

The Amazing Cycling Watsons

Family turns job loss into opportunity of a lifetime

By Nancy Bordine
Current Contributor

As with almost every place that they have been over the past four months, the Watson family's pair of 'bicycles-built-for-three' caught attention as they recently pedaled through Frankfort—two adults, four kids, two bikes, two trailers, eight pannier bags, two coolers, and about a bazillion water bottles, with the ambition of cycling 7,000 miles across 19 states over the course of 13 to 15 months, according to the family's blog.

So far, since they set out on March 31, 2017, the Watsons have biked approximately 3,300 miles across the states that line our country's northern border, from their home in Seattle through the Rocky Mountains of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming to the Great



Two adults, four kids, two bikes, two trailers, eight pannier bags, two coolers, and a bazillion water bottles trek across 19 states over the course of 13 to 15 months. Photo by Nancy Bordine.

Plains of North Dakota and the farm country of Minnesota and Wisconsin, then through Michigan's Upper Peninsula wilderness and along the Lake Michigan coastline to our fair shores here in Frankfort. After passing through here, they will continue their journey south into Indiana, Kentucky, and Virginia, with hopes of reaching the Atlantic Ocean by the end of October or early November. From there, they plan to follow the coast through both Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, with a goal of landing in Houston, Texas, by April or May of 2018.

The kids range in age from four to 10, and Mom and Dad are 38 and 40, respectively. Neither adult is a competitive athlete or authoritative travel guide, so why would they

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Benzie County Collaborates on Support for Haiti

Return2Haiti, Days for Girls, and Bedazzled work together to empower young girls

By Greta Bolger
Current Contributor

It all started at Northern Michigan University in 1983, when Kristin Pensyl (now 52), originally from Detroit, met Cynthia "Cindy" Peterson (54), originally from Cadillac, in a calculus class. At the time, both women were majoring in math but found that they had more than just numbers in common—both were socially minded and politically active, and they later became housemates during their college years. Little did they know, however, that their lives would continue to run in such tangential lines for the next three decades.

Kristin Pensyl went on to marry Jim "Bubby" Grabowski, a landscape designer with familial ties to Manistee, and the couple landed on 93 acres at the Benzie-Manistee county line. Together, they raised five kids, the

youngest of whom is about to be a senior in high school. Pensyl has spent her post-college life devoted to the education of her own children and the education of others. Having gone through the Waldorf school system herself, she helped to found the Benzie Waldorf contingency that ran from 1994 to 2007; for the past two years, Pensyl has served as an academic aide at Frankfort High School, helping out



Days for Girls volunteers in the Grow Benzie sewing studio. Photo by Greta Bolger.

with just about any subject, though, unsurprisingly, math is her forte. She also runs a Math Lab for high school students at Frankfort.

Similarly, Cindy Peterson (now Cindy Balthazar) is likewise a mother of five who has spent much of her post-college career in education: she has taught mathematics at several high schools, including currently in Lansing; she has also taught chemistry at Alpena Community College and Mid-Michigan Community College, after receiving her Master's degree in chemistry from Central Michigan University; she is currently a PhD student at Michigan State University in the Department of Community Sustainability.

Her husband is Pierre Balthazaar, who grew up in Belle-Anse, Haiti, and

Please see Haiti on page 6

Continuing the Tradition of Place

The value of connection

By Eliza Forrest
Current Contributor

Summers at the family cottage, where time slows. Cousins can be found building sand-castles and playing unconventional croquet. Aunts, uncles, parents, and grandparents sit around the table, while their chatter and the waves lull you to sleep.

There is something comforting about the memories of the cottage on Crystal Lake where I spent every summer as a child and most as an adult—up until four years ago.

I know that I was very lucky to have such experiences growing up. My summers there taught me to enjoy small, day-to-day moments and brought me closer to my family. My grandmother was very good at bringing ev-

eryone together, and even though she played host, we all felt at ease with coming and going in that space. I often wish that I could continue such meaningful traditions.

But my grandparents, looking to downsize, sold their summer cottage on the north shore of Crystal Lake



Eliza Forrest (right) with her mother, Ruth Forrest, at her maternal grandparents' cottage on Crystal Lake. Photo courtesy of Eliza Forrest.

four years ago, and it still saddens me to drive by. I know it is not the specific place that grips me but more the memories of times spent there with my family—especially with my grandparents, who have since passed on.

Losing a family cottage can be similar to losing a close relative, especially if that place was essential to bringing family together. It is hard not having that unique space that we once shared as a family.

As an adult, I go to visit family and close friends around the country, but it usually revolves around special events that are few and far between.

