

FRESHWATER REPORTER

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

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ALWAYS FREE!

EVENTS CALENDAR ON PAGES 2 & 5.

NORTH SHORE DISPATCH



Coyotes are calling

By PAT STINSON

This time of year, we begin to hear coyotes vocalizing in the woods around us. It's breeding season, and they are in search of their mates. One night in mid-February, co-editor Mark heard coyotes yip, scream and howl in what sounded like our front yard. Of course, sound travels extraordinarily well on windless nights, and it's more likely the animals were in the preserve across the street. I didn't find tracks the next morning, other than those left by our neighbor's dog, though we did see a coyote in our backyard last year.

We're advised by Michigan's DNR to keep our pets close this time of year. Coyotes are not innately vicious creatures, despite claims to the contrary, but they can aggressively defend their territory against others they perceive as threats, such as other coyotes and your dog. Both are canines, members of the canidae family. Anecdotes about dogs and coyotes abound. Here are mine. A friend's mother was walking her little dog on a National Park trail in spring, and a coyote raced toward it, until Mom picked it up in her arms. A neighbor whose property adjoins a cedar swamp chained his puppy outside, and a coyote killed it. At a rest stop

in South Dakota, Mark and I watched as a coyote stalked, from a safe distance on the other side of a barbed-wire fence, a lap dog on a stroll with its unsuspecting owners. It would pace forward to the next hiding spot, then retreat, repeating this maneuver several times until it finally gave up.

From October to March, during trapping season, veterinarians see an increase in dog injuries from coyote traps, as one told me years ago when my dog, while walking on a leash in the country, stepped in a trap. In a recent press release, the Michigan DNR announced a shorter official hunting season for coyotes but added a coyote management season open to hunting and trapping to "address interspecies conflict and overabundance on private and public lands, statewide." Read all about it at: <https://tinyurl.com/2tnchfrj>.

Intelligent, shy and highly adaptable, the coyote's resourcefulness is mistaken by humans for cunning, with biologists viewing their behavior more as opportunistic. Especially in the West, where food is scarcer in high-plains deserts and drought-stricken



Top: Manuel Lacoste / Adobestock. Above: A coyote displays typical traits: hunched back, tail down, and a thicker winter coat. Photo: Susan Hintz.

plains, the coyote must find its dinner where it can. This resourcefulness has led to strong population growth throughout the states, with coyotes found in every Michigan county. Females can have four to seven pups during their single breeding season each year, and the animals live anywhere from six to eight years.

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Bulk products for making soil mixes.

Starting seedlings with coco coir

Story and photo by MARK BANASZAK

Good gardeners must plan. Even though the last hard frost is still months away, you are probably getting ready now — paging through websites and catalogs, choosing vegetable varieties and planning how to fit all of it in the space available. Gardeners starting seeds are setting up grow lights in their basements and clearing windowsills to accommodate all the little pots to be planted with seeds. They will transplant the seedlings later when the soil is warm enough.

Starting seeds is cheaper than buying transplants, which is still less expensive than buying your tomatoes at the grocery store. Planting seeds is more sustainable, gives you more choice about varieties, and lets you begin gardening earlier than the last frost. If you start your own seedlings, the time to begin is now. There are many ways to get your costs down even further. You can recycle pots, save your own seeds and make your own seed-starting and soil mixes.

While it is possible to start seeds in soil from outside, you get better germination and healthier seedlings if you start them in a special soil mix. You can buy seed-starting mixes, but making your own saves you money. Just buy the bulk ingredients and mix them as needed. You can also choose ingredients that are more sustainably or ecologically sourced. There are many recipes for making seed-starting mix and potting soil on the internet.

One great ingredient for making a seed-starting mix is coco coir. Coco coir is an industrial byproduct of coconut processing. This ingredient has many useful characteristics. First, it holds moisture well, up to eight times its own weight in water, which means that tender sprouts are less likely to dry out. Second, it is fluffy. Young roots can push their way through easily, and water drains

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On track with the 'City of New Orleans'

Story and photos by RAMONA DEGEORGIO-VENEGAS



Drone view of a passenger locomotive. MaxSafaniuk / AdobeStock.

Our train trip to New Orleans took two years of planning. We saved Amtrak points and looked for tours and places to stay. Then there were places to eat and to enjoy beignets and chicory coffee! But back to the trip on the train, a 900-mile journey from Chicago to Louisiana's most famous city aboard its

namesake, the City of New Orleans.

A little history, courtesy of Trains-and-Railroads.com and Wikipedia. The train began daylight runs to New Orleans in 1947. Sometime in 1971, the train was switched to a night-time schedule and given a different name. That year, songwriter Steve

Goodman wrote the Grammy-winning "City of New Orleans," a nostalgic tribute to a ride he once took on the train. The next year, Arlo Guthrie famously covered Goodman's song on his album. The train reclaimed its original name in 1981, and the song was covered by another popular singer-songwriter, Willie Nelson.

We flew into Chicago's O'Hare International Airport and took the Blue Line train downtown. It could've been easier with a smaller suitcase. We walked about two blocks from the Cleveland Street train stop to Union Station and found the Metropolitan Lounge. When you have a sleeper- or first-class ticket, you are offered a cushy place to wait, eat snacks and/or to store or check your luggage. Once unencumbered, we enjoyed a late breakfast at Lou Mitchell's, a historic diner. There wasn't a line at the popular restaurant this time. Next, we visited downtown Chicago sights and ate at an Italian place before returning to wait for our 8 p.m. Amtrak departure. Many other travelers slept on the lounge's couches or watched TV. I read and sipped hot cocoa.

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Area Events Calendar

TELL THEM YOU SAW IT IN THE FRESHWATER REPORTER!

To be included in our April edition, submit your announcements by March 19. Be sure to include the address where the event takes place. Email your events to: editor@freshwater-reporter.com. Email any time for our online calendar. **St. Patrick's Day events were unavailable at press time. See 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 Mar 6

2026 Student Art Exhibition, 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.

Thru Mar 13

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

Mason-Lake Conservation District Tree, Shrub & Plant Sale, Ludington & Baldwin
Order online from a large selection of native plants. Pick up April 24 & 25. Info/order: <https://tinyurl.com/3tdhv9jd>

Thru Mar 15

AFFEW's Online Native Plant Sale, Ludington

Help protect our wildlife by gardening with native plants! These important plant species provide nectar, pollen & seeds that serve as food for insects, birds & animals. They also require minimal maintenance & water. Pick up in early June at U Dig It Community Garden, located behind the United Methodist Church of Ludington, 5810 E Bryant Rd. Orders: www.affew.org

Thru Mar 20

Manistee Conservation District Native Seedling Sale, Bear Lake

Order in person at Manistee Conservation District, 8840 Chippewa Hwy. or call (231) 889-9666. Pick up will be April 17 & 18. Info/order: <https://tinyurl.com/3a4jpt3>

Thru Mar 26

Benzie Conservation District Native Seedling Sale, Beulah

Pick up will be May 1 & 2. Info/order: www.benziecd.org/seedling-sales.html

Thru Mar 28

Image Makers: The Art of Illustration, Frankfort

Free. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd.

Mar 6-28

Cut, Paste, Create: A Collage Exhibition, Ludington

Free. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St. Opening reception Mar. 6, 4-7pm.

Joy & Whimsy Art Exhibition, Ludington

Free. A solo exhibit of art works by Vicki Beyer. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St. Opening reception Mar. 6, 4-7pm.

Mar 6-Apr 10

The Language of Women Art Exhibition, Manistee

Free. Works by women (or anyone who identifies as a woman) artists will be featured. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Opening reception Mar. 8, 12-3pm.

Mar 14-Apr 17

CONSTRUCTed: Works in Wood, Paper & Fiber, Frankfort

Free. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd. Opening reception March 14, 5-7pm.

