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By Tom Chmielewski

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DONE. FINISHED. FINITO. Yes, summer is over. My guess it that you have been wondering where the time went and why you didn’t do all of the things that you wanted to do.

Maybe you spent too much time on the golf course, or visiting Lake Michigan. Could it be that you got wrapped up in the Fontana Summer Festival, the Kalamazoo Symphony park concerts, the Kindleberger Summer Festival, or the Arts Council-sponsored Sunday afternoon concerts in Bronson Park? Possibly you spent way too much time at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts’ Bronson Park Art Fair or strolling through downtown during one of the monthly Art Hops.

If you were looking for a real change of pace this past summer, you might have checked out some of the many offerings put on by the City of Portage Parks and Recreation Department or attended the diverse array of festivals at the Arcadia Creek Festival Site. Various weekends saw everything from Greek to island music to black arts to blues, and of course, Taste of Kalamazoo and Ribfest.

Maybe you were drawn to some of the areas venues that continue to host long-running events like the Kalamazoo County Fair (here since 1846), the USTA Boys’ 18–16 National Championships (here for 65 years) — or the relative newcomer, the Big League Softball World Series that has been here since 1980.

For those with a special interest in cars, there were opportunities of every ilk. It may have been the 27th Vicksburg Old Car Festival, the Street Rods Nationals or the multiple special shows at the Gilmore Car Museum that caught your attention. Whatever the setting, there was certain to be many interesting cars and related activities.

With the arrival of the cooler days of autumn comes the beginning of another busy arts season and, of course, another season of Encore magazine. We have been occupied over the summer making a few changes and preparing for the 35th season of bringing engaging stories to our readers.

Two new columns appear this year. “Reading the Locals” is being written by Theresa Coty O’Neil to showcase people from the surrounding area who are pursuing their dreams by writing books and poetry. The second is aptly titled “Put Yourself First” and will feature local professionals sharing thoughts about ways to brighten your life and enhance your feelings of self-worth.

Larry Massie will continue to provide his perspectives on Michigan history, and the remaining story lineup continues to be varied, this month focusing on local residents such as the new first couple at WMU, two long-time workers at the USTA Boys’ 18–16 National Championships, a collector of exotic birds, and others whose stories will keep your interest.

Best wishes for a fall that is as full of activity as was your summer. Don’t forget to find a cozy spot to relax and take time to enjoy your Encore magazine — and learn a little more about the unique individuals who live in southwest Michigan.

Rick Briscoe
Publisher
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For JOHN and LINDA DUNN, Kalamazoo is a new place to explore.

DAVID MARKIN and ROLLA ANDERSON have been a USTA Boys’ Nationals team for much of the tournament’s 65 years in Kalamazoo.

For DENISE HEATH, 30 exotic pet birds are not too many.

GORDON BOLAR loves broadcast, especially story telling.

PEOPLE’S FOOD CO-OP has a history of good food.

NANCY EIMERS makes poetry her mission.

FROM THE PUBLISHER
READ THE LOCALS
Pizza Pie and Politics: How Mitchell Moon Lost His Childhood.

PUT YOURSELF FIRST
Massages: Not Just for Special Occasions

GUESS WHO

EVENTS OF NOTE

MASSIE’S MICHIGAN
Michigan’s Better Angel

POETRY
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S-Curve, 131
E WASN’T complaining, mind you. But John Dunn remarked that everywhere he and his wife seemed to walk in their new home, it squeaked.

Linda Dunn dismissed the idea that the errant noises had anything to do with the wood floors or their shoes. “WE just squeak.” Whether the sounds came from the floorboards, their soles, or their bones, John Dunn didn’t have much time in mid-July to find the source. The new home was provided by Western Michigan University, and with it came the job title for John of president — and no opportunity to ease into the post. Despite facing a budget crisis and major cutbacks from the Michigan Legislature, the WMU Board of Trustees in June declined to raise tuition by 9 percent, going against the trend by other state universities to raise tuition by a similar rate or higher. The trustees wanted less of a tuition hike in Kalamazoo, coupled with something “bold and innovative.” And by the way, they left it to the new guy to figure out. He was starting in a couple of weeks.

When John Dunn took over as the new president of WMU on July 1, he could have squawked, at least privately, about being handed the toughest issue for Western this year before he even had a chance to find his parking space. But he embraced the challenge — and by the end of July had talked to enough people and gathered all their ideas to present a tuition plan to the trustees that was just what they asked for — bold, innovative, and a less expensive hike for the students.

“He wanted — he embraced — this job, even though there were a lot of problems at the state and university level.”

By Tom Chmielewski
much choice.

In the midst of preparing the tuition plan in mid-July, John squeezed out an hour of what precious little free time he had on a late Friday afternoon to sit together with his wife and talk about coming to the university, the city of Kalamazoo, and the new high point in his academic career.

His journey in higher education has taken him from professor to department chair, assistant dean, and dean during his years at Oregon State University and the University of Utah — and later, at Southern Illinois University, to provost, vice chancellor, and, most recently, interim chancellor.

About his newest position, he said: “This is really the logical step for me in my career path.” He explained that after meeting with the search committee in Detroit and learning more about the job, he came home and told Linda, “Wow!”

The search committee had pretty much the same reaction to him, Miller said a few days earlier. John was the last to be seen by the committee in
four days of interviews. “We had a room full of interviewers, with no windows” in the room. Miller feared everyone, including himself, was thinking, “Come on, let’s go. We want to get home.”

That attitude quickly changed. “John came in and just brightened the room. I think the fact he had so much positive response with that time slot, that said to me, this is a guy with substance.”

Next, John and Linda were invited for a two-day interview session on

Why John Dunn?

John Dunn had to convince a lot of people that he should be president of Western Michigan University — faculty members, deans and assistant deans, undergraduate and graduate students, university staff, trustees, and Kalamazoo business leaders.

And that was just to get to the second interview.

The presidential search committee had 14 members of varied backgrounds from WMU and Kalamazoo wading through more than 80 initial candidates to find a group to interview in Detroit, and from there narrowing the field to four to face more extensive interviews on Western’s campus. Finally, last spring the search committee made its final recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

So why John Dunn?

Rosana Alsaud, chair of the Graduate Student Advisory Committee, was in essence a search subcommittee of one. She represented graduate students, but having only recently earned her bachelor’s degree at Western, she understood the needs of the undergrads. And being a native of Brazil, she had a good handle on the views of international students as well.

She was faced with even more divergent views from other committee members, who included the dean of Arts and Sciences, a physics professor, a bank executive and others with backgrounds far different from her own. “Faculty kept talking about research, businessmen about this person being a visionary,” she said.

As a student, she had a different view. “I expected a president who understood the values of the total experience at WMU.” She looked for someone who had experience dealing with student affairs programming. She was interested in the candidates’ participation in forums or opportunities for interaction with people.

“Has this person tried to have a close contact with students? Does he care to sit down and eat with them? Does he come to football games, for example? That was my perspective.”

Mostly, Alsaud wanted to know: “Is this person approachable?”

Does Dunn give the right answer to that question? “He sure does, said Alsaud. He’s very approachable; he’s very friendly.”

Considering the varied needs of the university, she appreciated his experience from his time as a faculty member, to a steady climb up varied administrative posts. “He’s been there and done that.” And because of his recent term as interim chancellor at Southern Illinois University, “He doesn’t come from a place that’s dramatically different. It seems like he would definitely relate to students.” That meant to her a significant break with Western’s recent past.

“I think students felt there was no openness, there was no shared governance. From what we’ve seen him do, what we know of his experience, he’s much more open to shared governance,” Alsaud said. “I think there’s a sense of openness when you talk to him, but also a sense of inclusiveness. Before, people felt completely disconnected. I think he will be able to change that and turn that around. People will have a much more positive experience. They’ll say that ‘Yeah, this is a great place.’”

Ken Miller, chairman of the search committee, came from a vastly different perspective. A member of the WMU Board of Trustees, Miller is vice president and chief operating officer of an investment management firm, chairman of Keystone Community Bank of Kalamazoo, and the owner of the Millennium Restaurant group. Yet, his key reason for wanting Dunn as president is much the same as Alsaud’s.

While Miller cited a broad range of Dunn’s qualifications that in “sum and substance tallied more than anybody else,” it was the new president’s personality that stood out in his mind.

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Miller said. “He has a low wall of accessibility. If you want to see him, one step and you’re there. You immediately feel you could greet this guy on the street and he will engage you, at all levels.”

Miller insists Dunn’s presence and accessibility is vital to turning around the morale at Western. “Because of low morale, you had a culture of negativity on campus,” perceived as affecting students, faculty and staff.

“The biggest thing we missed was an opportunity to retain students that we lost. Our enrollment problem is as much a problem of retention as it is recruitment. If we could have retained some of the students that we had lost, our financial situation wouldn’t have been so bad. ... We missed the opportunity to seize the positive. Instead, we grabbed the negative and ran with it.”

Miller insists that morale, enrollment and finances are all interrelated. “If you raise morale, you will start solving some of the enrollment and recruitment problems. If you solve some of the enrollment and recruitment problems, you will solve some of the financial problems. Trickle down, trickle up, trickle all over effect.”

On a campus that many have felt had become divisive over the past few years, Miller said the university needed someone. “I believe John Dunn’s the one, who starts saying: ‘You know what? Let’s bring everybody back together.’

Linda realized Western was where John could reach his goal. “This was something he wanted to accomplish,” she said. “A couple of times we were disappointed in the searches that he was included in. It was kind of a letdown, but we got over it. Western seemed like a great match.

campus. “That allowed us to come to see Kalamazoo, and wow, this is a great community,” John said.

“There’s a vitality here,” Linda added, and they both knew this was a great fit.

Linda realized Western was where John could reach his goal. “This was something he wanted to accomplish,” she said. “A couple of times we were disappointed in the searches that he was included in. It was kind of a letdown, but we got over it. Western seemed like a great match.
But that only raised the stakes higher for them when they first came to campus.

“I was a little nervous, you know, coming here,” Linda admitted. Yet that quickly passed. “Everyone was so welcoming and friendly. It made you feel comfortable and welcome. We came on Easter Sunday morning. It snowed. It’s the first time I’ve ever been in Michigan. Of course it was a light dusting. It wasn’t that cold.” And while everyone in Kalamazoo who had been here for a while was wishing winter would just give up and go away, to Linda it seemed enchanting. “I liked the town right away. It was interesting. I had the fun part of the interview process. I got to see the attractions, go out to lunch, meet people.”

She was impressed by everything she saw, saying: “Most things that I noticed they did really well. There’s a construction site on campus, where instead of putting up a really ugly line of chain link fence, they put up boards that had messages and pictures.”

The wood fence is around the renovation project at Brown Hall where the English and communications departments hold most of their classes. The fence is painted with portraits and quotes of famous writers in English literature. “I thought: ‘That’s pretty neat. That’s creative.’ If that’s a little bit of the way they do things around here ... ” From this she knew they were going to

“He has a low wall of accessibility. If you want to see him, one step and you’re there.”
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like the area.

while wmu and kalamazoo seem to be a great fit for the dunns, john admits that at times he's surprised at the position he has reached.

"i am shocked, really, sometimes. you kind of pinch yourself at where you are." becoming a university president was not an ambition he entertained when he began teaching.

"i was very happy, and i think a very effective faculty member," john said. he began his career at the university of connecticut while engaged in postdoctorate studies and then went on to oregon state for 20 years. when he arrived there, it was on the faculty of the department of exercise and sports medicine. but it was at oregon in 1980, after being there for five years, that he began his move into administration.

"the faculty needed a department chair. maybe i was the one not smart enough in the room to say, 'no way!'" but john began to realize he had a knack for that sort of thing.

"there was something that was kind of exciting about being able to take issues involving limited resources and trying to shape that in some way." it was also about that time when john became a member of the local school board, a position he occupied for 13 years. "that was a valuable experience. it was a city-wide school board, with two high schools, three middle schools, and 10 elementaries. that also allowed me to be in a public forum when you're involved in public policy decisions," an arena of conflict and discussion that sharpened his background.

"people can be real angry," he said. the challenge was to "create a forum where they can calm down long enough to really express themselves and do so in a forum that's respectful, and even if you

for a charity fundraiser for the assistance league of salt lake city, linda dunn helped out by modeling clothing from the shakespeare festival costume collection.

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really disagree fundamentally with their position, to somehow maintain a level of civility... All of that helped in my formation of leadership.

John admits he’s very much old school. “I’m very pleased I had the opportunity to be a chair, an assistant dean, an associate provost, then to be a dean, be a provost.” He’s learned a great deal as he’s moved up, but he adds that he can identify with the deans, the department chairs, and the faculty, all of them dealing with their own level of issues.

Despite growing administrative duties, “I’ve tried to keep my hand in my academic career. I still like to write and give some presentations.”

John taught in the area of health and physical activity. “At the time it was called physical education. My real passion was children with disabilities, mental retardation. I got my hands around that area.”

Working and teaching in rehab for children in turn taught him much, John said, giving him experience that pays off even in his new job. “If I know anything at all about administration, it’s probably because of those early great opportunities I had to learn with people with mental retardation. I always have to be careful how I say that, but it is about communications, about reinforcing, analyzing behavior and task. ... It’s a good set of skills.”

While John doesn’t expect “too many surprises” in terms of issues facing him as president, one challenge he admits to is “understanding the fabric and nuts and bolts of Western Michigan University.” Some of that is basic, such as the struggle to get adequate funding from the state.