Recently, my cousins and I lamented at our grandfather's memorial service that it is too bad we only get together for weddings and funerals—a common sentiment amongst people, beginning in their 30s.

As people grow up and have their own families, many go through a similar loss or transition. With the aging and passing on of family members who were the owners of vacation properties, many of the younger generation cannot afford to keep up second homes and/or pay the high waterfront taxes. My aunt and uncle have started to rent out

Please see Tradition on page 2

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Midwest Brass and Gas

Really old cars

By Susan Koenig
Current Contributor

Another sort of traveler passed through Benzie County recently, with stops in Honor and Frankfort, before heading south to Manistee and on to Cadillac, Fremont, and Reed City, eventually landing in Ludington, where the group will disband.

Thirteen antique cars—dating from 1912 and before, with 33 people accompanying them—are members of Midwest Brass and Gas (under the auspices of the Horseless Carriage Club of America), a group devoted to maintaining and preserving the originality of, or restoring to their original condition, vehicles vintage 1912 and older.

The HCCA national chapter is a non-profit educational organization that requires each car member—for it is the vehicle itself that is the organization member, not the person who owns it—to be faithful to at least 85 percent of its original form. Experts are assigned to assess the authenticity of each prospective participant.



Vintage car parked in Frankfort. Photo by Susan Koenig.

Midwest Brass and Gas gets its name from

the brass trim that adorns these beautiful relics in the form of lamps, horns, and other ornamental pieces.

This band of devotees tours three times a year, in the spring, summer, and fall. They have their business meeting in the summer at The Shack Lakeside Log Lodge near Fremont, where they come together with reports from each committee officer: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and (perhaps most important) technical chair.

I met with the group at The Frankfort Hotel, where four generations of the faithful were dining. These people have known each other for years and, naturally, look forward to the reunions. I chatted with several representatives of the vehicle members, including: Devin Shaw, proud to be a second-generation participant; Margaret Melville, the group's secretary; Sue Neller, a textile conservator, who is the earliest member of the assemblage, having joined with her husband in the early 1950s; plus a large table of third- and fourth-generation family members who love to go along for the ride.

Tradition

Continued from page 1

their summer place in Door County to be able to keep it in the family, and I know another family who inherited an estate and has had to cut back on upkeep expenses, which can be sad when they are used to the consistency of a place.

Things change further when people begin to go in different geographical directions, as they find new jobs and partners. For instance, my younger brother Alex and his wife are looking in Maine for their summer place, because that is where her family summered and is closer to their home in Boston. My older brother Luke and his family often spend their vacations in Alanson, Michigan, where his mother-in-law has a cottage. I am glad that my family is forging new summer traditions, but I do wish that we had something to draw us together in the summers, like we used to with our grandparents' cottage.

It makes me wonder—what is the best way to create new traditions? I have been thinking about what aspects of traditions I cherish most. I want something that I look forward to but that also brings a level of comforting nostalgia that comes with something familiar.

Sure, I love traveling and discovering new places, but I do not know that an annual trip with close friends or family to new places each year is something that can feel as relaxing as a summer place—the same place, year after year. So I am thinking that perhaps it is best to return to the same place each year, to create a sense of stability; however, buying and maintaining a property or a cottage to

share with friends and family may not be an option for many, certainly not in my Xennial generation, the micro-generation between Gen Xers and Millennials that I belong to.

Maybe finding rentable cabins or a campground to return to can fulfill that need, but there are risks associated with that.

My partner's family returned to the same cabins in the Upper Peninsula every year, beginning when he was five years old. He has great memories of that spot and shared that tradition with me three years ago. Unfortunately, the cabins sold last year and are no longer available to rent. In an effort to continue the magic of his youth and share it with his son, we decided to stay at the campground near the cabins this year. Ultimately, though, it made him sad to see the cabins but not have access to them. I understood his sense of loss. It seemed that returning to that location was only going to be a reminder of what he had lost—I told him that perhaps it was time to find a new tradition and that maybe we can work toward that together.

I am hoping to be able to purchase land someday in the Upper Peninsula, where I can create a home base for a gathering of friends and family. Until then, however, I think that the best thing for me would be to start small, with a yearly barbecue or a trip down a river.

Ideally, I would like to explore and discover a place that can become the backdrop for future reunions. A special place is important, but just as vital is to continue to nurture those relationships that make me feel at home, because what are traditions without someone to share them with?

Maybe to reconnect every year, we need a person to do the connecting. I see now how important my grandmother's role of family gatherer was, and I would someday like to fill those shoes.