DAILY EVENTS

March 1

Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser, Beulah

10am-1pm. \$10 per person. Hosted by Benzie Area Masonic Lodge #270 to support community charitable efforts. At 9513 Covey Rd.

Arthur Miller's The Crucible, Scottville

2pm. \$20-25. Center Stage Theater at West Shore Community College, 3000 N Stiles Rd. Tickets: www.westshore.edu/performing-arts/

March 2

Ace Hood in concert wsg Duke Deuce & Dizzy Wright, Cadillac

7-11pm. \$25. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

March 3

Lunar Eclipse, North America

Naked eye viewing begins 4:50 a.m. EST. Totality: 6:04 a.m. EST. Partial eclipse ends 8:17 a.m. EST. Known as the Blood Moon. Earth passes between the Sun and Moon, casting its shadow on the latter.

March 6

Near & Farr Friends, Onekama

11am. Game Day with Dawn. Onekama Township Hall, 5435 Main St.

Tree and Shrub Planting Presentation by Mason-Lake Conservation District, Scottville

1-3pm. Free. This session will cover how to choose the right species for your site, proper planting & care techniques, deer protection, & conservation-focused planting strategies. The workshop is especially helpful for anyone planning to participate in their tree sale. Webber Township Hall, 2886 W Springtime St. Registration required: www.mason-lakeconservation.org

Ties & Tutus Daddy/Daughter Dance, Ludington

5:30-8pm. \$25/person. Event includes dinner, photos, dancing, and a glow party. Radiant Church, 409 S Washington Ave. Tickets: <https://tinyurl.com/4hpb9wkm>

Jesse Howard, Rich Regal, Who TF is Justin Time in concert wsg Tyler Truth, Cadillac

7-11pm. \$30. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

March 6, 7

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/

March 6-8

Manistee High School Theatre presents Disney's The Little Mermaid, Manistee

Fri, Sat, Sun 7pm. Sat & Sun also at 1pm. \$10-15. Manistee High School, 525 12th St. Tickets: manisteetheatre.ludus.com/index.php

March 7

Chili Cook-Off, Filer Township

12-3pm. \$5 donation. Receive a card for voting at all 9 participating businesses. Proceeds will benefit the Filer Fire Dept. Info: Filer City Chili Cook-off Facebook page.

Spring CommUnity Auction, Ludington

6-8pm. Event includes auctions, food & drinks. Proceeds benefit students & staff of Mason County Central School. Doors open 5:30pm, bidding starts at 6pm. Graystone Event Center, 4079 W US-10.

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 warm beverages at the Amphitheater. Ludington State Park, 8800 M-116. MI Recreation Passport required for vehicle entry.

Gopherwood Concerts present: Ember & Ash, Cadillac

7-9pm. \$12.24-22.94. Cadillac Elks Lodge, 122 S Mitchell St. Info/tickets: gopherwoodconcerts.org

3rd Annual International Fly Fishing Film Festival, Manistee

7-10pm. \$20. A curated collection of world-class films & cinematic storytelling from independent filmmakers around the globe. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Tickets: ramsdeltheatre.org

March 8

Arthur Miller's The Crucible, Scottville

2pm. \$20-25. Center Stage Theater at West Shore Community College, 3000 N Stiles Rd. Tickets: www.westshore.edu/performing-arts/

Ben Traverse & The Little River Céilí Band in concert, Ludington

2pm. \$15 ADV, \$20 DOOR. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St. Tickets: at the Art Center or www.ludingtonartscenter.org

March 10

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.



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March 11

Winter Speaker Series, Ludington

7-8pm. \$10/nonmembers, Free for MCHS members. "Soldiers & Tactics of the Revolutionary War" presented by the Military History Academy at Mason County Historical Society, 103 E. Ludington Ave.

March 12

Tyler Farr in concert wsg The Boardman River Band, Cadillac

7-11pm. \$35. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

March 13

Near & Farr Friends, Onekama

11am. Dave Maylen's Magic Show. Onekama Township Hall, 5435 Main St.

That One Time at Band Camp Tour, Cadillac

7-11pm. \$20. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

Harmonius Wail in Concert, Ludington

7:30pm. \$25 ADV, \$30 DOOR. Americana-infused Gypsy Jazz trio. Cash bar available. Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S Harrison St. Tickets: at the Art Center or www.ludingtonartscenter.org

March 14

Finnish Slam Perch, Pike, & Steelhead Ice Fishing Tournament, Ludington

\$10 entry fee. Fish any Michigan lake while following all DNR rules. Prizes for the longest fish in each category. Participants must be in line for measuring by 6pm. The entry fee includes sloppy joes down by the river at Sutton's Landing following the tournament. Pere Marquette Expeditions, 1649 S Pere Marquette Hwy.

Irish Jog 5k/10k, Ludington

9am. \$20 students, \$30 adults. 100 Ludington Ave. Info/registration: <https://runludington.com>

Saint Urho Day Bakesale, Kaleva

10am-4pm. Kaleva Art Gallery, 14449 Wuoksi Ave.

2026 Polar Plunge for Michigan Special Olympics, Manistee

11am registration & turn in donations. 1pm Costume Parade & take the plunge. Silent auction. After-splash awards bash. Lunch for plungers raising \$100+. Lunch & drinks for spectators available to purchase. Little River Casino Resort, 2700 Orchard Hwy. Register/donate: <https://tinyurl.com/6fyrah7h>

Cheese Pairing Event, Kaleva

12-4pm. \$20. The Cheese Lady of Traverse City will be pairing cheeses with flights of 4 ciders, wines or beers. Cheese & drinks to take home will be available for purchase. Northern Natural Cider House & Winery, 7220 Chief Rd.

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 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.

Dr. Strangelove-National Theatre Recorded Live, Manistee

1-3:30pm. \$25. Seven-time BAFTA Award-winner Steve Coogan plays 4 roles in the world premiere stage adaptation of Stanley Kubrick's comedy masterpiece, shown on screen. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Tickets: ramsdeltheatre.org

March 14

Hardy Hall Series, Manistee

6-8pm. Free. "Winter's Last Song" featuring Tim Krause & Howard Wilson. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St.

Sponge in concert wsg Trouble & Versatile, Cadillac

7-11pm. \$20. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

March 15-21

Manistee County Restaurant Week

Participating restaurants will have exciting specials, showcasing the best of their culinary creations.

March 16

Saint Urho Dinner, Kaleva

5-7:30pm. Finnish dinner includes stew (Mojakka), cardamom bread (Nissua) & blueberry tart (Mustikkapiakka). Kaleva Lions Club, 14361 9 Mile Rd.

March 19

Mushroom Cultivation Workshop, Benzonia

6-8pm. \$35. Great Lakes Mushroom Company will teach all about growing gourmet and medicinal mushrooms. Participants will take home a mushroom-growing kit. Mills Community House (lower level), 891 Michigan Ave. Limited to 30 attendees. Tickets: <https://tinyurl.com/4bk6uadb>

March 20

Near & Farr Friends, Onekama

11am. Historian Mark Fedder will present Ethnic Communities in the Early Days of Manistee. Onekama Township Hall, 5435 Main St.

Merkules in concert wsg Takeheart & Young C, Cadillac

7-11pm. \$20. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

March 21

ARTIFACTORY 2026: the Power of the American Flag, Frankfort

10am-12pm. Free. Crafting the Poem with Steven Veatch. Learn poetry techniques, explore historical contexts of the American flag, and discuss work-in-progress in a supportive environment. Seasoned poet or a first-time writer, this workshop is designed to help voices of all skill levels & ages find their rhythm. Participants will have the opportunity to read their original poems aloud in April & be included in a printed chapbook. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/yt9x9xcj> More info: oliverart.org

Metropolitan Opera Live/Encore in HD presents Tristan Und Isolde (Wagner), Manistee

12pm, \$15-25. Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St. Tickets: ramsdeltheatre.org

Cabin Fever 2026 Chili Cook-off, Irons

6pm-12am. A night of music, food & fun to help those in the community who are less fortunate. \$500 in prizes. Participants in the cook-off must bring a full crock-pot of chili & register by 5:45pm. Skinner Park Hall, 5074 W 10 1/2 Mile Rd.

