

Phoenix Furniture From The Ashes

The “Wooden Bike Guy” is back in business, after quite a ride

By Greta Bolger

Current Contributor

Kurt Swanson and his fine woodworking business, Always August Designs, are now humming along nicely on the north shore of Crystal Lake. But it has been quite a ride for the former tool-and-die professional.

Within the span of three years, Swanson went from working a 9-to-5 Grand Rapids office job, where he used a computer to draw thin metal parts that would be used in cars and microwaves, to starting his own lakeside furniture business.

“I was working eight- and ten-hour days on a computer, being pulled in 20 different directions,” Swanson says. “Every job was a hot job, a rush job, as in, ‘We need it yesterday.’ There just wasn’t any reward or satisfaction



The gears on one of three wooden Schwinn Stingray bikes that Kurt Swanson entered in the 2015 ArtPrize in Grand Rapids. Photo courtesy of Kurt Swanson.

at the end of the day—I was doing the job because it needed to be done, not because I enjoyed it.”

Swanson knew that there had to be more out there for him. He wanted to find a career that spoke to his soul. And on happenstance, he found just that, after dabbling in wood-working for an art competition. Now Swanson is his own boss, he sets his own hours, and he can walk about 50 paces from his kitchen to his shop.

Sure, this all may sound like a luxurious change, but there was a time when Swanson thought to himself, “What was I thinking?”

From Dabbling to Full-Time

Swanson, age 52, has always enjoyed woodworking as a hobby, continually striving to create bigger and more challenging proj-

Please see Phoenix on page 6

Baby’s Breath: One Person’s Bouquet, Another’s Nemesis

Removing invasive species from Elberta Beach

By Emily Cook

Current Contributor

Baby’s breath—a plant commonly included in flower shop bouquets, boutonnieres, and corsages—is more than just a companion for roses and carnations. It is an invasive plant that thrives on the dunes and beaches that dot our Northern Michigan landscape.

A single baby’s breath plant can produce 14,000 seeds each year. Additionally, baby’s breath is often included in wildflower seed mixes, inadvertently introducing the plant to yards and surrounding natural areas. The negative impacts of baby’s breath can be seen in our community, as it spreads quickly and overtakes dunescapes, threatening habitat for native species, such as the federally threatened pitcher’s thistle and endangered piping



Full-sized baby’s breath growing on Elberta Beach. Photo by Emily Cook.

plover bird.

Fortunately, local organizations and volunteers will spend time this spring and summer treating and removing baby’s breath from Elberta Beach, where it has an established presence. Organized by the Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network (ISN) and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, volunteers will remove baby’s breath on the beach, one of the last unmanaged sections of shoreline between Arcadia Dunes Nature Preserve and the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

“Baby’s breath can be controlled through digging and piling, to prevent seed dispersion,” says Fields Ratliff, ISN’s habitat management specialist. “Our volunteers are out on

Please see Breath on page 7

Growing Native in Benzie County

Our local gardening and native plant network

By Monica Schultz

Current Contributor

The day native plants arrived was the day my garden buzzed to life. Insects had found the butterfly weed, prairie clover, lupine, maidenhair fern, and other assorted tagged sprouts and seedlings that stood potted, ready to be planted. Standing on our hillside property, within an invisible sound field of countless pollinators, I heard their wings hum and actually felt their vibrations. Our hillside garden had never been so alive.

I now understand why it is easy to get hooked on gardening with native plants.

Residents and visitors alike know that conservation and beauty run deep in Benzie County. Efforts by the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy have saved—and continue to save—large tracts of land, such



Carolyn Thayer, owner of Designs In Bloom, a Frankfort-based landscape design company, stands in front of a serviceberry tree in her front yard. Serviceberries are native to Michigan. Photo by Aubrey Ann Parker.

as Arcadia Dunes (along Lake Michigan) and Railroad Point (adjacent to Crystal Lake). Even national organizations such as The Nature Conservancy have a presence here (think Zetterberg Preserve, near Point Betsie Lighthouse).

But just as important are a multitude of smaller, less visible efforts to save and reclaim wildlife habitat on patches of land that consist of fractions of an acre. These are the native plant gardens—patchworks of vital habitat—scattered amongst our homes, cottages, and cabins.

Creating A Network

Over the past 15 years, a dedicated group of individuals have created a regional network of native plant education and restoration efforts that now crosses counties and forms a bridge between private and public entities. This network allows owners of small plots of

Please see Growing on page 3

Cory Bissell: The Candy Man

Questions and Answers with community faces

Cory Bissell is notorious around town. Always dressed dapper, with a shock of blond hair and Buddy Holly frames, he is most widely known as the owner of Kilwin's in Frankfort. However, even if you are not a "fudgie" or a candy connoisseur, it is likely that you recognize his mug from any number of the other organizations and activities that dot his resume—Bissell is a very busy young man with deep Benzie County roots.

Bissell graduated from Frankfort High School in 2005, but his family line goes back 10 generations, to Elberta and Frankfort's beginnings—French Canadian-born John Greenwood and his wife, Caroline (Robar), of Ludington, settled in what is now Elberta in June 1855. They made a living by hunting, fishing, trapping, and farming, and they contributed greatly to the development of Gilmore Township, according to *The Elberta Alert*. For instance, the Greenwoods' first home, commonly referred to as the Cedar Log House, was used as an informal school from 1855 to 1860, when the Greenwoods moved their farm just south of Elberta, and their first residence officially became the Cedar Log School, the first schoolhouse in Benzie County. Additionally, John Greenwood was a blacksmith and operated shops in both Frankfort and Elberta, including a shop at the Cedar Log House that was Benzie County's first place of business. He also was the first to carry the mail from Manistee to Frankfort, when the trail was less than developed. But arguably the most Founding Fatherly fact in this allegory is John Greenwood's hand in the naming of this area: according to *Blacklock's History of Elberta*, Joseph Robar and Frank Martin were others who moved to this area in 1855, with Martin living temporarily at the trapping shelter of Joseph Oliver, credited as Elberta's first (white) settler. The high winds off Lake Michigan would pile snow and sand, so Robar and Greenwood helped Frank Martin to erect a wall of logs to protect his home—they called the place Frank's Fort, and this is said to have been the inspiration for the name "Frankfort."

