

“That Star Is Crooked”

Bear Lake-based family business with national appeal

By Aubrey Ann Parker
Current Editor

“It’s a sore subject,” was the response I got when I asked if my friend had decorated for the holidays yet. “My Christmas tree stand is still at my ex’s house.”

I know what you are thinking: “So? Go buy a new one.” But that is probably because you have not heard of the legend that is Bowling’s Last Stand. I learned of the the Bear Lake-based family business—which promises to sell the last Christmas tree stand that you will ever buy—last year, so I fully commiserated with my friend: “Oh yeah, that’s a big bummer.”

If your family is anything like the Parkers in the 1983 film *A Christmas Story*

(no relation, though many of the major plot points are eerily similar to my paternal grandfather’s own Mid-western childhood during the 1940s, and, hence, it is his favorite movie, Christmas-themed or otherwise), battling the Christmas tree



Anything but “fra-jee-lay,” Bowling’s Last Stand is completely steel and claims to be the last Christmas tree stand that you will ever buy—unless you lose it in the divorce. (Then again, your chance of separating from your spouse is sure to be lower with this tree stand than without it.) Photo courtesy of Bowling’s Last Stand.

to get it straight can cause major havoc and stress. The simplest solution, experts agree, is to get a quality stand.

“There are options out there, and you don’t have to settle for a crummy stand,” Rick Dungey, spokesman for the National Christmas Tree Association, told *The New York Times* back in 2013. “A good one will make it way easier to set up and will greatly improve your experience with the tree once it’s up.”

The cheapest new tree stand that I was able to find online was the four-screw variety for \$5.24 from Lowe’s for a plastic stand that can accommodate a tree up to six feet tall; among the top-sellers for a tree of compa-

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The Pencil Project

Changing the world, one positive message at a time

By Aubrey Ann Parker
Current Editor

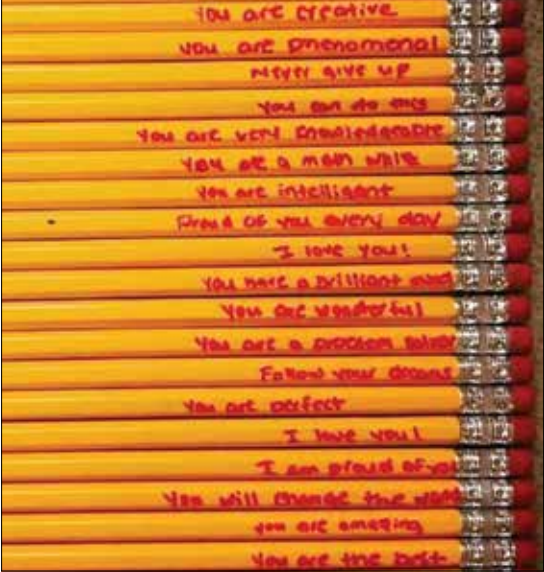
“You were created to do great things.” Imagine if all children began their day with a message like this, postures Belle Brown, creator of “The Pencil Project,” a Benzie-based Facebook group that originated in early October.

The idea is simple: volunteers buy a box of pencils and use permanent markers to write positive messages along the length of the pencil, near the eraser end. “You are so talented,” “This will be a great year,” “You are creative,” “Never give up,” “You can do this,” “Believe,” “Have a great day,” “Create a legacy,” “Do great things,” “Write your story,” “Leave your mark,” “Reach for the stars,” “Doctor, Lawyer, Cook, Truck

Driver,” “You can be anything,” are just a few of the messages that have been written on more than 1,000 pencils which have been dropped at a dozen local schools over the past two months.

Brown, a 2009 graduate of Benzie Central High School, is a 27-year-old mother of three boys, all under the age of seven. With her oldest now attending first grade at Lake Ann Elementary, Brown got an idea in her head and quickly whipped up a few examples.

“I shared a photo on my personal Facebook account of pencils with messages written on them, messages that I would want my own kids to start their day off with,” she explains. “You are brilliant,” ‘You are loved,’ things like that.”



Imagine if every child began her/his day with a positive message. Photo courtesy of The Pencil Project.

Corey Bechler, Brown’s former art teacher at Benzie Central, was one of about a half-dozen people who replied to her original Facebook post: “If you write the messages and drop off the pencils, I’ll sharpen them up and distribute them!”

Katie Van Hammen, a teacher at Blair Elementary, also replied: “I see about 75 kids a day, and we go through a lot of pencils. How fast can you spit these out?”

From there, Brown was off. But she knew this was something that had the potential to quickly become bigger than what she alone could handle, so the next day, she created a Facebook group and invited her small community of online friends and family who she thought might be interested in donating their time to

Please see Pencils on page 7

Holiday Taste

Sharing some favorite recipes from local chefs

By Kelly Ottinger
Current Contributor

Ah, the holidays—when our homes smell like spruce, spiced hot cider, and fresh-baked cookies. When we open the wine and let way too many people crowd around the kitchen island sharing cheese balls, crackers, and anything dipped in chocolate. When we play songs of dogs barking jingle bells, while grandpas snooze in front of family-room football games, dogs drink out of the Christmas tree stand, and cousins wrestle over new toys on the floor.

