

## The Messages of Mailboxes

Even when empty

By Beau Vallance

Current Contributor

We humans have always embellished important containers far beyond what is necessary for their practical functions. For instance, ancient Egyptians stored the organs of mummies inside of sealed clay jars, adorned with animal-head figurines as lids, while ancient Chinese left food for the dead in elaborate cast-bronze burial vessels. Medieval artisans encrusted boxes with gems as reliquaries to hold the bone fragments of saints. The Navajo weave patterns into their seed baskets. Some people serve tea from fancy silver pots. And Target has an amazing array of dishware designs, all serving the same purpose.

In a way, mailboxes are treasure boxes, too—waiting for news and only briefly hold-



We have always embellished important containers, and decorated rural mailboxes are now the bees knees in Benzie County. All mailbox photos in this issue by Beau Vallance.

ing outgoing mail, addressed to distant destinations. Among the junk mail and bills that come in, we can still anticipate the occasional actual letter, gift, check, good news, or invitation; less so now, with online communication, but that makes the occasional “real” letter that much more special.

The decorated rural mailboxes in our area reflect the same impulse as their ancient predecessors: the container has a simple job to do, but it can do more. It can communicate values and meanings—in this case, whimsical mailboxes proclaim the tastes and interests of their owners to passers-by.

While their owners spend barely minutes a day with them, decorated mailboxes themselves communicate steadily in various ways. Even when sitting empty, they offer clues about the addressee’s enthusiasms, taste,

Please see Mailboxes on page 7

## Shipwreck Café Finds Safe Harbor in Empire

New dining option fills void

By Stephanie Purifoy

Current Contributor

“With any business, you have [worry and doubt],” Steve Nowicki says about opening his Shipwreck Café in Empire earlier this spring. “We had all of our eggs in one basket. We put everything into this, and if it didn’t work out, we didn’t know what we were going to do.”

The Nowickis did indeed put everything into one basket. Shipwreck Café is a passionate and ambitious undertaking. The Nowickis raise their own chickens; make their own bread, rolls, muffins, and cookies; and the ingredients in their soups, salads, and sandwiches are fresh and of a high



A new take-out shop has everyone a-flurry in downtown Empire. Photo courtesy of the Shipwreck Cafe.

quality. Customers rave online about the homemade pretzel bread and the “three brothers sandwich.”

Nowicki, his wife Jennifer, and their two daughters worked hard throughout the winter and spring to revamp the small building, to the north of the gas station along M-22, into the functioning sandwich shop that it is today. They had to re-do everything, including the electrical, plumbing, and flooring, in addition to installing new appliances. But the hard work has paid off. Early in July, Shipwreck Café attracted lines that wound through the café and spilled outdoors, as customers waited more than 30 minutes for sandwiches.

Please see Shipwreck on page 3

## Medicine Woman Cindra Moore

A spiritual retreat named Windsong

By Susan Koenig

Current Contributor

Just a five-minute drive outside the Village of Honor is a peaceful, orderly farm where Cindra Moore—born and raised in Benzie County, with a hiatus in Alaska—owns and operates her healing arts business in the house that her great-grandfather built more than 100 years ago.

The Mead Farm dates from 1861, and Teddy Roosevelt Mead acquired the family land and built the home where Moore now lives, though she has renamed it “Windsong,” in honor of an ancient native grandmother who healed with her voice. (The home was once a Native American summer encampment, according to Moore.)



Windsong is the new name of The Mead Farm, which dates back to 1861 and has been recently converted to a spiritual retreat/bed and breakfast, just outside of downtown Honor. Photo courtesy of Cindra Moore.

Of Anishinabe decent (includes Odawa, Ojibwe, and Chippewa), Moore calls herself the “land steward” of this “very special and spiritual piece of property,” honoring the land and its history. Offering accommodations as a spiritual retreat/bed and breakfast, she has created a safe environment in which to “learn and grow; rest and renew the mind, body, and spirit.”

