In Winter
It's a Dog's World

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Up Close at the Iditarod
Meet the Darlins of the Derby
Exploring Life's Difficult Questions
The people have spoken. And we heard every word.

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Year in and year out, we ask all our clients to provide candid feedback on Greenleaf Trust’s performance, responsiveness, attentiveness, effectiveness, and other areas. Our clients rightly have a lot to say, and we take their comments and suggestions to heart. We know, despite scoring high marks in overall client satisfaction, that there is always an opportunity to enhance service, to elevate performance, and to exceed expectations. So thank you not only for speaking up, but also for having something important to say.
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belcea quartet

Tuesday, March 10  |  8:00 PM
Dalton Center Recital Hall, WMU

One of the most talked about young ensembles on the international scene, the Belcea Quartet is known for bringing “daring… and uncommon probing” (The New York Times) to its performances. Founded at the Royal College of Music in London and fresh off the heels of a critically acclaimed residency at Wigmore Hall, the Belcea Quartet’s Kalamazoo debut is not to be missed!

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eighth blackbird

with lucy shelton, soprano

Thursday, April 30  |  8:00 PM
Dalton Center Recital Hall, WMU

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PROGRAM includes works by Stephen Hartke, Roberto Sierra and Schoenberg.

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stefon harris and blackout

Thursday, May 14  |  8:00 PM
Dalton Center Recital Hall, WMU

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Why do we do the things we do?

Most of our activities and behavior are nearly automatic, and, for the most part, there is nothing wrong with doing what comes naturally to us. As children many of us did some pretty foolish things as we experimented with our own limitations and came to learn about our culture and our laws. It is from these childhood experiences that we gained our own personal sense of right and wrong.

At the most basic level we have learned how to survive, to obey the laws of our land, and to function within the limits of our culture. And, as part of these, most of us have learned to respect the rights of other people. These fundamental principles direct many of our actions and decisions on a daily basis without our giving them a conscious thought.

But we also live in a world where technology is exploding around us. We live in a world where we have much to be thankful for and where we are required to make complex choices about how to spend our time and resources. And, yes, we are currently living in a time of great economic insecurity.

Even so, as Americans, we are among the minority of people in the world who are giving personal resources to help others. With a per capita income of $45,000 compared to a world average of $10,000, it is not surprising that we are generous. What may be surprising, however, is that our giving as a percent of gross domestic product is more than double that of the next most giving country.

While we are a financially generous group of people, we can, and do, give in other ways. While none of us is going to save the world by our individual actions, we can all do a small part — and it need not be difficult. For a number of people it may be donating time to a service club or nonprofit organization where the efforts of the group are magnified. Others find it more rewarding to work one-on-one and become a mentor to another person. And then there are those who show goodwill and caring by remembering family at special occasions like Valentine’s Day — by simply taking the time to be sure every loved one gets a greeting card as a reminder of their importance.

Respecting others goes a long way in this vast world of ours. Whether our service to others is big or small, there is one absolute truth that we should have learned as children — doing for others is always rewarded by the feeling that we gained more than we gave.

Rick Briscoe
Publisher

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Cover photographs courtesy of Larry Connor and Jo Oostveen. Guess Who photography by John Gilroy.
Living for a Snowy Michigan Winter

Next to Alaska, Michigan boasts the largest number of resident sled-dog mushers, with over 30 individuals or families residing within 50 miles of Kalamazoo. Mid Union Sled Haulers (MUSH), a family-oriented group of amateur dog sledgers that gathers for yearly seminars, trainings and races throughout the state, was founded in 1980 and has over 160 families that participate in its activities.

The three people/families featured here illustrate the diversity of Michigan mushers. Mary Vowell has been training for the past 18 months and will shortly be entering her first official race. She offered this writer a glorious ride not soon forgotten. The Loves, Brad and Sharon, with their daughters, Tarin and Tatum, have made mushing a family affair that includes their kennel of 19 Alaskan huskies. Brad, who likes to go fast, is now training to enter a longer, more competitive race, the Jack Pine 30.

Jo Oostveen, who has been mushing, skijoring (mushing with skis) and bikejoring (mushing with a mountain bike) for 15 years with her beloved rescued dogs, as well as mentoring many new to the sport with her special brand of joy and enthusiasm, let her spirit of adventure propel her sled-dogging experience to new heights when she mushed 800 miles in Greenland to the Polar Ice Cap.

On Valentine’s Day weekend, weather-permitting, MUSH sponsors a local race at Fort Custer State Park where you can witness these mushers and their dogs in action. Both spectators and volunteers for trail assistance and dog handling are heartily welcome. More information is available at the MUSH Web site, www.midunionsledhaulers.com.

The Story of a Backyard Musher

By Theresa Coty O’Neil

Jo Oostveen didn’t want a bunch of black balloons for her 50th birthday. Always up for a new challenge, Jo completed five difficult Outward Bound adventure courses from the Brooks Mountain range in Alaska to Big Cypress Swamp in Florida by the time she was 43. It was during her fifth and final, a mountaineering course in California, that Jo promised a group of women sitting around a campfire that when she turned 50, she was going to dog sled in the arctic.

“It’s funny how one little thing can happen and it can change your whole life,” she said.

She returned home to Galesburg,
unsure of how she’d fulfill her promise; but she figured she had seven years to work out the details. Even though she had already been mushing for a couple of years, she knew she wouldn’t be able to tackle the task alone. Her own rescued Siberian huskies weren’t suited for subzero arctic conditions. She didn’t even immediately reveal her intention to her husband, Don, whom she affectionately refers to as “Saint Donald,” for “putting up with my obsession for 15 or 20 years.”

Then one day she learned of Paul Schurke, an explorer from Minnesota, who was taking people on Arctic trips. She contacted him and told him that whatever he was doing in 2002, she’d like to be included. Meanwhile, it had been discovered that Robert Peary, who was always thought to be the first person to reach the North Pole, was in fact beaten to the pole by an African-American fellow traveler named Matthew Henson. Peary had relied heavily on Henson, who learned the Inuit language and customs and was referred to as the “kind one,” during the arduous journey during which Peary suffered severe frostbite in his feet. Both men had taken Inuit wives in the northernmost Greenland village of the name Qaanaaq and had descendants there. The National Geographic Society posthumously awarded Henson a prestigious Hubbard Medal, and they asked Paul, who had already traveled to Greenland, to deliver it to Henson’s grandson, Ussarqak Henson.

The medal was delivered in 2001, and the momentous trip was captured in a National Geographic Society film. The Inuit asked Paul to return, which he planned to do in 2002.

Jo was invited to Ely, Minn., to a rigorous outdoor training session for those on the trip, at the end of which Paul said to her, “Jo, I’ll see you in Greenland.”

A retired research biologist for Pfizer Corp., Jo has always had an insatiable curiosity. When she was asked
Sled Dogs

to volunteer at a sled-dog race at Fort Custer State Park, she was game.

Out at a checkpoint, she watched the mushers shush by, one in particular who waved as he passed. She was told his name was Rick Wilkins. He had a stuffed dog attached to his hat, a stuffed dog in the dog bag, and one real Alaskan malamute dog pulling his sled, all so that he could "compete" in the three-dog run. Because he was the last to cross the finish line on Saturday's race, he was the last to start on Sunday's race. But during the Sunday run, he had a massive heart attack and fell out of his sled. By the time he was discovered, he had died.

"His wife was at the finish line, waiting for him," said Jo, who was so moved by this event that she decided she would race the following year in memory of Rick Wilkins, which is what she did. In 1995, with two dogs, a Siberian Husky, Balto, and a mixed-breed dog, Bumpus, who had been thrown out of a car door at her door step in the middle of winter, as well as a stuffed dog and a bag that said, "Racing for Rick," Jo entered the three-dog race. Rick's widow, Connie Wilkins, was at the finish line, tears streaming down her face as Jo crossed. Now, Jo added, intercoms are used at the races to help prevent a tragedy.

Jo calls herself the first of the "backyard mushers," dog sledders who race with one, two or three dogs, or who prefer to skijor (ski with dogs) and bikejor (mountain bike with dogs). "As things have gone on, more and more people realize you don't have to have a kennel to be a musher. You can have a couple of dogs and still have a lot of fun."

Before her three-week-long Arctic trip, Jo was given a list of things to bring, which could not exceed 35 pounds, including arctic sun glasses to protect her eyes from the cold and 24-hour sun-dehydrated food in case the Inuit were unable to catch any seal or fish, and special insulated winter gear. Together, she and Don, now in the know, watched a video about the extreme conditions of the Arctic. He asked her if she knew what she was getting into. The mother of two from Galesburg, Mich., shook her head no.

With 50 below air temperature, and wind chill well below that, even three-inch-thick boots and parkas are no full assurance as protection. "No place to go. No way out. Can't say I want to go home. We're sledding on glaciers. There's no brakes on the sled. It's extremely dangerous and I guess I did not know how dangerous it really was."

Her trip included a couple of close calls, one of which occurred while camping on ice that was breaking up and heading out to sea. The Inuit started screaming, and began throwing the dogs over the lead, with Jo and her fellow explorers following.

The child of deaf parents, Jo has many gifts, one of which happens to be communication. It was her ability to sign that allowed her to communicate with
the Inuit when no translator was available. She learned a great deal from the Inuit by signing, and their stories moved her. “Even if you don’t speak the same language, it’s just such an honor to be with them.”

It’s not everyone who could endure the harsh physical conditions a three-week trip to the Arctic requires, but Jo tackled it with aplomb. She gives a lot of credit to Donald.

“What other husband, when his wife says, ‘I want to go to the North Pole,’ says, ‘Well, OK.’” But Don pooh-poohs the notion that he’s a saint. “When things don’t go right, I’m just like anyone else. I’ve always liked to support other people’s dreams. I’d like to go to Greenland, too, just not as much as Jo or for as long.”

In 2004 Jo returned to Greenland for a repeat trip and says she would do it again in a heartbeat just to spend time with the Inuit, but she was disheartened to see already the changes a warming climate has wrought. “We couldn’t land on the sea ice anymore,” she said. “The people are struggling because they cannot get on the sea ice to hunt seal and hunt walrus, which are their staples.”

Still, she’s “anxious to see the people,” whom she describes as “tough,” but with a wonderful ability to laugh and live in the moment. “They have a great appreciation for life. For these guys every day is a day of survival.”

A mentor to many new “backyard mushers,” Jo has long-since grown discontented with the zoning in her Galesburg neighborhood that only allows her three dogs. So Jo and Don are moving, matriculating north as many who develop a passion for the sport of dog sledding often end up doing, so they can have “more dogs, more snow, more trails.”

When you’re mushing, Jo said, “You become a kid again. You forget all the troubles that are going on around you. Who cares about the economy? Who cares about family issues? It’s just you and the dogs.” 