Watsons

Continued from page 1

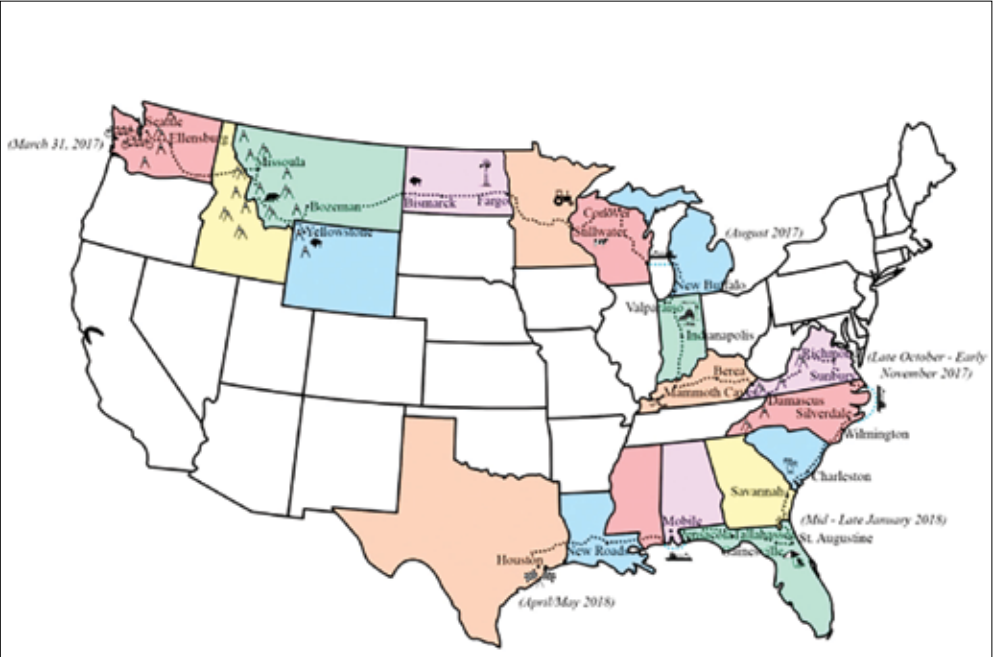
attempt such a feat?

First of all, to slow down: no soccer, no instruments, no Girl Scouts, no swim lessons, no camps, no birthday parties, nor any other activity that would typically fill their first-world, middle-class lives, according to their blog. The parents say that they wanted

By the Kindness of Strangers

The cycling family makes lodging arrangements as they travel, based on the weather forecast and their ‘Warm Showers’ phone app.

“Warm Showers is an organization that provides cyclers with a network of hosts, willing to allow them to camp on their property and take a shower in their home,” explains Dad Watson, a recent PhD graduate, as he pulls up the Warm Showers app on his phone, and the map lights up with a scattering of hosts around Lake Michigan. “It’s a reciprocal thing—we also host cyclists



The Watsons modified their initial route, seen in the map above, to go over the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, rather than taking the ferry across Lake Michigan from Wisconsin. “Flying by the seat of our pants here ...,” they say in their blog. Map courtesy of DandelionsAndTumbleweeds.com.

more time to watch their kids play, to focus on their marriage, and to read more books. They wanted to give their kids a way to engage with nature and to actually see the country in an entirely new way, given that the family is biking on mostly off-the-beaten-track roads and paths, rarely on the interstate. They also wanted to simplify their lives, in order to better distinguish between needs and wants: how many shoes, clothes, toys does one family really need?

The Watson parents believe that this trip will lead to a better appreciation of people and place over material things, since entertainment will be found in each other and the ever-changing landscape as they journey along, together. Most of all, maybe, the trip will teach this pair of Type A planner-parents to let go of the things that they have no control over, like Dad’s recent job loss.

“Our circumstances aligned, seemingly by divine intervention, to create this opportunity of adventure for us,” says Mom Watson (pseudo names used to protect the family while traveling). “An unexpected early retirement from a [military] career that has dictated the last 17.5 years of our lives; our previously unsellable house sold; graduating just prior to our departure, so the degree and related education are completely current and allow for us to take a pause before submitting to the demands of a new career path—now is the perfect time for us to make this trek. No one is in diapers anymore, and no one is in middle school, yet.”

at our home in Seattle.”

According to its website, the Warm Showers community is a free hospitality exchange for touring cyclists worldwide, in which hosts and bike tourists both sign up on the website or app. The interactive map and other search tools allow bike travelers to find hosts along their route; travelers send a private message to potential hosts through the site/app, and hosts decide whether to offer free hospitality, consisting of a couch, a room, or a place to camp—very similar to Couch Surfer, but tailored for cyclists. As of publication, there are 98,321 active members and 50,855 active hosts using Warm Showers globally.