“We have funding issues,” and he understands the problem is a long-standing one with the state legislature. “You go back 20 years, 70 cents on the dollar came from the state of Michigan. Today, it’s about 33 cents to the dollar.”

The struggle, he insists, is the perception at the state level that the universities don’t understand the need to better manage budgets, “that maybe we don’t get it. Well, it’s a tribute to a lot of people, I think, that we have gotten it pretty well. To be able to change our funding source that dramatically and still maintain our vitality, and still meet the standards of a great university, someone’s been doing something right.”

Yet beyond the nuts and bolts, the dollars and cents, is an understanding of WMU that will be much more subtle. “There’s the other part that’s really capturing the culture and history of the university,” he said. “Every place has its own culture, its own history. I want to make sure that in my role, I honor our past, and I honor those who have really contributed in significant ways.”

Notice that when John talks about Western’s history, it’s “our past,” even though he had been president for only three weeks at the time of this interview. When he talks of WMU accomplishments, he’s quick to identify with the community as what “we have done.” The comfort level of the Dunns with Western, and Western with them, has developed pretty quickly since their arrival in Kalamazoo.

The personal past of John and Linda as a couple goes back 36 years in August when they were married — and a little before when they met.

“We were both Catholic students at a predominantly Mormon institution, Brigham Young,” Linda said. John was seeking his doctoral degree. “We met at a church potluck that the parish had for community members and students.” They were drawn together at first for a seemingly pragmatic reason: “I got tired of walking to church. He had a car. I didn’t.”

When they met, Linda was student teaching in physical education and
health. She then moved back near her parents in New Jersey, where she taught at a large high school there.

“I was a skinny, absolutely green, young teacher,” she said. Remembering back, she said that a manual the school gave her included instructions on what to do in case of student rioting — instructions that seemed ill-suited to her.

“My assignment was to stand by a particular door leading to the outside, stretch out my arms, and prevent students from leaving the building. Fat chance. I also used to be able to catch many female students smoking in the bathrooms because they thought I was a sophomore, or worse yet, a freshman.”

After the couple married, Linda worked at a small facility for physically and mentally handicapped children. She was their physical education teacher and coach for the Special Olympics.

But after the birth of their first child, Linda chose to be a stay at home mother and, she said, “have the luxury of donating my spare time to volunteer activities.”

They have three grown children. Their oldest, Matt, 34, lives in Salt Lake City with his wife “and a mischievous dog,” and works in logistics for a large trucking firm. Their second son, Michael, also has a home in Salt Lake City, but he doesn’t spend much of his summer there. He works for the U.S. Forest Service as a smoke jumper, fighting forest fires in the West. Daughter Kerry, 23, just graduated from the University of Portland, Ore., with a major in psychology, and Linda said she hopes Kerry will be visiting Kalamazoo soon.

Since moving to Kalamazoo, John hasn’t had much free time, but says, “If I get a chance, I certainly have a pattern. I get out early in the morning on a run. In the evening I get a chance to hit a golf ball or something like that. I’m not very good.”

“We like to go out and explore, too,” Linda said. Within weeks they had already been to South Haven, Saugatuck, and an art fair in St. Joseph.
“We just discovered we have some long-time friends in Grand Rapids.” The couples re-connected after the Dunns came to Kalamazoo.

“John doesn’t have the time, but I’m not afraid to get in the car and go someplace by myself, exploring,” Linda said. But when he does have free time, John said, “We’ve enjoyed driving some of the back country, seeing all the growers and farmers and produce alongside the road. That speaks to the sense of vibrancy and vitality here. I know times are tough, but you find a way.”

As for the future, John said that after his tenure as president is completed, however long that may be, “I would hope people would reflect on the time we have had here and think the university itself is in a better situation that it currently is financially. Also from a standpoint in the research profile, we have some room to grow. But I also want people to know that we fully understand the university is over 100 years old, and it will be here long after we’re gone. Our role is not so much to leave our mark. It’ll be even more important that we’ve added to the university and helped it continue to grow.”

The best advice John takes for his new job, however, comes from his memories of two cooks at Northern Illinois University, Helen and Betty, and how they treated him as a young undergraduate just up from southern Illinois where he grew up.

“Helen and Betty, they sent a proper message,” John said. “What they did was important,” and they passed that message of kindness on to John by taking an interest in him. “People are, I think, far more influential than they might realize at times.”

What would Helen and Betty say to him now? John ponders the question and responds: “They’d reinforce the idea that everybody counts. Do your job; whatever it is, do it well. And remember that, yeah, you may be kind of at the top of the top now, but don’t lose perspective of where you’ve been and what you’ve done, and how you got there.”

Dunn
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Game, Set, Match — Markin Ends With a Win

By Penny Briscoe

IT WAS A LONG, long time ago, in the early ’60s, I guess. I used to come up and watch the tennis tournament there. I was a tennis player and enjoyed watching these young boys come and play.”

These are the ponderings of David Markin’s beginnings with the United States Tennis Association Boys 18–16 National Championships in Kalamazoo, Mich. Had it not been for then-tournament-director Rolla Anderson, who saw Markin hanging out and recruited him to help, the entire face of USTA tennis would have been different.

Markin, the son of the founder of Checker Motors, Morris Markin, an immigrant from Russia, was certainly busy enough with the family business to say “no” in 1964 when Anderson asked him to assume the volunteer roles of transportation chair and program chair. That basically meant hauling kids and their families to and from the airport and getting someone to print the program for free. “That’s what happened when you were chairman of a committee. You had to do all the work,” remembered Markin.

But because Markin loved tennis then as he does now, he said: “Yes.” And he was hooked — for 44 years.

This year marked the 65th anniversary of the tournament in Kalamazoo, and it also signals the end of David Markin’s involvement as official referee — after 32 years of service.

“The tournament is bigger than any one person,” said Markin. “It’s bigger than Rolla, it’s bigger than me; it’s bigger than George Acker (former assistant tournament director who also refereed); it’s bigger than Tim Corwin (most recent tournament director).” It remains the greatest junior tournament in the world and as such needs continuity with its officials and continuity with its support organization in the town. It needs to change in order to stay the same.

“As we get older, the tournament must stay young, and that requires people to understand when it’s time to step aside and put somebody else in their place. And that’s really why I am retiring.”

Stating that he is retiring at the peak of his game, when he still thinks he is a good referee and still has the respect of the players, coaches and parents, he said, “I don’t want to wait until I dodder along and I hear people saying, ‘Is that old man still around?’ So it’s by choice — and I think I made the right choice.”

Markin will be replaced by Darrell Davies, who is slated to be the tournament’s official referee next year. “I have trained somebody to take my place, said Markin, “and he’s superbly trained to be a referee. He has refereed many other tournaments, and he’ll be fine.”

Markin says he may bow out of the event altogether next summer for the first time since his involvement, perhaps

(Continued on page 20)
HEN TIMON CORWIN announced that he was resigning his position as tournament director of the United States Tennis Association Boys’ 18–16 National Championships in Kalamazoo to work for the USTA, and that he would be leaving the area before the 65th anniversary tournament this past August, there was really only one logical choice to ensure that it would come together successfully as usual.

Former tournament director Rolla Anderson was plucked from retirement to assist Corwin, who was splitting his time between both positions and aware that he couldn’t devote enough of himself to effectively run the tournament. “He needed someone to take care of the home base while he was away,” said Anderson.

“I guess he wanted to call me assistant tournament director, but it’s immaterial for me. I just wanted to keep it going. I knew what had to be done, and I am glad I could be around to help him and help this transition.”

Having already dedicated himself to the tournament for 38 years, from 1957 to 1995, he likely figured he could manage one more. Anderson, it seems, has a difficult time saying “no.”

Back in 1957, Dr. Allen B. Stowe, a Kalamazoo College chemistry professor who had brought the tournament to Kalamazoo in 1943 and filled the role of tournament director for 14 years, was fatally injured in an automobile accident. Anderson was on the faculty at the time, with responsibilities as the athletic director, football coach, basketball coach, and a variety of other activities. According to him, the college president at the time, Dr. Weimer Hicks, called Anderson into his office and said, “You are now the tennis coach, and you are now running the national tennis tournament.”

Anderson’s response was: “Oh, Doctor, you’ve got to be kidding.”

Dr. Hicks’ retort is memorable, says Anderson: “Rolla, I’m a very busy man right now, and I haven’t got time to talk to you about this.”

“So with that, young Anderson, who had been a U.S. Marine and was used to following orders, said, “I did an about face and went through the door and looked back at him and quipped, because we were good friends: ‘You don’t like me, do you, Dr. Hicks?’”

From that moment forward, Anderson was dedicated to the cause, even though he claims he “didn’t know one iota” about the job.

“I was still the athletic director and coaching football and assisting in basketball and doing other things. It was a terrible load and required a lot of time, and, incidentally, the fee for the first year of the tournament was $300 — that’s what I got. I said to myself, (Continued on page 20)
Markin
(Continued from page 18)

going golfing or traveling abroad “to give Darrell a chance to get his own personality in place.” But, just in case, Markin is certified to referee next year: “If they need me, I’ll be around to assist.”

Markin has always been aware that participation in the USTA Boys 18–16 National Championships in Kalamazoo is a highlight in the lives of young tennis players, who cherish the memories even when they become famous. Markin served in a variety of roles with the USTA, culminating in two years as the USTA president, while never giving up his official referee role in Kalamazoo. He said, “I have had players all over the world ask me, ‘What’s happening in the Zoo?’”

When you leave this tournament as a participant and become a pro player, you never forget it. You come back to play the exhibitions, which many of them have, and it’s part of your career, part of your growing up in the world of tennis. It should be a big point of pride for Kalamazoo due to the influence on the American boy players.”

Markin notes that the tournament has evolved considerably since its beginnings.

Anderson
(Continued from page 19)

‘Rolla, you didn’t have much in your brains to accept something like that.’”

Rolla remembers vividly that the talk around town at the time was that Kalamazoo was going to lose the tournament. “And I said: Be damned if they are going to lose it while I’m on duty. So I worked like Hades to keep the tournament here.”

That dedication didn’t come without sacrifice. He freely admits that he gave up a lot of time that he could have spent with his wife, Pat, and their three daughters, Julie, Mary Jane, and Susan. And Pat concurs, saying: “Our sacrifice was giving up Rolla to the tournament.”

But she also recalls many positive outcomes from his involvement. “We got to go to many nice places, me in particular, including Wimbledon, and met many wonderful people. But I didn’t do much — I guess I was just Rolla’s lady.”

In the early years, Pat assumed the role of house mother in the dormitory where the boys stayed. She attended to their needs and the needs of their parents, making sure everyone was comfortable and could find their way around Kalamazoo. Andersons’ young daughters enjoyed the role of ball runner.

“The girls loved it, you know. It was lots of fun for them because they’d go to the parties — the dances — and they were able to interact with the tennis players.”

Susan, who has remained in the community, still volunteers every year.

The Anderson family received prestigious honors for their dedication, including the Midwest Tennis Family of the Year award and the United States Tennis Family of the Year award. And, even though none of them became pro players, Anderson said he is happy that they learned to play for pleasure. He noted that his grandchildren also “have a game.”

Anderson refers to the USTA boys’ tournament in Kalamazoo as the Cadillac of junior tournaments. “It’s a Kalamazoo tournament; it’s not Kalamazoo College’s tournament.” He praises the hundreds of volunteers who turn out annually and expresses gratitude toward businesses that have helped sponsor it.

But he puts Timon Corwin and David Markin at the top of the list of people who have made the week-long annual event happen so successfully. To that end, he organized the late July ceremony in which likenesses of both of
these men on “The Winner” sculpture at Stowe Stadium were unveiled.

“Timon Corwin continued to improve upon the operation and structure of our tournament,” Anderson said. “You always have to make changes, and he did that and did it well. Now the new man, Mark Riley, is going to have to do the same thing Timon did when I left — build relationships.”

Of Markin, he said: “I have the highest respect for him for what he has done for our national tennis tournament in Kalamazoo and for what he has done at the national level. He did a splendid job.”

Not content with involvement only at the local level, Anderson himself juggled a variety of national USTA roles during his Kalamazoo tournament director years.

Aside from the dollars the tournament brings to the area, Anderson believes that the tournament gives people in the community a chance to be actively engaged in something positive. He believes that positive thinking plays a major role in shaping a growing, vibrant community.

To that end, Rolla Anderson will never really retire from the Kalamazoo boys’ tennis tournament. His likeness is also on “The Winner” sculpture, alongside that of Allen Stowe. For years to come, when people think of tennis, they will remember the contributions and sacrifices of a man who just couldn’t say “no.”

in particular in the areas of a code of conduct and certified referees, neither of which existed when Anderson asked him to help referee shortly after he had begun volunteering. “You know, you are a player,” Markin remembers Anderson saying, “How about helping me with umpiring?”

Markin recalls that the umpires were “some pretty incompetent local
people.” He said Rolla would recruit them by saying, “Hey guy; hey kid. Will you do me a favor and sit in this chair there and make sure these two kids don’t kill each other?

“There were really no rules about fair conduct except those from whoever was around or in charge at the time. From time to time Rolla got angry at somebody, and he would throw them out of the tournament.”

Markin remembers that as he started following Anderson around and doing some umpiring, one day he was

David Markin poses with the Bryan twins, Bob and Mike. They won 18’s doubles two years in a row, 1995 and 1996, and are currently ranked number one in the world.