Nowadays, Bissell is Frankfort's candy man. After working at Kilwin's since the age of 15, Bissell (now 29) bought the store at 23, just after finishing up at Grand Valley State University in 2010. Meanwhile, his father, Dave, is the water superintendent for the City of Frankfort, and his mother, Amy, is the registrar for Benzie County.

Bissell's love of this place and its people is apparent in his jovial personality but also in his dedication to local organizations and events—something that he likely picked up from Mom and Dad, both civil servants. For instance, Bissell is on the Frankfort Planning & Zoning Commission, he is a member of the Benzie County Community Chorus, he often participates in productions by the Benzie County Players, and his store sponsors numerous local events from the Betsie Bay Frozen 5k to the local youth soccer programs. And because he cannot sit still for very long, in the winter, when Kilwin's closes from the New Year through early April, he is a server at The Roadhouse Mexican Bar & Grill in Benzonia. Not to mention that Bissell also performs wedding ceremonies in the summer, his busiest season at the store!

Continuing with our interview series on impactful Benzie County characters, *The Betsie Current* caught up with Bissell in the last few sleepy Frankfort days, before the busy summer season is set to begin.

THE BETSIE CURRENT: What made you first want to work at Kilwin's, back when you were in high school? What was it like back then?

CORY BISSELL: I knew I liked working around people, and I have always had a huge sweet tooth. Kilwin's had the best tasting ice cream and seemed like a fun spot, where I would fit in.

CURRENT: We know that you studied Physical Therapy in college. That is a pretty far cry from owning your own candy store. So why did you return "home" to Frankfort, after leaving the area?

BISSELL: I was wrapping up my undergrad and trying to decide where I was headed afterward. My plan was to be a free spirit and take



Cory Bissell is the candy man. But he serves ice cream, too. Photo by Aubrey Ann Parker.

a year off to travel/work/see some new places. I came home for the summer to save up some money and was met with an offer to manage and then buy the store, if I could. I enjoyed running things so much that I decided to change paths and give it a go—grad school is always waiting, as a back-up.

CURRENT: What did you miss most about this area while you were away?

BISSELL: The outdoors!! I took for granted how beautiful this area is and what all it has to offer. It blew my mind that people had to travel 30 minutes, pay to park, and hang out on a crowded beach in Grand Haven. It was beautiful, but I missed having it all right out my back door.

CURRENT: What are the biggest challenges and rewards of working and living in Benzie County and in Northern Michigan in general? What is the best or most rewarding part of your job?

BISSELL: With any place, there are the pros and cons. Frankfort has always been home to me, and so I cherish it for all of the memories that I have of growing up here. I also enjoy the different people that find their way here and become part of the culture. It is nice to have friends from many different backgrounds. It was a bit difficult, when I first moved back, to find a good friend group—there are not a lot of people in there 20s and 30s around. Owning Kilwin's has also meant that I don't have the freetime to travel and take weekends to see college friends. It is a bit remote in that sense. The most rewarding part of my job is how happy it makes people. That is something I always strive to do, and I appreciate finding a fulfilling career that allows me to do so every day.

CURRENT: What other things are you involved with? How did you get involved with them, and why are you passionate about these causes?

BISSELL: I—very loosely—consider myself a Renaissance Man. Moreover, I feel the call to do my part, giving time to boards and organizations. I have been involved with the Frankfort Planning Commission and helped to create Frankfort's Downtown Development Authority, which helps to shape Frankfort, as well as protect the charm and character that we all love. I also sing with the Benzie Chorus and put on plays with the Benzie Players. The arts have always been a passion, and I feel privileged to be involved. I have Sue and Jay Gainforth to thank for getting me started, as well as my [maternal] grandparents, Jean and Bill Higman, who would take me to musicals at Interlochen.

CURRENT: How have you seen your work grow and change? How do you hope it will continue to grow? What's next?

BISSELL: Life in the summer is always busy, and our town seems to be booming. I have increased staff every year just to keep up. It is great to see new visitors who are falling in love with the area and new businesses making

a go of it here. **CURRENT:** What are some ways that you and your business give back to the community?

BISSELL: I am a proud supporter of the summer reading program, put on by the Benzie Shores District Library in Frankfort. I also donate gift bags throughout the year to many different charities and events that benefit the schools, community, and nonprofit organizations. I think it's so important to give back to the community that has been—and continues to be—so supportive of me.

CURRENT: Is there a busy season for you or is it pretty constant year-round?

BISSELL: Summer has always been the bread and butter of our year. Like many businesses in our area, that is the time that makes or breaks a year. With the growing popularity over the past few years, the shoulder seasons have become increasingly busy. I have seen a large bump in business, especially in the fall during color tour and the Frankfort Film Festival. Christmas is my favorite holiday, and it makes my season to get everything decorated and to play Christmas music and prepare gifts for everyone. January through March are quite slow, and so I close the store, to recharge my batteries and prepare for the next season. I fill my time with some travel, and I moonlight over at the Roadhouse [as a server]—it's great for getting me out of the house on snowy days and to see all of the friendly faces.

CURRENT: We would think that owning your own business would be challenging/time-consuming enough, yet you seem to have a lot of things on your plate? How do you balance them?

BISSELL: It definitely is a balancing act and requires a lot of my time. I have always enjoyed being busy and having a project to work on. It does get difficult to make everything work at times, but I have a lot of help from family and flexible friends that work with me. It's definitely a team effort, and I owe so much thanks to my partner, Matthew.

