

EVENTS CALENDAR ON PAGE 2.

## Where, oh where, is the snowshoe hare?

By **PAT STINSON**

Decades ago, while cross-country skiing on a National Lakeshore trail in Leelanau County, I was startled by the movement of white on white. Drawing nearer, I could just make out the hind end of a large rabbit with big ears and feet before it leapt away from me and disappeared into a thick stand of evergreens. A snowshoe hare! I could feel that glow you get when you spot a species in the wild for the first time. I was hopeful I would see more that morning, but it was extremely cold, and the thought of veering off the trail to follow tracks in the deep snow seemed like a good way to get hypothermia. I envied the big bunny’s fur coat.

In winters since, I’ve looked in vain for the white coat of a snowshoe hare. We live in a clearing we rarely mow, next to a marsh with a fringe of conifers and fallen trees. Conifer needles, grasses and tender buds of “woody plants” comprise their diet. Our spot would seem to be perfect habitat for them. Instead, what I see out my window are eastern cottontail rabbits, lots of them, scrounging for seeds beneath our birdfeeders and calmly chewing on the bare branches of shrubbery poking above the snow. Our neighbor named one frequent visitor “Cyclops” because it had a single eye and ear, scars from a fight with its kin or a predator.

Michigan’s DNR tells us that eastern cottontails abound (as we know), especially in southern Michigan, but snowshoe hares are better suited to northern Michigan, where we experience more snowfall and have denser forests. The snowshoe hare changes from light brown to white in winter, much as the ermine or “white weasel” does. (Read



*Snowshoe Hare (Lepus americanus), white morph, Shirleys Bay, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, Jan. 13, 2013. Taken by D. Gordon E. Robertson, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

“The hidden life of ermine,” by Jennifer Devine, Freshwater Reporter, January 2023.) Their breeding season stretches from March to September, and they can produce 2-4 litters a year. Despite this, their numbers have dwindled 50% in the last decade or more, according to a Michigan State University study conducted in 2014. Part of this is due to warmer winters with less snow, leading to greater predation by foxes, coyotes, owls and hawks.

I asked Josh Shields, the Manistee Conservation District’s wildlife biologist and the county’s tree expert, if he had ever spied one. He replied via email:

“...During my more than 11 years here meeting with private landowners, I have seen both eastern cottontails and snowshoe hares, but I see far more eastern cottontails. This is partly due to the nature of fragmented

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*Quilt by Patricia Innis. Courtesy photo.*

## Community quilt projects seek participants

From announcements

Quilting has historically created communities, bringing women together for quilting bees during which they discussed their trials, triumphs and the politics of the day.

Two quilt projects, one in Baldwin, the other in Thompsonville, intend to bring community members together, each in their own way. The goal of both projects is to create a larger work from quilt squares created by participants.

In Baldwin, the Lake County Historical Society is celebrating America’s birthday this year with a “Grand 250th Community Quilt Project.” Each participating quilter will design a quilt square that symbolizes what the country’s historical milestone means to them. Participants are asked to submit a 10-inch quilt block in red, white and blue fabrics between now and May 15. The blocks will be assembled and quilted by volunteers of the Lake County Historical Museum in Baldwin. The completed lap quilt or quilts will be raffled at a Nov. 11 museum program as a fundraiser for its exhibits and programs. Raffle tickets will be sold from June 1 until Nov. 11. For detailed quilting instructions, contact Chris or Jill at the museum: (231) 898-6500.

In Thompsonville, the Michigan Legacy Art Park is using a quilt theme for its 2026 community project, called “Quilts!” Each year, the art park asks members of groups and classrooms, as well as individuals, to create a piece related to a theme usually chosen by the art park. The individual pieces become part of a larger work to be installed at the park, located at Crystal Mountain resort. This year, participants are encouraged to

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*Saint Valentine. Zatlatic / AdobeStock.*

## Martyrs, fertility, and Greek mythology: the strange history of St. Valentine’s Day

By **GRACE GROGAN**

The origins of what is now celebrated as a day of love are the result of a strange history that combines religion, pagan beliefs and Greek mythology. How did the holiday of love get its name? For that, we can thank the Catholic Church and three different saints named Valentine, all martyrs.

### Christian beginnings

The first Saint Valentine was a priest in Rome during the third century. Emperor Claudius II (Claudius the Cruel) outlawed young men marrying due to his belief that single men made better soldiers than those who were married and had families. Priest Valentine thought this was unjust and violated the law by performing marriages in secret. When Claudius learned of his actions, he ordered Valentine put to death by beating him with clubs and having his head cut off. The execution took place on February 14, in the year 270 A.D. (“St. Valentine beheaded,” History.org, updated May 28, 2025.) While he was in jail, Valentine fell in love with the jailer’s daughter, and left her a farewell note signed “From Your Valentine,” the phrase we use today.

The second is Saint Valentine of Terni, a bishop found guilty of urging young men to convert to Christianity. This was illegal under Roman law, where Christians were persecuted and prohibited from proselytizing. Valentine was found guilty and was secretly decapitated along the Via Flaminia near Rome, likely in 347 A.D. (“Terni’s St. Valentine, Vivi Terni,”

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Area Events Calendar

TELL THEM YOU SAW IT IN THE FRESHWATER REPORTER!

To be included in our March edition, submit your announcements by February 12. Be sure to include the address where the event takes place, for visiting readers. Email your events/press releases to: [editor@freshwater-reporter.com](mailto: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 Feb 6**  
**Spectrum Art Exhibition, Frankfort**  
Free. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd.

**Thru Feb 13**  
**Andrew Jagniecki: Wild Impressions, Frankfort**  
Free. Features linocut, woodcut & intaglio prints. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd.

**Thru Mar 13**  
**Winter Art Exhibition, Arcadia**  
Free. Arcadia Community Center, 3586 Glovers Lake Rd.

**Feb 1-27**  
**Art is Love, Actually; Manistee**  
Free. A show of artwork by local community members. In the Hardy Hall at Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Opening reception Feb. 1, 12-3pm.

**Feb 6-28**  
**Art Reprize Exhibition, Ludington**  
Free. A collection of artworks from Artprize 2025. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St. Opening reception Feb. 6, 4-7pm.

**Echoes of Control ~ Narc Series, Ludington**  
Free. Artworks by Richelle Daniels that explore the experiences of victims of narcissistic abuse. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St. Opening reception Feb. 6, 4-7pm.

**Feb 13-Mar 6**  
**Student Art Exhibition 2026, Frankfort**  
Free. Hundreds of works by talented students in grades K-12 from regional schools, in a wide variety of media. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd. Opening reception Feb. 13, 5-7pm.

**Feb 20-Mar 28**  
**Image Makers: The Art of Illustration, Frankfort**  
Free. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd.