For all their maddening moments, each family’s holiday tradition develops over time and brings a sense of belonging as it is shared, once again, each year.

Every family is different, the celebrations

of many including elements of faith—lighting of the menorah, attending the candle-light Christmas Eve service, or watching the youngest members don “angel wings” to re-enact the nativity scene.

Some families gather for athletic pursuits—skiing, snowshoeing, an annual 5K, or a simple stay in a hotel with an indoor pool.

Some families forgo gifts to collect for group donation to a charitable cause, and some wrap whacky presents for a white elephant gift exchange.

But the traditions that seem to resonate most deeply with us all can often be traced to food. From the time when men would head out early in the morning to shoot the Christmas goose to the time when Clark Griswold’s Cousin Eddy admonished him to “save the neck for me,” we are extraordinarily



For families who like to add a southwest kick to the traditional Christmas ham or turkey, a flavorful peach salsa would be just the ticket. Photo courtesy of The Roadhouse Mexican Bar & Grill.

invested in the food that we cook and share together at our holiday tables.

For example, despite not eating dessert for most of the rest of the year, why can you not resist a piece of your grandmother’s lemon meringue pie at the holidays? Well, because you remember the first time that you ever had it, when you were seated at “the big kids’s table” during a holiday meal that you shared with family, and after a big dinner, you were served a piece of this pie, and now that memory is stored in the flavor. So every year, during the holidays, you just cannot wait for the possibility that you could get another bite, remembering all of the bites—and all of the warm holiday memories—that came before it.

Please see Recipes on page 6

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Tree Stand

Continued from page 1

rable size at The Home Depot were plastic and/or metal stands for \$10 to \$40.

But how many of us out there have been dissatisfied with our tree stands, plastic or otherwise, for one reason or another?

You get the tree home and have to re-saw it, because it is too big to fit in the stand. Then, a week later, you finally tie it to the upstairs bannister, because every time that the dogs hear the doorbell ring, they get overly excited and knock the tree down as they blaze a bark-fest toward the front door. Or perhaps you are a cat person who has given up entirely, instead switching to an artificial tree that hangs from your ceiling in an attempt to keep the cat from climbing up—and subsequently knocking down—your fragrant fir.

Though the initial upfront cost may be higher—\$120 for a stand that can accommodate a tree that is up to seven feet tall—the Bear Lake company's owner, Floyd Bowling Jr., says that the benefits outweigh the opportunity costs.

And the reviews for his 29-year-old product speak for themselves: Bowling's Last Stand has been featured in *Popular Mechanics* magazine, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and other large media outlets, such as *The Courier Journal* of Louisville, a Kentucky-based publication that rated Bowling's at the top of a list of eight comparable stands.

And as for the cat people out there? "Oh yeah, we've heard from them," Bowling says. "They no longer have to worry about it—the cat can climb all the way to the top of the tree as many times as it wants, and the tree won't tip over."

In The Family

Bowling, age 53, is a third-generation farmer in Manistee County, and although the tree-stand business keeps him busy year-round, he still manages to farm "a little bit," he says.

The family farm has been reduced to 200 acres from 800, and Bowling grew up helping

with crops like apples, cherries, two types of asparagus, strawberries, and peppers.

In the early 1980s, Bowling's parents built a new house, and they needed a bigger tree stand. So his father, Floyd Sr., a lifetime farmer and self-taught welder, built one from materials found around the farm.

"It was about 400 pounds," Bowling

"Before we got back, there were already phone calls asking for more," Bowling says. "Mom was at home, fielding calls."

That first year, the father-son duo made about 100 tree stands.

Now, Bowling Enterprises, Inc., has patented the design, and the company has made more than 100,000 over nearly 30 years.



Hundreds of tree stands await shipping (top photo) and painting (bottom photo). Photos courtesy of Bowling's Last Stand.

laughs.

Fast-forward nearly a decade to 1989, when Floyd Sr. was visiting a friend who ran a Christmas tree lot in the Metro Detroit area. Knowing that he already had a prototype at home that he could improve upon—a prototype that, despite the weight, was far superior to what his friend was selling at the lot—then-54-year-old Floyd Sr. enlisted the help of his then-24-year-old son. They loaded the truck and drove to Detroit.

The 6,300-square-foot facility in Bear Lake cranks out about 5,000 tree stands annually, with around 90 percent, Bowling estimates, that are sold in about 250 mom-and-pop stores in 28 states, including more than 40 stores in Michigan—you will not find these in the "big box" stores.

Their success, Bowling says, is due to a quality product, not any real marketing skills—the father-son duo just spent years hitting the road and cultivating relationships with stores throughout the country.

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And thanks to his wife, Patti, they are also sold online, a practice she began in the 1990s.