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“I grew up with it. It’s part of me. It’s who I am.”
—Tatum Love

HE LOVE’S OF KALAMAZOO are a perfect example of how mushing can become a family affair. Brad and Sharon, along with their two daughters, Taryn, 22, and Tatum, 20, have participated together in dog sledding for 15 years. The girls have grown up knowing their “hike” from their “whoa” and their “gee” from their “haw.” They’ve met famous Iditarod mushers, won their own competitions, and made friendships that will last a lifetime.

In fact, Taryn, then 7, and Tatum, then 5, drove a one-dog sled on a 100-yard dash before their parents even stepped foot on a sled, during the very first race the Loves watched. It was the Mackinaw Mush.

“From the get-go,” said Brad, the family was “hooked.” “I’m going to race that next year,” he told his wife.

The girls were quick to go along.

“I’ve always liked dogs,” said Tatum, known as the family’s own “dog whisperer” for her firm but gentle touch with the Love’s kennel of Alaskan huskies, all of whom have blood lines that are traced according to which Iditarod mushers owned the sire or dam. “I was happy to have more pets.”

And it didn’t take Sharon too many nudges to share her family’s enthusiasm. After all, born a city girl, Sharon grew up pet-starved. Her favorite toy as a child was G.I. Joe and his dog-sled team.

After the couple decided that mushing was for them, however, it took a while to get their “ducks in a row,” said Brad. First they needed dogs, then the sled—and they knew few mushers worth their weight in snow get very far in the sport.

These select families who “make it” become treasured mentors and friends. For that, the Loves turned to Mid Union Sled Haulers (MUSH), which has become for them a second family. Sharon presently serves as president. “It takes a dog-sled club to raise a child,” Brad said. “The girls have their graduation party. You have your family. Then you have your MUSH family.”

Veteran mushers, including the Gerke and Edge families, shared with the Loves where to find sleds, how to make...
Sharon Love and her dogs enjoy a Mid Union Sled Hauler’s race in Atlanta, Mich.

their own equipment, how to train lead dogs, and sage advice, such as “never spend more than $50 on a dog,” a rule that the Loves admit they may have broken once or twice.

“The first year Brad had a three-dog team,” Sharon said. “The next year I had a three-dog team.” Since then, the Loves have increased the number of dogs they run, presently training an eight-dog team for a more competitive race, the Jack Pine 30, that Brad plans on entering in February. Each family member has brought home respective trophies and T-shirts and have enjoyed the internal rivalry that has sprung up among MUS members at various sprint races held throughout the state.

“It is a sport you don’t want to take on too quickly,” Sharon said, having watched with Brad many gung-ho beginning mushers buy kennels and equipment one year and then not make it to the next racing season. “It’s definitely a lifestyle. Your family vacations change. Where you go on the weekends changes. When the dogs age, you must continue to care for them.”

Brad, a former avid hunter and fisherman, doesn’t do either of those things now. In between training for races and caring for the dogs, attending workshops and participating in the races themselves, he doesn’t have time.

“Dog sledding in Michigan is the best-kept secret,” said Brad. The state boasts MUS, an entry-level support group for sprint racers (under 10 miles), Michigan Dog Drivers (MIDD) for middle-distance runners, the Great Lakes Sled Dog Association (GLSDA), and many races, including the state’s biggest, the U.P. 200 held in Marquette. In fact, there are more sled builders in Michigan than anywhere in the country. And Brad added that currently top-name Iditarod drivers are buying Upper-Peninsula property for purposes of training.

“What keeps the family interested even now that the girls are grown can’t be easily summed up,” said Brad. “It’s the camaraderie, and being with the family. It’s the competition, and spending time with the dogs.”

“It’s just when you’re out there and the snow is falling and all you hear is the runners,” said Sharon.

“I grew up with it,” added Tatum. “It’s part of me. It’s who I am.”

“It’s just a lot of fun,” Brad said.

The Love family’s long involvement with sled-dog racing has given daughters Tarin and Tatum many opportunities to meet Iditarod mushers, including Libby Riddles, the first woman to run the Iditarod.
When I first planned to meet with Jo Oostveen and Mary Vowell to mush through the Fort Custer State Park trails, we intended to take “the rig,” a 130-pound three-wheeler used for off-season trail training. But by mid-morning, the weather had turned wintry, and as the snow collected on the roads, Mary, already on her way, decided to head back to Kalamazoo and grab her sled.

She arrived at the trailhead in her white ’95 Oldsmobile, sled attached to the roof, rig and mountain bike hitched to the rear, and three eager dogs in the back seat, all “evidence,” said Jo, “that you can do this on a shoestring.”

Mary, who started training 18
months ago, is an example, said Jo, of how to do it right. “A lot of people jump into this sport,” said Jo, a retired research biologist for Pfizer Corp. who has been mushing for the past 15 years, and has been the unofficial “mentor” of new mushers. “They will buy the dogs, all the equipment; then they can’t control their dogs. They crash or whatever, and then get out of it. This is a sport that it’s much better if you start with one or two or three dogs.”

Both women are members of Mid-Union Sled Haulers, a family-oriented community of mushers that holds trainings and races throughout the state. Mary has three dogs, the zoning limit in her Kalamazoo neighborhood. Willow and Hannah are mixed-breed dogs who were rescued from “The Farm,” an animal adoption center run by Pet Resource Network, and Naboo is an Alaskan husky and retired Iditarod runner whom she purchased from local mushers. Most people might expect mushers to use only Siberian huskies or Alaskan malamutes, but there have even been Iditarod teams of standard poodles, and all sorts of other breeds are used for recreational mushing, including Labrador retrievers, who Jo says are terrific runners if you can train them not to stop and sniff.

“All dogs like to run. If you’re out at the start of race, you can see the joy and anticipation on their faces,” Jo said. Both women subscribe to the theory of “dog whisperer,” Cesar Millan, that dogs like to work and exercise and discipline is integral to their well-being. At race time, dogs need to be held back before the start because of the intensity of their enthusiasm.

As Mary was harnessing up the dogs, Jo regaled me with stories of a few mashing accidents, including a story of “Brad’s Corner,” where veteran musher Brad Love tipped his sled and broke an ankle.

Up to this point, physical danger hadn’t crossed my mind.

“How fast do the dogs go?” I asked, hoping to sound innocent.
Sled Dogs

“Oh, they can go up to 20 miles per hour, but today probably around six to eight,” she said. I tried to do some quick calculations in my head. No luck.

Mary put Naboo in lead, Willow and Hannah in wheel (rear), though she’s normally a lead dog. Unlike other mushers, who like to train their leads and keep them there, Mary likes to rotate hers. Hannah is the “boss dog,” which is not necessarily the same as the lead dog, and is a mama’s girl, as all her dogs are.

When Mary camps, her dogs sleep in the tent with her. “Every night is a three-dog-night,” she said, laughing, a phrase that means a cold night on the trail.

When the sled was ready, Mary bestowed a pair of orange initiation gloves on me that had a yellow “Gee” on the right hand and “Haw” on the left. We then went over mushing rules, almost all of which are designed for the safety of the dogs. The only rule for mushers is: “Keep your hands on the sled.” Jo took us to the trail map and outlined what she thought would be the best route, a path different from the one Mary was used to taking.

Then Mary motioned to me to step on the runners. She pointed out the brake. “If I say, ‘brake,’ press down,” she explained.

“Hike!” Mary yelled, “Come on, girls! Hike! Hike!”

The dogs started out at a good clip but we hadn’t gone more than 10 yards when we came to a fork. Naboo, used to going ‘gee’ started heading gee. “Haw! Haw!” Mary yelled. The dogs seemed confused, and in their confusion one headed haw and another gee, which sent the sled straight into the woods. My brain tried to register the trees coming at us, at six to eight miles an hour. “Brake!” Mary shouted. “Brake!”

I was lifting my foot when the sled tipped on its side, and we fell shoulder-first into the hard ground. Standing and dusting off the snow, I apologized about the brake.

But Mary just laughed as she righted the sled and untangled the dogs. “Now you’re a musher!” she shouted.

When we remounted the sled, Mary decided she would ride the brake and I would straddle, to my relief. The dogs slowed down a little after that, and when it was clear that another accident was probably out of the question, I began to relax.

“Hike! Hike! Go girls! Hike! Hike!”

It was like flying in the forest over white clouds, with the steamy breath of the dogs and their prancing up ahead, and Mary’s commands under snow-covered trees.

“Come on, Hannah! Come on, Naboo!”

The dogs seemed a little cautious after the tip, but they soon assumed a leisurely pace. “Hannah’s not pulling today,” Mary told me. “You can tell by
looking at the line, and how loose it is."

Dogs, like people, have their own moods and personalities. With animal power, you never quite know what to expect, which is part of the thrill that mushers experience at race time. As we became accustomed to the trail, Mary began to fill me in on how she became involved in mushing. It started, as it often does for mushers, with watching a race. For Mary it was the U.P. 200, which takes place in Marquette. Her son, J. J., who was attending Northern Michigan University, kept telling her she had to come up and see the race. Finally, she did, and she was enthralled.

On the way home, she kept thinking this would be a passing fancy, but “it just grew and grew.” First someone at work handed her a book about mushing, then the Iditarod was taking place and in the news. Finally, driving down South Westnedge Avenue, she saw a truck with the MUSH logo and decided to follow. The couple in the truck turned out to be Brad and Sharon Love, and the three stood talking in a parking lot for two hours. Mary met Jo shortly after, and they began training together. “Mary has embraced the sport,” Jo said. “Mary and I are the new face of mushing. We’re ‘Backyard Mushers.’”

Soon Mary will compete in her first race in Atlanta, Mich. She is eager for it and more than ready.

Her reasons for mushing have continued to grow along with her experience. “I’m hooked,” she said. “It keeps me sane. When you’re out with the dogs on an early snow morning, there’s nothing like it. It’s magical.”

On the final leg of our trip, Mary stopped, got off and let me take the sled alone. I figured I had already survived a fall, and there were no turns, so what the heck. Mary went on up ahead, and because they love their mama, the dogs eagerly followed. “Hike! Hike!” I yelled, and for a moment I let myself imagine I was on the last stretch of an intense but exhilarating run in the Michigan bush, bringing her on home.
IT’S ALL ABOUT the excitement of the race. The dogs, of course, are excited. The mushers are excited and a little worried that they may let their team down. Even the veterinarians, from all across the country, are excited: “It is why I’m here,” one veterinarian from the Midwest said, “This is one of the most exciting events that I can be where there are working animals.”

In March of 2008, the Iditarod Sled Dog Race mounted a record field of 96 teams competing in the cross-Alaska run from Willow to Nome. Each team starts with 16 dogs, the human musher, and a sled loaded with food, GPS locators, and mandatory gear. Racing through largely undeveloped landscape, the teams confront serious sub-zero temperatures, Call-of-the-Wild situations, as they move from checkpoint to checkpoint. There are several mandatory eight-hour and one 24-hour rest period along the trail. Most of the mushers are ready to move out when their rest is over.