“Tonight we’ll probably stay in a hotel, because it’s predicted to be pouring rain,” Mom Watson explains. “Otherwise, we stay with Warm Shower hosts or at state campgrounds. Michigan is great, because the state campgrounds have a ‘no turn-away’ policy for anyone who arrives under their own power [i.e. walking, biking, etc.]—not all states we’ll be going through have that policy.”

There have been other instances when the family has not been able to stay with a Warm Showers host, but they have made due.

“Along our trek, we found ourselves one night without a campground or Warm Shower host within biking distance,” Dad Watson says. “So we asked an elderly farmer if we could set up camp on his property. He was kind enough to let us stay there. In the morning, the kids tended to his raspberry

patch for him.”

Prior to setting out, Dad downloaded many of the children’s home-school texts onto their e-tablets.

“Some of the boys’ workbooks weren’t available as downloads,” Dad Watson explains. “So we put them in care boxes that we’ve shipped to post offices along our route. The kids each have e-pads for doing their schoolwork.”

Beyond schooling, the logistics of the trip also include feeding the family.

“It’s hard to carry enough food for the six of us—food is heavy,” Mom Watson says. “We restock at every major grocery that we ride past. We have a two-burner stove that I prepare meals on. Before we left home, I compiled a whole cookbook of one-skillet meals.”

While both Mom and Dad have each lost weight on the trek, the kids have been able to maintain their weight, which is good for them.

“Not every Warm Shower host lists themselves as providing food, but we’ve not been to one yet that hasn’t given us something to eat,” Mom says. “With all the news about how bad our country is, we’re glad that our children are seeing so much kindness and generosity, but we don’t want them to develop a blind trust that everyone will always give them things. It’s a challenging to keep things in balance.”

From Sea to Shining Sea

Single adult cyclists average 70 miles a day in a cross-country trek. The Watson family averages 27 miles a day, taking into account rest days and set-backs.

“Our daily distance is limited to what our four-year-old can tolerate,” Mom Watson says. “If she gets too tired, she could fall off her seat, so we don’t risk that.”

The family has made changes to their initial route, like when they opted to cross the Straits of Mackinac from the Upper Peninsula, instead of taking the ferry from Wisconsin to Michigan.

“We like that our children are seeing how beautiful our country is,” Dad Watson says. “Until traveling slowly through them, I didn’t have an appreciation for states like Wisconsin and Michigan. We took the ferry from St. Ignace to Mackinac Island, then from the island to Mackinaw City.”

Ten-year-old Sissy says that the best part of a slow trek across the country is “seeing animals and things that I wouldn’t see in my own backyard.”

Meanwhile, eight-year-old Otter thinks that the toughest part of cross-country cycling is the uphill—by which he means going over mountain passes in the Rockies.

“The Appalachians are ahead of us,” Dad says. “They’ll be steeper than the Rockies.”

Six-year-old Mr. T likes sling-shots best: “You know, making sling-shots at each campground we stop at.”

Four-year-old Lil’ Mo describes the cycling lifestyle as, “Great! I get to play in all kinds of playgrounds at the campgrounds.”

The family will soon be stopping in New Buffalo, Michigan, taking a week off to rest, refit their gear, and visit with family.

A recent quote from the troupe’s blog: “We have about 260 miles to go to our respite stop at the southern end of Lake Michigan, and boy are we ready for a week off! We’ve been at this for four months. To have a break from near-daily camp set-up and break-down, a few days off that are not consumed with errands and civilization-based catch-up chores, and secure food storage that includes refrigeration will feel decadent. In the meantime, we will continue to enjoy the beautiful views and tasty fruits of Michigan as our route bounces back and forth between the lakeshore and orchards.”

Follow the family as they make their way south through Civil War sites at DandelionsAndTumbleweeds.com.

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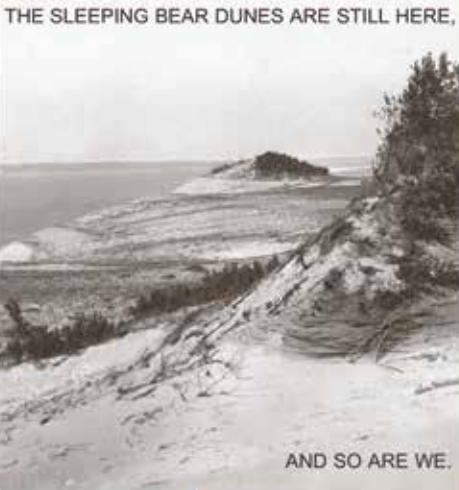
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Mondays
Barre Fusion (Barre + Yoga + Fitness) with Beth at the Oliver Art Center in Frankfort. 770-235-9306. 9-10am.