Bowling says that only about five percent are sold in Michigan, with the biggest sales out east. This coincides with recent statistics showing that the Northeast and the West Coast are where the preference for real trees is strongest. According to data from the NTCA, younger, environmentally conscious consumers are making a point to buy real trees; these are the same consumers who buy organic produce at the grocery store.

This could be great news for the Christmas tree market, as could word spreading about the efficacy of Bowling’s product.

For instance, back in 2006, Clark J. Geron Sr., then-spokesman for the NTCA, told *The Washington Post*: “As an industry, we need to move away from some of the ineffective stands, because it detracts from using a real Christmas tree.”

Notably, artificial tree sales appear to be increasing, from 9.3 million in 2005 to closer to 11.5 million recently.

Still, there are the die-hard among us, for those who say nothing but a live tree will do. And for good reason: buying real trees means supporting local farmers and the local economy, while most of the artificial trees are made in China of PVC and steel, then they are shipped to the United States, and they eventually are sent to a landfill. Moreover, when you can buy a tree stand that is made locally, it is a clear win-win.

“Where Plastic Fails, Steel Prevails”

The Bowling family’s design fixes what they considered to be a few basic flaws in the design of the tree stands that seem to dominate the market: they replaced cheap plastic with heavy gauge steel, and they swapped undersized screws for solid welds. Also, the stand has a unique T-bolt handle that makes it easy to straighten and tighten the tree, especially when compared to the traditional screw-variety stands. Additionally, small, wobbly legs were replaced by longer, more solid legs that span wide enough to steady your tree, should it be knocked about by children, dogs, cats, or all of the above.

The all-steel stand has three or four legs, depending on size, and Bowling suggests that the product looks like something for the lunar landing.

The smallest stand that Bowling makes is the 6XTS model, which weighs in at 13 pounds and is crafted for a tree that is up to seven feet tall; it sells for \$120. Meanwhile,

Odd Facts About Christmas Trees

- Average price that consumers want to pay for a life tree: \$25
- Average price that consumers want to pay for an artificial tree: \$50
- Average price of a live tree: \$75
- Average price of an artificial tree: \$107
- A six-foot fir can weigh 50 to 75 pounds.
- A 10-foot white spruce weighs 175 pounds.
- A 14-foot Fraser weighs 400 pounds.
- There are close to 250 million trees currently being grown on U.S. Christmas tree farms.
- Nationally, more than three-quarters of Americans decorate their homes with a Christmas tree, or close to 100 million homes.
- Around 20 percent of those homes use real Christmas trees.
- Americans buy around 20 to 30 million live trees each year, spending around \$1.5 billion for the chance to argue with their spouses and tussle with their trees.
- Conversely, around 12 million new artificial trees are purchased each year, and the average artificial tree is displayed for an average of 11 years.

Source: American Christmas Tree Association and the National Christmas Tree Association

\$790, which is designed for a tree that is up to 30 feet tall—this is the model that Michael Jordan bought. (Yes, that Michael Jordan.) The cup on the smallest model holds about two quarts of water, while the largest holds about six gallons of water.

Other celebrities to have purchased Bowling’s Last Stand include Laura Bush, who bought 12 for the White House; Sarah Palin, all the way up in Alaska; Supreme Court Associate Justice Clarence Thomas; and Diana Ross just last year. The tree stands that win the “farthest traveled” award go to the ones that were sent to soliders in Iraq a couple of years ago. Additionally, tree stands have been purchased for the Ronald Reagan Museum, the Henry Ford Museum, the Jimmy Carter Museum.

The largest tree stand that the company has made was for Ford Field, where the Detroit Lions play—that stand was a 20XTS model.

“There could be other [celebrities],” Bowling laughs. “These are just the ones that we know about.

For many years, the company was run by Bowling and his father. Since Floyd Sr.’s death, there are still only two employees for most of the year: Bowling and Dave Goorhouse.

However, that number increases to around

10 during the busy season, which begins to taper around December 5 each year.

“We’re swamped until then,” Bowling says.

Longevity and Mission

Sure, Bowling knows that he could potentially sell more tree stands if the quality was lower—that is what just about everyone else in the industry is doing.

But that is not what his mission is about. Rather, he prides himself in providing a quality product, one that can be handed down in your will, along with the precious family heirloom ornament that was saved, thanks to the tree stand that kept the tree from falling.

One last detail, Bowling notes, is that every tree stand is painted red, and they always will be as long as he is in charge.

“The red id symbolic of the blood that was shed for Christianity,” he explains. “That is what this season is really all about, right? Faith and salvation.”

In our corner of Northern Michigan, the stands can be found at: Bear Lake Hardware and Our Field of Dreams (the Bear Lake-based garden center that is owned by Bowling’s wife, Patti, and their 24-year-old daughter Briann); Wahr Hardware of Manistee, The Market Basket of Beulah; Shop-n-Save of Benzonia; Northwoods Hardware of Glen Arbor; all three Ace Hardware locations in Traverse City; and Barker Creek Nursery of Williamsburg.