As physically, mentally and emotionally daunting as the race is for mushers, equally challenging is the work of the Iditarod Trail Committee. They are the people who locate, train and coordinate 1,500 volunteers for the Ceremonial Start, recruit an army of veterinarians who carefully monitor the health of each of the dogs (1,536 in 2008), set up and run an extensive communications network, and provide detailed statistical reports on each musher. To this mix they must support and manage over 500 members of the media from all parts of the world as many of them face for the first time the unpredictable Alaskan weather. This “little dog race” is an amazing undertaking that everyone seems to enjoy. Locals point out that “the rest of the country has the Super Bowl. In Alaska they have the Iditarod.”

If you have ever followed the exciting competition between the top mushers, you have probably figured out that they do it for the bragging rights, because the prize money is

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE IDITAROD

THE EXCITEMENT PULLS IN MUSHERS FROM ALL PARTS OF ALASKA, MOST NORTHERN STATES, AND FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

Story and Photos by Larry Connor

The ceremonial start for the Iditarod Race is in Anchorage where enough snow is hauled in to make a 20-mile-long trail for the racers.
extremely low compared to most athletic competitions. Even the biggest winners have yet to clear a million dollars in prize money for their entire racing careers. The sponsors are outfitters, banks, oil companies, communications companies, a car dealership and an airline.

One such team comes out of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. There, Michigan State University Lyman College biology graduate Ed Stielstra, 39, of McMillan, Mich., who, along with his wife, Tasha, owns and operates the Nature’s Kennel Sled Dog Adventures and sells his dogs to other mushers and to folks interested in his husky dogs (www.natureskennel.com). He and his rookie musher, Jake Berkowitz, 21, drove over 4,000 miles (from McMillan to Wasilla) with 34 dogs, supplies for food drops, sleds and gear for two race teams. Two extra dogs were for delivery to a customer—Stielstra has yet to make more than a few thousand dollars racing in the Iditarod. Berkowitz was there to drive the second team; some call them a puppy team, to teach them the course as he learned it himself.

The excitement pulls in mushers from all parts of Alaska, most northern states, and from around the world. One British racer, Kim Franklin, was quoted as saying that she just wanted to take her dogs for a good run. There are many professions represented as mushers, from medical doctors, veterinarians, teachers, home-keepers to the self-employed. At least one wife-husband combination each had a team—Blake and Jennifer Freking of Findland, Minn. Foreign competitors (there were 20 in 2008) carry their country’s flag with the same pride and thrill as any Olympic athletic team.

Anchorage and the Ceremonial Start

Imagine Kalamazoo hauling in snow it has saved from street cleaning and making a strip of snow 20 miles long, from city center by the mall all the way to Paw Paw—and then paying for police and training volunteers to control traffic to allow mushers to travel down this ribbon of snow as part of the opening celebration. This is what the Ceremonial Start for the Iditarod demands of the city of Anchorage. They truck in and expertly groom snow to create a course down 4th Street and out to an airfield, for a 20-mile trail. As soon as the teams finish this 20-mile race, they load up and head off to the starting point for the big one. And the City cleans up the snow to get it out of the streets.

That opening event draws in a lot of fur-covered animals, some canine, and some human. Many families think nothing of watching a race with the kids, each member bundled up to stay warm.

The real race starts the next day, in Willow, well outside Anchorage. It seems to work better that way.

It’s All About the Dogs

It does not take too long to figure out that this race really is all about the dogs. At the Ceremonial Start of the race, the excitement of the dogs is
so great that there are volunteer dog handlers who must hold the dogs back from running off ahead of schedule. It may take eight or more humans to hold back each team. They want to run. As working dogs, their job is to run and they want to do it.

Two days before the race all the

**CLOSER ENCOUNTERS WITH RACE ENTHUSIASTS**

RIGHT OUT of college my daughter, Beth Connor, signed up for a one-year assignment of volunteer life in Alaska, working with one of the native tribes. That was 15 years ago and she is still there, charmed by the State's beauty and uniqueness. I've concluded that if she ever comes back "south" to live, it will have to be in a pretty amazing place.

During this time period Beth (Elizabeth at work), has been a volunteer firefighter in Sitka, Ala., and then became a volunteer emergency medical technician, and then an EMT trainer. She was encouraged to enroll in nursing school (University of Alaska in Anchorage), and she now works as an intensive care pediatric nurse at the tribal-owned Alaska Native Medical Center in that city.

The past governor of Alaska recognized her for her volunteer nursing service to EMTs. She trains EMTs on the North Slope once a year in an intensive, weeklong, 50-hour certification course.

At some point she volunteered as an EMT at the Ceremonial Start of the Iditarod in Anchorage.

Along this path she met Mike Owens, a big, friendly man from Nome, a medical technician who air-transports really sick children from Nome to Anchorage where my daughter would often intake the kids. Mike and Beth became acquainted, and Mike explained that he had run the Iditarod a few years back—and that his children, Melissa and Michael, were involved in the Junior Iditarod.

Last year I saved time and money for another visit to Alaska, my first in the winter, and timed to see the Iditarod, "The Last Great Race on Earth" as it is promoted. When I mentioned this to *Encore* magazine editor Penny Briscoe, she wrote me a letter of introduction so I could apply for a press pass for the event. When I was given my pass, I noticed that it was exactly the same as the reporter's pass from the *New York Times*.

It was a special experience—one Beth and I both enjoyed.

We arranged to meet Mike and his family at the "vet check" in Wasilla two days before the Ceremonial Start of the race. There I met Mike, his daughter Melissa, and the rest of the family. Mike speaks with a strong southern accent (“I live in south Nome,” he quipped), and explained that 18 years earlier at the Musher’s Ball, where the starting order for the teams is determined by a drawing, Mike climbed onto the platform carrying his two-week old daughter, Melissa.

Now it was Melissa’s turn to attend
dog teams are checked in at the Iditarod headquarters in Wasilla, a town made famous by the recent candidate for vice-president. On the glare-ice

the Mushers’ Ball and pull her race number. She was the youngest woman ever to compete, having made the 18-year cut with just two weeks to spare. She had been a winner of the Junior Iditarod, and I found her to be a very focused individual, more relaxed around her dogs than she is with strangers.

Melissa competes with the help of her mother and her 13-year-old brother, Michael, another Junior Iditarod competitor, all of them fetching dogs from the trailer one at a time for the veterinarians. “This is more excitement than your little brain can handle,” she said as she handled one of the enthusiastic dogs for the vet.

It was about 13 degrees outside, with a strong breeze off the Cook Inlet, when the Ceremonial Start began at 10 a.m. on March 1 in downtown Anchorage. I quickly learned that camera batteries, no matter how new and fresh, do not perform well at that temperature. Beth kept spares warm inside her coat.

I learned to lie down in the snow just like the professional photographers from National Geographic to get a head-on shot of the dogs and mushers as they charged out of the starting gate. I held back for the first racers to leave, timed at two-minute intervals, and by the time Melissa Owens’ number 59 came up, the crowd of photographers had thinned out, leaving the documentary crews with fancy booms and batteries that don’t freeze.

We drove to another point on the trail and found how some Alaskans watch the race—with gas grills and lawn chairs—and warm under heavy blankets. At one point the teams backed up, and we were able to photograph the dogs at rest, panting but seemingly quite happy. When

(Continued on page 22)
Alaska

parking lot, dog carriers (trailers, vans and specially designed vehicles) abound, and the air fills with dog barks and human yells of greeting.

This is a homecoming for many of the mushers and the support teams, folks who have competed before and who follow each other’s accomplishments with a mixture of competitiveness and pride. They are good friends who manage to pull off one of the most remarkable animal and human competitions you can find anywhere. They buy, sell and trade dogs from each other in a constant effort to improve their teams. Most have just come from other sled-dog races, but the Iditarod is the Big Race.

Volunteer veterinarians examine each dog, giving them an efficient physical exam, looking specifically at HAWL: H—Hydration and Heart (rate and rhythm); A—Attitude and Appetite; W—Weight (bodyweight); and L—Lungs. There is a strict procedure for each dog.

In early February each dog must be given a blood test for CBCs, with chemical panels. They each get an ECG. they took off, the snow flew into the air as they dug in!

We did not go to the official start in Willow, Ala., or make arrangements to be on the official trail during the race. Every day I checked to see how Melissa was doing.

Maybe that is why the race is not popular in the “south,” because it takes too long for impatient armchair athletes. But Alaskans feed on the nearly two weeks of reports on the progress of the different teams—which team has scratched, where the leaders are, how the female mushers are doing against the men, and how minus 60- or plus 30-degree weather was affecting the race.

I was back in Kalamazoo when Melissa crossed over the finish line in her hometown of Nome on Thursday, March 13, 2008. Her race time was 10 days, 20 hours, 21 minutes and 14 seconds, with an average speed of 3.99 mph. She finished 30th overall, the second best finish for a rookie musher. During the veterinarian checks at the rest points, dogs were removed from the team, and she finished with just seven of the original 16.

After talking with her father, I had little doubt about Melissa’s competitive spirit or the determination of her dogs to finish. Mike Owens had absolute confidence in Melissa and her dogs, knowing they would have a good race. “After all, these dogs know they are just going home. Nome is where they live.”

So, instead of that cruise to Alaska some summer (where you know there will be too much food), why not sign up to be a dog handler at the Ceremonial Start at a future Iditarod? It will give you the unique opportunity to see the dogs, mushers, sleds, and the media show that takes place. If you don’t mind holding back a dog or two to keep them from an early start, check with the organizers to be a part of the fun: It takes a lot of people to let these puppies run.
The 2008 Iditarod included 20 foreign competitors, among them Italian Fabrizio Lovati. These racers proudly display their country’s flag during the ceremonial run.

Both parents and a brother assist musher Melissa Owens as three volunteer veterinarians check her dogs for race suitability.

Mike and Melissa Owens are all smiles after veterinarians complete the check ups on her team and pronounce them fit.
Alaska

All are permanently identified with a microchip and this verified with each examination, preventing an illegal replacement. Only those dogs with normal results are allowed to compete. Like human athletes, the athlete dog has slightly different cardiac adaptations as a result of conditioning. Prior to the race all dogs must be vaccinated and dewormed.

The veterinarians are roughly 75 percent experienced and 25 percent rookies. The latter get specialized training the week prior to the race. All are volunteers, and some get their air travel covered by Alaska Airlines. However, winter protective gear, hotel, food and other expenses are up to the individual.

Once the race is underway, the veterinarians staff each of the checkpoints, leapfrogging as the racers pass, flying to a forward location. Each musher carries Team Medical Diaries (Vet Books) as part of their mandatory equipment, and these must be presented to the veterinarians at each checkpoint. These records provide each examining veterinarian with a complete picture of the dog’s health at prior examinations.

**The Iditarod XXXVII in 2009**

In early December the Iditarod XXXVII Committee (2009) announced 73 mushers and their teams. Melissa Owens’ (see accompanying article) name is again on the list, but now, at 19, she is listed as a veteran racer. She reports: “I loved my trip last year. I love working with my dogs and am really excited about the team this year. They are some really good athletes.”

