach the issue with an ode that features the eggplant's sadness at being an "it." Hopefully the poem's wit and craft carry the day. I'd love to be a "we," honoring us all as a collective. Gigs reveal again and again how folks love to laugh together. Yet I don't surrender to the temptation to be "entertaining" at the expense of disturbing or sorrowful content. I do want some poems simply to refresh, like the whiff of a good rose.



Louisa Loveridge Gallas in her beloved garden. Photo: Richard Gallas.

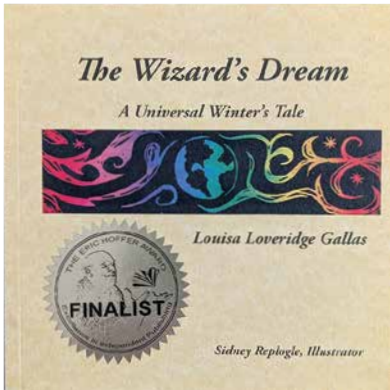
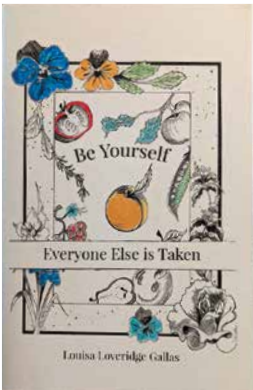
Speaking of vegetables and fruit, they appear frequently in your poems, as does gardening. What's up with that?

Gardening! Not only fun (also salvages a sedentary poet's body), but it also has so much tradition, science, history. I've written many "odes" to vegetables and fruit, since the form invites poets to address each "thing" as if forming a personal bond with the entire web of life, the vision taught to me by a Native American friend that all beings are alive. So, I say personally to the blueberry, "As we gather you/fresh, precious/ every single berry a sweetness/ in the midst/ of our world's furies."

How much has your experience as a therapist specializing in conflict resolution influenced your poetry? Do you feel a counselor's responsibility to take care of your readers and any characters we meet in your writing that might be based on real life?

I feel studying conflict resolution skills is the leading edge of human evolution. Many of my poems reflect on how major wars are mirrored in our "ordinary" conflicts we don't know how to address. As a therapist I witnessed how many unresolved issues come from folks' discomfort and inability to approach how to ease these tragic demolitions of friendships and family. May we get out there! Learn to negotiate uncomfortable situations and interactions!! As for the lives of real people I draw on, I'll quote a playwright who wrote "Burn This": "No one is safe around a writer." I have a large work in process that borrows with no

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permission from people still living. At the core we authors often have no boundaries. Anais Nin wrote a journal her husband or friends could see — and one in secret. But when the key people died, she let it all roll. Given my recent bout with cancer and turning the corner on 80, I must write the real deal now, let the chips fall where they may. I do not draw on others’ lives to harm, slander or reveal secrets. Only to create the full depth my story requires.

How has the content of your poems or writing changed as you’ve spent less time in the city and more time in Arcadia? Our move to Arcadia shifted my writing away from urban poems. My longer village walks inspire encounters that move into poems. Like in Arcadia, how, when folks pass on the road, everyone waves to each other, known or unknown. Sweet! Also, far more time to write, and heal, in Nature.

You wrote a poem about your objection to nicknames for male/female anatomy and read it aloud during a standing-room-only poetry reading in Onekama. It seemed a little naughty of you, maybe subversive, given your audience. What prompted you to include it? I like to be “naughty” with intent, like my take on slang for our bodies. May I never lose courage to trust the audience. I hope poets will disturb and push boundaries yet bring compassion, when compassion is due. It is not always thus. Attention and accountability must be paid; generosity is not always earned.