Relying on her Native American ancestry, Moore has developed/created a tool to gather traditional herbs in the style of old medicine healers. Her Covey Road farm is a licensed LLC learning center and is a designated sanctuary with the United Plant Savers, a national non-profit organization that educates about and protects native medicinal plants.

Please see Cindra on page 3





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# Vickie Polise Slater: Dancing Queen

Questions & Answers with community faces

Vickie Polise Slater can be seen pushing her four-year-old son, Jack, in a stroller as she runs along the Betsie Valley Trail with her dog, Daisy; grabbing a beer at Stormcloud Brewing Company with her husband, John; heading into the post office to mail a package; dancing with ribbons in Mineral Springs Park, next to the Benzie Shores District Library, during storytime for preschool-aged children; choreographing dances, to be performed by the Frankfort High School dance team during the home basketball game.

Like other 40-something-year-old mothers in Benzie County, she finds time to exercise and run errands, but she also is very involved with the area youth.

Originally from Syracuse, Indiana, Slater studied dance at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky, though technically she has a degree in hotel/restaurant and tourism management. Slater fell in love with dancing as a child and began teaching while she was in high school. During college, she was a member of Western Kentucky University's nationally ranked dance team, twice competing and placing in the Universal Dance Association's top six teams in the nation, featured on ESPN.

But after graduating college in 1996, Slater took a break from dance; she moved to Palm Springs, California, and worked for the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Rancho Mirage, California. ("I got to check Muhammad Ali into the hotel!" Slater exclaims.) A year later, she moved to Chicago to work for Gavel International, a meeting planning company, where she served as assistant program director, getting to travel to Hawaii, Costa Rica, and Bermuda. At this point in time, Slater decided that she wanted to live in Europe, so she became an au pair for an Italian family in Brescia, Italy, on and off for three years. Also during this time, in between living in Italy, she worked as a Chocolate Ambassador for Hershey Foods Corporation, getting to tour the United States in the Hershey Kissmobile and raising awareness for the Children's Miracle Network.

It was around this time that Slater went back to teach at her old dance studio in Syracuse, where it all had started for her. Rediscovering dance put Slater's life on a completely different trajectory, one that felt a lot happier and more full of purpose—she moved to Indianapolis to live with her sister, and in 2001, she opened her own dance studio, Accented Motions Dance Studio, where she taught ballet, tap, jazz, and hip-hop to more than 300 dancers, ages four to adult. In 2004, she married John Slater, a race car mechanic, originally from Muskegon, Michigan, and the pair lived in Indianapolis for close to a decade, before relocating to Frankfort, where she has continued teaching dance and being involved with area youth.

Continuing with our interview series on impactful Benzie County characters, *The Betsie Current* caught up with Slater on her way to a dance practice.

**THE BETSIE CURRENT:** How old were you when you first started dancing? What got you hooked?



From left to right: Jack, John, and Vickie Slater at the Frankfort Beach. Photo by Aubrey Ann Parker.

**VICKIE POLISE SLATER:** I started dancing when I was five years old. I just really loved to move to music. I grew up dancing at Lee Anne Stewart Dance Studio in Syracuse, Indiana. I started teaching dance when I was 16. When I returned after college [to Lee Ann Stewart Dance Studio], I knew teaching dance is what I really wanted to pursue.

**CURRENT:** Tell us about the different places that you have worked, and how does that compare with the work that you are doing now?

**SLATER:** I have choreographed for numerous dance teams, show choirs, and musicals. I completed the 2001 Arena Football Season as a member of the Indianapolis Firebird Dance Team. For more than 10 years, I was a dance judge for Jamfest Cheer and Dance Competitions. From 2008-2011, I was the Indianapolis Children's Cast Director for the Moscow Ballet, coordinating auditions and directing rehearsals for the annual Great Russian Nutcracker touring production. I have also performed as an illusionist with Magician Sean Scott and appeared on Discovery Channel's Houdini-inspired special. I owned my own dance studio for 12 years in Indianapolis, and now in Frankfort for the past five years. At my Frankfort studio, Get Up and Dance, I teach ages three to adults. Tap, ballet, and jazz classes are held Monday through Thursday.