Ed Stielstra’s name is back on the list, along with Tim Riley, a man from Hastings, Mich. Riley is another Michigan State University graduate who

Norwegian Kjetil Backen smiles as he passes by a group of well-wishers waving the Norwegian flag.
moved to Northern Michigan for work and to work with dogs. He will be running Stielstra's second team this year.

Then there is Timothy Hunt, 43, of Marquette. With his MSU doctorate in veterinary medicine, he has developed an interest in the race and is one of 17 rookies currently scheduled to run in 2009. He had done research on dog nutrition and works with Stielstra.

So, as the 2009 race approaches on March 7, you can support the Michigan racers and their teams, or cheer for the women in the race. It is always fun to watch the antics of the big-time racers. Since Kalamazoo doesn't get much news about the Iditarod from local media, sign up for daily updates at the Web site, www.iditarod.com. There, for nearly two weeks, you can transport yourself to a wild place and learn about the progress of these teams as they traverse a wild and exciting landscape.

Jason Mackey literally grew up mushing. His father and two older brothers are Iditarod champions and another older brother is also a veteran musher. Jason finished 33rd in 2008 while his brother, Lance, won the race for the second time.
Building for a Greener World

By Theresa Coty O’Neil

When talk about global climate change occurs, many people are quick to blame the emissions from large vehicles, but, as local architect Jim Nicolow points out, almost half of our emissions in the United States come from the building sector, most notably from electricity generation and heating.

Nicolow, director of Sustainable Development for the firm Lord, Aeck & Sargeant and a nationally recognized expert in his field, advocates a common-sense approach to decreasing emissions in our own homes.

“The most important piece is energy efficiency,” said Jim, known to his colleagues as “Mr. Green Jeans.” A lot of residential housing was designed when “energy was cheap” and by developers who did not occupy it. Therefore, basic common sense was often not the determining factor in housing design.

“If you don’t get the energy piece right,” Jim pointed out, “other stuff doesn’t matter as much. Everyone wants to stick on the latest, greatest, green thing. There’s a jump to the sexy technology.” However, he said, “the cheapest improvement is to tighten the building envelope.”

If the attic is underinsulated, add insulation. If the windows and doors are drafty, caulk. A home energy audit can help you identify opportunities for improvement. “The cheapest thing to do is to reduce what you’re actually using before you go to supplying it,” he said. “It will get you the most bang for your buck, but it’s not as sexy.”

As home improvements become necessary, as they did for him recently when his furnace needed replacing, he and his wife, Amy, chose the highest-efficiency dual-stage furnace with variable frequency drive to replace it. “We didn’t look for a project to create,” he said. “Greening up your home can be an incremental thing. If a light bulb burns out, get a compact fluorescent one.”

Jim laughs when he hears about 6,000-square-foot “green houses.” A fan of well-known architect Sarah Susanka, author of “The Not So Big House,” Jim encourages people to think about what they actually need, instead of going “for big.”

And at a time when the cost of electricity and natural gas are easily outpacing inflation, Jim adds that the positive side of this is that cost for green energy options is going to come down. In fact, federal home-energy grants have recently been extended to 2013 as part of the bailout package, he said.

Many of Jim’s clients, typically colleges and universities, are motivated to consider greener ways to build because of public relations and operating costs. “I don’t care why other people come to it,” he said. “I’m just glad they do. I’m doing it because I think it’s the right thing to do.”

He added that there’s currently a bottleneck in the residential green market because there aren’t yet enough developers and contractors to supply demand.

“What’s exciting for me personally,” said Jim, “is that sustainability is what I’ve wanted to focus on in my career, and in the last five years especially, things have taken off so that I’m able to do that exclusively.”

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Whiskey and Sherry and Ports, Oh My!

By Shawn and Terry Hagen

SOME RESTAURANTS simply give us too many options. Before we even look at the menu to decide if we want the Free Range Provini Ranch Beef Tenderloin or the Motto Farms Organic Chicken we are asked to select a cocktail. Even ordering beer has evolved into a difficult task, from “domestic or imported” to “lite, ultra, micro-brewed, iced, or with fruit.” Wine lists are an atlas of grapes from around the world. Whiskeys are single malts, bourbons are single batch — and what is the difference between sherry and port?

Terry: Whiskey — Scotch or bourbon — is liquor distilled from a fermented mash of grains (rye, barley, wheat, corn, etc.) and matured in wooden casks, usually for three years or more. Scotch whiskey takes its dry, somewhat smoky flavor from the barley malt that is cured with peat. Similar is Irish whiskey, but no peat is used — giving it a sweeter taste. American rye whiskey, aged in charred, new oak barrels, is made from a mash of at least 51 percent rye; other ingredients are usually corn and malted barley. Bourbon is an American whiskey made primarily from corn and named for Bourbon County, Ky. Canadian whiskey is blended multi-grain and usually lighter and smoother than other whiskey styles.

Shawn: For people who enjoy Scotch or bourbon, there are many high quality options, like single-malt Scotch, which must be an unblended whiskey made in only one distillery using only malted barley as the sole grain ingredient. A single barrel of bourbon has to be made from at least 51 percent corn. Single barrel comes from the barrels believed to contain the finest whiskey of each batch. When at their peak, they are taken from the warehouse and bottled one barrel at a time. Both options are almost always aged longer than the minimum three years and are intended to be served “neat” or with a splash of water — never mixed with cola.

Terry: We also have infusions — flavored liquor created when a spirit (e.g. vodka) is enhanced by one or more other ingredients. By definition, infusions do not contain added sugar; such beverages are called liqueurs. An infusion is sometimes referred to as schnapps, although the original schnapps of Central Europe are made differently. The most popular use of an infused liquor is the original “cosmopolitan” from the 1980s, which calls for citron vodka.

Shawn: At the end of the meal are more options. Port and sherry are both popular choices. These are examples of fortified wines, meaning that a neutral grape brandy has been added to the wine, raising the alcohol content.

Terry: The difference is when the brandy is added. It is added to port during fermentation, killing the yeast and stopping fermentation, which is why port is relatively sweet. With sherry, the brandy is added after fermentation, making them relatively dry.

Terry: Beer and wine ordering are two other stories entirely.  

*Pleasin’ the Palate*  

Shawn & Terry Hagen
Bravo! Restaurant and Café
Guess who?
CLUES

• This former cheese-head is much more of a “read-head” these days.

• Like the ancient philosophers, our Guess Who has vast amounts of information to share with everyone.

• This Guess Who has been “merry” her whole life.

ANSWER ON PAGE 54.

Photography by John Gilroy.

Costume and makeup by Tony Gerard, The Timid Rabbit Costume Shop.
Performing Arts

Plays

“The Baker’s Wife” — A musical fable of life and love in southern France. Feb. 6, 7, 13, 14, 8 p.m., Feb. 5, 7:30 p.m., Feb. 8 & 15, 2 p.m. Parish Theatre, 426 S. Park St. 343-1313.

“Rain: The Beatles Experience” — These four musicians look and sound like the Beatles and they cover them from Liverpool to the late ’60s. Feb. 14, 8 p.m. Miller Auditorium, WMU. 387-2300.

“The Magic Flute” — Mozart’s delightful opera presented by the WMU School of Music. Feb. 20 & 21, 8 p.m. Miller Auditorium. WMU. 387-2300.

Musicals & Opera

“Love’s Labour’s Lost” — Shakespeare’s comedy about the pursuit of love. Feb. 13, 20, 21, 27 & 28, 8 p.m., Feb. 15, 2 p.m. Farmers Alley Theatre, 211 Farmers Alley. 342-2727.

“The Affections of May” — This comedy will touch your heart and your funnybone. Feb. 27, 28, Mar. 6, 7, 8 p.m.. Whole Art Theatre, 246 N. Kalamazoo Mall. 345-7759.


Symphony

“Valentine Hearts” — A KSO Pops concert will present vocalist Kathy Wagner performing the music of romance. Feb. 14, 8 p.m. Chenery Auditorium, 714 S. Westnedge Ave. 349-7759.

“Marimba Magic” — Guest performer Makoto Nakura will perform Jalbert’s Marimba Concerto with the KSO under the baton of guest conductor Steven Smith. Feb. 27, 8 p.m. Miller Auditorium, WMU. 349-7759.

Chamber, Jazz, Orchestra & Instrumental

“Winter Evening” — The Burdick-Thorne Quartet and others perform including a Piano Quintet with Raymond Harvey on piano. Feb. 6 & 7, 8 p.m. Epic Center Theatre, 359 S. Kalamazoo Mall. 349-7759.


Faculty Recital — School of Music faculty member Yu-Lien The will perform a piano recital. Feb. 8, 5 p.m. Dalton Center Recital Hall, WMU. 387-4667.

Western Winds — The faculty and graduate-student ensemble from WMU will perform under the baton of Robert Sprading. Feb. 18, 8:15 p.m. Dalton Center Recital Hall, WMU. 387-4667.

“Scottish Garnish” — The Kalamazo Concert Band led by Dr. Thomas G. Evans will perform. Feb. 21, 7:30 p.m. Miller Auditorium, WMU. 806-6597.

University Symphonic Band — A free concert by WMU’s Symphonic Band. Feb. 22, 3 p.m. Miller Auditorium, WMU. 387-4667.

Student Chamber Ensembles — Ensembles from the WMU University Symphony Orchestra will perform. Feb. 23, 8:15 p.m. Dalton Center Recital Hall, WMU. 387-4667.

University Concert Band — A free concert by this WMU group under the direction of John A. Lychner. Feb. 24, 8:15 p.m. Miller Auditorium, WMU. 387-4667.

Stulberg International String Competition — Come hear the concert stars of the future Mar. 7, semi-finals 9 a.m.—4 p.m.; finals 8 p.m. Dalton Center Recital Hall, WMU. Free admission. 343-2776.

Vocal

Gold Company Celebrates Motown and Beyond — WMU’s award-winning jazz vocal group pays tribute to the Motown sound. Feb. 7, 2 & 8 p.m. Miller Auditorium, WMU. 387-2300.

Josh White, Jr. — The New Vic presents this legendary singer/songwriter in concert. Feb. 7, 8:30 p.m. New Vic Theatre, 134 E. Vine St. 381-3328.

High School Choral Festival — Timothy Takach of Cantus works with Southwest Michigan high school choirs and conducts them in a mass choir production as part of
the Kalamazoo Bach Festival educational outreach. Feb. 11 & 12, 9 a.m.–1:30 p.m., Light Fine Arts Building, Kalamazoo College. 337-7407.

**Western’s Men’s Ensemble** — A free program from this WMU vocal group under the direction of Ken Prewitt. Feb. 26, 8:15 p.m. Dalton Center Recital Hall, WMU. 387-4667.

**Miscellaneous**

**All Ears Theatre** — Step back into radio history through these free, live productions at First Baptist Church, 315 W. Michigan Ave., 6 p.m. “Lost in Kazoo,” Feb. 7, “Beware the Spoken Word,” Feb. 21. 342-5059.

