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Sowing the Seeds

by Edmund Lawler

To the west are Lake Michigan's endless horizon and the prevailing westerly winds moderating temperatures along its eastern shore. To the east is a glacial moraine and its gently sloping hills. To the south is the Indiana state line and to the north the Kalamazoo River.

In between is a rolling bed of sandy, nutrient-rich soil underlying the nearly 1.3 million acres of the federally recognized Lake Michigan Shore American Viticultural Area, home to a bounty of fruit farms, orchards and vineyards growing dozens of varieties of wine grapes. Southwest Michigan's unique combination of lake-effect climate, glacially sculpted topography and enriched, well-drained soil are key ingredients of what the French call *terroir*: the characteristic flavor and taste of a wine bestowed by the environment in which it's grown and produced.

Also unique to the region that holds 90 percent of Michigan's vineyards is the Midwest's only commercial teaching winery and tasting room, Lake Michigan Vintners. It is part of Lake Michigan College's six-year-old Wine and Viticulture Technology program operating from a new \$7 million, 14,000-square-foot teaching winery on its Benton Harbor campus. Known as the Welch Center, it provides students a real-world laboratory in the science, business and art of winemaking in a region where wineries are elegant engines of tourism.

The two-year degree program and its companion commercial teaching winery is led by Michael Moyer, a former winemaker in Washington State and graduate of the University of California-Davis' Viticulture and Enology program, not far from

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Sowing the Seeds

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Napa Valley. Earlier in his career, Moyer was a wine instructor who developed the science of winemaking curriculum at Walla Walla (Washington) Community College's Institute for Enology and Viticulture. The college cultivates several acres of teaching vineyards and operates a commercial teaching winery called College Cellars of Walla Walla.

If it sounds a lot like Lake Michigan College's program, it is. A delegation from LMC visited Walla Walla and essentially took home their blueprint. And for all practical purposes, they made off with Moyer as well. But it was more of a seduction than an abduction, Moyer assures.

"I was working as a winemaker for the Figgins Family's Leonetti Cellar in Walla Walla, and the owner said, 'I'm giving some guests a tour. Can you come down and meet them and have a glass of wine with us?' They told me about what they were doing in Michigan, and I was intrigued," Moyer says.

The conversation over a glass of wine serendipitously evolved into a job interview with the LMC delegation led by then-president Bob Harrison and Mike and Lisa Welch, longtime supporters of the college whose name now graces LMC's teaching winery.

The impromptu interview went well.

"They described the wine region and the program

they were hoping to create that would be similar to Walla Walla Community College's. The mission was to develop a professionally trained class of winemakers and vineyard managers to help the local industry grow," Moyer, a Utah native, says. "I was very excited about it and went home and told my wife, and she was excited as well. I was expecting her to say, 'No way. We're not leaving.' We had met in Walla Walla and had started raising our family."

He was delighted, however, that his wife, Erica, a California native, agreed the possible opportunity to launch a hybrid academic/commercial program sounded too good to pass up.

"But I was a little apprehensive," Moyer said. "Afterward, I asked them to send some Michigan wine because I never had any before. They put together some bottles from local wineries. I was expecting fruit wine or maybe some Riesling, maybe some cold-hearty varieties. I didn't know what to expect.

"What I got was a selection of dry red wine — Cabernet Franc, Syrah and Merlot. The wines knocked my socks off."

Moyer figured if Michigan winemakers can ripen Syrah grapes — which typi-

cally produce bold, full-body wines — then the possibilities were endless in a state boasting the nation's longest freshwater coastline, where most vineyards are within 25 miles of Lake Michigan. The big lake's insulating effect extends Southwest Michigan's cool-climate growing season by up to a month.



Michael Moyer directs Lake Michigan College's Wine and Viticulture Technology program.

The selection of wines clinched the deal, and by January 2015, Moyer began planting the seeds of the program to grow a well-trained talent pool for Michigan's wine industry. Wine is big business in the Mitten State, the nation's fourth-largest grower of wine grapes. A study by the Michigan Craft Beverage Council estimates the wine industry produces a \$5.4 billion economic impact on the state, including tourism, business with wholesalers, retailers, bars and restaurants. More than 1.7 million people visit Michigan's wineries each year, contributing about \$252 million in tourism dollars.

Moyer found the program's early days could be daunting.

"I got here and realized, 'Oh my gosh, I don't have any students,'" Moyer says. He enlisted Candice Elders, the college's savvy executive director of marketing and communication, who quickly got the word out on the new program, and the enormous potential of the winemaking region in which the program would be rooted. A cohort of students was not far behind.



The Welch Center opened in the fall of 2019

Then there were the local winery owners to deal with, including a vocal minority concerned a new commercial winery backed by the resources of a college would be an unwelcome competitor. Moyer persuaded them the degree program and Lake Michigan Vintners were to their advantage.

"I maintain good relationships with the wineries here, the winery owners," he said. "One of the most vocal of them came up to me a couple of years ago and said, 'I'm sorry. I didn't want what I said to lead to bad blood.' And I said, it's all good."

Is it ever.

"The program is a game-changer for Michigan. Mike is teaching students all the right things," says John Braganini, president of Michigan's oldest and largest winery, St. Julian Wine Co., based in Paw Paw. "The program does two things. It gives the growers' children, who if they choose to

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John Braganini

continue growing grapes, the opportunity to study somewhere locally. Other than that, they have to go to Michigan State's Ag School or to Cornell University in upstate New York or out to University of California-Davis.

"It also gives us a talent pool. We have about 100 employees, and we are hiring people. We have hired three students who came out of the Lake Michigan program. Two are still with us, one went out west. When we get them, they are well-trained."



Students pick grapes as part of their training.

Braganini says the 22 wineries in Southwest Michigan all need people.

"When you are a small winery with one or two employees, it's hard to find people," he said. "Having our own winemaking college in the heart of the winemaking district of Michigan speaks volumes about our agricultural community. I hope that at

some point in the future one of the community colleges up north would do the same because the fruit and winemaking techniques in the southwest are very different from up north."

The most important lesson college students studying for wine industry must learn is how to manage the supply chain.

"It is the most essential component of the business," Braganini says. "And you must have a solid plan for selling your product. There are a lot of moving parts in a winery."

St. Julian, celebrating its centennial anniversary this year, has six tasting rooms across the Lower Peninsula. The busiest is in Union Pier, because of its proximity to Interstate 94 and the Chicago market, which drives tourism in Southwest Michigan.

"Wineries give tourists one more thing to do here," says Braganini, who learned valuable lessons about the wine trade from his grandfather, Mariano Meconi, an Italian immigrant who founded the company in 1921. "Tourists come to Michigan primarily because of all the water. But the wine industry is also a big contributing factor to tourism. Our tasting rooms are busy year-round."

Moyer acutely is mindful of the pairing between wine and tourism.

"We have a tasting room in the Welch Center where students gain experience interacting with customers," he said. "That's a very important part of our business and the wine industry in general, especially in Southwest Michigan where tourism is so important to the local economy."

"It is all synergistic. People come over here for an art show, and they want to taste some wine on the day they are not going to the art show. Similarly, people going to the beach may want to taste some wine while they are here. And people who like to drink wine like to eat good food, and that helps the restaurants."