CURRENT: What are your favorite local events and activities? Any favorite dining, recreation, hiking spots?

BISSELL: I try to get out and support as many local events as my schedule allows. I enjoy the local music festivals and farmers' markets the most. It is great to see what talented people live in Northern Michigan, and I love music. The farmers' markets are a great way to get some truly delicious produce and homemade goods, as well as support local, sustainable operations.

CURRENT: What is your favorite item that you sell at Kilwin's?

BISSELL: It changes seasonally, especially when we introduce limited edition confectations. Right now it would have to be the Jordan almonds. Sweet and crunchy!

CURRENT: What's your perfect summer day look like in Benzie County? How would you spend it?

BISSELL: The perfect summer day starts out with making a full breakfast at home—something I rarely get to do—then either biking/hiking/kayaking through the afternoon; dinner on the deck of Coho with friends; and heading to a friend's house for a bonfire, preferably with someone with a guitar.

Kilwin's of Frankfort is open Monday-Thursday 12-5 p.m., Friday 12-8 p.m., Saturday 12-6 p.m., and Sunday 12-4 p.m. Call the store at 231-399-0350.



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Growing

Continued from page 1

land to play a part in habitat restoration and preservation, too.

Some say local interest and passion for native plants—and their landscape possibilities—began with Suz McLaughlin, a caterer specializing in organic and local foods via her business Still Grinning Kitchens, whom *The Betsie Current* profiled back in a 2015 Q&A. (Read here: bit.ly/2qGoQLi) McLaughlin, a longtime Frankfort resident, humbly denies this, however.

“I learned a lot from a group of women on Leelanau Peninsula who worked with developers,” McLaughlin says. “The women harvested native plants on properties prior to new construction, then they sold the plants. When I worked for the Benzie Conservation District, I thought native plant sales were a good way to raise money, and so did Mary Pitcher, the Conservation District’s executive director at the time.

“To promote our fundraising and conservation efforts,” McLaughlin continues, “I gave talks about native plants and invited folks who were interested in native species gardening to a local Benzie Audubon meeting. It took off from there.”

Did it ever. Carolyn Thayer, a landscape designer and owner of Designs in Bloom in Frankfort, was one of the people who showed up to the meetings. Soon, an informal native plant gardening group had formed under the umbrella of the Benzie Conservation District.

“Eventually, we decided we wanted something more formal,” Thayer says, laughing. “We thought of joining a national organization, but—well—there were all these rules. Where’s the fun in that?”

Hence the group formed its own board, and Plant It Wild was born in 2000.

Growing The Network
Plant It Wild is an independent, nonprofit, native plant group, based in Benzie and Manistee counties in Northern Michigan. The mission of Plant It Wild is to foster greater awareness and appreciation of the fragile natural environment of our region. Through direct efforts, Plant It Wild works to preserve, protect, and promote the natural beauty of the area and its plant communities.

Whereas there were few (if any) online resources when McLaughlin got started, Plant It Wild’s website now offers a multitude of links to specialists who assist

those who are interested in preserving and restoring habitat. The list includes local native plant nurseries and organizations, such as the Invasive Species Network, Master Gardeners, the Benzie Conservation District, the Grand Traverse Conservation District, and many others.

But back then, the network was less established. Especially when it came to growers.

“We didn’t have a huge inventory of harvested plants,” McLaughlin says. “We needed a native plant nursery to supply us. Mary Pitcher was able to develop a relationship with Prairie Moon Nursery in Minnesota—it was the only nursery that would ship to us! But we both wanted a more local supplier, so I approached Paul and Jody Zemsta of Misty Ridge Green-

her encouragement, we started collecting native plant seeds within a 50-mile radius of our greenhouse. Now, we have our own plants that we collect seed off of. Since then, we’ve sold thousands of native plants, and we would’ve never done that if it wasn’t for Suz McLaughlin.”

Several other local nurseries have begun to grow native plants to meet the demand, including Greystone Gardens, outside of Honor, a nursery run by Tom Brodhagen, a third-generation grower.

“My grandparents ran West Winds Greenhouse on M-22,” Brodhagen says. “Their property is now part of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. I started working in their greenhouses. I’ve always been outdoorsy. Always loved native plants. Five years ago, I decided to grow natives and offer them to customers. They’re more in demand, as people realize how hardy they are and how valuable to the ecosystem.”

Recently, Four Seasons Nursery out of Traverse City began carrying native trees and shrubs.

“It was a really big deal to have such a large nursery come on board and carry larger native plants in our region,” Thayer says. “They’ve dedicated themselves to growing and selling trees, shrubs, and perennials at landscape sizes.”

Using The Network
Thayer uses several plant suppliers in her landscape design work, and she advocates for the beauty of native plants, as well as ecosystem restoration.

“We know plants are very specialized, and the relationship between native insects and specific plants is specialized, as well,” Thayer says. “Take away one specific plant, and you take away what could be the only food source for a specific pollinator. For example, take away the milkweed family, and we lose the monarchs: no milkweed, no monarchs.”

Where does “local” fit in, then? Various types of milkweed grow throughout the United States, for instance.

“I wouldn’t suggest that people take milkweed from Florida and replant it in Michigan—I get asked that a lot,” Thayer says. “Climate varies throughout the U.S., and different milkweed genotypes bloom at different times and are adapted to different climates. So plant local milkweed; it’s adapted to our climate and our growing season.”

It is easy to catch the native plant landscape “bug.” If it seems overwhelming or if you are uneasy about starting, don’t be. Because of the work of McLaughlin, Pitcher, Zemstra, Brodhagen, Thayer, and others, there are now many resources. (Just look at those listed in the sidebar.)

“You can go as big or as small as you want. Even a small patch helps; don’t underestimate the power of a small patch of native garden,” Thayer advises. “The important thing is to design a garden you’ll enjoy and that—happily—supports the local ecosystem, too. Any garden can be tackled in stages.”