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.

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.

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.

Grow Benzie Farmers' Market: Every Monday at 4pm and 5:30pm, there will be free cooking and nutrition-education classes. All are welcome! Fresh vegetables and fruits, baked goods, bread, jam, honey, maple syrup, artisan crafts, and more will be featured at each market! You can also tour our new edible trails and try out mini-golf! The Grill Benzie Food Truck will be there so bring the family for dinner! 5885 Frankfort Highway (M-115) between Benzonia and Frankfort. 3-7pm.

Tuesdays
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. Email annamallien@gmail.com if interested. 9-10am.

Gentle yoga in the barn at the First Congregational Church of Benzonia. All levels welcome. Donation. 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.

Yard Yoga with Jenn Ryan at St. Ambrose Cellars. Register via text 231-218-0655. 6-7:30pm.

Steve Fernand plays Ballads a la Bossa at the Cold Creek Inn. 6-9pm.

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

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

Fitness Fusion (Yoga + Fitness + Pilates) with Beth at Discover YOU Yoga & Fitness. 770-235-9306. 10-11:15 am. *

Michigan Legacy Art Park (Crystal Mountain) is offering ATV-riding tours to guests who may be unable to hike the rustic, hilly trails. Tours take place at 10am on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, from June 21 through August 12. Because seating is limited to five passengers, advanced registration is required for these tours. Tour is free with \$5 admission. 10am-12pm.

Open art 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.

The Storm Riders Cycling Club is rolling through beautiful Benzie County this summer. Join the rides every Wednesday, or just those that you can make! Explore rotating sections of rides around Frankfort and Elberta. Rides will begin and end at Stormcloud Brewing Company, and riders get a discount on their first beer after the ride. No registration; just show up!

Thursdays
Elberta Farmers' Market at the Elberta Pavilion Park. 8am-12:30pm.

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
Fitness Fusion (Fitness + Yoga + Pilates) with Beth at the Oliver Art Center. 770-235-9306. 9-10 am.

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

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

Michigan Legacy Art Park's ATV-riding tours. 10am-12pm.

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.

Steve Fernand plays Ballads a la Bossa at the Cold Creek Inn. 6-9pm.

*Yoga classes at Discover YOU Yoga and Fitness in Frankfort every day of the week, except Saturday. For a complete schedule and more information on classes and rates, visit discoveryyogami.com.

ON DECK

Thursday, August 10
Volunteer Trail Building Day - Arcadia Dunes. Come help connect the Dry Hill Trail to the Village of Arcadia! We are looking for plenty of helpers on this project, which will last into October. Meet at the intersection of St. Pierre Road and the seasonal Taylor Road. Tools will be provided, but bring comfortable shoes, gloves and plenty to drink. Contact Steve Lagerquist or Jon Troop at (231) 929-7911 with questions. To RSVP please visit our website: www.gtrlc.org or call 231-929-7911. 10am-12pm

Thursday, August 10
Beulah Music in the Park featuring "Awesome



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Distraction”. Free Family Fun. Bring a chair or blanket. 7pm Downtown Beulah Park every Thursday. Brought to you by the Crystal Lake Community Business Association along with many gracious sponsors. 7-9pm.

Friday & Saturday, August 11 & 12
Port Oneida Fair. Visitors take a step back in time at the two-day Port Oneida Fair to experience life as it was in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Take the trolley, hike, bike or drive to the select historic sites where a variety of traditional rural crafts and activities take place. Over 100 demonstrators will be hard at work. Children can try their



hand at crosscut sawing and other farm implements. Horses mowing in the fields while artists create paintings inspired by the cultural landscape. Take in a display of antique bicycles, cameras and phonographs. Learn about basket weaving, soapmaking, buttermaking, spinning, and fur trapping. Satisfy your curiosity and walk through many of the historic farmhouses and barns that will be open for tours. www.phsb.org Port Oneida.

Saturday, August 12
Crystal Lake Team Marathon. The race starts in Beulah and goes around Crystal Lake and ends back in Beulah. First four team members run 5 miles each. Fifth team member runs 6.2 miles. Register onlin <https://eevents.bytepro.net/crystal-lake-marathon>. Downtown Beulah. 8am-1pm.

Saturday, August 12
Summer Sounds: Nashon Holloway Band at Michigan Legacy Art Park at Crystal Mountain. Enjoy a concert in the woods at Michigan Legacy Art Park. Equally at home in jazz, soul, and folk music, newcomer Nashon Holloway and her band bring an honest, heartfelt performance all can enjoy. 7-9pm.