DAILY EVENTS

**February 5**  
**Tree Planting Presentation, Manistee**  
3-5pm. Learn which trees/shrubs are best for your specific site conditions, site preparation, planting techniques, handling seedlings & the importance of native species. Presented by Manistee Conservation District & Plant It Wild. Classrooms A & B, WSCC Manistee campus, 400 River St. Registration required by Feb. 2 at [manisteecd2.org/events](https://manisteecd2.org/events)

**February 6**  
**Near & Farr Friends, Onekama**  
11am. Game Day with Dawn. Onekama Township Hall, 5435 Main St.

**February 6, 7**  
**Kendell Marvel in concert, Cadillac**  
8:30pm. \$20. Coyote Crossing Resort, 8593 S 13 Rd. Tickets: [coyotecrossingresort.com](https://coyotecrossingresort.com)

**February 6-8**  
**Midwest Kite Jam, Cadillac**  
Premier snowkiting weekend in the Midwest on frozen Lake Cadillac or Lake Mitchell, depending on conditions. Info: [midwestsnowkitejam.com](https://midwestsnowkitejam.com)

**February 7**  
**MUSH Sweetwater Challenge Sled Dog Race , Baldwin**  
Various times & events. Amateur in nature, emphasizing fun & family participation. Stearns Siding parking area, W. Wingleton Rd. at Stearns Rd. Info/register: <https://tinyurl.com/mtrr3kd9>

**Benefit Breakfast Buffet, Arcadia**  
9-11am. \$12 suggested donations will go towards replacing the ACC's water tank. Buffet will include: scrambled eggs, pancakes with maple syrup and/ or fruit sauce & whipped cream, sausage, ham, mini quiche & muffins, coffee, tea, OJ, water. Arcadia Community Center, 3586 Glovers Lake Rd.

**February 7**  
**Spirit of the Woods Annual Chili Feed & Winter Hike/Ski/Snowshoe, Wellston**  
10am hike. Chili & hot chocolate around 12pm at the heated trail shelter. \$5 day use fee or use the federal annual Forest Pass, Interagency Pass or Interagency Senior Pass. Please bring a potluck

side dish to pass. Big M Cross Country Ski Trails on Udell Hills Rd., east of Manistee. Meet where the trail crosses Madison Rd., at the corner of Madison & Skocelas Rds. Park on Madison Rd. Carpooling encouraged. RSVP to hike coordinator, Loren Bach, call or text 231.510.1963 or email [spw@northcountrytrail.org](mailto:spw@northcountrytrail.org). Info: [www.facebook.com/groups/spiritofthewoods](https://www.facebook.com/groups/spiritofthewoods)

**Chocolate Pairing Event, Kaleva**  
12-4pm. \$20. Grocer's Daughter Chocolates of Empire will pair chocolates with a flight of 4 hard ciders or wines. Chocolates & drinks to take home will be available for sale. Northern Natural Cider House & Winery, 7220 Chief Rd.

**Screening of the film Did You Guys Eat? ¿Ya comieron?, Manistee**  
2pm. Free. Stories of Michigan farms & the people who work them. Downtown campus of West Shore Community College, 401 River St.

**Ski & Sip, Thompsonville**  
4-6pm. \$25. Women's Nordic Skiing Clinic. Learn new skills, connect with other women, & enjoy a fun-filled afternoon on the cross-country ski trails. Certified Nordic Coach Beth Major will guide beginners through the essential techniques & fundamentals, & experienced skiers will benefit from valuable tips. The afternoon wraps up with beverages around a cozy campfire. Ages 21+ only. Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr. Held at the Cross Country Center, located on Mountain Center Rd. Info/register: 231.378.3110 or <https://tinyurl.com/53ha8fma>

**Lantern-Lit Snowshoeing, Cross-Country Skiing, or Hiking, Ludington**  
6-8pm. Free. Hike 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.

**Gopherwood Concerts present: Mary Sue Wilkinson & Mark Schrock, Cadillac**  
7-9pm. \$12.24-22.94. Cadillac Elks Lodge, 122 S Mitchell St. Info/tickets: [gopherwoodconcerts.org](https://gopherwoodconcerts.org)

**Sisters of Soul concert featuring Jenni Rae of Barefoot, Frankfort**  
7:30pm. \$25. A live tribute to Ella Fitzgerald and Etta James. Experience an evening of soulful vocals, swinging jazz, and blues classics. The Garden Theater, 301 Main St. Tickets: [garden theater.org](https://garden theater.org)

**February 8**  
**SOUPer Ski Sunday, Thompsonville**  
11am-1pm. \$25. Arrive no later than 10:45am if rental skis are needed. Spend time on the cross-country trails learning new skills and connecting with friends. No experience necessary! Certified Nordic Coach Beth Major will guide beginners through the essential techniques & fundamentals, & experienced skiers will benefit from valuable tips. Session wraps up with chili, soup, & warm beverages around a campfire. This event also serves as a can drive for Benzie Area Christian Neighbors (BACN). Donate up to 3 non-perishable cans of food to receive \$5 vouchers (one/can) redeemable for future cross-country tickets, rentals, or cross-country retail purchases. Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr. Reserve a spot & pay: 231.378.3110

**February 10**  
**Bees Knees Book Club, Beulah**  
5-7pm. Free. 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.

**February 11**  
**Community Conversation on Housing, Benzonía**  
5:30pm. Annual event led by the Housing Trust of Benzie County. Mills Community House, 891 Michigan Ave.

**Annual Meeting Open House & Board of Directors Election, Manistee**  
5:30-7:30pm. Free. Meet Manistee Conservation District staff, browse info tables, get 2025 annual MCD report, take a survey to help future planning, participate in an all-ages nature activity, vote for board members (county residents only) & learn about a new cost-share program for landowners



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presented by the Michigan Forest Association. Snacks, drinks & prizes. Wagoner Community Center, 260 St. Mary S. Pkwy.

**February 12**  
**The History of Crystal Highlands, Benzonía**  
4pm. Free/donations accepted. Presented by Anne Rogers of the Benzie Area Historical Society. Mills Community House, 891 Traverse Ave.

**Fire from the Gods: The Human Tour in concert wsg For the Fallen Dreams, Cadillac**  
7-10:50pm. \$20. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: [thevenueeccadillac.com](https://thevenueeccadillac.com)

**February 13**  
**Near & Farr Friends, Onekama**  
11am. TBD. Onekama Township Hall, 5435 Main St.

**Candlelight Concert, Manistee**  
6:30pm. \$25/person, \$40/couple. Cocktail hour in Hardy Hall followed by solo guitar concert featuring classical guitarist/composer Mathew Cochran in the Theatre performing his own compositions. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Tickets: [ramsdelltheatre.org](https://ramsdelltheatre.org)

**Valentine Contra/Square Dance, Benzonía**  
6:30-9:30pm. Suggested donation \$10-20. First ½ hour is a dance workshop. No partner or experience necessary. If you prefer not to dance, come for the live music & socializing. Proceeds benefit the Benzie Area Emergency Fund. The Mills Community House, 891 Michigan Ave. Info: 231.651.0370

**February 14**  
**12th Annual Betsie Bay Frozen 5k, Frankfort & Elberta**  
10am. \$37. Runners' package pick-up at Frankfort American Legion Post 221, 206 Main St. on Feb.13, 4-6pm & again on race day 1 ½ hours before the race. All participants receive a lightweight hoodie & finisher's medal. Awards given to top place overall & top 3 in each of 15 age categories. Proceeds from the race will benefit the Benzie Area Youth Initiative. Info/register: <https://bit.ly/3PvcFu4>

**Guided Snowshoe Hike of the Michigan Legacy Art Park, Thompsonville**  
1-2:30pm. \$10 adults, \$5 kids. Free for Crystal Mountain houseguests. Tour payment will be collected at the Art Park trailhead. Reservations are not required. Snowshoe rental \$15/hour/pair of snowshoes. At the Cross-Country Center. Rent for 2 hours to ensure enough time for the tour. Available on a first-come, first-served basis. Snowshoes should be rented at least 15 minutes prior to hike start time. Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr.