Since 1976, David Markin has spent the first week in August on the courts at Stowe Stadium as official referee of the USTA Boys’ 18-16 National Championships.
asked to take a few parents to his house for dinner. “I said, sure, why not. And six parents and a coach came along — and that was the beginning of the party we have had for the past 40 years or so.”

Smiling, he recalls that last year the event included “700 of our closest friends.” He said that it became a place to honor the local people who worked on the tournament, and to have parents and the coaches who were there come and have dinner and “mix in a little bit and get a flavor of the tournament.”

Markin noted that for the 65th anniversary this past August, events were planned almost every night to entertain the participants. “The entire town really gets behind this tournament, which has made it the best junior tournament in the world without exception as it’s grown over the years.” He lauds the volunteer group of over 500 people who, a couple of weeks after the tournament is over, start planning again — for next year.

Markin has contributed a great amount of his energy and resources to Kalamazoo, saying, “I’ve gotten a certain amount of recognition because of running one of the companies in town and being involved in the tennis tournament, although I am not really a public sort of person. I like to think I am just another citizen of Kalamazoo and have not been interested in being a civic leader.

“I can’t say enough for Kalamazoo and how much I enjoy being here. It’s been a wonderful town — it supports the tournament, it supports its citizens. It’s everything a middle-size town should be, and it’s really been a great place to raise kids.”

Four of Markin’s children attended Loy Norrix and Hackett Catholic Central, with two of his sons playing high school tennis. Markin claims they likely only played because they knew he was interested in tennis. “They never really had their hearts in it,” he said.

Markin himself never attended a
school in Kalamazoo because he lived with his mother, Bessie, in Chicago. He attended Cheshire Academy and then Bradley University in Peoria, Ill., where he played the number one spot on the tennis teams of both schools.

After serving in the United States Air Force of which he said, “I went in as a boy and came out as a man,” he moved to Kalamazoo. However, he has remained close to his college alma mater, contributing six tennis courts to the university because they had none on campus when he attended there, and he didn’t think it was right that he had to take a bus five miles to play on the public courts in the park.

Markin also helped finance the student center at Bradley. As an honorary life trustee, having served on the board for 12 years, he was at first interested in building a field house, but when he was asked, instead, to help finance the new student center, he agreed, saying: “Sure, I want to help this school.

“I get a terrific pleasure out of seeing facilities at a school that I love get better and better to provide a better education and be a first choice for students in the area.” He noted that enrollment has doubled and that the school has flourished since he graduated in 1953.

What attracted Markin to contributing his talent to the tennis tournament in Kalamazoo was undoubtedly the same reason that he has supported his alma mater. He likes being part of growth and moving forward. He also willingly admits that he likes the feeling of knowing he will be remembered. Take, for example, his reaction to the addition this past August of his name and image to Kirk Newman’s “The Winner” sculpture, which sits in front of the tennis courts at Stowe Stadium.

“It kind of gives you the feeling of being immortal, to be honest with you. Kids will be able to look at you and know that you were there. It makes me immeasurably proud of what I’ve done. It’s everything you could hope for if you are a volunteer ... ”
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DENISE HEATH, a registered nurse and avian enthusiast, claims a natural correlation between her occupation and her avocation. At Bronson Methodist Hospital, Denise dons medical attire as she fulfills her duties in the arenas of orthopedics, neurology and gerontology. As originator of Avian Wonders, she wears practical, multi-pocketed khaki to administer to and show approximately 30 colorful parrots — macaws, cockatoos, Amazons, African grays, cockatiels, Senagals, conures, lovebirds, parakeets, and parrotlets — as well as finches of various varieties that she might have in her possession at any one time. Plus, her yard and pond are the home of ducks, quail and other waterfowl that drop in for brief, or longer, visits.

In both health care and the world of birds, Denise strives “to do things to the top,” and she believes the skills practiced in each endeavor enhance her excellence in both. “The people I take care of have needs, and I have to anticipate what they need — to stop hurting, to be more comfortable — and I do that with a caring attitude,” Denise says. “With birds, it’s the same thing — they may be hurting or their environment isn’t right. I try to anticipate their needs and make it as good as I can.”

Having been a nurse since 1990, Denise has won numerous awards at Bronson, including the Presidents Team Award in 2007. She serves on several shared governance councils and in 2006 was one of only 30 nurses invited to a retreat hosted by the Michigan Center for Nursing, which focused on leadership and team building within her profession.

In the avian field, she is among a network of members of the Great Lakes Avicultural Society (GLAS), which meets monthly in Grand Rapids. She has worked with Dr. Charles Mehne, a Kalamazoo veterinarian, to rehabilitate injured waterfowl and return them to the wild. And she has appeared on the Reading Train, a television show for children, and Parrotville U.S.A., an avian information show for adults, in Grand Rapids.

“When I started Avian Wonders, I wanted to make it a quality experience,” Denise says. “The quantity of shows I do is not as important as the quality of all the shows I do.”

Working three consecutive 12-hour shifts at Bronson gives Denise time during the rest of each week to care for her birds and focus on shows, which range from private parties to corporate events to school, library, camp and public demonstrations. Denise and her birds, for example,
have entertained and informed at the Bronson Health Fair, the Renaissance Festival in Marshall, and the Detroit Freedom Festival, hosted by Radio Disney, a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company that broadcasts music and information to children and teens. She and her husband, Dennis, have even sat with their colorful macaws along community parade routes.

For a small party, Denise will take five or six parrots — usually macaws, cockatiels and lovebirds — to delight a birthday child, family and friends. For a corporate or public venue, she will transport her entire entourage in custom travel cages within a specially designed trailer.

Fortunately, Dennis, who is also employed as a nurse at Bronson, and son Jessie, a 2007 graduate from Parchment High School, are supportive aides.

"I think it’s a good thing," Dennis says of his wife’s avocation. “She takes birds to different groups and educates people there. A lot of people think they want a bird but don’t have a clue about what type of bird to buy, so she invites them out here — lets them hold the birds and hear what sounds they make — and that helps them make a better decision.”

Jessie, who also plans a nursing career, thinks his mom “is doing a wonderful thing by teaching people how to take care of birds and making the bird environment safer.”

In turn, Denise thanks her son for cleaning cages, giving the birds food and water, getting them to where they need to be during a show, and being an all-round behind-the-scenes helper. Denise appreciates her husband for similar assistance on show dates as well as maintaining their beautiful home and natural two-acre yard near the north end of Woodward Avenue where Kalamazoo Township meets the City of Kalamazoo’s VerSluis Field. This “piece of paradise,” where the family has lived since 1990, contains an outdoor aviary, a large pond enjoyed by amphibians, reptiles and recuperating waterfowl, and ample space for breeding registered Doberman pinschers.

When Denise shows her birds, her primary intention is for the experience to be educational and fun. Her motivation derives from her childhood in Lansing and Portage where she played in the wild but was not allowed to have a pet bird. “I’ve always loved nature and animals,” she explains. “Ever since my teenage years at Portage Northern High School, I’ve been fascinated with the avian world. I got my

Tiki, a blue and gold macaw that weighs almost three pounds and stands 34 inches tall, prides himself on his mechanical prowess at having unscrewed the nut on a connection link that holds a rope swing to his outdoor perch.

Showing no shortage of personality, Tiki gives owner Denise Heath a kiss. Because Tiki has been known to bite, this display of affection requires mutual trust.
first bird, a goffin cockatoo, when I was 18 and living in downtown Kalamazoo.”

That pet inspired Denise to read and research more about birds. Then people started coming to her with questions about their feathered friends. That led her to deeper research while she also took courses at Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Western Michigan University and Bronson School of Nursing from which she graduated in 1990. Further requests for help, especially in regard to bird behavior, motivated Denise to start Avian Wonders in 2005. From there, it was a small step to birthday parties and public showcase events.

For small, private parties, in which she invests about three hours plus travel time, Denise informally meets with children, encouraging them to touch and hold the birds and to let them perch on their shoulders. “My goal is to get the kids involved,” she says. “A lot of 3- or 4-year-olds don’t want to touch the birds at first, but the birds will bring them out, and by the end, they don’t want to leave. That’s great. That’s what we’re there for.”

For larger events, which often consume an entire day, Denise, Dennis and Jessie establish three stations at which children and adults can pet birds, receive a temporary tattoo modeled after small parrots, and have their photos taken with birds, often lovebirds that enjoy perching on human shoulders. “Everything is interactive,” Denise states.

She adds, in nurse fashion, that all persons who handle birds must wash their hands with an alcohol gel before, and preferably after, touching them. “This is to help prevent the spread of diseases, for the protection of both humans and birds,” Denise says. Dennis also offers a healthful reminder that no one should pick up a dead bird with bare hands, even by its talon, because of the possibility of contracting West Nile Virus or other avian-borne maladies.

And while Denise’s birds enjoy fresh air and sunshine on most days when the temperature is above 65 degrees, she is also aware that the time may come when she will have to quarantine them indoors and “take bio-security measures” in order to guard them from what is commonly known as bird flu. Even now, the Heath family has “indoor shoes” and “outdoor shoes” to prevent the transportation of germs and dirt between their home, their yard and their workplace.

Completing the connection between education and fun, Denise and Dennis both emphasize the need for prospective bird owners to match their situation with the right species.

“Birds are very similar to people,” Denise says. “They have the same health and environmental needs that we do. They need to be outside, get proper nutrition and veterinary care, and have their nails and beaks trimmed so they don’t overgrow and so the bird can eat properly.” Even though pet birds might reside in a cage, she says, “They’re not a picture you put on the wall.” In other words, just like a family member, they require love, attention and consideration.

“Birds want to sleep 10 hours every night,” Denise points out. “If you leave your bird in the living room while you play video games until 3 in the morning, that bird will get cranky. If you put your hand in its cage at 8 or 9 a.m., it’s likely to bite you. And you know why? Because you didn’t let it get enough sleep.” If family members are night owls, Denise suggests putting pet birds in a private “sleep room.” Barking dogs, preying cats and children poking sticks in the bird’s cage will result in similar aggressive behavior and even self-mutilation.

“Macaws and cockatoos, if they get really upset, will start picking at or pulling their feathers — just like people will bite their fingernails if they become nervous. Feather pulling secretes endorphins, and the bird starts to feel good, like being on a high, and they’ll keep doing it. It’s a very hard, negative behavior to stop.”

Knowing what size of bird to buy or accept as a gift is also an important consideration. “People say, ‘We like big birds,’” Dennis states, “but if they have little children, that’s not a good idea. Some of them do bite.”

“They can be dangerous,” Denise adds. “With a bite of 600 pounds of pres-
Large birds are also master mechanics. “They’ll take their cages apart with their beaks,” Denise states, matter-of-factly. “So you have to be careful about cage construction, making sure that all the screws and nuts are on the outside of the cage, not the inside. If the fasteners are on the inside, you can take a wrench and tighten them, but a large bird will still unscrew them.”

“If you live in an apartment or a trailer where your neighbor is only a wall away, you might not want a big bird,” says Dennis. “The bigger the bird, the louder the roar. Denise can educate potential bird buyers and give advice on what a bird will do and how loud it can be.”

Denise cites, as an example, a man who was considering a large cockatoo until he heard hers sing, and then decided on a small, quiet Quaker parrot. “If he had not visited me, he might have bought a big bird that would not have been suitable for his family. I try to prevent problems like that.”

Another consideration is a bird’s life expectancy. “Smaller birds have a high metabolism and a shorter life span,” says Denise. “Parakeets might live five years; cockatiels, 25 years; but a large parrot could live 80 to 100 years. They’ll outlive their owners and have to be willed to a younger generation.”

While such longevity is the norm in the wild or a proper domestic environment, conditions in the home that have little effect on humans can kill a bird in a matter of minutes. Odorous household hazards include scented candles, plug-in and aerosol air fresheners, bleach, overheated Teflon cookware, perfumes and mold. “Birds have multiple air sacs rather than lungs to filter air, like we do,” Denise explains. “That’s why coal miners took canaries into mines — because they knew the little bird would die instantly if there was any gas.”
**Heath**

She adds that birds can drown in a laundry tub, a toilet bowl or a sink of water. “I recently lost a Senegal parrot in our duck pond,” Denise confesses. “Now, I put branches in the pond so if a bird falls in they can get up on a branch.

“And birds will chew on anything, just like a child. You have to be careful about electrical wires, plastics and things coated with lead paint or toxic particles.”

Like humans, pet birds fare better on a healthy diet of fresh fruits and vegetables. Denise and Jessie feed her birds squash, cucumbers, carrots, grapes and apples every day and keep them away from caffeine, dairy products, snack food and salt. “Birds don’t have the enzyme lactase, like people do, so no milk and cheese. And they don’t have a high blood volume, so stimulants, like caffeine, and salt can kill them,” she says. “Potato chips, nachos, chocolate and beer are not a good idea. Pizza is OK, but only the crust and vegetables. Popcorn is great, but unsalted and no butter.”

*It’s clear when Ruby lifts her crown feathers upright that she is enjoying the ride given to her by Avian Wonders owner Denise Heath.*

*Noah Gross of Cub Scout Pack 290 and Jasmine, a white face cinnamon pearl cockatiel, eye each other during one of Denise Heath’s demonstrations about the friendly behavior of pet birds.*
Of a bird’s intelligence, Denise says, “It’s surprising how intelligent birds are, even with a small ‘bird brain.’” While most parrots are able to think at the level of a 3-year-old child, Denise tells of a parrot named Alex, an African grey studied since 1977 by animal psychologist Irene Pepperberg, initially at the University of Arizona and currently at Brandeis University. Alex, whose name is an acronym for “Avian Learning Experiment,” has a vocabulary of about 100 words and seems to be capable of abstract thinking. “He was just an ordinary bird, bought at a pet shop, but he can use words to distinguish between fabric materials, geometric shapes, colors and numbers,” Denise states.