Our best guess as to what the August eclipse will look like for Benzie County. The eclipse will start just before 1pm with the max eclipse around 2:20pm, before finishing around 3:40pm. At its max, the sun will be approximately 80-90 percent covered. The next few North American exlipsees will be in 2024, 2044, and 2045.

Wednesday, August 16
Elvis the King ”Rains” at Stormcloud. Break out your blue suede shoes for our Elvis Costume Contest with stormy prizes for participants. Plus, get \$1 off your first pour for impersonating the King. Sing Like the King Karaoke on the patio and the King’s Fave Food cookin’ on the storm-grill. Frankfort. 7-10pm.

Thursday, August 17
Beulah Music in the Park featuring “The Ramblin’ Band”. 7-9pm.

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Thursday, August 17
Volunteer Trail Building Day at Arcadia Dunes. 10am-12pm.

Friday & Saturday, August 18 & 19
41st Frankfort Art Fair! Held at Market Square Park in Frankfort. Over 170 artists. Friday: 4-8pm. Saturday: 10am-4pm.

Saturday, August 19
Flags of Good Intentions at Michigan Legacy Art Park. Take time to break from the busyness, mental clutter, and stress with this outdoor art experience. Enjoy an introspective

art project in the park led by Deona Paine, followed by a contemplative hike to Sanctuary for reflection. 10am-12pm.

Saturday, August 19
Summer Sounds at Michigan Legacy Art Park. The poignant songwriting and Americana-infused indie rock from The Bergamot promises to perfectly suit the Art Park forest setting. 7-9pm.

Sunday, August 20
Benzie Area Symphony Orchestra will have its second concert at the Benzie Central High School Auditorium. The theme of the concert is “Burnished Brass.” Our principal trumpet player, Mr. Jim Bekkering, will be featured on Hummel’s Trumpet Concerto in E. The repertoire for the afternoon will be as follows: Hummel’s Trumpet Concerto in E featuring Jim Bekkering, Beethoven Egmont, arr., Sopkin, A-8353, Beethoven Symphony Number 1, op.21,C, Schubert Rosamunde Schubert Unfinished Symphony, Wagner Tannhauser. Ticket cost are \$15.00 for adults, \$10.00 for Seniors and Students, Children under 12 will be admitted free. 4pm.

Monday, August 21
Solar Eclipse!

Tuesday-Thursday, August 22-24
U of M: Learning Through Doing Workshops at Mills Community House. Four free creativity, maker, and STEAM workshops for libraries, educators and the community! Come to one or a combination! SCECH credits provided for three or more seat hours. Register: makinglibraries.si.umich.edu/road-trip

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Wednesday, August 23
Groundbreaking celebration for the new Interlochen Public Library. The effort to build our new library began in February 2014. Since then, the capital campaign has had overwhelming support from community members as well as major foundations from throughout the state. More than five hundred donors have contributed \$2.6 million to date! Free Pizza. Corner of M-137 & 10th St, in Interlochen. 6-7pm.

Wednesday, August 23
Benzonia MakerFest 2017 at the Mills Community House. Tinker, craft, try new technology. Sponsored by the University School of Information’s Making in Michigan Libraries project. Funding made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. 6-8pm.

Thursday, August 24
Volunteer Trail Building Day at Arcadia Dunes. 10am-12pm.

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Haiti

Continued from page 1

over the past decade, the Balthazars have developed quite the curriculum vitae in the non-profit world, including co-founding Return2Haiti, an organization that focuses on sustainable, locally driven solutions for challenges in education, health, and the environment in Pierre’s native Belle-Anse and the nearby areas. The couple met at a sustainability conference in Michigan in 2007, and Cindy Balthazar has traveled to Haiti at least twice annually since 2008, oftentimes with her own children or her students in tow.

A year after the 7.0 earthquake that devastated Haiti in January 2010—killing an estimated 230,000 people, injuring 300,000, and leaving more than 1 million homeless—Balthazar invited Pensyl’s two eldest daughters, Chloe (now 28) and Marika (24) Grabowski, to Haiti to help out with BUCOSEH, another non-profit that the Balthazars co-founded. BUCOSEH was dedicated to supporting an orphanage/school near Port-au-Prince that was organized by local Haitians in the aftermath of the earthquake. Chloe was attending the University of Michigan for engineering at the time, and Marika had just graduated from high school. The girls worked at an orphanage, teaching classes and doing activities, as well as cooking for the children. It was a very eye-opening and expanding experience for them.