Masquerade Ball with local DJs, Cadillac

7-11pm. \$15. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

J2B2 (John Jorgenson Bluegrass Band) in concert, Scottville

7:30. \$20-25. Center Stage Theater at West Shore Community College, 3000 N Stiles Rd. Tickets: www.westshore.edu/performing-arts/

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Photo: Shannon Courier

Tree Top Kindergarten

By Shannon Courier

A rustling above catches your attention.
You look up, covering your head.
You see leaves rustling, some breaking free
and floating around you.

Two squirrel kits make their way down the tree.
Claws still learning, shakily grabbing bark to
keep themselves from falling.
They see you and freeze in place.
Tails twitching furiously back and forth.
Slowly they continue onward to the large
branch below them.

Clumsily making the transition
from trunk to branch.
They start to tussle with each other.
One loses grip and nearly falls
but quickly gains a foothold.

They continue their tussle with each other,
claws and tails flailing.
Small squeaks and cries as they roughhouse.
Tree top kindergarten is in session.

High above their mama calls them.
Without hesitation they heed her warning,
climbing quickly to the top and out of sight
to safety.

Michigan's Historic Wildfires: What We Know Today

By GRACE GROGAN

As snow cover melts in our area of Michigan in March and April, the threat of wildfire rises. Dead leaves and fallen limbs are exposed. Residents think of clearing their yards of debris, a spring-cleaning ritual. However, people burning debris are the cause of one-third of all wildfires. Michigan averages 8,000-10,000 wildfires annually; about 100 homes are lost or damaged as a result, (https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/understanding_wildfire_behavior_in_michigan_e2882).

Michigan holds two spots on the list of the "10 Largest Wildfires in U.S. History," (<https://wfca.com/wildfire-articles/biggest-wildfires-in-us-history>) and three spots on a list of the "13 Most Destructive Wildfires in U.S. History," (<https://usatoday.com/picture-gallery/weather/2023/12/12/the-13-most-destructive-wildfires-in-us-history/50871955/>). Of those, the Thumb Fire ranks No. 4 and the Peshtigo Fire ranks No. 1 as the deadliest U.S. wildfires, (<https://wfca.com/wildfire-articles/deadliest-wildfires-in-us-history>).

In our beautiful Great Lake State, with the longest freshwater coast in the U.S. and never more than six miles from a body of water, (<https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/natural-resources-at-a-glance>), how could we encounter such tremendous wildfires not once, but three times? Let's look at each fire, its cause, and how it spread.

The Great Michigan Fire, Oct. 8-10, 1871, burned 2.5 million acres. The fire raged in three areas of the state, individually known as the Port Huron Fire, Manistee Fire and Holland Fire, ("Incident Summary Page for the 100 Fires Project," <https://wffoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Great-Michigan-2025.pdf>). Since they all started on the same day and were assumed to be fueled by the same strong winds that accelerated their spread, they are referred to collectively as the Great Michigan Fire. This fire resulted in the loss of 500 lives, (<https://earth.org/worst-wildfires-in-us-history/>).

One reason the fire spread so rapidly was the belief at the time that wildfires were not a concern unless they threatened towns. As a result, preventive measures were not taken. Instead, standard practices helped fuel the flames. In Holland, dry creek beds had been filled with downed trees and slash, so rather than serving as a fire break, the creek beds were perfect fuel that burned quickly and broke through the "break." Towns were destroyed because "bucket brigades" could not keep up. Only two things squelched the flames: spent fuel or a hard rain.



Meridian Fire of 2010. Photo: USFWS Endangered Species. Licensed under CC BY 2.0. The human-caused fire burned 8,500-plus acres in the Huron District of the Huron-Manistee National Forest in western Michigan.

The Peshtigo Fire, Oct. 8, 1871, began in Peshtigo, Wisconsin, on the same day as the Great Michigan Fire. The small frontier town of Peshtigo had no means of communication other than U.S. mail and one telegraph line which was destroyed in the fire. The Peshtigo Fire Company had just one horse-drawn steam pumper that couldn't keep up with the blaze. Without a means of communication, news of the burning town did not reach the cities of Green Bay and Madison for two days.

The fire's origin is unknown, but there is speculation that the fire was caused by a small brush or land-clearing fire set by farmers, loggers, or railroad workers. A weather observer 60 miles southwest of Peshtigo saw smoke from several local fires. Due to a combination of dry conditions, prolonged drought and logging debris, the fire spread and became uncontrollable when hurricane-force winds collided with cold and warm air masses.

The Peshtigo Fire is considered the deadliest fire in recorded U.S. history. It claimed 1,200-2,500 lives and burned over one million acres across the two states, (<https://climatology.nelson.wisc.edu/wisconsin-peshtigo-fire>). After burning Peshtigo, the fire traveled north and crossed the Menominee River, raging into Michigan's Upper Peninsula. It burned Escanaba State Forest land in Michigan's Menominee

County and destroyed several towns. Rain eventually extinguished it.

The Thumb Fire, Sept. 4-6, 1881, burned over 1 million acres in Huron, Lapeer, Sanilac, St. Clair, and Tuscola counties, (<https://earth.org/worst-wildfires-in-us-history/>). The cost of destroyed buildings and land exceeded \$2,347,000 in 1881 dollars. Five months of intense drought, combined with the loggers and farmers using the slash-and-burn technique to maintain the land, created an easily ignited tinderbox. The fierce fire spread quickly with the help of a "mid-Atlantic cyclone" driving hurricane-force winds inland.

Primitive firefighting methods, including hand-pumped extinguishers and bucket brigades from private wells (many had run dry during the drought), could not keep up. In only three days, the fire and smoke had destroyed 3,400 buildings, killed 282 people, and displaced over 10,000 people. The loss of 20 townships, 51 schools, and 3,000 barns was profound, equivalent to \$76 million today. Heavy rains falling Sept. 6-7 extinguished the fire, (Historical Society of Michigan Facebook post, Sept. 5, 2025).

The Thumb Fire was the setting of the first-ever American Red Cross deployment. The American Red Cross was a new nonprofit organization, only four months old at the time of the Thumb Fire. ("How Michigan's Great Fire of 1881 launched American Red

Cross Disaster Relief," Frank Wistil, Detroit Free Press, Sept. 5, 2025). They collected supplies and shipped them to Michigan, helping 14,000 people left homeless on a burned landscape just before winter. By providing temporary shelter, supplies, and clothing, they proved the value of disaster relief organizations, (<https://www.govtech.com/em/preparedness/how-a-michigan-fire-from-1881-holds-lessons-for-the-future>).

Wildfires continue to impact Michigan.

The Upper Peninsula lost 21,000 acres during the Duck Lake Fire in May 2012 and is the state's third-largest fire since 1881, (<https://wrkr.com/worst-forest-fires-in-michigan-history/>). In 2022, the Blue Lakes Fire, sparked by lightning, spread in Cheboygan and Montmorency counties, burning over 2,500 acres. In June 2023, the Wilderness Trail Fire was the result of a campfire and burned 2,442 acres.



Smokey Bear reads fan mail. Art by Jean Beaufort. CC0-1.0 Universal, Public Domain.

Updated in 2001, Smokey Bear's 81-year-old public service announcement is as important as ever: "Only you can prevent wildfires."

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 articles found in these pages.



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Make Light With Rags

By Louisa Loveridge Gallas

In honor of Women's History Month: Bessie Smith, famous in the 1920's-'30's for her independent spirit and influence on American music.