In writing this article, as one interview led to another, I realized that the roots of our local native plant trend are difficult to dig up (pun intended). I mentioned this to McLaughlin.

“But that’s the thing,” she laughs. “They’re not roots, are they? They’re seeds. They float around and spread all over.”

Monica Schultz lives just outside of Frankfort, where she enjoys her garden while spending as little time as possible actually working in it.

Find Native Plants

Misty Ridge Greenhouse, Mesick
Jody & Paul Zemsta
231-885-2290

Greystone Gardens, Honor
Tom Brodhagen
231-326-5855

Four Season Nursery, Traverse City
fourseasonnursery.biz
231-932-7400

Designs in Bloom, Frankfort
Carolyn Thayer
designsinbloom.biz
231-352-6962

Native Plant Resources

Plant It Wild
plantitwild.com

Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership
mishorelinepartnership.org/

Benzie Conservation District
benziecd.org

Michigan Wildflower Association
wildflowersmich.org

Pollinators Partnership
pollinator.org

house in Mesick.”

Paul Zemsta confirms this.

“We have been growing natives for about 15 years,” says Paul Zemsta, who sells native plants at both the Elberta and Traverse City farmers’ markets. “It started when Suz McLaughlin visited us at the Elberta Farmers’ Market—she kept telling us that the community needed a local place to source native plants. With

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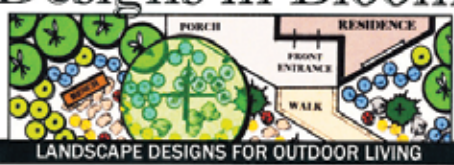
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P.O. Box 90 • Frankfort, MI 49635
Phone: (231) 649-3988
editor@BetsieCurrent.com
ads@BetsieCurrent.com

Editors: Jordan Bates, Aubrey Ann Parker
That one guy: Jacob Wheeler
Contributors: Greta Bolger, Emily Cook, Monica Schultz

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

CONSTANTLY FLOWING

Mondays

Qi Gong Yoga with Jessie: A series of flowing repetitive movements, stretches, and breathing exercises. This ancient practice helps cultivate and increase life-force energy and your awareness of its movement through and nourishment of the body. 8:30-9:45am.*

Circle Time for infants and toddlers at the Benzie Shores District Library at 630 Main Street in Frankfort. Infants and toddlers (+ their parents/caregivers) will have fun rhyming and moving with Miss Char, as well as a focus on repetition. Each week, children build their repertoire of rhymes, both old and new. There is an informal playgroup following Circle Time. 10-11am.

Yoga class for seniors led at no charge by Michelle Leines at The Gathering Place Senior Center. 10579 Main Street in the Honor Plaza. 231-525-0600. 10-11am.

Cards at The Gathering Place. We have a dedicated group of card sharks who play Pinochle weekly during lunch, but we aren't limited to Pinochle: grab your friends and join us for euchre, cribbage, and rummy, too! 12-1pm.

A volunteer will be at the Benzie Shores District Library to repair clothing while you wait. No formal wear or upholstery; no drop-offs. 10:30am-12pm.

Tuesdays

Slow Flow with Janna: Begin the day with this slow-flow vinyasa practice, where you'll have plenty of time and space to move mindfully through poses to refine and strengthen them. Take time to become familiar with your body, as well cultivate your inward focus. 6:30-7:30am.*

Sunrise Rotary Club's weekly meetings are over breakfast at the Cold Creek Inn of Beulah. Come join us! 7:30-9am.

Stretch and tone with Jean at the Oliver Art Center in Frankfort. Email annamallien@gmail.com if interested. 9-10am.

Technology Tuesday: Benzie Shores District Library in Frankfort offers assistance with technology. Learn how to download ebooks, audiobooks, and magazines to your personal devices. 10am-12pm.

Music by the Melody Makers at The Gathering Place. 10:30am-1:30pm.

Knitting Group at Benzonia Public Library. A "knit-along" project for those who want to work on the same project, or bring your own project if you prefer; we'd love your company! Need help? If you are having troubles with a current project, bring it along and we'll help you get it straightened out. Call Michele at 231-383-5716 with any questions. 1-3pm.

Chair Yoga class for \$5 at The Gathering Place. 3:30-4:30pm.

Yoga with Kari at Pleasant Valley Community Center in Arcadia. Open to all levels; \$13 per session. 231-383-1883. 5:30-7pm.

Deep Stretch & Meditation: This practice begins with asana (postures) and sequences that encourage deep release and ends with meditation. A variety of guided & non-guided meditation techniques, including Yoga Nidra, will be explored week-to-week. 5:30-7pm.*

Wednesdays

Pilates with Anna at the Oliver Art Center. annamallien@gmail.com 9-10am.

Stay Fit with Doris at The Gathering Place. 10-11am.

Open studio at the Oliver Art Center. Participants are strongly encouraged to become members and to contribute a donation of \$2 per visit. 10am-4pm.

Bingo at The Gathering Place. Cost is \$1 per card or bring a prize. 12:30-1:30pm.

Yoga with Kari at the Oliver Art Center. Open to all levels; \$13 per session. 231-383-1883. 5:30-7pm.

Thursdays

Slow Flow with Janna. 6:30-7:30am.*

Stretch and tone with Jean at Oliver Art Center. annamallien@gmail.com 9-10am.

Adult coloring at Benzie Shores District Library. All materials provided. 10-11am.

Bible Study at The Gathering Place. 10-11am.

Bunco at The Gathering Place. 1-2pm.

Computers with Carol at the Darcy Library at 7238 Commercial Street in Beulah. Ask Carol computer-related questions. Read to Rosie, the cute little dog! 1-5pm.

Everyone is welcome to attend Open Clay Studio at the Oliver Art Center, including families! Per 4-visit block (12 hours total, used how you like), \$60 fees cover one adult or one adult and child pair. It can be as fun or focused as a student prefers, and all skill levels should consider taking part. Children must be accompanied by an adult at all times in the studio. Price includes: 25 pounds of clay, glaze, and firings. 3:30-6:30pm.