**February 14-15**  
**Michigan Free Fishing Weekend, Statewide**  
All fishing licenses waived in Michigan during this weekend. Regulations still apply. A Recreation Passport will NOT be required for entry into state parks & boating access sites during Free Fishing Weekends.

**February 19**  
**Annual Dinner & Board of Directors Election, Scottville**  
5-8pm. Free/donations accepted. Celebrate conservation success stories from the past year. Open House 5-6pm, staff will have table displays to share programs & services available & answer any conservation questions. Board of Director elections & raffles also during this time. Dinner at 6pm, catered by Pere Marquette Bistro and Catering. After dinner, a presentation will showcase 2025 projects & those planned for 2026. Conservation Awards will be presented to community members; election & raffle winners will be announced.

Registration by Feb. 13 required for dinner: <https://tinyurl.com/y2yn2snx>

**February 20**  
**Near & Farr Friends, Onekama**  
11am. Invasive species expert. Onekama Township Hall, 5435 Main St.

**February 21**  
**Ski & Sip, Thompsonville**  
4-6pm. \$25. Women's Nordic Skiing Clinic. Learn new skills, connect with other women, & enjoy a fun-filled afternoon on the cross-country ski trails. Certified Nordic Coach Beth Major will guide beginners through the essential techniques & fundamentals, & experienced skiers will benefit from valuable tips. The afternoon wraps up with beverages around a cozy campfire. Ages 21+ only. Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr. Held at the Cross Country Center, located on Mountain Center Rd. Info/register: 231-378-3110 or <https://tinyurl.com/53ha8fma>

**Community Poetry Gathering, Bear Lake**  
4-6pm. Free. Featuring local female poets, including Nicole Mezeske of Z&N Farm. Motel Bear Lake, 12273 West St. Story on page 8.

**Lantern-Lit Snowshoeing, Cross-Country Skiing, or Hiking, Ludington**  
6-8pm. Free. Hike 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.

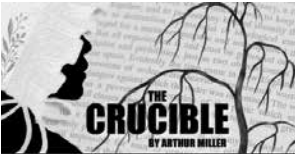
**February 22**  
**Ecstatic Dance, Benzonía**  
10am-Noon. Led by Northern Michigan Ecstatic Dance. Mills Community House, 891 Michigan Ave.

**February 27**  
**Near & Farr Friends, Onekama**  
11am. Lunch & Aging Well Forum. Onekama Township Hall, 5435 Main St.

**Tikis in the Snow, Manistee**  
7:30pm. \$25. Leave the cold behind and escape to the tropics for a winter luau. The ballroom will be transformed with tiki torches, swaying palms, and warm island ambiance. Enjoy delicious treats, tropical cocktails from the cash bar & high-energy Polynesian dance performances. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Tickets: [ramsdelltheatre.org](https://ramsdelltheatre.org)

**February 28**  
**Old 'Brose Begonia Ice Bowl Disc Golf Tournament & Chili Bowl Showdown, Beulah**  
10:30am players meeting, 11am tee off. 12-3pm chili bowl showdown. \$25/disc golf. \$10/chili showdown. Info/register: QR code in ad on page 7.

**Brown Town Skyline Rags, Manistee**  
7-10pm. Free. A full crew of Northern Michigan's best singers and instrumentalists interpreting the songs of Bob Dylan. Brown Township Hall, 8233 Coates Hwy.



**Arthur Miller's The Crucible, Scottville**  
7:30pm. \$20-25. Center Stage Theater at West Shore Community College, 3000 N Stiles Rd. Tickets: [www.westshore.edu/performing-arts/](https://www.westshore.edu/performing-arts/)



Winterberry grows along a lakeshore. Photo: Shannon Courier.



# Winterberry: an eyeful of cheer this time of year

By MARK VIDEAN

As I drive around northern Michigan in the winter, I love seeing the brilliant scarlet of the winterberry. I first spotted them in late fall near Escanaba in the Upper Peninsula. I can't recall seeing them as a kid here in the Lower Peninsula. If I had, I would surely remember because their incredibly bright color smacks you in the head in an otherwise dull wintry landscape. Like cardinals, the tightly clustered berries are easily spotted against the background of gray tree trunks, green conifers and white, snowy ground.

A species of holly native to eastern North America, the winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) is found in the United States and southeast Canada, ranging from Minnesota and Ontario to as far east as Newfoundland, and south to Alabama. In various locations, winterberry has also been called black alder, Canada holly, coralberry, fever bush, Michigan holly or winterberry holly.

Growing 3-15 feet tall and 3-12 feet wide, winterberry is a slow-growing,

woody tree or shrub which grows best in moist, acidic soil with good drainage. In this environment, it will multiply to form a dense thicket. In drier areas, it will remain a compact shrub. Winterberry grows well in full sun and partial or deep shade, tolerates heat and drought, and resists salt, fire and deer foraging. I see them most often along roadsides, especially where it's wet or swampy, along ponds or the edges of upland forests where the water table approaches the surface. Sometimes they can be seen atop a dune or in patches in the woods.

Winterberry is deciduous, losing its leaves after they turn yellow. This makes the berries highly visible in late fall and throughout winter. It is also dioecious, like most hollies, with separate male and female plants. Berries are produced on the female plants only if there is a male plant within 50 feet or so.

Winterberry plants are available from nurseries for home planting and are low maintenance. The flowers provide a food

source for butterflies, bees and other pollinators. The berries are a welcome resource, eaten by small mammals and over 48 species of birds in the winter months. Native Americans are said to have used the plant for medicinal purposes (hence the name fever bush), but all parts of the plant, including the berries, are toxic to humans and pets if eaten.

A couple of acres of winterberry bushes can be seen in Manistee County along US-31, six tenths of a mile north of Maidens Rd., on the east side of the highway, across from the First Baptist Church of Bear Lake. I've also seen them in many wet places along backroads in Mason County.

As you travel around this winter, keep a watchful eye out for these intense red beauties. Their numbers gradually diminish as they are eaten and we head into spring.

*Mark Videan is a visual artist and a co-editor of the Freshwater Reporter.*



Photo courtesy of Seeing Double Dog Sled Racing, Alaska.

## Sunny Side of Heaven

By Shannon Courier

The sky is ablaze with orange, red and yellow.  
The forest ahead towers dark in the foreground.  
The smell of pine fills your lungs and overwhelms your senses.

Fresh snow covers the land, the quiet whispers at your ears.  
As the sun rises higher, it lights up the site before you.

Ten dogs line out in perfect formation, harnesses of red and blue mixed with heavy winter fur. Their breath can be seen in the cold winter air.

Quickly you weave down the trail, the runners of the sled making muted swishing sounds as you glide along. Snow-covered shrubs and trees race by you.

The crisp air takes your breath away as the team pulls you toward the ever-lightening forest. The rising sun reflects off the snow like a billion crystals.

The sky turns bright blue, The coats of the dogs show their true colors. Black, brown, white and gray melding together. Moving as one.

Above you a Bald Eagle soars in the morning sky. A herd of deer just along the tree line far in the distance. Blue Jays squawk at your passing.