People!
 Survival takes imagination.
 That's right.
 So ponder how Black bands traveled all day, 12-14 hours, to play a show for white clubs, had to piss out in the field, served no meals, after the show drive miles past midnight for a safe place to sleep, catch a few hours, then jump in the car, head to the next gig.

So Bessie Smith, she customized a railroad car two stories high, full kitchen, living room, a saloon, to ease on down, and four bedrooms to sleep and make love. When storms put out the lights, the band soaked rags in kerosene. That's right. They improvised like the best jazz.

Nobody gonna tell Bessie where she's to eat, piss, drink, sleep, love. When somebody holds you down let your imagination burn like kerosene on rags. Let resistance roll like a freight train heads for the station. Clickety-clack clickety-clack.

Like Bessie, own your journey.

On track

continued from Page 1

Our suitcases were loaded onto the baggage car by Amtrak employees, and we only carried backpacks for the 20-hour train trip. We each had our own roomette

The roomettes are in a sleeper car, second level. The view is good if you are lucky and get a cleaner window. There are two bench seats which later are made into a bed. If traveling with another person, one can have the upper berth in the same roomette. The 'Superliners' are bi-level cars designed for comfort and scenic views, according to Amtrak history.

I watched the lights of the city fade as we motored south towards Kankakee.

There is no internet service and only limited cellphone service. Smoke breaks are offered at only a few stops. Plan accordingly.

Since it was still early, I wandered to the sightseer lounge (observation car) for a bit. There is a café below the lounge where you can purchase snacks, drinks and sandwiches. Many coach-ticketed people do so. I went to the dining car for a light supper.

In October 2019, the previous dining experience was replaced with "flexible dining options" (aka box meals). No more chefs, real plates and silverware or flowers on the tables. The food was okay, but staff was very limited and service reduced. I used to enjoy being seated with strangers at a scheduled mealtime and being spoiled with gourmet food.

The purser turned down my bed while I was at supper. All meals are included in the roomette price. Around 10 p.m. the hall lights were turned low. At almost 11 p.m. in Champaign-Urbana, where some people departed, I quit reading in the roomette and closed my curtains. There are reading lights, a small closet, phone chargers, heater/air options, dark curtains on both windows and a sliding door. The bed, about 6 feet long and four feet wide, is a 4-inch pad



Roomette in a sleeper car.



Just north of New Orleans.

with cotton sheets and two pillows. Where the track is rough, you feel like you need to hang on to avoid ending up on the floor. Eventually, the rocking rhythm smoothed out and let me sleep.

During the night I needed to use the lavatory, located a few doors down. Later, I rolled over a few times when the train stopped for passengers to disembark. We reached Memphis at 7 a.m., so I got up, washed and dressed. I was ready for coffee and breakfast. The French toast was yummy.

Navigating in the aisle of the train car is interesting, especially if you meet someone coming toward you. A choreographed crab dance ensues in the narrow space. Not dangerous, unless hot coffee is involved. Moving between cars, though, is a no-man's-woman's-land of shaking space. A door is opened by elbow or foot on either side of this area. You must wear shoes on board. If a toe were caught in that "between-car" space, it could be lost.

The sun came up as we entered Missouri; we passed through small towns and then Yazoo City, Miss. No snow on the ground now.

We went to the lounge to read and chat with other passengers while the purser made our beds back into seats. My friend took a shower — yes, they have them!

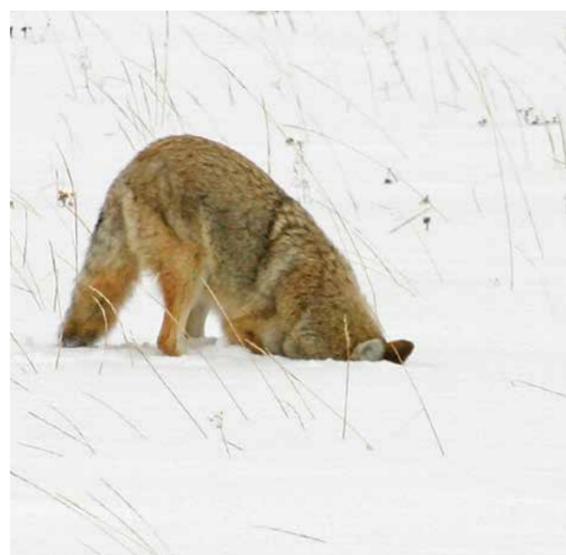
Near Hazlehurst, Miss., we had lunch on board. Dessert was my favorite part — a vanilla cake with cheesecake filling.

Soon, we entered Louisiana. The train follows along the Mississippi delta and seawater. The view was great! I expected to see more wildlife but did see an eagle and some ducks.

New Orleans was now coming up. After tipping our purser, we left the train around 4 p.m. and waited for our luggage. There was limited public transportation from the station to our lodging, but the taxi ride wasn't expensive.

I recommend the trip and plan to travel via Amtrak again. For information about the train ride I took, visit: <https://www.amtrak.com/city-of-new-orleans-train>.

Ramona DeGeorgio-Venegas is a retiree of the Manistee Ranger District, Huron-Manistee National Forest, where she worked in recreation.



Hunting coyote. R. Matthew Locknane / AdobeStock.

Coyotes

continued from Page 1

They are not classified as apex predators. That is, they are not at the top of the food chain when predators such as bears, mountain lions and eagles are present, but in areas without these, coyotes become apex predators. As such, they are often viewed by hunters as competition for game (they can kill deer) and by farmers as "nuisances" when they eat their corn or orchard fruits and kill livestock. Gardeners can find them dining on berries and vegetables, too.

Nevertheless, coyotes play an important role in the ecosystem, feeding on small mammals such as mice, rats, voles, rabbits, muskrats and squirrels. Researchers have found correlations between high squirrel populations in urban-suburban areas, neighborhoods, parks and wooded areas and the presence of coyotes. Additionally, the coyotes, with their keen sense of smell, are further attracted to these areas by birdseed, garbage and gardens. It falls to us, as stewards of the planet, to keep a balance between coyotes and humans, so both species can coexist in an increasingly crowded world.

(The above information was obtained from the Michigan DNR, including its SMART brochure about coyotes, University of Utah-Office of Undergrad Research, CoyoteYipps.com, PetShun.com and KnowAnimals.com.)

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Area Events Calendar

TELL THEM YOU SAW IT IN FRESHWATER REPORTER!

continued from Page 2

March 22
ARTIFACTORY 2026: the Power of the American Flag, Frankfort
1-4pm. Free. From beginners to experienced artists, this session will guide participants in creating a visual piece of art that complements the American flag theme. Hands-on class provides a space for community members to translate their historical reflections into a physical medium. Participants will have the opportunity to share their artwork with friends, family, and the public in April. Oliver Art Center, 132 Coast Guard Rd. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/5d3x78zt> More info: oliverart.org

March 25
Struggle Jennings in concert wsg Mike Spitz, Cadillac
7-11pm. \$20. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

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

Ozzy Rebourne in concert, Cadillac
7-11pm. \$20. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

The Rocket Man Show (Elton John tribute), Manistee
9-10:30pm. \$20 at the door. Little River Casino Resort, 2700 Orchard Hwy.