Yoga with Kari at the Ware Farm of Bear Lake. Open to all levels; \$13 per session. 231-383-1883. 4-5:30pm.

Open Mic Night at The Cabbage Shed in Elberta. 8pm.

Fridays

Pilates with Anna at the Oliver Art Center. annamallien@gmail.com 9-10am.

Bunco at The Gathering Place. 9:30-10:30am.

Wii Bowling at The Gathering Place. 1-2pm.

Saturdays

Frankfort Farmers' Market at Open Space Park on Main Street, between 7th & 9th streets, along the beautiful waterfront. 9am-1pm.

Farmers' Market and Flea Market at the Interlochen Eagles #3503 at 20724 Honor

Highway/US-131, three miles west of Interlochen. Consisting of Michigan-grown fruits and veggies, flea marketers, cottage food vendors, artisans, arts & craft vendors, and independent reps. 12-4pm.

Body Sculpting on the ball with Deanne at Oliver Art Center. annamallien@gmail.com 9-10 am.

Sundays

Hot Yoga with Megan, a Bikram-trained instructor. Taught in the traditional Bikram style, performing the same sequence of 26 postures (each two times) over the course of 90 minutes. Class is in a heated studio (95-100 degrees), focusing on breath and alignment. Postures are static but dynamic, and students are encouraged to work safely at their own level of ability. 10-11:30am.*

Warm Gentle Yoga with Beth: Emphasizing breath, mindfulness, and meditation for stress relief. To gain both strength and flexibility, this class, held in a warm room, is perfect for unwinding and bringing out the best in yourself. 5:30-7pm.*

*Must pre-register for all DiscoverYOU Yoga classes. Single class is \$15; five-class package is \$70; 10-class package is \$130; 20-class package is \$240. Contact Jessica Ryan at 231-620-3529 or jessayogini@gmail.com to register.

ON DECK

Thursday, May 18

Darcy Library Book Club: *Plainsong*. 1:30-2:30pm.

Thursday, May 18

Benzie Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours at the Darcy Library. Network with other Benzie businesses, enjoy hors d'oeuvres (A. Papano's Pizza), and have a chance to win some prizes. Admission is \$5 at the door. 5-7pm.

Thursday, May 18

Open Mic/Thirsty Thursday at St. Ambrose Cellars. Get 35% off your howlers and growlers. 841 S. Pioneer Road, Beulah. 6-8pm.

Thursday, May 18

Sip & Dab: Queen Ann's Lace. Paint with a local artist as you are guided through your own paint-on-canvas masterpiece; all experience levels welcome. Create a memory of art with Sip and Dab, while eating and drinking the great food offerings of Platte River Inn in Honor. \$35 registration covers supplies and instruction. It is recommended to arrive 15 minutes prior to the start time for check-in, seat selection, and ordering the first beverage of your choice. 6-9pm.

Thursday, May 18

Live music with Doc Probes at the Cold Creek Inn of Beulah. Doc will sweeten the air with beautiful singing and guitar playing. In addition to his own singer-songwriter compositions, Doc spans a wide range of musical genres including folk, traditional, Gospel, old time, Irish & Celtic, blues, mellow rock, easy listening, jazz standards, country & Western, and Latin. No cover. 6-9pm.

Thursday, May 18

Severe Weather Training: If you are interested in learning more about severe weather or becoming an official National Weather Service SKYWARN storm spotter, you are

encouraged to attend this free presentation by meteorologists from the NWS at the Philip A. Hart Visitor Center, 9922 Front Street (M-72), Empire. 6:30-8pm.

Thursday, May 18

Elberta Village Council Meeting at the Village Community Building (behind the old Bay Valley Inn/Elberta Elementary School). 7pm.

Friday, May 19

Garlic Mustard Work Bee and Lunch: Join the Invasive Species Network (ISN) and other local partners to remove invasive garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) from Tank Hill in Frankfort. Then, stay after for a delicious garlic mustard-themed lunch. This is a workbee for all ages! All volunteers will also receive a free ISN t-shirt as a thank you for participating. Dress for the weather, and bring garden gloves if you prefer. We will work rain or shine! Meet at the First Congregational Church in downtown Frankfort, and we will carpool to Tank Hill, and then return to the church for lunch! RSVP with Emily Cook, ISN's outreach specialist, at 231-941-0950 x20 or email ecook@gtcd.org. 9am-12pm.

Friday, May 19

Spring Hike throughout the hilly terrain of Pete's Woods, part of the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy's Arcadia Dunes, C.S. Mott Nature Preserve. Learn the local flora and fauna on a leisurely spring hike with local botanist Judy Kelly and the Benzie Conservation District. Free event, all welcome. Call 231-882-4391 or email aime@benziecd.org to register. 1-3pm.

Friday, May 19

Free VinKarmaFlow: A flow to build strength, increase flexibility, and find focus. Link breath with movement, as you flow from one traditional pose to the next and build confidence mastering this routine. Help Jenn to hone her teaching skills by attending this FREE class. 5:30-7pm.*

Friday, May 19

Water Protectors Symposium: The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians will be hosting a symposium to raise awareness to the dangers of Enbridge Line 5. Speakers include GTB Councilors Mark Wilson, Jane Rohl, and Percy Bird; GTB Chairman Thurlow McClellan; Eric Keller of the Michigan League of Conservation Voters; Liz Kirkwood of FLOW for water; Bad River Tribal Chairman Robert Blanchard; Michigan State Senator Rick Jones; Michigan State Representative Yousef Rabhi; Holly Bird of Water Protectors Legal; Jim Lively and Pete Kirkwood of Great Lakes Business Network; Kate Madigan of Michigan Environmental Council; Kevin Gilbert of Change.org; Lee Sprague of the MI Canoe Team; and youth speakers Kristen Berry, Annie Lively, and Sonny Haworth.