Some of the wineries, themselves, are full-blown



Students process grapes at the Welch Center.

entertainment venues, such as Round Barn in Baroda. During summer weekends, thousands of guests pay a small cover charge to sip wine and hear bands perform on a stage amid the laid-back vibe of the winery's rolling terrain.

Graduates of LMC's wine and viticulture program need to master much more than just pouring wine. They learn how to cultivate and harvest grapes in several vineyard blocks three miles away from campus at Michigan State University's Southwest Michigan Research Extension Center.

"It's the students' classroom for viticulture," Moyer says. Most of the education takes place at the Welch Center, equipped with a grape press, a large fermentation tank, bottling rooms, a laboratory and a dry storage area. The center also has two classrooms, three offices, a workroom and a commons area for wine tasting and community education classes.



Bottles of Lake Michigan Vintners wine.

Upon harvest, students bring grapes to the Welch Center, where they are destemmed and crushed before they begin managing the fermentation process.

"We have a quality-control class that analyzes our wines," Moyer says.

Most of the students are from Southwest Michigan, but they also come from nearby metropolitan areas such as Chicago, South Bend, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. The program concentrates its classroom and field work into two days a week to accommodate commuting students.

The program also draws students from more distant places like New York, Wisconsin and Traverse City. Those students typically live in the dorms on the Benton Harbor campus.

Students range in age from those just out of high school to retirees looking to launch a second career or supplement their passion about wine and its culture. And oh, the places the program's graduates and interns go.

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“We’ve had students work in Virginia, the Finger Lakes region of New York, Oregon, Napa Valley, even a few in New Zealand,” Moyer says.

But most stay closer to home, like Adam McBride, owner and operator of Hickory Creek Winery in Buchanan. The 43-year-old former captain in the U.S. Air Force who led logistics operations for two multinational corporations was just awarded an associate degree in applied science in wine and viticulture technology from LMC. He enrolled in the program part time, not long after he bought Hickory Creek in 2017 after seeing a notice in the agricultural real-estate listings.



Adam McBride at work at his Hickory Creek Winery.

His dream of becoming a winemaker took wing when the Air Force assigned him to Ramstein Air

Base in southwest Germany, where he helped manage logistics for NATO’s Allied Air Command. He lived in a quaint winemaking village in the Mosel Valley, one of Europe’s oldest wine-growing regions, best known for its Riesling.

“There was a vineyard in my back yard,” McBride says. “I just loved everything about it — the viticulture, meeting winemakers and going to festivals and dinners. I told myself, ‘This is what I want to do some day.’ When I returned to the U.S., I was never able to shake it.”

Prior to buying Hickory Creek, he started making wine at home and even went to California for several months to take classes at the Napa Valley Wine Academy. Shortly after buying Hickory Creek, McBride met Moyer at a wine conference in Grand Rapids and learned about LMC’s program.

“My thought was to squeeze in a course here and there when I had the time,” McBride says. “But after taking a couple of classes the first semester, I was so impressed with the depth and professionalism of the faculty, the curriculum and the facilities. I’m in a chemistry lab doing rigorous chemical tests and quality analysis on the wines. I thought, ‘I’ve got to keep going.’”

Moyer says there were so many practical things a novice winemaker like himself harvested from the program.

“We might go over something in class on a Tuesday morning, and I was applying the concept that afternoon in my winery,” he said. “It was eye opening for me when I sat down in my first class in January 2018. It took me by surprise in a very good way — this coming from a guy who has had wine training in Napa Valley and an MBA from Michigan State.

“I’ve been around the block from an educational standpoint. This program is right up there with the best that I have seen. I can’t say enough good things about it.”

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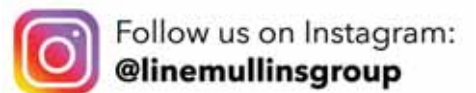
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School of American Music to Kick Off Family Concert Series

The School of American Music kicks off its first family concert of the year, "A Valentine Serenade," at 3 p.m. EDT Sunday, Feb. 14, at Converge Community Church, 601 W. Buffalo St., New Buffalo, Mich.

Organized by Phil Bauman, the program will feature vocalists Kim Jones, Matt Daniel and Bill McMurray accompanied by Lisa Kristina on piano and Charles Steck on trumpet. The lineup of romantic serenades includes music from "La Boheme," "The Magic Flute," "Porgy & Bess," "West Side Story," "South Pacific!" and "Les Misérables," as well as selections from composers ranging from Handel and Bizet to Richard Rodgers, Jerome Kern and Leonard Bernstein. Tickets are free, but must be reserved online. Donations are welcome. Social distancing will be observed and masks required throughout the concert.

Daniel, a tenor, is in his 12th season with Lyric Opera of Chicago's chorus. He is well-known in the Michiana area as a soloist, voice teacher and co-founding member of Tenors Three.

Jones, a soprano, is an alumna of the Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago. She has worked with conductors such as Riccardo Muti and Leonard Bernstein, and performed in Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, Philadelphia Academy of Music and the Spoleto Festival in Italy.

McMurray, a baritone, has performed more than 40 operatic roles and as a soloist in Handel's "Messiah," Mendelssohn's "Elijah," Vaughan Williams' "Five Mystical Songs" and the Faure "Requiem." He

has appeared with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chicago Arts Orchestra, and worked with many regional orchestras around the U.S.

Steck teaches at Valparaiso and Andrews universities, Lakeshore High School, Portage High School and Culver Academy. He has been principal trumpet with LaPorte County and Elkhart County symphony orchestras, and a featured trumpet and vocal soloist with the St. Joseph (Mich.) Municipal Band, the Tom Milo Big Band and the North American Brass Co. In 2006, he was named LCSO's Most Outstanding Musician.

Kristina has appeared in Andrew Lloyd Webber's "The Phantom of the Opera" on Broadway, on tour in the U.S. and in Germany. She has toured internationally and played keyboard for the Chicago Opera Theater, New Philharmonic Orchestra, Elgin Symphony Orchestra, Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra and Northwest Indiana Symphony.

The SAM concert series is supported by donations and a Pokagon Fund grant. The next concert, "With a Youthful Spirit," is at 3 p.m. EDT Sunday, March 14, at Converge Church. It will feature the Northwest Indiana Youth Symphony Musical Ensembles.

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Jones



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Director, Star of “Prancer” Pay Tribute to Cloris Leachman

by Andrew Tallackson

Hollywood lost one of its shining stars last week, one who left an indelible mark here through a movie that became a perennial Christmas favorite.

Cloris Leachman died Wednesday, Jan. 27, at 94, at her home in Encinitas, Calif. The Des Moines, Iowa, native held the distinction of winning eight Primetime Emmys from 22 Emmy nominations, as well as a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for Peter Bogdanovich’s “The Last Picture Show” (1971).

Here in LaPorte County and especially Three Oaks, Mich., Leachman is remembered for her scenery-chewing turn in “Prancer” (1989) in which she played Mrs. McFarland, the eccentric recluse who takes a liking to free-spirited 8-year-old Jessica Riggs (Rebecca Harrell).