The Sunny Side of Heaven is here.

# Rabbit in LOVE

Story and photo by ROSALIND JAFFE

Velveteen Rabbit enjoys a comfortable life for a stuffed animal. It has survived decades longer than its wild cousins in our yard. Longer than other stuffed animals I've lost or abandoned along the way — the plump grey armadillo purchased at a Texas bookstore, the sweet brown mole my sister bought me in England, the red hippo from a Bela Fleck concert. This Rabbit barely shows its age, with only minor wear despite the many hugs it has endured. Its whiskers are a bit disheveled, but that doesn't diminish the dignity and solemnity of manner it shares with the title character of the "Velveteen Rabbit" storybook.

Years ago, when I was a sales representative traveling by car and airplane, Rabbit accompanied me on the road, a comforting presence. At home it had an honored and visible spot in the bedroom. Nowadays, Velveteen Rabbit is serious about its current responsibility, which consists of holding the closet door in its proper place. A quiet life, a simple life, a sufficient life.

Or so I thought, but, surprisingly, Rabbit has fallen in love. It was always aware of love, being a worldly rabbit, but love was irrelevant. As irrelevant as clothing or food or the internet is to a stuffed animal. Rabbit feels confused and a bit foolish by this new development, but it also glows with contentment. If Rabbit is happy, I'm happy, though I too am befuddled by the change.



Several months ago, I purchased a pair of Minnetonka slippers, tan suede with exuberant white fur lining, perfect for cold-weather comfort. The furry slippers are cute but somewhat dim-witted, the golden retrievers of footwear. When not in use, they loaf by Rabbit's closet door, staring up at Rabbit with blind adoration. Rabbit loves the right slipper and tolerates the left one. The left slipper is too dumb to notice it's not included in this tale of romance. The right slipper is delighted and pouts if it's far from its beloved for long.

Being inanimate, there's no hanky-panky, or honestly, any activity at all between the Velveteen Rabbit and the right slipper.

Their love is pure and platonic.

After these many years, why would the Velveteen Rabbit find love? Because we all need love. My silly, vivid imagination has given my little friend this new, special relationship, reflecting my wish for us to treasure another. Connection with another, whether it's human, natural or inanimate, is our highest calling. Even if you don't agree with this philosophy, be happy for Rabbit & Slipper, and cherish your loves, new or old, friend or lover.

*Rosalind Jaffe is a retired bookseller and banker. She writes from northern Michigan.*

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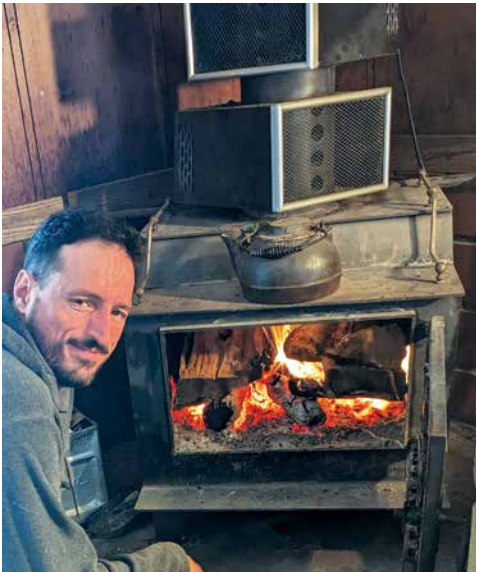
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# Makin' wood

By JOSHUA ELIE

I love heating with wood. The excitement of felling trees, the natural endorphin rush that comes from the physical challenge of cutting and splitting, the relaxing, even therapeutic, dry heat emanating from my fire box ... I love all of it. I've been heating with wood nearly my entire life and getting a little better at it each year. My usual plan of waiting until there is snow on the ground before getting started was not a good idea this year as the snow cover began on Thanksgiving Day 2025 instead of February 2026.

Waiting is usually helpful in many ways. Cold temperatures make it much more enjoyable for accomplishing such physically demanding tasks, and it is much easier to keep your "chain out of the dirt" (dulling your saw chain), by having a layer of snow between the tree and the ground. You may have read in my story "Draggin' Tree" (Freshwater Reporter, Nov./Dec. 2024) how much I enjoy dragging lengths of trees



Enjoying my fire. Photo: Patricia Elie

through the snow. Unfortunately, a couple of years ago (and after nearly two decades of problem-free service), my poor little \$500 pickup truck just couldn't take it anymore, and the transmission went out. It needed new tires, anyway, and that would have cost

## THE SAUCE BOSS



more than I paid for the truck in the first place. In a pinch, I hooked a pickup-bed-sized trailer to my little garden tractor, and it worked surprisingly well. Though I could never move lengths of trees this way, the ability to maneuver through tighter spaces isn't that bad of a trade-off.

Mid-November, I was bouncing back and forth between bringing in firewood and picking up leaves, depending on the weather. It had been a few days without rain, so I started my outdoor workday by hooking my lawn sweeper to the tractor. After sweeping a few hundred yards, I looked back and noticed it wasn't picking up any leaves. On further inspection, I found the axle on the lawn sweeper had broken in the middle. I tried to braze the axle back together, but all I ended up doing was melting the brushes. Still, having a half day left to play, I installed a two-inch ball (trailer hitch) and headed out to get my trailer — already stacked more than full of firewood. The transmission on the 40-year-old tractor had been slipping more the past few years. After it was attached to the trailer, it decided to give up entirely.

Walking home (not my favorite pastime), I had to laugh, thinking to myself, "Can this day get any better?" I should have known that it wouldn't. I drove to Wrigley's Pharmacy (Dublin Store) to pick up my meds, and they were backordered due to supplier changes. I was also informed that my insurance wouldn't cover one of them. To top it off, on the way home I checked the mail and found a jury-duty summons.

A few days later, a friend of mine set me up with another lawn sweeper I could fix and a lawn tractor with a blown engine. I was able to swap my tractor's engine into the tractor I was given, just in time for the snow to roar in like a lion — and stick.

For at least 50 years, the county has plowed

celebrating the new book,  
Heart Soil, by Nicole Mezeske

Saturday, Feb 21: 4-6pm

COMMUNITY Poetry Gathering

hosted at  
Motel Bear Lake

Readings by  
Nicole Mezeske Louisa Loveridge Gallas  
Shannon Courier Ramona DeGeorgio-Venegas

In Collaboration with  
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My trusty wood wagon. Photo: Joshua Elie

my little "dead-end" road all the way to the end, though about eight years ago or so they stopped and started turning around at the edge of my property. To this day, I still don't know if they are going to plow it all or not.

This year they were not, which was good. I didn't have to shovel where the plow truck turned around because they backed into my property and pushed the snow out, clearing about 50 yards. I only had to shovel foot-deep snow for another 50 yards to reach the trailer. Otherwise, it would have been 100 yards to the trailer if the county had plowed the whole road. Even with the shoveling and the extra foot of snow on top of a nearly overflowing load of wood, I still managed to get it backed into my shed.

With all the challenges our winters present, it is still my favorite season. In the middle of February, I'll sit relaxed in front of my firebox, a glass of merlot in one hand and a plate of my homemade dark chocolate fudge in the other, and that's when I'll start to think that maybe it's about time I take our Christmas tree down.