“The girls returned from the trip and said, ‘Mom, you have go to,’” Pensyl recalls. “Since then, I’ve been to Haiti [with Cindy and Pierre] several times. My husband just went earlier this year, and now my youngest daughter will be going with me in August—our whole family has become enchanted with Haiti and with doing what we can to help.”

All In The Family

Pensyl traveled to Haiti for the first time in 2014, and she has been making trips at least yearly since then, often taking other family members along with her.

Most recently, her husband, Jim, and their youngest son, Quintin Grabowski (17), went for the first time during Spring Break 2017. Jim applied his strong building and construction skills to work with the residents on some key improvements to safety and accessibility. For instance, they installed a set of stairs at the school in Belle-Anse. The couple’s eldest son, Nate Grabowski (28)—who has worked for Jim’s Upland Meadows Landscaping business on and off since he was in high school—plans to travel to Haiti the next time that his father goes, to help with construction jobs. Daughter Marika is hoping to return on a medical trip in January 2018.

And later this month, former housemates and calculus buddies Cindy Balthazar and Kristin Pensyl will return to Haiti once again, this time joined by Pierre, as well as Cindy’s 17-year-old daughter Brita Goren and Pensyl’s 20-year-old daughter Aria Grabowski, who has never been before. The group of five are planning a trip that will focus on the young girls in Belle-Anse, and their efforts are being aided by local Benzie County businesses and non-profits, like Days for Girls. (Read *The Betsie Current’s* article on Days for Girls from last winter here: bit.ly/2tFQIPH)

Empowerment Through Education

“Many of the girls in Belle-Anse do not go to school, and their access to personal hygiene supplies and to health education about their own biology is limited,” Pensyl says. “The hygiene kits, made by Days for Girls, give us the perfect avenue to educate them in self-care and empower them with knowledge of how their bodies work.”

Days for Girls is an international non-profit organization that has a team in Benzie County, led by Katherine Ross, a retired

Benzie Central teacher who first learned of the project from an article about the Livonia branch in the *Detroit Free Press*. Around the globe, tens of thousands of Days for Girls volunteers work to provide reusable, sustainable feminine-hygiene kits and education to more than 300,000 girls in more than 100 countries. Here in Benzie County, 650 hygiene kits have been made in less than a year’s time that the group has been operating, and 400 have already been distributed.

Each Days for Girls kit is made up of eight washable, soft, flannel liners; two moisture-barrier shields; two pairs of underpants (a first for many girls); a washcloth; a small bar of soap; and two gallon-size Ziploc® freezer bags to transport soiled items, as well as to wash items in a small amount of soap and water (Ross calls these bags “the world’s smallest washing machines”). The completed kits are packaged in drawstring bags, made of pretty cotton, so they can be carried to school or work as an attractive and discreet accessory that allows girls and women to handle their “days of the month” with fewer restrictions.

In countries where adequate feminine-hygiene options are not available—especially to impoverished families—girls and women are often restricted to their homes during their menstrual cycles. This forces them to miss school and work, causing them to fall behind educationally and economically.

So the slogan of Days for Girls International is: “Every girl. Everywhere. Period.” The organization’s long-term vision is to provide every girl and woman in the world with access to quality, sustainable hygiene kits and education by 2022—in essence, giving back the days that girls and women would typically have to miss school or work.

The kits are made by concerned, caring people—like those here in Benzie County or down in Livonia—and are distributed by Days for Girls headquarters in Washington state, or, as in this case, are distributed by an organization that the local team has collaborated with directly. No kits are distributed without the presence of a qualified teacher, who explains how to care for the kits over their three-year life cycle, along with information about personal hygiene, ovulation, sexual safety, and related topics that help give girls control of their lives and the ability to be equal participants in their communities.

The Benzie County Days for Girls group has been meeting twice weekly to sew and assemble the kits in the sewing studio in the basement of Grow Benzie since they began in the fall of 2016.

“We are so grateful for all the help and support we have received from Grow Benzie and Josh Stoltz,” Ross says. “Our work would not be possible without it.”

Sharon Jones of Bedazzled, a Benzonia-based soap and candle shop, is pitching in on the project by donating supplies, training, and workspace for volunteers to make the bars of soap that are included in each kit.

These special soaps will be scented with tea tree oil, peppermint oil, and lavender oil, which have anti-fungal, cleansing, and healing properties, respectively. (Beedazzled is part of the honeybee-inspired business trifecta of Sharon and her husband, Kirk, the other two being Sleeping Bear Farms honey and St. Ambrose Cellars meadery. Read *The Betsie Current’s* article from last summer on the Jones’s bee business here: bit.ly/2aetzKp)

A total of 250 kits will be taken to Haiti from Benzie County, and the kits will be distributed during a “camp” at the school in Belle-Anse.