Matching the right bird with the right human usually brings great benefit to both, Denise points out. “I see geriatric depression among my patients, many of whom have arthritis and joint problems, but pet birds give them a reason to get up in the morning. Birds are similar to a dog but they’ll also talk and say ‘hello’ or ‘I love you.’ Birds give. I have a friend who puts finches in nursing homes. Watching an aviary with little birds flying around is therapeutic.”

In return, Denise gives, too. She currently hosts a flock of zebra finches that came from an avian community within a nursing home in Grand Rapids. “We took about 40 birds from there because they were overpopulated and because they were sick with scaly mite that was weakening their beaks,” she explains. To correct that health problem, Denise utilized her nursing skills to place a drop of parasite killer in each tiny bird’s jugular vein.

Importation of foreign birds from wild habitat has been illegal since 1992, so much of the current population in the United States comes from breeding or because “babies just happen,” Denise explains. As a result, she says, there are thousands of birds in Michigan alone that need homes. This is in addition to tens of thousands of birds...
that people own and want to keep.

Some bird owners, such as one of Denise’s patients, love their pets so much that they have a hard time letting them go even when it becomes necessary to do so. “This patient developed a lung infection and became allergic to his macaw, which had been caught in the wild more than 20 years earlier; the bird had become like a daughter to him,” Denise relates. “He was in the hospital on oxygen and steroids because he was having difficulty breathing. His medical report said he was allergic to a bird at home and wasn’t willing to part with it. So I said, ‘I can help you; finding new homes for birds is what I do,’ but he still chose to keep his bird. A year later, he was even sicker, and he called the hospital, looking for me because he was finally willing to give up his bird. That’s how Tiki, our blue and gold macaw, came to us. It took another year for the man to visit Tiki here because she meant so much to him. Tiki will not go to anybody except me, but he came here and picked her right up and gave her a kiss; that was neat. But, more importantly, he’s off oxygen, off steroids, and is healing now.”

Whether helping a person or family acquire, keep or relinquish a feathered pet, Denise’s love of birds helps her fulfill a personal mission of teaching “respect for animals” and “respect for nature and the ecosystem.” Jessie credits his mom for being among the people who are teaching people of his generation “how to make wildlife better and clean up the environment.”

And Denise sees teaching within her nursing profession and her avian avocation as natural extensions of each other. “Recently, for example, I taught a couple how to use a blood glucose monitor to check their blood sugar,” she says. “When I talk with bird owners, I teach them how to keep their birds safe. When I do shows, I teach people how to keep their environment safe. It’s all the same message. I’m open to teach at any time.”

Heath
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YOU DON’T HAVE to be a 20-something party animal on the verge of making post-college decisions to be happily transported to that land in local writer Troy Place’s debut coming-of-age novel, “Pizza Pie and Politics: How Mitchell Moon Lost His Childhood.”

In fact, the further this stage is behind you, the more you may feel relief (for yourself) and compassion (for Place’s title character, Mitchell, a recent Michigan State University political science graduate) when reading this book. Originally, and also aptly titled “The Grooms-men,” Place changed it after a movie with the same title was released. The novel, which takes place primarily in Battle Creek, features three close high school buddies and their ménage of friends and girlfriends as they return for one last summer after college graduation to work together again at a pizza joint.

I know, I know; we all know: You can’t recapture the past. And Place’s very likable and intelligent characters soon find it out, too — but the journey is quick, funny and often poignant. Throughout the summer, the three friends serve as groomsmen for four weddings while trying, often under the influence of Bell’s beer at Rikki Tikki’s, a local dive, to avoid making decisions about relationships and career.

Place, who teaches technical writing to engineering and aviation students at Western Michigan University and has also had poetry and short stories published in literary journals, including the Sow’s Ear Poetry Review and The Dickinson Review, captures the in-between state of late adolescence and adulthood.

“I thought the 20s were pretty terrible,” said Place with some irony. “From graduation until my daughter was born, I probably was depressed and didn’t realize it.” “Post-college blues,” as this period has been often called, has recently been capitalized on by many writers; in fact, a whole genre of “chick lit” has grown up around novels that feature single young women making post-college decisions. Place’s book might be classified into the brother of this category, which could easily be called “dude lit.”

“Maybe I’m crazy or something. I just always wanted to write a book. I was one of those people who thought I was supposed to do everything before I turn 30,” said Place, who at 33 added that he doesn’t feel that way now.

Writing a novel is a long-term project, and Place faced some challenges, mainly having to do with time, because he wrote on his off days during the summers of 2001 to 2004 as a stay-at-home dad to his now 6-year-old daughter, Amara, since joined by a brother, Colton.

The novel was an enjoyable project to return to in the summer, he said. “I definitely didn’t have writer’s block because I liked the characters. When I wrote the first draft, I really did go out to the woods to sit and write. Sometimes all day. I always stopped writing on a good note. I didn’t stop when I was blocked. I made sure I stopped when I had some momentum.”

Like many good stories, Place’s is also a love story, one in which the end is refreshingly unpredictable.

“I definitely tried to stay away from clichés and contrived plots,” said Place. “I didn’t know how it was going to end until I got there.”
Massages: Not Just for Special Occasions …

MASSAGE IS THE JOURNEY to well-being. Unfortunately, most people view this ritual as a mere redemption of a gift certificate — “Loved it, but just for special occasions.”

For the most part, massages are not a new trend. The concept has been around for thousands of years. The word massage stems from the Greek word “masso,” meaning to “touch.”

Massage converges the healing and relaxation of the body and psyche, and it repels the stress of everyday living. It’s about relieving your body of toxins that lay dormant in your system. An experienced, licensed, and/or certified massage therapist can provide a magnificent experience, a continued progressive relief of pain, improved range of motion and relief from migraine symptoms. Massage can stimulate the lymph flow and enhance the body’s defense mechanisms.

Massage can exercise and stretch weak or atrophied muscles. Studies consistently show that it can lessen depression and anxiety. Massage can relieve lower back pain, enhance the quality of sleep — and the stimulation of massage can pump oxygen into tissues and improve circulation around vital organs. Additionally, expectant mothers may experience shorter labor and speedier recoveries when routine prenatal massage sessions are provided by a qualified massage therapist.

Why would anyone decide to keep this wonderful nurturing and curative tradition of the body for only special occasions? Just as nutrition and exercise are an important part of a healthy and vigorous existence, so should be massage.

The most common and best known is the Swedish massage — long soothing strokes — a perfect relaxation for those experiencing a first-time massage.

Deep tissue is a deeper concentration pressure for those seeking relief from tight muscles and soreness.

Some massages are indigenous to different parts of the world, for instance, the lomi lomi massage. This massage originates from Hawaii and is taught only by a master, passed down from generation to generation. This rhythmic massage is set to Hawaiian music, and its soothing strokes are awe-inspiring.

Hot stone therapy originated from the Native American Indians who would place sacred stones on the body and apply pressure to cure ailments and relieve pain. Hot or cold stones are strategically placed on parts of the body while the stones receive and then provide healing energy from the earth.

These are just a few types of massage that can provide you with a great opportunity to “get in touch” with your inner wellness.

Solid statistics state that 90 percent of diagnosed diseases are stress related, and nothing ages the body faster than stress. This translates into the fact that massage can help you manage stress and embrace your “youth.” The medical community is welcoming the concept of this ancient inspirational cure. Many hospitals are incorporating prescribed on-site massages in order to regain a sense of wellness, clarity and recovery.

When was the last time you had a massage?
CLUES

• If he was stormin’, he might have played for the Detroit Tigers in the ‘60s and early ‘70s.

• He is the namesake of a Danish island located between the Great Belt and Bay of Kiel.

• He undertakes to do the best for all of his clients.

ANSWER ON PAGE 70.

Photography by John Gilroy.
Performing Arts

Plays

“End of an Error or The Last Days of George W. Bush” — From a secret bunker 500 feet under the White House comes a comedy of politic proportions! Whole Art Theatre, 246 N. Kalamazoo Mall. Sept. 21, 22, 28, & 29. 11 p.m. 345-7529.

“The World of … Edward Elgar” — Maestro Raymond Harvey is your guide for a celebration Elgar’s life and music on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his birth. Kalamazoo College, Light Fine Arts Center. Sept. 30, 3 p.m. 349-7759.

Symphony

“Opening Night” — Kick off the season with the KSO, joined by piano duo Tengstrand & Sun, and an evening of Mechem, Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff. Miller Auditorium, WMU. Sept. 15, 8 p.m. 349-7759.

Musicals & Opera

“Smoke on the Mountain: Homecoming” — The Sanders family returns with more down-home music and lots of laughs. Sept. 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, 29, 8:30 p.m.; Sept. 9, 16, 2 p.m. New Vic Theatre, 134 E. Vine St. 381-3328.

“Ragtime, The Musical” — An epic story of three families dealing with the social clashes of early 20th century America. Civic Theatre, 329 S. Park St. Sept. 21 & 22, 28 & 29, Oct. 5 & 6, 8 p.m.; Sept 27 & 28, 4, 7:30 p.m.; Sept. 30, 2 p.m. 343-1313.

“Annie” — Boasting one of Broadway’s most memorable scores, you can bet your bottom dollar that this musical will bring a smile to your face. Miller Auditorium, WMU. Oct. 2–Oct. 4, 7:30 p.m. 387-2300.

Visual Arts

WMU Richmond Center for Visual Arts (RCVA) 387-2455:


Kalamazoo Institute of Arts 349-7775:

Silk Road to Clipper Ship: Trade, Changing Markets and East Asian Ceramics — An exhibition on the impact of the exchange of goods, people and ideas on Chinese potters, and their counterparts in Japan, covering nearly two thousand years of history. Sept. 8–Nov. 25.

Gus Foster and Ando Hiroshige: The Tokaido Road — offering contrasting views of one of Asia’s great highways, the exhibition is a collection of 19th-century prints by Hiroshige and Foster’s contemporary, panoramic photographs. Sept. 8–Dec. 5.
Appraisal Day at the KIA — Clean out your attic and bring up to three treasures to the KIA for a verbal appraisal with auctioneers and appraisers from DuMouchelles, in Detroit. A per-item fee will be assessed. Sept. 29, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Call 349-7775, ext. 3160 to register or for more information.

ARTrbreak — Informal, free presentations on art-related topics, including: “Vasya,” Sept. 4; “A Royal Menagerie” with Wendy Vaughn, Sept.11; “Site Interventions and Other Recent Works” with Caroline Gore, Sept. 18; “Journeys on the Tokaido,” Sept. 23; “Mabarosi (Part 1),” Oct. 2. Bring lunch. 12:15 p.m.

Park Trades Center 345-3311

Saniwax Gallery Exhibition — Rich Wozniak, opening reception, Sept. 7, 5-9 p.m. during Art Hop.

Miscellaneous

Art Hop — View the works of local artists in a casual, fun atmosphere. Local venues/galleries in downtown Kalamazoo. Sept. 7 & Oct. 5, 5 p.m. 342-5059.

Literary Events

Kalamazoo Public Library 533-7809:

Come to Zakland — Zak Morgan uses music, theater, and comedy to encourage children to read. Free tickets may be picked up beginning Sept. 14. Oshtemo Branch Library, Sept. 20, 5:30 p.m.

Meet Alisa Smith and J.B. Mackinnon — The authors will talk about their continuing effort to support sustainable farming by eating foods grown and produced within a 100-mile radius of their home. Central Library, Sept. 25, 7:00 p.m.

Freedom to Read — Hear short readings from books that have been banned or challenged. Central Library. Oct. 4, reception 6:30 p.m., readings 7:30 p.m.

Museums

Kalamazoo Valley Museum 373-7990:


Oral History Symposium — Learn about the KVM’s project, Voices and Images, as well as how to conduct your own historical interviews. Sept. 29, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Music At The Museum — Eclectic music in a great venue. Sept. 20, Blue Dahlia; Oct. 11, Twilight Hotel 7:30 p.m.

Film Movement Series — Award-winning foreign independent cinema. “The Island” (Russia, 2006), Sept. 27, 7:30 p.m.

Air Zoo 382-6555:

Blood Drive — The Air Zoo will be hosting a Blood Drive on Thursday, September 6. For more information, please visit www.airzoo.org.

International Plastic Modelers Society Show — See over 300 plastic models of spacecraft, custom cars, hotrods, airplanes and helicopters. September 8.

Nature

Kalamazoo Nature Center 381-1574

Leave No Trace — Learn the 7 principles that will help you Leave No Trace when hiking, camping, or picnicking. September 9, 2 p.m.

BioBlitz 2007! — Scientists from around the region converge to see how many species they can count in a 24-hour biological survey. September 14, 6–11 p.m. & September 15, 7 a.m.– 6 p.m.

Families United in Nature (FUN) — The focus of FUN is to teach each family new ways to explore our natural world in a safe and exciting way. Learn tips and tricks for fantastic family adventures in nature, on and off the trail! September 22, 1-4 p.m. Pre-registration by September 17.