**CURRENT:** Why did you move to Benzie County?

**SLATER:** John is from Muskegon, and we would drive along the lakeshore after holidays; we would always stop in Frankfort. We fell in love with the area, as it is similar to a small town [Syracuse, Indiana] that I grew up in—it was also a tourist town but with a much smaller lake. John and I sat on a Frankfort park bench and vowed that we were going to leave the big city, downsize our lives, move to this paradise, and start a family. We had a great life in Indianapolis, but it was busy and crazy, and we didn't want to keep that up. It took us three years to sell our two businesses and house [in Indianapolis], along with the majority of our stuff. We moved up here, not knowing anyone, and started a new adventure. We wanted to move to a place that made us appreciate life and slow down. Frankfort is

that place for us. We moved here in June 2012, and our son, Jack, was born the next summer! I am so thankful that Jack is growing up in this small-town paradise: fresh air, beautiful scenery, good people, and close friends. I am so thankful that we decided to take that leap five years ago—I truly believe we were

meant to be here. We are home.

**CURRENT:** When did you start working in Benzie County? What were you doing then? How did it shape your work today?

**SLATER:** When I first moved here, I worked for SEEDS after-school program at Benzie Central High School, led [at that time] by Josh Stoltz. I worked with a group of students who wanted to start an anti-bullying group—PRIDE was created in the fall of 2012 and is still going strong at Benzie! Jeff Seymour [a BCHS math teacher] is now the PRIDE coordinator, and the group is student-led performing

and making a difference. I help out each year with choreography and encouragement.

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

**SLATER:** The Frankfort dance scene is significantly smaller than the one in Indianapolis, which makes sense. Honestly, I am always happy to have more friends join our dance program, but I am perfectly happy with the size of our dance family, as it stands now. We have a great time dancing together and have a total blast performing our annual recital every May. For the new school year, we start dancing next week! I am so thrilled to start this year in our newly renovated studio at Frankfort Elementary School. Principal Touseley headed up the clean-out and renovations of the old, second-floor art room. It is now a bright, open space with fresh paint and new flooring, complete with ballet barres and mirrors! I love that there are so many kids that love to dance at Frankfort, and now we have our very own space!

**CURRENT:** What other things are you involved with in our local community? How did you get involved with them and why are you passionate about these causes?

**SLATER:** This summer, I started July Beach Parties on Frankfort Beach—the response and turnout was so fantastic! I thought it would be a fun thing for Jack and I to do on a Saturday night; we had a blast dancing on the beach with locals and visitors! I was so thankful for the [Frankfort-Elberta] Chamber supporting my idea and for Anet and Ollie's, who donated the game prizes! Additionally, I also continued the [Benzie Shores District] Library's Friday morning Parties in the Park [at Mineral Springs Park, next to the library]. Lots of fun dancing! Oh, and I helped to organize the Frankfort Fourth of July parade for the past two summers.

**CURRENT:** What are some ways that you and your business give back to the community?

**SLATER:** After five years of dreaming of a fun mascot that could welcome visitors, host beach parties, and represent an anti-bullying theme, Frankie Fish has now come to life!



Frankie Fish is a fun and friendly fish from Frankfort. He is a mascot with a message: “In a school of fish, be a friend!” Frankie has already appeared at Art in the Park, the library’s Eclipse Party, and Trinity’s [Lutheran Church]’s Concert in the Park.

**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? What is the toughest part?

**SLATER:** Watching the kids progress every year as dancers and as individuals is so rewarding and inspiring. The biggest challenge with living here—as a mom with a traveling husband and no family around—is finding childcare and wishing we had restaurants that delivered.

**CURRENT:** What are your favorite local events and activities? Any favorite dining, recreation, hiking spots? What’s your perfect fall day look like in Benzie County? How would you spend it?

**SLATER:** I love the Frankfort Fall Fest and the Scottville Clown Band! I will be volunteering this year, because I can’t say, “No,” to Donna Phillips and Joanne Bartley [of the Frankfort-Elberta Chamber of Commerce]. Ha! I love sitting on Frankfort beach after Labor Day, or a glass of wine at Arcadia Bluffs. And the breaded green beans at Stormcloud are great.