You like to write and rewrite in local coffee shops. People you know may stop to say hello. The noise level can be intense sometimes. How does being in a coffee shop get you into your writing groove? Do you compose at the keyboard, or do you prefer a pen and paper (and why)? Background noise or brief chats in a cafe rarely shake me off course. With the charm of a cappuccino and trusty muffin at my side, head down, I frantically write originals in a journal. At home, domesticity looms too easily as chronic distractions. I feel more connected to my imagination if I physically write with my trusty #2 yellow pencil. Only revisions on computer. Many writers haven’t the privilege or time to find a special space. Toni Morrison spoke wryly about how she had no “room of one’s own,” always had the kids with her. A holocaust survivor/writer made notes for a later book on soap fragments in the concentration camp. Poets: Let nothing stop you!!



Louisa at a 2019 Earth Poets Earth Day event in Milwaukee, Wisc. Photo: Dena Aronson.

Are ideas for your poems the result of internal meditations on a subject, or are they more often written spontaneously in reaction to external stimuli, such as the news or encountering a new situation or person? Any observation or “glimpse” is grist for the mill, certainly including the news. These times of struggle could inspire a turnip to respond. Here’s a favorite “glimpse” that ended up an image in a poem about “My Mother’s Lover’s 95th Birthday,” about my elderly mother’s late-in-life romance. As she sat side by side with her old love on a summer evening, I was reminded of two elder horses I’d seen leaning on each other, eyes closed, totally content, each other’s refuge.

Would you name a couple of poets or writers in general who inspire you/give you the most food for thought (and why)? Other writers/musicians. So many. Early on, the heartfelt “Charlotte’s Web,” by E.B. White, with its cross-species love story that often animates my vision. Michigan’s James (Jim) Harrison is my most recent inspiration — his no holds barred on the human and his own condition, his fierce dedication to poetry. He died writing his last poem. Like him, I need poets who endure, break boundaries to refresh me, teach me, uplift our collective spirit. Alice Walker, Annie Dillard, Bob Dylan, Tom Waits. Of course, Mary Oliver, who reaches us like a companion, lyrically, yet available. ALWAYS I look for craft, beyond only personal expression, however heartfelt. I consider any of these poets a success personally and commercially, earned as masterful universal wordsmiths. The young poet, Botony Newton Knudson,

whose poems you publish, and I admire, truly already walks the poet’s path with gifts for imagery and vision.

You’ve said many times that poetry is the least read and least appreciated of the various forms of writing. So, for our aspiring poets, on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), how much of an ego does a person need to be a poet? A 20. Any poet must have a strong sense of self, a center. Certainly, we writers form a supportive community that helps sustain us. I’d consider any poet who keeps on writing and never quits a spiritual success. First, the publishing world will give us many rejections. A poet friend with a national reputation has a rejection pile six feet tall. Secondly, we need a thick skin, an attitude; poets experience a lot of indifference, among even close friends or family. So many folks just have no impulse toward poems. Maybe early on in school the forced analysis line by line damaged their experience. Anyway, for sure, no harm, no foul. Also, once poets’ work is released to the world, how received, how interpreted, positive or negative, is at times far afield of our intent, truly a walk on the wild side.

What are you currently working on? I am finishing a novel, “Bitter Sweet Dues.” How my jazz influences and experiences of the ’70s weave into a multi-cultural blend of civil rights, feminism and Vietnam. What I find most unique to “Dues” is how the music “speaks,” joins the characters as a narrator/observer, helping us to reach an upbeat note amid struggle. And the theme of improvisation central to jazz goes beyond music, as an approach to survival, how our lives require the ability to create under pressure. Hmmm, we say. The usual strategies are breaking down. What to do?! *Just keep going. Pay your dues.* Some new melody, poem, answer to a prayer, or kindly pal, will arrive, in the midst of the rubble, right on time.

Books by Louisa Loveridge Gallas include: “Revelations on Longing Street” “The Wizard’s Dream” (Eric Hoffer Award Finalist), “Rescue the Good Stuff,” chapbooks “Low Life and Blood Relatives,” “Leak of Faith”, and a second, expanded edition of a recent collection dedicated to Freshwater Reporter, “Believe in Yourself: Everyone Else is Taken.” A novel, “Bitter Sweet Dues,” is in the pipeline for 2026. Her books are available in Frankfort at The Bookstore, Bella’s Cafe and Oliver Art Center; in Arcadia at MT Plate Diner; and also in other bookstores. Or email her: riverlakelou@gmail.com.