The Beacher reached out to the film’s Oscar-nominated director, John Hancock (“Bang the Drum Slowly”), and its star, Rebecca Harrell Tickell, to share their thoughts on the beloved actress. Since “Prancer,” Hancock, a Galena Township resident, has directed films such as “A Piece of Eden,” “The Looking Glass” and “The Girls of Summer.” Harrell Tickell, now a filmmaker and environmental activist, is 40 and married with children. She is the co-director with her husband, Josh, of the 2020 Netflix documentary “Kiss the Ground,” which has earned Oscar buzz for a Best Documentary nomination.



Hancock



Harrell Tickell



Cloris Leachman is photographed with Rebecca Harrell on the set of John Hancock’s “Prancer.”

John Hancock

Cloris had such range. A beautiful woman without vanity. Who could forget her mustache as Nurse Diesel? I remember her so well in “The Last Picture Show.” An entirely different Cloris. Boy, that picture was well cast!

Gus Van Sant (I think it was) said he spent a great deal of time pretending to understand what actors

said to him. I had that with Cloris. Really never understood a word she said. I think she lost a son to an overdose, so there was an undertone of unspoken sorrow, but mainly she was a wag: poking her finger in the yolk of someone’s sunnyside up at breakfast, flashing her breasts in the bar of the Holiday Inn on Pine Lake Avenue. Her performance was in a slightly different style than the rest of the cast, but I let her do it, and it worked. Love the moment when she takes the candle from the little boy.

Rebecca Harrell Tickell

As a 9-year-old working with Cloris on “Prancer,” I remember her bold sense of humor and ingenious improv. We both decided to do the stunt ourselves of me getting away on the sled under the gate. She cursed the whole time. She equally made me laugh and terrified me. She had no shame. I absolutely loved her.

Michigan City Public Library

The library is open, but with restrictions in place.

Hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Saturday. There is no public seating. The library also follows LaPorte County Health Department's Public Health Order Face Covering Mandate by requiring masks inside the building. Every individual must wear a face covering over his/her nose and mouth at indoor areas open to the public. The circulation and reference desks will have masks available for \$1.

The following services are temporarily suspended: public programs and meetings; literacy tutoring; MakerSpace/3-D printing; study rooms; homebound service; interlibrary loan; puppets; puzzles; blocks and children's AWE computers in Youth Services; Ellison die cut machine; public faxing; microfilm use; magazine/book sale; and accepting donations.

Access is limited to the computer lab: One session (up to one hour) per person per day is allowed. Due to social-distancing guidelines, only one person at a station at a time. Children are not allowed in the computer lab with parents/guardians.

One computer is reserved for genealogy research, with time limited to one hour per person per day.

Four charging tables allow a limit of 30 minutes per use (no seating is available at these stations).

WiFi is available throughout the building and exterior/parking lot.

The following virtual programming is scheduled:

- The Online Graphic Novel Club returns with Alex Sanchez's You Brought Me the Ocean. The Zoom meetup is Jan. 28. Contact Jonathan at (219) 873-3045 or email YOnline@mclib.org to register.
- Great Decisions returns in February through Zoom. Discussion booklets are limited and available at the circulation desk. Call Robin Kohn at (219) 873-3049 for more details.
- Craft kits are available weekly. Children can make a photo album, with all supplies available. Children also can pick up a "Crow Kit." Available now is "Cool Critters and Waddling Penguins."

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“Promising Young Woman” is a Revenge Tale With Bite, a Brain

by Andrew Tallackson

Had “Promising Young Woman” been released in the ’80s, it would have been about violence. Vengeful violence, exacted by women against men who wronged them. Pulp fare exploiting feminist rage for cheap thrills.

But having arrived as a product of the #metoo era, “Promising Young Woman” is about the scars of violence. And because of that, it has more bite. This movie stings. It isn’t afraid to push buttons. It’s also sensational entertainment, toying with your expectations and delivering a career-best from its star, Carey Mulligan.

The Oscar-nominated actress (“An Education,” “The Great Gatsby”) stars as Cassie, and we only get bits and pieces of her backstory at a time. What we do know is that she’s 30, living at home with her parents (Jennifer Coolidge and Clancy Brown) and working at a local coffee shop. Seven years earlier, she attended medical school with her best friend, Nina. Something terrible happened. We don’t quite know what or to whom. We have our suspicions. But now, in the evenings, Cassie heads to local bars, dressed insanely provocative and feigning being blitzed out of her mind. When men take her home for the night, seeing her as easy prey, Cassie springs into action. Intent on teaching them a lesson. Not the fatal kind, but the Karmic type that leaves scars both literal and symbolic.

Now, this may sound like trash: grindhouse exploitation dressed up as Oscar season bait. It is not. No gratuitous gore, sex or violence. The film has

★ ★ ★^{1/2}

“Promising Young Woman”

Running time: 113 minutes. VOD, in theaters. Rated R for strong violence, including sexual assault, language throughout, some sexual material and drug use

more on its mind, thanks in large part to Mulligan, who never once treats Cassie as a #metoo terminator. The performance is consumed by anguish. Penetrating eyes that bore through alpha male exteriors. Mulligan creates a woman who may never heal, and that is far more wrenching than a woman who derives pleasure from inflicting pain. Cassie, indeed, is a #metoo symbol: still standing, but the sadness remains etched all over her face.

“Promising Young Woman” marks the directing debut of Emerald Fennell, a familiar face in British television, specifically on PBS’ “Call the Midwife” and as Camilla Parker Bowles on Netflix’s “The Crown.” What she’s created here is a revenge fantasy with a brain. The film is not about Cassie turning to violence as a twisted cathartic release. She wants these men, particularly those with a link to her past, to learn from their mistakes. To understand why their behavior left a damaging trail. As these men, Fennell casts likeable actors playing against type — Adam Brody, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Bo Burnham — to conflict with our notions of the type of person with potential for violence. And in dolling up Cassie in evening wear that ranges from stew-



Cassie (Carey Mulligan) finds a relationship that appears healthy and supportive with a young pediatrician (Bo Burnham).

ardless to nurse, Fennell, again, is toying with audience expectations: the male sex fantasies of desirable women.

“Promising Young Woman” carefully plots its course toward a payoff that, in the context of Cassie’s world, is enormously satisfying, but doesn’t hold water once you consider it in greater detail. Without letting any spoilers slip, let’s just say, there is no way everything could lock into place *that* quickly.

However, we are willing to cut the movie some slack. For much of “Promising Young Woman,” Cassie represents so much pain and sorrow, a little payback, well, it’s just what the doctor ordered.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com

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“The White Tiger” is a Compelling Look at Raw Ambition

by Andrew Tallackson



Balram (Adarsh Gourav, right) becomes friends with his boss' son and daughter-in-law (Rajkummar Rao, Priyanka Chopra Jonas) in “The White Tiger.”

Consider “The White Tiger” a cynical cousin to “Slumdog Millionaire.” It’s not interested in lifting your spirits, as Danny Boyle’s 2008 Oscar winner did, but in crafting a world where the underdog says, screw it, I’ll do whatever it takes to succeed.

By shucking any and all sentimentality, “The White Tiger” makes for compelling storytelling. You may not be moved by it, but you cannot dispute, it’s never dull.