*Interested in signing yourself, your husband/ wife, or a little tyke that you know up for dance classes with Miss Vickie? Email vickie@getupanddance.net or call 231-620-1411.*

## Cindra

Continued from page 1

For example, she grows turkey rhubarb, which is an ingredient in Ojibwa tea that is used in medicinal healing.

“Being a medicine man or woman is a gift from the Spirit,” Moore says. “Like being a natural-born leader or teacher, one is born a healer, and it’s natural to live this truth—uniting and supporting each other, our sacred Mother Earth, and her medicines.”

Moore is also a master gardener, and she recently sold her garden service to spend several years getting certifications to practice holistic health, so that she will be able to teach on the farm, practice yoga, and give massages.

*To learn more about this modern-day “medicine woman,” visit her beautiful farm, greenhouse, and studio, call Cindra Moore at 231-325-4242 or visit her websites WindsongCenter.net and HeartSongWellnessCenter.net.*

## Shipwreck

Continued from page 1

Nowicki spent 15 years running Finicky Fishing Charters fishing company, but when the business began to run dry, he turned to an idea that had been lurking in the back of his mind—he knew from his fishing customers that many summer visitors were looking for a simple place to pick up lunch, instead of always patronizing the area’s numerous sit-down restaurants.

“We are the gateway for the [Sleeping Bear Dunes] National Park, and Empire has almost nothing,” he says.

Shipwreck Café is located a stone’s throw from the National Lakeshore Visitor’s Center, which welcomes nearly 1 million tourists each year to our neck of the woods. Many of them stay in Empire to lounge on the public beach or shop in the eclectic stores along Front Street. Despite these massive crowds, the town has only three restaurants, a small grocery store, and an ice cream/sandwich/coffee shop. When looking for a quick bite to eat, tourists may find their options limited.

“There’s just not a lot here, so we are just trying to fill that void,” Nowicki says.

After recognizing the demand for an easy dining option, the former charter fishing captain decided to scope out the building across the street from Empire Outdoors that had sat vacant for seven years, since a local dentist retired.

Though a new face amidst the familiar lineup of Empire shops, Shipwreck Café has instantly become a hit.

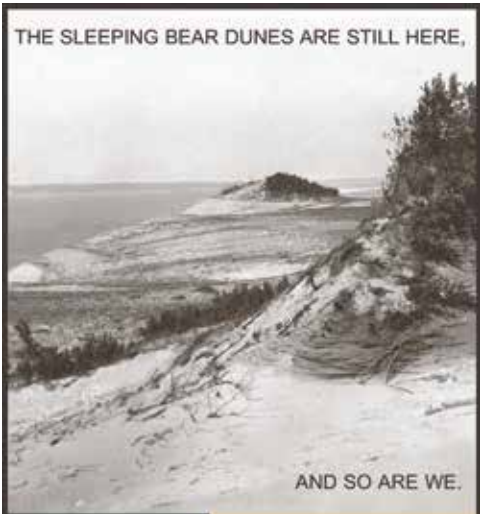
“It’s better than what we anticipated it to be,” Nowicki says.

Even through last winter, the community showed its support by stopping in to ask when the café would open. Now, with no advertising whatsoever, word of the sandwich shop has raced up and down the county line between Benzie and Leelanau, reaching both tourists and locals, alike. Nowicki warmly recalls customers stopping by on their way home, just to tell the staff how much they had enjoyed the food that they had picked up earlier in the day.

“The community has really stepped up,” he says.

*A version of this article previously published in our sister publication, the **Glen Arbor Sun**.*

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Mondays

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.

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. \*

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 Denny, the new puppy! 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

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.

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 discoveryogami.com.

ON DECK

Thursday, September 7

Volunteer Trail Building Day—Arcadia Dunes. Come help to 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. 10am-12pm.