Photo: Ivan Kmit, Adobestock.

A Moment. So Simple, So Blessed
By Louisa Loveridge Gallas

In bedazzled snowfall,
two swans close together,
at ease in bitter cold
on Lake Arcadia.
Flash of white on dark waters.
I’m bundled, hidden in wool.
Dog’s black fur a bright cloak
of winter’s lace. We stop.
Gentle ripples follow
the swans’ graceful glide.
Enchanted by ordinary magic
I cannot move.
Cold reaches beneath my clothes
until I tremble. Am I in a dream?
I could stay here forever.
An ice sculpture of praise.
The swans, companions
in a frigid world, slowly lift
and settle their wings
so elegant as they swim.

Finally, the patient dog
pulls me away to go home,
where she warms her paws
while I seek to capture
in words delicate as memory
our simple, shared moment,
sacred,
a brief hymn.

Data centers

continued from Page 1

once required expertise based on a lifetime of experience. Want a complicated court case explained in simple English? Copy and paste it into ChapGPT. Need to learn more about whatever is chewing up the leaves of your plum trees? Ask Google. Artificial intelligence speeds up tedious thinking tasks, and it is an industry that is growing quickly. But like every other development of civilized life over the past few centuries, there is a cost you can't see when using AI.

Identifying the costs of AI

Human thinking about artificial intelligence goes back a long way in history. However, the first realization AI might someday successfully pass for a human dates to the 1950s and the Turing Test, which was designed to test for the ability to distinguish human from machine communication. Though there have been chatbots since the late 1960s, none consistently passed for a human until a study reported in Psychology Today (“AI beat the Turing Test by being a better human,” April 2, 2025). In this test, a UC San Diego research team gave ChatGPT-4.5 the socially awkward, slang-using persona of a young adult. It passed for a human 73% of the time.

Artificial intelligence is currently engineered, like social media, to make you feel good about using it. It flatters you about your questions and answers them clearly with helpful suggestions. But it is not without cost. When you use AI, you are effectively having a data center work for you. Data centers are large computing centers using special computer chips. These chips, called GPUs, use a lot of energy. According to Nvidia, their H100 GPUs use about 700 watts of power — about as much as a refrigerator.