Now streaming on Netflix, the film, based on Aravind Adiga’s 2008 best-seller, weaves between past and present. Opening in 2010, we meet entrepreneur Balram Halwai (Adarsh Gourav) right before Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao is scheduled to visit India. Balram, arguing the Chinese, not Americans, are the ideal business model, writes a long email to Jiabao, telling his life story and how he made it to “the top.” In it, we learn how Balram grew up in Laxmangarh, earning a scholarship to a school in Delhi because of his advanced English and literacy skills. His teacher calls him a “white tiger,” a metaphor for a once-in-a-generation individual. However, after his father’s death, Balram is forced to leave school and work for the family, which smashes coal for the village landlord, who operates like the feudal systems of old.

Balram realizes the only way to get ahead in life is to become a driver for the landlord. It is the



“The White Tiger”

Running time: 125 minutes. Netflix. Rated R for language, violence and sexual material

first step in Balram’s relentless drive, his ingenuity, to adapt. He takes driving lessons. He talks a good game to the landlord, which gets him hired. He blackmails Driver No. 1 into leaving, thus securing his position. Again, whatever it takes.

The landlord’s son and daughter-in-law, Ashok (Rajkummar Rao) and Pinky (Priyanka Chopra Jonas), who also serves as the film’s executive producer, have spent years in America. They are a tricky blend of old and new worlds. They don’t care for Ashok’s father — Pinky, especially, would prefer to return to America — so they embark on ways to enfold Balram into their world.

This is only Gourav’s second film, and he is captivating as Balram. This is a portrait of raw ambition, an unceasing drive for wealth. Gourav operates on a level of relentless persistence, pouring good humor and wicked honesty into “The White Tiger.”

The turning point of the film, hinted at during the opening sequence, is a fatal car crash in which a young child is killed. The landlord insists that Balram take the fall for it, that he will honor the family

by doing so. The look on Gourav's face is crushing. A sense of duty to the family *and* the realization he will never be fully accepted by it.

From there, writer-director Ramin Bahrani (the HBO remake of "Fahrenheit 451") does not look back. His film places Balram in survival mode, doing everything in his power to trump the impossible odds staring him directly in the face.

That pessimism wears you down. Bahrani is blunt in making his point, rapidly editing the images together, the Bollywood score pounding away at times. The last act of the film even factors a shocking murder into the equation.

Does Balram retain his humanity? Chopra Jonas, who acts her heart out as Pinky, offers him the most pressing advice: "The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave." Whether he takes that wisdom to heart at the end remains to be seen. I have my theories. In some respects, that open-ended nature to "The White Tiger" leaves us uncertain as to how we feel about Balram.

We certainly are not bored by him. Can't deny that.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com



Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who serves as an executive producer on the film, gives a sensational performance.

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Central Avenue Beach in Indiana Dunes National Park has reopened thanks to an Army Corps of Engineers project that placed 56,000 tons of sand there.

The beach area was closed since spring 2020 due to severe erosion from high Lake Michigan water levels. The Army Corps of Engineers project was the second sand-nourishment effort at the national park in the last year. The other occurred in fall 2020 at Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk.

This winter, access to Central Beach is down a

steep sandy slope. According to a press release, walking down the slope can be difficult, and the return climb is strenuous. Individuals need to decide based on their own abilities if they are capable of the climb.

After erosion from winter and spring storms concludes, park staff will be able to restore a more gradual access path down to the Beverly Shores beach in time for the summer beach season.

All photos by Paul Kemiel

Kirby, Burstyn Give Everything They've Got in "Pieces of a Woman"

by Andrew Tallackson



Vanessa Kirby and Shia LaBeouf star as a couple dealing with loss in "Pieces of a Woman."

"Pieces of a Woman" is like watching a film school project, or something by a Tarantino-type who knows plenty about movies, specifically what gets critics jacked up.

We have:

- The arty title.
- Showy visuals.
- Grim subject matter.
- Oscar-bait monologues.

It feels a tad calculated. Having said that, and likely having come across as a cynical poop here, I still recommend "Pieces of a Woman" for two reasons: Vanessa Kirby and Ellen Burstyn. These two actresses devour the material with a fearlessness that makes it watchable. You *are* moved by the end, and it's because of them.

Now streaming on Netflix, "Pieces of a Woman" is based on a 2018 play by Kornél Mundruczó and Kata Wéber, with the two returning as director and writer, respectively, for the film.

It opens with an unmarried couple, Martha (Kirby) and Sean (Shia LaBeouf), on the cusp of becoming parents. A home birth is planned, and when Martha's water breaks, her scheduled midwife is unavailable, a substitute, Eva (Molly Parker), arriving in her place. Eva is confident, calming. Ready to take charge.

The birth encompasses the first 30 minutes of "Pieces of a Woman," all of it filmed in one take. No editing. The camera follows every step of the pro-



"Pieces of a Woman"

Running time: 126 minutes. Netflix. Rated R for language, sexual content, graphic nudity and brief drug use

cess. Initially, it feels show-offy, distracting...until we realize *why* the birth is presented this way. This is a film about grief, about the ability for some to survive it, and others to be consumed by its brutal grip. Martha ultimately will lose the baby, and by staging the birth in one take, we feel like we've been privy to everything, that it hasn't been edited, shaped, to convey Martha's point of view.

Once the baby perishes in Martha's arms, her domineering mother, Elizabeth (Burstyn), takes charge, filing a wrongful death lawsuit against the midwife that draws intense media focus, and prodding Sean into believing he was never good enough for Martha.

The opening 30 minutes of "Pieces of a Woman" are such an exhaustive roller coaster, what ensues almost does not recover from it. The story charts how grief, particularly from the loss of a child, drives a wedge between people, threatening to destroy them. As the story progresses month by month, the sadness of it all becomes consuming, to the point of numbing the viewer into submission...capped off by a full-frontal nudity shot of LaBeouf that, I believe I speak confidently, the world did not need to witness.



Ellen Burstyn delivers one of her best performances in years in "Pieces of a Woman."

Kirby and Burstyn, though, are remarkable. I still maintain that once Kirby and Claire Foy left "The Crown," the series nearly lost its mojo. Kirby, as Princess Margaret, *wow* — you couldn't take your eyes off of her. When she wasn't engaged in the art of seduction, her eyes flickered with mischief, her body language a carefully calculated mix of yearning, boredom and resentment.

Here, in "Pieces of a Woman," her performance is raw. Cool calm on the surface, a crushing sense of emptiness beneath. You ache for Martha, and you understand, too, what drives her mother, Elizabeth, into repeatedly calling the shots. Elizabeth has a monologue that links her and her family back to the Holocaust. In the hands of any lesser actress, the scene might have been shameless Oscar bait. But in Burstyn, the moment is a wrenching reminder of Elizabeth's own scars, ones that all these years later never healed.

Burstyn gives the moment her all, and it is a cathartic release not only for her, but for Martha as well, whose final courtroom scene is beautifully realized by Kirby, the actress dialing it down considerably and *still* packing a wallop.

We are affected by the final scene, the understanding that now exists between mother and daughter. And we have Kirby and Burstyn to thank for that.