March 28
Let's Make Discory 4 Man Scramble Charity Tournament, Scottville
8am. \$30/player. 100% of proceeds benefit Disc Golf for Kids & Ludington Animal Shelter. Labyrinth Course at West Shore Community College, 3000 N. Stiles Rd. Info/register: www.discgolfszene.com

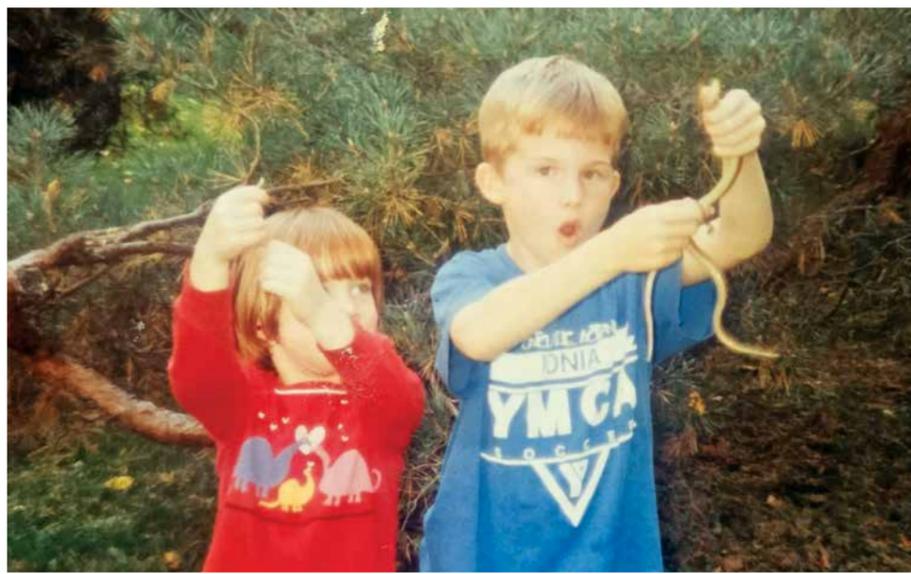
Community Sauna Sessions, Ludington
9am-7pm. Loomis St. boat launch, 905 W Loomis St.

No Kings Day, Ludington
1-3pm. Free. Rotary Park (City Park), 500 W Ludington Ave.

Texas Hippie Coalition in concert, Cadillac
7-11pm. \$20. The Venue Event Center, 902 W 13th St. Tickets: thevenueeccadillac.com

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MI BACKYARD



Adam and Emily with eastern garter snakes, 1993. Photo: Sally Cook



Emily with a terrarium-raised monarch, 1998. Photo: Sally Cook

Witty, wistful and wild: four seasons of outdoor observations

“The Comfort of Crows, A Backyard Year” by Margaret Renkl. Spiegel & Grau, 2023.

Reviewed by **EMILY COOK**

Our parents had a firm “one night only” rule when my older brother Adam and I would bring home living creatures we had found while exploring the natural areas around our house. A hand-me-down terrarium, originally purchased during our hermit crab phase, lived its second life as habitat for monarch caterpillars, toads, frogs, snakes and even the occasional turtle. We had one night to assemble the perfect space for whatever animal we happened to have, observe what it did, and then return it to the place where we had originally scooped it up.

The rule remained in place when I happened to come across an extremely overweight and slow-moving mouse in our garage. Despite our 24-hour limit, Adam and I painstakingly collected leaves and grass clippings to mimic the forest floor, found a clump of moss that seemed like it would be comfortable to a mouse, and added a small branch to give it privacy. We tucked the little mammal inside, where it immediately hid.

The next morning, we excitedly checked

on “our mouse” — or mice, as it turns out. She hadn’t been overweight but pregnant, and we now found ourselves with eight pink newborns curled into the chunk of moss we had placed in the corner — perfect nesting material, unbeknownst to us.

As an adult, I realize it is best to leave things where they are. No terrarium habitat could equal an animal’s wild home, but I also understand my parents’ compromise. For children who spent most of their good-weather days outdoors, it was inevitable we would bring things home from time to time. I also understand why members of the mouse family were our final wild overnight guests. Every parent has their limit.

I hadn’t thought about that part of my childhood in years until I read “The Comfort of Crows, A Backyard Year” by Margaret Renkl. Reading is something I enjoy so much that I liken it to another life necessity, such as eating or sleeping. I read to relax, to escape, to feel less isolated, and in January I was reading because the sub-zero windchills had forced me entirely inside. I was craving nature when I wasn’t physically

able to be in it. “The Comfort of Crows” provided the imaginative exploration of the outdoors I needed.

Each chapter in Renkl’s book correlates to a week of the year in her Nashville backyard. She connects the birds she sees, the plants growing, and insects flying (among many other things) to memories from her own childhood, experiences raising children, the world’s political climate, climate change itself, and how her priorities have changed since she started truly observing the half acre she had spent years rewilding.

She tells stories spread across the emotional spectrum, ranging from hopeful to tragic, even comical. One chapter is a reflection on the number of baby birds she sees hatch in her various nesting boxes and how few of them reach fledgling age. Another recounts her fixation on a backyard find, certain it was an owl pellet, only to discover it was a matted piece of hair and dirt her husband had dislodged from their vacuum cleaner and tossed outside. The story of how she and her brother collected tadpoles, but did not consider they would eventually turn into very hungry frogs requiring constant meals of insects, is what triggered my own childhood memories.

Renkl’s writing often reads as poetic prose, with beautiful imagery speaking to the love of her own gardens and, more broadly, of Tennessee’s Cumberland Plateau and the life existing within each

space. I found myself highlighting quotes throughout, little statements that provided comfort and connection while living in a cold and dark world, metaphorically and quite literally.

There was also physical imagery inserted between each chapter. The author’s brother, Billy Renkl, a naturalist in his own right, created 52 original pieces of art to correspond with each week of written reflections. The art provided a much-needed pause for reflection while reading.

Since completing “The Comfort of Crows,” I have prioritized daydreaming about childhood adventures, as well as my own spring garden plans, and how I can improve habitat even more. My internet searches have expanded to include things like “where to buy hummingbird protein feeders” and “how to attract bats to your yard.” Nashville’s seasons may have less dramatic transitions, but the principles remain the same when applying them to my own backyard in Northern Michigan.

As Renkl simply put it, “I can’t solve the problems of climate change, but I can plant a garden.”

Emily Cook is a resident of Arcadia, where she lives with her husband and two collies. She is a conservationist, writer, artist and avid gardener. She can nearly always be found exploring the nearby nature trails and beaches of Manistee and Benzie Counties.



“The Comfort of Crows” jacket, Photo: www.margaretrenkl.com



Celebrating NATIONAL READING MONTH

MORE BOOK REVIEWS

Youthful passion, wit and 'sweet sorrow'

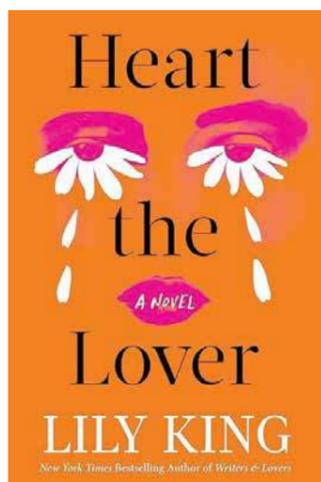
"Heart the Lover," by Lily King. Grove Press, 2025.

Reviewed by **ROSALIND JAFFE**

Lily King's latest novel "Heart the Lover" provides a marvelous portrait of romance and passion that widens to an exploration of family, friendship, love and grief. It's a tale of youthful experience, the wisdom and perspective of age, and the way lives reverberate back and forth as memories color the past and the present.

"Heart the Lover" is narrated by a solitary English major in her senior year of college in the 1980s. She meets two male friends, Sam and Yash, and is quickly drawn into their orbit and the charming old home they house-sit for an absent professor. She is fascinated by them, their intellectual obsessions and self-assured philosophies, in contrast with her low-key college life. The book's title comes from a rowdy, made-up card game that fuels their friendship and competitiveness. Lily King captures the joy of finding one's people and the seemingly unlimited potential of youth.