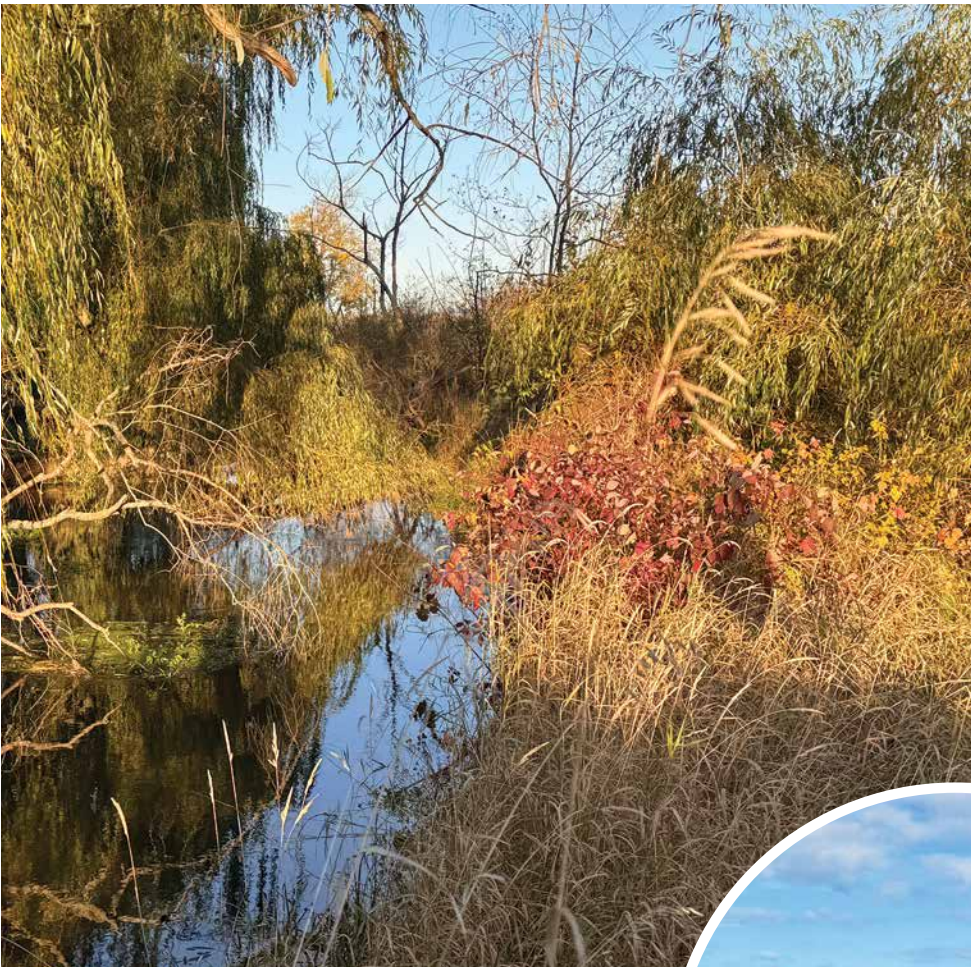
Because AI chips use so much energy to process information for us, they also create heat. This means that data centers must have specialized cooling to keep things from overheating. Currently, many centers use local, fresh water to cool, and the cooling is water intensive. According to a Washington Post article (“A bottle of water per email: the hidden environmental costs of using AI chatbots,” Sept. 18, 2024), having an AI chatbot produce a 100-word email uses the equivalent of a bottle of water. An AI monitoring website, Exploding Topics, reports that billions of people use it regularly and that usage continues to grow. That means energy use and cooling costs are also growing. These two characteristics of AI — high energy use and significant cooling costs (water use) — are being debated in public with greater frequency.

As a shared resource, electricity use and water use affect us all. Concerns have been raised about the water and energy use of data centers, which are the heart of ChatGPT and other AI tools. Energy is often supplied by a public utility, and water for residential, agricultural, industrial and commercial use often shares the same resource (groundwater and the surrounding lakes).

Understanding data center energy usage

For energy, power plants supply electricity for a particular region. In many states, the electric utility is regulated by the state and, in turn, has a monopoly on the provision of electric power through power lines. In northern Michigan, the October 2025 Michigan Public Service Commission Utility Rate Books (<https://tinyurl.com/bdkkm3eu>) compiled by Michigan's Regulated Energy Division, shows that Consumers Energy charges more than the state average for residential electric use in Michigan. So, our prices are relatively high and could increase with additional demand for electric power.

Large energy uses have the potential for a significant impact on the community. As an example, the Wall Street Journal reported in an Oct. 30 article, “Related to



Above: Willows over Bowens Creek. Photo: Mark Banaszak.
Right: Lake Michigan overlook. Photo: Deborah Besanson.

Build More-Than-\$7 Billion Data Center for Oracle, OpenAI's Stargate,” that a developer, Related Companies, proposed building the multi-billion-dollar data center campus for Oracle and OpenAI's Stargate project in Saline Township, Michigan (south of Ann Arbor). Michigan utility DTE Energy would supply all the power for the project. The Wall Street Journal described DTE as crucial to the project. A major hurdle facing data-center developers is lining up reliable electricity for energy-hungry AI infrastructure. Related's chief executive was quoted in the article saying, “We recognized early that tying up power was going to be a key to success.” This data center is designed to deliver more than one gigawatt of computing capacity. That is roughly equivalent to the electricity needed to power more than 750,000 homes.