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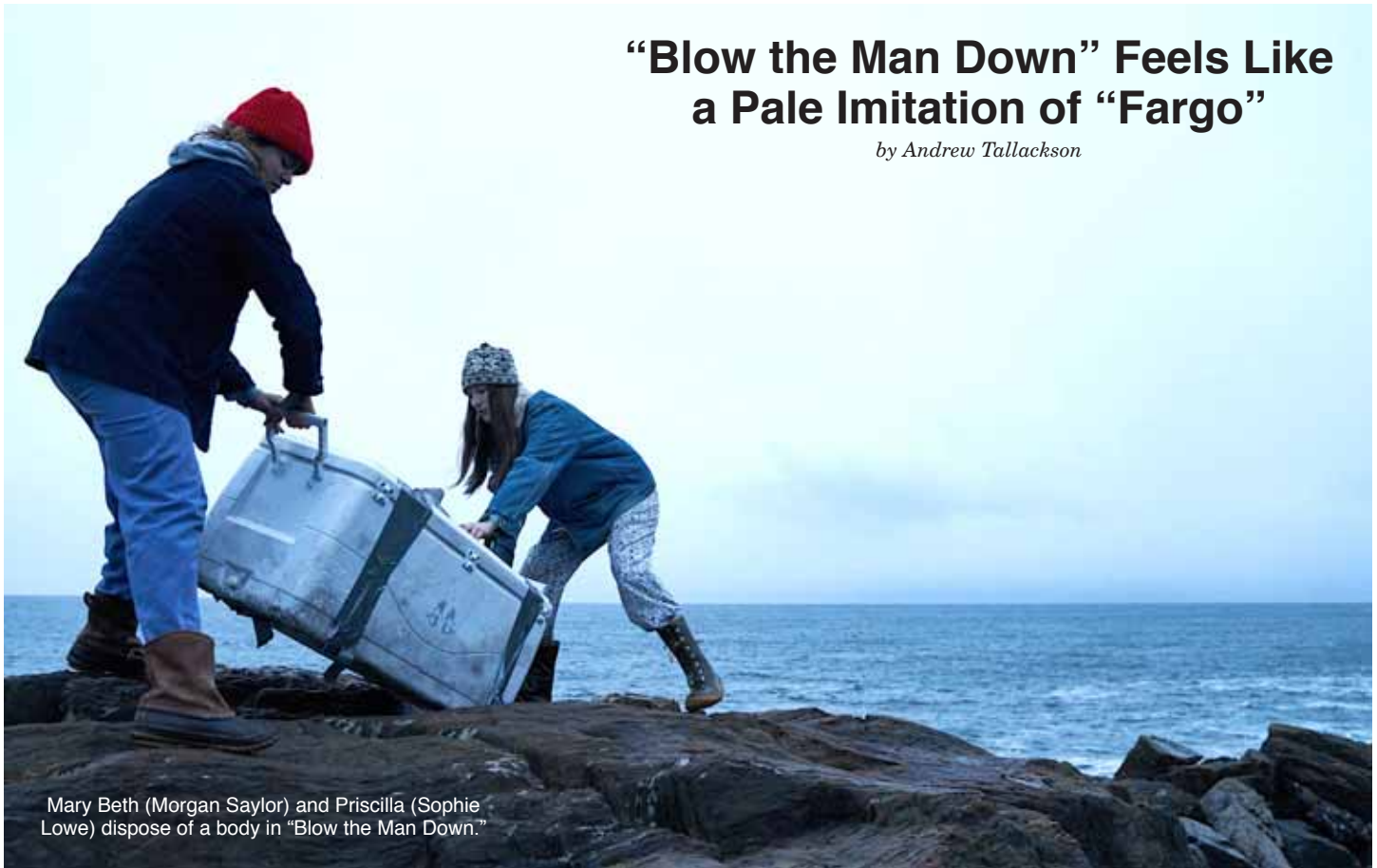
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“Blow the Man Down” Feels Like a Pale Imitation of “ Fargo ”

by Andrew Tallackson



Mary Beth (Morgan Saylor) and Priscilla (Sophie Lowe) dispose of a body in “Blow the Man Down.”

“Blow the Man Down” is sort of the amateur hour version of “ Fargo .”

Streaming on Amazon Prime, the film marks the writing-directing debut of Bridget Savage Cole and Danielle Krudy. They have all the key ingredients for a darkly comic thriller: secrets, murder, twisted humor. And, it is a rarity where women drive the action; hence, its social media popularity amid COVID-19.

There is good stuff here, but the movie feels like it’s one beat behind where it should be. Perpetually in the ghostly shadow of “ Fargo .”

“Blow the Man Down” is set in one of those Maine fishing villages that crime writers adore. An insular community, isolated from the rest of the world. The kind where the villagers know each other’s business, yet somehow, a murder slips past their watchful gazes.

We meet sisters Mary Beth (Morgan Saylor) and Priscilla (Sophie Lowe) who, as the film begins, are mourning their mother’s death, although her passing prompts more anger than sorrow. Mom, it seems, did not plan for the future, saddling her daughters not only with debt, but also the possibility of losing the family business. Out for a drink after the funeral, Mary Beth heads to the local bar, eventually leaving with a guy (Ebon Moss-Bachrach) who seems friendly enough. But when Mary Beth unexpectedly sees something she shouldn’t have,

★ ★ 1/2

“Blow the Man Down”

Running time: 91 minutes. Amazon Prime. Rated R for language, some violence, sexual material and brief drug use

he turns aggressive. The outcome? Mary Beth, in self-defense, shoves a fatal fishing harpoon into his throat.

Mary Beth turns to her sweet sister for help. You’d think the sensible Priscilla would go to the police. Nope. Her solution — chop the guy up, stuff him into a fish cooler and toss him into the sea. A gruesome fate not quite as memorable as the gnarly wood chipper from “ Fargo ,” but it’s enough to spur an ensuing police investigation, and rising suspicions from the town’s “mother hens” who carry themselves as if knowing what’s best.

It all sounds delicious, a crime thriller where the guilty parties are lambs dodging the slaughter. Cole and Krudy, as directors, have assembled a juicy cast as the townsfolk, including June Squibb (the Oscar-nominee from “ Nebraska ”), Annette O’Toole (“ Smallville ”) and Marceline Hugot (“ Better Call Saul ”). They play a trio of women whose primary target is Enid (the marvelous Margo Martindale, last seen as Bella Abzug in Hulu’s “ Mrs. America ”), who runs the local brothel as the town’s way to keep aggressive sailors in line.



Character actress Margo Martindale steals her fair share of scenes in "Blow the Man Down."

The four veteran character actresses circle each other as if part of some wary dance. They are the best part of the movie, to be sure. But herein lies the problem with "Blow the Man Down." The emotional core of the picture is the two sisters, and we are more interested in the bitchy townsfolk. Saylor and Lowe, as Mary Beth and Priscilla, are a bit of a snooze. There is no life to their performances, and their dialogue is equally flat. Ditto the two police officers, played by Will Brittain and Skipp Suduth, although at least Brittain's character is smart enough to realize when he's being bamboozled.

We also have singing fishermen — yes, *singing fishermen* — who exist as the movie's Greek chorus, their songs offering parallels to the actions of the sisters, but it just doesn't work, like it belongs in a different movie.

At the very least, "Blow the Man Down" confirms Cole and Krudy, as writers and directors, have potential. The seeds of promise are there, and the final shot is perfection.

Their next film, let's sincerely hope, will deliver the goods.