Thursday, September 7

Open mic with Jim and Wanda Curtis at St. Ambrose Cellars, where growlers/howlers are 35 percent off every Thursday night. 6-9pm.

Friday, September 8

Chris Michels plays at St. Ambrose Cellars. 6-9pm.

Friday-Sunday, September 8-10

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Saturday, September 9

Forestry Field Day at Interlochen Center for the Arts. Area land owners are invited to the workshop, which will include an indoor presentation in the morning and a field tour of some of Interlochen’s nearly 1,000 acres in the afternoon. The Forestry Field Day is presented by the Forestry Assistance Program; Benzie, Leelanau and Grand Traverse conservation districts; Michigan Tree Farm System; and the Interlochen Center for the Arts. 4000 Highway M-137, Interlochen. \$5 per person, includes continental breakfast and lunch. Call 231-256-9783 or email kama.ross@macd.org to RSVP. Learn more at Interlochen.org. 9am-3pm.

Saturday, September 9

Michigan gubernatorial candidate Gretchen Whitmer will host a meet and greet at the Benzonia Township Hall. 11am-2pm.

Saturday, September 9

11th Annual Taste of Benzie and Beyond is a food-, wine-, and beer-tasting event, held in downtown Frankfort. Come sample the area’s restaurants and what they have to offer, as well as local beers and wines. Sidewalk chalk art contest, kids’ games and activities. Mineral Springs Park in Frankfort. 11:30am-3:30pm.

Saturday, September 9

Benzie’s Magical History Tour: Benzie Bus and the Benzie Area Historical Museum offer two distinct loops (Frankfort and Thompsonville) around the county, with historic stops along the way. \$15 for one loop or \$20 for both loops. Ask about our discount for groups of five or more. Loops begin at the Historical Museum. Tours begin at 12pm. Reservations required. 231-325-3000.

Saturday, September 9

Kyle White, a third-generation musician from Toledo, Ohio, plays at Stormcloud Brewing Company. Playing with various cover bands, acoustic duos/trios, and solo, she has been a staple of the Toledo music scene for the past 20 years. As a solo performer, Kyle White plays a wide range of covers, from folk to pop to rock to bluegrass, along with her original songs. In the 2010 *Toledo City Paper’s* “Best of Toledo” issue, she was voted “Best Singer/Songwriter”. Kyle has opened for national acts, such as Five for Fighting, Skid Row, Rusted Root, and The Doobie Brothers. 8-10pm.

Tuesday, September 12

Andre Villoch—singer, songwriter, and all-around good citizen—performs at Lake Ann Brewing Company. 6:30-9:30pm.

Thursday, September 14

Open mic with Jim and Wanda Curtis at St. Ambrose Cellars, where growlers/howlers are 35 percent off every Thursday night. 6-9pm.

Thursday, September 14

Matchbox Twenty and Counting Crows, with special guest Rivers & Rust, will perform at Soaring Eagle Casino in Mount Pleasant. 7-11pm.

Friday, September 15

Unabunner performs at St. Ambrose Cellars. 6-9pm.

Friday, September 15

Abigail Stauffer performs at Stormcloud Brewing Company. 8-10pm.

Saturday, September 16

Empire Hill Climb, an automobile sprint race. 8am.

Saturday, September 16

Adopt-a-Beach Clean-up : Join the Benzie Conservation District to help clean up the Elberta Beach on International Coastal Clean-Up Day! Litter data is collected to help us prevent pollution and make positive changes for our beautiful beaches! Contact 231-882-4391 or aime@benziecd.org to register. 10am-12pm.

Saturday, September 16

Benzie’s Magical History Tour begins at 12pm. Reservations required. 231-325-3000.

Saturday, September 16

Lego Club at Interlochen Public Library. Children in grades K-5, accompanied by a parent. Legos provided. 2-3pm.

Saturday, September 16

6th Annual Hops & Props on the River in downtown Manistee. 2-7pm.