Joshua Elie is a musician and homesteader and is the Irons' area handyman. He is working on obtaining his second Michigan builder's license.

## Elie's Simple Chocolate Fudge

- 1 cup chips (milk chocolate, dark chocolate, white chocolate ...)
- 1 14-oz can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 tsp vanilla, vodka or amaretto
- Parchment paper-lined baking pan

Combine all ingredients and melt in double boiler on medium heat (preferred), stirring regularly, or microwave at intervals, stirring regularly. Once melted and smooth, transfer immediately to lined pan to cool. (Refrigerate to speed up the process.) Lift out of pan using edges of paper, cut and serve.

Notes: If you get tired of the smell and flavor of vanilla, a good polish vodka makes a great substitute in any recipe. Amaretto (since it's almond based) mixed with the chocolate is a match made in heaven.



Chocolate fudge. Photo: Joshua Elie

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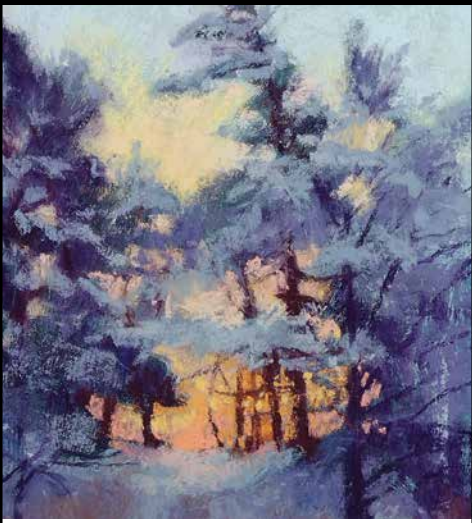
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## A Hometown Delight

By Louisa Loveridge Gallas

I trudge through drifts, my breath  
white wisps in the chilly air,  
toward our village lighthouse,  
bright beacon in winter’s gloom,  
Matt and Tracy’s MT Plate Diner.

A bitter wind at my back  
I arrive, sit, huddled in a corner,  
radiant quilts, photos, paintings  
by our community’s artists delight  
spacious walls to become a gallery.  
Outside the generous windows,  
M22 is serene,  
while the grey sky  
is miserable, shabby  
as a stray alley cat.

Not me! So sheltered  
I feel like soft dough  
on a radiator, rising  
to become fresh warm bread.  
The yeast kindles my imagination  
as a poem settles in.

The brightly lit diner  
glows with companionship,  
friends, old and new, stop by  
red-faced, cheery hellos.  
Kindly servers and cooks  
bring the menu to life.  
Split Pea soup today,  
heart-warming chili  
and Patty Opdyke’s  
renowned peanut butter pie,  
proving dessert’s *true* purpose.  
As we take the first smooth bite,  
these tough sunless days, tragedies  
and dilemmas, the wearying hardship  
to heal our broken world, all vanish!

A lovely amnesia takes over.  
With ooohs and ahhs, we slowly  
savor the lacing of dark chocolate  
over soft pudding within a tender crust,  
our only experience a sensation of bliss.  
This precious interlude, brief rescue  
from too much shadow:

O yes!  
Embrace life’s sweetness  
as it flies by.

Come on in  
to the MT Plate Diner!

A refuge  
within winter’s grasp  
and the world’s bite.

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### NORTH SHORE DISPATCH

## Snow blankets the garden

By MARK BANASZAK

Some people use the phrase “dead of winter” to describe the time after winter solstice, the year’s shortest day. Even though days after the solstice have begun to grow longer, and the energy from the sun is increasing, there is a lag between the shortest days and the coldest. According to weather scientists, this seasonal lag is caused by the effect that large bodies of water, like Lake Michigan, have on temperature and weather. Despite the increase in solar energy, large bodies of water slow this effect by releasing trapped warmth slowly. This means that January and February are our coldest months even with increased sunlight.

Though the landscape looks lifeless, plants and animals are not dead. Winter is an opportunity for recharging the land. Plants and some animals are dormant or hibernating. Trees have lost all their leaves, but roots are storing water and nutrients for springing to life in a few months. Animals reduce their physical activity. And some birds and insects have migrated, waiting for the time when the foods they eat are available. All will return with vigor when the sun’s energy allows.

This cold and moisture from the lake helps to give us plenty of snow in the winter. Snow cover has many benefits. Most important is that snow provides great insulation. It keeps things from getting too cold because, like down jackets and winter quilts, it is 90% trapped air. Air conducts heat poorly, so snow keeps the warmth of the soil trapped.

This insulation has benefits for the health of your garden soil.

Snow keeps seeds and existing plants from freezing (and sometimes being eaten), leading to new growth the next spring.

Insulating snow cover also reduces the chance of frost heave, which can damage small trees, shrubs and other perennial plants. One important benefit is that it insulates roots that grow close to the surface, keeping them from freeze damage. Without that insulating layer of snow, freezing soil can cause root damage, injuring the plant. Shallow-rooted plants like garlic, strawberries and asparagus are sensitive to this, and a good blanket of snow can prevent it when there is no other cover. Even sugar maple trees benefit from snow cover, according to the University of Wisconsin Extension. If their roots are protected, it leads to stronger growth when spring returns.

A layer of snow slows erosion. Snow covering bare soil prevents wind erosion. Good snow cover also acts as a water barrier, keeping heavy rain from saturating the ground too quickly and carrying away soil.

The gradual release of water from snowmelt soaks the soil deeply, recharging groundwater.

Since falling snow (like rain) collects small amounts of nitrogen and trace elements from the atmosphere and deposits them on soil, it has been known as poor man’s



Dry Hill Trail. Photo: Mark Banaszak

fertilizer. And, as there is less water runoff with snow, more of these nutrients are absorbed by the soil, getting it ready for spring.

Cold weather can also be helpful in reducing pest numbers. Certain insects and fungi find it difficult to survive long cold spells, so a good, cold winter can be helpful in that way. Unfortunately, the cold is often not sufficient to wipe out some pests, like emerald ash borer, which can survive even extremely cold winters when they are protected by bark and snow drifts.

In fact, the space beneath the snow cover becomes its own little world. Many things survive under snow cover. Voles and other small animals build networks of tunnels at ground level under the snow, where they live and forage. This is important for their predators — like foxes, weasels and owls — whose pounce holes you can sometimes find in snow-covered fields.

Winter isn’t dead; it’s just life concealed, biding its time until sunlight and warmth allow things to spring back to visible life.

Thanks to the Institute for Environmental Research and Education for some of the above information. Read more about critters under the snow in “Squirrels and spring peepers and other tales of surviving Michigan’s winter,” by Emily Cook, Freshwater Reporter, Nov. 20, 2024.

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



Hunting for field mice. Photo: Katrina Stierholz.



Blue ribbons in trees outside the North Lake Detention Center near Baldwin show support of detainees inside.



Witnessing at the North Lake facility on a cold snowy day.

# Peacefully witnessing at North Lake Detention: a personal perspective

Story and photos by **KEVIN HOWELL**

Sometimes you just have to stand up and join what feels like a righteous cause.

This is one of those, the re-opening of the former Baldwin prison run by the GEO Group, Inc. as an immigrant detention center. The former North Lake Correctional Facility is now called the North Lake Processing Center. On its website, GEO states it is “committed to providing leading, evidence-based rehabilitation programs to individuals while in-custody and post-release into the community.”