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JROTC Remains Active During COVID-19

Michigan City High School's Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps continued to support school activities despite restrictions stemming from COVID-19.

The cadets provided color guards for the Boys basketball game against Munster, and the Girls and Boys doubleheader against LaPorte. They also assisted the gymnastics team with equipment required for a home meet.

Maj. Tom McGrath, the senior Marine instructor, noted in a press release the cadets' enthusiasm and desire to return to a normal active routine.

"It has been tough on the cadets, particularly the seniors, to not have had a military drill competition yet this year," he said.

McGrath remains hopeful the school can host a drill meet March 20.

"I am optimistic that there will still be a national MCJROTC drill championship in Washington, D.C.," he said, "and that we can earn a spot in that competition."

Other activities in which the cadets normally participate are the leadership camp at the St. John's Northwestern Military Academy in Delafield, Wis., in June and the National JROTC Drill Camp near San Antonio, Texas, in July.

"Due to the lack of public exposure because of numerous COVID-related cancellations, I am fearing that our enrollment will drop for the next school year," McGrath said. "The Drill Camp would be particularly beneficial, as we have lost much time this year in developing our younger cadets."

The Marine Corps requires schools to have 100 cadets to maintain the JROTC program at MCHS. All activities are completely funded by the Marine Corps, with help for incidental expenses provided by the MCJROTC Booster Club.



Top photo: The color guard of Sgt. Alexis Moll, 2nd Lt. Declan Rice, Sgt. William Tate and Sgt. Rosa Rojas prepares to march on the Colors. Bottom photo: Cadets assist with the setup for a gymnastics meet.



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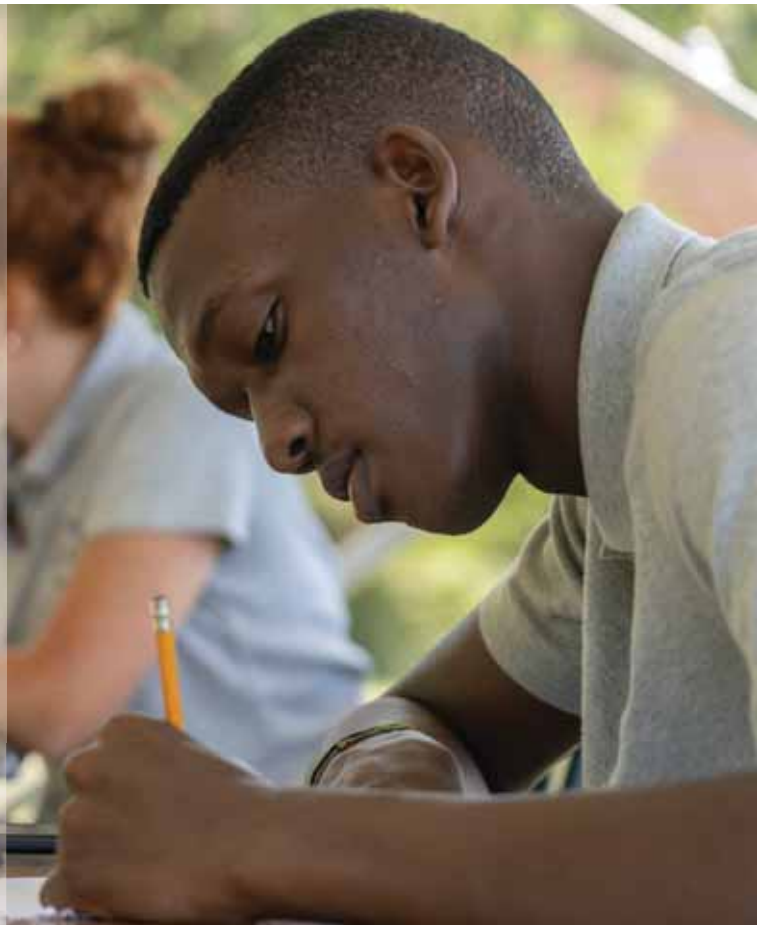
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LCSO In the Spotlight



Scott Kurtzweil (center), photographed during a concert with LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra.

Editor's note — This week, we kick off a weekly spotlight, provided by Tim King, LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra executive director, that highlights its talented musicians.

Scott Kurtzweil is in his sixth season as principal clarinet with LCSO. He also serves as the operations manager, handling the setup for rehearsals and performances.

A free-lance woodwind musician and teacher throughout northern Indiana and Southwest Michigan, Kurtzweil also runs his own small business, creating custom woodwind mouthpieces. The Artist-in-Residence for Buchanan (Mich.) Community Schools, he has a Bachelor of Music from Western Michigan University and a Master of Music from the University of Maryland.

Outside of music, he is an adult volunteer with the Boy Scouts of America and sails with his family.

Indiana Dunes National Park

Indiana Dunes National Park is offering virtual ranger chats for teachers and students through a variety of media methods.

The programs can cover a wide range of topics and grade levels. IDNP educators can customize programs to meet teacher preferences. For example, the park can bring Max, the milk snake, into a virtual classroom to teach about animal adaptations.

No Maple Sugar tours at Chellberg Farm are planned, but a virtual presentation about maple sugaring, complete with activities and connections to the area's history, is offered.

Visit www.nps.gov/indu or www.facebook.com/IndianaDunesNPS for a list of regular programs, then call the scheduling office at (219) 395-1885 for more details.



Snowshoes are available for free checkout from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. daily, with at least a 2-inch snow base required, at The Paul H. Douglas Center for Environmental Education.

Snowshoe sizes are available for kids and adults. They can be used to explore the three-mile-long Miller Woods trail system that leads visitors on an easy to moderate hike through oak savanna and dune habitats. Inside the Douglas Center are exhibits, a live animal display and "Nature Backpacks" stocked with supplies and nature guides. Wear a face covering when inside the center and maintain social distancing on the trails.



The Visitor Center is at 1215 N. Indiana 49, Porter. The Paul H. Douglas Center is at 100 N. Lake St. in Gary's Miller Beach neighborhood. Call (219) 395-1882 or visit www.nps.gov/indu for additional information.

Harbor Country Hikers

Harbor Country Hikers will head to Indiana Dunes National Park's Glenwood Dunes for a 2.5-mile hike at 2 p.m. EDT Saturday, Feb. 6.

HCH President Pat Fisher will highlight the glacial features and nearby Great Marsh and Toleston shorelines. The trails there are part of an extensive system featuring interconnected loops ranging from less than a mile to nearly 15 miles. The paths are popular with hikers, runners, horseback riders and cross-country skiers.

Hikers should dress in layers, wear a warm hat and take water. Depending on the weather, there may be muddy or icy areas. Social distancing and face masks are required.

HCH will meet in the parking lot at 1596 N. Kemil Road (County Road 300 East), Chesterton. Visit www.harborcountryhikers.com/events for details.



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In Memoriam



Nancy Schindler

Nov. 10, 1929-Jan. 15, 2021

Born on her parents' farm in Pulaski County, she was preceded in death by her father, Edward O'Connor, mother, Marie (Costello) O'Connor, all of her siblings in birth order, Francis, Joan (Render), Richard, Ellen (Essling) Timothy, two husbands, John O'Neill and Ferdinand Schindler, and her daughter, Mary Webster (O'Neill).