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CONSTANTLY FLOWING

Mondays

Circle Time for infants and toddlers at the Benzie Shores District Library of 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.

Pilates with Anna at Frankfort’s Oliver Art Center. annamallien@gmail.com 10-11am.

Free yoga class for seniors with Michelle Leines at The Gathering Place Senior Center. 10579 Main Street in the Honor Plaza. 231-525-0600. 10-11am.

Mending Time: a volunteer will be at the Benzie Shores District Library to repair clothing while you wait. If you have a tear in your shirt, your child has a rip in her jeans, or the hem has unraveled from your tablecloth, bring your items. No formal-wear or upholstery. No drop-offs. 10:30am-12pm.

Computers with Dustin: Let Dustin help you to unlock the mysteries of the computer! Bring your own or use one of ours. These sessions are FREE! Benzonia Public Library. 11am-1pm.

Cards at The Gathering Place: A dedicated group of card sharks play Pinochle, euchre, cribbage, and rummy during lunch. Bring a friend! 12-1pm.

MIFiberShed at Grow Benzie is a place for fabric, fiber craft, and clothing to be recylced, remade, or exchanged. Clear our your closet or sewing/craft room and get inspired to make new stuff. We give fiber nine lives before the landfill. Come use a sewing machine, help to sort donations, and acquire clothing for \$1 per pound! Donations give you fibercredit to use in the shop. Workshops on the 2nd Monday of the month. MIFiberShed is open every Monday 12-7pm. Call/text Emily Votruba at 231-399-0098 or email emilylvotruba@yahoo.com to join the email list.

Zumba with Suzanne at The Gathering Place. All welcome. \$3 per class. 2:30pm.

Marvelous Art with Mrs. Connie McLaren, a retired local teacher. Free class, includes supplies! Benzonia Public Library. 4-5:30pm.

Tuesdays

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

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. 1-3pm.

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

Taco Tuesdays at The Roadhouse Mexican Bar & Grille in Benzonia. Only \$1.89 each! 4-9pm.

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

Wednesdays

Stretch 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.

Computers with Carol at the Darcy Library at 7238 Commercial Street in Beulah. Ask computer-related questions. Also, read to dogs Chaz & Denny! 1-5pm.

PLARN at The Gathering Place. Crochet plastic mats to donate for the homeless. 1:15pm.

Thursdays

Arcadia Branch Library hosts sewing basics at the Pleasant Valley Community Center. 231-889-4230.

Pre-school Story Time with Miss Désirée: Enjoy exciting stories, followed by a fun craft. A time to socialize, make new friends, and hear great stories. Benzonia Public Library. 10:30-11am. Bunco at The Gathering Place. 1-2pm.

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/child pair. It can be as fun/focused as you prefer, 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. Open to all levels; \$13 per session. 231-383-1883. 4-5:30pm.

Mending Time: a volunteer will repair clothing while you wait at Benzie Shores District Library. 5-6pm.

Open Mic Night at St. Ambrose Cellars. 6-9pm.

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

Fridays

Bngo, music, and lunch in Thompsonville with Benzie Senior Resources. 10:30am-1p.m.

Tech Support to help you navigate the tech world. Please call in advance to schedule your appointment with Robert. The Gathering Place. 1-2pm.

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

Saturdays

MIFiberShed at Grow Benzie is open 9am-4pm.

Nature Classes for Kids with Amalia Fernand of Nature Explorers International: art, games, scavenger hunts, nature walks, and inteactions with animals at our indoor and outdoor classroom at 6962 Burr Street in Benzonia. \$12 per class. Ages 3-6 from 9:30am-12:30pm; ages 7-12 from 1-4pm.

Sundays

Community Pick-up Indoor Soccer: open to the public. Young or old, join us! We don’t keep score, it’s just for fun! Benzie Central High School gym. 6-8pm.

*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

Friday, December 7

3rd annual Heikki Lunta Party: Join us in paying homage to the great Finnish snow god with drink specials all night, live music by the Blake Elliot duo (7-9pm), a special appearance by Heiki Lunta himself, and a giant bonfire! Iron Fish Distillery. 4-10pm.

Friday, December 7

Mistletoe Magic: Join more than 15 businesses for downtown shopping night in Frankfort, and celebrate the season in style! Discounts, special pricing, prize drawings, live music, and more—come check it out, and shop local! 5-8pm.

Friday, December 7

Toy Graham performs at St. Ambrose Cellars. 6-9pm.

Friday, December 7

Jake Frysinger performs a hamonious fusion of cover songs and originals on acoustic guitar. Stormcloud Brewing Company in downtown Frankfort. 8-10pm.

Friday, December 7

The Groove Suns acoustic duo, out of the Metro Detroit area, is comprised of Jason Locke on vocals, acoustic guitar, mandolin, and harmonica with Todd Fletcher on vocals and acoustic guitar. Featuring intricate guitar work and tight vocal harmonies, The Groove Suns provide both fresh and familiar takes on much loved classics and forgotten hits throughout the history of rock and pop music. A typical Groove Suns show will take the audience through many twists and turns and provide several “Oh! I love this song!” moments. Never the same. Always familiar. Stormcloud Brewing Company. 8-10pm.