Pushing back against data centers

Saline Township initially opposed the proposed data center, but the developer used the threat of litigation to get the town to the bargaining table. (Editor's note: As of Dec. 17, an article in Michigan Advance, “Saline Township data center faces potential funding snag,” quoted the Financial Times, stating that Oracle's largest data center partner, Blue Owl, is no longer supporting the project, to the tune of \$10 billion. In the same article, a Saline township resident reportedly has “filed a motion to intervene in the lawsuit” — the full motion is available online at: stopsalinedatacenter.org — because the township board held a closed session, violating the Open Meetings Act, in settling the developer's lawsuit.)

In November 2025, a Traverse City company proposed building a data center near Kalkaska on 1,440 acres of state forest land. Though there was some initial public support for the idea, public meetings in November had a heavy turnout, with many citizens there to express their concerns and opposition. Michele Hoitenga, the state senator for the 36th district, posted, “ ... for a multitude of reasons, I stand with the voices of the people in firm opposition of this project. I'm confident that our northern Michigan communities can attract businesses that not only bolster our local economies but also align more closely with our values, prioritizing the preservation of our land and way of life.” After two community meetings, the developer withdrew the project.

Should an AI data center come to northern Michigan, this level of energy demand would likely have an enormous impact on the energy costs and priorities in our area.

This could be a case where the data center's energy use would drive decision-making for Consumers or any other electric utility and increase prices for residents, not to mention any potential pollution generated by the power plant. This would then likely move considerations for residents and the environment down the list of priorities.

Missing data about water usage

Small water use in Michigan is covered by Michigan's riparian doctrine; more extensive water use is generally regulated by EGLE (the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy). Residential water use in rural Michigan is often obtained through individual well water systems; regulation begins when there are large withdrawals of water from lakes or groundwater, typically when the withdrawal is over 100,000 gallons a day. However, data centers can recycle water, limiting the need for major extraction.

Large water usage is a concern, but as it stands now, it is difficult to know the full extent of consumption. Data centers are not required to report water usage, so the impact is unclear. Some reports suggest their water usage is less than that of golf courses, and others that it is similar to a small city. Data centers provide the backbone for our computing uses; the local jobs they provide

are mainly short-term construction jobs, with few long-term positions relative to their size. Data centers are, after all, focused on automation.

Weighing the impact on communities

The issues surrounding AI data centers are more than the actual amounts of water and energy used. Residents are concerned about the economic and environmental trade-offs. The state of Michigan recently extended tax breaks for data center construction to 2065, according to the website aibusiness.com. These tax breaks are for construction with capital investments of more than \$250 million that provide a minimum of 30 permanent, in-state jobs. However, according to the public advocacy organization Alliance for the Great Lakes, proposed data centers are not required to disclose proposed water and energy use or conduct regional water demand studies or groundwater mapping. Effects like energy or water use may often be protected by non-disclosure agreements or have consequences not anticipated by citizens. Lacking important information like this, local communities like ours may find it difficult to determine what relative costs and benefits are.

One of the premier schools of public policy in the U.S., the Gerald R. Ford School at the University of Michigan, found that data centers have disturbing consequences for local communities. Electric utility rates often rise because infrastructure upgrades are necessary. The centers strain local resources and infrastructure. Finally, their economic benefits are suspect because they do not appear to create local, long-term, skilled jobs or provide increased tax revenue.

While one day we may choose to stop filling our freezers with food from the garden and heating our houses with firewood from our woodlots, we would like our children to still have those options. Our Gen Z nephew and informant said, in the conversation that sparked this article, “Mostly it's just a concern for me that places like the fields around our town could be taken up by a data center the size of several city blocks using an absurd amount of natural resources and power for college kids (using AI and) cheating on their essays.”

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FRESHWATER REPORTER

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