She is survived by her son, Patrick O'Neill (Tam), four grandchildren, Emily Nozawa (Webster), Madi Ashour (Webster), Miles Webster and Hannah O'Neill, and two great-grandchildren, Rose Marie Nozawa and Theodore Nozawa, all of whom live in Colorado.

She met Ferdinand Schindler in Winamac, Ind., and they married in October 1968, living in Michigan City. Ferd was director of library services at Indiana State Prison. Nancy was a homemaker and wrote a weekly column for *The Beacher* from about 1970 to 1987 called "The Culinary Corner," which consisted of recipes and her observations about life.

Nancy and Ferd retired to Colorado Springs in 1987 to be near her children and grandchildren. Shortly after her daughter, Mary, died in 2007, the Schindlers moved into an assisted living facility in Denver, where Ferd died in 2016.

She had many dogs and cats, and loved all animals. She enjoyed gardening, knitting, reading, writing, swimming, travel and politics. Donations can be made in her name to a local Dumb Friends League.

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Fernwood Botanical Garden

• **“Meet the Greats: Fernwood Virtual Lecture Series” from 7 to 8 p.m. EDT Thursday, Feb. 4.**



Hinkley

The series continues with “Daniel J. Hinkley: Windcliff: A Story of People, Plants, and Gardens.”

In 1987, Hinkley and partner Robert Jones founded Heronswood Nursery and gardens in Washington state. Introducing rare and unusual plants, the endeavor led Hinkley into the wilds across the globe for more than 20 years. He has spent his career plant hunting, writing, speaking and conducting plant research. A native of north central Michigan, he began his academic career as a horticulture student at Michigan State University.

Hinkley will share images, principles, philosophies and practicalities that helped him create his second garden, Windcliff, that sits on a high bluff overlooking Puget Sound in Washington.

Tickets cost \$40, or \$32 for members.

• **Live Stream Yoga from 10-11:15 a.m. EDT Fridays and Wednesdays through February.**

Deirdre leads weekly sessions to bolster immunity through stretching and meditative movement set in Fernwood’s Winter Gardens. If unable to attend the live-stream session, email Deirdre (dguthrie@fernwoodbotanical.org) for a Zoom link.

Visit <https://spore-studios.com/yoga/> for more information and to register.

Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve is located at 13988 Range Line Road, Niles, Mich. Call (269) 695-6491 or visit www.fernwoodbotanical.org for more information and to confirm the status of classes.

American Red Cross

The American Red Cross LaPorte County Chapter will sponsor the following bloodmobiles:

- South Central Junior-Senior High School, 9808 S. County Road 600 West, Union Mills, 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 5.
- First Church of God, 2020 E. Lincolnway, LaPorte, noon-6 p.m. Monday, Feb. 8.

Donors must be in good general health and feeling well, at least 17 (16 with parental consent) and weigh at least 110 pounds. Call (800) 733-2767 or visit red-crossblood.org for more details. Visit rcblood.org/ together for more details.

Indiana Dunes State Park

The following programs will be offered:

• **To the Beach & Back Discovery Hike at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 6.**

Wear hiking shoes during the one-mile moderate hike starting at the Nature Center.

• **Superb-Owl Hike at 10:30 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 7.**

The one-mile flat hike through owl habitats sheds light on owl adaptations in the dunes.

• **COVID-19 program safety precautions.**

Pre-registration is required for all programs to properly meet gathering guidance restrictions. Social distancing must be practiced by staying at least 6 feet away from others. Masks or other face coverings of the nose and mouth are required.

• **Snowshoe Rentals are available at the Nature Center.**

Snowshoeing is offered as long as 6 inches of snow is on the ground. A driver’s license is needed, and the cost is \$5 for the day. (10 a.m.-4 p.m.) Call the Nature Center to ask about snow conditions.

Indiana Dunes State Park is at 1600 N. County Road 25 East (the north end of Indiana 49), Chesterton. Call (219) 926-1390 to register for programs or for more information.

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Feb. 6 — To the Beach & Back Discovery Hike, 10:30 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Registration: (219) 926-1390.

Feb. 6 — Harbor Country Hikers, 2 p.m. EDT/1 p.m. CDT, Indiana Dunes National Park's Glenwood Dunes. Meet @ parking lot, 1596 N. Kemil Road (County Road 300 East), Chesterton. Info www.harborcountryhikers.com/events

Feb. 7 — Superb-Owl Hike, 10:30 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Registration: (219) 926-1390.

Feb. 14 — The School of American Music family concert, "A Valentine Serenade," 3 p.m. EDT, Converge Community Church, 601 W. Buffalo St., New Buffalo, Mich. Free; donations welcome. Reservations: <https://schoolofamericanmusic.com>

Through March 31 — Dale Cooper installation (3-D paper flowers), The Legacy Center Gallery @ Queen of All Saints Catholic Church, 1719 E. Barker Ave. Gallery hours: 6 a.m.-8 p.m. Info: jessicar@qas.org

Through June 5 — New exhibits, "Lost and Looking" & "Pipelines and Borderlines: The Art of Survival," Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St. Info: www.lubeznikcenter.org

In the Region

Feb. 4 — "Meet the Greats: Fernwood Virtual Lecture Series," 7-8 p.m. EDT. Through Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, 13988 Range Line Road, Niles, Mich. Cost: \$40, \$32/members. Info/registration: www.fernwoodbotanical.org, (269) 695-6491.

Fridays and Wednesdays through February — Live Stream Yoga, 10-11:15 a.m. EDT. Through Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, 13988 Range Line Road, Niles, Mich. Info: <https://spore-studios.com/yoga/>

Through March 7 — New exhibits, Elkhart's Midwest Museum of American Art, 429 S. Main St. Exhibits: "The Blue Ribbon Collection: The Amish Acres Arts & Crafts Festival"; "Adam Grant: A Holocaust Remembrance"; "Gabor Peterdi: The Early Works." Info: www.midwestmuseum.us, (574) 293-6660.

Through March 12 — Student exhibit, Art Barn School of Art, 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso. Gallery hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tue., Thur., Fri./10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. Info: (219) 462-9009, www.artbarnschool.org

Through March 28 — New exhibits, KAC Members' Show & local ceramist Jennifer Zona, Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, Mich. Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. EDT Fri.-Mon. Info: www.krasl.org, (269) 983-0271

Virtual Wine Tasting

Unity Foundation of LaPorte County will host a Virtual Wine Tasting at 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 11.

The cost is a \$25 donation. Participants can purchase featured wines at Al's Supermarkets in LaPorte and at Karwick Plaza. Visit tinyurl.com/y3sks22h for details. A virtual event link will be sent closer to the date.

A Notice to Our Readers

The Beacher will continue the following office hours for now

Mon.-Thurs.: 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Friday: 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

*Thank you for your patience
during the COVID-19 pandemic*

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Miller Pizza By the Beach, 1012 N. Karwick Road, is taking applications for employment. Apply within. No phone calls, please.

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Seeks dedicated full and part-time employees for re-opening in February, as well as seasonal summer help. Chefs, line cooks, hostesses, servers, buss staff, dishwashers. Will train. Email letter of intent and resume to FishcampMC@gmail.com

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Lovable Siberian male/female pups: born 12/11/20.
Please call (219) 879-2364 if seriously interested.