What I view as aggressive tactics employed by ICE agents in removing immigrants from our cities — the recent killing of U.S. citizen Renee Good in Minneapolis, the reported death of at least one detainee at North Lake, and tackling first and checking citizenship later of people on the streets — is inhumane behavior in a supposed civil society, and it’s just wrong.

Soon after the center opened last summer, a stalwart group of folks began bearing witness on Saturdays to the comings and goings at North Lake in support of the center’s detainees. The number of persons gathering to witness outside the center or along M-37, at the corner of West 32nd St. leading to North Lake, has ranged from a couple to 30 or more. Some of them are well into their senior years, others are in their 20s and 30s or younger. Members of the group come from around the state: Petoskey, Traverse City, Midland, Saginaw, Flint, Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids, Luther, Branch and Baldwin.

We have joined these folks on several occasions.

We carry signs denouncing the actions

of ICE, we have noisemakers to attract attention to our concerns, and we talk to visitors lucky enough, after driving for hours, to see their detained family members. No, we are not paid, unless you count the donuts, cookies and hot chocolate some folks bring us as legitimate currency.

The center’s visitors share their stories with us when they realize we are there to support them, that we don’t “hate” them as some have been told.

The weekly gathering outside the gates of North Lake was originally organized by Witness Baldwin, a local group supporting immigrants which is opposed to the detention center. Standing and chatting in a group one Saturday, a member of Witness told the story of two women whose husbands have been detained since October.

“We talk to the visitors as they come out, and they tell us their story. We had two women that stopped (and talked to us). Their husbands are in here, and (when) they came out, they had tears in their eyes. They said, ‘What are you guys doing here?’ and we told them we were here for the prisoners. They said they thought all America hated them. So, we came out here to let them know we are here for them. We hand out information.”

Another Witness organizer noted, “The two women, their husbands both have PhDs at U of M, they had work visas, they worked for the government. They’re down in Ann Arbor.”

When some detainees are released, they are simply shown the door and left to wonder where in the heck they are, and they must find their own way back home. An effort is underway to have backpacks

with some supplies ready for them and to offer assistance in getting rides or accommodations.

I’m not naming names of the group that gathers here because some folks don’t appreciate our efforts. We’ve seen cars rev their engines to roar past us. They wave their middle-finger flag or throw out obscenities as they pass. When one of us tries to talk with them, they stop, back up and turn their anti-immigrant rant on us. We could see one SUV pause a block away, rev up the RPMs and roar by us. That one then revved back up and slid as close to some of us as they could on the snowy road.

A few weeks back we heard about Nenko Gantchev, 56, who died Dec. 15 at North Lake. According to a story by ABC7 Chicago, “ICE has previously said Gantchev’s death is ‘suspected to be from natural causes and ‘the official cause of death is still under investigation.’”

No one from the federal government has answered the family’s questions about what happened. Gantchev was a diabetic. The news team talked with a relative. She told them, “There was no accommodation for his (type 2) diabetes, the fact that he needed any kind of special diet, he was not feeling well, progressively.

“(North Lake staff) told him he needed an echocardiogram, at least a month went by up to the point that he died, that he did not get that, it never happened.”

Other reports and rumors have circulated about sub-standard conditions, poor food and lack of health care. This is why we are there, to bring attention to it.

Detainees are from outside the area

— Minnesota, Chicago, Cleveland and elsewhere — and their visitors travel those distances to see them for half an hour or so, if lucky. Some come all that way to be turned aside for infractions as minor as wearing sweatpants.

As far as I have been able to discover, there is no accurate count of the numbers of detainees held at North Lake, a privately operated (GEO) facility and one of two main detention centers in the country.

I contacted No Detention Centers in Michigan, a statewide coalition organizing to abolish immigration detention and migrant incarceration in Michigan. In response to my question about detainee numbers, “JR” from the group said, “The exact number of people detained at a facility like this is the kind of detail that ICE makes it very difficult to obtain. But we know that since the facility reopened last June, it has quickly filled up. For the last several months, we think the population has been hovering around 1,400. The official capacity is closer to 1,800, but ICE may be maintaining that lower number to allow for continuing transfers in and out.”

And, despite the insistence of ICE and Homeland Security that they are only going after the worst of immigrant criminals, JR also said, “Of those arrested by ICE in Michigan last year, nearly three-quarters did not have criminal convictions.”

At the risk of repeating myself, this is inhumane and cruel and is aimed at people who look or speak differently than those in charge. So, we will be back at North Lake again and again, until something changes for the good.

## Another Witness account at North Lake Detention

By **JEAN HOWELL**

I am a bleeding-heart liberal with a long history of working with the least of us — infants, toddlers, children and people with disabilities of all ages. I like to think of myself as nonjudgmental, usually.

These are not usual times.

When I heard that Homeland Security contracted with GEO (a private provider of services for detention facilities) to reopen the prison near Baldwin, I took notice. When I heard a group of citizens had decided to stand witness at the facility, I was interested in joining them. So, one Saturday, I did.

It’s a small group but dedicated and hearty! No matter the weather, a group is present on Saturdays, witnessing who comes into the parking lot and who comes out. Saturdays also happen to be family visitor day. Sometimes families stop to speak with us. Some need reassurance that

we are not protesting against the detainees. They appreciate the reassurance that we are protesting the lack of due process that sent their loved ones there.

Sometimes clergy come out and thank the group for the good work they are doing.

Some visitors described the difficulties they have in gaining entrance to see their family members. Visitation is behind glass barriers. After driving for hours, they learn they can’t visit if their wardrobe is considered unacceptable. In those cases, the protesters offer advice on where people can go to acquire “proper” attire.

Some people wait for hours and are turned away because visiting hours end before they come up on the waitlist. Those people ask about overnight accommodations nearby. Baldwin and Lake County don’t have a lot of choices to offer these people, though the

protest group does what it can by offering snacks and beverages, with suggestions and directions.

Everybody that stops thanks the group for protesting. Many visitors are seen weeping as they leave and do not stop to chat at all. It’s heartbreaking when children are in the car.

Sometimes GEO staff come out to tell us not to trespass past the tree line next to the parking lot. Staff are generally polite. Traffic is extremely light on the prison road. There isn’t much else out there worth driving to in mid-winter. Sometimes staff come and go at apparent shift changes. The protest group generally waves and tells them to have a good day. Some wave back. Some try to pretend we aren’t there. One staff person said she doesn’t like the job, but she does like the paycheck. People in the

Saturday group tell us only 10 percent of the GEO employees live in Lake County. They also tell us that GEO pays no local property taxes. I haven’t verified either statement.

Nowadays the group has moved further from the facility to the intersection of the prison road and Highway 37. This somewhat limits any interaction the group may have with the visitors. The presence of a small group of peaceful protesters is enough for GEO to deny visitation to people who made whatever effort it took to travel hundreds of miles to see their loved ones. Protesters had to give way. I recognize this common technique of finding a way to punish all who resist, as if we fell into a dystopian novel.

I do get judgy when some people work at making other people suffer.

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# Community quilt

continued from Page 1

work in collaborative groups. Each person will create a quilt square using 4-inch squares of wood that they lacquer for protection from the elements. Each group or classroom may choose an abstract patterned or colored theme or design each square to create a larger image when assembled, such as a self-portrait.