Friday-Sunday, December 7-9

Benzie County Community Chorus’s 2018 Christmas

Concert Series: all are welcome, but a freewill offering will be taken. Friday's performance begins at 7:30pm at the Frankfort United Methodist Church; Saturday is 3pm at the same location; Sunday is 7:30pm at the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, on the hill between Honor and Beulah.

Saturday, December 8

Bake sale for Betsie Valley Elementary's new shed project. Iron Fish Distillery. 3-10pm. Also, from 7-10pm, Delilah DeWylde will perform.

Saturday, December 8

Terry Robertson Benefit: Terry has been diagnosed with advanced cancer in his stomach (and likely in other parts of his body), which has caused a blockage. Due to his previous heart surgeries, he is not a candidate for surgery. Terry is unable to work, and finances are strained. Hors d'oeuvres prepared by L'Chayim Delicatessen. Open to the public. For questions & information, contact Jack Goodson at 231-920-7937. Frankfort Eagles Club. 6-8pm.

Saturday, December 8

3&2 perform at St. Ambrose. 6-9pm.

Saturday, December 8

The Nutcracker, presented by Northwest Michigan Ballet Theater. BCHS auditorium. 7-9:30pm.

Sunday, December 9

Santa and Mrs. Claus make a visit to the Oliver Art Center. Craft projects, hot chocolate bar, holiday storytime, and more! 3-5pm.

Monday, December 10

Hannukah ends. (Began on Sunday, December 2.)

Monday, December 10

International Human Rights Day.

Monday, December 10

Save money on wrapping paper (both buying it and throwing it out) by adding an extra touch of love to your presents with these super-easy fabric drawstring and button closure bags! All materials provided by MIFiberShed at Grow Benzie. Suggested \$5 donation. We'll teach you how to sew these. 3-7pm.

Friday, December 14

4th annual Ladies Night: 20% off the entire store, plus sip win or a little beer with muchies and special giveaways. Nugent Ace Hardware in Benzonia. 5-7pm.

Friday, December 14

Maggie McCabe performs at St. Ambrose. 6-9pm.

Friday, December 14

Stormcloud's 5th annual story-writing contest, to celebrate the release of "Gerald's Talking Dog," a Belgian rye dubbel that is fermented with cherries. All 500-word entries had to be turned in by Monday, December 3, and they are now being read by a panel of judges; the top three stories will then be presented at a public reading. Each essay submission should begin with the first line, "Gerald's talking dog just can't stop talking..." Prizes for the top three essays include \$100, \$50, and \$25 gift cards and a growler for each, as well as a 2019 Cloudspotter membership and five pounds of dried cherries from Graceland Fruit. The top three essays will also receive publication in the online version of *The Betsie Current*. 7:30pm.

Saturday, December 15

Jen Sygit performs at St. Ambrose. 6-9pm.

Saturday, December 15

Mitch & John G: Mitch Washer is a singer and songwriter who has toured Nashville to Daytona to the West Coast. His acoustic style and smooth, clear vocals blend to create an enjoyable listening experience. Meanwhile, known by his candy apple

red 1963 Fender Stratocaster, John Giordano has spent 35 years developing influences from country, jazz, rock, and blues. His guitar work is featured on several albums that have been recorded by prominent Michigan artists. Stormcloud. 8-10pm.

Sunday, December 16

Annual Barrels & Carols Holiday Sing-Along. Bring your thirsty vocal chords for some good old-fashioned Christmas caroling in the pub. Representatives from local churches will be here to help fuel the holiday spirit. Come, all ye faithful, because it's the most wonderful time for a beer! Stormcloud. 7-9pm.

Sunday, December 16

Dessert & Drinks—Batter: Remixed will pair four deliciously decadent dessert and four drinks for only \$15! St. Ambrose. 12-4pm.

Friday, December 21

Shortest day of the year; longest night of the year.

Friday, December 21

Barefoot is comprised of: lead vocalist Jenni Rae, Nathon Lane on acoustic guitar, Phil Coryell on harmonics, and Bee Jay Reffit on stand-up base. They put their own twist on Top 40 popular songs that span decades of great music, and they love to have a good, toe-tapping time. St. Ambrose. 6-9pm.

Friday, December 21

The Season of Giving is here! And all we want for Christmas is your most hideous holiday sweater for our annual Holiday Party & Ugly Sweater Contest. Live music from Evan Burgess begins at 8pm; ugly sweater judging begins at 9:30pm. There will be prizes: ugliest sweater overall receives a \$25 gift card, one stainless steel growler, and the coveted winner's t-shirt; most creative sweater receives a \$25 gift card and one glass growler. Stormcloud. 7:30-10:30pm.

Saturday, December 22

The Lofteez at St. Ambrose. 6-9pm.