Free cat available. Black male cat, 5 months old.
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WANTED: I buy all types of antiques and collectibles, including toys, advertising, military items and more. Call Matt at (219) 794-6500.

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Email LBrental@snuffer.net

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We prefer elderly tenants. Shared bedroom: \$150/week.
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Common areas are shared with two other elderly people. \$400 deposit required. Must have good references. We will do a background check.

Call Sue at (219) 874-4891.

DARLING MICHIANA SHORES COTTAGE: 2BR/1.5BA, hot tub. \$200/night, Feb.-March, sec. dep., cleaning fee (2-night min.). Permit No. 2020-02. Email Jennifer.willey@hotmail.com

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Greenwood Cemetery plots for sale. Northwest corner, Section C, block 15, plots 1-6. Upon entrance to cemetery, turn left at circle, first left, plots are in the section on the right. \$1,500 per plot. If interested, call (708) 269-9717.

LaPorte County Public Library

LaPorte County Public Library has updated its curbside pickup service using meeScan.

New users can download the meeScan app through options such as Apple and Google Play. Then, place holds on items using a customer account. Once at the library, check in using the app and clicking Pickup from the bottom of the screen (or calling the library location). An appointment no longer is needed. Add the parking space on the app if picking up from the main location. Enter information in the instructions box if picking up holds placed on more than one account, or if needing additional assistance.

A staff member brings held items to the vehicle. Customers using the app receive updates as their requests are processed. Returns can be placed in book drops and be checked in within 24 to 72 hours. At this time, there is no limit to the number of items customers can reserve and pick up during curbside.

Hours for locations in *The Beacher's* readership area include:

- Coolspring Branch: Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Main Library: Tuesday/Thursday (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and Saturday (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.).

Check laportelibrary.org and follow social media for updates.

LaPorte County Public Library is located at 904 Indiana Ave. The Coolspring Branch is located at 6925 W. County Road 400 North. Visit www.laportelibrary.org for more details.

Tree, Shrub Seedling Fundraiser

Orders are due by April 9 for Berrien Conservation District's tree and shrub spring fundraiser.

Bare root seedlings of evergreens, deciduous trees, shrubs and fruit trees are offered, along with strawberry, rhubarb and asparagus plants. Rain barrels and composters also are available. Quantities are limited.

Orders may be placed at www.berriencd.org. Forms also may be printed from the website, or request one to be mailed by calling (269) 471-9111, Ext. 3.

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Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter

Blacktop Wasteland by S.A. Cosby (hardcover, \$26.99 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook. 275 pages.)

“So why did he feel a flutter in his chest like a hornet was trapped in his ribs? If he wasn’t like his Daddy, why did he miss the life?”

This week, I turn to the seedier side of life and the eternal question — can you outrun your past? Beaugard (“Beau”) Montage is about to find out...

We’re in rural Virginia for a tale as gritty as the two-lane blacktop roads Beaugard has traveled all his life. He’s a black man married to Kia, who works at Comfort Inn in a nearby town. They have two young sons — Javon and Darren.

Beau also has a teenage daughter, Ariel, from a stupid hookup when he was only 17 and fresh out of juvie.

Beaugard owns and operates Montage Motors, an auto repair garage that has made him a decent living until now, when the much-larger Precision Auto moves into town and puts a squeeze on his business — like \$19.99 for an oil change and tire rotation. Hard to compete with those prices...

Like his Daddy before him, Beau was a “wheelman” — the getaway car driver for various criminals — and he was the best in the business. Back then, his nickname was “Bug.”

His proud possession is still a Duster his Daddy gave him before he left for good, a car he refuses to sell. Not a pretty car, but that souped up motor could beat any police car...and that’s Beau’s biggest problem — he’s a much-desired commodity in the criminal world, and he just can’t forget the thrill of it all, even though he keeps telling himself he’s not like his Daddy.

Here’s the conundrum — Who is Beaugard Montage? Family man and business owner? Or getaway driver and criminal? Can he be both? We’re about to find out.

After taking part in an illegal street race with his beloved Duster, Beau finds he was hustled. He was counting on the \$1,000 prize money to pay off his overdue mortgage payment on the garage. Now what? Beau left the criminal life behind, and yet, he can’t help but wonder if he made the right decision. Then, the letter comes about the overdue payment for his mother at the nursing home. Yeah, the bills just keep piling up...

Then, Ronnie Sessions shows up with a proposi-

tion that could take care of all of Beau’s problems.

Ronnie is a white boy with an arm full of Elvis tattoos; always looking for the big job he thinks will make him more than poor white trash.

Ronnie, however, is not the brightest bulb in the pack. Beau’s past job with him ended up with a dead horse and almost getting caught. Don’t ask. Which means Ronnie is not Beau’s best friend, but this time, he has an idea even Beau finds intriguing...

Seems the jewelry store where Ronnie’s girlfriend works has received a large shipment of diamonds worth a small fortune. It could be an easy hit and a really big profit — around \$90,000 each for Beau, Ronnie, his cousin Reggie and another guy named Quan. Ronnie has a contact who will fence the gems, making a quick turnover to cash.

Like I said, this is mighty tempting to Beau. It could solve all his money problems. He agrees to be part of the robbery, but Ronnie and the others must do as he says. One thing about Beau, he’s thorough and researches all aspects of the hit beforehand.

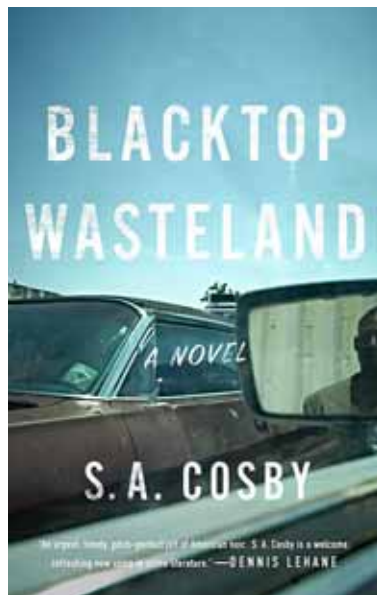
All seems to go well...well, almost all, but the deed is done and the money divided up among the four of them. End of story? Not by a long shot.

Lordy, Lordy, here comes the bad part — those diamonds are owned by a criminal nicknamed Lazy, who is anything but, and he soon confronts Beau. How did Lazy figure out who got away with the heist? Seems the diamonds they stole were supposed to be used to purchase some girls for his “business.” He’s not happy. But all can be made right by doing a job for him. All Beau and the others have to do is...well, I’m not going to give that up. Lazy says it should be a piece of cake for such a talented crew as Beau and his boys, but Beau knows his family is at risk if he doesn’t help Lazy. What’s it gonna be?

Remember Newton’s third law: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction? The contradiction remains for who Beau is and who is still Bug — a bitter lesson, indeed.

One thing’s for sure — you won’t know from page to page what’s coming next, except that it will be heartbreaking. Thing is, whatever the outcome, Beaugard Montage is one character you will not forget. I could hate Beau for the man he used to be, but I have compassion for the man he’s trying hard to be.

Till next time, happy reading!





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