Pensyl’s daughter Aria—now a senior at the University of Michigan who plans to do graduate work in public health—will help to teach the girls how to use the kits, as well as how to track their menstrual cycles and ovulation. The Return2Haiti team expects at least 225 girls to participate in the camp.

Fun and French Movies

The three-day girls’ camp in Belle-Anse will also involve four Haitian girl-leaders

who will be working and planning the activities, along with the Michigan group. Formal teaching will take place from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., followed by lunch, which will also be provided by the Return2Haiti group.

“After lunch, it’s really too hot to do anything outdoors, so we are planning to show movies inside the school building. Although the language in the village is a Creole that is spelled kind of like a phonetic French, the girls understand French [when they hear it], so they should enjoy that,” Pensyl says. “And in the evening, we plan to have soccer matches, along with chat sessions that follow the Return2Haiti approach. The sessions are called ‘Open Space Circles,’ and the girls themselves decide which subjects we will discuss.”

Kristin herself speaks fluent French, having spent a year abroad in France during college, which makes working with the Haitians much easier. Having Pierre Balthazar, a native to the community, helps, as well—not only in terms of language but also for legitimacy. Too often, well-meaning U.S.-based non-profits try to do work in other countries where they lack insight into local cultures or customs, making their efforts less effective.

“We are not there to save them,” Pensyl says. “It’s more of an exchange. We are trying to help them become more self-determining, more able to take on the challenges they face, and work to create a better situation for themselves and their families. Four of five [of our own children] have been here with [me and Jim], and we have all learned and grown so much through this experience.”

Plans for the Future

The group will leave August 12, and stay in Belle-Anse for seven days—the first two days will be planning the girls’ camp, then three days for running the girls’ camp, and two days for working with the kindergarten teacher at the free kindergarten, sponsored by Return2Haiti. Their residence while in Belle-Anse is the Catholic priest’s rectory.

The team is also planning future projects for the community of 80,000.

“The people from here who become educated end up leaving, which creates a real vacuum in the capabilities of the villagers,” Pensyl says. “Those who remain need trade skills to maintain and construct and repair buildings and other infrastructure, and they need assistance to gain those skills.”

Additional plans to meet the needs of the community include running water and a regular doctor’s office. Pensyl’s youngest son, Quintin, is working on a prototype of a small desalination plant, which may provide an interim solution to providing potable water.

Whatever the challenges and obstacles, it is clear that the team is dedicated to working closely with the people of Pierre Balthazar’s home town, to improve their opportunities and quality of life. But, as Pensyl says, things do not always go as planned.

“We joke that, in Haiti, you have to have ‘Haitiance,’ which is a much deeper form of patience than we usually have,” she laughs. “But we love being there and doing this work. It feeds our souls.”

Want to help? Kristin Pensyl and the other members of the Return2Haiti team pay for their own airfare and accommodations, and they seek donations to pay for other costs, so that Return2Haiti can dedicate funds directly to the projects that the organization undertakes. Donations can be made at Return2Haiti.org. Likewise, Days for Girls accepts donation to our local team, “Benzie County MI Days for Girls,” and welcomes volunteers who would like to assist in the several sewing and other tasks associated with making the hygiene kits. For more information, email BenzieCountyMI@DaysForGirls.org.

*Greta Bolger is a member of Days for Girls in Benzie County, and she previously wrote an article for **The Betsie Current** about Days for Girls in December 2016.*

Human Interest Story

Three generations on water skis

By Aubrey Ann Parker
Current Editor

On the 4th of July, three generations of a Platte Lake family got behind a ski boat for a photo op. Pictured below, on the left is Al Amstutz (75), in the middle is his daughter, Sarah (45), and on the right is his granddaughter, Libby (15).
“I have been looking forward to this picture for some time,” Amstutz says. “We took a similar picture in 2013, when Libby was 11, but we thought that 75, 45, 15 would

be even more significant.”
We at *The Betsie Current* love when we get story submissions like this one. In fact, all of the family-oriented stories in this issue—from vintage cars to three-person bikes, from Haiti to Crystal Lake—came to us from people in our community who knew of a cool or unusual story that needed telling.
Do you have a story idea, family-related or otherwise? Send an email to editor@betsiecurrent.com or call 231-649-3988. We would love to hear from you.



Three generations, waving as they ski. On the left is Al Amstutz (75), in the middle is his daughter, Sarah (45), and on the right is his granddaughter, Libby (15). The family’s cottage on Platte Lake can be seen in the background. Photo courtesy of Al Amstutz.



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