Saturday, September 16

It’s that time... THE CRUSH! St. Ambrose Cellars presents the yearly birthday party that we all love! This year, we’ll be donating a portion of your \$10 entrance fee to the Honor Area Restoration Project (HARP). For your entrance fee, you will get to enjoy four great bands: The Ol’ Microtones, Kellerville, The Barbarossa Brothers, and the world famous K. Jones & The Benzie Playboys, and you will get a drink token! 4-11:30pm.

Saturday, September 16

Blind Dog Hank—Michael’s Place Fundraiser at Lake Ann Brewing Company will feature rock, rhythm, folk, and blues. 6:30-9:30pm.

Sunday, September 17

IACC Avenue of the Arts Autumn Festival and Classic Car & Motorcycle show. Arts and crafts.

Sunday, September 17

Open Mic, hosted by Blake Elliott, at Stormcloud Brewing Company.

Tuesday, September 19

Pat Niemisto and Andre Villoch at Lake Ann Brewing Company. 6:30-9:30pm.

Wednesday, September 20

Preschool story hour at the Interlochen Public Library includes children’s activities, stories, songs, and a craft. 10am and 1pm.

Thursday, September 21

Open mic with Jim and Wanda Curtis at St. Ambrose Cellars, where growlers/howlers are 35 percent off every Thursday night. 6-9pm.

Saturday, September 23

National Alpaca Day at Crystal Lake Alpaca Farm & Boutique. 10am.

Saturday, September 23

Coho Fever Boom and Bust at The Garden Theater in Frankfort. 7-8:30pm.

Saturday, September 23

Star Party: Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and the Grand Traverse Astronomical Society will host a star party in the Dune Climb parking lot. 9-11pm.

Mondays, Sep 25-Nov 13

Mysteries of a Michigan Autumn: This eight-week program at Grow Benzie will explore the change of seasons every Monday, through interactive art projects, games, animal interaction, and outdoor exploration. Why and how do the leaves change color? Which birds migrate and where? What are the different methods that animals use to store food and hibernate? Children will take home art projects and activity sheets each week, help to harvest the Nature Explorers garden, interact with program animals Scaly and Slimy, and participate in interpretive nature walks. Each class will be tailored to the specific age group and designed to foster a greater understanding of our local environment. Sibling and multi-class discounts available. Classes are 9-10am for Toddler Tracks (ages 1-2) at a cost of \$8 per child; 10:30am-12pm for Preschool Ecology (ages 3-5) at a cost of \$10 per child; 1-4pm for Home-School Explorers (ages 5-10) at a cost of \$15 per child; and 4:15-6pm for Earthy Afternoons (ages 7-12) at a cost of \$10 per child. To register, please contact Amalia Fernand at amaliaceleste@gmail.com or 231-871-0276.

Tuesday, September 26

Shawn Butzin with special guest Zachary James at Lake Ann Brewing Company. A fresh blend of Americana, Southern rock, alt-country, and folk. 6:30-9:30pm.

**Way out:** Plan now for the Frankfort Film Festival! October 19-22. frankfortgardentheater.com/film-festival/

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# Mailboxes

Continued from page 1

and history.

The messages of mailboxes may be more subtle than those of cottage names and signage (read my 2015 article on this subject in *The Betsie Current's* archives here: bit.ly/1K9g22B) They vary only a little in shape and size, having been gradually standardized since 1896, when Rural Free Delivery began as an experiment and people used cigar boxes or anything else as receptacles. Nowadays, mailboxes usually include only the house number, maybe the family's last name. There is not much room to decorate, and the message must be clearly conveyed to a fast drive-by. Generally the enhancement is flat, but many designs extend the three-dimensionality of the standard shape.