Monday, December 24

Christmas Eve.

Tuesday, December 25

Christmas Day.

Wednesday, December 26

Kwanzaa begins.

Friday, December 28

E Minor at St. Ambrose. 6-9pm.

Friday, December 28

Patty PerShayla plays folk-rock original songs, classic rock covers, and grunge favorites (reimagined with a ukulele). Iron Fish Distillery. 6:30-9:30pm.

Friday, December 28

Barefoot at Stormcloud. 8-9pm.

Saturday, December 29

Mike Struwin at St. Ambrose. 6-9pm.

Saturday, December 29

Barefoot at Iron Fish Distillery. 6:30-9:30pm.

Monday, December 31

New Year's Eve.

Monday, December 31

Grab your dancin' shoes for a Barefoot New Year's Eve party at St. Ambrose. 6pm.

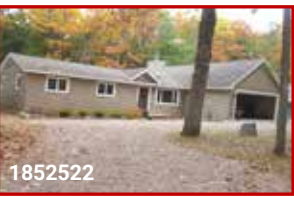
Tuesday, January 1

New Year's Day.

Tuesday, January 1

Kwanzaa ends.

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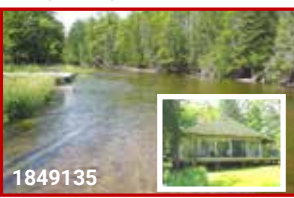
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Of course we appreciate the financial gifts, but so many also help in quiet ways, never expecting to be acknowledged. They make repairs on our building, bring soup to our volunteers, knit scarves for Neighbors, collect food, donate Christmas trees and more. This community understands that we all have needs to be met, and gifts to give—what a wonderful Neighborhood we share, thank you!
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The Betsie Current

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Recipes

Continued from page 1

In this spirit of sharing in good food and good cheer, we at *The Betsie Current* have asked some of our area chefs—professional and casual—if they would be willing to share some of their favorite traditional holiday recipes! These are but a few holiday favorites that may be fun to add to your own family’s traditions as we close out 2018.

What are your favorite dishes this time of year? Would you consider emailing us the recipe and a photo for next year’s holiday edition? Email to editor@betsiecurrent.com. Wishing everyone happy holidays—and great smells from the kitchen!

Peach Salsa from Gretchen Boekeloo-Nahnsen, owner of The Roadhouse Mexican Bar & Grill

For families who like to add a southwest kick to the traditional Christmas ham or turkey, a flavorful peach salsa would be just the ticket. Here, Boekeloo-Nahnsen shares one of the signature salsas that gives flavor to dishes at The Roadhouse in Benzonia.

- Peach Salsa**
- 2 cans (28 ounces) of peaches in syrup, drained
 - 1 medium red onion, diced very fine
 - 1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced very fine
 - 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced
 - ¼ cup fresh cilantro, chopped
 - 2 teaspoons honey
 - 1 teaspoon coriander
 - 1 teaspoon cumin
 - 1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
 - Juice of one lime

Chop peaches into small pieces, then stir into a large bowl with the remaining ingredients. Store in refrigerator.

Butterscotch Cookies from Myra Elias, former owner of Marshall’s Motel in Frankfort (now Bayport Lodging)

In 1933, Elias’s grandmother, Helen (Kohn) Kraftchick, gave this recipe to Elias’s parents—Dorothy (Anderson) and Milton Kraftchick—when they were newly married.

The cookies are unique, in that there is so much flour in the recipe that the dough needs to be kneaded to work it all in. The cookies are rolled into four tubes of dough, which are chilled overnight in the refrigerator, then sliced and baked. They are initially soft coming out of the oven, but then they turn crispy and are excellent dunked in coffee. Elias’s mother passed the recipe down to her in 1966.

“These were Dad’s favorite cookies, and Mom only made them during the Christmas season,” Elias says. Following her mother’s tradition, she makes the cookies each Christmas.

- Butterscotch Cookies**
- 1 cup butter
 - 4 cups brown sugar
 - 4 eggs
 - 1 tablespoon baking soda
 - 1 tablespoon cream of tartar
 - 1 tablespoon vanilla
 - 6-8 cups flour

Knead ingredients together into a stiff dough, divide into one-fourths, and roll into long loaves. Allow to chill overnight. Slice 0.5 inches thick before baking at 325 degrees for about 10 minutes.



Kielbasa from Beth Roethler, co-owner of The Cabbage Shed

For the Roethlers, memories are what make the holiday, and the recipes that the family hold dear to their hearts are not just about flavors and delicious scents—for many years, the family has gotten together to make their own recipe of Polish Kielbasa.

The recipe, given to their Grandpa Hudson (from the Kaminiski side of the family) has evolved over many years, but the one thing that remains the same is the Polish tradition that everyone works together to make the sausage.