“We challenge participants to adapt styles of traditional quilting techniques (embroidery, applique, patchwork, etc.) and to reimagine them using different mediums (paint, ink, cyanotype, collage, etc.),” organizers stated in their website announcement of the project.

To participate, email Lindsay Greer, director of programs and public engagement, at: [lindsay@michlegacyartpark.org](mailto:lindsay@michlegacyartpark.org).

Quilt by Patricia Innis. Courtesy photo.

# Michigan tribes voice concerns about ICE

*Editor's note: This submission was written by someone who wishes to remain anonymous to safeguard their family, friends and other tribal members.*

Whether you are on social media, watching television, reading the newspaper, listening to the radio or chatting with friends, it's likely you are hearing about U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and recent actions taking place across America. While I have disagreed with the actions taken by ICE, I've also thought, "There's nothing to worry about because that's all in the big cities." Well, it has become a reality much closer to home, much quicker than I ever imagined. I am proudly part Native American, and though I do not have the customary dark skin or black hair like many of my friends and family, I have been mistaken for a race other than Caucasian.

Just last week, the chair of the Bay Mills Indian Community in the Upper Peninsula published a statement that their community had tribal citizens detained by ICE. Since then, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe and Grand Traverse Bay Band have issued notices to their citizens, making them aware of the arrival of ICE agents locally. While no American-born citizen should have to fear being arrested or detained, the thought of having to prove birthright citizenship is insane, especially if the only "crime" is being born from a historically American race that archaeologists have determined arrived on

the continent between 12,000 and 20,000 years ago, and possibly earlier.

I am concerned about my fellow Native people and the thought of any of them being separated from their families, especially their children who likely do not understand the current world circumstances in which we're living. Single parents, a family with a newborn, newlyweds, elderly with critical medical issues, students pursuing higher education, individuals that just started a new job or just moved into a home after being on a waitlist for two years — every single one of their lives could be thrown into jeopardy by one interaction with an ICE agent. I carry my state driver's license and tribal identification card "just in case."

Like myself, many of my friends and family and other tribal members I know are accustomed to wearing some type of jewelry, clothing or hairstyle reflective of our Native heritage as part of our everyday presence. It has become a topic of conversation if we should change our appearance or tone it down from our norm. While our appearance may make us a target due to racial profiling, I do not intend to change my ways. I understand the necessity of actions taken by others who feel differently, and all I can hope for right now is understanding and peace.

## LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

*(Letters are edited for clarity and to meet our space requirements.)*

### Overlooked in the AI debate

Another great edition ... I enjoyed the articles. Joshua is fun to follow. The Old Mare made me tear up. The sharing shack is awesome. Can't wait to check it out. The words we love ..... not. Made me LOL. Louisa is inspiring.

Of interest was the AI center debate. I am serving on a citizen committee for the township zoning rewrite. This is something

that will need to be addressed and added. We have been reading up on it. One thing that is not mentioned in the article is the incredible noise. The ones in the U.P. that slipped into areas that aren't zoned are causing neighbors to move.

— Christine Stapleton, Honor  
*(Full disclosure: The writer is a Freshwater Reporter advertiser and friend.)*

### Use your brain

I find the need to comment on the well-written article by Mark Banaszak and Katrina Stierholz concerning data centers and their impact on rural communities. The story thoroughly analyzed the environmental costs and economic impacts. However, the most important aspect of artificial intelligence was not examined.

The use of artificial intelligence to make useful computations at astronomical rates ... is a boon to certain aspects of engineering, medicine and mathematics. Issues of accuracy in these fields aside, the casual use of AI provides quick answers to questions, acting as the world's most efficient encyclopedia. It allows people to formulate emails and reports of all kinds and navigate their way from place to place. The problem is that many of these activities are basic functions of the human brain. When we outsource these tasks to AI, we are no longer using our minds to analyze, weigh options and consider the practicality of the outcomes. Brains that are not exercised, like any body part, atrophy. An example of this is what is known as "dumbing down." Take the example of cashiers who can no longer make change without the use of a computerized cash register, or the rapid decline of students' performances on standardized tests.

The habitual use of AI is resulting in the erosion of basic life skills. I have personally witnessed someone reading AI directions to a business ... when within clear sight of a large sign (which) indicated the location of the destination. Up to this point in time, people would have used much simpler navigation aids such as eyes and maps, remember those? Satellite navigation has its place ... but total reliance has led to

some dangerous situations when the GPS has made errors. Accuracy in directing our routes is generally very good. But when it is not and people have abandoned their own best judgement, disasters have occurred, such as driving into bodies of water, turning the wrong way on one-way streets, even turning onto railroad tracks.

Satellite navigation has much greater accuracy than the large language models so many people accept as gospel. Some of these answers are so ridiculous, like using glue to hold cheese on a pizza, any thinking person rejects them. The problem lies with small errors that skew the desired outcome. Many don't bother to proofread what ChatGPT spits out and simply pass it through, often claiming it as original work. In a recent interview, one of the developers of ChatGPT said that it was accurate 85% of the time. Fine, if users would assume that and question the quick and easy answers thoroughly, but that step is not often done.

There is (also) the huge number of workers it will replace. Technological innovations have always resulted in upheaval. Our current economy is largely based on service jobs, many of which will soon be done more quickly and efficiently digitally. Employers won't have any reasons to hire living, breathing humans when the job can be done by computers who never need breaks, call in sick, ask for a raise and work 24/7 fed only by electricity.

It seems that humanity will soon be dominated by artificial intelligence. One thing that can be done to slow this inevitability is to boycott its use. People will be better off if they think for themselves and not rely on AI.

— William Ward, Manistee

### About our January issue, readers also said...

A wonderful edition don't miss it. Still some copies available at ACC.

— Betty S., Arcadia

Was definitely a paper full of great articles this month.

— Debbie B. Arcadia

# Valentine

continued from Page 1

Turrismo.commune.terni.it.)

The third was St. Valentine of Africa, a Christian martyr who died around Feb. 14 in the Roman province of Africa. So little is known about him that the Catholic Church removed him from the General Roman Calendar in 1969, yet the church still recognizes him as a saint and lists him on Feb. 14 in the Roman Martyrology. (“St Valentine,” Daily Readings with Catholic Online, Catholic.org.)

The name Valentine symbolizes men who were sympathetic, heroic and romantic. All three were executed on or around Feb. 14. The martyrdom of these men is honored by the Catholic Church with the celebration of St. Valentine’s Day. (“The dark origins of Valentine’s Day,” by Arnie Seipel, NPR.org, updated Feb. 14, 2022.)

How do we know which Saint Valentine is honored on our day of love? A group of scholarly Jesuit priests, the Bollandists, is considered the ultimate authority on saints. They determined that the first two Valentines are the same person and represent the holiday’s meaning. This decision is based on many similarities in the stories of the two men. Both men supported Christian values and marriage; both were killed by beheading for violating the rules of Emperor Claudius II. (“The history of Valentine’s Day,” by Dr. Michael Carter, English-heritage.org.uk.)

## Pagan origins

Christianity isn’t the only basis for Valentine’s Day; some believe it originated in the pagan festival of Lupercalia. This event is held on the “Ides of February,” the 13th day of February. Lupercalia was a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman God of Agriculture, and the Roman founders, Remus and Romulus.