The boys christen her "Jordan" after the Jordan Baker character in "The Great Gatsby," and she is called by that name for most of the book. Their choice of name shows the boys' misunderstanding of the narrator's true self as this Jordan lacks the cynicism and amorality of her namesake. The main characters' idealism and emotional inexperience steer the action of the unfolding love triangle. Jordan's sensual romance with Sam burns bright but she is immediately drawn to the brilliant



and charming Yash who becomes her true passion. When Jordan leaves for Paris for an au pair position, this idyllic life is dramatically upended.

The story then jumps 21 years to find Jordan a highly respected and popular literary novelist, a married mother of two. Her past intrudes in subtle and overt ways as she struggles with the residue of events from her early twenties. When an old lover visits, the contrast and similarity

between their younger selves and middle-aged adulthood becomes apparent. Then once again, King moves ahead another seven years where the main characters enmesh in scenes of crisis and great emotional import.

Lily King's other books include "Writers and Lovers" and the best-selling "Euphoria," inspired by the life of Margaret Mead. With King's clear and powerful prose, "Heart the Lover" is a moving novel that opens the heart in various ways.

Bonus Book Review: For a unique reading experience, consider Lucy Ellmann's "Ducks, Newburyport" (Galley Beggar Press, 2019). This brilliant novel captures the texture of contemporary America through the mind of one anxious, conflicted, funny mother of four in one stream-of-consciousness sentence that runs for almost a thousand pages.

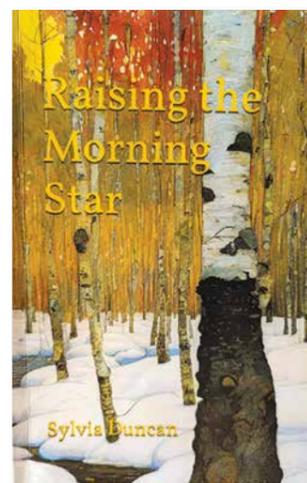
Rosalind Jaffe is a retired bookseller and banker. She writes from northern Michigan.

Long-awaited sequel to U.P. story doesn't disappoint

"Raising the Morning Star," by Sylvia Duncan. Sylvia Duncan, 2025.

Reviewed by **PAT STINSON**

Fans of Bear Lake author Sylvia Duncan's "My Escape to Loon Haven" will be excited to know that her protagonist, Jenna, is still living life as a homesteader in "Raising the Morning Star," set 10 years later. The now 26-year-old Jenna continues to chop and stack firewood, can and store food in her root-cellar hideaway, feed her bird companions, and paddle and swim in her pond. Her two older adult friends visit as irregularly



as ever, one nurturing her literary and artistic growth and the other teaching her outdoor skills. Both tether Jenna to life beyond Loon Haven.

As ever, one nurturing her literary and artistic growth and the other teaching her outdoor skills. Both tether Jenna to life beyond Loon Haven.

At the end of the first book, Jenna inherited not only the deed to Loon Haven but enough of a nest egg to make improvements to her cabin. In "Raising the Morning Star" her inheritance has allowed her to further explore her talent for painting, and she has experienced some success in the art world. What she hasn't explored are friendships with people her age, and she is encouraged by her older friends to take steps toward that goal—met with varying success. Some of her encounters are humorous, others poignant or scary, mirroring relationships outside the book's pages.

Readers of all ages can find nuggets to appreciate. At least every other page is a window to the outdoors, with just enough detail to delight a nature lover, enhanced

visit to a doctor, how to act and react in a bar setting, or to be a mentor. Duncan's lessons for young people are grounded in practical advice, and Jenna sidesteps some challenges while faltering as she faces others completely outside her experience.

To learn to let live and to let go, respect and forgive — these test her mettle as an adult, as they do all of us. Jenna draws her strength from nature, driving out her fears by pondering only her surroundings as she floats on her back in her pond, becoming "the pupil in the earth's eye" from which she feels she "can observe the universe."

"Raising the Morning Star" is available on Amazon. To reach the author about discounts for multiple copies or speaking engagements, email her at: sylduncan@hotmail.com.

Pat Stinson is a co-editor of the Freshwater Reporter. The U.P. is one of her favorite places to explore.

10-Minute Play Festival to include two works from Manistee

From staff reports

"Tales from the Stage" is the theme of the fourth annual 10-Minute Play Festival taking place April 10-12 at Ludington Area Center for the Arts, the festival's host.

Two of the eight, short, original works chosen by theater professionals were written by Manistee residents.

Maripat Allen's "Mike and Amy and Dave and Diane" is a comedy about love, marriage and AI. Mike and Amy are a middle-aged couple who have lost their romantic spark. Can an AI therapist and life coach help? What about a sexbot and virtual partner? Follow the couple as they navigate problems as old as the institution of marriage and as new as today's technologies.

Madison Dix's "Mourning Dove" takes place in Michigan in 2075, and it's a conversation between four generations of women living together in a small, shared apartment. Dix said she took her inspiration from the Seventh Generation Principle — that people should consider the impact of their actions (and inaction) on seven future generations.

For details about the other six plays, tickets and auditions, go to: freshwater-reporter.com.

Historical, fictional, magical ... and almost local

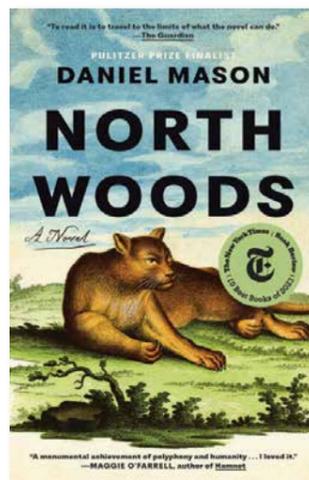
"North Woods," by Daniel Mason. Random House, 2023.

Reviewed by **MARK BANASZAK**

Walking in the woods here, you are sure to notice signs of human history — a spot where one kind of tree grows in perfectly straight lines, stone arrowheads in newly turned fields, old wagon parts and horse tack buried in muck, and near the edges of open fields, half-buried, rusty implements. The stories of the people who left or lost these things are hard to know because their importance has been, like everything human, temporary, made unimportant by the next thing.

Daniel Mason's novel "North Woods" is like a collection of those signs, but with the background and story supplied, told in a way that gives a broader context to each layer of local history.

Mason's novel is often classified as historical fiction because it relates the stories of many of the inhabitants of a place in western Massachusetts, a place similar to ours, with mountains instead of a Great Lake. These stories reflect elements of the



period in which they are set. The land changes and evolves with each generation that inhabits the spot.

The first story is about a Puritan couple who escaped from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and built a cabin. An apple-crazed veteran of the American Revolution makes it his homestead, his two daughters live there, later an escaping slave hides there, a landscape painter revels in its natural beauty, a button manufacturer hopes to turn it into a resort

for the very rich, and more generations of people come, live there, and fade away. Many of the stories focus on the house, which undergoes many changes from the time it is first built to when it finally is reabsorbed by the land centuries later. All the stories are connected, some closely and others less, by the progression of the inhabitants or their children.

Each of these stories is told in a different style, which is an engaging aspect of the book as well as evidence of Daniel Mason's skill as a storyteller; parts of the story

are told in letters and journals. There are ballads and poems, historical and academic reports, true crime writing, Gothic storytelling and others. Each part of the story is stylistically different. This makes it feel as if the reader is the one piecing the parts of the story together.

Even though "North Woods" is historical fiction, there are whispers of a strange sort of magic. People disappear and reappear; trees sprout, grow, and die in unexpected fashion; and, behind the scenes, there are connections from one story to the next that are not just human.

There is a strong element of natural history connecting parts of the story. Natural history and human history are so connected in this book that a beetle or an apple tree is as important as who owns the house.

There's a saying that history doesn't repeat, it rhymes. "North Woods" rhymes with our local area, and part of the pleasure of reading it is the sense that it could have happened very close by.

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.