The family cuts the meat by hand, mixes in the onions and spices, and then everyone takes turns putting the meat into natural casings. The work takes an entire day, and everyone finds time to also share stories, food, drink, and laughter. The sausage is then packaged and labeled. Each family pitches in, and—come Christmas morning—everyone will be greeted with the aromas of this flavorful Polish tradition cooking. But they each also take some home, so then the memories of creating their Christmas feast together as a family will last all year.

- Polish Kielbasa**
- 8 lbs. boneless pork butt meat
 - 2 lbs. beef chuck
 - 4 heaping tablespoons salt
 - 1 heaping tablespoon pepper
 - 1.5 heaping tablespoon sweet marjaram
 - 2.5 medium onions, chopped

Hand grind and mix together the meat, onions, and spices; then spoon into natural casings. Best achieved by many hands!



Honey Butter from Natalie Niederhofer, co-owner of Birch & Maple

“This is a great little recipe for the holidays, and it is very user-friendly for both kids and adults,” says Niederhofer, who goes on to say that the honey butter is especially good on crusty bread, cornbread, pancakes, waffles, and French toast. The honey butter is used on at least one dish at Birch & Maple—their signature “chicken and waffles.”

- Honey Butter**
- ½ pound softened butter (unsalted)
 - 1 tablespoon local maple syrup
 - 3 tablespoons local honey
 - Pinch of sea salt

Whip all of the ingredients with a hand or table-top mixer until completely incorporated; the butter should be light and airy. Store in a container in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Rum Cake from Jim Johnson, co-owner of Jim’s Joint BBQ

Every Christmas dating back more than 40 years, Johnson’s mother, Astrid, made her special rum cake. The cake tended to get a little boozy each year—it is definitely not for the kids. After she passed away, Johnson’s sister, Lois, continued the tradition.

“She would ship us our cake each Christmas, after we moved from New York to Michigan,” Johnson says. “We could always count on it still being moist and delicious, even after shipping. Food is about family, and the traditions keep the memories alive. With our cooking, we are creating and continuing the stories of our lives.”

- Cake**
- 1 box of yellow cake mix
 - 1 cup chopped pecans or walnuts
 - 3.75-ounce box of instant vanilla pudding mix
 - 4 eggs
 - ½ cup cold water
 - ½ cup Wesson oil
 - ½ cup of Bacardi dark rum (80 proof)

- Glaze**
- ¼ pound butter
 - ¼ cup water
 - 1 cup granulated sugar
 - ½ cup Bacardi

Melt butter in sauce pan, stir in water and sugar, and boil for five minutes, stirring continually. Remove from heat, and add rum. Preheat oven to 325 degrees; grease and flour either a 10-inch tube pan or a 12-cup bundt pan. Sprinkle nuts over the bottom of the pan, and mix all of the cake ingredients together. Pour batter over nuts, and bake for one hour, then allow to cool. Invert onto serving plate, and prick the top of cake for glaze to penetrate. Drizzle and smooth glaze over the top of cake and evenly down the sides. Allow cake to absorb glaze, and repeat until glaze is gone. Optional decoration: pipe buttercream frosting or whipped cream along the bottom and top of cake, then add maraschino cherries.

Raspberry-Preserves Sandwich Cookies from July Welch, Frankfort resident and retired Benzie Central teacher

“This cookie is a holiday tradition with a bit of a twist,” Welch says. “Because I started using it first, and then I gave the recipe to my mother.” Even though recipes are usually passed from parents to children, Welch’s family and friends are thrilled to see these cookies each year, even if the order of this tradition was a little unconventional.

- Raspberry-Preserves Sandwich Cookies**
- 1 cup of butter
 - ½ cup sifted 10X powdered sugar
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla
 - ½ cup ground nuts
 - 1.5 cups sifted all-purpose flour
 - 1 cup raspberry preserves

Cream together sugar and butter until well-blended, then stir in vanilla and nuts. Roll dough into 0.75-inch balls, and place on greased cookie sheet. Grease the bottom of a drinking glass, then dip in additional 10X sugar. Use glass to flatten balls before baking. Bake approximately 10 minutes, allow to cool. Spread half of the cookies generously with raspberry preserves, topping each with the remaining plain cookies to make the sandwich. Drizzle with frosting, if desired. (For bite-sized cookies, make the original balls a bit smaller before flattening and baking.)

Pencils

Continued from page 1

help. Brown immediately had responses pouring in from people who wanted to buy pencils and participate. Each volunteer could choose her/his own school where s/he wanted the pencils to end up. So far, deliveries have been made to Benzie Central High School and Middle School, plus Lake Ann, Crystal Lake, and Betsie Valley elementary schools, as well as to Frankfort Elementary, Middle School, and High School. On top of that, pencils have been delivered to neighboring school districts: Blair, Courtade, and



Positive messages have been written on more than 1,000 pencils that have been dropped at a dozen local schools over the past two months. Photo courtesy of The Pencil Project.

Traverse Heights elementary schools; Kingsley schools; Kaleva Norman Dickson; and the home school co-op.