(continued on page 68)

Please send notification of activities to: Encore “Events of Note” 350 S. Burdick St. Ste. 316 Kalamazoo, MI 49007 Phone: 383-4433 • Fax: 383-9767 E-mail: events@encorekalamazoo.com
It had not been easy growing up “different” in Barton, Mich., during the early years of the 20th century. For as long as he could remember, adolescent Kurt Gray had not been interested in the things other boys his age liked. Where they could be hard and cruel, he was soft and kind-hearted and, of course, suffered near constant teasing at school because of that and his lily white skin. Inept at sports, after the humiliation of attempting to play baseball or football, “more than likely, he headed for the big chair in the front window with a storybook.”

Kurt’s father, editor of the local newspaper, showered him with the best brands of athletic equipment. They went unused or were given to neighboring boys. Puzzled and hurt, the elder Gray wondered but never articulated, “Why should his son be so different? Why was he like a girl?”

His mother, who doted on her only child, attempted to console him in his fear of ridicule by schoolmates and to instill a sense of superiority. “Why do you want to be like other boys, Kurt?” she would ask. “Everybody who amounts to anything is different.” And gradually, with her backing, he began to acquire a sense of pride in his difference; but still, except for his treasured books and a few other pleasures, he mostly suffered a lonely childhood.

Among those other pleasures was a near innate love of theater. He constructed miniature stage sets with cut-out dolls as actors. He wrote and directed elaborate plays staged in the loft of a nearby carriage house, acted out by a few younger children of the neighborhood, who unlike his peers did not constantly ridicule him.

Life got easier for the different boy in high school. He found himself welcomed into a clique of about a dozen sons and daughters of middle class and professional people in the little town couched within the sinuous coils of the Kalamazoo river. The tough kids who had tormented him in grade school were mostly gone. Kurt explained why:

“The factories were the cause of that. Their doors were always open for young muscles, strong bodies, nimble fingers; and the temptation of twelve dollars each week and the attendant independence that such a salary and such a life seemed to involve was a strong one. So as soon as they were sixteen many of them bought overalls and drill aprons and dinner pails and become slaves of the whistle as they had been slaves of the bell. Often when Kurt had occasion to go on the far side of the river, where the paper mills and the shoe factory and the cabinet workers were, he would see older boys he had avoided in school — stripped to the waist, their bodies shining with sweat, moving through the weird scene of billowing
steam and the acrid smell of disinfectant, pushing trucks of paper or snatching a breath of air at one of the open windows. It was a hot, unhealthy place, the paper mill. Beaters were the worst, reeking with steam and bleach, but it was all abnormally humid and odorous. In the sorting rooms, where fingers flew through bags of refuse and rags, or through long grimy windows at the clicking stitching machines of the shoe factory, he would see girls who were not so much older than he."

Kurt graduated in 1918, as class valedictorian, and entered the University of Michigan. His mother had arranged for him to room with a woman who had been the wife of a minister in Barton before moving with her son and daughter to Ann Arbor. Kurt got along well with the boy, Derry, his own age and with similar interests, and by the spring of this first semester, he had his first homosexual liaison with him.

Kurt Gray is the hero of a novel, "Better Angel," pseudonymously written by Richard Meeker, whose real identity long remained a mystery. Published in New York in 1933, it became an underground classic, considered “the first novel published in America to show male homosexuality in a positive light — it even provided its gay protagonist with an apparently happy ending.” Retitled “Torment” and reprinted as a tawdry paperback in the 1950s, “Better Angel” reappeared in a better edition published in Boston in 1987. Not long afterwards, Forman Brown finally outed himself as the author. He wrote an epilogue for a 1995 edition of the novel in which he admitted that “like so many first novels, mine was largely autobiographical.” He revealed the names of the real-life people portrayed as characters (including one bisexual he had a brief fling with who later married Gypsy Rose Lee) and that Barton was, in fact, Otsego, Mich.

Born January 8, 1901, the first child born in the 20th century in Otsego, he was the son of Mr. and Mrs. George R. Brown. The elder Brown published the Otsego Union from 1897 to 1929. The details of Forman Brown’s life while growing up in Otsego are well documented in “Better Angel.” He also wrote another autobiographical work under his real name, “Punch’s Progress.” Published in 1936, it relates the story of the traveling puppet troupe he and fellow students Harry Burnett and Richard Brandon (real life characters in “Better Angel,” as well), launched while at the University of Michigan. During summer recesses the threesome toured resorts along Lake Michigan: Saugatuck, Macatawa, Muskegon, Manistee, Petoskey, Cheboygan and Mackinac Island, setting up a portable stage and delighting growing audiences.
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Steven M. Nitsch, M.D.

The Otsego of Brown’s youth.

with their puppetry.

Following graduation from the University of Michigan in 1922, Brown spent a brief stint as an instructor in North Carolina State College, toured Europe and then rejoined the love of his life, in New Haven, Conn., where Burnett had formed the Yale Puppeteers. By the late 1920s, the Yale Puppeteers had opened a theater on Oliver Street in Los Angeles, and they soon enjoyed an enthusiastic following that included movie stars Greta Garbo, Marie Dressler and Douglas Fairbanks.


The following year Brown and the other Yale Puppeteers founded the Turnabout Theatre in Hollywood to stage adult programming. Unique in that it contained two stages, one on either end of the auditorium, the theater featured swivel seats so that when the puppet show ended, the audience would
reverse direction to view the “Turnabout Revue.” Brown wrote all the songs and sketches featured, including more than 50 numbers for Elsa Lanchester, who joined the troupe on a permanent basis. The theater became a favorite with famous Hollywood stars, and one wall was devoted to autographs of those who had attended. The Turnabout Theatre thrived until 1956.

In the 1990s a documentary film about the Turnabout Theatre and the many popular songs and skits Brown wrote brought renewed interest in his work. Bette Midler sang one of Brown’s most requested pieces, “Mrs. Pettibone,” at an AIDS benefit in Los Angeles.

Following her husband’s death in 1929, Brown’s beloved mother spent the last 20 years of her life living with her son in Los Angeles. In 1957, Richard Meyer had reviewed “Torment” in the pioneering gay journal “Mattachine Review,” and prophesized: “I wouldn’t bet that (the hero and his lover) lived happily ever after.” He was wrong: The man considered “one of the world leaders in puppet theater in his day” died two days after his 95th birthday in 1996.

The demise of this nationally famous celebrity who had spent his formative years in Otsego went unheralded by any Allegan County newspaper.
As if to validate Encore magazine’s mission of preserving the stories of area residents, the StoryCorps MobileBooth lumbered into town, lassoed by WMUK’s determined Gordon Bolar.
project in Kalamazoo is the oral history tradition of transferring generational information in families,” Bolar notes. “I was thrilled to see how that concept is applied through this nationwide project. There’s a values transfer implicit in a story that is handed down from a grandfather or grandmother to their grandchildren. There were similar revelations and personal information recorded in the security of that perceived isolation in a MobileBooth traveling studio in Bronson Park. The shared moments were a form of bonding and communion that eventually came alive for others through the magic of radio.” The StoryCorps MobileBooth is a retrofitted, shiny-silver, Airstream trailer. Kalamazoo was one of hundreds of stops on its cross-country journey to collect “the stories and legends of everyday America.”

WMUK listeners were brought into what Bolar calls “the circle of intimacy” through the stories that were broadcast locally and captured for posterity. “Using only voice, there are no preconceived ideas placed in the mind by images of body language, hairstyles or how someone is dressed,” he adds. “This sharing of honest information, depth of emotion and unique ideas is why the folks at StoryCorps call listening ‘an act of love.’”

According to the project organizers, “The oral histories that StoryCorps collects will be given in digital form to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, which has a statutory mandate to preserve and present American folklife.” StoryCorps is the first “born-digital” audio collection for the Center, which is the largest oral narrative collection in the United States. The stories will all eventually be available online. You can listen to the Kalamazoo StoryCorps interviews via a link at wmuk.org.

Gordon Bolar was the development director for the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts for eight years prior to joining WMUK and says he always appreciated the “art is for everyone” focus found there and throughout the local arts community. “I have always enjoyed promoting art for all ages,” he notes. “As the arts in education coordinator for the Louisiana State Arts Council, I traveled the state, helping to place working artists within the classroom setting to involve youth.”

In between his duties at WMUK, Gordon enjoys a few rounds of golf or some gardening — when he’s not plying a fly on a trout stream. His wife of 12 years, Elly, is an office administrator for Allen Edwin Homes and is also a potter. While Bolar does not share his spouse’s penchant for hands-on applications in the visual arts, he does use his extensive arts and theater background in print. He has authored three plays, two of which were seen on stage while he lived in Alaska. The other made its debut in a staged reading.

During the past decade, Bolar has also written theater reviews for the Kalamazoo Gazette and plans some personal creative writing endeavors in the near future.

“We live in a community with an incredible variety of good theater and venues,” he stresses. “From the road shows at Miller to the Civic, the Whole Art and the wonderful theater program at WMU — I have to blow that horn because Western’s program is really a great one — we have a lot from which to choose. I can’t possibly name them all but it’s been a pleasure to do the newspaper reviews.” Bolar critiques about a dozen or so performances each year. He says his personal preferences run to the more intimate productions that closely...
Devoted to Story Telling

By Penny Briscoe

One by one, and over the course of three weeks, interview facilitators Susan Lee and Jenna Weiss-Berman ushered more than 120 eager interview teams into the StoryBooth of the specially outfitted Airstream trailer parked in Bronson Park last June. Their mission? According to the nonprofit organization they work for, it is “to spark a revolution in this country — of thoughtful communication, of gathering the wisdom of older Americans, of appreciating the importance and beauty in the stories of loved ones and friends.”

Brought to Kalamazoo through the efforts of the local National Public Broadcasting station, and funded through the generous donations of American corporations and individuals, local residents had the opportunity to record the stories of those they loved and respected. Each interviewee’s personal story was preserved in the Library of Congress, and participants received their own personal copy of the interview.

Lee, 27, a native of New York City and armed with a University of Michigan undergraduate degree and master’s in journalism from Columbia University, has been traveling throughout the country to gather stories for StoryCorps. Lee said she believes in the organization’s mission. “It gives every average American family a voice. The stories we read are people of power, in the media. Having this kind of archive of rich stories will be important for the future and is resounding, giving these people a voice.”

She said one of the most profound benefits of her job is that she has discovered resilience. “I sometimes want to follow them out of the booth — the way people react, with empathy and compassion. There are a lot of emotional and intense conversations here.

“I’ve tried to take away from each interview how to live, and seeing people come together has been reaffirming.”

Having heard thousands of stories across the United States, Susan notes similarities, especially love for family.

Weiss-Berman, a 24-year-old graduate of Oberlin College who grew up in North Hampton, Mass., agrees that facilitators learn a lot about American life through the many stories they hear. “I know I talk to people differently than I did before. People seem so over privileged; then you learn the intense struggles they have had,” she said.

One local interview that stood out for her and showed the therapeutic value of the project was a grown child interviewing a parent involved in the Drug Court program. The interviewer asked: “Why did you choose to do drugs with three children? What was better than us?”

Weiss-Berman also gained insight from a local pair of nuns: “I learned so much. I have a new impression about nuns,” she said.

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Dave Isay, originally from Connecticut and making a career of radio documentary production, originated the idea of gathering American interviews. Isay was inspired by the Works Progress Administration recordings of the 1930s.

The first StoryCorps interviews were conducted in 2003, in New York City, and the mobile unit was added in 2004. Outposts, like the one in Kalamazoo, are set up around the country, funded in part by local organizations or cities. Oftentimes, to ensure participants from varied backgrounds, as in Kalamazoo, representatives from a broad spectrum of local community organizations are asked to encourage individuals to sign up. Other interview slots are filled on a first-come basis by the general public, always with a huge waiting list.

Delivering the U.S. Mail

Eric Tiller’s grandpa, Russell H. Tiller, 80, spent 30 of his working years as a letter carrier. He’s a patriotic American who is honored to have served his community, humbly taking somewhat for granted his honest and faithful service.

“I couldn’t have asked for a better job,” he said. “It was truly rewarding, and I never regretted getting up and going to work each day.”

Eric, 32, who now works for A.G. Edwards as a financial consultant, grew up knowing his grandfather had a work ethic and approach to life that he and others should model. So, when StoryCorps came to town, he seized the opportunity to capture his grandfather’s legacy and have it archived in Washington, D.C.
Russell’s trust in the U.S. mail goes back a long way to a very personal event. In 1948, two years after discharge from the U.S. Navy, he decided to marry Vergia Lee Gillespie, who has been his bride for 59 years. He proposed by putting a diamond ring in the mail to her, having faith that it would arrive safely in her hands in Bloomfield, Mo. — all the way from Otsego, Mich. The two had met a few months earlier in Otsego, where Russell lived on the family farm. She was visiting her sister in that community when fate brought them together.

Eric said that the surprise for him in the interview was how much his grandfather had enjoyed being a mail carrier. An observer of Russell’s coat lapel with the stamp-shaped pin embossed with a letter in a mail carrier’s hand emphasizes that point. It commemorates his 50-year affiliation with the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Of his postal-service days that spanned from the ’50s to the ’80s, Russell said: “People trust you. That’s the good part about the job.”

An example of the kindness and trust he felt surrounds his memory of the fact that there were no public bathrooms on his routes once the public bus he rode reached his destination. He chuckles at a memory: One of the ladies to whom he delivered mail said to him: “Any time you need to use the bathroom, just knock and come in.” Then one day there...
was a note waiting at the door that read: “Russ, I have a pot of beans on the stove. Would you turn these off?”

Eric says of his grandpa: “I respect him and love him. He’s a good grandpa, and I feel really blessed — and hope I can be a good grandfather, too.