Friday, May 19

The Feral Cats at St. Ambrose Cellars: stop out to see Phil Coryell and his mad harmonica skills, Monte Klein on guitar, and Professor Dave Grimes on bass—sure to heat things up! 6-9pm.

Friday, May 19

14th Annual Empire Asparagus Festival: Live music and pig roast. Entry is \$5 per person (16 and under is free); pig roast meal is \$11 per person. Dance, drink, and be merry with us under the big tent! Jack Pine will be performing live.

Saturday, May 20

14th Annual Asparagus Festival: Kick Yer Ass-paragus 5k Fun Run starts at 10am, with registration at 9am at the Empire Public Beach. Asparagus Cook-Off Recipe Contest at 12pm—due to the popularity of this event, the audience will be limited to the first 80 people in line. Food & Beer Tent open from 12-10pm. Andre Villoch & Friends will play music from 1-3pm. There will be a Children's Magic Show with Gordon Russ at 3:30pm under the big tent. From 5-7pm, Benjamin James will play, and The Benzie Playboys will take the stage from 7:30-9pm. (Entry fee is \$5, with 16 and under free.) At 1:30pm, the Asparagus Parade “is so nice, it goes around twice!” Anyone is welcome to participate, but you must salute asparagus! We welcome the eccentric: just call Ashley at 231-883-8297 or email besquirrely@gmail.com to be involved. Parade participants can begin to line up on Lake Street near the old Storm Orchard Barn at 1:15pm. The Ode to Asparagus Poetry Competition begins at 2pm: open to children, youth, and adults. Please send entries to info@glenlakelibrary.net.

Saturday, May 20

The first fundraising event for the 2017 Coho Salmon Festival (later this summer, in August) will be the Co-Ed Softball Tournament, held at the Homestead Township Park. Rosters are six guys and four girls, and the cost is \$150 per team. Concessions will be available throughout the day. Register with Sean at 231-383-5248 or contact Festival President Josh at 231-383-1654.

Saturday, May 20

Benzonia Township Spring Clean-up Day on US-31 South, behind Tri-Gas and next to the former Antolin (a.k.a. former Magna plant). Stop into the township hall to get a ticket and a list of items not accepted. 7-11:30am.

Saturday, May 20

Homestead Township Spring Clean-up Day at the Road Commission in Honor. 8am-12pm.

Saturday, May 20

Weldon Township Spring Clean-up Day at the Thompsonville Industrial Park; please line up on Second Street. Proof of property ownership/residency (i.e. tax notice or utility bill) must be presented in order to dump. Only one 4x8-foot trailer or pick-up load will be allowed. Plan to unload your own items. 9am-1pm.

Saturday, May 20

Young Naturalist Spring Birding, presented by the Benzie Audubon Society. Learn how to use binoculars, spot birds around Crystal Lake, and learn to identify birds using a guide book. Darcy Library. 10am-2pm.

Saturday, May 20

Fun Day at Watson's: Raising money for the Benzie Central Track and Athletic Stadium, while having fun! Watson's is donating money for test drives, oil changes, and any vehicles purchased that day. We will also have food, games, car wash, music, and lots of fun. There will also be raffle tickets available for \$50 each; only 1,400 raffle tickets being sold. Winner gets a brand new Jeep! 10am-2pm.

Saturday, May 20

Benzie Area RC Club's Fun Fly & Swap Meet at the Thompsonville Airport. This year, we will be using the paved East-West runway, which will make it easier to fly larger aircraft, like jets and ¼-scale planes. The airport will be closed to full-size aircraft. All pilots and builders are encouraged to bring a table, back of vehicle, or booth, so that they can sell and/or trade remote control planes, parts, tools, and building supplies. Last year, the swap meet was a great success, with lots of pilots walking around with new and used plane parts—and with smiles on their faces! No food vendors, so bring your own beverages and food in a cooler, or go to the nearby Thompsonville

restaurants. Call Mark Harrison at 231-970-0088 for more information. 10am-3pm.

Saturday, May 20

Saldaje at St. Ambrose Cellars. Saldaje is new Old World folk music. 6-9pm.

Saturday, May 20

Big Band Dinner & Dance at Portage Point Inn & Marina of Onekama. Swing into spring by joining the fun with a dinner dance, featuring the 16-piece band General Assembly in the historic, lakeside banquet room. Cut a rug on the spacious hardwood dance floor or just kick back and enjoy the sweet sounds of the big band. \$140 per couple. Dinner: 6-7:30pm. Dance 7:30-10:20pm. For reservations or more details, call 231-889-7500 or email info@portagepointresort.com.

Saturday, May 20

Community Dinner at the Elberta United Methodist Church. 8-10pm.

Sunday, May 21

Melissa Lee at Stormcloud. Originally from Traverse City, Melissa Lee is an up-and-coming Nashville Country music artist. 8-10pm.

Sunday, May 21

The Northwest Michigan Draft Horse & Mule Association is partnering with the Rex Dobson Ruby Ellen Farm in Leelanau County for their Plow Day event. Bring your sun hat, camera, and chair for a field-side seat to see the working horses and various types of farm equipment: horse-drawn wagon rides, horse-drawn plowing demonstrations (up to 10 teams of 2-, 3-, 4-, and 6-horse hitch), horseshoe display, and harness demonstrations. Two museums open, with farm-made products available for purchase. Food and beverages provided by Dusty Trails 4-H Club. Free, and the public is welcome. 11am-4pm

Sunday, May 21

Join Stormcloud and TC Tango for a Tango Milonga dance party in the pub. 4-6pm.

Sunday, May 21

Storm the Mic: Join Stormcloud for open mic night, hosted by Blake Elliott. 6:30-9pm.