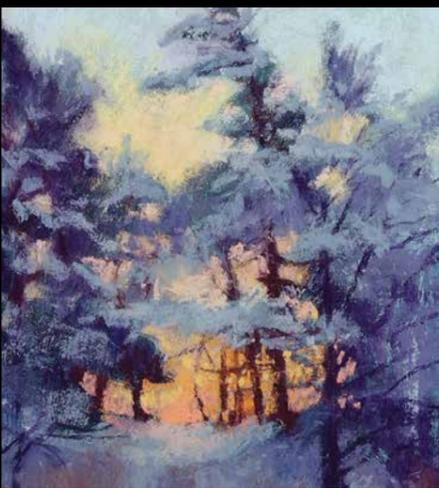
Stapleton Realty
BUILDING LOT



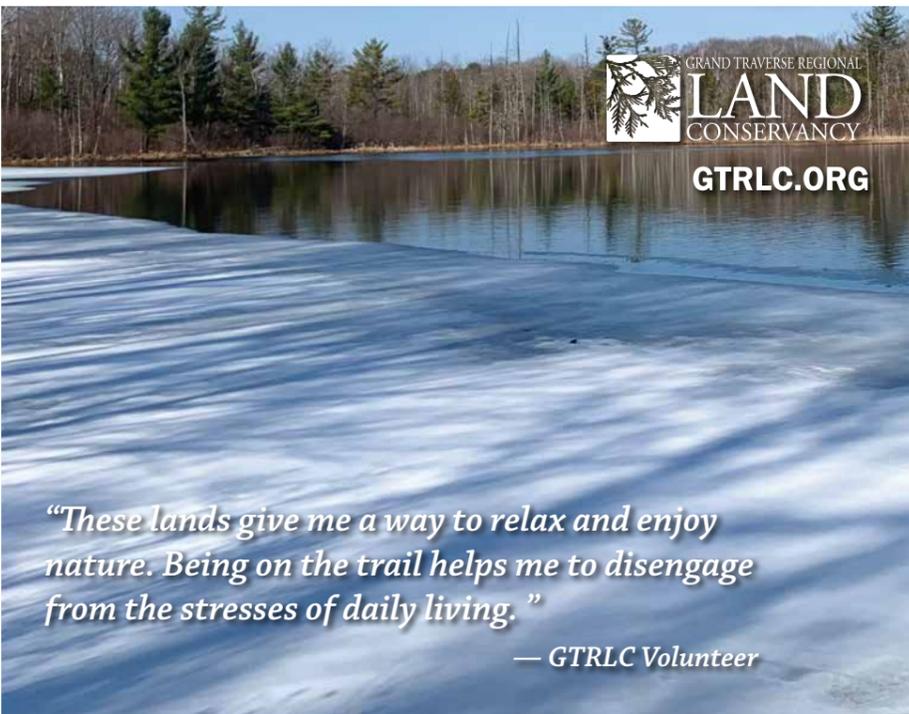
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BOOK REVIEW

Former F.R. columnist pens a mystery novel

“Hollow Pines,” by Jennifer Devine. Jennifer Devine, 2025.

By **PAT STINSON**

Let’s just get this out of the way: I have not read Jennifer Devine’s new mystery novel ... yet. Anyone who knows me knows I have stacks of books growing like stalagmites from my office floor.

It’s not surprising that our former MI Backyard columnist writes in her spare time, but I am shocked she has any. Devine and her husband, who have two children still at home, have traveled the U.S. since they left the area and now own a deli. When we checked in with each other last fall, she told me about her book, available on Amazon — Kindle only. (There is a free Kindle app for your smartphone. Go to your app store.)

The book blurb reads as follows:

Twelve years ago, a storm tore through Hollow Pines and carried Mara Whitlow into the river—or so the town believed. The search was called off. The case went cold. And Clara Johnson’s mother sent her away to live with an aunt, desperate to keep her safe. Then a letter arrived. “If you want truth, go back to the hollow.”

Now Clara is back in the town that built its silence on that night. The deeper she digs, the more she feels the heat of what her mother tried to warn her about—truth like fire, spreading fast, devouring everything it touches. As the secrets unravel and the past closes in, Clara begins to see the storm for what it really was.

For fans of Freida McFadden, Tana French, and Riley Sager, Hollow Pines is a slow-burn psychological thriller about guilt, buried memory, and the dangerous weight of remembering the truth.

Devine told me she is currently “creating an herbal sleuth cozy mystery-type series. And a detective mystery set in Traverse City.” With her background in herbs and homesteading, familiarity with Traverse City and skill as a storyteller, the new works are sure to resonate with readers.

Old John

By **JOSHUA ELIE**

About 30 years ago, I was cruising down Ford Road on Detroit’s west side in my ’75 Oldsmobile Delta 98, and I had my 14-year-old cousin Rob with me. Even as a young teen, he was always coming up with interesting, mature observations and questions. He asked me, “Why do people mistake our kindness for weakness?” I still don’t have an answer for that, only more questions. Are some people just born “takers” and care only about themselves and nothing about the people they “take” and hurt? Did some hard-life experience make them that way? I had the thought the other day that maybe we are the ones that are mistaken, and not them.

I don’t recall how I met Old John, nor did I ever get to know much about who he was, but I learned the hard way what he was. My first recollection of him was one morning when I walked, still half asleep, into my living room and saw him parked in front of my house. There he was, emptying one of my gas cans into his truck. I opened the door and asked him what he was doing. He said he just needed enough gas to make it to the EZ Mart (to gas up). Of course, I’m always someone to help another in need, so I didn’t think much about a couple gallons of gas. About the time he rounded the corner and headed down the road, I was starting to wake up a bit ... Wait a minute, he had to go past the EZ Mart to get here in the first place. I went back outside to find he had emptied all my cans, and I’m not sure how full they were, but he got at least 10 gallons. There really wasn’t anything I could do. What? Call the police and tell them I stood there and watched him do it? A couple of weeks later I caught him doing it again, and I went outside to chase him off. He apologized and told me his check (Social Security) would arrive in a couple days, and he would pay me back. He then told me of his place on Sauble 1,

THE SAUCE BOSS



a local lake here in Irons, and said I could fish there anytime I wanted. It wasn’t long before I put my little fishing boat in the water and began exploring Sauble 1, 2, and 3 as they were all connected by channels. I asked him about the money a few times, but all he would do is go on and on about how he didn’t know how he was going to pay for his electric bill and groceries and gas to make it to the doctors’ appointments. I stopped asking after a while and just settled for the lake access.

He also had this big, old ’80s-something pickup truck that he sold to me for \$350. After I bought it, I found that the engine and transmission were not in the “good shape” he said they were. I just kept making excuses for him — he’s old, he’s poor, his mind is going ... As fall came on, and it got too cold to be fishing in open water, he told me I could leave my boat at his place through the winter. I flipped it upside down on top of my seat cushions, anchor, oars and probably a few other things. As the first spring blossoms formed on my lilac bush, I excitedly went over to Old John’s for the opening day of my fishing season. Low and behold, Old John was gone, so was all his stuff and so was my boat! I heard later through the rumor mill that he gave somebody my boat for helping him move.

Who was mistaken, me or Old John? I think we both were, though it really didn’t matter in this case. After all, I only paid \$35 for the boat and got a great year’s fishing in. One thing for sure, I’ve learned

Elie’s Blackened Pan Fish

- 1 stick (½ cup) of salted butter, plus more as needed
- panfish fillets
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- ½ tablespoon black pepper
- ½ tablespoon salt
- Paper towel is also needed and possibly a lemon

Mix dry ingredients (the “batter”) in a large bowl, then put one stick (½ cup) of butter in a large frying pan. Heat on high until butter turns dark brown. Coat fillets with batter and place in pan. Add butter generously, as needed. Flip when browned and remove after both sides are done. Set on paper towels, then cover with more paper towels (two to three per layer). Continue stacking until all fish is cooked. Larger fillets may enjoy a slight squeeze of lemon.

to not make excuses for other people’s bad behavior, regardless of their situation. It’s not like they would act any better if they were young, healthy and rich.