“I also learned that maybe I get my interest in serving people from him,” Eric said. “We should find out more about people in our lives. We, as Americans, are in too much of a hurry to get things done, and we need to slow down and get to know people.”

Grandfather Tiller affirmed StoryCorps’ value: “I am glad that I got to go with Eric. It made me think back that I wish I would have talked to my Grandfather O’Connor to learn of his youth, and I hope this interview and article will make people realize that there are important things in life and that it should include the histories of their parents and grandparents.”

A Miracle Worker

How do you thank a mother who defies all the odds and teaches your mute 6-year-old child how to talk?

One way is to invite her to participate in a StoryCorps interview so she can tell her remarkable story.

Laura Livingstone-McNelis, co-proprietor of the Henderson Castle with her husband, Peter, said, “My mother has been instrumental in transforming my daughter’s life.”

Mary, at 6, had never spoken, despite Laura’s continued efforts. Therapists, including experts at Michigan State University, University of Michigan, and a well-known clinic in Detroit, also failed to make any breakthroughs, or even diagnose her condition, eventually telling Laura the situation was hopeless.

Heartbroken and exhausted from the effort, she called her mother, Phyllis Livingstone, who lived in Detroit, to report the bad news and tell her she would not be further continuing the battle.

“You can’t do that. You can’t give up,” Phyllis said. “You let her stay with me over the summer, and I’ll make something happen.”

At 72, the concerned and determined grandmother had already started taking classes at Wayne State University, trekking around campus with arms full of books on audiology and related topics, trying to learn what she could.

“Fine,” Laura said. “If you want to try, more power to you. I need a break.”

Laura admits she didn’t have much faith that anything was going to happen, but three weeks after young Mary left for her grandmother’s, Laura received a phone call that makes her cry at the very thought of it.

Phyllis was on the other end of the line, announcing that Mary was going to talk to her.

Mary had excellent reading skills, they were sure, beginning to learn at age 2 with refrigerator magnet letters. She used an augmentative speech device that
allowed her to read sentences from the computer so she could be heard through Laura’s voice, which had been programmed in. But no one had ever heard Mary’s voice. Their communication with her was written, in sign language, or through the computer.

On the phone that eventful day, Mary’s grandmother read a short letter to Laura and then asked Mary to read it. And, for the first time, Laura heard the sweet sound of her daughter’s voice as she read: “Dear Mom. I love you. From Mary.”

“I couldn’t believe my ears. Of course, I burst into tears on the phone and said, ‘Oh, my gosh, I have to see this miracle.’” She quickly packed up the baby and jumped in the car to head to Detroit, where she stayed for three weeks to learn how her mother had managed to do it.

The process involved creating what Phyllis calls experience stories and collecting them in a three-ring notebook. The stories were about typical activities of which she and Mary had participated. They were written in simple sentences with pictures Phyllis drew to make the book more interesting. She simply asked Mary to point to various words and repeat the word after she herself said it. Because Mary could identify with the stories through recent experiences, she began to repeat the words.

“The missing piece was having the experience connect to the words she knew on the page, the printed words that were visually available, and then having the audio sound from someone she trusted, the voice of her grandmother connecting the final dots there. And all those things came together to allow her then to try to speak, and she did. She started with vowel sounds and then gradually began to add consonant sounds,” explained Laura.

Phyllis ultimately sold her house in Detroit and moved to Kalamazoo to be closer to her granddaughter and continue to work with her, so that now, at age 12, Mary’s speaking problems are in her past.

When it was clear the technique was working, Laura took Mary back to U of M to show them, and they were dumbfounded, using words like “amazing” and “miracle” to describe the breakthrough. Since that visit they have continually studied the case, and have put Laura in touch with Michigan families who have similar situations.

Laura said she hopes her interview through StoryCorps will help others with like conditions so they don’t lose hope, and so they might benefit from her mother’s technique.

Intrigued by the StoryCorps idea, and convinced that recording personal stories...
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**Learning From Experience**

As a child, Beniam Johnson never gave much serious thought to the older neighbor with the great back yard. Beniam had spent a lot of time exploring that small parcel of land and knew it far better than its owner, Eligah Stegall, who was, simply, a good friend of his grandmother. But that was all Beniam knew.

Then one day last spring, Beniam, a 1993 Comstock High School graduate and student at KVCC studying Liberal Arts and Film Communications, had a casual conversation with Mr. Stegall that Beniam said was so compelling that he arranged to have it archived with StoryCorps. The interview in the StoryCorps Airstream trailer also led to a PowerPoint presentation in a Public Speaking class at KVCC in which students were to focus on a nonprofit organization.

What most dramatically caught young Beniam’s attention when conversing with Mr. Stegall, aside from the fact that the older gentleman had always been kind to him, was that he was 88 years old and a veteran of World War II.

Born in Mississippi in 1919 and reared on a farm in western Tennessee, Eligah Stegall was drafted into the army and remembers boarding a ship in Newport News, Va., in 1942 — and heading over sickeningly turbulent seas to North Africa as part of a “quartermaster outfit to support the troops with what was needed.”

Having had little interaction with whites, he says he was pleasantly surprised at the good treatment he and other blacks received, although they were in a segregated unit. He noted that to his surprise they received most of the same privileges as whites. He vividly remembers his first plane ride — to Switzerland — in which he was, to his dismay, asked to board and sit with white soldiers, who were helpful and friendly toward him.

Eventually his unit was moved to Italy where he saw Mt. Vesuvius erupt. He also experienced frequent bombing raids and found himself acting as a guard for their walled camp, in addition to providing supplies to the combat troops.

Mr. Stegall credits his army experience with the beginnings of his positive impressions of whites, and says it was a time in which he grew accustomed to being with them.

You see, it wasn’t always that way. As a boy of about 9 or 10, young Eligah was walking home from school with friends when they were approached by “a couple of white boys (teenagers) on the roadside.

“We tried to avoid them — we ran and then they ran, and they caught us and held us,” he explains with a matter-of-factness in his voice that suggests he has gracefully accepted the incident as part of his growth and maturity. But he admits the experience greatly affected him, even though the white boys ultimately didn’t harm them physically.

“I was afraid of white folk. I was never around them — I only saw them when I went to the store; my neighborhood was black folks.”

In 1945, when Mr. Stegall returned
home, he found the segregated way of life unchanged in the south. “You knew your place and tried to live the best you could. You didn’t want to stir up animosity.”

But he had been forever changed: “It (the war) gave me a sense of the world, I suppose. I met different types of people — Arabians, Italians, Germans, Englishmen. I would say the army is a good way of getting lots of experience, travel, meeting different nationalities.”

The happiest part of the whole experience, he says, was arriving home alive after the war to marry the love of his life, Doris Campbell.

Doris died in January 2006, and the couple’s son, Charlie, still lives in the Kalamazoo area. Granddaughter Shanitra Scott is studying law at the University of Michigan.

Mr. Stegall earned a degree in French from Lane College in Jackson, Tenn., after the war, and then he did some substitute teaching. However, unable to find a permanent position, he moved with his wife to Kalamazoo where he worked a variety of jobs that included a long career in food service at the Veterans Hospital in Battle Creek.

Mr. Stegall’s experiences have taught him that “racial issues in the United States can be solved by doing what the Bible says: ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ Give people a chance.”

His simple philosophy: “People should love each other more and be more considerate and polite.”

An observer would surmise a great amount of mutual respect when witnessing interactions between Beniam Johnson and Eligah Stegall during the interview that generated this story. Mr. Stegall has provided for Beniam more than a chunk of history. He serves as a kindly friend and role model, with his well-spoken demeanor and calm reflections that serve as guidance. And, no doubt, Eligah sees a little of himself in Beniam, an ambitious yet patient young man who is finding his way in the complex world.
examine human values. “I like the type of focus that takes me to a different place or makes me ask some questions about the human experience,” he explains. “I feel fortunate to live in a community that always seems to find new ways to celebrate the arts, year-round.”

One of Bolar’s main motivations in his career in public broadcasting has always been some form of outreach. “For StoryCorps in particular, we made a concerted effort to reach out to various segments of the community, to all the neighborhoods and the full gamut of race, religion and income levels,” Bolar recalls. “Those who might be disenfranchised or reluctant to come forward were proactively encouraged to tell their stories.” That effort gave voice to well over 100 unique tales, including a heartfelt story about a Kalamazoo mother who successfully completed a court-ordered drug rehabilitation program instead of doing time in prison.

“In all the places I’ve worked, I believe I’ve made a contribution by assisting my organization to reach out to the underserved portions of the community,” Bolar adds. “WMUK has that philosophy of making its programs and opportunities available to all segments of society. That type of proactive movement is of personal importance to me as well.”

Gordon Bolar’s brief brush with the StoryCorps residency in Kalamazoo has whetted his appetite for more. “There are extraordinary stories waiting to be told by everyday, ordinary people,” he says with a smile. “These stories are all around us and can shape how we look at and relate to our fellow human beings. I have always shared that philosophy with others, long before I ever heard about StoryCorps. We simply have to take the time to listen.”

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HRIS DILLEY, The People’s Food Co-op manager, first learned about co-ops in 1992 at a party at Michigan State University. “They were having banana-raisin curry on rice,” he said, at an event put on by the Atlantis Housing Co-op. Intrigued, he joined soon after. “The experience of living in Atlantis,” he recalls, “was like living with 25 siblings. We all struggled and supported each other ... It was really the sense that people from all backgrounds could come together and support one another in a healthy, fun and rich lifestyle.”

Chris’s big smile is framed by glasses, a goatee, and long hair in a ponytail. He’s well-liked at the People’s Food Co-op, or PFC, for his hard work and diplomacy. By all accounts, he’s done a first-rate job since becoming manager in late 2003.

Unlike many food co-ops that came and went in the 1970s, PFC has stuck around, weathered tough times, and prospered. The mission statement says PFC “is a consumer cooperative offering product choices that emphasize natural and organic items while promoting nutritional awareness and environmental responsibility.” Today PFC has 461 members, compared to 300 in 2003, is still located at 436 S. Burdick St., the same place it’s been for 31 years, and has a Web-site at www.peoplesfoodco-op.org.

Chris was born in Methuen, Mass., in 1970, and lived many places with his family. “As a kid I liked to take things apart, he said. “I liked art a lot. I wrote. I was in the woods as much as possible.”

Chris graduated from MSU in 1993, and while still a student, he visited China, the first of five trips there with another scheduled in 2008. He’s become an expert on Chinese cuisine — just one example of his dedication to all aspects of food. “That’s really where I learned about my interest in food and where it became clear to me, said Chris. It’s a diversity-rich cuisine, but I was most interested in how people and food interacted culturally. It corresponds with what I do now relating to food and the community.”

Chris majored in cultural anthropology at MSU where his academic counselor was Laura DeLind of the Women’s Agricultural Community. She and Chris later developed a shared interest in community supported agriculture (CSA) — “bringing farmers into a direct relationship with people who eat.”

Chris and another friend have also written a not-yet-published manuscript: “A Portable Menu: Eating Out in Eastern China.”

Chris moved to Kalamazoo in 1993 to work with the disabled at Living Ways, Inc., and later became a graphic artist for Brakeman Design. He started...
shopping at PFC in 1994 and became a volunteer in 1998 when he did the “Coop Scoop” newsletter layout.

Chris said PFC’s “financial rough times” started in 1997. Up until then, “we had had a stable management team of three people for something like 15 years; by the late 1990s, that team was moving on.” Back during 1983–1998, PFC had no formal membership. Annual store sales averaged $400,000 — they’re nearly twice that today. PFC was then more of a worker collective; today it’s a consumer co-op run by and for its member owners.

The co-op nearly folded in the late 1990s. However, PFC began collecting dues and keeping careful financial records. During 1998–2000, an interim board that included Chris created bylaws. “What we needed,” Chris said, “was skill — in finances, in how to run a retail business, in how to run the numbers.” Sue St. Onge then served as the new manager in 2000–2003 and provided this skill. According to Chris, Sue “stabilized” PFC.

Sue left PFC to work and live in St. Ignace in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, and Chris became manager in September 2003 with very little experience. “I was actually sort of lucky since I was ignorant about so many of the problems facing me,” he said.

He was, fortunately, surrounded by capable employees like Lucy Bland, Jenny Doezema, and Maria Panone. Two other staff from 2003 — Elizabeth Forest and Derek Roseboom — are still working at PFC today. Eric Benson was also an employee in 2003, and he is now on the nine-member board that applies John Carver’s Policy Governance model, which helps governing boards to be successful.

Chris’s senior coworkers are Heather Finch, assistant manager, and three coordinators — Heather Colburn (grocery), Rosie Florian (produce), and David Draper (deli).

Plans are now afoot for PFC to move to a bigger location within two years. The co-op, whose sales are expanding, grew over 50 percent between 2003 and 2006, outgrowing its current site — although in February 2006, to help accommodate the growth, the store was closed for one week and was fully renovated at 10 percent under budget.

The impact of this renovation has been “phenomenal,” Chris said. “The store is now cleaner, more orderly, more intuitively organized, and more shopable.”

One enters PFC and finds two accessible cash registers to the left. Ahead are two aisles, one leading past produce, groceries, and refrigerated and frozen goods, the other past books, baked goods, bulk grains, nuts, and flours, and hot and cold deli selections. PFC also offers a fine selection of local, organic produce, including that grown at Bangor’s Blue Dog Greens Farm.

PFC has changed its membership system from an annual fee with a register discount to purchasing a share of the co-op’s equity. It has recently installed a state-of-the-art POS (point of sale) cash register system. Everyone, not just members, is welcome to shop here.