Monday, May 22

The Benzie Shores District Library offers free after-school homework help to students in grades 4-6. Please stop in or call 231-352-4671 to register your child for this program. 3-6pm.

Monday, May 22

Live music with Doc Probes at Bud's in Interlochen..No cover. 5-8pm.

Monday, May 22

Screening of “13th” at the Darcy Library. An in-depth look at the prison system in the United States and how it reveals the nation's history of racial inequality. 6:30-8pm.

Thursday, May 18

Sip & Dab: Lake Michigan Love. All experience levels welcome. \$35 registration. Hotel Frankfort. 6:30-9:30pm.

Tuesday, May 23

5-to-One Playgroups are an innovative project of the Great Start Collaborative that brings families and local partners to ensure that all children reach their highest potential. Playgroups are designed as playful, child-led explorations that nurture adult-child relationships and promote growth of the whole child. All playgroups are free and include a snack and story for children, as well as playtime with engaging materials. The parent advisory team meets in the last 30 minutes of each playgroup. Families with children 0-5 years of age invited. Older siblings are welcome! Located at Grow Benzie. 10-11:30am.

Tuesday, May 23

Live music by Gregory Evans at Lake Ann Brewing Company. Gregory Evans is a singer,

songwriter, guitarist, and music teacher. You will enjoy his unique style of vocals and guitar as he performs music from the “singer-songwriter” era, as well as classic and contemporary rock and a wide variety of rhythm and blues. 6:30-9:30pm.

Tuesday, May 23

Cyber Security: At the Benzie Shores District Library, cyber security manager Susan Swanson will provide tips and lessons on how to keep you and your loved ones safe online. 7-8pm.

Tuesday, May 23

Off The Page with Lynne Rae Perkins: Now in its fifth year, the series brings award-winning writers and readers together in Benzie County. Perkins received the Newberry Medal award in 2006 for her illustrated novel, *Criss Cross*, and has written and illustrated other novels and picture books. She will speak with Benzie Central elementary students in the morning at the Benzie Central High School Auditorium, and then she will present a community program at the Mills Community House that evening. Free, open to the public. 7-8pm.

Tuesday, May 23

Immigration Concerns in Benzie County is a free community event, presented by the Concerned Citizens of Benzie County. Come for a panel discussion with Benzie County Sheriff Ted Schendel; immigration lawyer Marcelo Betti; local grower Don Smeltzer; Father Wayne Dziekan from JPAC; and Carolina Tabora Cortez, a Migrant Family Services specialist. The public is welcome and urged to attend. Grow Benzie. 6:30-8:30pm.

Wednesday, May 24

The Benzie Shores District Library offers free after-school homework help to students in grades 4-6. Please stop in or call 231-352-4671 to register your child for this program. 3-6pm.

Wednesday, May 24

Honor The Family Knight: This will be the last year that Platte River Elementary will operate, so Benzie County Central Schools is inviting our alumni and families of past and present to join us to celebrate and relive memories from times spent in our school. This event is free and open to all people with a connection to Platte River Elementary. 6-8pm.

Thursday, May 25

Baby's Breath Work Bee: Help ISN to pull invasive baby's breath from the Elberta Beach. No need to register beforehand, but any questions can be directed to Emily Cook. Bring work gloves, water, and sunscreen. Meet at the beach parking lot. 9am-12pm.

Friday, May 26

Frankfort musician Jake Frysinger performs a harmonious fusion of cover songs and originals. Get down to Stormcloud this Memorial Day Weekend for live music, BBQ on the patio, and other start-to-summer essentials. 8-10pm.

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Phoenix

Continued from page 1

ects. When he entered ArtPrize in 2012 with a bike that he had made entirely of different types of wood, he got the nickname “Wooden Bike Guy,” as well as his first exposure to the international competition.

ArtPrize is an open, independently organized art competition that takes place for 19 days each fall in Grand Rapids. The idea came from Grand Rapids entrepreneur Rick DeVos, who wanted to create an art competition that was open to anyone who wanted to submit work and in which the public voted for the winner online. The first ArtPrize took place in 2009 with 150 venues displaying works by 1,262 artists from more than 40 states and a dozen countries, and that first year, ArtPrize awarded the world’s largest monetary art prize.

Now, more than \$500,000 in prizes are awarded each year, which includes a \$200,000 prize awarded entirely by the public vote and another \$200,000 prize awarded by a jury of experts.

ArtPrize’s website states, “Any artist working in any medium from anywhere in the world can participate. Art is exhibited throughout downtown Grand Rapids—museums, bars, public parks, restaurants, theaters, hotels, bridges, laundromats, auto-body shops, vacant storefronts, and office spaces. Artists and venues register for the competition, then find each other through an on-line connections process in late spring... From the beginning, ArtPrize [has been] a totally new type of city-wide event, intended to disrupt typically highly curated art prizes. And from the beginning, it has provoked discussion, on the streets and online.”

Since ArtPrize is free and open to the public, it attracts more than 500,000 annual visitors who walk the city to check out the art displays at the various venues. Thus, getting a good location can be a big part in securing votes.

“The venue we were at in 2012 wasn’t high traffic, so we didn’t get a lot of visitors, but the venue was really supportive, and we had a great time,” Swanson says. The experience was so enjoyable that Swanson once again entered Art Prize in 2015—this time with an even more challenging project.

“When we were growing up, my brothers and I all had Schwinn Stingray bikes. We loved those bikes. So when I thought about creating another Art Prize entry, the vintage Stingray seemed perfect. But making just one didn’t seem hard enough—so I made three,” Swanson says.

Whereas he had been working on the 2012 bike on and off for two years, the 2015 set of three bikes took a total of 450 hours within one year. The bikes were again constructed of wood and stained so that the wood grain shows through. This time around, Swanson was fortunate enough to land at a high-traffic venue, and his work was voted into the Top 20 by the public. The extra confidence he gained from that recognition convinced Swanson that it was time to devote himself full time

to the creative life. He left his 30-year career in the tool-and-die industry and moved to Benzie County, where he and his wife, Sue, had purchased a cottage near Crystal Lake three years earlier.