Success So Far
A box of 150 pre-sharpened pencils costs about \$13, plus shipping, on Amazon. Volunteers spent the month of October ordering pencils, writing messages on them, and turning them in to area principals and teachers, so that they could be handed out by November 1, at the beginning of the “thankful month,” Brown says.

At Lake Ann Elementary, where Brown’s son attends, principal Larry Haughn was delighted.

“He looked down at the pencils, picked one out, read it silently to himself, and looked back at me with a smile,” Brown says. “He said, ‘Wow, this is way more than just a pencil that someone will need.’ It absolutely melted me!”

Even in the sometimes more cynical, less innocent environment of teenagers, BCHS art teacher Bechler is seeing an impact from the project.

“I received approximately 300 pencils from [Brown], and I’ve passed out about one-third of them,” Bechler says. “The kids love them. When I pass them out, I ask the students to read out loud what the pencil says, and it always brings a smile to their faces when they read the pencil message out loud.”

Be The Change
Interestingly, one of Brown’s all-time favorite quotes adorns many of the pencils that she has sent out: “Be the change you wish to see in the world,” attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian lawyer, politician, social activist, and writer who became the leader of the national move-

ment against the British rule of India. Gandhi is best known as the architect of a form of non-violent civil disobedience that would influence civil movements in other parts of the world, from Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States to Nelson Mandela in South Africa. However, according to a 2011 opinion piece in *The New York Times*, the quote has been highly tweaked from its original: “If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him... We need not wait to see what others do.” The author, Brian Morton, opines: “Here, Gandhi is telling us that personal and social transformation go hand in hand, but there is no suggestion in his

words that personal transformation is enough. In fact, for Gandhi, the struggle to bring about a better world... involved a steady awareness that one person, alone, can’t change anything; an awareness that unjust authority can be overturned only by great numbers of people working together with discipline and persistence.”

When looking at the full quote within the context of Morton’s analysis, it is important to break down what Brown’s project could mean: what began as a small, somewhat innocuous “what if” post on Facebook has already inspired others and gained momentum.

But it will take the work of even more people coming to the cause if Brown’s hope is to be fully realized, her hope that this project will continue to catch on in neighboring communities throughout Northern Michigan, starting a trend to place positivity and optimism into the minds of children. She will need further help to do so: help buying the pencils, help creating the clever messages, help delivering them, and help spreading the word to get more volunteers.

“Maybe we can’t change the whole world,” Brown says. “But we can change one individual kid’s world by simply starting their day off with these simple messages.”

Do you want to join in the pencil revolution? Request to join “The Pencil Project” Facebook group at <http://bit.ly/BNZpencilproject> or contact Belle Brown at belq-isbrown@gmail.com or 231-651-9384.

Chickadees

By Staff Reports

One evening eight years ago, in the heart of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Faith Lewis looked out her picture window toward Lake Michigan. Chickadees rose up from the bird feeder and darted into the woods. She leaned forward and watched them disappear. Though dementia was taking away her power of speech, Lewis’s expression spoke clearly: “Where do those little birds go?” Lewis’s caregiver was Bill O. Smith, a recently retired elementary school principal who happened to love rhyme and storytelling.

He asked Lewis: “With chickadee caps on chickadee heads, do they sleep eight across on chickadee beds?” Lewis laughed. Later Smith asked: “From northern woods to the Alabamas, what do chickadees wear for pajamas?” Lewis laughed again, and her laughter launched three books.

Smith’s couplets eventually became the Up North best-seller *Chickadees at Night*, which begat the holiday treat *The Chickadee Spirit*, which begat the third and brand new book in the series, *Chickadeeland*.

Chickadeeland celebrates national parks and shores of the United States, including, of course, our own Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Michael Soukup, recently retired chief scientist for the National Park Service, calls *Chickadeeland* “a beautiful, delightful introduction to America’s natural wonders.”

Renowned local water colorist Charles R. Murphy has lent his talents and sense of whimsy to illustrate the entire “twilogy.” As author Smith says: “I could be Shakespeare, but these are picture books.” All three flights of fancy honor nature, beauty, whimsy, and community—ideas dear to Lewis’s heart. When *Chickadees at Night* was first published, Smith took Lewis on a road trip all the way to the shores and stores of New England.

According to Smith, when dementia arrives you have to adjust your expectations. “For Faith and I, it was about replacing beautiful memories with beautiful moments,” Smith says. And in the moment, the New England sights and sounds—and milkshakes—gave her great joy. Smith called it “the greatest trip she’ll never remember.”

That journey continues now with *Chickadeeland*. It is available, along with the other two chickadee books, at most local bookstores and gift shops.

The chickadee books are proudly printed in the United States. Profits from the sale of all three books will be shared by national and regional non-profit groups that love our parks and planet. Locally, the recipients include: Historic Sleeping Bear Preservation, FLOW (For Love Of Water), Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conversancy.

Find all three books, and hear complete readings, at BillOSmith.com.

*A version of this article previously published in the **Glen Arbor Sun**, a semi-sister publication to **The Betsie Current**.*

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