**Visual Arts**

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


**Frostic Video and Sound Art Series** — An exhibition titled “44 Meaningful Sounds” by Patrick Craig Manning will be shown. It derives its name from the number of meaningful sounds (or phonemes) in the English (American) language. Feb. 11–Mar. 7.

**Kalamazoo Institute of Arts 349-7775**

**Young Artists of Kalamazoo County** — See thousands of works of art created by local artists in Kindergarten through 8th grade in one of the KIA’s most popular exhibitions. Feb. 21–Mar. 22.

**2009 West Michigan Area Show** — One of the area’s largest juried shows, this annual exhibition presents examples of the best art produced in a 14-county region of West Michigan. This year’s guest juror is photographer Larry Fink, whose work has appeared in The New York Times, Art in America, Vogue, Rolling Stone and The New Yorker. Feb. 28–Apr. 26.


**Park Trades Center 345-3311**

**Saniwax Gallery** — Western Michigan University BFA and MFA Student Exhibition begins with an opening reception on Feb. 6, 5–9 p.m., during the Art Hop.

**Miscellaneous**

**Art Hop** — View the works of local artists. Local venues/galleries in downtown Kalamazoo. Feb. 6, 5 p.m. 342-5059.

**Literary Events**

**Kalamazoo Public Library 553-7809**

**Women’s Writing Group: Family Reunions** — Jacque Eatmon will lead a Talking Circle to help participants share their family traits, values, health, and childhood stories. Bring a valued keepsake along and learn how to pass family history to younger generations. Feb. 11, 6 p.m., Powell Branch Library, 1000 W. Paterson St.

**Mississippi Freedom Riders** — Author/photographer Eric Etheridge will share his new book, “Breach of Peace,” a memoir of those who rode interstate buses into the segregated South. Miller Green, one of the 1961 Freedom Riders who inspired his book, will be with Etheridge. Feb. 24, 6:30 p.m., Main Library, 315 S Rose St.

(Continued on page 52)
Roller Derby

ETTY PAGE HAIRCUTS, psychedelic-striped knee socks, ultra-short dresses, fishnet tights ... Is it 1970-something at the disco? A 1980s rock concert? No, it’s roller derby, courtesy of the Killamazoo Derby Darlins!

The Darlins opened their first season of play this past June in a blur of black and pink, drawing nearly 700 spectators to Wings Stadium for the action-packed game. Not bad for a sport that most people don’t even realize exists!

Usually linked with spectacles such as Roller Games of the 1970s, roller derby has a much longer and more noteworthy history. The all-female game actually came into existence in the 1930s, spinning off from multi-day rollerskating races, which began as far back as 1885.

Roller derby has come in and out of style several times in the past half century, and it’s making a definite comeback now, both with people who remember it from their youth, and with a new generation of fans. “We try to get people who are young excited about it,” Noam Stompsky, a member of the Killamazoo Derby Darlins, says. “But there are also all these people who were fans back when it was popular before.”

Indeed, people of all ages enjoyed the opening game at Wings, which was made fun and light-hearted by the colorful clothes and retro monikers, part of the current revival of the sport. Another
If you’ve never been to a roller derby bout, make time to enjoy the sport locally at Wings Stadium. It’s a jammin’ good time!

Member of the team, who calls herself Delilah Danger, explains her “derby name” as a kind of alter ego. “I work in customer service, so I have to smile all day long, and Delilah Danger is kind of a cocky, snobby, I’ll-bite-your-face-off kind of girl.”

As for other players, whose ages range from their teens to the 40s, Delilah Danger says, “We have a girl whose name is Letha Venom, and Letha was her grandmother’s name. Charisnakov is actually a play on her own name: Her name is Charissa, and a Kalashnikov is a Russian gun (the AK-47). We (also) have a Beverly Hells.”

When it comes to the funky outfits, Delilah Danger says, “We just kind of like to make our game crazy and fun, as well as competitive.”

Although the Killamazoo Derby Darlins just began play this past year, they are a revamped team from the former Kalamazoo Kamikazes, who came together in 2006. Says Lily St. Smear, a captain and founding member of the team, “There was a group of five of us that basically just got together. We had friends that were on different teams, the Grand Rapids team, Detroit team, and so we thought that maybe we would just start a team of our own.”

They began practice and games at RollerWorld on Stadium Drive, though some on the newly formed team, like Noam Stompsky, had a bit of a rocky beginning. “When I started, I was lucky enough that it was early and there weren’t a lot of girls on the team, so there weren’t tryouts, because there was no way in hell I would’ve made the team! I’m from the Upper Peninsula so you’d think I’d know how to skate, but I don’t. I’m like the only person from the U.P. who can’t skate!”

So what prompted her to join the team? “I had just finished graduate school, and I was really out of shape, so I was looking for something where I could be active, and I also thought that roller derby would help me be more assertive.”

Joining the team was different for Delilah Danger, who saw a flier in a tattoo shop for the league. “I went to check them out and fell in love day one,” she says.

“It’s funny because once you go to one game, pretty much everybody returns,” Lily St. Smear says. “You want to keep coming back, so we have a really large fan base, and all the girls on the team have their personalities along with their names, and everybody kind of has their own little fan base of people who come to watch them.” The team played at RollerWorld for two years, but the venue soon proved too small for the crowd drawn by the intense action of the sport.

And roller derby is, indeed, a sport. Each game consists of two periods of 30 minutes each, with referees bearing names like “Eduardo Dinero,” “Handso Low,” and “Trickless Magician,” judging the game play. Trickless Magician, the Derby Darlins’ head referee, trains other refs and coordinates the bouts.

“A lot of refs come from the surrounding areas. We get refs from Grand Rapids, anywhere from Illinois or Ohio, who want to come and volunteer to ref the games,” Lily St. Smear says. “The biggest job to being a ref is that you have to learn the rules to get started out.”

Though the rules are quite complex, the basic idea is that five women from each team are on the track at a time during two-minute jams. During this time, the scorer, or jammer, has to lap the other skaters in order to win her team points. The other skaters, known as the pack, consist of blockers, who try to stop the opposite team’s jammer from scoring, and pivots, who set the pace of the pack.

“You just kind of naturally pick a position that you like that works best and you’re good at,” Delilah Danger says, adding that the natural position for her is pivot.

Lily St. Smear, who plays jammer, says that skaters in her position tend to
be not only the fastest skaters, but those with the most endurance. “It also helps if you’re smaller because you can really duck and weave, and a lot of the girls will do whips and pushes,” says Lily, who measures in at 5 feet 3 inches.

“Sometimes if you’re a really solid type of girl, the Pack is a little bit better because you can administer some pretty strong hits if you need to. One of the owners of the team and also our coach, her name is Javelin, she’s probably the best player on the team. She’s a brick house; you can’t stop her. So in the pack, she’s a heavy, but as a jammer, she’ll just barrel right through.”

During the course of the bout, fouls such as elbowing, tripping, and pushing from behind are called by the referees. Noam stompsky says that a good rule of thumb is that “for the legal blocking zone we can block them anywhere from our knees to our shoulders, but we can’t use our elbows, and we can’t use our fists, and we can’t hit anywhere below the knee because that’s considered tripping.”

Even with these rules in place, though, the game can get rough. “It’s a pretty vicious sport,” Delilah Danger says. “We’ve had some broken bones, some crazy goings on. I’ve had two concussions, and I’ve gotten nerve damage on my left leg from when I bruised my tibia.”

Such injuries are common, as Lily St. Smear can attest to, having once gotten a broken nose. “It was actually Delilah Danger who broke it,” she says with a laugh. “It was random; my face was in the wrong spot at the wrong time.”

“I’ve been lucky enough not to have gotten seriously injured,” Noam Stompsky says. “In the beginning, I wasn’t very steady on my feet so I was always falling, but the good thing is, I got really good at falling. I can take a really hard-hit fall so I don’t seriously hurt myself because I fall all the time!”

Of course, derby girls wear a multitude of protective equipment, including knee pads, elbow pads, wrist guards, helmets, mouth guards, and sometimes even crash pants (like bike shorts with padding on the sides and tail-bone area). Roller derby is not a cheap sport, but the cost of these items depends on each individual player.

“You can buy $10 knee pads from Meijer, or you can buy $60 knee pads online,” Delilah Danger says, though knee pads are a small expense compared to other equipment, such as skates. Lily St. Smear’s new custom skates, for example, cost nearly $500. “I didn’t get a specific pair of skates. I got a boot that I wanted, a plate that I wanted, bearings that I wanted, and wheels that I wanted, and I created my own skate.”

Luckily, ticket purchases from home games go a long way to cover expenses like travel, and some community members choose to donate products or services. “We have different levels of sponsorship, all the way from ‘friends of’ up to ‘platinum,’ depending on the amount you give, and they get in return a certain amount of tickets or T-shirts or advertising space in the program,” Lily St. Smear says.

The Killamazoo Derby Darlins also love to give back to the community, participating in events such as the Warm Kids Project, which donates hats and boots to underprivileged children, and Light the Night, a walk to raise money.
Delilah Danger
#187
Aka: Tiffany Middleton
Age: 23
Position: Pivot
Tagline: Putting the “fun” in funeral!
A mild-mannered barista by day, Delilah tears up the track as a member of the Killamazoo Derby Darlins.

Noam Stompsky
#1984
Aka: Sally Andersen
Age: 29
Position: Blocker
Namesake: Noam Chomsky, linguist and political activist.
As a speech pathologist at a local public school, Noam Stompsky doesn’t get much opportunity to talk about her all-encompassing hobby at work, but she’s as devoted to roller derby as they come.

Lily St. Smear
#32-20
Aka: Michele Sullivan
Age: 33
Position: Jammer
Namesake: Lili St. Cyr, French-Canadian burlesque dancer.
A single mother of two boys, Lily St. Smear works at Salon Honoré, formerly the Dancing Crane Salon. She is a founding member of the Killamazoo Derby Darlins, and considers roller derby “a way of life.”
Roller Derby

for lymphoma research. They also hold afterparties at a nearby bar, skate in the Do-Dah Parade, and held a “zombie prom” one year for Halloween.

Big things are in the works for the Derby Darlins this coming season in the guise of the WFTDA—the Women’s Flat Track Derby Association. The team is not currently under the WFTDA, the national organization for the sport, but they are now in the application process.

“That, for us, is really going to open a lot of opportunities because even though we don’t need to be part of that league in order to play games, if we are, then we can get into a lot more tournaments,” Noam Stompsky says. “Tournaments are sponsored by the league. And if we ever get good enough, we can go to the regional games, or the nationals.”

The Derby Darlins play year-round and are currently in their travel season, making trips as distant as Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., for their bouts. They won’t play on their home turf until spring due to the restraints of their venue, namely that it is primarily a hockey rink. “We can’t skate on ice,” Delilah Danger points out.