Competition is tough in the natural and health foods business. PFC can’t afford to stay still. Sawall Health Foods and Natural Health Food Center are PFC’s main competition, but most supermarkets now also stock “health foods.” To address that competition, Chris wants PFC to become a “one-stop” shopping site for its customers but still
stay downtown. The co-op’s members have said what they want in a new store. Comments have included “play area for the kids,” “outdoor seating area/garden growing herbs,” “live music and entertainment,” “not an island in a parking lot,” etc. Few co-ops will ever have the space or money to satisfy all wishes, but PFC will try, said Chris.

Chris identifies three typical types of PFC shoppers: long-time, “for-the-cause” customers; young families educating themselves; and college students primarily from the Vine Neighborhood. PFC collaborates with both Kalamazoo College, through what is called Farms-to-Kalamazoo College, and WMU organizations such as the Progressive Community Alliance, the Peace Center, and Students for a Sustainable Earth. People also learn about PFC while shopping at the Bank Street Farmers’ Market, Taste of Kalamazoo, and Island Fest. And, along with stocking Kalamazoo-area produce like that from the Farmers’ Market, United Natural Foods in Greenwood, Ind., delivers to PFC two mornings per week.

In order to help Kalamazoo-area agriculture, PFC provides one or two small micro-loans each year to local farmers who help supply the store, and the loan program is in the process of becoming more formalized to meet the needs of PFC members.

PFC supports recycling, composting, Fair Food Matters (a nonprofit that educates the community about food issues), and the Growing Matters Garden (an urban educational gardening

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**PFC’s Early Years 1970-81**

It was January 1970 — the Grateful Dead were busted for LSD in New Orleans; the soap, “All My Children,” premiered on ABC; anti-war protests mounted across America. In Kalamazoo, opposition grew to a plan to start integrating the public schools by fall 1971. Cliff Pequet, a 22-year-old WMU political science undergraduate from Midland, Mich., returned to Kalamazoo from a year’s study at England’s Oxford University.

Cliff, who now makes fine leatherwork in northern Indiana, lived upstairs at 713 W. Vine St. in the “student ghetto,” just half a block from the “Common Market” — today’s O’Duffy’s Pub and Cosmo’s Cucina — an ever-changing cluster of hippie headshops, bookshops, and restaurants housed in an old livery stable. Cliff and friends decided to create a buying club to save money by ordering food in bulk. They bought a large bag of long-grain brown rice to divvy up and sell and looked for “loss leader” supermarket specials that they advertised on fliers passed out at Locust Street Leatherworks.

In those early days, the itinerant buying club also resided at 714 W. Vine and 813 W. Cedar St. Cliff tried to secure their first “storefront” location at the Gryphon House, 1104 S. Westnedge Ave. The communards were already meeting there Saturday mornings. They learned about a group of English weavers, the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society (1844), that started the first co-op. One Saturday morning, Cliff was astonished when officials from five different government agencies — buildings, fire, police, food stamps, and health — showed up unannounced, apparently to bust the fledgling business. This bad public relations soured the Gryphon House deal.

In April 1971, the co-op moved first to 1011 W. North St., later to 701 Douglas Ave. (its first store-front location), and finally to 817 W. North St., site of the old Kline’s Market & Grocery. Here the co-op could be closer to “the people” or low-income residents. The Patriot newspaper of February 26, 1973, stated: “The Kalamazoo Food Co-op is a People’s Store. It is run by people in the community for the benefit of the community. No one gets paid to work. We realize that we have to make sacrifices to Serve the People.” Ambitious plans were on the table for three retail stores and a warehouse. (Ann Arbor eventually got the warehouse, and there was never more than one retail store.) There was even, for a time, a mobile food co-op.

Bill Hyslop, who now lives in Michigan’s northern lower peninsula, recalls the place at 1011 W. North St.: “The house was kind of a dump, but the rent was only $110, to be split four ways … We purchased most of our stock at the Seventh Day Adventist mission/store in Grand Rapids. Food runs were always a good time. We took the back seat out of my old Chevy Nova ... and headed up (north) … We also stopped to pick up a

(Continued on page 61)
program for local youth). PFC is also co-sponsoring the Fifth Annual Southwest Michigan Community Harvest on Sept. 23, 2007, at Tiller’s International in Scotts, Mich. Chris described the event as a fun day at a lovely rural farm with live music, good food, oxen plowing, and more.

“Cooperatives,” Chris said, “allow everyday people to own the businesses that they shop, keeping more of the resources of a community within that community ... At the co-op we’re interested in providing good food to our community ... in a way that supports our economic, environmental, and human health.”

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Intrigued by Asian cuisine, Chris Dilley has traveled to China five times, and enjoys the relationship between Chinese culture and their food.

Former locations of the People’s Food Co-op include the 701 Douglas Avenue address, where it located in 1971, and the 1973–76 location at 141 Burr Oak Street.

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Remembering Kalamazoo’s Counterculture

HAVE THIS MEMORY — it’s past midnight,” said Rob Backus, a longtime Kalamazoo resident. “Eighty bikes going eastward down Wheaton Avenue hill, silently, nobody talking, just the sound of all those tires whirring on the old brick road.” The Midnight Maulers — they lived, ironically, in the “Mall City”— were students and hippies who played on hot summer nights in 1970-72.

“Did you hear about the Midnight Mauler ... ?” (Can you hear Jagger?) It would have been Sunday night as they rode all over town, not much traffic, on their “old junker bikes.” Earlier that evening there’d been a free concert at Hyames Field or East Campus Gym. Then, about 10:30 p.m., as many as 130 people met in South Westnedge Park across from Gryphon House. They were off! — so many Merry Pranksters, Hipsters, or wannabe Brando Wild Ones shoving a thumb in the square Establishment’s eye.

The Four Collectives

PFC was one of four semicoordinated “collectives” — people working together toward a single purpose a while “exploring alternative lifestyles” — envisioned by Cliff Pequet and others. The other three were the Media Collective, or Media Zoo, based at Fritz Seegers’s 505 Stuart Ave. home (where Fritz still lives), the Recycling Collective at Jewel House, 1101 S. Park St., and the Kalamazoo Patriot Collective, located at 417 and then 705 Douglas Ave.

“The Media Zoo,” according to Bill Hyslop, focused “on creative community development. They put on elaborate events at the local school, the most memorable of which were the Halloween haunted-house events.” Fred Scurry, a moderate black social activist, ran in 1971 for City Commission. The Zoo was his campaign headquarters. Scurry, who died in 2006, worked for Planned Parenthood and the Comstock Community Center. He drew a lot of flack back then for his views — some said he’d “sold out” to the whites or was engaged in “genocide.”

The Recycling Collective was run by the Student Committee for Community Involvement. It recycled at Vine Street Elementary School and organized a voter registration drive. One source noted: “Bull McClusky, Principal at Vine St., said ‘Saturdays around here look like World War II with all these tin cans these hippies collect. Whew.’” By April 1972, this collective disbanded. Some members left for Boise, Idaho.

The Patriot Collective published a boisterous, in-your-face newspaper called the Patriot Mauler (1970-73), founded by Carl Botan, Rob Backus, and Chato Hill. One person recalled, “The Patriot house was a serious Maoist bunch that was said to be in contact with the Black Panthers in Chicago. ... They had little patience with our (the food co-op’s) stoned and laid-back ways but had to respect the fact that we were delivering real service to the community.”

Radical Newspapers

Other alternative papers of that era included the Western Activist (1966-73), Black & Red (1968-69), and Woman (1973). The Activist was a leftist WMU alternative to the conservative Western Herald. Mike Lilly, who now lives near Flint, Mich., was the illustrator who drew the controversial Sept. 14, 1967, cover showing LBJ’s head “with little antlike people making love in his eyebrows and relieving themselves in his ears.”

Black & Red was a far-left publication (six issues total) headed by Fredy Perlman, a Czechoslovakian immigrant and controversial WMU economics professor (1966-68). He later ran Black & Red Press with his wife, Lorraine Nybakken, in Detroit until his death in 1985.
On February 15, 1973, the first edition of Woman was produced by Julie Kull, Judy Martin, Kathy Ralph, and Judy Supnick. It folded soon after.

Those weren’t moderate times. This city experienced racial violence at Kalamazoo Central High School and elsewhere. On Saturday, March 30, 1968, Stokely Carmichael, the radical Black Power nationalist, spoke to 1,500 people in the WMU auditorium. He said, “We must organize our (black) people with guns ... since it’s clear to us that white people intend to commit genocide on us.” Earlier that same day, Fran Villarreal (later Dwight — Fran is a professional photographer who still lives in Kalamazoo) witnessed what became known (with some exaggeration) as the “Bronson Park Massacre”: “I had just turned 16,” she writes. “We lived in Plainwell but shopped in Kalamazoo. It was a very lovely Saturday — warm for March. A young man who I would later come to know as Woody ... came up to me and my Mom and handed me a flower. Said there was going to be a ‘Be-In’ in Bronson Park and would I come ... I was totally mesmerized by this motley crew of lovely people, and my life was forever changed by that day.”

Rich Gibson, a student writer at the time and now a university professor in California, described what happened that afternoon in the Activist’s April 5, 1968, issue, whose cover featured the large headline: “BRONSON PARK MASSACRE,” above a sketch of baton-wielding cops. According to Gibson, the small group of perhaps 20–30 students was relaxing, strumming guitars, and listening to the Lodovick Avenue Washboard Band. Gibson writes that “the first cop came ... wearing a riot helmet and black leather jacket. He simply, although gruffly, told us to move on.” More cops appeared. They tried to arrest a black man, named “Bo.” When he resisted, several cops “jumped him” and sprayed him with MACE. Tension mounted. At least two students were thrown to the sidewalk. Mayor Paul Schrier arrived to
Counterculture

Music, Schools, & Communes

Music, including folk, rock, and blues, was everywhere, like some nonstop Renaissance Faire. The Crazy Horse, a live music venue located in an old barn north of W. Milham Avenue, hosted the Kalamazoo Pop Festival on October 26–27, 1968. It featured MC5, The Grapes of Wrath, The Frost, The Thyme, Wilson Mower Pursuit, The Tiers, and Caste. The Common Market on W. Vine Street had a new restaurant in 1971, “H. Buffalo Esq.,” that advertised, “Entertainment this fall include(s) folk musicians, clowns, magicians, puppets and bands.” The Canterbury Coffee House, located at WMU’s St. Aidan’s Episcopal Chapel, was open 1971-82. The Troubadour was on W. Vine Street in the “Common Market,” and the Focus Coffee House was at WMU’s Lutheran Center at 1720 W. Michigan. At the Masonic Temple Auditorium, 210 Eleanor St., the People’s Rock Koncerts happened alternate Sundays at 7:30–10 p.m., admission $1.00.

That was the era of B.F. Skinnerian behavior modification, alternative schools — Roger Ulrich’s Learning Village opened in 1967, the Kazoo School in 1972, and both are alive and well today — and back-to-the-land “intentional communities” like Maynard and Sally Kaufman’s School for Homesteading in Bangor (that school no longer exists, but the Kaufmans now live in the eco-friendly Sunflower House) and Lake Village Homestead which still functions on Long Lake.

One participant of that era who still lives in southwest Michigan and chooses to remain anonymous recalls optimism, creativity — and shame because, prodigal daughter, she had to return home to admit her foolishness. In 1970 at age 20, she stunned her middle-class parents in Detroit by dropping out of the university and leaving on a “long hair’s” motorcycle. “We were starting out to change the world,” she said. “We were committed hippies.” That life soon disappointed — months in a farm teepee without running water does that. She got pregnant, lived in Kalamazoo co-op houses, and fixed Euell Gibbons-inspired food like violet flower jelly — “it looked pretty and tasted awful!” She divorced but earned a business degree to support herself and her daughter.

Only recently did she learn that her younger sister, then in high school, had felt “proud” and “envious” of her “carefree” alternative lifestyle. Her shame finally abated.

“I was totally mesmerized by this motley crew of lovely people, and my life was forever changed...”
Life’s journey presents a different road for each of us.

30-pound tub of natural peanut butter at Koeze’s on Burton St. — the stern, hair-netted Germanic matrons there weren’t nearly as much fun as the Adventists, but the peanut butter was to die for.”

Roger Rzonca, a steadfast co-op baker and manager, recollects frenzied buying trips. Starting Friday morning, they drove in his turquoise 1969 Ford Econoline van from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids, back to Kalamazoo, then to Ann Arbor and Detroit’s Eastern Market, and finally back home in time for Saturday business. Roger and his wife, Teresa, an artist, now live near Paw Paw.

By 1973, PFC had merged with Wild Bill’s Walk On Water Bakery (South Fork Branch) and moved to 141 Burr Oak where it stayed until late 1976. Then it moved to its present location at 436 S. Burdick St., while Wild Bill’s moved to the basement of 926 Davis St., which was for 50 years the home bakery business of the beloved Mrs. Nina M. Erway.

Wild Bill’s what? According to Zolton Cohen, who is still a life-long resident of Kalamazoo, he, Tim Greening, and Sue Fortin (Tim now lives in the U.P. and Sue in Virginia) were talking one evening. Zolton, perhaps too-energetically, sang the praises of a good friend, Bill Holman, not affiliated with the co-op. An exasperated Greening finally said: “Enough already about this guy! What? Does he walk on water, too?” Thus the name was born.