I have spent several summers "collecting" interesting mailboxes, in photos. The ranges of styles, "messages," and wit are delightful. I do not have precise statistics—some mailboxes have come down since I first photographed them, I may have misinterpreted a few, and many may have been intended just as wayfinding help for visitors ("Look for the striped mailbox")—but here are some of the kinds of mailbox messages that can be received as we drive through Benzie County:

**Enthusiasms.** Many mailboxes proclaim the interests, hobbies, or enthusiasms of their owners. Up here in lake country, we see a lot of fish, often an entire fish that incorporates the whole mailbox, with the door as the open mouth of the fish. Additionally, on County Road 667, there was a mailbox that was mounted as the head of a complete deer, made of a log with log legs, presumably by a hunter; the head had antlers protruding from the top, and the hook on the door of the mailbox was intended to look like the nose of the deer. Somewhere in Benzie, there was a mailbox that was a small red caboose—a railroad or trains enthusiast, we may presume. A handmade, painted plywood mailbox along M-22 is someone's memorial to a beloved turquoise 1957 Chevrolet. In this same vein, there are many mailboxes in Benzie that are camouflaged as boats—a sailboat and a sleek wood speedboat, on M-22 and Crystal Drive, for example—and others are adorned with images of sailboats, anchors, nautical flags. At least one local mailbox is decorated with images of flip-flop sandals, that symbol of laid-back summertime, and another is topped by an actual old wooden tennis racket, with reflectors stapled around the edges.

A cook festooned her mailbox with kitchen utensils: actual wooden spoons, eggbeater, spatula. And I occasionally see miniature tractors, sometimes specifically a John Deere (enthusiast? salesperson? farmer? the homeowner's actual name?). Somewhere near Glen Arbor is a mailbox that has been transformed into a University of Michigan football helmet: Go Blue.

**References to the environment/outdoors.** There are mailboxes that have been painted with beach umbrellas and Adirondack chairs,





pine trees, lighthouses, ivy, dragonflies, bears, birds, and shells. Some mailboxes are encrusted with real pebbles or shells. Mailboxes have even been incorporated into small, three-dimensional lighthouses. I also recall a standard mailbox, beautifully painted to resemble a birch log, somewhere near Crystalia. (Author's Note: I have never noticed a mailbox with a winter scene.)

**Home!** A few mailboxes appear to be miniatures of the houses that they serve.



There was a great example of this along M-22 near Crystalia for years, but absent this summer—a rambling green cottage with white trim, a close miniature replica of the cottage visible behind it. A white mailbox house with a red shingled roof matches the house behind it on South Shore Drive, and there is a mailbox that reflects the gray-logs motif of the house beyond it, also along the south shore. Some mailboxes offer a simple visual reference to the real house, perhaps just in color scheme. Usually, the houses are more generic. Along M-22, south of Elberta, there is one such, with a blue roof and miniature window boxes with flowers; log cabins are another example. Since they seem handmade and quite detailed, these cozy “homes” for the mail are surprisingly numerous.

**Work or profession.** A mailbox in Arcadia, near a woodworking business, featured painted images of circular saw blades. For years, the mailbox for the RV dealership on US-31 in Benzonia was a white RV, apparently replaced now with a simpler reference—four small wheels on a plain metal box. A mailbox on Crystal Drive features a bewigged judge (and the “T” in the cottage name is a gavel). Perhaps the cook with the kitchen utensils was actually a professional chef. And there are those tractors...

In some cases, the family identity is clear. A mailbox on M-22 near Crystalia, now gone, was hand-painted in the tartan associated with the Scottish family name. In another example, the silhouette of a baker, holding a loaf of bread, is a play on the family name.

Most often, the box simply expresses a **delight in color or design**—these are messages, too, expressions of taste. Many of these boxes are covered in painted flowers. Some are elaborately random and abstract in design (blue and white polka dots, a patchwork of varying colors and shapes within swirling rectangles, colorful stripes, a pattern of dragonflies, a pattern of swirling mosaics, a smiley face). They seem to be saying simply, “Notice! Enjoy!”

You can buy quite fancy mailboxes, and removable mailbox covers. But each idiosyncratic, one-of-a-kind, treasure box is special, a surprise statement among the many other more-ordinary boxes that line our rural roads.

Whimsical roadside mailboxes make up a long linear gallery of creative colors, shapes, symbols, messages, and quirkiness, a collective community exhibition of embellished practical objects (“decorative arts,” in museum-speak). Quietly on view beside the road, they surprise and delight the strangers passing by.

Watch for more surprises; the exhibition changes from time to time!

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