The Killamazoo Derby Darlins’ home season begins this upcoming year at Wings Stadium in June against the Chicago Outfit. Tickets will be available at the Wings Stadium box office for preorder or can be purchased the night of the game. To learn more about them, visit killamazooderbydarlins.com.

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March 1 | 3 p.m. | $15 – $20

Fred Garbo Inflatable Theater Co. stars multi-talented entertainer Fred Garbo and Brazilian ballerina Daelima Santos. This exquisite duo has performed around the world, transcending barriers of age and language in a seamless program that includes physical comedy, dance, juggling, and most importantly, their own creative inventions that INFLATE! Audiences are mesmerized by the artistic imagery and creative foolishness as they perform fast-paced, energetic, clever theatrical pieces in a universally engaging and family friendly show.

March 21 | 2 p.m. | $15 – $25

Flat Stanley puts himself in a big envelope and travels the world—as a human letter! In a whirlwind musical travelogue, Stanley—the ultimate pen pal—scours the globe for a solution to his problem. And wherever Stanley goes, he meets new friends, learns about different cultures and closes in on his goal of being a three-dimensional boy once more.
When life took a turn for the worse for a woman of the 1800s, what was she to do?

If Annie Nelles had been in a worse predicament during her short but miserable life she could not remember when. True, heretofores her lot “had been one constant scene of clouds and darkness, with only here and there a ray of sunshine, which served but to make darkness, both preceding and following it, more dense, impenetrable and frightful.” But now, penniless in Detroit and masquerading as a young widow, of which the recent Civil War had produced so many, she labored long hours as a housekeeper at wages of a paltry $2 a week.

The constant brooding over her fate had brought on a bout of depression, which deepened into physical illness. She took to her bed from which “it was thought for some time she would never rise.” During the sickness she raved feverishly about her previous life, the details of which she had shamefully hidden from her kindly employers. She babbled of her birth in 1837, daughter of a wealthy planter near Atlanta, Ga. Alas, that brief, happy childhood would soon fade. Her father died in 1843, and by the time she was 13 her mother and three siblings lay in graves beside his.

The benevolent uncle and aunt who took her in died soon after. The shock of that unrelenting mortality resulted in “brain fever,” and for 11 weeks she languished in a coma. Had not her brother periodically held a mirror to her nostrils to prove she still breathed, she would have been buried alive.

On her 17th birthday she married Eugene Giles, a handsome young widower introduced to her by the man appointed her guardian. After their first child died in infancy, Giles took to the bottle and during drunken jags gambled away all their possessions. As if that were not enough, shortly thereafter came a knock on the door to reveal Giles’ first wife whom he had deserted some eight years before.

Annie fled the bigamist, settling in Detroit where she ran a boarding house. Two years later when she spotted Giles walking the streets of Detroit, she quickly packed up and boarded the first train for Chicago. There she managed another boarding house. Some time later she was wooed by one of her boarders, a seemingly fine young man. She married Frank Ford in 1866 and enjoyed a brief period of matrimonial bliss. That is until she found a series of love letters tucked in a jacket Ford had left on a chair, shadowed him and witnessed his assignation with a “woman of the night.” Annie gulped a vial of laudanum, and only the skill of a pair of physicians working on her all night saved the distraught woman from a successful suicide.

When her health had been restored, her husband, now unmasked as the brute he was, connived a complete separation through cruel treatment. Annie left Chicago with a trunk and a measly $15 Ford doled out to her. She tarried briefly in Niles where she worked as a housekeeper. But she found the haughty contempt of her employer intolerable. Returning to Detroit, she secured another housekeeping position, this time with a decent and considerate family. After Annie had recovered from her latest sickness, during which she had deliriously blurted out her many misfortunes, the sympathetic family consoled her on how she might recoup her life.

Obviously, working as a maid at $2 a week was not the answer. And it was an
era when most of the other occupations thought suitable for women—seamstress, laundress, cook, teacher, etc.—offered little better financial rewards. But there was one opportunity, if a woman possessed sufficient talent, that might prove otherwise. It was the father of the household who suggested to Annie that she became a “book agent.”

The period after the Civil War through the Gay Nineties emerged as the golden age of door-to-door book selling, thanks in part to a ready supply of ex-soldiers, many without limbs, hungry to make a living as best they could. In addition to salesmen proudly sporting Grand Army of the Republic badges, aging clergymen, spinsters and widows, schoolteachers in the summertime and college students swelled the ranks of the thousands knocking on doors while armed with thin prospectuses containing samples of the illustrations, text and other features of the thick volumes yet to be published. These itinerant sales people cajoled householders into signing on the dotted line of the blank pages, conveniently provided at the rear of each prospectus, after choosing the binding they preferred; garishly gilded cloth, half leather or full Morocco, ranging from $2.50–$10.00 or more, 25 to 30 times the value in modern terms. If sales were sufficient to warrant publishing the works, weeks later the “canvasser” would deliver the books and collect payment.

Gen. Ulysses S. Grant’s memoirs published in two volumes by Mark Twain’s Charles L. Webster Company in 1885 and sold exclusively by wandering agents achieved a press run of 350,000 sets. On the other hand, Warner, Beers & Co.’s Atlas of Berrien County projected in 1885 and James L. Smith’s History of Michigan slated to appear in Muskegon in 1909 exist only as prospectuses. Not enough patrons signed up to make publication a reality.

By the early 1870s the New York Tribune declared “there is not a crossroad in any part of the country that is not at some time visited by the book agent.” Publishers in Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis and other eastern and Midwestern cities broadcast agents by the hundreds into the hinterlands. But the many firms in Hartford, Conn., rendered that city the center of the subscription publishing industry. The J.B. Burr and Hyde Company, headquartered

The prospectus for Parson’s Hand Book published in Battle Creek in 1882 included samples of the various bindings available—pebbled cloth for $4.00 and sheep leather for $5.00.
Kalamazoo Valley Museum presents
Feb/March Events For Adults

Music At The Museum
Thursdays, 7:30 pm, $5
Great music the way it should be—eclectic and performed live in a fine acoustic listening room!
2/5 - Louie and Guest
Join guitarist, singer songwriter, Louie Miranda from New York City for an evening of Mood Music.
3/5 - Whiskey Before Breakfast
Whiskey Before Breakfast performs Irish traditional dance music: jigs, reels, hornpipes and all manner of toe-tapping tunes and songs.

Film Movement Series
Thursdays, 7:30 pm, $3
This is your chance to view award-winning foreign cinema on the big screen.
2/19 - The Trap
(Serbia/Germany/Hungry) 115 min
3/19 - In Love We Trust (China) 115 min

Free Sunday Documentaries
Sundays, 1:30 pm
2/15 - Warning By the Devil’s Fire: A Film By Charles Burnett
3/15 - Red, White, and Blues: A Film by Mike Figgis

Motown Movies Film Series
Thursdays, 7:30 pm, $3
2/12 - Contact the museum for titles and tickets

4th Annual Fretboard Festival
A celebration of Kalamazoo’s stringed-instrument legacy and musical heritage. Free workshops and performances.
3/28 - 10-5 pm
3/29 - 1-5 pm
More details at www.kalamazoomuseum.org

An 1890s trade card depicts a successful book agent at work.

Massie

at 114 Asylum St. in Hartford, published a long list of titles popular in the 1870s, including: “Officer Geo S. McWatters’ Knots Untied”; or “Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Life of American Detectives”; P.T. Barnum’s “Struggles and Triumphs”; Mathew Hale Smith’s “Twenty Years Among the Bulls and Bears of Wall Street”; and Mrs. Stephen M. Griswold’s “A Woman’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land.” Burr and Hyde proudly described how it conducted business:

“The method we adopt of selling books exclusively by canvassing agent is an established, legitimate and reputable branch of the book trade, and is the medium through which the most popular books have been and are circulated. Through its agency, many of the most reliable, instructive and entertaining books published for the past ten years or more have reached the public, and it is generally conceded that it will ultimately supersede the book stores as a means of giving circulation to first-class books of a standard character.”

If Burr and Hyde seemed somewhat defensive in their testimonial, there was good reason. The thousands of agents that inundated the countryside had begun to take on the character of nuisances. Charles B. Lewis, a humorous Detroit Free Press writer of the 1870s, described his experiences fending off swarms of book agents:

“He or she will call on you to sell you this book. He may be a pale-faced young man, standing on the verge of the grave, as it were, or she may be an interesting young lady with freckles on her nose and a forlorn look.

“Do not be deceived. They will have a deceptive story at their tongue’s end, and as they corner you they will get off something like this:

“Let me put your name down for this book—best book published for years—selling like hot cakes—first edition exhausted in 24 minutes—author known all over the country—orders being received from China, Japan, Madagascar and the Cape of Good Hope—sold only by subscription—write it right there on that line.’

“Book agents will stick to their game like a burr to a boy’s heel … Book agents have worn holes in my front door steps; they have unhinged my gate; they have aroused me from sleep, and have...
trailed me up and down and hung to me until I could offer no further objections.

The persistence of book salesmen moved the editor of the Grand Rapids Daily Times to dash off an angry column in 1874:

“The number of book agents is rapidly on the increase in the city and forms one colossal nuisance of the most unmitigated character. They are not content with pestering business men and annoying the people of ‘down town’ but creep up into the resident districts, infest private houses, waylay honest citizens and almost torment the lives out of defenseless housekeepers. If the city authorities have no power to remove the mischief then let readers take the law into their own hands, buy an ugly dog, and ‘sic’ him on first occasion.”

Despite a growing reluctance to tolerate the hordes of book canvassers plying their trade, Mrs. M.L. Rayne, Detroit authoress of
the popular tome, “What Can A Woman Do,” published in her hometown in 1883, saw no reason why respectable women, single or married, should not take up the profession. She wrote:

“It is doubtful if there is any work more especially suited to the taste and capacity of a bright, energetic woman, with a good fund of common sense about her, than the sale of subscription books throughout the country ... There is nothing in the work to be ashamed of ... Some of these agents make as much as $2,000 a year.

“The true lady will compel every man into whose office or store she enters, to treat her as he would wish his own mother or sister to be treated at the hands of other men. She has a right to be heard; has just as good a right to demand a market for her goods as he has for his, and both parties must approach each other on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance.

“It is a pleasant image—a dignified matron expostulating on the merits of a good book before a respectful businessman.”

And it may well have happened that way, sometimes. But for all the “wives and widows of lawyers, doctors, statesmen and army officers” whom Rayne assured her readers formed the bulk of lady book canvassers, there were numerous pathetic examples of women forced into the business because of heartfelt need.

Witness an 1892 letter from Mrs. J. Honsberger of Charlotte to Laban D. Emery, who distributed alcohol and narcotics-laden elixirs from his hotel room on Kalamazoo’s North Burdick Street:

“Enclosed please find $2.25 for 4 bottles of bitters and 2 cough medicines.
I am not able to buy more at present for Mr. Honsberger has not been able to work for one year and I am obliged to canvas for a living. I have been working with books and since Christmas have been sick with La Grippe so if your medicine braces me up again I shall sell more.”