Steve Siegel and his wife, Robin, were folksingers who, during 1975-78, were also co-op workers; they still live in southwestern Michigan. According to Steve, “Wages were pretty substandard, even illegally so ... I may have made only $1.50 per hour, but my rent was $40 per month and gas was 35 cents a gallon. The method of payment in those days was ‘co-op bucks,’ a unique form of script the co-op printed on colored paper, paid to its workers and also given out at the rate of 5 percent on purchases each customer made. They ... were redeemable for any-

thing in the store.”

“An interesting collection of personalities and characters stalked the creaking wooden floors of the old co-op,” Steve continues. “The pioneers of the Southwest Michigan branch of the back-to-the-land movement were often seen dragging in sacks of organic potatoes or asparagus or beets. College professors, students, artists, revolutionaries, hippies and health nuts, street people, wealthy yuppies and just normal folks spent their dollars and co-op bucks there ...”

Terry Verdon (now Peattie), who now lives in Florida, worked at the co-op in 1975 right out of Hackett High School. She remembers the characters from the Rex Café next door to the S. Burdick Street location. “There was a very countrified woman,” Terry explains, “who used to come in to the co-op in the late summer asking (with a mainly toothless grin) if we would like to buy her suga’ pumpkins. It took a few repetitions to figure out that she was selling sugar pumpkins. We bought some and soon adopted ‘suga’ punkin’ as an affectionate way of addressing each other, i.e., ‘Would you fill up that bin with wheat berries, suga’ punkin?’... Sometime later we opened up a PFC bank account that needed a 10-letter authorization code. Sure enough, it was ‘sugapunkin.’”

In his 1994 book, “Storefront Revolution: Food Co-ops and the Counterculture,” Craig Cox cautions that writing food co-op history isn’t easy: “People came and went almost as regularly as customers at the till, leaders bloomed and wilted like dandelions in spring, and the mission behind the movement varied widely, depending upon who was talking at any given moment.” This was true in Kalamazoo, too.
HEN POET Nancy Eimers reflects on her childhood, she attributes two experiences as strong influences on her writing — a suburban upbringing and the musical talent of her mother.

Eimers, who spent her high school years in Park Ridge, a suburb of Chicago, remembers feeling intrigued by the “sameness of the houses” because she knew “each family was unique.”

“The uniformity of the suburban landscape, is, paradoxically, part of what engendered in me a love for language,” said Eimers, an English professor at Western Michigan University who has published three books of poems — her latest, “A Grammar to Waking,” in 2006 — and has received numerous awards and appointments, including two coveted National Endowment for the Arts fellowships.

This early awareness of landscape has developed into a strong sense of place, which is apparent in her poems, whether the setting is her old house on Arlington Street, Crossroads Mall, or the infamous S-curves of 131 in Grand Rapids.

Her sensitivity to language, she said, was heightened by her mother, Jeanne, “a homemaker with artistic ability” whose talented piano playing inspired Eimers. It awakened in her at an early age the idea that there were many ways available for expression that didn’t involve just the exchange of facts and information.

“There was some language she was speaking while she was playing the piano that I found very mysterious and beyond my understanding, but I was very interested in it,” she said, citing her mother’s musical gift as a reason she felt compelled to take up classical guitar in grade school, although she later gave up any thought of a career in music. “I wasn’t bad at it,” said Eimers, who continues to pluck and strum at home, “but I didn’t really like to perform in front of people.”

Then in high school, Eimers, who had always been an avid reader and writer, especially of mysteries and biographies, started to take writing more seriously. “I fell in love with language,” she said. “I like the privacy of writing.” She had been intrigued by the idea “that there was another way to say things that didn’t involve information and plain-spokenness but that involved some sort of imaginative force.”

And so upon graduation, Eimers began her writing journey, a path that has taken her through several graduate programs and finally landed her here in Kalamazoo when WMU offered her a position in 1991 following the publication of her first book of poems, “Destroying Angel” (Wesleyan/University Press of New England).

“I’m of the generation of writing programs so I just naturally gravitated toward creative-writing classes,” said Eimers, who earned a menagerie of degrees, including a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Iowa Undergraduate Writers Workshop, a Master of Arts in English from Indiana University, a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Arizona, and a doctorate in English/Creative Writing from the University of Houston. “If you’re not ready to find a job,” she quipped, “you just keep going to graduate school.”

Originally she thought she would write fiction. “I read a lot of fiction and loved fiction, but I am not good at narrative or dialogue,” confessed Eimers, who was inspired by writers such as Jane Austen and William Faulkner, “masters of the long sentence,” and continues to count fiction as an “oblique influence.”

In college, however, as she began taking creative-writing courses, it became clear that poetry was the form for which she had an affinity, though it still wasn’t apparent to her how writing would result in making money.

“I didn’t know how that would translate on the professional side, but the longer I took writing classes, the more I began to see how poetry might be a larger and larger part of my life.”

One of the possibilities that presented itself was to find a job teaching in a program similar to the ones in which she was enrolled, but she wasn’t sure how someone who considers herself somewhat shy could “end up in a classroom.”
After trying teaching, however, she found it “exhilarating,” especially because she gets to work with some “really bright young writers.”

“...In a really impractical way, I knew that I loved writing and I wanted to do that. In a way I'm glad that I didn’t have some sense of career about it. It was always the writing.”

It was because of “the writing” that she has been the recipient of a “Nation” Discovery Award and a Whiting Writer's Award, as well as had her book, “No Moon,” published by Purdue University Press as part of the 1997 Verna Emery Prize. Her poems have appeared in numerous anthologies and literary magazines, including Best American Poetry 1996 and Poets of the New Century. She also teaches in the summer at Vermont College.

Not long after Eimers entered college — two days in fact — she met the man she ultimately married, fellow poet and Western Michigan University professor William Olsen, through mutual friends.

Later, they attended University of Arizona together, and then both received their doctorates from the University of Houston. “We got our degrees in the morning and were married in the afternoon,” she said, adding with a laugh, “mainly because our families were coming to town.”

Following marriage and graduation, Olsen, who had recently published his first book, “The Hand of God and a Few Bright Flowers,” headed to a job he had been offered at WMU, and Eimers took off to a teaching job at Northern Kentucky University, where, following a dispiriting night out to a bad movie, she returned home to discover a message that Wesleyan, the publisher of her first book, had some really good news for her. What sweetened this news was the...
fact that the book publication allowed WMU to offer her a position so she could join Olsen in Kalamazoo where they were both given two-thirds positions that eventually evolved into full professorships. And together they’ve worked, both outside and inside the home, ever since, serving on committees together and as each other’s first reader of new poems.

“We’ve had a lifelong conversation about poetry,” said Eimers. “We offer each other appreciation and consolation. It’s been a great journey together.”

Ask any writer where and how they write best, and you’re bound to hear a wide variety of demands. Eimers keeps hers pretty simple: a lot of reading, a little caffeine, and “unbroken hours of writing time,” preferably in the morning.

“The most important parts are hours of time, if possible days in a row where I can really sink into that world and think about what I’m reading,” she said. “When I have lots of time for writing, I write every day. Then I let it go, go to the market or something. I’m not always working. When I don’t get these unbroken periods, I assume that something is being stored up in the meantime, but it doesn’t always feel that way.”

Her writing, she said, is often informed by an idea of “breakthrough poems” introduced to her by her mentor, poet Jon Anderson at University of Arizona, who believed that “after periods of writing, seemingly out of the blue, it gets ratcheted up several degrees.”

“Any writer has moments when suddenly everything you wanted to do becomes easy,” Eimers explained. “All the bad writing days go into the writing of a well-written piece,” what Eimers calls the “invisible work.”

Eimers often takes her poems through several drafts before she feels

Nancy holds Spike, her 19-year-old cat. Eimers and her husband, fellow poet William Olsen, picked Spike out of a batch of four kittens when she moved to Kalamazoo in 1996. Spike had clambered up a tree to avoid them, and the couple fell in love with him immediately.
**S-Curve, 131**
— Grand Rapids, spring 2000

Because it's dangerous or old, because it doesn't slow us down, because it ought to be less drastic, maybe half an O, because we want to skirt something and live, because no other single letter tells us there is more, they've closed the S-curve down. Construction for at least a year. “A nightmare,” says a woman. “There are people out there working on it 24/7.” Meaning in any language that I can speak all day all night seven days a week, out there when we sleep or wake at night as stars are out there far beyond our puny streetlight-halo grasp of them. 24/7 — that phrase belongs to a kind of highway talk, made out of numbers, letters sprinkled here and there, S-curve, U-turn, I-94, G.R., All other words lopped off, a language without future or history, a freeway, a now bare, digital. Numeric grace I can't even aspire to. And yet the S-curve on 131 through downtown Was not one terse unbroken passing through — too many ornate gasps and swerves and tailgaters to translate into simple speed. Oh then the surge of us believed language could be sleeker, less circuitous, a set of bits each smaller than addressable memory. Meanwhile inside our cars many had words, the angry kind, words might drive us off the road. And to be fair, there were apologies, a password, song lyrics, maybe a reassurance, a promise made. Speed would not remember them. The curves would. Will they be there in a year? How gentled will that S become? Gentle as speed is, relegating language to the tires, to what it always was, humming and repetition. God speed. His pulse sped up. The days raced by.

By Nancy Eimers

Nancy Eimers is a professor of English at Western Michigan University and co-coordinator of WMU’s Creative Writing Program. “Arlington Street,” originally published by Indiana Review, and “S-curve 131,” originally published in Denver Quarterly, were both included in her latest book, Grammar to Waking (Carnegie Mellon 2006).
satisfied with them, and the time that has passed between drafts helps form her final work. “The person who you are one day can write the first draft, the person you are another day can write the second draft,” she said. “The person you are a year later can complete the piece.”

In the workshops she teaches, Eimers finds she returns often to three principles. The first is her recommendation to students that they read a lot and allow themselves to be influenced by their reading. The second is what she calls “discovery in the act of writing,” by allowing the poem to take on a life of its own. The third is speaking with an authentic voice, which she explains as being “true to uncertainty.”

Eimers, who used to follow the credo “write what you know,” has gradually changed her philosophy. “Now I think I’m more interested in exploring my way towards what I don’t know, allowing myself to stay longer in uncertainty and openness.”

Recently Eimers has taken on added responsibilities as co-coordinator of WMU’s creative-writing program, which continues to broaden its offerings to graduate students with “Third Coast Literary Magazine,” New Issues Press, and a Prague Summer Program. Her academic life has become richer, she said, though definitely more demanding, which has required her to adjust her schedule by writing on the days she isn’t scheduled to teach.

“Writing and teaching are separate types of activities,” said Eimers. “During times you’re only teaching, it’s as if you’re living on the outside instead of the inside.” As academic life gets busier, it takes increased discipline to write during the school year, but Eimers finds if she doesn’t make that time, her life feels less lived.

“I just try to be susceptible to anything. I try to pay attention to what is happening to me, to be open.

“When I don’t do that I’m not making connections. I’m not writing.”

Eimers
2007

OCTOBER
2–4  Annie

NOVEMBER
2–3  CATS
6    American Indian Dance Theatre
     Hanay Georganah, Artistic Director
9    Take 6
     Special Guest opening by the NAEA GospelFest Choir
10   NBC's Last Comic Standing Live Tour
24   B.B. KING
30   Clay Aiken Christmas performing with the KSO

DECEMBER
5–6  DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS
14   Odds Bodkin's StoryBlast!
     Performed at Show Theatre inside the Civic Theatre Complex
16   A Year with Frog and Toad

2008

JANUARY
13   A Columbia Artists Production
     ST. PETERSBURG BALLET THEATRE
     Swan Lake

JANUARY CONTINUED
15–20 Menopause The Musical™
     Performed at Show Theatre inside the Civic Theatre Complex
22–24 EVITA
27    JUNGLE JACK HANNA

FEBRUARY
1    BLAST!
9    The Best of Gold Company:
     The 30th Anniversary Show
     Dr. Stephen Zegree, Director
22   The Peking Acrobats™
23    ICM ARTISTS PRESENTS Canadian Brass
26–29 MAMMA MIA!

MARCH
1–2  MAMMA MIA!
29    RING OF FIRE—The Music of Johnny Cash

APRIL
8–10  MOVIN' OUT
19    Cherryholmes
20    Miller Auditorium presents
     Five by Design in Radio Days
     a Five By Design Production
Audubon Society of Kalamazoo
345-0541

Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge:
— Steve Kahl, manager of the refuge, will speak on various topics of interest. People’s Church, 1758 N. 10th St., Sept. 24, 7:30 p.m.

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Norman D. Langeland

Norm Langeland grew up in the family funeral home and attended Kalamazoo Christian High School. Western Michigan University was his destination for his pre-mortuary studies, but he transferred to the Wisconsin Institute of Mortuary Science to complete his degree in 1960. He returned to Kalamazoo to begin working for what is now known as Langeland Family Funeral Homes. He is currently president of the family enterprise.

Norm is the only licensed funeral director in Kalamazoo to be a member of the prestigious Academy of Professional Funeral Service. He is also a member of the Michigan Funeral Directors Association.

The Langelands are members of Heritage Christian Reformed Church. Norm has previously served as a board member for Park Village Pines, Constance Brown Hearing Centers and the local chapter of the March of Dimes. For many years he was an active member of the Sertoma Club, having served as president.

Norm and wife Bonnie have been married for 41 years and enjoy travelling throughout the United States and the world. Son Greg and daughter Lisa Baas are both long-time associates of the family business. When Norm isn’t working or traveling he enjoys fishing off his dock at Eagle Lake and spending time with his four grandchildren.
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