The Luperci, an order of Roman priests, would gather in a sacred cave, where the founders of Rome, Remus and Romulus were believed to have been cared for by a Lupa or she-wolf as infants. They would sacrifice a dog for purification and a goat for fertility, then remove the goat’s hide, cut it into strips and dip them into the sacrificial blood. (“History of Valentine’s Day,” History.com, updated Sept. 3, 2025.)

The Luperci would then go into the



Cleveland Museum of Art. “À la plus belle,” 1800s, Antoine Béranger (French, 1785–1867) France, 19th century lithograph. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis B. Williams Collection.

streets, slapping women and area crop fields with the blood-saturated goat hide. They believed this made the women fertile in the coming year. At the end of the day, the women placed their names into a large urn, and each city bachelor drew the name of a woman with whom he would be paired the following year. The matches often ended in marriage. Lupercalia was eventually outlawed as un-Christian. At the end of the 5th Century, Pope Gelasius declared Feb. 14 as St. Valentine’s Day.

Greek mythology comes into play with that chubby little Cupid pictured launching arrows at lovers on Valentine’s Day cards. Cupid is the son of Aphrodite, goddess of love. He originated in 700 BC under the name Eros, which in Greek means “desire.” In his late teens, Eros was sexually powerful and could throw arrows at people, striking their hearts and making them fall in love.

When the Roman era began, they adopted this mythology by converting Cupid’s image into a cute little kid with wings and an arrow, naming him Cupid, a synonym for Eros. Renaissance painters adopted this image in their work and depicted Cupid as a child. (“Cherubic Cupid is Everywhere on Valentine’s Day: Here’s Why that Famous

Embodiment of Desire Is a Child,” by Rachel E. Greenspan, Time Magazine, Feb. 13, 2019.) It is the love of these Renaissance images that inspired Hallmark Cards, Inc. to include the little cherub on their Valentine’s Day greetings. Still, they didn’t start the greeting card industry.

## American Valentines

The oldest known Valentine is a poem written in 1415 by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife while incarcerated in the Tower of London. (“History of Valentine’s Day,” History.com, Updated Sept. 3, 2025.)

It was the mid-18th century when friends and lovers began exchanging tokens of affection, including handwritten notes. Esther A. Howland developed one of the first Valentine businesses in America during the 1850s and 1860s. Working from the family home, Esther created elaborate cards using lace, ribbons, fancy paper, and colorful pictures. Female family friends and her brothers promoted her work. (“The Hidden History of Valentine’s Day,” by Keyonna Summers, Feb. 5, 2020, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.) Esther was amazed when she sold over \$5,000 worth of cards her first year. By the 1870s, her small family

business had grown into the New England Valentine Company, with Esther earning over \$100,000 each year. At her death in 1904, she was proclaimed the “Mother of the American Valentine.” (“Valentine’s Day Cards – The Rest of the Story,” by Matthew Schaefer, Feb. 13, 2019, National Archives, “Hoover Heads,” blog of the Herbert Hoover Library and Museum.)

H.C. Hall, founder of Hallmark, began selling Valentine’s Day postcards in 1910; Valentine’s Day cards appeared on store shelves in 1916. (“Valentine’s Day through the Years,” corporate page of Hallmark.com.) Today, Hallmark sells around 146 million Valentine’s Day cards annually in the U.S., not including kids’ packages for classrooms. (“About Valentine’s Day,” Hallmark.com.) Valentine’s Day is the second-largest holiday for greeting cards; Christmas ranks first.

According to the National Retail Federation, the average person spent \$185 on Valentine’s Day in 2024. Love is a sweet expenditure.

Grace Grogan is a freelance photographer and writer who lives and travels in a motorhome with her partner Paul Cannon. She writes many of the historical pieces found in these pages.

## For the Birds

During the Middle Ages (500 CE to 1500 CE), February 14 was the beginning of the birds’ mating season in England. The “Parliament of Fowls,” a poem written by Geoffrey Chaucer in 1375, refers to St. Valentine’s Day as a day of romantic celebration. The poem reads:

“For this was on Seynt Valentyne’s day / Whan every foul cometh ther to chese his make.”

(“History of Valentine’s Day,” History.com, updated Sept. 3, 2025, and “The Parliament of Fowls” found on Librarius.com.)

# Bear Lake event to feature area poets

By PAT STINSON

Poets whose works have appeared in the Freshwater Reporter will read selected poems during a Community Poetry Gathering hosted by Motel Bear Lake, 4-6 p.m., Feb. 21. All are welcome to attend the free event for an evening of community, connection and poetry.

Partnering with Motel Bear Lake for the event are Z&N Farm, the Freshwater Reporter and Bear Lake Promoters.

The evening will feature Bear Lake farmer Nicole Mezeske, of Z&N Farm, who will read poems from her new book, “Heart Soil.” Mezeske read her poems at a conference of farmers in Glen Arbor last year and most recently presented them at a Near and Farr Friends’ program in Onekama. Her poems share the love and travails of farming as she and her husband Zac raise their young children in the farming tradition begun by Zac’s family on land acquired generations ago. Fellow farmers urged her to publish her collection, and the book’s first printing quickly sold out.

Poet Shannon Courier, of Wellston, is an outdoor enthusiast. Her poems reflect a love of nature as seen through the eyes of an area explorer and homesteader. She will read her poem “Crown of Velvet” published last fall in the Freshwater Reporter. The poem was recently chosen for inclusion in

the “Michigan Bards Poetry Anthology.” A book launch will be held at noon, Feb. 4, at the Jackson County Library in Jackson, Michigan.

Ramona DeGeorgio-Venegas, of Manistee, has written several stories for the Freshwater Reporter, and her first submission was a poem the Reporter published in 2019. She has self-published several fiction books based on her travels, some available on Amazon. She will read her poem “Stone Linguistics” and one other selection as time allows.

Louisa Loveridge Gallas was named Freshwater Reporter’s “poet in residence” because she has submitted a poem for almost every issue since 2022. Her poems have won several awards, and she recently updated and reprinted a novella-like book, “Rescue the Good Stuff,” and a collection of poems, “Be Yourself: Everyone Else is Taken.” She will read her poem “Basic Hygiene.”

Light refreshments will be served during the event.

Motel Bear Lake is located at 12273 West St., along US-31 in the village of Bear Lake. Follow the Facebook event page, “Community Poetry Gathering,” for updates.

Pat Stinson is a co-editor of the Freshwater Reporter.

# Snowshoe hare

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landscapes where private land dominates, which in turn results in favorable habitat for eastern cottontails. The most significant threats to the snowshoe hare are habitat fragmentation and other practices that reduce favorable habitat for this species, as well as climate-change factors such as the mismatch in their winter coat color (they turn white in the winter) and the lack of consistent background snow cover to match their camouflage.”

Together, the Michigan DNR and the Michigan United Conservation Clubs are taking steps to protect snowshoe hares. According to the Michigan Wildlife Council, the two groups are improving the hare’s habitat by cutting some older trees to create horizontal ground cover and clearing brush prone to wildfires.

I remain hopeful that I will cross paths again someday with this fluffy white megabunny.

Pat Stinson looks forward to winter each year and is a co-editor of the Freshwater Reporter.

# FRESHWATER REPORTER

Fresh community stories from Manistee, Mason, southern Benzie, western Lake and Wexford.

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