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



Olds Delta 98. Photo: Joshua Elie.



Fish catch. Photo: Joshua Elie.

Help create squares for Manistee's Quilt Trail

By **CYNTHIA ASIALA**, board member, Arts and Culture Alliance

To celebrate 20 years of promoting arts and culture in Manistee County, our Arts and Culture Alliance (ACA) has set a goal to expand the Quilt Trail. This project began in 2014, and presently we have 12 quilt squares in 4-foot and 8-foot sizes affixed to buildings or placed as freestanding signs. Each quilt display includes an explanation of the historical significance of the building or site. Current locations range from the Norwalk Railroad Crossing Square in Norwalk to the Maple Leaf at Marilla Museum and Pioneer Place, to the Autumn Star at Kaleva Art Gallery. The trail is outlined on our website as well as in rack cards found in public places around the county.

ACA would like to add historic sites and buildings to the quilt trail by erecting more squares. Some we've identified are: Old Kirke Church/Museum, Manistee Fire House, Portage Lake Garden Club (90 years), historic Village of Chief, Copemish-Thompsonville Museum, the CCC camp in Brethren, Chittenden Nursery at the Manistee National Forest headquarters in Wellston, and Bear Lake's historic church/museum.

Presently ACA offers a \$50 incentive to interested groups or individuals who request it. The cost to produce and install the square and print signage ranges from \$400 to \$800. ACA hopes to secure grant money to offer more financial help to those who need

it. Northwoods Sign Company in Ludington will print the design on a long-lasting composite board for \$500. Groups that wish to lay out and paint the design themselves will find it costs somewhat less. Jackpine Business Center in Manistee has printed signage on a durable plastic for around \$50. Some groups might request funds to replace one of the original squares that deteriorated over the years.

The Arts and Culture Alliance was formed in 2006 as part of EnVison Manistee, an effort to identify assets, resources, needs and solutions for challenges in Manistee County. One goal was making art and culture accessible to all. Twenty years later, the vision and goals of ACA have been met in a variety of ways:

- Provided student scholarship opportunities and materials for music and art projects,
- Supported Children's Theater workshop and Children's Choir,
- Formed the Manistee River Valley Museum Alliance, which provides a forum for sharing ideas and opportunities to benefit the 10 unique and impressive museums in the area,
- Supported the Spirit of the Woods Music Festival by operating the food and beverage concession as well as donating money to the event,
- Erected a sculpture by Dewey Blocksma which honors our migrant population



Marilla Church of the Brethren. Photo: Pat Stinson

- for their service in the production of the food grown in our area,
 - Collaborated with KND schools and local sculptor Bernadette Zachara Marcos to create bronze sculptures of James Earl Jones and his mentor Donald Stroup entitled "Mentorship Can Be Life Changing," and
 - Established a Quilt Trail leading to historic sites in the county.
- Our 501(c)(3) nonprofit has worked with other county entities to promote arts and culture. In addition, ACA has published brochures about many of the projects, set up and maintained a website, and held an

annual ice breaker event to bring arts and culture enthusiasts together to share talents and ideas. ACA is financially sustainable through dues, donations and grants. Our organization has continued to increase its membership by offering individual, family and organization memberships with the same dues structure as in 2006!

Celebrating 20 years, the ACA is looking for more ways to promote the arts, culture and humanities of Manistee County, helping this area to become a place to "live the arts." For more information, contact Cindy Asiala, (231) 299-4484, or visit the ACA website: <https://allartsmanistee.com>.

BOOK REVIEW

Timeless advice for savory venison

"Best Venison Ever: The Indispensable Guide for Big-Game Hunters Who Love Eating Wild Food," (Cartier Associates, Inc., 1995), by John O. Cartier.

Reviewed by **MARK VIDEAN**

After writing about deer hunting (and fishing and waterfowling) for over 40 years, 20 of them as a full-time staff editor for Outdoor Life magazine, John O. Cartier knew how to prepare and cook venison. He shared that knowledge in



He includes recipes for all cuts of meat and many different cooking methods. He shares sage advice and recipes making roasts, soups and stews. He tells what to look for in knives, both for use in the kitchen and in the field. Cartier

even includes guidelines on barbecuing, how to get the best from freezers and ways to prepare and serve tough meat, using seasonal ingredients and gravy tricks. Some quick tips at the end of the book touch on making and using marinades, smoking meat and making jerky a variety of ways.

Though designed for venison, his recipes would work well using most any large game: whitetails, mule deer, elk, moose, antelope and caribou. Any lean cut of beef or pork could also be used.

If you are fortunate enough to have a freezer stocked with venison, this book could be your ticket to some tasty meals.

"Best Venison Ever" is available through mail order for \$12.95 plus \$3.99 shipping and handling. Contact: Jack Cartier, P.O. Box 68, Ludington, MI, 49431.

It is also for sale at the Book Mark, 201 S. Rath Ave., Ludington.

Mark Videan is a co-editor of the Freshwater Reporter. He enjoys experimenting in the kitchen and has cooked all sorts of wild game – from roadkill to gifts from hunter-friends.

"Best Venison Ever: The Indispensable Guide for Big-Game Hunters Who Love Eating Wild Food." As the magazine's Midwest Field Editor, he was given writing and editing assignments across North America. When he visited an area to write a feature, many local hunters, guides and outfitters invited him to game dinners. He noticed a huge disparity in the quality of those meals and began taking notes on how the outstanding ones were prepared. As he mentions in his introduction, he never thought of writing a cookbook at the time but just wanted the recipes for himself. Years later, after retiring, he decided to compile all he had learned into this excellent book, one of at least six he wrote about hunting.

Since the "Best Venison Ever" was published in 1995, some of the details about prices of grills, hunting knives and other products are outdated. However, Cartier's vast knowledge of proper field dressing, useful tips on venison care and simple-to-prepare recipes are timeless. The first chapter imparts the must-know basics in a question-and-answer format. Cartier stresses the fact that wild game meat that is improperly handled will not make a fine meal, no matter how great the recipe is.

Seedlings

continued from Page 1

once the material is dampened. This, in addition to the fact that it is sterilized in the production process (a third characteristic), reduces the chances of "damping off" in which seedlings die from fungal infections in the soil. Fourth, coco coir is pH neutral, which means that though you will have to fertilize carefully, more of the nutrients you apply will be available to the young plants.

There are numerous recipes for seed-starting mixes using coco coir. Many gardeners use 2 parts coco coir, 1 part perlite and 1 part vermiculite. This mix has no added nutrients, which is common if you are going to "pot up" your seedlings. When the seedlings develop the first real leaves, you can fertilize with a weak, water-soluble solution. If you start your seedlings in larger pots to skip the "potting up" step, also add 1 part worm castings or compost. Your seedlings may still need extra nutrients as they get larger, especially heavy feeders like tomatoes.

Keeping them happy is simple if you keep a few things in mind. Keep the light source as close as possible to the plants. With a

pulley or chain system, you can raise the light fixture as the plants grow. This can help prevent them from becoming leggy. You can also strengthen their stems by running a small fan or brushing your hand gently across the tops of the growing plants. Pay close attention to watering. You don't want the soil to dry out, but you also don't want your plants in soggy soil. To avoid these problems, bottom-watering (watering the tray under the pots) is a good strategy. Finally, keep temperatures 70-80 degrees for warm-season vegetables and 60-70 degrees for cool-season ones, until a week or two before you plan to transplant them outside. Then, gradually accustom them to being outside, so you minimize shocks to the plants when you transplant them. This will keep them healthy and happy as they grow outdoors.

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.

FRESHWATER REPORTER

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