That is when things got a little more interesting.

Up In Flames

ArtPrize concluded in October 2015, and the couple had moved Up North before the new year. Long before Swanson’s success at ArtPrize, the couple had been trying to figure out how they could make a living up here. Sue had been working in IT for the Catholic Diocese, and she was able to secure a job up here in cyber security.

For those first few months, Sue was the breadwinner, until her husband’s business could get off the ground. Over that winter, Swanson worked for his brother-in-law, Rick

was minor this time, and Swanson was able to re-open his business on schedule, and he has been happily creating custom furniture pieces for clients in his new woodworking shop for the past six months.

What The Future Holds

The business name, Always August Designs, is Swanson’s way of communicating his love of summer in Benzie County. His works capture the feel of cottage life and the beautiful days spent outdoors, with furniture that fits perfectly into that lifestyle.

“Always August Designs will specialize in custom, hand-built furniture that is a step up from what you can buy in stores,” Swanson says. “A customer may need a piece that fits into a specific space, or that meets other special requirements. I want to make beautiful, useful pieces in a price range that most people can afford.”

When asked about his business plan, Swanson says that he will stay flexible and respond to the needs of the market.

“There are not a lot of others doing what I’m doing in this area,” he says. “I want to make things I like and see if customers want them.”

He has made mahogany table tops for Stormcloud Brewing Company in downtown Frankfort, and a custom dresser that he made for a local customer has been featured in a recent exhibit at the Oliver Art Center.

Current projects in Swanson’s workshop include mahogany tables, designed to resemble the hull of a Chris Craft boat—these can be personalized with the customer’s boat name. He is also working on a hickory bench and other custom projects. He

is confident that he can respond to growing demand for his work.

“I’m used to being under the gun,” he says, remembering the demanding 9-to-5 office job. “I’m good at planning ahead and being very organized, so I welcome requests for new projects.”

In between designing and building furniture, Swanson is loving his new life in Benzie. He and his wife take advantage of the year-round recreational options, including biking, skiing, snowboarding, and just enjoying life in general.

“I love this place,” he says. “I love the people here, and I want to do good work for them.”

You can see samples Swanson’s work at the Frankfort Craft Show on Saturday, June 17, along Main Street from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. And by the way, the Stingray bikes are still for sale.

Greta Bolger is president of the board for the Oliver Art Center. Contact Swanson by emailing kurt@alwaysaugustdesigns.com.



Top: One of three Schwinn Stingray bikes that Kurt Swanson entered in the 2015 ArtPrize in Grand Rapids. Bottom: A custom table. Photos courtesy of Kurt Swanson.

Breath

Continued from page 1

the beach for about three hours at a time, which isn't a bad way to spend a morning during the summer in Northern Michigan." Removing baby's breath during the early summer is ideal, because the plant dries out by late August and can break off at the base, turning it into a tumbleweed that can travel down the shoreline in the wind, dispersing its seed along the way.

The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy has been treating baby's breath at the nearby Arcadia Dunes Nature Preserve since 2004 and recently expanded removal efforts to Elberta Beach in 2016, according to Jon Throop, GTRLC land steward.

"These dune ecosystems host a number of rare and threatened species that rely

Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Manistee counties. Of those Top 20, the priority plants are known as the Focus Four, which includes garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed, oriental bittersweet, and Phragmites. While baby's breath is not listed as a Focus Four priority species, Elberta Beach is a valuable landscape that serves as critical habitat, making this an important project for ISN.

Volunteer events, called work bees, will begin on Thursday, May 25, and continue sporadically until early August—all are welcome to join in this effort from 9 a.m. until noon each day!

- Thursday, May 25
- Thursday, June 1
- Saturday, June 17
- Thursday, July 6
- Saturday, July 15
- Thursday, August 3



Volunteer Paula Dreeszen holding a full-sized baby's breath plant that she removed from Elberta Beach. Photo by Emily Cook.

on the dynamic nature of dunes for their survival," Throop says. "GTRLC quickly realized that protecting land against development isn't enough to maintain these habitats into the future. We have to safeguard these areas from the ongoing threat of invasive species to truly preserve the health and beauty of our iconic beaches and dunes."

Paula Dreeszen is a volunteer with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy and frequently helped with last year's baby's breath-removal events.

"I fight invasives, because I love native wildflowers," Dreeszen says. "Removing baby's breath at Elberta Beach is especially important to prevent its spread south into beach and dune areas, rich with natives like hairy puccoon, beach pea, and pitcher's thistle."

Baby's breath is one of ISN's "Top 20 Least-Wanted Invasive Species," a list of invasive plants that are prevalent in the four-county region that ISN serves: Benzie,

As a thank you, anyone who participates in a work bee will receive some ISN swag and discounts to local businesses, including Stormcloud Brewing Company and the Crescent Bakery in Frankfort. Additionally, names will be entered into a drawing that takes place at the end of each event. Prizes include certificates to The Cabbage Shed and FrankZ, native wildflower seed packets, t-shirts, and more.

Emily Cook is ISN's outreach specialist. If you want to participate in a work bee session, there is no need to register beforehand, but any questions can be directed to 231-941-0960 extension 20 or ecook@gtrcd.org. As these work bees will be held outside, volunteers are asked to bring work gloves, water, and sunscreen. Meet at the beach parking lot. For additional volunteer opportunities or more information on invasive species, visit habitatmatters.org.



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Chelsea Menhart wants to make a difference. It's why she decided to become a family nurse practitioner.

A graduate of Michigan State University's specialty FNP program, Chelsea is eager to work with patients to achieve the best health they can, through preventive medicine and by helping them manage their acute and chronic illnesses.

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Chelsea Menhart, FNP-C
Family Nurse Practitioner



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