Quack Emery disappeared from the Kalamazoo City Directory in 1896. Whatever happened to poor Mrs. Honsberger and her invalid husband remains an unanswered question.

For Annie Nelles, we can record a more satisfying conclusion. The seed planted in her mind by that kindly employer—to attempt to sell books—spurred her to answer the following newspaper advertisement in 1866:

“Wanted, agents, both ladies and gentlemen, to canvass for ‘Tried and True,’ or Love and Loyalty; a new book destined to have an immense sale. Apply to W. J. Holland, 38 Lombard Block, Chicago.”

Early the next morning found Annie knocking at the Lombard Block office. She talked her way into being assigned the rights to sell the novel, “a romance of the Great Rebellion,” in Peoria County, Ill. Armed with a prospectus and wicker basket, she sold 40 copies at $2.75 each during her first week’s work,—a profit for her of $40.00.

Naturally, her climb up the ladder of success varied from day to day. Sometimes scoring a sale was like pulling teeth, her own, as it turned out. A skinflint Peoria dentist only ordered a copy of the novel for his wife by yanking a pair of the agent’s teeth as payment. But Annie was on her way, eventually securing exclusive sales rights for northern Indiana and the southern tier of Michigan counties. In addition to “Tried and True,” she hawked the “Life of Lincoln,” E. A. Pollard’s “The Lost Cause,” a history of the Civil War from a southern perspective, “The Children’s Album,” “The Home Circle,” and the “General History of Freemasonry in Europe,” a volume nearly irresistible to ambitious lawyers, politicians and businessmen in an era when membership in the Masonic order was sine qua non.

In 1867 Annie published an account of her own career, “The Life of a Book Agent.” Other novels and collections of short stories would follow. By 1892 her autobiography had gone through five editions (and included details such as those presented at the beginning of this article).

The final chapter of Annie’s story finds her comfortably ensconced in “a pleasant mansion in the midst of a beautiful grove, two and half miles from the city of Lexington, Ky.,” purchased with the proceeds of her success in banging on doors with subscription book in hand.

Detroit newspaper humorist Charles B. Lewis included a cut of a book agent attempting to sell to a tailor.
As a professor of philosophy, Shirley Bach has devoted her life to exploring the answers to some of life’s most difficult questions.

Exploring the World of Bioethics
By Robert M. Weir

OF THE MANY ways to explore, Shirley Bach has tried several: world travel, crafts, culinary arts, philosophical inquiry, curriculum development and teaching at the university level. But the deepest and most profound, the focus of her professional life, is that of bioethics—exploring new frontiers of human research and clinical patient care.

Shirley is professor of philosophy, emerita, at Western Michigan University. She says she’s retired, but you wouldn’t know it. She still serves on the board of Western’s Center for the Study of Ethics in Society. She still teaches two classes through Michigan State University’s Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies (KCMS). She still serves on the hospital ethics committees at Bronson Methodist Hospital and Borgess Medical Center. And she still is a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the West Michigan Cancer Center for which she reviews proposed human research protocols.

“As hospitals, universities, and medical centers that conduct research on living human beings must have their studies reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board prior to any patient being invited to participate in the project,” she explains. “In order to give their ‘informed consent,’ participants must be provided with a reasonable assessment of benefits and risks.”

To sit on an IRB is to serve with people of diverse skills, educational backgrounds and perspectives, all of whom are savvy of medical protocols and institutional and federal guidelines. The Cancer Center’s IRB consists of the organization’s chair (who is also a physician), nurses, a pharmacist, and Shirley.

Although guidelines define and guard the health, rights, and welfare of study participants, Shirley also likes to pose a few simple, ethical questions. “If I, as a researcher, would not take part in my own study, is it fair to involve somebody else? If I can’t get a medical student or a bank officer to take part in the study, then how can I ask the disadvantaged?”

Regulation of human research came to the forefront of American consciousness in the 1970s with the work of the President’s Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research. That commission was responding to a public outcry for human rights protection as a result of the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study of the 1930s through 1960s, which involved African-American men, and the Willowbrook Study of the early 1960s in which some institutionally housed, mentally handicapped children were deliberately infected with the hepatitis virus in order to search for a vaccine for the disease.

In 1979, the commission issued its “Belmont Report,” which provided fundamental ethical principles for the protection of individuals in research. “That’s about when I got interested in medical ethics,” Shirley claims. She was, then, chair of Western Michigan University’s Human Subjects IRB. She describes that as a time when: “Some researchers were reluctant to believe that social science research fell under the same guidelines as medical research.”

Prior to that, Shirley’s education and experience had been liberal arts and science.

Shirley was born in Williston Park, N.Y., on Long Island. She attended Queens College, then a small liberal-arts school, and obtained her doctorate in chemistry from the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1957. She and her husband, Michael, and two sons, David and Mark, moved to Kalamazoo from West Virginia in 1961, he to take a job in biochemistry research at The Upjohn Company and she, wanting to teach, to
that formality didn’t stop her from teaching. After 37 years on the faculty, but in the philosophy department.

Several bioethics and health care ethics courses were developed or co-developed and taught in the 1990s. In the following summer, she attended a workshop on ethical studies in medicine. During a subsequent summer, she traveled to Berkeley, Calif., to attend a workshop on the social biology of medicine. During the first sabbatical, she says, “Some people were becoming wary of what was going on in genetics. I had studied genetics and philosophy, so I wanted to understand what the brouhaha was about.”

In the following summer, she traveled to Berkeley, Calif., to attend a workshop on ethics in medicine. During a subsequent summer, she attended a workshop on clinical medical ethics at Dartmouth Medical School. “One thing led to another,” she says, “and that’s when I started developing and teaching medical ethics courses for Western.” She was the first person to do so.

Her first course was called Issues in Medical Ethics. During the 1990s, she taught courses in bioethics and health care ethics courses for the WMU Honors College and the philosophy department.

Shirley retired from Western in 1998. After 37 years on the faculty, but that formality didn’t stop her from teaching for another three years in the Honors College.

“No, what I’m teaching now,” she says with a smiling countenance that shows she is able to bring a lightheartedness to her profession, while at the same time taking the subject very seriously.

The course Shirley teaches helps resident students identify, analyze, and resolve ethical problems regarding patient care and professional relationships with colleagues and institutions. Each week’s lecture contains a Calvin & Hobbes cartoon, which, Shirley says with a grin, always portrays wisdom, usually delivered by Hobbes, but which she doesn’t try to explain.

Throughout their careers, Shirley and Michael have had the opportunity to travel abroad on professional sabbaticals and personal exploratory trips, which has helped ease the tension associated with such serious professions. The first of these was to Sweden in 1986–87, where Michael did biochemical and immunological research on asthma and allergies and she conducted a medical ethics project about the risks and benefits of an innovative research project on pancreas transplants. At night for relaxation, Shirley learned to weave, and when the academic year was over, she says, “My husband brought home a Saab, and I brought home a loom.”

As an extension of this travel, Shirley and Michael belonged to a small international group of allergy researchers that met about every two years to share ideas. The meetings were often held on an island because, as Shirley explains, “They didn’t want you to go to plays and concerts and museums, so they met where you would agree to do things together.” Through this club, Shirley and Michael have been to such interesting places as Capri, Martinique, Madeira, Konstanz, Goteborg, and Corfu.

Always making the most of places she has gone, Shirley has studied cooking in Italy, knitting in Sweden and has been on expeditions to Svalbard, which is north of Norway, and to Greenland and Antarctica.

“Cold climates and glaciers fascinate me,” she says, adding that she also enjoys polar bears and penguins. “It’s fascinating to go to Antarctica where there are many different kinds of penguins and I can sit there and watch and photograph them,” she adds.

Speaking at a Kalamazoo Torch Club meeting, Shirley compared and contrasted South Pole explorer Ernest Shackleton (1874–1922) with cancer researcher Judah Folkman (1933–2008). In her talk, she praised Shackleton’s courage and fortitude “at the end of the earth” as he attempted to reach the South Pole and cross the Antarctic as well as Folkman’s perseverance to explore “the center of the cell” and attain credibility for a cancer treatment that took 30 years to gain the acceptance of his peers.

Although having chosen not to explore politics, Shirley did accept an invitation to serve on a Michigan commission that studied and made recommendations to Gov. John Engler and the Michigan legislature about ethical issues of the Human Genome Project in the late 1990s.

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Bach

living room and surrounded by crafts and art in various forms, Michael's framed photographs from global adventures, shelves and shelves of large-format books with adventuresome titles, and a wall hanging that she wove, Shirley becomes — what else? — philosophical.

“A reasonable level of good health is necessary to enjoy all the other goods of life,” she ponders. “We all need access to healthcare. And access to healthcare seems to come out of a concern for the ethical principles we teach: respect for persons, beneficence and nonmaleficence, and justice and fairness. If I had my way, if I were smart enough, I would figure out a number of changes.” She pauses again. “But that's as far as I go, and I leave it to the politicians to figure out how to do it.”

She ponders similarly about the planet, noting “our drastically changing climate.” She considers the situation too broad for her scope. She considers adopting a puppy or a mature dog. “I can’t get into the global and solve the big major problems, but I can do something little within my abilities.”

And, yet, she has accomplished much. Shirley Bach has explored and defined her Ethical Self. She is a role model, admired by her peers, for those who would do likewise.

*A break from the seriousness of medical ethics took Shirley Bach to Italy where she learned to make ricotta-filled squash blossoms.*

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Trauma Care at the Beginning of Life

TRAUMA CARE for a medically challenged newborn is carried out in a surrealistic setting in which fragile infants, often born prematurely, are placed in a supremely high-tech, cost-intensive environment. There, nurses proxy for parents 24/7, watching each tiny human being, lying in a temperature-controlled incubator, illumined by dimmed lights amid the low-volume hum of machinery.

Normal human gestation is 38 to 40 weeks, and a child born at only 22 to 23 weeks of gestation is technically still an embryo whose lungs are not sufficiently developed to breathe air, noted Robin Pierucci, M.D., a panelist who spoke on beginning of life issues at the Healthcare Allocation and Ethics conference.

An infant born at 23 weeks has only a 10 percent chance of survival; at 24 weeks, 65 percent; and at 25 weeks, 80 percent. But the chances of survival decrease if there is an infection, multiple births, or the infant is small for its gestational age, she said.

The complications of medically challenged birth are compounded when parents, who are often young, are asked to make quick, emotional decisions usually after a crisis delivery. Communications are further hampered when the mother is discharged from the hospital after three or four days but the child remains in the neonatal intensive care unit for many weeks or months.

“It’s a heartbreaking reality that some parents will not take home a healthy baby,” adds Pierucci.

So, if you were a neonatal physician, what would you do?

“I have cared for kids beyond the point I can save them to give the family time to catch up with the reality of the situation and to make sure I know I did all I could to save the infant,” Pierucci says.

And, while nurses and physicians in NICU experience emotional loss when a newborn succumbs to insurmountable challenges, they also glow with relief and accomplishment when an infant gains sufficient strength and maturity to graduate from life-support systems to go home to the care of parents and family.
Making Decisions on Life and Death

YOU’RE A NURSE or doctor in a major local hospital. Your station is the emergency room. Outside, you hear the wail of an ambulance siren. EMTs rush in, pushing a gurney. “No ID,” one says. A John Doe.


“No.” And, surely, no advance medical directive.

What do you do?

Provide treatment and care, of course. But what kind? And how much?

All-out life support or comfort measures or something in between?

“This is a recurring theme in patient care,” said Shirley Bach, Ph.D., professor of philosophy, emerita, at Western Michigan University and associate director of Western’s Center for the Study of Ethics in Society. “What do you do when the patient cannot tell what he wants, when you are not sure what the outcome will be, when there is no family to provide counsel, and when someone could legally charge you for not doing enough — or even doing too much?”

Speaking at a conference on Healthcare Allocation and Ethics, hosted by Bronson Methodist Hospital in November 2008, Bach reminded participants of the ethical principles and virtues of medical professionals: respect for persons, including the autonomy of individuals to participate in their treatment decisions; beneficence and nonmaleficence to maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms; and justice, which includes fairness to all persons, including the patient’s family and society as well as those who are financially disadvantaged.

Forty-eight hours have passed. You and your medical team have consulted, decided, and provided what you believe is the best and most appropriate treatment and care possible. Your patient is still alive, but vital signs are diminished. Infection has developed near a compound fracture of the left ankle; amputation is being considered.

You now know the patient’s name, thanks to investigations by police officers.

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A sister from out of state has come and sat with the patient for the past six hours. She has watched his condition deteriorate. She tells you: “He loves to hunt. Even if he were to live, he wouldn’t want to live without his foot, without his freedom to walk the fields and roadways. And he lives alone. Who would care for him?” She asks that you make sure he’s comfortable, and let him die in peace. Then his daughter, estranged for many years, arrives. “Keep him alive. Do everything. I have to talk to him,” she screams. What do you do? This is the “ethical dilemma” in which trauma health-care providers are sometimes “faced with choices in which there is a conflict or tension between certain values, duties or rights,” when they are “required to choose between two or more alternatives, both of which are desirable, or, more often, between alternatives, neither of which is desirable.”

Alan S. Messinger, M.D., a speaker who presented a case about a burn...
Bach

victim who was also an unconscious John Doe, told the audience: “I often ask myself, ‘What would I do for myself or a family member?’ I poll the nurses and ask, ‘Would you want to live with this disfigurement?’”

But simple questions can still lead to complex answers. When presented with data from actual cases, the 100-plus participants at the conference voted, often without a clear-cut majority, on whether to administer all-out treatment or comfort measures. In one extreme case, a significant minority opted to let a judge or a mediator from the hospital’s ethics committee decide, a signal that practitioners’ decisions are sometimes motivated by threat of legal action. “You don’t want to spend your days in court even though you may win in the end,” said Shirley Bach. “It’s better to do too much than not enough.”

But is more medical intervention better? It depends, agreed the panelists and participants who were physicians, nurses, social workers, medical ethicists, and pastoral care providers, especially considering the high cost of high-tech life support for persons whose condition is beyond the point of probable recovery. Therefore, discernment is a highly valued virtue.

“Good ethics start with good facts,” were words on the conference program, echoed by several presenters. “We must consider all issues,” stated Bach. “How is one case different from another?” Bach added that discussion of actual cases, anonymized, of course, is a beneficial way for medical practitioners and bioethicists to examine what they would do. “We can learn from past cases that our colleagues have struggled with, and that enables us to have an easier time when similar cases crop up in the future,” she said.

A confrontation between your patient’s sister and daughter has escalated. Both have hurled harsh words across the patient’s bed.

What do you do?

“We are trying to make reasonable decisions, but times are not reasonable when people are dying,” observed Walter Balk, MDiv, chaplain at Bronson Methodist Hospital. “Thirty minutes spent in meaningful conversation helps 24 hours down the line.”

Alan Messinger agreed that communication is necessary to resolve conflict. What does he do? “I continue treatment and continue talking,” he replied.

“Doctors and nurses know that families who decide to end treatment will have to live with that decision. They tell families the decision to stop treatment is not what will end the patient’s life; it’s the injury or illness,” stated Christee Dyk, LMSW.

“In a way, you are treating the whole family,” confirmed Bach, “and you should be able to articulate the ethical justification and values that took precedence.”

After five days of intensive care, your patient stopped breathing. His heart stopped beating.

What do you do?

You remind yourself that it happens more often than people realize, especially compared to the high success rate of fictional medical drama on television.

You mentally review your conduct while treating the patient and caring for the family — and you know your colleagues are doing the same. Yes, running down the checklist of medical virtues, you acted with compassion, trustworthiness, integrity, caring, empathy, mercy, courage, discernment, altruism, humility, concern for relationships, concern about potential conflicts of interest, and responsibility for the welfare of others. You communicated honestly. You did all you could and to the best of your ability.

At the same time, you take time to grieve the loss of human life and you pray for the mending of the family members who still live. You care. You sigh.

Outside, you hear the wail of an ambulance siren. EMTs rush in, pushing a gurney.
Facts About Advanced Medical Directives

AN ADVANCE MEDICAL directive is a document that describes treatment preferences should a person become unable to make or voice medical decisions on his or her own behalf. Yet, fewer than 25 percent of Americans have written directives before they become ill.

Many directives are lengthy, vague, and ineffective. The good ones are short and address specific quality-of-life issues, such as the ability to feed, clothe, and toilet oneself.

Most hospitalized patients are treated not by their regular physician but by hospitalists, a new medical specialty of physicians who are employed by hospitals and who don’t have ready access to the patient’s medical history. Therefore, at a time when patients are generally most in need of critical, possibly terminal, care—and ethical, end-of-life issues are most likely to arise—they are in the care of physicians they have probably never met before.

To alleviate this, some people tape an advance medical directive to their refrigerators or in a location easily visible to EMTs. And it is possible to file a directive with some ambulance companies.

But the recommended solution is to thoroughly discuss your end-of-life wishes with relatives and/or close friends whom you trust to speak on your behalf if you are unable to do so yourself. Include those persons’ names and contact information with your directive.

For professional assistance and advice regarding an advance medical directive, consult your physician.
Events of Note

Continued from page 31)

Portage District Library
329-4544

The History of Motown — Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Motown in collaboration with Corner Records. This multi-media exhibition will feature artists from the Black Arts & Cultural Center and others. Feb. 13-April 19.

Museums

Kalamazoo Valley Museum
373-7990

Eyes on Earth — This interactive exhibit examines how satellite observations are made and what we learn about the earth using space technology. Thru April 19.


Audubon Society of Kalamazoo
343-6541

Wildflowers and Butterflies — Linda Koning, founder of West Michigan Butterfly Association, will be the featured speaker. Feb. 23, 7:30 p.m. People’s Church, 1758 N. 10th St.

Kalamazoo Nature Center
381-1574

Connecting Women & Nature: A Snowshoe Adventure — Watch the full moon rise as we walk the trails. Dress in layers and wear hiking boots. Feb. 10, 6–8:30 p.m.

Great Observatories Images Unveiling — KNC has been chosen by NASA to display two large-scale images of the spiral galaxy Messier 101. Join us to celebrate and be the first to see these images! Feb. 21, 1–3 p.m.

Kalamazoo Nature Center
381-1574

Boomers and Beyond: Maple Sugar Magic — Learn about the process of collecting sap from the sugar maple tree and turning it into liquid sunshine, aka maple syrup! Program includes a moderate ¾-mile hike. Adults (ages 55+) Feb. 24, 11 a.m.–1 p.m.

Green Living Series: Tips for Living Lightly on the Earth — Learn how to safely tap sugar maple trees and collect sap. Then see what is needed to set up a simple outdoor kitchen to boil sap down to maple syrup. Mar. 3, 6:30–8 p.m.

Kellogg Biological Station
671-2510

Flying Hunters of the Night — Kellogg Bird Sanctuary presents a family program on Michigan owls during which you can learn about the ten owl species found in Michigan. Feb. 10, 7 p.m.

Great Backyard Bird Count — The Kellogg Bird Sanctuary invites nature lovers to participate in bird walks as part of the 12th annual GBBC. Feb. 13–15, 9–11 a.m.
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Trivia PurZoOt

Answer! (question on p. 10)

One hundred trout enjoyed celebrity status in the Bronson Park fountain during the summer months and were then moved to warmer quarters in the winter, living out the snowy months in the basement of the Kalamazoo Public Library. Incidentally, the very first fountain in Bronson Park was installed in 1867. However, the park was not officially named until 1876, the only Kalamazoo city park named by ordinance.

Information provided by Beth Timmerman of the Kalamazoo Public Library
Mary Doud

Our scholarly Guess Who, Mary Doud, has been working in the halls of learning, i.e. libraries, for more than 35 years. Mary grew up in northern California and southern Wisconsin, graduating from Beloit College in Wisconsin with a bachelor’s degree in English and a high-school teaching certificate. It was the WMU library sciences program that brought her to Kalamazoo where she received her Master of Science in Librarianship from WMU in 1973. Immediately she landed a job with the Kalamazoo Public Library and has been enriching our lives and improving our libraries ever since. She currently holds the position of Deputy Director of the Kalamazoo Public Library.

While working at the KPL, Mary has been instrumental in the development of several popular programs, among which are Ready to Read, for early childhood literacy, and Reading Together, the community reading program. Outside of the library, Mary has also contributed her time and energy to many community programs and boards. She says she seems to gravitate toward organizations that empower women, value diversity, advance educational opportunities, and advocate for seniors. Among those groups are Senior Services, Friendship Village, YMCA of Kalamazoo, Women’s Education Coalition, Professional/Executive Association of Kalamazoo, and Leadership Kalamazoo. Last year she and her husband, Bob, an executive at Bronson Healthcare Group, were honored with the Helen Coover Lifetime Achievement Award for Community Service.

Mary and Bob met at Beloit College and have been married for 38 years. In their spare time they enjoy golfing, travel and their many friends. Mary also does some gardening and, when she finds a spare minute, she has been known to write poetry and definitely enjoys reading a good book.

Costume courtesy of Timid Rabbit Costume Shop.
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When KNI introduced Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to Southwestern Michigan in 1985, few people knew what was in store for this amazing technology.

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KNI is home to the most powerful and the most advanced imaging technology in Southwestern Michigan. Five MRIs, including this region’s only high-field open MRI, serve patients at KNI’s Gull Road site and on the campus of Borgess Medical Center, KNI’s long-standing medical partner. Specialists at Premier Radiology in recent years have helped KNI continue to grow and make possible new procedures and new technology. The Premier team has more than a dozen radiologists, including MRI specialists.

KNI continues to introduce new software, techniques and knowledge to serve physicians and patients throughout Southwestern Michigan.